

## WHAT IS OR ARE EUGENICS?

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IN a rather clever novel by Ian Hay, which bears the buoyant title "Happy-Go-Lucky," the following significant conversation takes place. "Tiny, my bonny boy," he enquired of me one morning after breakfast, 'do you happen to have any sort of notion what Eugenics is—or are?' 'I believe,' I replied hazily, 'that it is some sort of scheme for improving the physique of the race.' Dicky nodded appreciatively. 'I see,' he said. 'One of old Sandow's schemes. His name is Eugen. That is better than I thought. I was afraid it was going to be another kind of political economy.'

Without subscribing completely to the truthfulness of the foregoing ideas, may it be asked in all humility, Where is or are eugenics going to end? If one reads Géza von Hoffmann's recent book, "Die Rassen-

hygiene in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika" (J. F. Lehmann, Munich), with that degree of intelligence which it deserves, and if, after closing it, one cogitates over its contents, can one's conclusions be other than that the science of eugenics is a very mischievous matter at present—that is, as conceived by the enthusiasts who with their half-baked ideas have been instrumental in passing laws in many of our States—with every promise that its prosecution in the future will make the happenings of today seem by comparison a puerile effort at tentative measures? Surely not, for are we not already sterilizing the unfit in some fourteen States, and if this is done today, what with the science of eugenics still in its swaddling clothes, will not the future write in much larger letters our direful "wholesale tampering with the structure of the population," to use Professor Bateson's significant words from his Address on Heredity delivered at the Seventeenth International Congress of Medicine? Now, without being alarmists and always hopeful that reformers will see the errors of their ways, especially after they have rushed blindfolded into a matter that has caught their fancy but not their deeper intelligence, it would seem that the times are ripe to put a few questions to our reformers in the hope of ascertaining just what, in their present state of intelligence, constitutes that badge of infamy which confers on the individual his title to being considered that appalling derelict of modern society—an 'unfit.' According to the intellectual (?) wave that must have deluged Iowa ere its eugenical law was passed, an 'unfit' is a person of either sex who is either an idiot, a drunkard, a narcotist, an epileptic, a syphilitic, a prostitute, or a unit in the province of the feeble-minded. Of course, by 'unfit' is not meant that he or she is an undesirable companion, one to be shunned in true Anglo-Saxon fashion, to be received with the finger of scorn, as did our enlightened ancestors, when, in their righteous indignation, they were at times compelled to sit in the most democratic of all American institutions—the street car—next to a prostitute, a drunkard, or a narcotist. That sort of deplorable attitude toward those who do not live our correct lives would today be considered too feeble an effort at reform, in fact, declarative not only of a deprecatory tolerance, but of so great a lack of interest in the future of the human family that the person guilty of the old-fashioned protest, if really found out by the eugenists, would receive some very harsh criticism. What he should do, if we have read the literature on the subject correctly or understood the frenetic spoutings of our eugenical friends—eugenical in arranging other persons' lives but not their own—is to make a note of the number of derelicts he has come across, fortify his knowledge with their respective house numbers, visit them in kindness, but ever with the eugenical eye on the alert, and, when quite positive that a person is unfit to be the progenitor or progenitress of children, turn him or her over to the tender mercies of the invocers of the Law for Doing Away with Future Degenerate Children, and have the sexual organs emasculated! Could simplicity go any further and the interference with personal rights in a republican form of government be better exempli-

fied than by this procedure, which has all the beauty and glamor of Louis XIV's famous saying: "The State, it is I."

But to return to our mutttons, what is an 'unfit' or, to be a better grammarian, who are the 'unfit?' Let us suppose that the man or woman upon whom we have fastened our eugenical eye, in the hope of protecting the future of the race, is not such a bad lot as our present frenzy on the subject of eugenics makes him or her out to be,—would not our insistence for either to come under the ban be attended later on by some remorse on our part? Can we be sure that their children will turn out to be so undesirable that they will be simply refuse in our triumphant civilization? If we knew the inscrutable laws of Nature—and, though we may think we are intelligent giants, let us record here without trying to insult mankind that, when it is a question of the secret workings of Nature, we are, alas! only too often pigmies—there might be some justification; but our present state of ignorance being no better or worse than it was in the past, the realization must be ours that there are some things that even we Americans will never understand. And in making this statement we have not overlooked the much-exploited book on the Jukes family, that fearsome record of crime, pauperism, disease and heredity, nor have we forgotten a matter of much greater importance from our point of view—the decided defects in the character of the ancestress of Jonathan Edwards.

The subject of personal rights should be a very important matter to every individual; and while it might be considered a bit socialistic for us to write that a narcotist, a drunkard, or a prostitute has certain rights, even though under great pressure we may say that in the early months of a syphilitic infection the individual has no further rights than to live the life of an outcast, yet we are firm in the belief that personal rights should be treated both by individuals and by the State with the greatest respect and consideration. There are circumstances, as all medical men know, when their advice, if followed with intelligence, can lead to considerable happiness though not to the complete routing of wretchedness; but this advice never partakes of that interference with the individual's life, which our various States are effecting when they boldly grind the sexual organs, or rather those parts which make for fertility, under the Juggernaut of their medieval frenzy. So again we ask, What is or are eugenics?

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