



WHO ARE THE UNFIT?

UNFITNESS is a very relative term, though we have developed a vicious habit of talking very dogmatically about it. We are really on very dangerous ground when we attempt to characterize definitively such types of humanity as fall short of obviously gross unfitness. There are degrees of degeneracy, decadence and criminality still leaving traits that are admirable, often undiscernible to such sensationalists as Nordau, such pseudo-scientists as Lombroso, and such people as the extreme, fanatical eugenists, bent upon "standardizing" the race. The only individual in history who was wholly damnable was Judas.

We ought to get past the attitude that the so-called unfit are any different from ourselves essentially. Properly viewed, the unfit are the unfitted. Such an attitude is not based on sentimentalism, but upon sympathetic understanding of other people and of the hard facts of life. It is the unfitters who deserve study—and sterilization. The burning at the eugenic stake of the products of our vicious social order is a remedy unworthy of a high civilization.

The born criminal is a rare bird and a late hatching when he does exist. Feeble-mindedness, also, is too often the result of generations of industrial slavery and bad hygiene. A Russian investigator recently found the antecedents of five hundred insane people whom he studied to be practically as good as those of five hundred sane men and women.

We confess a sneaking liking for the Alfred Jingles, Dick Swivellers, and Micawbers of the world. We are not for the unsexing of potential Rousseaus. If the "defective" boy Oliver Goldsmith were living today we should be the last to recommend him for observation as a near-imbecile. Nor would we feel any eugenic prejudice against such an "impenetrably stupid" boy as Richard Brinsley Sheridan. We protest against the condemnation by a board of eugenics of all the delightful vagabonds whose lives divert us and themselves. Through what prescience could such a board guarantee that no Colonel Mulberry Sellers would suffer at its ruthless hands? Such a board would probably include no humorist, and in this connection we should like to record our conviction that total lack of the sense of humor is the greatest earnest of unfitness that we can think of, more indicative of the need of sterilization than any other form of deficiency. What defective would be more of a menace than a eugenicist endowed with power but lacking this sense?

We very much fear that in the eugenicist's Utopia only the poor would continue to be exploited. The capitalist who works children all day and women all night, the demagogue, the smug philanthropist, builder of "model" tenements, constructed with money which in its

accumulation has caused more tuberculosis than it will ever cure—would they take precedence of the idiot? Would such a type as the man who corners a necessary of life in the market be arraigned by a eugenic board before a low-grade imbecile? Would the embryo Swifts, De Quinceys and Poes be wholly safe in its hands?

One so-called degenerate like Rousseau is worth all the enthusiastic and fanatical eugenists who are now filling the air with their advice. There will be no beloved vagabonds like Francis Thompson, "the greatest achievement of nineteenth century Catholicism," no John Synge, no Villons, no Masefields, no Levers, if they can help it. The "half scholar, half vagabond" who interested the young Lincoln in Burns and Shakespeare would never have received the endorsement of a board of eugenics. Such a board would find no solace or justification in the contemplation of the tramp in Synge's "Shadow of the Glen," or of the picturesque vagabond in Galsworthy's "The Pigeon," or of the vagrant in Yeat's "A Pot of Broth."

Holbrook Jackson makes a bid for sterilization when he insists that vagabondage is but the abjuration of the upholstery of civilized life, which is but a distorted reflection of life itself. The truth is that the vagabond is not nearly so mysterious, freakish and unaccountable a figure as the one-idea'd eugenist, steeped in propaganda forever—and the same propaganda; "devoted" to something eternally and everlastingly; bent upon cheating himself and others of life and upon establishing a régime of disgustingly sane people, absolutely moral—according to Philistian concepts—and wholly "efficient" as regards work-a-day, engineering standards.

Suppose the eugenist's dream were to be realized (there is no danger of it, after all)? What then? Would we see the vision that the soul of man yearns to encompass? Would anybody worth his salt wish to live in the eugenist's world? Would he be happy? Could he realize the greater possibilities of life and express them? What would there be in such a world to inspire the Carlyles and Ruskins and Emersons, much less to create them? What would be the final outcome of such a society if not degeneracy—real, sordid decadence of the worst possible sort?

If genius derives from certain of the unfit, pray God to conserve a sufficiency of that element against the maraudings of these bulls in the human china shop, that His purposes may be served and consummated.

ARTHUR C. JACOBSON.