

# THE CASE FOR EUGENICS

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IT must ere now have dawned on most people that the late war was a mistake in the interests of all concerned. It was a colossal blunder from the standpoint of those who started it, the various potentates—whether feeble-minded, megalomaniac, or senile—who plunged gaily into war without counting the cost or the risk. For they gambled recklessly with magnificent positions, and lost their thrones in consequence. It was no less a mistake from the standpoint of the ruling rings in their *entourage* who instigated and applauded them, and have since produced such voluminous attempts to exculpate themselves; for these show how badly they miscalculated, and they too have lost their jobs. It was a mistake from the point of view of the politicians who carried it on—much too long—and did not know how to end it; for they in turn, after missing unprecedented opportunities of realizing their “ideals”, are now all out of office.

It is not too much to say that at various times, during or after the war, Germany, Austria, England and France could all have “won the war,” in the sense of establishing their predominance in Europe or in the whole world, if only those who conducted their affairs had had the sense to see what it was obviously intelligent to do. That the war was a mistake from the standpoint of the workers goes without saying; but it was also a mistake in the interests of capitalism. For it brought about the Russian Revolution, which is a standing challenge to the capitalistic order. Moreover, it has greatly weakened and impoverished the *rentier* class everywhere, and wiped it out over large tracts of Europe. The landlord class has suffered almost as much; it has been massacred or exiled in Russia, and “expropriated”, with nugatory compensation, in most other parts of eastern Europe. Even though a few profiteers made gains out of the war, they are being stripped of these again by heavy taxation and bad trade. Lastly, the war has been a gigantic menace to civilization itself, which seems likely to go under if the performance is repeated, as—in view of the political explosives it has deposited all the world over—it may well be before long.

This deplorable experience has naturally somewhat shaken the complacency of the more intelligent about our civilization,

and shattered their belief that human affairs are conducted with intelligence. It seems incredible that our ruling classes should have been so stupid as they demonstrably were. And why were we all so stupid as to let ourselves be led with such stupidity? What has gone wrong with our civilization? This is the vital question men are asking, more and more earnestly.

Eugenics provides at least a partial answer, both to this and to many other manifestations of human stupidity, which will have to be taken with great seriousness. It has detected a radical defect in our civilization? which undermines the hope of progress, and is an ever active source of deterioration and decay. The gist may be stated in a single sentence. Society, as at present organized, wastes its good material and extirpates its better stocks, while it recruits itself from its inferior elements. It does this unconsciously and unintentionally, but at a growing rate. It does not mean to favour the survival of the less fit; but it has so organized itself that in point of fact it does. This is due to the fact that the upper, and apparently more favoured, classes of the social scale are perpetually dying out, because—though their death rate is low—their birth rate is very much lower. Hence they can keep up their numbers only by the rise of ability from below. The lower strata of society, on the other hand, though they have a higher death rate (which is not wholly evil, if it is selective and weeds out the weaklings) multiply so freely that they not only fill the gaps in the upper strata, but increase the total population. Thus quantity increases, but quality deteriorates.

All of this follows inevitably from the fact that in every society more or less, but more in modern societies than in ancient times, merit is recognized and ability rewarded. It is rewarded by social promotion; the able rise in the social scale. But their reward entails unforeseen consequences which recoil upon the society that bestows it:

The effect is twofold. In the first place, the lower classes are continually drained of their ability, and their average must deteriorate because their best men are taken from them. Consequently they must be getting stupider, especially as it is precisely the feeble-minded who breed most copiously. Secondly, the ability which is promoted and rises in the world is largely wasted. For it is sterilized by rising into a class in which the rate of reproduction is inadequate. And it is wasted probably more rapidly than that which is native to the class; for an able man, ambitious of rising, is even more tempted to postpone his marriage and to restrict his offspring than those who are "born in the purple." These, moreover, are not given

sufficient motives to develop their ability, and to employ it in the public service. Is it a wonder that the outbursts of our growing stupidity are threatening us with destruction? And even if our civilization does not destroy itself in the next war, will it not be bound to decay and finally to become exhausted so long as it retains the fatuous and suicidal organization it has at present?

There is not, however, any reason why it should. Even if it can be shown, as probably it can, that in the past *every* civilization has blundered into a similar form of organization which has proved deadly to its ruling class, it would not follow that civilization is bound to waste and use up the races that practise it. For history also shows that societies have existed, and indeed still exist, which are differently organized, so as to recruit themselves from above and not from below. This is particularly marked in the inferior stage of culture called "barbarism." Among barbarians the conditions of life are so severe that only those specially favoured can increase in numbers. Hence a barbarian society (such as ours was in Anglo-Saxon times, i. e., until comparatively recently) recruits itself in the main from among the children of the chiefs, who have themselves to be physically and mentally superior to the common herd if they are to keep their places. It was one of these barbarian chieftains, King Kabba Rega of Unyoro, whom the British Government—which had deported him some thirty years ago as a source of political trouble—would not allow to return to his native land at the age of ninety, because he was still considered dangerous. It came out incidentally in parliament that when he left Unyoro he had left behind him two hundred and fifty sturdy sons!

This does not mean, of course, that because in this respect barbarism is superior in its organization we should revert to it. Nor does it mean that the methods by which a preferential survival of the fit is secured in barbarian life are models for us to copy. These methods are barbarous, crude, and wasteful, like natural selection everywhere. Our problem is to devise schemes of *intelligent* selection, which will conserve the benefits of natural selection without their drawbacks, and without plunging into the fatuities of our civilized *contra*-selection.

It is with this problem that eugenics must now grapple. Being a social problem, it is necessarily complicated, and needs much study. The Eugenics Education Society, presided over by Major Leonard Darwin, fourth son of the immortal Charles, exists for this purpose. It is not a revolutionary body. It is animated by cautious and conservative, but scientific, spirit. It has always

realized, with Francis Galton, that attempts at reforming the social order must start from existing institutions and existing sentiments, and must respect the established results of historical evolution. We may often by judicious manipulation improve the working of institutions, and even reverse their effects. For example, it should not be too difficult to turn such sentiments as family pride, pride of race, and parental devotion in a eugenical direction, and to lead society to view a large and fine family of distinguished ancestry with admiring approval. It may be possible to generate a social sentiment that will frown upon the frivolities of wastrels in high life.

But Utopian schemes like Plato's, which presuppose a total transformation of human nature and postulate the abolition or suspension of our strongest feelings in order to start with a clean slate, are hopelessly impracticable. Plato was the first eugenicist, as he was the first communist and the first feminist, and he was a mighty prophet as well. But as a practical politician he cannot be taken seriously. His idea of starting his Ideal State was to drive all the inhabitants above the age of ten out of the city. How the Philosopher-King was to drive them, and whether thereupon he would also undertake the functions of a Universal Nurse-Maid, is not stated. In their details his proposals for abolishing the family and improving the race are similarly puerile. It can be shown that they would defeat the purposes at which they aim.

Yet these Platonic phantasies have had a wonderful vitality. They are surely responsible for the ordinary conceptions of eugenics to this day. When the man in the street hears the word "eugenics," it at once sets him thinking of "human stud-farms," and the figure he would cut therein, and he decides to approve or denounce eugenics accordingly. Even Mr. J. B. S. Haldane (who of course knows better) pokes fun at "the eugenic official, a compound of the policeman, the priest, and the procurer," who is to "hale us off at suitable intervals to the local temple of Venus Genetrix, with a partner chosen, one gathers, by something of the nature of a glorified Medical Board."

But of course the people who really believe in such bogies only show thereby that they have never reflected on the ways society employs to influence its members, and to induce them to behave as it wishes. They should study the ways in which the existing maladjustment is brought about. Society does not say to the desirable parents "You shall not have more than two children," and to the undesirable "You must have as many as possible." It just makes arrangements which act as motives sufficient to produce these results. It never says "You shall marry So-and-so,

or go to prison." There is hardly any compulsion. Society works much more subtly. To induce us to marry persons it delights to favour, it makes them appear desirable in our eyes. This it can easily do by bestowing rank or wealth on them at random. Could any young man honestly deny that a young woman introduced to him as a princess or an heiress would seem far more interesting and attractive in his eyes than a kitchen-maid? If she were even passably pretty, he would find it quite easy to fall in love with her. Yet the kitchen-maid he scorns may actually be prettier, healthier, and eugenically more commendable. And what are rank and wealth but social institutions, which cast a glamour over their beneficiaries, and prompt him to swallow the hook that is baited with them? The same is true of the manners and modes of speech which fascinate in the princess and repel in the kitchen-maid.

If, therefore, the eugenical reformer desires to promote eugenically good unions, why should he not take a leaf out of the book of society's present practice? Instead of preaching to Cupid, or trying to browbeat him, he should gently guide the arrow's aim. He should labour to create a eugenical atmosphere, which all will breathe in unwittingly, and of which the pressure will be felt no more than that of the air. He should make propaganda for eugenics, as our existing social order does for senseless snobbishness, and he should substitute real social values for imaginary ones. If he does this skilfully, everyone will feel as free, and as free to choose whom he admires, as now. But he will admire rather different persons, and his taste will be better—socially more wholesome. It is perfectly possible, therefore, to combine freedom with eugenics.

It should not, however, be supposed that eugenics is on principle against all coercion of the socially undesirable, and would dispense with it entirely. The license society allows at present to the criminal, the insane and the feebleminded to multiply at pleasure, and to have their worse than worthless offspring cared for at the public expense, or rather at the expense of those who feel too heavily taxed to produce children that would yield better returns to the community—this is, after all, something of a social oversight. It never was intended, and is incapable of defence. It too much resembles the strange toleration shown by ant-*bee*-communities towards the moron parasites that infest their nests. One can hardly suppose that this sort of arrangement will be allowed to continue indefinitely when its true character and effects become widely known. The best methods of checking the proliferation of undesirables may still be a matter of enquiry, but there is little doubt that a number of expedients might prove effective. Similarly a great

variety of social influences might be suggested that would tend to improve the quality of the population.

Thus there is no impossibility in the *conception* of intelligent social control which would not interfere with the individual more than he is interfered with by the present random interventions of society. But of course nothing will be done, or can be done, to reverse the dysgenic tendencies of our civilization unless there is, throughout the community, a strong and widespread conviction of the need for thus eugenically reconstructing the social organism. This is a matter of *education*. People have to be educated up to understanding the case for eugenics, and the Eugenics Society does well to call itself an "Education" society. But even education presupposes a modicum of intelligence to be educated; and if civilization is not to be submerged in a flood of congenital feeble-mindedness, there is no time to lose.