

# EUGENICS: ITS DEFINITION, SCOPE, AND AIMS.

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EUGENICS is the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage. The improvement of the inborn qualities, or stock, of someone human population will alone be discussed here.

What is meant by improvement? What by the syllable *eu* in "eugenics," whose English equivalent is "good"? There is considerable difference between goodness in the several qualities and in that of the character as a whole. The character depends largely on the *proportion* between qualities, whose balance may be much influenced by education. We must therefore leave morals as far as possible out of the discussion, not entangling ourselves with the almost hopeless difficulties they raise as to whether a character as a whole is good or bad. Moreover, the goodness or badness of character is not absolute, but relative to the current form of civilization. A fable will best explain what is meant. Let the scene be the zoological gardens in the quiet hours of the night, and suppose that, as in old fables, the animals are able to converse, and that some very wise creature who had easy access to all the cages, say a philosophic sparrow or rat, was engaged in collecting the opinions of all sorts of animals with a view of elaborating a system of absolute morality. It is needless to enlarge on the contrariety of ideals between the beasts that prey and those they prey upon, between those of the animals that have to work hard for their food and the sedentary parasites that cling to their bodies and suck their blood, and so forth. A large number of suffrages in favor of maternal affection would be obtained, but most species of fish would repudiate it, while among the voices of birds would be heard the musical protest of the cuckoo. Though no agreement could be reached as to absolute morality, the essentials of eugenics may be easily defined. All creatures would agree that it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well-fitted than ill-fitted for their part in life; in short, that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens of their kind, whatever that kind might be. So with men. There are a vast number of conflicting ideals, of alternative characters, of incompatible civilizations; but they are wanted to give fullness and interest to life. Society would be very dull if every man resembled the highly estimable Marcus Aurelius or Adam Bede. The aim of eugenics is to represent each class or sect by its best specimens; that done, to leave them to work out their common civilization in their own way.

A considerable list of qualities can easily be compiled that nearly everyone except "*cranks*" would take into account when picking out the best specimens of his class. It would include health, energy, ability, manliness, and courteous disposition. Recollect that the natural differences between dogs are highly marked in all these respects, and that men are quite as variable by nature as other animals of like species. Special aptitudes would be assessed highly by

those who possessed them, as the artistic faculties by artists, fearlessness of inquiry and veracity by scientists, religious absorption by mystics, and so on. There would be self-sacrificers, self-tormentors, and other exceptional idealists; but the representatives of these would be better members of a community than the body of their electors. They would have more of those qualities that are needed in a state--more vigor, more ability, and more consistency of purpose. The community might be trusted to refuse representatives of criminals, and of others whom it rates as undesirable.

Let us for a moment suppose that the practice of eugenics should hereafter raise the average quality of our nation to that of its better moiety at the present day, and consider the gain. The general tone of domestic, social, and political life would be higher. The race as a whole would be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable, and politically more provident than now. Its demagogues who "*played to the gallery*" would play to a more sensible gallery than at present. We should be better fitted to fulfill our vast imperial opportunities. Lastly, men of an order of ability which is now very rare would become more frequent, because, the level out of which they rose would itself have risen.

The aim of eugenics is to bring as many influences as can be reasonably employed, to cause the useful classes in the community to contribute *more* than their proportion to the next generation. The course of procedure that lies within the functions of a learned and active society, such as the sociological may become, would be somewhat as follows:

1. Dissemination of a knowledge of the laws of heredity, so far as they are surely known, and promotion of their further study. Few seem to be aware how greatly the knowledge of what may be termed the *actuarial* side of heredity has advanced in recent years. The *average* closeness of kinship in each degree now admits of exact definition and of being treated mathematically, like birth- and death-rates, and the other topics with which actuaries are concerned.

2. Historical inquiry into the rates with which the various classes of society (classified according to civic usefulness.) have contributed to the population at various times, in ancient and modern nations. There is strong reason for believing that national rise and decline is closely connected with this influence. It seems to be the tendency of high civilization to check fertility in the upper classes, through numerous causes, some of which are well known, others are inferred, and others again are wholly obscure. The latter class is apparently analogous to those which bar the fertility of most species of wild animals in zoological gardens. Out of the hundreds and thousands of species that have been tamed, very few indeed are fertile when their liberty is restricted and their struggles for livelihood are abolished; those which are so, and are otherwise useful to man, becoming domesticated. There is perhaps some connection between this obscure action and the disappearance of most savage races when brought into contact with high civilization, though there are other and well-known concomitant causes. But while most barbarous races disappear, some, like the Negro, do not. It may therefore be expected that types of our race will be found to exist which can be highly civilized without losing fertility; nay, they may become more fertile under artificial conditions, as is the case with many domestic animals.

- 3- Systematic collection of facts showing the circumstances under which large and thriving families have most frequently originated; in other words, the *conditions* of eugenics. The

definition of a thriving family, that will pass muster for the moment at least, is one in which the children have gained distinctly superior positions to those who were their classmates in early life. Families may be considered "*large*" that contain not less than three adult male children. It would be no great burden to a society including many members who had eugenics at heart, to initiate and to preserve a large collection of such records for the use of statistical students. The committee charged with the task would have to consider very carefully the form of their circular and the persons entrusted to distribute it. They should ask only for as much useful information as could be easily, and would be readily, supplied by any member of the family appealed to. The point to be ascertained is the *status* of the two parents at the time of their marriage, whence its more or less eugenic character might have been predicted, if the larger knowledge that we now hope to obtain had then existed. Some account would be wanted of their race, profession, and residence; also of their own respective parentages, and of their brothers and sisters. Finally the reasons would be required, why the children deserved to be entitled a "thriving" family. This manuscript collection might hereafter develop into a "*golden book*" of thriving families. The Chinese, whose customs have often much sound sense, make their honors retrospective. We might learn from them to show that respect to the parents of noteworthy children which the contributors of such valuable assets to the national wealth richly deserve. The act of systematically collecting records of thriving families would have the further advantage of familiarizing the public with the fact that eugenics had at length become a subject of serious scientific study by an energetic society.

4. Influences affecting marriage. The remarks of Lord Bacon in his essay on *Death* may appropriately be quoted here. He says with the view of minimizing its terrors: "There is no passion in the mind of men so weak but it mates and masters the fear of death .... Revenge triumphs over death; love slights it; honour aspireth to it; grief flyeth to it; fear pre-occupateth it." Exactly the same kind of considerations apply to marriage. The passion of love seems so overpowering that it may be thought folly to try to direct its course. But plain facts do not confirm this view. Social influences of all kinds have immense power in the end, and they are very various. If unsuitable marriages from the eugenic point of view were banned socially, or even regarded with the unreasonable disfavor which some attach to cousin-marriages, very few would be made. The multitude of marriage restrictions that have proved prohibitive among uncivilized people would require a volume to describe.

5. Persistence in setting forth the national importance of eugenics. There are three stages to be passed through: (1) It must be made familiar as an academic question, until its exact importance has been understood and accepted as a fact. (2) It must be recognized as a subject whose practical development deserves serious consideration. (3) It must be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion. It has, indeed, strong claims to become an orthodox religious, tenet of the future, for eugenics co-operate with the workings of nature by securing that humanity shall be represented by the fittest races. What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly. As it lies within his power, so it becomes his duty to work in that direction. The improvement of our stock seems to me one of the highest objects that we can reasonably attempt. We are ignorant of the ultimate destinies of humanity, but feel perfectly sure that it is as noble a work to raise its level, in the sense already explained, as it would be disgraceful to abase it. I see no impossibility in eugenics becoming a religious dogma among mankind, but its details must first be worked out sedulously in the study. Overzeal

leading to hasty action would do harm, by holding out expectations of a near golden age, which will certainly be falsified and cause the science to be discredited. The first and main point is to secure the general intellectual acceptance of eugenics as a hopeful and most important study. Then let its principles work into the heart of the nation, which will gradually give practical effect to them in ways that we may not wholly foresee.

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