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VARIOUS

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SOCIAL DISEASES

VOL. III.

JANUARY, 1912

No. 1

A REGULAR MEETING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SANITARY AND MORAL PROPHYLAXIS WAS HELD AT THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE, 17 WEST FORTY-THIRD STREET, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1911.

General subject for discussion:

THE STERILIZATION OF CRIMINALS AND DEFECTIVES.

Paper on

PRACTICAL EUGENICS, BASED UPON OBSERVATIONS OF SEVERAL HUNDRED CASES OF STERILIZATION OF CRIMINALS.—Dr. John N. Hurty, Secretary Indiana State Board of Health and State Health Commissioner of Indiana.

PRACTICAL EUGENICS.

BY DR. JOHN N. HURTY, INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

Victor Hugo has said: "The time will come, when, looking back over the thorny path trodden through the centuries, mankind will say: 'What! We had slaves? What! We had kings?'" And is it a far cry, in the light we now have, to say the time will come when mankind will exclaim: What! We had insane? What! We had idiots? What! We had criminals? What! We had the hereditary lame, halt, and blind? It is now known that very probably forty per cent. of insanity, if not directly, is certainly indirectly hereditary—about twenty-five per cent. is caused by alcohol, about twenty-five per cent. by syphilis and about ten per cent. by other

causes. Counting ten per cent. as unpreventable, even under a very high state of understanding coupled with practical action, then ninety per cent. is preventable. And is it not food for thought to know that the rational control of procreation would directly prevent fifty of the ninety per cent. and would indirectly prevent the remaining forty? I say indirectly prevent, because eugenics would surely produce a race which would be in such close harmony with its environment as not to use and suffer from alcohol, and not to sin and have syphilis. As to insanity, let us remember that the science of medicine must be credited with having discovered that it is a physical ill and not a possession of the devil. And that, because of this discovery, mankind abandoned its cruel and inhuman treatment of the insane, and in its stead adopted kindness, patience, and charity. In this instance, religious teaching through centuries was not sufficient to abate insanity one iota, nor to develop the practical application of kindness, patience, and charity, but when we knew and understood, then we arrived.

It is medicine, too, in the person of Dr. Francis Galton, that has pointed out the possibility of making man mentally, morally, and physically more perfect through the scientific control of heredity. And, again, it is medicine which proposes, through medical inspection of children and the early discovery and correction of hereditary and acquired physical defects, and diseases, to do a great work in strengthening the physique, the mind, and the morals of mankind.

Railroad officials discovered a few years ago that many employes were color blind. They could not distinguish a green light from a red one or a blue one; and scientific examination proved that about eight per cent. of these public servants were absolutely color blind. And so it is with a large portion of the defective and criminal classes. They are born morally color blind; they can make no distinction whatever between right and wrong, between truth and falsehood; so that when we come to study the relationship between crime, insanity, and imbecility, we find them much of a kind and the field is indeed most melancholy. An examination of the letters received by the inmates of prisons from their relatives and friends show they come from other prisons or from institutions for defectives. Fully a third of prisoners have had a

fallen brother, sister, daughter, mother, or some immediate relative in a charitable or penal institution. Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes speaks of "border liners" by which he means those afflicted with hysteria, epilepsy, chronic neuralgia, chorea, catalepsy, the introspective, the drunken, the melancholy. Their kinship is found to be very close, they all need the care of medicine and the state. They are not infrequently found in family groups. One will be a thief or a drunkard, one will be insane or idiotic, one will have epilepsy, another chorea, or maybe one or two will exhibit only a morbid self-consciousness or more or less eccentricity. It is as impossible to make them sound and well as to replace a destroyed eye. These defectives may be quite well educated or their surroundings and conditions in life be conducive to wholeness, but there they are, simply defectives, and neither prayer nor science can do more than ameliorate their condition. A border liner may be kind-hearted, kindly disposed, but with negative qualities. He cannot say no. No power can make him reliable. At one time it was thought that many, if not all, degenerates and defectives could be made into reliable citizens through religious conversion; but, alas! it failed utterly. Now, at last, we realize that the human race is to be improved by applying exactly the same laws to man that will perfect the breed of the lower animals. A child gave her parents much trouble on account of her violent temper. She did not learn to walk well until rather late in childhood, and at ten had thick speech. The father thought she must have something the matter with her tongue or throat. A few moments' examination made plain to the physician that these symptoms were the stigmata of imbecility. The parents were highly indignant when the truth was told and in anger dismissed the doctor. That girl, now a woman, is the mother of three imbecile children, all in an institution for feeble-minded. And it is thus that society is burdened with the unfit. We bear the burden willingly, but not always intelligently. Its extent is not generally comprehended, the underlying causes are not generally understood. Of the three prominent neurotic diseases, namely, insanity, epilepsy, and feeble-mindedness, we find the first principally a disease of adult life manifesting itself in the great majority of instances before twenty-one years of age. The last, feeble-mindedness,

generally exists from birth. Feeble-mindedness, imbecility, and idiocy are varying degrees of arrested development, and development is arrested, simply because its limit has been reached. If the business man, who is in the saddle and who runs things, could realize the vice, crime, misery, suffering, and the heavy burden of taxation caused by feeble-mindedness, and then could realize that hygiene knew how to prevent it all, false sentiment and prudery would depart in a hurry, and practical science would have its beneficent way.

The criminally inclined and the feeble-minded regard marriage vows very lightly, frequently paying no attention at all to them, not caring or not understanding the situation. Their increasing number is apparent in our statistics and the expense of maintenance grows annually. Each criminally inclined and each feeble-minded person who lives will almost certainly produce his kind and may bring blight and disease into blood of normal character. I sat in the gallery of the great hall of one of Indiana's institutions, and with the superintendent watched the inmates solemnly walk through square dances. A young man at the piano attracted my attention on account of his firm touch and excellent execution. "He is an inmate," said the superintendent. "He can play the music of the great composers quite well and has composed several good waltzes. He is a graduate of one of our minor colleges, yet he is an imbecile and now suffers from impulsive insanity." "What is his heredity?" I asked. "That is the pity. A strong attendant sits at his side, ever watchful to report," was the reply. "His mother is feeble-minded and passes as a neurasthenic in her neighborhood; and his father died in the Central Insane Hospital. He had a sister in the idiot asylum." How easy it would have been under a wise government to have practically applied hygiene to the grandfather when in childhood he most certainly exhibited the stigmata of degeneracy, and so have prevented the birth of the degenerate mother and of her two degenerate children. It is certainly useless, unnecessary, cruel, bad every way, to permit the procreation of the unfit and then bear ourselves to the earth with a burden of taxation to care for them. We have had almost two thousand years of Christianity, and in that time there has been ceaseless inculcation of religion and morals, and still the scarlet woman, social diseases, imbecility,

insanity, and crime exist. Wars are still going on, in which the young, healthy, normal men are slaughtered. The monastery and the nunnery still claim a no insignificant number of the healthy and the gifted, and the cripples, the imbeciles, the diseased, the vicious are left free to multiply.

In Indiana a start has been made to stop at least a part of this foolishness, and, while progress has been and will be slow, still the beginning has been made. But let me give that story later.

In concluding the chapter on "Race Improvement" in his *Memories*, Dr. Galton says: "Charity refers to the individual; Statesmanship, to the nation; Eugenics cares for both." "I take Eugenics very seriously, feeling that its principles ought to become one of the dominant motives in a civilized nation, much as if they were one of its religious tenets. Individuals appear to me as partial detachments from the infinite ocean of Being, and the world as a stage on which Evolution takes place, principally hitherto by means of Natural selection which achieves the good of the whole with scant regard to that of the individual. Man is gifted with pity and other kindly feelings; he has also the power of preventing many kinds of suffering. I conceive it to fall well within his province to replace Natural selection by other processes that are more merciful and not less effective. This is precisely the aim of Eugenics. Its first object is to check the birth-rate of the unfit, instead of allowing them to come into being, though doomed in large numbers to perish prematurely. The second object is the improvement of the race by furthering the productivity of the fit by early marriages and healthful rearing of their children. Natural selection rests upon excessive production and wholesale destruction; Eugenics, on bringing no more individuals into the world than can be properly cared for, and those only of the best stock."

I remember hearing in boyhood a lecture upon education in which the speaker eloquently contended that, universal education would improve the race, would decrease crime and increase morality. No one controverted him, and I think all present accepted the dictum in full. But what havoc has been made of this theory by experience? Then we did not know that acquired characters were not transmitted, and in our darkness believed education would prove a cure-all for the

ills of society. Now we know that natural characters only, the good and bad, are transmitted, and that education and training, no matter how extensive and thorough, has not the least effect upon germplasm to modify its power to transmit other than innate characters.

I was at Asheville one time and visited Vanderbilt's farm. On that farm they produce all kinds of high grade stock. They do it by practical breeding. When I got to the dog kennels there were a number of beautiful collies that seemed to be able to understand everything that was said to them. They came up and looked at me and I turned to the man in charge and asked him if they ever had any vicious animals, and he answered, "Do you suppose we are so foolish as to breed from vicious stock? A vicious dog is a defective dog." We have not yet arrived at the point where we have the "gumption" not to have defectives. Defectives ought not to exist. Their existence is a reproach to us. We have not come to that higher intelligence that should control the peopling of the world.

What is it to be practical? In public health work I have been told that this or that man is not practical, and that this or that thing is not practical. When you ask these critics what it is to be practical, they do not know. In reading, I ran across a story where Tyndall told what it is, and that was his story: "I will illustrate to you what I think is meant by being practical. Volta invented the Voltaic battery. Now," he said, "I have read and learned that Volta was an odd man; he did not take care of his family. He was all the time making experiments, and experimented a great deal in metals. One time he had gone off into the woods, and he came back with some frogs. While he was at the sink, dressing them, he noticed that when they touched a projecting nail which was driven through the zinc they jerked. He knew there must be a cause, and so he figured it out very speedily that it was an electric current. From this was born the Voltaic battery. We all know its usefulness and the practical benefits derived from it. Now," says Tyndall, "I can imagine some unthinking person asking, 'But what are its practical uses?' and Volta would have but one answer to give, and that would be, 'It is enough for me to have discovered this great truth of Almighty God.' And if man has the gumption"

(that was the word Tyndall used) "to apply it, then it is practical, otherwise it is not." So this is what it is,—to be practical.

When we would take this great science of eugenics and practically apply it, put it into use, we have to fight against the false sense of modesty that prevails, for it is not true modesty that prevents us from talking about and doing the most important matters in the world. When we analyze it, it is found to be simply prudery, and it cannot be anything else. It has recently been said that hygiene, which surely includes eugenics, can prevent more crime than any law, and it is true. It knows how, and if we have the "gumption" to practically apply eugenics, we can do much toward preventing crime; but there is no amount of moral teaching or general education that will stop it. I told you about a young man who acquired a good education and broke down immediately after his graduation from college, and was sent to an insane asylum. What was the use of bearing the expense of educating that young man? He cost the state of Indiana \$3,000. He cost his parents a great deal of money. In college, and all through life, he had done strange acts—one time he tried to set fire to a house—and still he could take an education, and did, and stood well in his classes. Yet the stigma was in him and sticking out all the time, and he should never have been born. Defective people curse the day they were born, and this man cursed his parents. Almost every man you find with an hereditary infirmity, curses the day of his birth. I thoroughly believe that nine out of ten of those who have inherited infirmities would rather be dead than alive.

I have one more story to tell. Go with me in imagination to a certain orphan asylum in Indiana. I went there with skilled assistants to examine all of the inmates. This story is in regard to four of them. We found there two girls and two boys who were all under twelve years of age and all of the same parentage; they all had hereditary syphilis and were a miserable lot. The attending physician was trying with medicine to suppress the horrible disease. The children all bore the marks of feeble-mindedness. In our Christian charity and patience, we are conserving these deviates. The state will bring those children on to maturity, to adult life and