THE
EUGENICS REVIEW


"Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally."

NOTES OF THE QUARTER

"A WISE Dictator, called upon to deal with the appalling dangers which lie before us to-day, would recognize that the human race itself must be improved and developed before wiser conduct can be expected from it. . . . By excessive latitude given to the weak-minded, by imposing burdens in the shape of taxation on the hard-working to help out the improvidence of the inefficient and less capable, we are doing for the human race exactly what every intelligent breeder avoids in the animal world; we are stimulating breeding from the weak, the inefficient, and the unsound. . . ." — The Viscount D'Abernon.

"Like previous speakers, I would lay stress on the growing importance of eugenics, not only in the narrower medical sense, but even more in shaping our whole outlook upon social legislation. The whole trend of our legislation and taxation in recent years has been based on a shortsighted sentimentalism, which has tended not only to discourage thrift and self-reliance, but to encourage the actual multiplication of the improvident and incompetent. . . ." — The Rt. Hon. L. S. Amery, M.P.

"On the side of social services we have succeeded in doubling the number of the feeble-minded in less than a generation by false sentimentality. . . . In this matter I endorse all that Lord D'Abernon said. . . . Somehow the advance in our control over nature has got ahead of, and out of step with, our spiritual capacity and attainments. In biology especially we have a potential instrument for improving the human race and we are not using it. The study of modern anthropology and eugenics ought to be a compulsory item in the training of every man and woman who is destined to take up administrative service in any part of the world. . . . Nor can we afford at home much longer to follow the aggressively dysgenic course of breeding mainly from the unfit. . . ." — Sir Basil Blackett.

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The foregoing quotations are taken from separate contributions to the B.B.C.'s "What I Would Do with the World" series,* and not one of them is from a member of this Society. They cannot therefore be said to be prejudiced utterances; but, on the contrary, reflect the independent judgments of men who have attained to eminence in entirely different walks of life. Lord D'Abernon is now chairman of the Medical Research Council, and he has held some of the highest appointments this country can offer in diplomacy, economics, and Imperial politics. Mr. Amery's achievements in politics scarcely need recounting; he has held several of the most important offices and has had ample opportunity for assessing the relative values, in the social organism, of the Man and the Machine. Sir Basil Blackett, during a distinguished

* Later reprinted in the Listener of November 4th, 18th, and 25th.
career in the Civil Service and in India, made his mark as an economist and is now, among other things, a Director of the Bank of England.

Such emphatic unanimity from such different men is significant of the changed status of eugenics, and to these should further be added the similar opinions of Sir James Jeans, physicist and astronomer—who was not, at the time he broadcast them, a Fellow of the Society—and the remarkable prominence of eugenics at the centenary meeting of the British Association. No less than five prominent Fellows of this Society read papers on eugenics, which aroused prolonged scientific discussions.

One contributor to the "What I Would Do with the World" series spoke against eugenics—very strongly. He was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, whose general attitude was that people should drink, but not think, what they liked. But, putting such declared opponents on one side, eugenics now has the support of most of our intellectual leaders, and in practical politics has at least reached the stage of national health before the War. This Society can justly claim to have played the largest single part in so remarkable a development, and to have exercised an influence out of all proportion to its numbers. Its success has been largely due to its steady refusal either to outpace the growth of educated opinion or to make any move or statement that was not fully supported by the balance of scientific evidence.

It has not been—and still is not—an easy task for its principal servants to hold the balance between the 'left' and 'right' wings of the movement, or to make a team out of the unusually varied assortment of members and fellows of the Society, many of whom have only the one thing in common, that they agree on the need for some sort of eugenic policy. Some consider the Society and the Review too 'diehard,' and others too Socialist; one group complains of too much sentimentalism and humanitarianism, while the next considers that our attitude is too ruthless and severe; a third objects to evidences of moral and religious scruples, while to a fourth the attitude and policy of the Society seem dangerously rationalist. Abortion, birth control, and even sterilization are further causes of division, while non-eugenic considerations influence the attitude of many. It is only possible to provide a free platform from which all these points of view can be expressed, and to base a practical policy upon their highest common factor.

Altogether, eugenics has been much 'on the air' during the quarter, among others to broadcast on it being two Fellows of the Society, the Dean of St. Paul's and Dr. J. R. Baker. The former, speaking in the same series,* pleaded mainly for eugenic education, since he feared that public sentiment was not yet ripe for sterilization. In this he was surely mistaken. The Society's speakers, who address all types of audiences, but mainly those drawn from the 'working' classes, have almost invariably found a nearly unanimous endorsement of our policy in this respect; while the Bill which the Commons threw out last July was supported by all sorts of eminent men and representative bodies, including the majority of the late Guardians and of the present Public Assistance sub-Committees—the people who more than any others have an intimate personal knowledge of amentia in everyday life.

Dr. Baker, who had been giving a series of talks on general biology and evolution, devoted his final address† to a strong plea for eugenics in general and the Society in particular, and the attention which he called to our Sterilization Bill promptly resulted in a crop of interested inquiries.

To these signs of the increasing spread of eugenics may be added the very strong general support we have lately had from the

* The Listener, December 9th.
† The Listener, December 16th.
most impartial body in the world—the English Bench.

Working for the London County Council, Dr. A. C. Williams has recently analyzed the case-histories of 130 aments—80 feeble-minded and 50 imbeciles—and the causes to which the parents attributed their children’s defects.* As would be expected, only 2.5 per cent. suggested that heredity might be responsible—indeed, it is surprising that even they did—while among the favourite ‘causes’ were fright and worry in pregnancy, injuries in infancy, and alcohol and syphilis in the parents.

Dr. Williams closely confirms Tredgold in his comments on these ‘causes,’ indicating that they have at least been exaggerated, and that many of the cases are more suggestive of genetic factors. As he says, “Against the probability of fright or shock during pregnancy being a common cause of defect, it must be remembered that of all the babies born during the air raids, no more than the usual percentage was defective.” Again, “Falls or blows on the head are often mentioned by parents, but in the cases here cited the condition was ordinary primary amnesia, whereas the mental disturbances caused by a fall are of a very different type.”

In 30 per cent. of the imbeciles and nearly 50 of the feeble-minded no cause was suggested by the parents, but “in a large proportion...there was evidence in the family history of an inferior or unstable stock, though rarely of certifiable mental defect or lunacy.” This is suggestive of genetic factors which are imperfectly recessive to normal.

There was a difference between the feeble-minded and the imbeciles, a difference which was sufficiently marked as to be biologically significant, and which also indicates a grain of truth in the parents’ hypotheses: “One of the striking features is that in 70 per cent. of the imbeciles the alleged cause

depends on extrinsic factors, whereas in the feeble-minded the percentage is only 42.5. The difference seems to be in agreement with the fact, noted in last year’s report, that the parents of imbeciles were often more intelligent than those of the feeble-minded.” Dr. Williams here confirms Dr. E. O. Lewis (in the Wood Report), who found that the grosser grades of defect occurred sporadically in all classes of society, but that the feeble-minded were largely concentrated in the ‘social problem’ group. The general implication of these and similar studies is that the severer forms of defect—notably mongolian imbecility—are usually due to extrinsic factors, while feeble-mindedness, which is much the commonest type of amnesia, is most often hereditary.

unknown to those worthy social workers who still talk about slums and housing problems and imply that they are the cause of the growing ill-health and defect in children. In so far as there is a housing problem, it is a temporary economic one, due to the fact that whereas prices and wages have fallen, rents have been artificially maintained at approximately their highest War and post-War level. This is the root of most of the non-biological problems which confront Public Assistance Committees.

Readers of the Review will already have received a leaflet describing the Pedigree Schedule which the Society has prepared to take the place of the spare leaves in the old Family Bible. That Bible, however, was slightly less useful than the domestic animal herd-books in the amount of really useful information it gave, whereas the Schedule, if a little trouble is taken in compiling it, will provide the material for a scientific analysis of the family’s qualities, as well as a particularly interesting tabloid history. If only those many people who ask whether they should risk having children, could provide some such schedule for both husband and wife it would more often be possible to give them enlightened and satisfactory advice.

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**THE GALTON DINNER**

will be held at

**THE REMBRANDT HOTEL**

**SOUTH KENSINGTON**

On Tuesday, February 16th, at 7.15 p.m. for 7.30

The Galton Lecture

"THE SOCIAL PROBLEM GROUP"

will be given by

Mr. E. J. LIDBETTER

Sir Bernard Mallet, K.C.B., will be in the Chair

Fellows and Members are requested to get their tickets (10/6) from the General Secretary as early as possible