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A EUGENICS PROGRAM
for
THE UNITED STATES



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The Need for a Program

FOR over two hundred years on this continent the forces of nature and of social custom made for rapid natural increase. Today, these forces have ceased to be effective with large sections of the population. Some groups are still increasing, but the majority of our people have now too few children for permanent replacement. This change, as yet almost unrecognized, is rapidly and profoundly affecting our national life.

A generation ago some relatively small groups with an established educational and cultural tradition were dying out, but only to an extent which could be replaced by the able or ambitious from other groups with a large surplus of births. Recently the shortage of births has extended to almost all educated, urbanized people, and it is a serious question how long the old method of replacement can continue. The groups which are at present failing to replace themselves by a fairly wide margin include all the professions, clerical and skilled manual workers, small owners, business executives, and many partly skilled workers. Among our city people, only unskilled laborers and certain marginal economic groups still show some natural increase. It is solely in the rural districts, particularly those in which incomes are lowest, that substantial groups are reproducing at a rate sufficient to provide a rapid increase in their own numbers. So long as present differentials in birth rates continue, a large proportion of the more highly trained urban elements of the population must be replaced in each generation by migrants from rural districts with an entirely different background. There is a great inertia of educational and cultural tradition to be overcome in fitting to a new and complex environment so many

people from a different order of activity. The difficulties in such a change must go far to offset other efforts at social progress in our urbanized civilization. Further, we may well ask whether in the process of replacement the more isolated or the more ignorant groups are not being forced to give up a large proportion of their abler and more ambitious members, with serious injury to the stock which remains. It is not necessary to rely on the existing, but meager, evidence of biological differences between the upper and the lower economic groups in the cities, to feel that the present situation needs correction.

As the full significance of the decline in birth rates comes to be realized, both the number and the quality of our people will become increasingly a matter of public concern, and there may arise at any time a demand for hastily conceived and ill planned measures. Fortunately, some years will pass before the public realizes the extent of the change which has set in, and the intervening period can be devoted to scientific investigation and the intelligent development of public opinion.

The vital change from an increasing population to one tending toward decrease has accompanied the spread of birth control. The idea that family limitation is proper, sometimes even a duty, has already reached a large part of our population. Wherever this idea has become generally established, there, with few exceptions, the population has ceased to grow. The shift from involuntary to voluntary parenthood has enormous possibilities for good, and also for evil. What many consider a new freedom is in fact a new responsibility.

If our civilization is to reach its fullest possibilities, such new conditions and attitudes must be established that the families best able to contribute to American life will tend to participate voluntarily and effectively in the renewal of the nation's children.

The American Eugenics Society has in the past been concerned mainly with those aspects of the birth rate which affect genetic inheritance. It is now consciously enlarging its interests to include not only the hereditary qualities but also the environmental conditions which should influence size of family in homes of various types.

The present is an opportune time for the reformulation of many social policies. For better or worse, Western Civilization is in a period which is likely to result in profound changes. Whether these changes prove beneficial in the perspective of history will depend in large measure on the extent to which our attempts at social planning take accurately into account the less obvious underlying forces of our social life, not the least of which are our present differential rates of reproduction.

The following program gives, in broad outline, some of the practical proposals advanced by the American Eugenics Society in answer to this situation. It should be added that the Society is less concerned with any particular set of proposals for social reform than with a sense of the urgency of the problem, and the necessity that public spirited citizens give this subject the intensive, prolonged, and constructive thought that will eventually lead to effective social action.

The Aims of a Eugenics Program, and Some Practical Applications

I. PUBLIC OPINION AND SOCIAL ATTITUDES

THE first aim of a eugenics program must be to develop an intelligent and aroused public opinion. The need for better homes and a better home life is already recognized. What must now be learned is that a disproportionately low birth rate in socially adequate homes, and a disproportionately high birth rate in inadequate homes, is an adverse social force, working against all other efforts to improve society; and that undoubtedly in many cases it is a force opposed to biological improvement as well. Leaders of American thought must be aroused against the continuation of such a condition, and, at the same time, the mental attitudes of the ordinary citizen must be redirected. It is a two-fold problem.

The leaders of American opinion can best be aroused by supplying them with factual scientific material bearing on population trends in this country and on the social and biological effects of such trends. Much material of this sort is already available; vastly more needs to be developed. The universities of this country, with chairs in psychology, sociology, anthropology, genetics, and other sciences which deal with man, must soon recognize the importance of teaching and research in the field of population, from the point of view of the quality as well as of the quantity, of our people. Studies on the interaction of heredity and environment to produce human characteristics should be made in close relation to further studies in human genetics. Only in this way can we determine the biological founda-

tions necessary for the development of character and intelligence, and the method of their inheritance.

The development of new attitudes towards family life presents another and different problem. It is nothing less than an attempt to reorient human desires among a substantial proportion of our people. Such a task calls for the highest effort on the part of those responsible for education in the home, the school, and the college. For the moment, it may be the popular habit to give immediate material interests preference over the deeper values of life. The sense of survival through children and of the continuity of generations, while overemphasized in Oriental countries, is much neglected in our Western Civilization. But one of the most fundamental urges of living things is that which makes for survival of the individual and of the race, and it does not seem an impossible task to redirect popular thinking towards a more balanced view than that now prevalent.

Determining the best means of modifying present social attitudes in regard to the family, and putting these means into effect, are among the most important aims of eugenics.

In considering practical methods of redirecting social attitudes, we cannot neglect the economic factors which may prevent emotional needs from finding expression. People may be brought to realize that adequate economic means do not necessarily supply the best background for the proper rearing of children, and that character, intelligence, and affection can provide a good home for children in the poorest circumstances, where wealth without character cannot. But at the same time, intelligent

parents will continue to desire for their children certain proper things, such, for example, as a higher education, in which money is usually a factor, and will of necessity limit the size of their families in order to obtain their desires for their existing children. It may seem a paradox that the poorest people have the largest families, while less poverty would make for larger families among people of moderate means. But we must take into account, on the one hand, the lack of aspiration among many of those in the lowest groups, and, on the other, the financial handicaps which block the aspirations of people in moderate circumstances who have many children. If the desire for children among responsible parents is to find full expression, we should consider how it may be possible to remove some of the economic handicaps which at present attach to rearing children among those large groups of our people whose aspirations for their children exceed their means of fulfillment.

2. ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND LARGE FAMILIES

In the period of selective decline in population which we are now entering, the greatest effort of applied eugenics must be to increase the proportion of large families among people who provide homes fitted for the rearing of children. Birth control and the system of voluntary parenthood affect reproduction mainly by reducing the proportion of large families. The present decline in population is not the result of a change in the average age at marriage, or of a large increase of actual sterility. It is the result of a decline in the proportion of families of more than four children, and an increase in families

of one, two, and three children. Although at present rates of death and marriage in this country an average of about three children per surviving married couple would be a sufficient number for replacement, the use of such an average is misleading. In every group some couples are sterile, others are limited in fertility to one or two children, and others, because of illness or for compelling economic or other reasons, will have few or no children. To bring the average up to three, and secure permanent replacement for any population group, a fairly large proportion, about twenty per cent, must have five or more children. In rural areas, such a proportion of large families is frequent. But in the cities where the expense and the physical effort involved in the care of children are both very high, it is only among certain small and relatively well-off groups that a number even approaching twenty per cent of the married couples have a sufficient income to provide a secure living for so large a family without seriously impairing their standard of living. Evidently the expense of children is in proportion to the relative standard of living of each different group, and the expenses of those who send their children to college are greater than are the expenses of those who are content with high school alone. But at present, in none of the larger city groups can twenty per cent of the couples rear five children or more at even the most moderate American standards.

It must therefore be our aim to provide conditions such that in every class of society and in every occupational group as many as possible of the economic handicaps now attaching to large families

shall be removed for parents providing decent homes and desiring large families, so that it may be possible for a reasonable proportion of young people to have families of five or more children without serious change in their standard of living. This objective will not be fully attained until we can increase the economic well-being of very large groups of our people. Eugenic reform, however, need not wait on the hope of an increased production and distribution of wealth. Even under present economic conditions, there are many changes which might be expected to effect a substantial increase in the present rate of births among people with whom parenthood is voluntary.

Economic and environmental conditions are so inter-related with attitudes affecting family life, that further studies of the family are necessary before final proposals can be made. The following are among the suggestions most seriously considered at the present time:

(a) Among all social groups more thought should be given to strengthening the economic position of young couples during their early married life. There is no more vicious system than the so-called American ideal that young people should work up through a period of great self-denial in order to arrive at a complacent maturity—with a minimum of children. The expenses incident to the bearing and rearing of children should be the concern of the whole family group, especially of the parents of the bride and groom. These expenses should be prepared for, as far as possible, by savings in the form of dowry, special types of insurance, and all possible help from parents and relatives.

(b) The conditions of farm life, especially in those districts where farm incomes are lowest, should be improved

as rapidly as possible in order to retain on the farm a full proportion of the best family stocks. The birth rate among married women in farming communities is at present about double that of married women in the cities. While this wide difference may diminish, it is probable that for a long time to come the farm will continue to be the source from which the otherwise diminishing population of our cities will be replaced. We cannot afford to continue, in any rural districts, those farm conditions which result in inadequate facilities for the training of children, and which may well tend to drive the abler and more ambitious people off the land, leaving the less able to supply, of their own kind, the replacements necessary to make up the shortage in the cities. An important part of the farm program consists in educating public opinion in the cities to the need for maintaining at a high cultural level the rural home from which will come, in each generation, so many of their citizens.

(c) City housing programs should be planned with a view to providing, to a far greater degree than at present, recreational and educational facilities for the proper rearing of children. In our cities as they are now constituted there should be more adequate transportation to residential developments especially adapted to child nurture.

(d) There should be a greater development of nurseries and preschools where, for frequent short intervals, mothers may obtain brief periods of freedom from the constant care required by young children. There would appear to be great possibilities in the organization of cooperative nurseries.

(e) The excellent work now being done by child welfare agencies should be extended at the same time that restriction of further births is urged in the case of inadequate families.

(f) In certain large groups comprising teachers in schools and colleges, ministers, and possibly Government employes,

it would appear practical to base salary payments on a scale proportionate to the number of children. Such an arrangement has been in effect for some twenty years among the American staffs of American educational institutions in foreign countries. The introduction of such a basis of pay appears to have been a factor in the relatively high birth rate among these groups. Ultimately, such a system might find its way into industry as well.

(g) In assigning school and college scholarships, the primary factor must, of course, be individual merit, but special attention should be given to qualified students from large families. Substantial benefits might be derived from an increased number of scholarships specially designed to meet this need. Instead of limiting higher fellowships to unmarried students, many more graduate fellowships should be open to those who are married.

(h) Existing income and gift taxes already contain provisions of some advantage to parents with several children. Such provisions should be so enlarged as to effect, in every income group, a reduction in tax somewhat more related to the actual cost involved in rearing each child to maturity. Such a radical change in present exemptions would not seem unreasonable, in view of the interest of the country as a whole in its future citizens.

We have cited above some of the changes which might be expected to increase birth rates by diminishing the economic handicaps now attaching to parents of large families. It is possible that insurance for medical and maternal care and many other changes would be desirable to the same end. Important as all these factors are, they will be effective only so long as there exists a strong conscious desire for children among a substantial proportion of our

people. The study of factors affecting size of family has only just begun; as it develops, further important changes may appear possible.

3. DECREASE IN SOCIALLY INADEQUATE FAMILIES

It would seem a truism that as few children as possible should be brought up in homes where there is a bad physical environment, improper parental care and interest, seriously retarded or handicapped parents, or other factors which make for an unhappy childhood and a poor development of the personality. The large families which often occur in such homes consist usually, after the first two or three, of unwanted children, the product of ignorance or of isolation, or of that hopelessness which is engendered by tenements or slums, whether urban or rural. The very statement of these facts suggests the remedies. If we can judge by the experience of European cities, better housing, and the improvement of economic conditions would bring a new sense of responsibility to the majority of these parents, and the extension of birth control knowledge, with new and cheaper methods of contraception, would then tend to reduce the proportion of very large families, and bring these groups below the replacement level. Those who because of sub-normal character or intelligence are unable to respond to an improved environment will be considered in the section which follows.

Along with these changes in physical conditions, public opinion must be aroused to demand that there should not be large families in homes where the children cannot be given a fair chance to become good citizens.

The Eugenics Society strongly urges the spread of birth control information through clinics and doctors, and the removal of restrictive laws. Social advance can continue only with difficulty in a population in half of which parenthood is voluntary, with a shortage of births, and in half, involuntary, with an excess of births. The change to voluntary parenthood is already in progress. It can be hastened by improving the condition of life in the poorest districts of our cities and on our most isolated farms, as well as by the development of contraceptive methods sufficiently inexpensive and simple to meet the needs of people unable to afford present methods.

4. PREVENTING REPRODUCTION BY DEFECTIVES AND SUBNORMALS

There are two reasons for the efforts being made in all the States to prevent reproduction among defectives. In the first place, the perpetuation of a defective strain of human beings tends to thwart all future progress, and cannot be defended by either reason or charity. In addition, defective parents cannot under any circumstances provide a proper home for the rearing of children. Secondary reasons are the need for reducing the enormous public expense at present involved in the care of defectives, and the fact that many subnormal people who might otherwise support themselves with little help, leading reasonably happy lives, require custodial care if involved with the strain and responsibility of parenthood.

Reproduction by defectives may be prevented by segregation, or by modern methods of sterilization which do not unsex the individual. All of our states provide for some degree of segregation of defectives

in institutions, and over half of the states provide for legal sterilization, with consent of the individual concerned, or his guardian, in properly certified cases. Neither of these methods is at present effectively carried out, segregation being limited because of the enormous cost involved, and sterilization because of criticism by various religious groups and the apathy of the general public. A combination of both methods, with competent administration and psychiatric and medical advice, is undoubtedly necessary for effective control. In California recent experience with sterilization indicates the possibilities of combining effective control with great savings in cost, and a lessening of hardship among these unfortunates.

The American Eugenics Society urges the awakening of the public conscience to face the realities of this situation and to bring about in all states of the Union real measures to prevent continued reproduction by known defectives.

IN CONCLUSION

There is nothing radical about these aims and methods. They are in line with almost every other program of social and human advance. They agree with those which might be put forward by the economist in the search for greater economic security, or by the educator looking for a greater cumulative effect in education. Nor does science at the present time offer us any better general test of biological fitness for parenthood, applicable within the large groups with whom we must deal in a period of declining population, than the two-fold test here proposed, namely, under a system of voluntary

parenthood, the desire for children rather than the satisfaction of other wants, and the ability to provide home conditions which will give every child a fair chance.

Even a slight change in the present differential birth rate could be of great social and eugenic value. We have already noted that birth control affects reproduction mainly by changing the proportion of couples with large families. A relatively small increase in the proportion of families of five or more children among certain groups, and a relatively small decrease in others, would have a significant effect on present trends. Since desirable eugenic changes may thus be effected through conditions that will actually alter the habits of a relatively small proportion of all married couples, progress in eugenic reform is perhaps not so difficult as it is imagined to be by those who are unacquainted with recent studies.

The present program of eugenics seeks to attain a wisely balanced distribution of births by methods which are practical under the conditions of today. It seeks a social morality so changed, that under the system of voluntary parenthood a larger majority of our children will be born and reared in those homes which can give them the fullest and happiest preparation for life. It calls for a public opinion which believes that the quality of the human beings who compose our nation is of more importance than are other problems which have received far greater attention. When these changes have come, then the way will have been prepared for an enlarged eugenics program with all it may contain of hope for the future. With each new advance in knowledge, the

ideal of a better life on earth, to which all men aspire, points ever more clearly to this need, that the nation's children be well born.

A detailed popular presentation of eugenics in the United States is set forth in "Tomorrow's Children, The Goal of Eugenics", a small book which can be read in a few hours. It can be purchased for \$1.25 (postage included) from the American Eugenics Society.

For the scientific background necessary to a full understanding of recent population trends, reference should be had to standard works, such as "Population Trends in the United States", (Recent Social Trends Monograph: McGraw-Hill), and "Dynamics of Population" (The Macmillan Co.).

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