Selection and Race

The fact of an individual being naturally gifted with high qualities, may be

due either to his being an exceptionally good specimen of a poor race, or

an

average specimen of a high one. The difference of origin would betray

itself in his descendants; they would revert towards the typical centre of

their race, deteriorating in the first case but not in the second. The two

cases, though theoretically distinct

, are confused in reality, owing to the

frequency with which exceptional personal qualities connote the

departure of the entire nature of the individual from his ancestral type, and

the formation of a new strain having its own typical centre. It is hardly

necessary to add that it is in this indirect way that natural selection

improves a race. The two events of selection and difference of race ought,

however, to be carefully distinguished in broad practical considerations,

while the frequency of their concur

rence is borne in mind and allowed for.

So long as the race remains radically the same, the stringent selection of

the best specimens to rear and breed from, can never lead to any

permanent result. The attempt to raise the standard of such a race is like

the labour of Sisyphus in rolling his stone uphill; let the effort be relaxed

for a moment, and the stone will roll back. Whenever a new typical centre

appears, it is as though there was a facet upon the lower surface of the

stone, on which it is capable o

f resting without rolling back. It affords a

temporary sticking

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point in the forward progress of evolution. The causes

that check the unlimited improvement of highly

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bred animals, so long as

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the race remains unchanged, are many and absolute.

In the first

place there is an increasing delicacy of constitution; the

growing fineness of limb and structure end, after a few generations, in

fragility. Overbred animals have little stamina; they resemble in this

respect the "weedy" colts so often reared from first

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lass racers. One can

perhaps see in a general way why this should be so. Each individual is the

outcome of a vast number of organic elements of the most various

species, just as some nation might be the outcome of a vast number of

castes of individuals, ea

ch caste monopolising a special pursuit. Banish a

number of the humbler castes

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the bakers, the bricklayers, and the smiths,

and the nation would soon come to grief. This is what is done in high

breeding; certain qualities are bred for, and the rest are dim

inished as far

as possible, but they cannot be dispensed with entirely.

The next difficulty lies in the diminished fertility of highly

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bred animals. It is

not improbable that its cause is of the same character as that of the

delicacy of their constitution

. Together with infertility is combined some

degree of sexual indifference, or when passion is shown, it is not

unfrequently for some specimen of a coarser type. This is certainly the

case with horses and with dogs.

It will be easily understood that these

difficulties, which are so formidable

in the case of plants andanimals, which we can mate as we please and

destroy when we please, would make the maintenance of a highly

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selected breed of men an impossibility.

Whenever a low race is preserved under condi

tions of life that exact a

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high level of efficiency, it must be subjected to rigorous selection. The few

best specimens of that race can alone be allowed to become parents, and

not many of their descendants can be allowed to live. On the other hand,

if a h

igher race be substituted for the low one, all this terrible misery

disappears. The most merciful form of what I ventured to call "eugenics"

would consist in watching for the indications of superior strains or races,

and in so favouring them that their pro

geny shall outnumber and gradually

replace that of the old one. Such strains are of no infrequent occurrence.

It is easy to specify families who are characterised by strong

resemblances, and whose features and character are usually prepotent

over those of

their wives or husbands in their joint offspring, and who are

at the same time as prolific as the average of their class. These strains

can be conveniently studied in the families of exiles, which, for obvious

reasons, are easy to trace in their various br

anches.

The debt that most countries owe to the race of men whom they received

from one another as immigrants, whether leaving their native country of

their own free will, or as exiles on political or religious grounds, has been

often pointed out, and may

, I think, be accounted for as follows:

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The fact

of a man leaving his compatriots, or so irritating them that they compel

him to go, is fair evidence that either he or they, or both, feel that his

character is alien to theirs. Exiles are also on the whole

men of

considerable force of character; a quiet man would endure and succumb,

he would not have energy to transplant himself or to become so

conspicuous as to be an object of general attack. We may justly infer from

this, that exiles are on the whole men o

f exceptional and energetic

natures, and it is especially from such men as these that new strains of

race are likely to proceed. Influence of Man Upon Race

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The influence of man upon the nature of his own race has already been

very large, but it has not b

een intelligently directed, and has in many

instances done great harm. Its action has been by invasions and migration

of races, by war and massacre, by wholesale deportation of population,

by emigration, and by many social customs which have a silent but

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idespread effect.

There exists a sentiment, for the most part quite unreasonable, against the

gradual extinction of an inferior race. It rests on some confusion between

the race and the individual, as if the destruction of a race was equivalent

to the des

truction of a large number of men. It is nothing of the kind when

the process of extinction works silently and slowly through the earlier

marriage of members of the superior race, through their greater vitality

under equal stress, through their better chan

ces of getting a livelihood, or

through their prepotency in mixed marriages. That the members of an

inferior class should dislike being elbowed out of the way is another

matter; but it may be somewhat brutally argued that whenever two

individuals struggle

for a single place, one must yield, and that there will

be no more unhappiness on the whole, if the inferior yield to the superior

than conversely, whereas the world will be permanently enriched by the

success of the superior. The conditions of happiness a

re, however, too

complex to be disposed of by à priori argument; it is safest to appeal to

observation. I think it could be easily shown that when the differences

between the races is not so great as to divide them into obviously

different classes, and whe

re their language, education, and general

interests are the same, the substitution may take place gradually without

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any unhappiness. Thus the movements of commerce have introduced

fresh and vigorous blood into various parts of England: the new

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comers

have

intermarried with the residents, and theircharacteristics have been

prepotent in the descendants of the mixed marriages. I have referred in

the earlier part of the book to the changes of type in the English nature

that have occurred during the last few hun

dred years. These have been

effected so silently that we only know of them by the results.

One of the most misleading of words is that of "aborigines." Its use dates

from the time when the cosmogony was thought to be young and life to

be of very recent ap

pearance. Its usual meaning seems to be derived from

the supposition that nations disseminated themselves like colonists from a

common centre about four thousand years, say 120 generations ago, and

thenceforward occupied their lands undisturbed until the v

ery recent

historic period with which the narrator deals, when some invading host

drove out the "aborigines." This idyllic view of the march of events is

contradicted by ancient sepulchral remains, by language, and by the

habits of those modern barbarians

whose history we know. There are

probably hardly any spots on the earth that have not, within the last few

thousand years, been tenanted by very different races; none hardly that

have not been tenanted by very different tribes having the character of at

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races.

The absence of a criterion to distinguish between races and sub

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races,

and our ethnological ignorance generally, makes it impossible to offer

more than a very off

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hand estimate of the average variety of races in the

different countries of

the world. I have, however, endeavoured to form

one, which I give with much hesitation, knowing how very little it is worth. I

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registered the usually recognised races inhabiting each of upwards of

twenty countries, and who at the same time formed at least

half per cent

of the population. It was, I am perfectly aware, a very rough proceeding,

so rough that for the United Kingdom I ignored the prehistoric types and

accepted only the three headings of British, Low Dutch, and Norman

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French. Again, as regards In

dia I registered as follows:

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Forest tribes

(numerous), Dravidian (three principal divisions), Early Arian, Tartar

(numerous, including Afghans), Arab, and lastly European, on account of

their political importance, notwithstanding the fewness of their numbe

rs.

Proceeding in this off

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hand way, and after considering the results, the

broad conclusion to which I arrived was that on the average at least three

different recognised races were to be found in every moderately

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sized

district on the earth's surface. Th

e materials were far too scanty to enable

any idea to be formed of the rate of change in the relative numbers of the

constituent races in each country, and still less to estimate the secular

changes of type in those races.

Population

Over

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population and

its attendant miseries may not improbably become a

more serious subject of consideration than it ever yet has been, owing to

improved sanitation and consequent diminution of the mortality of

children, and to the filling up of the spare places of the earth

which are still

void and able to receive the overflow of Europe. There are no doubt

conflicting possibilities which I need not stop to discuss.

The check to over

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population mainly advocated by Malthus is a prudential

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delay in the time of marriage; but th

e practice of such a doctrine would

assuredly be limited, and if limited it would be most prejudicial to the race,

as I have pointed out in Hereditary Genius, but may be permitted to do so

again. The doctrine would only be followed by the prudent and self

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denying; it would be neglected by the impulsive and self

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seeking. Those

whose race we especially want to have, would leave few descendants,

while those whose race we especially want to be quit of, would crowd the

vacant space with their progeny, and the st

rain of population would

thenceforward be just as pressing as before. There would have been a

little relief during one or two generations, but no permanent increase of

the general happiness, while the race of the nation would have

deteriorated. The practic

al application of the doctrine of deferred marriage

would therefore lead indirectly to most mischievous results, that were

overlooked owing to the neglect of considerations bearing on race. While

criticising the main conclusion to which Malthus came, I mus

t take the

opportunity of paying my humble tribute of admiration to his great and

original work, which seems to me like the rise of a morning star before a

day of free social investigation. There is nothing whatever in his book that

would be in the least o

ffensive to this generation, but he wrote in advance

of his time and consequently roused virulent attacks, notably from his

fellow

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clergymen, whose doctrinaire notions upon the paternal

dispensation of the world were rudely shocked.

The misery check, as M

althus called all those influences that are not

prudential, is an ugly phrase not fully justified. It no doubt includes death

through inadequate food and shelter, through pestilence from

overcrowding, through war, and the like; but it also includes many ca

uses

that do not deserve so hard a name. Population decays under conditions

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that cannot be charged to the presence or absence of misery, in the

common sense of the word. These exist when native races disappear

before the presence of the incoming white man,

when after making the

fullest allowances for imported disease, for brandy drinking, and other

assignable causes, there is always a large residuum of effect not clearly

accounted for. It is certainly not wholly due to misery, but rather to

listlessness, du

e to discouragement, and acting adversely in many ways.

One notable result of dulness and apathy is to make a person unattractive

to the opposite sex and to be unattracted by them. It is antagonistic to

sexual affection, and the result is a diminution of

offspring. There exists

strong evidence that the decay of population in some parts of South

America under the irksome tyranny of the Jesuits, which crushed what

little vivacity the people possessed, was due to this very cause. One

cannot fairly apply the t

erm "misery" to apathy; I should rather say that

strong affections restrained from marriage by prudential considerations

more truly deserved that name.

Endowments

Endowments and bequests have been freely and largely made for various

social purposes, an

d as a matter of history they have frequently been

made to portion girls in marriage. It so happens that the very day that I am

writing this, I notice an account in the foreign newspapers (September 19,

1882) of an Italian who has bequeathed a sum to the c

orporation of

London to found small portions for three poor girls to be selected by lot.

And again, a few weeks ago I read also in the French papers of a trial, in

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reference to the money adjudged to the "Rosière" of a certain village.

Many cases in which i

ndividuals and states have portioned girls may be

found in Malthus. It is therefore far from improbable that if the merits of

good race became widely recognised and its indications were rendered

more surely intelligible than they now are, that local endowm

ents, and

perhaps adoptions, might be made in favour of those of both sexes who

showed evidences of high race and of belonging to prolific and thriving

families. One cannot forecast their form, though we may reckon with

some assurance that in one way or an

other they would be made, and that

the better races would be given a better chance of marrying early.

A curious relic of the custom which was universal three or four centuries

ago, of entrusting education to celibate priests, forbade Fellows of

Colleges t

o marry, under the penalty of losing their fellowships. It is as

though the winning horses at races were rendered ineligible to become

sires, which I need hardly say is the exact reverse of the practice. Races

were established and endowed by "Queen's plate

s" and otherwise at vast

expense, for the purpose of discovering the swiftest horses, who are

thenceforward exempted from labour and reserved for the sole purpose of

propagating their species. The horses who do not win races, or who are

not otherwise speci

ally selected for their natural gifts, are prevented from

becoming sires. Similarly, the mares who win races as fillies, are not

allowed to waste their strength in being ridden or driven, but are tended

under sanitary conditions for the sole purpose of bea

ring offspring. It is

better economy, in the long

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run, to use the best mares as breeders than

as workers, the loss through their withdrawal from active service being

more than recouped in the next generation through what is gained by their

progeny.

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The co

llege statutes to which I referred were very recently relaxed at

Oxford, and have been just reformed at Cambridge. I am told that

numerous marriages have ensued in consequence, or are ensuing. In

Hereditary Genius I showed that scholastic success runs stro

ngly in

families; therefore, in all seriousness, I have no doubt, that the number of

Englishmen naturally endowed with high scholastic faculties, will be

sensibly increased in future generations by the repeal of these ancient

statutes.

The English race ha

s yet to be explored and their now unknown wealth of

hereditary gifts recorded, that those who possess such a patrimony

should know of it. The natural impulses of mankind would then be

sufficient to ensure that such wealth should no more continue to be

neg

lected than the existence of any other possession suddenly made

known to a man. Aristocracies seldom make alliances out of their order,

except to gain wealth. Is it less to be expected that those who become

aware that they are endowed with the power of tra

nsmitting valuable

hereditary gifts should abstain from squandering their future children's

patrimony by marrying persons of lower natural stamp? The social

consideration that would attach itself to high races would, it may be

hoped, partly neutralise a so

cial cause that is now very adverse to the

early marriages of the most gifted, namely, the cost of living in cultured

and refined society. A young man with a career before him commonly

feels it would be an act of folly to hamper himself by too early a marr

iage.

The doors of society that are freely open to a bachelor are closed to a

married couple with small means, unless they bear patent

recommendations such as the public recognition of a natural nobility

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would give. The attitude of mind that I should expec

t to predominate

among those who had undeniable claims to rank as members of an

exceptionally gifted race, would be akin to that of the modern possessors

of ancestral property or hereditary rank. Such persons feel it a point of

honour not to alienate the o

ld place or make misalliances, and they are

respected for their honest family pride. So a man of good race would

shrink from spoiling it by a lower marriage, and every one would

sympathise with his sentiments.