

A Goal for Eugenics

Eugenics

WALTER B. PITKIN in *The Twilight of the American Mind* (Simon and Schuster):

By all odds, the most important human type, the one which must be multiplied on the largest scale under present conditions of civilized life is the thoroughly healthy man. And when I speak of health, I refer equally to health of body and health of mind—which are pretty nearly the same thing. Health is a matter of organic stability, a condition which enables us to recover easily from wounds and infections and to go about the day's work without strain or worry or quick fatigue. On the mental side it is revealed in simple sanity and steadiness of temper. Always its mark is a quick return to normal after a shock, and the normal here is always a fairly pleasant and active manner of living.

Next to an improvement in health types, we need a great increase in the relative number of people blessed with high energy. This is something over and above mere health. Millions of healthy people are not very energetic. I have observed, in my own psychological practice, that some of the very healthiest varieties go through life doing very little work of any sort; and what little they do is performed for bread and butter's sake. In a word, healthy but lazy! On the other hand, some of the most energetic people I know are not wholly well; they have a wonderful fund of vital power to draw on, but many things upset them and leave them in an unsettled state of physical or psychic debility. Some of the world's noblest achievements have been the products of half-sick men and women. The ideal, of course, is to link this flow of free available energy to a healthy body. But as yet nobody knows quite how to accomplish this. Some day, though, our eugenic research workers will discover which human stocks possess such energy as a dominant trait; and then it will be easy to advise people how to energize their descendants. For that fair day we shall probably have to wait a millennium or two. But what's a millennium between eugenists?

Finally there seems to be a genuine need for a larger relative number of people endowed with keener sensitivities than the run of mankind. Whether the senses of the race have or have not deteriorated since man began dwelling in cities is a question into

which we need not go; for it does not bear on the issue at hand. This much seems fairly certain, on the basis of extensive observations by many specialists: defective vision is almost universal; partial deafness is increasing generally; the sense of smell begins to degenerate in early childhood, if not in infancy; and the esthetic sensitivities of most people are very crude indeed, as is reflected more or less by the mania for violent noises and rhythms, as well as for extravagant forms and colors in design and in dress. Whatever the causes of this may be—and I have no idea what they are—the inferior sensitivities are eugenically bad, though not for the obvious reasons that make ill-health bad. Low sensitivity robs the ordinary man of a world of innocent pleasures which, if once possessed and tasted, would enrich his existence. And in the second place, low sensitivity makes him indifferent to a host of evils in his environment against which he ought to rise up in wrath. A race of degenerates who could neither smell nor taste would never resent heaps of

garbage and manure around their doorsteps; hence the only way they could ever protect themselves against the infections lurking in decay would be by the application of the highest order of scientific curiosity and experimentation. But this is so rare that, as probably has happened a thousand times in the past million years, whole races might well be exterminated through sheer lack of eye, ear, tongue or nose keenness. For, barring pure accident in discovery, there are only two ways of finding and correcting the evil: one is by being disturbed and incommoded by some phase of the evil and thus being aroused to fight it, and the other is by sheer inquisitiveness. He who is both insensitive and incurious has a slim chance of great-grandchildren, unless somebody else comes to his rescue with sensitivity or curiosity. And then he survives only as a parasite, becoming a menace to the superior types.

Science News-Letter, November 3, 1928

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