

Science Notes

BY WILLIAM G. HAYNES.

BREEDING OF DEFECTIVES SHOULD BE PREVENTED

Sentiment hostile to the preventable production of defective children appears to be growing. Even where there is objection to limiting the freedom of the individual by restrictive legislation it is recognized as the height of absurdity to favor the marriage of defective with defective, as our system of educating them in groups has hitherto tended to do. Statistics show beyond doubt, for instance, that two congenitally deaf parents are more apt to have deaf children than one deaf parent and one normal one. Why, then, should we insist on educating the deaf in institutions by themselves where they will be practically certain to mate with deaf partners? The same applies equally to other forms of defectiveness. In his book on "Being Well Born," Prof. Michael F. Guyer, of the University of Wisconsin, has some pertinent paragraphs on this subject. Our quotations are from an abstract in The Volta Review (Washington, March). Says Professor Guyer:

"In certain abnormal states there is danger of confusing similar conditions which may have two entirely different sources of origin. Deafness, for example, may be strictly inborn as the outcome of a germinal variation, or it may result from extraneous influences, such as accidents, infective diseases, neglected tonsils, and the like. The former is inheritable, the latter not. Bell, in 1906, in a special census-report to the United States Government, showed that deaf-mutism is markedly hereditary, particularly where deaf-mutes intermarry, as they are prone to do. Fay's extensive studies on 'Marriages of the Deaf in America' also demonstrates the hereditary nature of the congenital forms of deafness. Cut off as such individuals are from communication with normal people, the association of the two sexes in special schools and institutions is, of course, highly conducive to such marriages. . . . Two deaf-mutes should not have children, and yet such marriages are occurring every day. Even if two persons marry from families which tend to become hard of hearing, the evidence indicates that their children are likely also to develop this partial deafness as they grow older, altho it seems safe for a person of such tendency to marry into a family without it. . . ."

"Education of the public in the principles of eugenics is the method calculated to be of more far-reaching service than any other, in the negative as well as in the positive phases of eugenics. Education is necessary before we can have effective restrictive measures for the mentally incompetent established and enforced, and it is also a prerequisite to intelligent procedure on the part of normal individuals in considering their own fitness for marriage.

"Of greatest importance in preventing undesirable marriages, as far as people of normal intelligence are concerned, will be the sentiment of disapproval which will arise on the part of society itself when it becomes really convinced that certain marriages are inimical to social welfare. Public opinion is, in fact, one of the most potent influences in marital affairs,

simply because refusal to abide by the dictates of the community means social ostracism."

That social disapproval can become a real factor in preventing marriage is evinced, Professor Guyer reminds us, by the barriers to marriage based on race, religious sect, or social status. Even in democracies one is looked down on who marries "beneath" his or her social set. This sentiment of tabu, so readily and often so senselessly cultivated, will inevitably be extended in the direction indicated above when there is wide-spread knowledge of the facts of human heredity. To the establishment of a disapproval which is the product of its own sentiments rather than to legislative enactments, society must look for the greatest furtherance of the eugenic program. The writer goes on:

"Necessary as legal restraint is in certain cases, it must obviously be restricted to only the most glaring defects. Moreover, legislation can not run far in advance of public opinion.

"It must be admitted that there is a reluctance on the part of many even thoughtful individuals to the application of methods which savor in any way of restraint. An objection not infrequently urged by such persons against the application of certain eugenic principles is that they demand an unwarranted curtailment of personal liberty. . . ."

"We do not hesitate to send the

pick of our stalwart healthy manhood to war to be slaughtered by the thousands and tens of thousands when an affront is offered to an abstraction which we term our national honor, and, sublimely unconscious of the irony of it all, we throw ourselves into a well-nigh hysterical frenzy of protest when it is proposed to stop the breeding of defectives by infringing to a certain extent on their personal liberties.

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