

The SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE SECTION

A Magazine for your Reading Table

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS' PAGE



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Health First and Matrimony Afterward

By Dr. Edward C. Spitzka

A CERTAIN FRENCHMAN named Millet once wrote a book which he called by the high-sounding name of *Megal-Anthropogenesis*, or the art of breeding great men. It attracted attention—more attention than it deserved—until it fell into the hands of a wit of the day. "Very interesting," was his comment; "but what a pity it is that Millet's father did not possess a copy of the book."

Thus collapsed, punctured by an epigram, the soap-bubble dream of one early exponent of eugenics. The theory that perfect specimens of humanity can be turned out to order is more seductive than proven. Unfortunately, however, we can not apply to man the methods that are employed in producing race horses, prize dogs and blooded cattle. Here we have the mental, as well as the physical, to consider. More than once has the child of puny parents proved to be a genius; and—to complicate matters still further—it is often just the other way. Eugenics, although studied for centuries, is still a theoretical rather than an exact science, and must be approached with due circumspection.

Nevertheless, medical men are now able to take a definite stand on at least one aspect of this vital subject. We can not tell men and women how they should mate in order to insure positive types of offspring. But we can state, emphatically, and without reserve, that persons suffering from certain diseases should not enter into the marriage relationship, at peril of the health and happiness of children that may be born to them and the well being of the community at large.

Only the Healthy Should Wed

I BELIEVE that municipal and state governments should take cognizance of this fact. Eventually it will be regarded as a matter for Federal, perhaps for international, action. We must go slowly at first; for even vicious liberties, if they are of long standing, can not with safety be destroyed overnight. But wherever it can be done without working extraordinary injustice to the individual, laws should be adopted preventing the marriage of the physically unfit. Every candidate, man or woman, applying for a marriage license should be required to present a physician's certificate declaring him or her to be free from insanity and certain virulent transmissible diseases.

What then are these diseases? I will

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list them in the order of importance as menaces to humanity.

- 1: Constitutional insanity.
- 2: The two great forms of constitutional venereal disease: syphilis and gonorrhoea—the former as a source of danger to both the marriage partner and offspring, the latter to the marriage partner only.
- 3: Deformities that are likely to be associated with the transmission of serious defects of the nervous system, such as cleft palate, hermaphroditism, etc.
- 4: Epilepsy of the standing of more than one generation.

Medical statistics prove that a proportion of three out of every five children born to imbecile parents are certain to be weak-minded, and that the marriage of such unfortunates is a calamity to the race. Syphilis persists from generation to generation. Any sufferer from this disease who marries before he is certain that it has been eradicated from his system is guilty of a crime against society.

I have hesitated about including epilepsy in the list. It is undoubtedly transmissible to the offspring, though transmission does not occur in every case. A conservative ruling would be that an epileptic who is believed to be the first of his line to contract the disease should be permitted to marry, in the event of his being declared cured. But the epileptic sons and daughters of epileptic parents should, under no circumstances, be licensed to marry.

Persons showing the active symptoms of tuberculosis and other organic diseases should also be placed under the ban. But, for the present at least, it would not be practicable to forbid the marriage of the children of consumptives.

Romantic Love a Large Factor

SO MUCH for the dark side of this human problem. In conclusion, I should like to say that in spite of the restrictions that I trust will be placed upon the marriage of the future, it would be injudicious to overlook the factor of romantic love—that refinement of sexual attraction that raises man above the beasts.

Taken by and large, the offspring of parents who are deeply attached to each other are the best morally and mentally. It has even been found that the illegitimate child of love is the superior of the legitimate offspring of the loveless marriage. The reason for this is obvious. Erasmus of Rotterdam and the great Dunois, the Bastard of France, were notable examples of the high mental qualities of the illegitimate child. Probably on account of secondary social influences, however, a family thus founded degenerates in the course of a few generations.

The more that women are emancipated the fewer marriages there will be for financial reasons, women being today the greater offenders in this respect. The universal establishment of the real love marriage would be a boon to the human race. If the students of eugenics would modify their theories accordingly, they would earn the respectful appreciation of the true philanthropist.

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