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Publication/Creation

[Washington, D.C.?] : [publisher not identified], [1908?]

Persistent URL

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MORAL STIGMATA OF
DEGENERATION.



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A PERSON may have several physical stigmata or signs of degeneration and be at the same time endowed with moral and intellectual powers of the highest order. One may possess a healthy body and be a criminal by nature. A mental genius may be morally depraved. A high moral sense may coexist with mental mediocrity; indeed, it is not uncommon, but unfortunate to find goodness of heart combined with mental stupidity. There are very few persons without a stigma of degeneration.

In brief, mental, moral and physical defects and endowments may exist in individuals in most varied degrees and apparently independent of each other. Great injustice is therefore often done, by applying the term "degenerate" indiscriminately. In fact, some of the most ideal characters have been physical nonentities, or even physical degenerates of a pronounced type.

MEANING OF DEGENERATION.

In its anthropological sense, degeneration signifies departure from the primitive type, or reversion to a lower type, causing deterioration and loss of native faculties or race characteristics. Thus domestication has caused the degeneration of most of the primitive races.

For the naturalist, the most perfect type of horse is the Arab horse, the horse of nature and savagery. But

¹ Senate Document 87, 58th Congress, 3d Session.

from the agricultural point of view, the domesticated horse is superior.

Degeneration in a general sense, may be considered an essence, aptitude or tendency, which hinders development (mental, moral or physical) favorable to the species and tends toward diseases, which lead to dissolution of the species or offspring.

This essence, aptitude, tendency, disposition, or weakened power of resistance existing from birth until death, is degeneration.

This degenerative tendency may manifest itself by mental, moral and physical effects, signs, or stigmata, which may be the product of an original defective disposition, or the result of bad nutrition before or soon after birth.

These stigmata are either physical and so signs of intrauterine degeneration, or are mental and moral and can be signs of degeneration appearing in childhood, or later in life.

MORAL STIGMATA.

Moral stigmata of degeneration refer to the lowering of character and are much more injurious to society than mental or physical stigmata.

The popular idea of degeneration is a man of bad moral tendencies and habits, a profligate, spendthrift, gambler, drunkard, opium fiend, libertine, and the like. It is the moral defects of stigmata rather than the physical and mental, that the public mind emphasizes in designating an individual as degenerate. Moral degeneration consists in any evil thought, feeling, willing or action detrimental to individual or community which is a permanent element or tendency in the character of the person.

Such degeneracy, though it manifests itself only on occasions or periodically, exists from birth until death.

Moral degeneration, like physical or mental, may express itself in acts, which are its signs or stigmata.

FORMS OF MORAL STIGMATA.

Moral stigmata, in general, consist in anomalies of character, especially in infancy, as bad impulses, violence, anger, strange vagaries of sensibility, refractory to all reform, and instinctively perverse acts, as theft, murder, brutality, coarseness, etc.

Evil tendencies, showing stigmata, may be awakened or developed by intoxicants, as alcohol, opium, hashish, cocaine, chloral and tobacco (cigarettes).

Acts in which there is permanent tendency, disposition or inclination to commit crime, constitute the most serious forms of moral stigmata. Such stigmata are: Crimes against person as, homicide, murder, assault, torture, robbery, rape, kidnapping, seduction, blackmail, etc. Crimes against property, as, burglary, arson, larceny, embezzlement, forgery, extortion, destroying property, etc. Crimes against chastity and decency, as incest, sodomy, exhibitionism, and other sexual perversions.

Any act is a moral stigma of degeneration in which there is a permanent tendency or inclination:

To indulge in any form of vice, dissoluteness, depravity, profligacy, vileness, or loathsomeness.

To use any form of deception, as lying, fraud, trickery, imposture, etc.

To any kind of meanness, villany, baseness, etc.

To extreme selfishness, self-love, egotism, stinginess, covetousness, etc.

To cowardice, poltroonery, extreme distrust or suspiciousness, etc.

To any form of cruelty, brutality, inhumanity, etc.

To any form of vulgarity, coarseness, etc.

To any form of malice, hatefulness, ill-will, revenge, etc.

To laziness, indolence, listlessness, dilatoriness, etc.

To ostentation, display, pomposity, vanity, or arrogance.

To frivolity, silliness, giddiness, etc.

To run into debt, insolvency, etc.

To wastefulness, extravagance, etc.

To uncleanness, filthiness, etc.

DISEASED MORAL DEGENERATES.

Diseased moral degenerates are those with a disequilibrium of the sensibility and the emotions. They react with great energy from all causes, which affect the emotional side of their individuality. The modes of reaction are of two orders (1) depression and (2) excitation.

To depression belong cases of moral hypochondria, states of great perplexity, in which the person lives continually subject to the common causes of simple depression, as chagrin, reverse of fortune, etc.

Those who react by excitation, at the least solicitation are the prey of an erethism, which manifests great irritability, violent outbursts, and acts so brisk, that they seem irrational.

Moral insanity is a stigma of the most profound nature.

Certain degenerates seem unable to adapt themselves to the rules of morality; they know these requirements, but have no feeling responsive to them. Such degenerates are called morally insane. The degrees of moral insanity run from simple obscurity of insight to complete indifference or obtuseness to moral sense or feeling.

The bad instincts may exercise tyrannical influence, during life constituting a dangerous infirmity. Conscience may be very weak or nil.

SOCIOLOGICAL STIGMATA.

Sociological stigmata are fundamentally a form of moral stigmata, and are due to a permanent inadaptation

to surrounding conditions consisting in manifestations, or acts, that are detrimental to society. The want of adaptation, causing such acts, or stigmata may be:

Total or partial. In the total, the individual is lacking in so many elements of adaptability, that it is impossible for him to live in society.

Partial inadaptations may be racial, natural and individual.

A person of one race is often not adapted to live among people of another race. In the lack of family instinct, absence of love for children is a greater stigma than absence of love for parents, though both wound the most intimate feelings.

Social inadaptability depends largely on the surroundings of the individual. A person may be living a quiet and inoffensive life, in complete harmony with his environment, when through some misfortune, everything is changed, and if unable to adapt himself to the new conditions, he succumbs and becomes an enemy of society. If he has been living for a long time in harmony with his conditions, this very fact makes it more difficult to overcome new hardships and temptations.

RELATION BETWEEN DEGENERATION AND ECONOMIC SYSTEM.

Every human being should have sufficient food and clothing, a healthy habitation, opportunity to be clean, no requirement to work beyond his powers and freedom from excessive anxiety. Such surroundings would be simply normal. But it is doubtful if half of the population are so fortunate as to have such an environment. The more the individual is deprived of such normal conditions, the more he is liable to deteriorate mentally, morally and physically. The poor are badly and insufficiently nourished, which is due to ignorance as well as want of money. They

become feeble through mal-nutrition, are rendered more susceptible to disease. Thus women with rickets often have a narrow pelvis, which is a stigma of degeneration and can be the cause of injury to the child's head at birth.

The inability or unwillingness of many women to nurse their own children favors the development of degeneracy in their offspring. Such women place the pleasures of society above the duties of motherhood, which indicates extreme selfishness, a stigma of degeneration.

A degenerate, if possessed of means, can easily marry, but his children will probably be degenerates. On the other hand, many healthy and strong individuals are prevented from marriage, because of their very limited means.

Again, militarism takes the strong and destroys them by war, or returns them to society enfeebled and diseased. In the meantime those too weak or defective for military service have had opportunity to reproduce their like at home.

Many of the causes of degeneration in the poorer classes are not found among the well-to-do and wealthy. Yet the lazy and indolent ones are prone to indulge in all kinds of excesses, which can lead to degeneration.

In the strenuous life of the middle classes, where competition is at its maximum, there is constant strain on the nervous system and if misfortune threatens, fear pervades the mind continually. In the liberal professions also competition has become so great that the strain on the nerves not infrequently results in neurasthenia, which is chronic fatigue.

The authorities are almost unanimous in the opinion that alcoholism is a prolific cause of degeneration. The spread of syphilis by means of prostitution which in its turn is influenced by economic conditions, is one of the most insidious causes of degeneration.

ECONOMIC STIGMATA OF DEGENERATION.

The present economical system of the world, though it may be the best possible under the conditions, seems to tend towards a weakening of the social instincts. The spirit of domination and insensibility for the misfortunes and defects of others among the upper classes and the servility and jealousy of the lower classes create a state of unrest and disequilibrium which are mental stigmata of degeneration. This condition is unfortunately increased by the contrast on the one hand of luxury often accompanied with laziness or debauchery and, on the other hand, extreme poverty with its consequent misery.

The spirit of domination and insensibility over against servility and jealousy are economic stigmata of degeneration.

Poverty and the fear of poverty (often worse) are also stigmata of an economical order, and in weaklings especially, are the occasion or cause of innumerable social evils. Thus child labor increases, and with it a tainted morality due to its bad, if not unnatural conditions, hindering normal development and producing premature agedness in the young.

The parent has charge of the child's education. The public pays little or no attention to it. The consequence is that large numbers of children are brought up by wholly incompetent persons. For the children of the lowest classes, education is hardly possible, owing to lack of means and absence of both parents from the home.

Extreme poverty, moral abandonment and educational neglect of children in the lower classes and cupidity in the upper classes are economic stigmata, giving rise to much misery and crime.

CIVILIZATION AND NERVOUS EXHAUSTION.

Civilization, the development of science and industry, and the economic system are the result of adaptability to environment. Each new effort of adaptation, each advance of that which is called civilization, is a new cause of exhaustion, which always acts with more intensity upon the feeblest individuals, who soon become incapable of continuing the struggle and succumb either to general troubles of nutrition or to degenerative tendencies, manifested in different organic diseases or functional defects.

In this struggle for existence, especially in the cities, it is the central nervous system, which bears the greater burden of the work of adaptation. It should be remembered that exhaustion of the nervous system can come from physical as well as from mental strain. One of the main effects of such exhaustion is incapacity of sustained effort, a stigma of degeneration. It is true that those congenitally healthy usually recuperate from the exhaustion. But if there be added privations of all sorts, the exhaustion may become more profound and not only favor individual decay but bestow morbid aptitudes upon the generation which follows.

EVIL EFFECTS OF LONG HOURS OF LABOR.

Too long and too severe work to which the laboring classes are often forced bring on conditions, that tend to develop degeneration. For the nervous system is overstrained, causing a certain irritability, which later may give rise to an abiding weakness or languor, which can be accompanied with a dull headache or even inability to think clearly. If excessive work be continued a long while, soon the whole body will be involved, the heart and larger vessels will be injured; circulatory disturbances may appear, as swelling in different parts of the body, especially

in the feet, and also there may be vomiting of blood. The brain ceases to act normally, so-called cerebral symptoms appear, as dizziness, whizzing in the ears, deafness, defective sight, paralysis and apoplectic seizure. Likewise, liver, kidneys, and the digestive tract are involved in the general weakening process. The muscles also lose their strength.

Not only overwork but its monotony is a cause of physical and mental fatigue resulting in deterioration. The less variation in work, the more tiresome it is, as it requires only the use of the same muscles, while the other muscles, being unused, may become dwarfed. The effect upon the mind is still worse. The specialization in modern methods of production, which requires an individual to do one thing only, is extremely monotonous. Thus in the making of shoes, each man has one or two parts only to attend to, requiring the same muscular movement, which he repeats day after day. This also makes him unfit to do anything else. And to add to his misfortune, as soon as he begins to grow old he is very liable to be replaced by some younger man, and thus becomes helpless and dependent. To cast a faithful man out in this way, is wrong in the very nature of things. The ignoring of people simply because they are old, is the result of extreme selfishness, a moral stigma of degeneration.

The present economical system causes women and children to seek employment outside, which gives rise to conditions leading to degeneration.

Many women are obliged to work at trades ill adapted to their nature. The fear of losing their places and the impossibility of living without their wages cause many to work almost up to the last moment before giving birth to a child, and to resume work a very short time after confinement. This can produce very serious results both to mother and child.

CRIME AND MORAL DEGENERATION.

The moral degenerate often becomes a criminal. Unable to direct his mental operations, slave of his impulses, or sentiments, which make him partially automatic and suggestible, it is easy to comprehend how he may, on the slightest temptation, be lead into crime.

Many criminals possess the marks of degeneration. No one has established this better than Lombroso and his school. Yet many degenerates are not criminals and probably would never commit a criminal act. Nor do all criminals have the stigmata of degeneration.

Criminals may be said to be inadapted to society. This want of adaptation may be permanent or temporary; in one case it is due to inward nature, in the other, to environment. But the lack of adaptation is a stigma of degeneration only when it is permanent.

The normal man has a certain capacity sufficient for the exigencies of life. This capacity is wanting in the criminal and the degenerate, and is also wanting in a more or less degree in children, aged persons and insane.

A man can be a moral degenerate and have a criminal nature, though he may not have committed any act which could be regarded as a sign or stigma of either. He may have had immoral or criminal tendencies in him, but a good home in early life and like surroundings later on may have saved him from falling.

Incapacity of sustained effort is one of the most common stigmata of degeneration. Degenerates therefore, in addition to the usual need of subsistence, have special wants for the relief of their decaying vitality. They are thus often forced to depend upon others as they are incapable of supporting themselves. They accomplish this by dishonesty or violence. Thus it is that degeneracy increases crime. The more an individual, or race, becomes

feeble, the more its need of stimulation or excitation, and each excitant only leaves it more exhausted still. The degenerate is attracted by the very things that injure him, which increase his degeneration and tend to eliminate him. The alcoholic, the gambler, and the libertine are similar examples only too well known.

DEGENERATES IN PRISON.

To gain an insight into the actual relation of degeneration to crime, there is perhaps no better way than to give the divisions of prison population with the classes and proportion of degenerates. As an illustration the prisons of Paris and suburbs may be taken. In these prisons, the inmates are of two classes, those who are fixed there and those who form a floating population, consisting of persons who may have been convicted once or twice but rarely more, like the wine merchant who is imprisoned for adulterating his product, or the bank clerk who at the time of great need borrows money from his case and forgets to return it.

These and similar criminals are only prison transients. Generally one or two days confinement are enough to make them more honest, or at least more careful.

Those who are permanent inhabitants of prison are often habitual criminals who have been convicted many times. These may be divided into two classes: The infirm, beggars, and vagabonds, persons incapable of earning a living and to whom prison is a refuge. They are seldom convicted of theft, but continually arrested for begging, or vagrancy. The second, or permanent class are the real criminals, those whom theft, vagabondage, drunkenness, rape and murder continually bring back to prison. These are degenerates.

If we eliminate the floating population of prisons, most

of those who remain are sons of alcoholics. Father alcoholic, son criminal and usually a thief.

The habitual criminal shows the influence of parental alcoholism, manifests absence more or less complete of moral sense and exhibits the influence of prison life.

The class of degenerates most frequent in prison are the weak-minded, then follow superior degenerates. The least numerous are the imbeciles.

The weak-minded are without intelligence and judgment, with narrow ideas and mechanical memory, with feeble will powers, incapable of attention, without imagination and giving passive obedience to the suggestions of others.

The superior degenerate is relatively rare in prison. He is without equilibrium, yet intelligent, but his mind acts in an unequal and sudden way. He may have generous ideas and high ideals, but he is incapable of sustained effort, and so unable to carry out his principles. His eccentricities suggest the need of an asylum rather than a prison; but being without equilibrium he may not know how to repress his passions and so commits crime.

In his youth the imbecile is most frequently placed in the asylum, but his mind being moved almost wholly by instinct and impulse and thus being liable to commit some offence, he may find his way to prison.

STIGMATA OF CRIME ACCORDING TO THE ITALIAN SCHOOL.

According to the Italian School of Criminology, the habitual criminal is a born criminal and presents certain physical and mental deviations from the normal man, that are characteristic. Some of the more important of these deviations or stigmata are: very small or very large head and a general lack of symmetry, as saddle-shaped head (clinocephalus), pointed or sugar-loaf head, a twisted

shape head (plagiocephaly), sometimes called kidney-shaped.

With the anomalies of the skull go naturally those of the face. As the bird face with the very small head, the flat forehead of the pointed head, a crooked and flat nose, prominent eyebrows and jaws, asymmetry of the orbits, slanting of the teeth, deformities of lips and gums, lower jaw projecting beyond the upper, and many irregularities in the shape of the ears.

Of the deviations or stigmata in the rest of the body might be mentioned excessive or dwarf growth, unequality of both halves of the thorax, club-foot, club-hand and many anomalies of the genital organs. These are some of the main anatomical stigmata, claimed to be characteristic of habitual criminals.

Some of the functional irregularities or stigmata are: obtuseness of sensibility to pain (analgesia), incapacity of blushing, color-blindness, left-handedness and abnormal sexual impulses.

Mental anomalies consist in a weakened intelligence, or unequally developed. There is an obtuseness to or absence of kind feeling or altruism, a moral color-blindness, with an incapacity for repentance or for improvement, an inconstancy and changeableness in feeling, and from childhood up a permanent inclination to immorality and maliciousness.

It will be admitted that all of these stigmata are also stigmata of degeneration. But that they are characteristic or peculiar to habitual criminals, is disputed by the great majority of authorities and is therefore a question that can be left to the future.

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