

## **The intermarriage of relatives and its consequences.**

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# THE INTERMARRIAGE OF RELATIVES AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

THAT the intermarriage of blood-relatives is ordinarily attended with calamitous consequences to their offspring, might be established by *à priori* arguments which belong to the school of physiology, and of which the present writer has no knowledge. We may, however, satisfy ourselves as to the conclusiveness of those arguments from the fact—of which we are credibly assured—that they are accepted by our Catholic physiologists generally; by not a few non-Catholic writers on that science; and that the hesitancy (for it is no more) of many English Protestant authors may be traced to their unwillingness to condemn a practice so common amongst themselves, and in which they may, perhaps, be personally concerned. As a distinct illustration of this unwillingness, we may refer to the fact, recorded by Dr. Shuttleworth of Lancaster (*The Relation of Marriages of Consanguinity to Mental Unsoundness*), that when, in 1871, Sir J. Lubbock suggested to the House of Commons “that a question should be inserted in the Schedules [of Census Returns] with reference to cousin marriages,” the proposal met with “the scornful laughter of the House, on the ground that the idle curiosity of speculative philosophers was not to be gratified—at any rate by State aid.”

With all this easily intelligible disinclination to reprobate marriages of consanguinity, we find many eminent writers

constrained to surrender personal prejudice to professional conviction. Thus Dr. Charles West (*Mother's Manual of Children's Diseases*, 1885) says: "First among the causes of sickly infancy and premature death, may be mentioned the marriage of near relations." Dr. Shuttleworth—for many years Medical Superintendent of the Royal Albert Asylum, at Lancaster—writes: "There exists in the public mind, as one sees evidenced by remarks in *Society* and other journals, a misgiving as to the propriety of such marriages; and in medical literature also we find a disposition to attribute many evils, both physical and mental, to the intermarriage of relatives." The same learned and experienced physician, writing in the *British Medical Journal*, July 6th, 1889 (p. 53), says: "Subsequent experience leads me to think, even more seriously than before, of the undesirability of marriages between cousins . . . Quite lately I admitted into this institution four imbecile brothers and sisters out of a family of six, and in this case no other cause than the consanguinity of parents has yet been ascertained." The "misgiving" referred to as seeking relief in the correspondence columns of *Society* and other journals, is no more and no less than the expression of a dread, graven on the minds of interested correspondents by the revelation of such melancholy results in others; while the fact that "medical literature" has the smooth current of its philanthropy so continuously ruffled by the repetition of the same question, proves, beyond a doubt, that the medical mind too is incessantly haunted by the same unbidden and unwelcome apprehension. I may add that those issues of the *Medical Journal* and *Lancet* are rare in which reference to this question does not recur; and that the treatment which those references receive—at the hands of writers whose professional reputation and fortune are at stake—is either wholly condemnatory of intermarriage, or so transparently evasive as to be tantamount to unequivocal condemnation.

The editor of the *Lancet* writes (January 28th, 1888):—"Few questions are more frequently asked by the readers of this journal than the important and interesting one, 'Do consanguineous marriages lead to disease in the offspring?'"—

showing that medical men believe that it unquestionably does lead to degeneracy. And, although English physiologists are, as a rule, reluctant to place on record the results of their own enquiries, they do not hesitate to reproduce the inferences of others. They refer their readers, for example, to the Clinical Lectures of Trousseau, who treats at considerable length "*des funestes influences des unions consanguines sur la propagation de l'espèce,*" and who "dwells especially on the prevalence of *deaf-mutism* in the offspring of such marriages." On this subject we shall have much to say later on. They also refer, and seemingly with tacit approval, to Devay's *Hygiène de Famille*, in which he "charges upon marriages between relatives of the same stock, *by the sole fact of the identity of blood*, the production of a specific cause of organic degeneration, fatal to the propagation of the species." Dr. Shuttleworth writes: "It is doubtless the case that morbid heredity, and especially mental morbid heredity, is likely to be intensified in the offspring of cousins." Sir J. Crichton Browne goes much farther when he asserts that "even healthy temperaments, when common to both (cousin) parents, often come out in the children as decided *cachexiae*"—that is, disordered states or habits of body. Dr. Sir Arthur Mitchell, Deputy Commissioner in Lunacy for Scotland, arranges as follow the conclusions to which he has been led:—

"I°. That consanguinity in parentage tends to injure the offspring. That this injury assumes various forms. That it may show itself in diminished viability at birth; in feeble constitutions increasing the risk of danger from the invasion of strumous [glandular or scrofulous] disease in after-life; in bodily defects and malformations; in deprivation or impairment of the senses, especially those of hearing and sight; and, more frequently than in any other way, in errors and disturbances of the nervous system, as in chorea [St. Vitus' dance], paralysis, imbecility, idiocy, and moral and intellectual insanity. Sterility is another result of consanguinity in marriage.

"II°. That when the children seem to escape, the injury may shew itself in the grandchildren; so that there may be given to the offspring, by the kinship of the parents, a potential defect which may become actual in their children, and thenceforward perhaps, appear as an hereditary disease.

"III°. That, as regards mental disease, unions between blood-

relations influence idiocy and imbecility more than they do the acquired forms of insanity, or those which show themselves after childhood."—(*Blood-Relationship in Marriage, &c.*)

But perhaps no stronger argument need be adduced to establish the melancholy consequences of intermarriage than that which is found in the fact that the advocates of its "harmlessness" require, as an essential prerequisite in the parents, the presence of conditions that are most rarely, if ever, verified; and which, even if verified, would, according to Sir Crichton Browne, Devay, Sir Arthur Mitchell, &c., afford no guarantee whatsoever. The editor of the *Lancet*, in the paragraph already referred to, answers the question,

Do consanguineous marriages lead to disease in the offspring?" His words are pregnant with suggestion: "Our reply has constantly been, 'PROVIDING both parents are healthy'—which here means devoid of all taint—'no harm need be expected to result to the children of such marriages.'" But, he adds: "If both parents exhibit a proclivity to any particular form of disease (as, for example, to scrofula), the tendency is likely to be exaggerated in the children." This very negative argument represents the fullest force of the defence put forward by those who advocate the possible "harmlessness" of cousin marriages; but, in the face of what has been already written, and of what is to follow, it is practically of no value. Even a non-medical man may confidently interpolate that, as (1) no man or woman exists without some more or less serious default of constitution, and (2) as that default is, as a rule, possessed either openly or latently by all of near cousinship, such default is sure to be reproduced in an "exaggerated" form in the offspring. The unhappy progeny derives a "double dose" of the malady concentrated within the compass of a single constitution. Where the parents are not related by blood, there may be some corrective: here there is stimulated growth.

I shall conclude those general observations by repeating that, according to the most eminent and experienced writers, it matters little whether the disease that may be "exaggerated" in the offspring, has been "exhibited" or "latent" in the parents; and furthermore, that the development and

outward manifestation of the malady may not occur till the third or fourth generation. That it does eventually occur, as the melancholy inheritance of cousin marriages, is a fact to which unprejudiced writers of all classes bear testimony.

#### IDIOTCY AND INSANITY.

The generalizations from physiology and actual observation, conveyed in the above-quoted extracts, seem to be unassailable, especially when they come to us on the authority of writers whose professional eminence has been disciplined and matured by that "mistress of all the arts"—experience.

But there is another and more accessible method by which this "important and interesting question" may be elucidated—that, namely, which exhibits to us the actual results of marriages of consanguinity. To form, however, anything like a scientifically accurate estimate of the calamities created by intermarriage, it is manifest that we should have within reach an authenticated record of the consanguinity or non-consanguinity of contracting parties generally. The duty of providing that return would naturally devolve upon the Government, to whose administration is entrusted that *suprema lex*, the *salus populi*, and to whom the decennial Census papers afford such an easy opportunity of securing it. But, as we have seen, the Government affects to regard the suggestion as a pandering to "the curiosity of speculative philosophers;" and the proposal—even when made by so distinguished a public man as Sir J. Lubbock, P.C.—has been hitherto "rejected amidst the scornful laughter" of the House of Commons. If, nevertheless, such imperfect statistical returns as we do possess afford the strongest *pro tanto* evidence of the disastrous evils of marriages of consanguinity, nothing can be more rational than the inference that, if those returns were exhaustive, that evidence would be overwhelming.

In 1860 Sir Arthur Mitchell collected evidence embracing the history of forty-five cousin marriages, "nearly all from the upper and middle classes of society." His informants were "intelligent and observing men," and their statements

he accepted as "substantially correct." "In eight cases no evil results were observed. In eight cases sterility followed. The twenty-nine cases which remain gave eight idiots, five imbeciles, eleven insane, four paralytics, two deaf mutes, three blind, two with defective vision, three deformed (spinal curvature, &c.), six lame, one rachitic, twenty-two phthisical, scrofulous, or manifestly of weak constitution."

In pursuance of his inquiry Dr. Mitchell investigated the subsequent history of some of those consanguineous marriages, and gives the dreadful results as follow:—

"*Case I<sup>o</sup>*. A married B, his full cousin, and had five children. No. 1. Sound in mind and body; twice married to wives not related to him; had nine children, of whom one died in early infancy, one was eccentric, one imbecile, and three became insane. No. 2. Imbecile. No. 3. Dead. No. 4. Imbecile. No. 5. Became insane.

"*Case II<sup>o</sup>*. A B married X Y, his full cousin, and had issue nine children. No. 1. Of defective vision, and very scrofulous; sterile. No. 2. Of small stature, defective articulation, cleft palate. No. 3. Spinal curvature. No. 4. Idiot. No. 5. Defective vision; sterile. No. 6. Sound in mind and body; sterile. No. 7. Imbecile. No. 8. Of sound mind; dwarfish. No. 9. Idiot and dwarf.

"*Case III<sup>o</sup>*. E B married X Y, his full cousin, and had issue five children. No. 1. Eccentric. No. 2. Of sound mind; rachitic. No. 3. Of sound mind; married a gentleman not related to her, and had two children—one idiotic; the condition of the other not known. No. 4. Imbecile, ineducable, dwarfish. No. 5. Idiot; dwarf.

"*Case IV<sup>o</sup>*. M married F, his cousin, and had issue five children, of whom one was sane, one was paralytic, one was lame, and two were idiotic.

"*Case V<sup>o</sup>*. M married F, his cousin, and had issue ten children, of whom two were sane and arrived at maturity, one was an idiot, one an imbecile, one deaf and dumb, and five died in early infancy.

"*Case VI<sup>o</sup>*. A married B, his cousin, and had issue several children. No. 1. An idiot boy. No. 2. A sound girl, who married a man not related to her, and had two children, one of whom was an idiot boy, the other a boy sane and sound, but who became the father of an idiot child, &c., &c. The parents of the last-mentioned child were not blood-related, nor even her grand-parents, but her great grand-parents were cousins, and in their children, grand-children, and great grand-children idiocy had appeared, though it had never done so in any of the collateral branches of the family

"Deaf-mutism, blindness, deformity, club-foot, hare-lip, &c.,

have come under observation [as the results of intermarriage]. Cases II., III., and IV., illustrate the combination of mental and physical defects, and afford an interesting manifestation of sterility. In Case V., we have idiocy, imbecility, deaf-dumbness, and lameness, combined with a large infant mortality."

The "Cases" given above are manifestly "selected," and any *general* conclusion drawn from them would be unfair and indefensible. But there are two methods of inquiry by either of which the suspicion of "selected" cases, and the logical invalidity of the inferences deduced from "selected" cases, may be dissipated. The first would take the form of fixing upon some one mental or physical disease in a district of sufficiently extensive dimensions, and then ascertaining the relative number of marriages of consanguinity and of non-consanguinity in which that specific disease exhibited itself. If the ratio of its appearances in cousin marriages was found to be distinctly and notably greater than that in marriages in which no relationship could be traced, the inference would be inevitable that intermarriage was responsible for the disproportion. The *second* method would consist in selecting some localities of large area, ascertaining the family history of every marriage in those localities, and comparing the results of those marriages in which kinship existed with those in which it did not exist.

The refusal of the public authorities to register marriages of consanguinity, *as such*, makes it impossible to obtain a strictly and mathematically exact return by either method; but the enterprise of individuals, who have laudably taken advantage of the opportunities placed in their way, enables us to establish with practical accuracy that marriages of consanguinity are, as a rule, attended with lamentable consequences.

As a postulate, however, to the deducing of fair and legitimate inferences from the statistics I am about to give, it must be continuously borne in memory that the marriages of blood-relatives are *comparatively* few. Dr. Howe, of Massachusetts—one of the best known of modern scientists—speaking of marriages of *first* cousins, says that "they are not even perhaps as one to a thousand to the marriages of persons not so related." This estimate is quoted, and



apparently adopted, by Dr. Shuttleworth. The inquiry about which this paper is concerned, however, does not limit itself to first cousin relationship, but extends to that of third cousins, and the estimate of Dr. Howe must be modified accordingly. From evidence to be given at a later stage it will appear that we are making a liberal concession by fixing *as one to two hundred* the ratio of marriages contracted within the "forbidden degrees of kindred," to those contracted by non-relatives. Adopting this largely-abated ratio, let us apply it to a few of the many returns at hand.

I°. In 1875 Mr. George H. Darwin (son of the well-known naturalist), "from information obtained from various British idiot and lunatic asylums, ascertained that about 3·4 per cent. of the inmates (5·25 per cent. in Scotland) were children of *first cousins*." As Dr. Howe and Mr. Darwin both speak of *first cousin* marriages, we may lawfully draw inferences from the figures they give. Taking 4 per cent. as the average of inmates from England and Scotland who were the children of first cousins, it will follow that lunacy or idiocy will be forty times more probably the inheritance of the children of first cousins than of those whose parents were not—or were not so closely—related.

II°. Dr. Grabham, Superintendent of Earlswood Asylum, to whose report special value is attributed by scientists, states that "consanguinity of the parents accounts (partially only) for about 6 per cent. of the cases admitted to Earlswood." This would assign to the consanguinity of the parents one out of every seventeen cases. But what must be the reckoning if marriages of consanguinity be to other marriages not as one to seventeen, but as one to, say, two hundred?

III°. Dr. Langdon Down (*London Hospital Reports for 1866*) gives as his experience that "out of 852 cases of known parentage . . . 7 per cent. were children of consanguineous marriages, and among these 5·4 per cent. were children of first cousins."

IV°. Regarding the Royal Albert Asylum, Lancaster, Dr. Shuttleworth writes:—

' Of 900 patients . . . 46 are known to be children of consanguineous marriages. Of these 26 are the marriages of

first cousins, 3 of first cousins once removed, 10 in which the grand-parents were [first] cousins, and 7 in which other degrees of consanguinity existed. We may conclude, then, that these Case Books furnish, in the parental history of 100 imbeciles, 5.1 per cent. of consanguineous marriages."

V°. Sir Arthur Mitchell, writing in the interesting work already quoted, tells us of an inquiry which he instituted in a group of 299 parishes in Scotland:—

"The whole number of idiots examined was 711. Of these 108 were illegitimate; the parentage of 84 was not known; the total number whose parentage was known, 519; in the cases of 421 the parents were not related, while in 98 cases the parents were related . . . In order to believe that relationship does not influence the amount of idiocy, marriages of kinship would require in these countries to be to other marriages in the ratio of 1 to 7, *which they notoriously are not*. But in order properly to test this influence of consanguinity, we must at least deduct the cases of whose parentage I could obtain no information . . . Instead, therefore, of every seventh or eighth marriage in the community, we should require every fifth or sixth to be between persons related by blood to each other, in order to show that consanguinity of parentage does not influence the amount of idiocy."

If we assume that the marriages of relatives and non-relatives are in the ratio of one to two hundred, we cannot escape the conclusion that marriage "within the forbidden degrees" entails upon the offspring at the very least a ten-fold liability to those dreadful disorders.

It would be easy to multiply references and statistics supplied by Continental and American writers of eminence and experience; but our readers must take the assurance we give—that they are a mere repetition of those already set forth. All the world over, the intermarriage of cousins involves their unfortunate offspring in the same calamitous inheritances, and practically in the same proportion.

#### DEAF-MUTISM.

Many of the facts and some of the paragraphs in the following references to Deaf-Mutism, as a result of intermarriage, are taken from the "*The Children of Silence*," an admirable work written by Dr. Seiss, Director of the

Pennsylvania Institution for the Deaf and Dumb. The story it tells is simply appalling.

J. Scott Hutton, Principal of the School for the Deaf in Halifax, Nova Scotia, gives a summary of cases in that Institution, and states that—

“Out of 81 families connected with the school since its commencement more than one-fourth of the parents have been related in various degrees of consanguinity. In 23 families where the parents were related, there were 56 deaf children . . . One cousin marriage gives 3 deaf children, 2 of whom are imbecile, and 1 idiotic; another gives 4 deaf, 1 almost blind, and the rest with defective sight . . . Out of 110 deaf children, of whom we have definite information, 56, or *fully one-half* are the offspring of cousins.”

In 59 cases of deafness reported by the Illinois Institution in 1873, the parents of 42 were first cousins; of 9, second cousins; of 5, third cousins; of 2, fourth cousins.

Dr. Dudley Peet of New York writes:—

“Of all known causes, intermarriage is the most prolific cause of predisposition to deafness. *It has been settled beyond a shadow of doubt* that intermarriages of first cousins, and even some of second cousins, give rise to offspring which are generally either of small size, imperfect health, or imperfect development in some part: they are either idiots, blind, club-footed, or deaf. Those offsprings of first cousins who are not, are rather the exception than the rule.”

In the Report of the Pennsylvania Institution for 1884, there is given the result of a “special investigation respecting the pupils who left their Institution during the ten years prior to 1884. Out of 344, respecting whom reliable information was received, 28 were the children of 16 couples related in blood—9 first cousins, and 7 second cousins. Of these 28 deaf children, 22, or more than 78 per cent., were born deaf—a proportion of 45 per cent. more than where no such blood-relationship existed.”

Dr. S. M. Bemis, of Louisville, Kentucky, in a Report to the American Medical Association, gives the “result of 883 instances of such marriages, collected from various quarters in America, and with the intention of embracing, as far as possible, those in which the results were favourable as well

as unfavourable. Of these 883 consanguineous marriages the number of offspring was 3,942; 1,134 of them were defective in one way or another; 145 were deaf and dumb; 85 were blind; 308 were idiotic; 38 were insane; 60 were epileptic; 300 were scrofulous; 98 were deformed; and 883 died young . . . *I am satisfied that over 10 per cent. of the deaf and dumb, and over 5 per cent. of the blind, and near 15 per cent. of the idiotic . . . throughout the country at large, are the offspring of kindred parents."*

At the Third Conference of Principals of American Institutions for the Deaf, Dr. Gillett, "gave it as his belief that from 15 to 25 per cent. of all the blindness, deafness, and idiocy in the world is the result of consanguineous marriages."

I have been courteously favoured by Rev. Brother Stephens, Superior of St. Joseph's Institution at Cabra, Dublin, with the following valuable table, compiled from the Official Query Sheets of Admission, and verified by himself:—

—	Admitted within last 10 years	Of First Cousins	Of Second Cousins	Of Third Cousins	of remote Cousins	Degree of relationship not given
Males -	355	3	8	7 <sup>b</sup>	4	1 <sup>c</sup>
Females -	311	0	15 <sup>a</sup>	5 <sup>b</sup>	6	1 <sup>c</sup>

a. Two of these were members of families containing 4 deaf mutes each.

b. These include 1 boy and 1 girl of a family containing 5 deaf mutes each.

c. A brother and sister of a family containing 8 deaf mutes each.

From the foregoing Table it will appear that of the 666 children admitted to the Male and Female Institutions at Cabra, during the decade just ended, 50 were the offspring of cousin marriages, giving the ratio of 1 to 13.32. But if to these we add the 15 members of the same families, referred to in the "notes," the ratio will stand as 1 to 10.5.

1°. Manifestly, if cousin and non-cousin marriages were in the ratio of 1 to 10, no argument could be formed on the above statistics. But the proportion is enormously less.

With the present uncollected condition of local returns, it is indeed impossible to strike the exact ratio ; but that cousin marriages are comparatively few in Ireland may, I think, be conclusively inferred from the following facts : (1) That in one of the largest dioceses in Ireland, with its Catholic population of 168,000, the Dispensations in consanguinity granted from May, 1879, to May, 1889, were under 70. (2) That in a certain parish containing about 8,000 Catholics, only 2 Dispensations (and those in *Affinity*) were granted during the same 10 years, although the marriages contracted in that parish during that period numbered 424.

From the foregoing and collateral sources of evidence, it is manifest that the inference of Dr. Seiss cannot be rationally impugned :—

“ Whether the ill consequences of consanguine marriages upon the children born of them be attributed to the fact of blood-relationship, *per se*, or to some precedent unadaptability of constitution, hereditary taint, latent disease, or unfavourable tendency in one or the other or both of the parties, it does not and cannot alter the one clear and outstanding fact, that such marriages of kin do more surely and more amply develop in their progeny the whole catalogue of human defaults and infirmities than would otherwise be the case ; and among them a greatly multiplied number of instances of congenital deafness and imbecility.”

2°. It is manifest that if—as is incontrovertibly established—one out of every ten of our lunatic, deaf-mute, or otherwise afflicted population be the progeny of cousin marriages ; and if (2), at a most moderate computation, cousin marriages are 200 times less frequent than the marriages of non-relatives—the inference is inevitable that parties contracting within the “forbidden degrees of kindred” expose their offspring to a twenty-fold liability of being born with a heritage of deaf-mutism, lunacy, or some other most melancholy mental or bodily deformity.

3°. It is manifest that, in the words of Dr. Seiss, “ considering the blindness, insanity, lunacy, idiocy, and varied defects and weaknesses of mind and body, besides deafness, which are entailed on innocent children from such unions, we should think people would shudder at them and shrink from

them as reservoirs of misery, and that every voice would be raised to denounce the abomination, alike at variance with the laws of nature, reason, and divine prohibition."

4°. It is manifest that the Catholic Church exercises a most wholesome and discerning judgment in discountenancing and reprobating such unions; and when she is reluctantly moved to grant a Dispensation, in imposing, as a deterrent to others, a large money fine to be applied—as Canon Law prescribes—to the promotion of works of piety or charity, so that reparation may thus, in some measure, be made for the more than probable irreparable injury inflicted on society.

C. J. M.

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Subsequent experience leads me to think even more seriously than before of the undesirability of marriages between cousins. Quite lately I admitted into this institution four imbecile brothers and sisters out of a family of six, the progeny of the marriage of cousins, and in this case no other cause than the consanguinity of parents has yet been ascertained."

Shuttleworth B. M. J.

