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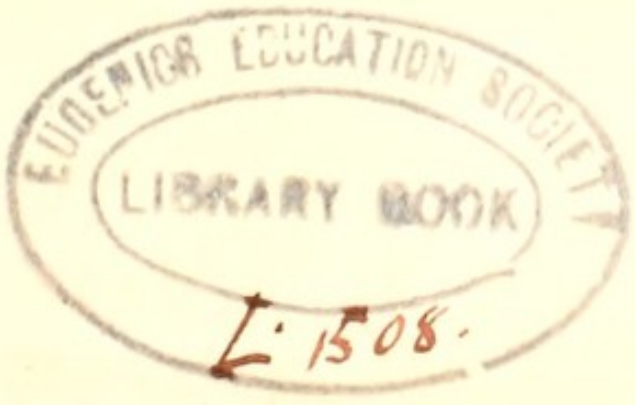
CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

PROGRESS AND THE UNFIT

LEONARD HUXLEY



PROGRESS AND THE UNFIT

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CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURE

PROGRESS AND THE UNFIT

DELIVERED AT SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE ON
MAY 27, 1926

BY

LEONARD HUXLEY, LL.D.

(Sir Arthur Keith in the Chair)

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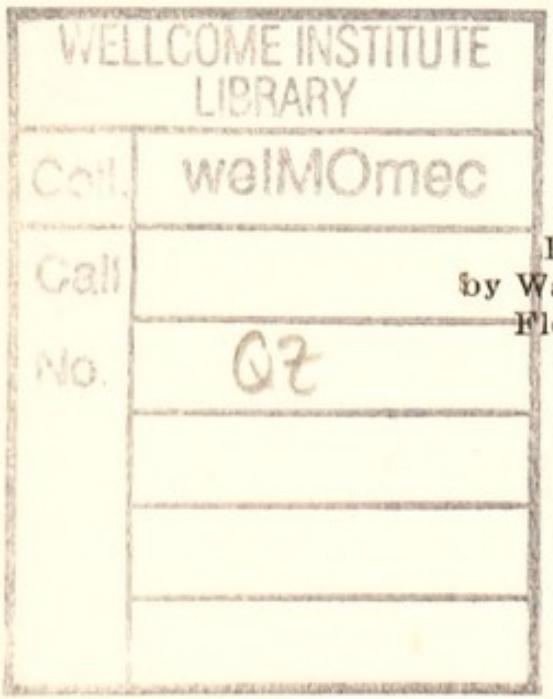

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

DR. LEONARD HUXLEY, our lecturer of to-night, rendered a great and permanent service to all of us when he wrote the *Life and Letters* of his father, Thomas Henry Huxley, for the subject of that biography was the most fearless champion of Truth produced by our country in the nineteenth century. Our lecturer, however, when setting down the events of his father's home for 1860, with characteristic modesty made no direct mention of his own arrival. I mention this omission for two reasons. Manifestly the date has a special interest for us who have met this evening to hear the seventeenth Conway Memorial Lecture; but there is another and even more important reason for my reference to the year 1860. The date of Dr. Leonard Huxley's arrival at 14 Waverley Place, St. John's Wood, marked a new and critical departure in his father's

career, one which was destined to revolutionize our outlook, not only on life in general but on the destiny of mankind in particular. In this critical year, 1860, Huxley was a man of thirty-five; since completing his medical studies he had given himself to the investigation of invertebrate forms of life, but as 1860 began to approach he saw he would have again to turn his attention to the study of man and of those mammalian forms which bear the nearest structural resemblance to that of man. He was moved thereto by the conviction that Sir Richard Owen was not being guided by the light of reason when he sought to isolate man from all other forms of life and set him as a thing apart. He therefore determined to survey the whole field of evidence for himself. No doubt zest was given to this inquiry by the publication of the *Origin of Species* at the close of 1859. The result of that inquiry was *Man's Place in Nature*, published in 1863. The cogency of the reasoning displayed in that work is known to all of you, but at the present moment I would merely draw your attention to those splendid concluding pas-

sages in which Huxley enunciates a new gospel for mankind. "Science," he writes, "has fulfilled her function when she has ascertained the truth; but.....it would be unworthy cowardice were I to ignore the repugnance with which the majority of my readers are likely to meet the conclusions to which the most careful and conscientious study I have been able to give to this matter has led me. .....Healthy humanity, finding itself hard pressed to escape from real sin and degradation, will leave the brooding over speculative pollution to the cynics and to the 'righteous overmuch.'.....

"Nay, more; thoughtful men, once escaped from the blinding influences of traditional prejudice, will find in the lowly stock whence man has sprung the best evidence of the splendour of his capacities, and will discern *in his long progress through the Past a reasonable ground of faith in his attainment of a noble future.*"

Thus, by a happy coincidence, this gospel of hope, as set forth in *Man's Place in Nature*, and our lecturer of to-night came into the

world together—born in the same household and in the same year.

Under the free and untrammelled working of these mundane forces which shape the destinies of living forms, man has come by his present estate; he has ascended the steps of the evolutionary ladder which lead from apehood to manhood. Will man's progress continue, or is it possible, under the workings of our higher civilization, that we shall not only fail to keep what we now have, but actually decline to an inferior status? This is the problem on which our lecturer is to focus our attention to-night. It is a problem on which the penetrating intellect of his father had played, and I am sure Dr. Huxley will forgive me if I again quote a passage or two from his father's writings to show how difficult and intricate are the questions which have to be answered by any people which seeks to improve its evolutionary position by the deliberate adoption of eugenic measures. In writing a Prolegomena to "Evolution and Ethics" in 1894, the year preceding his death (*Collected Essays*, vol. ix, p. 39), Huxley

states: "I sometimes wonder whether people who talk so freely about extirpating the unfit ever dispassionately consider their own history; surely one must be very 'fit' indeed not to know of an occasion, or perhaps two, in one's life when it would have been only too easy to qualify for a place among the 'unfit.'.....What sort of a sheep-breeder would he be who should content himself with picking out the worst fifty out of a thousand, leaving them on a barren common till the weakest starved, and then letting the survivors go back to mix with the rest? And the parallel is too favourable, since in a large number of cases the actual poor and the convicted criminals are neither the weakest nor the worst." Then, again, in a lecture on Harvey's discovery of the Circulation, Huxley expressed himself thus: "I myself am of the opinion that the memory of the great men of a nation is one of its most precious possessions, not because we have any right to plume ourselves upon their having existed as a matter of national vanity, but because we have a just and rational ground of expectations that the

race which has brought forth such products as these may, and in good time, under fortunate circumstances, produce the like again. I am one of those people who do not believe in the natural decay of nations."

Much has happened since Huxley expressed himself thus, and it is possible that in the light of later-day experiences his opinions might have been modified. Indeed, it is probable that in separating these extracts from their context I may have made him to appear as a champion of the free working of evolution in human societies to an extent he himself would have deprecated. In any case, it is but right, on an occasion such as this, that we should recall his great contemporary, Sir Francis Galton, who held and advocated the belief that man, by taking thought and by adopting rational eugenic measures, could expedite his evolutionary progress and reach a still higher estate in mind and body. How far we should permit the human society in which we live to work out its evolutionary end under such conditions as now exist, or how far we should alter and circumscribe these

conditions, under the belief that we can expedite and improve that end, are matters which are now receiving the attention of all thinking men. These are issues which are being canvassed and debated, and out of the clash of opinion we may hope that the truth will ultimately emerge. But whether we are inclined to accept the views which I believe were Huxley's, or whether we are avowed disciples of Galton, we shall all agree that the case as presented to us this evening is such as could be given only by one who is at once a man of letters and, like his father, an earnest searcher after the truth.

PROGRESS AND THE UNFIT

By way of preface to the Moncure Conway Memorial Lecture, to give which is my privilege to-day, let me recall the fact that I can conjure up from the past a living memory of the man as he was in the late 'seventies of last century, when he used to come to the familiar Sunday evening gatherings at my father's house. I was only a boy then, and whether or not, according to Shakespeare's characterization of youth, "unfit to hear moral philosophy," at all events it was not in my modest part to push myself into the eddying circles of big people's conversation, or plant myself, no doubt embarrassingly, at the feet of any Gamaliel. Thus I can clearly recall his personal appearance; but while I can see him in my mind's eye talking to other people, I have no definite impression of what he said or the phrases he used. It must have been

somewhere about 1878, when Moncure Conway was working hard to organize an Association of Liberal Thinkers, of which my father was chosen President at the outset of its brief career. The slim, alert figure, with quick, sympathetic eyes and a crown of crisply waved greying hair, stands out quite clearly in memory, with a definite part of the big room as background. He is in close talk with those around him. The immediate impression is of one eager and vivid. The later impression, gathered from others' talk or from books, was of one whose high enthusiasms sought allies in the scientific camp against the common enemy of cramping dogma and practical obscurantism. He preached a liberation of ideas which a generation later is echoed by thoughtful men in the English Church itself. Does not the Dean of St. Paul's declare that large parts of the Old Testament are a dead weight upon the intellect and conscience of the modern man? But the union Conway sought was an unequal alliance. He directed the campaign from another standpoint. Science fought from an intellectual

position, with the weapons of evidence from nature's history and the philosophy derived from nature and from historical criticism; Conway from the humanist position, attacking on the ground that the hard crust of the great religious organizations promoted unhappiness and effected a moral injury. The basic philosophies of the two wings differed; they were not in accord as to the nature and cause of that human unhappiness which Conway held to be the root of all evil. It was perhaps this divergence in scope and methods of propaganda which so speedily broke up the Association, and left Moncure Conway to follow the way of humanist preaching and writing, on his own lines, with the goodwill but without the direct aid of the man of science.

Still, ready as he always was to assimilate effective reasonings from other quarters that lent support to his main purpose, I imagine that he would not have shrunk from adopting, possibly with modifications of his own, some of the practical deductions since drawn from research, both physical and psychical, for the

betterment of mankind, even though the process advocated were not the spiritual way of moral suasion alone. For the prior question arises whether all men are equally capable of responding to moral suasion alone, equally advanced in the moral and intellectual development necessary to that end, and therefore whether selective measures should not be deliberately applied so as to ensure survival value to the best types for carrying humanity onwards to its highest developments. For the higher development of humanity was his constant aim.

The fable of the Sphinx is perennial. The generations pass, but the questioner remains, and every age has its own question to answer. On the answer to that question depends its prosperity, if not its very existence. Successive ages have found sufficient answer; failures have been many, but man in selected kinds survives and flourishes to show that failures have been outbalanced by successes against the incessant dangers that threaten the life of the individual or the community. The primal questions have been answered; nature

is more and more taken into subjection ; the wild is beaten back ; whole regions once deemed uninhabitable save by inferior races have been opened up by discovery of the cause and cure of tropical diseases ; fine culture and high civilization are attained, order and morality established. But though nature has been greatly tamed, there are still enemies without and within. The greatest of external enemies are rival communities of men, strong and predatory. It is the tragedy of civilization that culture alone is impotent against the overweight of physical force. Again and again the hungry generations have trodden it down. Lacking political perseverance or the sense of national unity, the art, the philosophy, the literature of Greece went down before the cunning and the spears of half-oriental Macedon. From ancient Crete to more ancient Mesopotamia, from India in the East to Peru in the West, the same story is revealed in the ruins of a splendid past.

In its form and character our own English civilization is usually compared to that of Rome—of Rome, the imperial city ringed

about with her provinces. Assuredly there is much in common. As pioneers, as civilizers of waste places and savage men, as builders of roads and suppressors of piracy, as upholders of law and order and dispensers of even justice between man and man, as respecters, imperially speaking, of local customs, religions, and cultures so long as not openly injurious to others, as creators of enduring civil institutions, and guarantors, each in its own degree, of liberty and equality before the law, Englishman and Roman have much alike. The great differences which underlie these obvious likenesses are in the mainspring both of expansion—military, with the burden of tribute, as against commercial, vivifying trade; and of government—the absorption of the provinces into a bureaucratic administration tempered by imperial decrees, as against the composite workings of individual liberties: autocracy from without as against self-expression from within. Thus we possess living springs of political action, unhindered potentialities of social and individual development denied to the Roman

Empire. There authority had come to be based upon the sword, and when the imperial diadem became the prize of military faction the larger inspiration declined along with the symbol. With us the sense of sovereignty is pervasive; it is shared by each unit of the whole, as life is shared by the members of the body; or as in a vast electric battery each cell, however small, is charged with its own tiny contribution to a vast cumulative potential. Thus, though the activities of the two empires are roughly parallel, their courses are not the same.

The fall of the Roman Empire has been attributed to many and diverse causes—the land system, where the latifundia of the big landholders wiped out the peasant proprietors; the weakening of the population by the spread of malaria, aided perhaps by these same latifundia substituting untended pasturages for the tilth of careful agriculture; the existence of slavery and the aggregation of a useless proletariate in the capital, supported by the unremunerative tribute of the provinces; the scattering or decimation of the

fighting men, who had to be replaced by trained barbarians; the crushing out of the middle classes with their wide potentialities for civic life and individual development; the spread of Christianity and other Oriental cults, with consequent incivism towards the old imperial régime and its ideals; and, later, religious faction which split the fabric of the Empire. Add to this the inevitable curse of military autocracy, that initiative, administrative, and military genius were suspect to rulers who held power by so precarious a tenure. With growing weakness, the policing of the frontiers broke down, and the hardy barbarians rushed in.

If we have to face a decline and fall, it will hardly be for external reasons. We are animated by a very different degree of resilience in political and social life, born of a strong individualism which even in our most socialistic movements keeps the individual in mind. It provides an impetus of movement which, in the nation as in the man, keeps the constituent atoms moving in the stream of life—which dissolves and recombines, and

renews by releasing fresh energy for common action.

In these latter days we have successfully resisted the assault of external force, not from uncivilized tribes, as in the case of Rome, but of a highly organized power backed by all the resources of modern civilization. If the new generations are wise, never again will representatives of Western culture risk the whole edifice of civilization by such a suicidal struggle, which jeopardizes not merely the existence of rival groups, but the structure of the Amphictyony of nations, the very life of all Western civilization. While that civilization stands unbroken, it commands resources which enable it to rest secure against any invasion, however numerous, of the hungry tribes on a different plane of social, if not of human, evolution, too different from ourselves to be assimilated as the invaders of the Roman Empire were ultimately assimilated.

But if we do not stand in the same fear of external assaults, we have internal foes to contend with, forces of bodily degeneration, of social disintegration. In ruder ages the

ruthless purge of nature tended to eliminate the weak in body, however intelligent, and the feeble in intelligence, however strong. The march of civilization has constantly been towards checking nature's ruthless hand as it fell upon the tribal group and the elements that composed that group. The wounded stag might be driven out of the herd ; sympathy for his fellow worked more strongly in man. Moreover, he had more skill to help or heal ; less chance of the sufferer's attracting the attack of beasts of prey. Not but what a very Spartan realism prevailed in many communities, and not only primitive communities. Scythians, we are told, no less than native Australians, put an end to the aged, who had become useless and a hindrance to the welfare of the tribe. At the other end of life infanticide has been and is a widespread form of control to prevent pressure on the means of subsistence. Still, it is true that with the advance of civilization as we know it human sympathies have grown, and a calculated regard for human life, of whatever quality, has risen to the rank of a first principle in organized

society. We see Napoleon acclaimed as a demigod though he fed national vanity and his own ambition with the blood of millions; but nothing was thought more ogreish in him than the fact that he was credited with ordering the euthanasia of the wounded soldiers he would not abandon to the tender mercies of the Turks on his retreat from Acre.

This Western regard for human life has come to consider life as a universal without distinction of individual values. Where Eastern philosophies hold life to be a universal with no individual values apart from the central universality, Western philosophy holds it as a universal which confers infinite value on each of its individual manifestations. Belief in an immortality which absorbs its several manifestations into the undifferentiated whole is at the opposite pole from that which ascribes a separate immortality, and therefore an infinite value, to each fragmentary manifestation. Thus in Western eyes life is life, whether it be the flickering spark in an idiot or the full flame in a great teacher of men. The man who dashes into an angry

sea to save a drowning dog gets as much honour in the organs of popular opinion as the scientific investigator whose very body is eaten up by the powers which he harnesses for the salvation of others. Thus, on the face of it, European civilization appears to be fostering every life which comes into being, good, bad, or indifferent, regardless of the physical envelope which conditions it or of the subsequent physical conditions to which it may give rise. Civilization having grown up by resistance to untamed nature, nature's harsh selection is improved away—and, what is more, man is forbidden to select either. If he proposes to do so, he is called by any name that comes in handy from the farmyard or the racing stable. He may build better houses, he may plan garden cities; he may enact short hours and long leisure, compulsory education for all, and the manufacture of silk purses out of incongruous elements; but he is not to set about conscious selection of the basic material upon the potentialities of which all progress in the long run must rest. Against even the deliberate restriction of breeding from

damaged stocks Christian sentiment, we are told by one of the most liberal bishops, is at present instinctively opposed.

This is one more example of the strange practical results which flow from large abstractions taken absolutely or applied to active life without qualification. A similar case is that of the pronouncement of certain Roman Catholic bishops a few years ago on birth control. The practice, they declared, was sinful, because innumerable souls were clamouring at the doors of human life and trying to get incarnated. To prevent their entering the world, and so presumably passing through their proper course of spiritual purgation, was wicked interference with the plans of the Almighty—a form, clearly, of the sin against the Holy Ghost. Quite apart from the fact that this is a curious argument to lie in the mouth of an organization which approves wide forms of celibacy and forbids yielding to these clamourings of earth-seeking souls before the performance of certain rites, it is the actual argument which in its logical fulness justifies and demands the child-

marriage of India with all its pernicious results.

It is an idea on the same plane as the conviction, strikingly illustrated not so long ago by pious Boer folk, that a plague of sickness, like a plague of locusts, was a visitation of a wrathful God. Wicked and irreligious was the profane hand that set about preventive measures. Looking back a hundred years, we perceive a similar attitude on the part of many excellent persons with regard even to more materialistic events, such as the coming of railways. To exceed the natural speed of the horse, the sufficient gift of an all-wise Providence, was to fly in the face of that providential wisdom. Queen Victoria herself, though compelled to go by rail, took care that her train should not exceed the pace of a racehorse.

On the mechanical side at least, the present generation has dropped all such hesitancies. The daily applications of mechanical science have laid bare the magnificent simplicities actuating the wildest complexity of the world's machinery and man's borrowings from it.

Working custom and educational habit have taught the multitude to believe that they understand "how the wheels go round," and they apply their knowledge to adapt the present and shape the future, prophets who justify themselves by calculated wonder-working.

But it has been otherwise with the phenomena of life. Here lay mystery, unpenetrated in its intricate recesses, its elusive and delicate balance, its flame-like inconstancy, at once so strong and so fragile, a thing creative but perishable, a gleam between a darkness and a darkness. Running through matter, it seemed to transcend the material. It was claimed to be other-worldly—chief mystery of the keepers of the mysteries. In prehistoric times this sense of mystery expressed itself in elaborate taboos connected with the activities of life and generation, things of power too marvellous to be rashly handled. Later these material taboos passed into an opposition of idea, attached to the religious outlook; an opposition, as our Bishop puts it, now instinctive rather than reasoned, whatever change

that instinct may be destined to undergo hereafter through the reasoning of future generations, as the results of studious investigation spread abroad.

Latter-day investigations point more and more to the closest interaction of body and mind. The working of either is affected by the other. Character as the sum of working tendencies may be altered no less by bodily conditions than by moral pressure. The whole theory of criminal responsibility is being reviewed as a branch of psychical pathology. The conception of the soul as an absolute entity arbitrarily planted in a body compact of tendencies derived from unsoulful sources, and bound to work out its ideal destiny through the channel of this alien, unrelated, indeed inimical, body, is passing away. A man may be respectable without holding the Platonical doctrine of the inherent baseness of matter. Plato himself, speaking of the healthy airs blowing from beautiful places which should play educationally upon the young, had moral influences in mind. He did not contemplate slums, physical degradation, maimed lives.

We, with such things around us, try to create healthy surroundings in order to enable the mind as well as the body to function healthily. Becky Sharp, from her limited point of view, was not guilty of worse than pardonable exaggeration when she declared it would be easy to be virtuous on ten thousand a year. Slums do not breed virtue, and we abolish slums ; but, unlike the ascetics of all ages, we do not regard the body as a residential slum and reduce it to extinction as soon as may be. Nor do we qualify our view by the reflection that, probably enough, persistent mortification of the flesh has been responsible for many of the visions and ecstasies of spiritual enthusiasts.

Suffering is an unconscionable teacher, and the concentration of bad conditions among a dense population cannot be overlooked. The amelioration of the conditions of life is admitted as a step towards better living and the higher life, if only as providing the nidus in which the germ may develop. There is no chance for the finer feelings where people herd together six in a room. When hunger

presses, what becomes of honour, honesty, altruism in the mass? Break the scaffolding of society, and savagery ensues. In the breakdown of social organization after the War, life in some of the highly civilized cities of Eastern Europe presented a piteous spectacle. Against the possibilities of such general failure, we have begun to insist upon decent housing, stability of employment, satisfactory occupation for leisure time (this last one of the happy results of general education)—these are matters in which as the politician said, we are all socialists nowadays.

But these things leave one vital element untouched. We select conditions, we select individuals more or less roughly from the mass for administrative and other purposes, but we do not select the human raw material that goes into the distilling vat of society. We work to raise the intellectual and moral and physical standard of our people, but we are equally zealous in refusing to close the channels through which the material whence the future shall be distilled is diluted and debased. We look on complacently while

the feeble-minded multiply—and multiply without self-control far faster than the general average; we preserve them sedulously, for are they not human and demanding pity, incompetent and demanding help? We educate them, knowing that, though they may rise a little in the scale, they will never reach the average; and finally release them from adolescent restrictions to enjoy the forms of adult independence, free to breed their like superabundantly, to bring down the general level of intelligence and character, and to be a life-long and growing burden on the rest of society. Against bodily disease we work indefatigably; a cure here may restore the sufferer to average health or better, and render him able to leave descendants capable of development to still higher physical conditions. But the mentally deficient are without hope of rising, and the heritage they pass on is equally incapable of rising. Their increase is like a fungoid growth on a sound tree, precursor of degradation and decay.

Are they increasing? It appears so. Not only are we more aware of them, since all

children pass through the schools, but more are preserved under our care. In old days, to be sure, the village idiot was a regular figure; cities, far smaller and less degenerative than those of to-day, had their own mental degenerates. But now we have begun to mark them down and give them systematic treatment; there are in England, we are told, 150,000 in regular institutions, without counting the large number kept at home. It has been estimated that in Europe as a whole one per cent. of the population are in a recognizable degree mentally deficient. More completely, perhaps, than consumptives and syphilitics they are a source of national weakness. Consumption and syphilis we are beginning to deal with, if not drastically, at least reasonably up to a point. We aim at some measure of prevention as well as cure, so far as it is possible to restore a damaged body to working order. But though cure means that thereafter the disease itself is not passed on, and that the resultant lesions may not be such as to affect inheritance, in the case of consumption at least there is passed on a constitutional

inability to resist attack of the disease, with all its individual suffering, its public waste, its grief and burdens to those near and dear to the sufferer. Could the disease be eradicated as, for example, rabies and leprosy have been eradicated in this country, the innate susceptibility would cease to be dangerous, in the absence of the source of infection. But that happy consummation has not yet been reached. Meantime the uncertainty of the incidence of the disease in the next generation, the hope, if the question is ever seriously considered, that it will skip the children or be kept off by careful prophylaxis, diverts any movement towards renunciation of marriage and the hope of offspring, and the disease, though less disastrous than of old, is still a portentous source of national weakness, for all that mentally there is no feebleness, but rather a stimulus and excitation of imagination and feeling. It has even been asked whether the existence of a single Keats did not give the world more than it loses by the sacrifice of the army of consumptives. Assuredly, for my part, I should answer No. The poet's

sensitiveness may indeed burn high in the fever of the disease, but that fever is not the only source of high poetry, and to give answer it is enough to have seen a little of human suffering in the other scale.

So the strain of the susceptible continues to multiply, with much national injury still, but with very little restriction self-imposed or external, and justifying its freedom to multiply by the ever-improving defence of various hygienic safeguards. But with the mentally deficient there is no hopeful margin ; it is not a case of mere susceptibility to harm in a single direction which may be countered by measures of defence. The weakness is fundamental. Biologists tell us that in any case of mental deficiency a complete genealogical record will show somewhere a similar case. The heritable factor has been handed down the line of descent. But it is one of the class denominated recessive, which in the larger proportion of cases where it is transmitted remains latent. It is only called into activity in combination with certain other factors, and the mathematical chance of such combination

occurring is happily fairly small. It would become still smaller if the developed cases did not multiply.

This theory of origin accounts for the sad fact that sporadic cases occur in strong-headed, strong-bodied families which have no memory of any misfortune of the kind among their forebears. But whatever their surroundings, however harmless, gentle, and affectionate they may be, the sufferers can play no independent part in social life, can contribute nothing of higher value to progress. They are without intelligent powers of self-protection, and if left to themselves they are prone to drift on the warm tide of instinct and multiply their kind with abnormal rapidity, increasing the social burden and lowering the average of intelligence, moral energy, human worth.

Where the family is well-to-do the sufferer is provided for and protected so long as life lasts; the question arises, What is to be done with the others who have no provision and no protection? There are institutions which care for them when young and try to train

them to be useful in the meagre part open to them thereafter. Are these institutions to continue this care as long as they live, restraining them from the public danger of falling into crime or multiplying their kind—a gentle and tender form of segregation? Or shall the alternative suggestion be enforced, to leave them their personal independence while rendering them sterile by a simple surgical operation which, we are assured by those who have tried it, leaves the functions and the enjoyment of life unimpaired while preventing actual propagation? This method has at least the advantage of saving large public expense and avoiding the visible stigma of confinement and constraint. And if restriction be applied to defectives other than the feeble-minded—such, for example, as the intelligent deaf-mute who is still able to work and maintain himself—such a man, instead of being compelled to endure the comfortless isolation of lodgings or an institution, would not be debarred from having a home of his own at the price of a childless marriage, for a home demands a woman's

hand to keep it for the worker, and in our villages a woman who comes in to "do for" a single man is liable to malicious talk, one effect of which in another direction is to make the re-marriage of widowers a practical necessity. On either method there must be an infringement of individual liberty; there is certainly some gain in making less parade of the infringement, especially in a country where the very idea of personal liberty is still so potent a factor and the individual still stoutly resists surrender of his rights and his being, whether to a committee or to an autocrat.

As in every case of legal restriction, we are up against the question of a general principle and its limitations. Social life is a compromise between the interests of the one and the interests of the many; as in the parallelogram of forces, it moves along the resultant of clashing desires, and law is the agreed formula which declares the working balance between them. Experience reveals new forces; new forces mean new balances and new laws. But law, however skilfully based on fact, cannot

outrun public opinion, and public opinion is largely governed by sentiment. To-day sentiment is hardly ripe for drastic measures, but with reasoned discussion and consequent habituation to the idea and its results, sentiment changes its colour and opinion faces about. What was out of harmony and intolerable to one generation is the accepted custom of the next, not in fashion only, but in art and practice. It will be borne in upon us year by year that of destructive forces now present the subtlest and deepest going lie within the body politic. Army Leagues and Navy Leagues against external aggression, Leagues of Nations to remove causes of offence and smooth the path of peace—these are all very well, but their success means nothing if the nation preserved is cankered within. We were unjustly reproached with being a C_3 nation because, after two million of the best had voluntarily enlisted, conscription raked in the remnant. We shall justly incur the reproach if we openly preserve and multiply the weaklings in mind who make the nation incurably below C_3.

Enthusiasts for regenerative control have proposed aggressively wide scope for similar methods of restriction. They would bring into the net not merely the obviously unfit in mind and body, but hopeless offenders against the social code, such as drunkards and criminals, whose moral delinquencies seem to have grown out of or grown into their very structure, mental and physical. It is easy to be too drastic before we know for certain whether the heritable qualities which under one set of conditions lead to crime may not lead to very different results when put to work under better conditions, and the milder educative and constructive methods of the conditional sentences, as known across the Atlantic, seem better adapted to these cases. Nevertheless, it is fairly clear, I think, that to breed from epileptics, from the worse types of the insane, from the ungovernable who cannot refrain from violence, is to lower the standard of human society, even though it may be that individuals here and there among these classes have contributed something to history. The debit side of the account, in

suffering and loss, far outbalances the credit side, and it should not be beyond the wit of man to devise methods of registration and restriction free from cruelty or injustice.

Another form of the unfit sedulously preserved to-day is the class of prematurely born infants—those born before the seventh month, which experience gives as the working limit for subsequent development of a useful life, physical and nervous instabilities notwithstanding. It has become a point of honour with the medical profession to stimulate these imperfect lives, to grow them on in incubators, to see how far they will advance in the scale of human beings—and yet they do not advance far in that scale. Puny, miserable half-lives, they struggle on for a longer or shorter while in defiance of a steadfast Nature which is trying to let them slide into oblivion ; a pitiful sight, a hapless burden, destined only to swell the empty figures of the birth-rate and the death-rate. True that brilliant and gifted persons have emerged from the ranks of the too early born—a Newton or a Jane Welsh Carlyle ; but they did not come from the lower

ranks of that company below the dividing line, where the spark of intelligent life is fainter and feebler, and never passes into a clear and steady flame. There is all the difference in the world between permanently helping on the possible and temporarily bolstering up the impossible, between the rare possibility of winning a valuable life and the overwhelming probability of adding to the number of the maladjusted and useless.

The difficulty lies, to be sure, not in the principle, but in its application. On which side of the dividing line is the individual case? Is it worth while trying to make a man out of this? Nevertheless, to the experience of the skilled practitioner it should be fairly clear where the line should be drawn between letting Nature have her way and countering her by human art. As to the burden of responsibility, that is immeasurably less where there is only a simulacrum of life to consider than where life is already in fuller activity and human in kind. Euthanasia, for example, in certain cases may seem unutterably desirable; but in face of the responsibilities involved, the

moral apart from the religious judgments of Western civilization to-day, who shall venture to be the judge and carry sentence into effect? Nowhere, save under the criminal law for murder, is the power of life and death now accorded either to individual or community. And where, outside criminality, liberty is curtailed for the safety of the community and the welfare of the incapable, responsibility is divided, authority works under safeguards. But the principle is clear and confirmed by precedents. Manifest danger to abnormal individual and normal public may properly be met by reasonable segregation or restriction. Even though society has not made up its mind as to the rights and wrongs of leaving the insane, or some classes of them, free to pass on the possibility of the taint to future generations, public opinion is satisfied once the fact is made clear that personal liberty in such cases is harmful. When a demand is made to deal more drastically with the feeble-minded, public opinion will only be satisfied if it can be persuaded that here also entire liberty is detrimental, however unspectacular

the injury is. As soon as it is thus satisfied, there is precedent for the expert machinery to determine the state of mind and to apply whatever treatment, even life-long, has been chosen to deal with it. Certain diseases are notifiable because they can be passed on; this is an infirmity which can be passed on. Certain diseases are to be isolated so long as the power to be passed on remains; this is one which keeps that power throughout full functional life. Infants are specially protected till they reach years of discretion: to these the years never bring full discretion; they continue to need, some more, some less, the protection accorded to infants. Justification lies here, if the eyes of society can be opened. Seekers after improvement must strive to open the eyes of the public.

Dr. Johnson once snubbed a boring young man who persisted in asking for advice whether he ought to marry or not. "I should advise no man to marry," he retorted, "who is not likely to propagate intelligence." This is an excellent motto for half at least of eugenic propaganda, however embarrassing in the

application when it comes near home. Every one admits the pious aspiration that society should be saved from being flooded by the offspring of the feeble-minded or the epileptic, of the dangerous lunatic or the hopeless inebriate; but no one quite likes to acknowledge such heritors among his ancestry, nor to bear the possible consequences of such an acknowledgment. If the signs are against them, must they renounce so much of life? There is nothing here of the enthusiasm which embraces asceticism for the sake of a higher personal existence hereafter: the reward is all for others; the ordeal all for self. Will the religion of an unrealized future place a halo round the heads of these living martyrs to an ideal, or give them a visible badge like the spurs of knighthood, to earn the outward respect and goodwill of their fellows, instead of the half-contemptuous pity for an inferior, rejected of men?

Renunciation would be all the more difficult because inheritors of these characters are precisely those least qualified for self-control or renunciation. External pressure there must

be, and such pressure will be the more effective as public opinion, on the one hand, has grown stronger and spread wider, exercising an educative effect on all from earliest days; and as, on the other hand, the significant cases among the sufferer's ancestry gather impressiveness by being nearer in time and closer in affinity.

Still, for the moralist remains the eternal question. It is easy enough, as Napoleon said, to govern by bayonets. Compulsion by the will of the majority is a still more sweeping weapon of democracy. But the moralist feels that not all things can be the object of compulsion. Thought in chains is no thought, and acquiescence at the knife's point is not morality. As the custom of slavery corrupts both master and slave, so the custom of force paralyses moral relations. On either side there is a loss of moral status. To enforce repression on a section of the community may be a help to physical progress, but, the question may be asked, is it not a set-back to the moral progress man also seeks? Action impelled from without is moral

only if the will imposing it is adopted and assimilated by the will accepting it. Lacking any suasive, character-developing element, then, is the enforced submission of these stricken folk immoral—a negation of the human potentialities latent in them—an act of injustice on the part of the doer, a falsity to vital ideals, worthy to be called, as Plato called such, a lie in the soul?

A half truth, perhaps, for in its entirety it applies only to normal man, man with intelligence to appreciate and firmness to apply the discipline laid upon him, man who by exercise of that intelligence and firmness is able to make further progress. The subject of restriction here is but a sub-normal man, a half man, hardly capable of assimilating and acting on the larger view. The normal man owes him tenderness, but not a liberty unhelpful to himself, which would end in the lowering of the average level of mental and moral power, retrogression instead of advance.

Improvement in the mass moves slowly. It is a commonplace to declare that human nature is much the same as it was a thousand,

two thousand, five thousand years ago. Be it so; still the emphasis on the various elements that compose it has assuredly been shifted, and in the process of civilized life will continue to shift, even if the ape and tiger within do not die. Millennial aspirations apart, change in this way is feasible, and such change is progress. And with deliberate bettering of conditions progress of this kind may be vastly speeded up; but it is hard to defend the retention, or, worse still, multiplication, of hindrances to this end. Progress, we grant, demands a sound physical basis on which to work; why, then, enlarge the unsound parts? It works by education; why foster those especially who can never reach the necessary standard? It works by the development of intelligence and character; why drag back the mass by encouraging the incapable? To remove these deadening elements entirely is perhaps impossible, but every reduction in their incidence is so much gain. If restriction of these can be effected without harshness, let it be done. Progress is not inevitable as society evolves; the hope

of ensuring progress is to make certain that the evolutionary material, moral and intellectual as much as physical, is not unfit for the purpose. To make no effort towards this difficult end is to abandon reasonable hope for the future of mankind.

APPENDIX A

BIOGRAPHICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES CONCERNING MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY

1832. Born in Virginia.
1850. *Free Schools in Virginia.*
1851. Enters Methodist Ministry.
1854. Enters Unitarian Ministry.
1858. Marries.
1863. Comes to England; Preaches at South Place Chapel.
1864. Appointed permanent Minister.
1869. Abandonment of prayer, followed by gradual abandonment of Theism.
1870. *The Earthward Pilgrimage.*
1874. *The Sacred Anthology.*
1877. *Idols and Ideals.*
1883. *Lessons for the Day* (2 vols.). (Revised edition, 1907.)
1884. Temporarily retires from South Place.
1892. Returns to South Place.
Life of Thomas Paine.

1897. Death of Mrs. Conway.
Final retirement from South Place.

1904. *Autobiography* (2 vols.).

1906. *My Pilgrimage to the Wise Men of the East.*

1907. Dies in Paris.

1909. *Moncure D. Conway: Addresses and Reprints.* (A Memorial volume containing a complete Bibliography.)

1910–1926. Memorial Lecture annually (see list opposite title-page).

APPENDIX B

THE CONWAY MEMORIAL LECTURESHIP

At a general meeting of the South Place Ethical Society, held on October 22, 1908, it was resolved, after full discussion, that an effort should be made to establish a series of lectures, to be printed and widely circulated, as a permanent Memorial to Dr. Conway.

Moncure Conway's untiring zeal for the emancipation of the human mind from the thraldom of obsolete or waning beliefs, his pleadings for sympathy with the oppressed and for a wider and profounder conception of human fraternity than the world has yet reached, claim, it is urged, an offering of gratitude more permanent than the eloquent obituary or reverential service of mourning.

The range of the lectures (of which the seventeenth is published herewith) must be regulated by the financial support accorded to the scheme; but it is hoped that sufficient funds will be eventually forthcoming for the endowment of periodical

lectures by distinguished public men, to further the cause of social, political, and religious freedom, with which Dr. Conway's name must ever be associated.

The Conway Memorial Lecture Committee, although not yet in possession of the necessary capital for the permanent endowment of the Lectureship, have inaugurated and maintained the work while inviting further contributions. The funds in hand, together with those which may reasonably be expected from supporters of the Movement, will ensure the delivery of an annual lecture for some years at least.

The Committee earnestly appeal for either donations or subscriptions from year to year until the Memorial is permanently established. Contributions may be forwarded to the Hon. Treasurer.

On behalf of the Executive Committee :—

(Mrs.) C. FLETCHER SMITH and ERNEST CARR, *Hon. Secretaries.*

(Mrs.) F. M. COCKBURN, *Hon. Treasurer*, "Peradeniya," Northampton Road, Croydon.