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THE LIMITS OF EUGENICS.¹

By ALBERT GALLOWAY KELLER, PH.D., New Haven, Conn., Professor of the Science of Society, Yale University.

It is with considerable trepidation that a layman sets out to speak before the members of what is, in many ways, the most imposing and the most noble of the professions. As the savage tribesman maintains a devout silence in the presence of the medicine- or mystery-man of his group, so is the more civilized man wont to feel a certain abjectness in the presence of the successors of those primitive mystery-men; his tendency is to stand deferentially outside the wigwam that encloses the wisdom and the rites, and to greet the explosions from within with pale-lipped anxiety, meanwhile murmuring the aboriginal Americanism—"Big Medicine!"

However, it is not to be denied that the doctor has always been an influential social functionary, from the time he made rain for the crops and sucked bullfrogs out of rheumatic arms, up to these days when he is a prime factor in missionary enterprise and in societal betterment—nay, even writes the best of detective stories and novels, commands armies of the United States, or makes dashes for the Pole. His activities have always had a pronounced social character; and so, perhaps, the student of the evolution of society may be permitted to foregather with him and talk somewhat of the social activities and duties of the doctor without incurring the charge of what the college boys call "butting-in."

To plunge at once, then, into the subject. One of the grandest ideas of the opening century, if it is capable of realization at all, is so capable only on condition that the doctors take the lead. This idea is that of a man-breeding which shall produce thoroughbreds; it is what its sponsor, Francis Galton, first called *stirpiculture*, and in latter days, *eugenics*. And the reason why the doctor must lead off in any eugenic campaign is the reason why any guide or pilot goes ahead, namely, because he has the information, and nobody else has any to speak of.

¹ Read at the third mid-year meeting of the American Academy of Medicine, New Haven, Conn., November 12, 1909.

Eugenics, says Galton, is "the science which deals with those social agencies that influence mentally or physically the racial qualities of future generations." And the program of eugenics, as proposed by Galton, is: (1) a historical inquiry into the rates of contribution to population of the several classes of society; (2) a systematic collection of facts showing the circumstances under which large and thriving families have most frequently originated; and (3) a study of the influences affecting marriage, that is, of social and other factors that tend to control the strength of passion. Here is some work laid out for the social scientists, comprising economists, demographers, anthropologists, and their congeners; but beneath and fundamental to social investigations of whatever sort there must, in this field, lie considerations to be emphasized and clarified, if at all, out of the experience and reflections of medical men.

There is nothing in this investigation-program that cannot be attempted with hope of result. The limits of eugenics do not inhere in the study of eugenics, but in its applications. Let us follow Galton yet a little into his program for the popularization of eugenics as a national policy; it must, he says, be made familiar as an academic question until its exact importance is understood and accepted as a fact; it must be recognized as a subject whose practical development deserves serious consideration; and "it must be introduced into the national conscience like a new religion."

This program does not strike one as quixotic, except for the last point. Galton realizes that he is at the beginning, and that the campaign must be laid out over long decades and with reserve. He evidently holds the view that most grand enterprises begin by being academic questions, and there is a good deal of evidence to support him; it is generally conceded that it is worth while to know something, and, if so, the academic reasoner has his function in life. As for the second point, it seems likely that it can be proved, and that readily, to most thinking men, that the "practical development" of the question "deserves serious consideration." But the making of eugenics into a religion is a different matter. What Galton means by

this expression is, in reality, that feeling—sentiment—apart from intellect shall be enlisted in the establishment of eugenics; that some sort of motive beyond and above reason, be it fear or what not, must sanction what has been celebrated out in the threshing-over of the new idea, before the latter can become a reality.¹

In this latter proposition is the heart of the whole matter of popularization, for we might well say that if eugenics can be lent the sanction of religion, or a sanction comparable in weight to that of religion, it is sure to prevail; but that if, on the other hand, it must take recourse to rational sanction alone, it is sure not to prevail, at least for long ages, except among very limited groups and classes. Here is a question whose clarification plainly falls to the student of human societies and of their evolution; and since this is the vital issue, within it must lie all the serious "limits of eugenics"—which is the specific subject before us.

Our first concern must be to develop the implications of that phrase, "into the national conscience like a new religion," and this carries us back at once into general principles of social evolution, and of the science of society. I do not know how the philosophers define "conscience" or would define "national conscience," nor do I care; what Galton has in mind in the use of the phrase is perfectly plain. To show that there has been some control of sex-passion in the activity of what he might call "tribal conscience"—which he evidently regards as at least the germ of his "national conscience"—he cites, chiefly from primitive life, a series of instances: for example, monogamy, taboo, prohibited degrees, celibacy. He is entirely correct in stating that these are cases of almost absolute control of one of the strongest, and on many occasions, by far the most powerful of human passions; and what is more to his point, here are cases of control of the very passion which the eugenists are most bent upon controlling. Incestuous union, for example, is regarded by many peoples with a horror that precludes the thought of

¹ Most of the above paragraph is taken from an article by the author on "Eugenics, The Science of Rearing Human Thoroughbreds," in the *Yale Review* for August, 1908, pp. 127-155.

sex-attraction as between those close of kin. And Galton need not stop with primitive peoples, nor with the restraint of one passion alone. Consider the case of the Hebrews in respect to the food-taboo and the taboo upon unions within certain degrees of blood-kinship. Consider the strength of the taboos lurking in present-day conventions respecting, say, the eating of human flesh or the marriage of the closest kin. If the same distaste were present to forbid non-eugenic unions which exists to prevent the eating of the flesh of cats, the aim of the eugenists would be in large part attained. All these taboos, primitive and modern, are evidently of the same sort; they are not based upon reason, nor are they capable of being changed by reason, but they rest upon something far more primitive and compelling than reason—upon sentiment and emotion, custom and habitude. This point cannot be over-emphasized. Let us take a more frivolous case of the same thing out of our own life. A dozen years ago it became fashionable for men to wear short trousers—golf trousers—a great deal. These college grounds were covered with young fellows in that costume. Now nobody wears them; you cannot buy them at the clothing stores—which sold out their last stock several years ago, at a few cents a pair, to be made into golf caps. There is now a taboo—perfectly irrational in almost every aspect—upon this style of clothing. If non-eugenic unions should become as infrequent for a dozen years as golf trousers have been for that time, the eugenists could point to a golden era.

But, returning now to the more serious, lasting, and elemental taboos, let us see what Galton was driving at when he spoke of "conscience" and "religion" in this connection. It is plain enough from the foregoing that these taboos lay in custom, but it is perhaps not so clear, except in the case of the Hebrews above cited, that conscience or religion had anything to do with them. When an Australian boy by some error ate the flesh of the emu, which was tabooed to all save the old, he is reported to have died of fright. This is not far from saying that he died from the pricks of conscience, rendered mortal by fear of the ghosts and spirits who sanctioned the broken taboo. The case

of Oedipus is a parallel one on a higher stage. Despair in both cases was the result of fear—the conscience of the race was never, historically, awakened by any other sentiment than fear. Furthermore, this fear was the intangible and helpless fear of the supernatural. It is plain that the taboos of primitive people, as recounted by Galton, satisfy him as to their connection with the group-conscience and with religion. If now, we wish to place eugenics under such sanction, we must try to find out how the effective taboos gained their power, for in all probability eugenics must go the same way to attain a like control.

Parenthetically, it may be remarked that Galton seems to mean by a “new religion” a sort of religion of rationality, a sublimated intellectual faith. But this is not the style of religion that ever lent any sanction to any taboo worth mentioning; and it is far from being the kind of religion invoked in the cases derived from primitive life. Such a “religion” lacks real and elemental strength, being bereft of that control over action which feeling wields practically alone. Of this more presently—for now it is understood that we are dealing with religion as it has been known by and has controlled man throughout the ages.

So far as we are able to reconstruct the remote past—for all the strongest social taboos were in operation before history began—the line of development was, briefly, as follows: Men acted first and thought afterward—long afterward. In the effort to live they reacted upon their environments in various ways, some advantageous and some disadvantageous. By the activity of selection, as operating upon human groups through annihilation or subjugation of those possessing less apt ways, certain social habitudes became prevalent, persisting with the persistence of those practising them. This was along the familiar Darwinian lines. Certain ways having succeeded for a group were gradually enforced upon it by the living authorities, and at length by the authority of the dead, which was infinitely more powerful than that of the living because of the animistic beliefs of the time. What the patriarch when alive had enforced by temporal means he did not cease, when he had be-

come a spirit, to enforce by his now supernatural and irresistible power. These ways then came to include a judgment that they were good for the society in question, and became fixed and inalterable. Men were as unconscious of their restrictions as we are unaware of the tension of the atmosphere. When habitude had arrived at this stage, they became the *folkways* or *mores*,¹ as the foremost writer upon social evolution calls them, and as such formed the basis and germ of all our later developed social institutions.

It is particularly to be noted, however, that they had become custom before ever they joined relation with religion or law. Religion and law sanction the folkways; they do not make them, and neither religion nor law can long exist in contravention of them. To get eugenics from religion into custom, as Galton at times seems to wish, would save much time but would reverse the order of evolution. "Religion, as a student of its origins and history will readily admit, and as a dispassionate observer of contemporary life will have noticed, but rarely lends effective and enduring sanction to anything that has not time out of mind existed in custom; even written law may long precede religious sanction. The Middle Ages demonstrate the attempt to proceed from dogma to the regulation of practical life and its customs and ways. In general, religion can lend effective sanction to custom only. But a thing that becomes a custom—a folkway—must have been, in origin, a tried and proved expedient in living, a socially selected adaptation to environment. If this is the only kind of thing to which religion can lend effective sanction, then eugenics, if it is to be 'introduced into the national conscience like a new religion,' must first pass into the body of habitudes and traditions.

"How can this be done? Or, to put it more concretely, how can unfortunate unions be effectively tabooed, as incest is tabooed? Applying the principles we have developed, and their implication, it might be answered: Not by rational prescription, but by sad experience; not by persuasion, but by pain. The conviction that such and such unions are evil must be brought

¹ See W. G. Sumner, *Folkways*, Boston, 1907.

home to the masses, if at all, not by the microscope or the statistical table, but by actual, tangible misfortune, and on the large scale. This alone will cause them to distrust their accepted "ways," and to tolerate the thought of other ways. There must at least be personal suffering to be compared with the weal of others; or, since this is a social matter, there must at least be a comparison of the destinies of societies practising, respectively, good and bad systems of man-breeding. "At least"—for such an outcome, though it looks slow and hard, would be far too easy a way. It is doubtful, contemplating in the light of the past, if a process even thus tardy would be practicable; reform in such manner suggested and rationally adopted would appear too cheaply bought to be a human purchase. To judge by the past, individuals and societies are not introspective or rational enough to perform such a feat of pain-economy as this; anticipatory convctions arrived at by the comparative method have played little part in the molding of the race. For a people to become rationally eugenic, would be a performance certainly far eclipsing in grandeur the changing of folkways presented in the recent history of Japan; and yet, granted that the latter development was purely rational in its origin and prosecution, it stands to all as a sort of latter-day wonder of the world. It could not have been accomplished in the absence of a discipline to which Europe and America are strangers. It does not seem possible that eugenics could thus be realized; a convention or habitude such as eugenics would demand for its enforcement would probably have to go back for its origin to the destructive efficacy of group-conflict, and elimination or subjugation. It is thus only that the expediency of the folkways has been proved—without reasoning, but beyond peradventure.

"A baneful custom—close and continued inbreeding, for example—is driven from the world, persisting only in out-of-the-way stations. How? Because inbreeding groups have succumbed in the conflict with those whose blood is freshened by mixture, or they have persisted solely in isolation from such competition, in the corners of the earth. They have lost their lives, or their group-identity. In general, societies prosper as

they give up close inbreeding; a tendency towards exogamy has been an advantage in the conflict of races. For this reason it has passed naturally into the folkways. How might eugenics take a similar course? Suppose—a thing which is true—that the races of the present day differ in their observance of eugenic principles, in their toleration of counterselective agencies, and the like. If then, ill-breeding and counterselection are great handicaps, the races that depart from them already possess a substantial advantage, which must some day tell. If it does, then eugenics is sure to crystallize into a policy of successful living, that is, to get into the customs and habitudes of controlling groups. Having become by demonstration a heritage of unquestioned value, it is then a candidate for religious sanction. It is hard to see how eugenics can receive wide-spread acceptance without some such conflict and survival. Perhaps in these later ages it will not be necessary to go through all the crudity and cruelty of the race-struggle; perhaps such selection can be avoided or anticipated by the taking of thought. But if eugenics can, even within centuries, as a result of rational analysis and demonstration, and of propaganda based thereon, come to stand for a 'national religion,' then it must be admitted that there has come about a qualitative change in the ways of men—the folkways. For it is into the body of these that eugenics must penetrate, if it is to become such a force as its founder hopes."¹

This is the great and vital limit of eugenics. It would seem, in thinking of certain of the folkways—for example, fashion—that their alteration might be possible without invoking such an elemental process as the one described; and this is true. But the folkways are alterable in proportion as they are new and superficial and are the more persistent as they are the more inveterate, deep-seated, and elemental. And eugenics deals ultimately with the union of the sexes, and the establishment of new ways in that which has to do with the great passion that ensures society's self-perpetuation. Hence it seems reasonable to draw the case at its hardest; and I believe experience would here support theory.

¹ The preceding paragraphs are from *Yale Review*, August, 1908, pp. 153-155.

It is not meant to say, however, that nothing can be done. Some advocate a let-alone policy, but that is not man's way; he seems to be under the sway of a nature-force which impels him into efforts to control nature-forces of many kinds. All civilization is really a collection of maxims and methods for mitigating or evading the action of nature-forces, so that man will try to do something, however forlorn the hope—and not every forlorn hope has come to a melancholy end. Non-eugenic practices can be crippled, if they are not eradicated, and may be held within bounds, narrower or wider. In any society the wiser and more powerful are constantly handing down the ways of their group to the more ignorant and less powerful, and by virtue of their superior intelligence they are able, through the control of the societal organization, to set up regulations which, if they do not have the force of prohibition sanctioned by religious fear, have at least the power of the state behind them. Such regulations, as everybody knows, are effective in proportion as they are negative and concrete in form, like the primitive taboo; contrast the laconic, "Thou shalt not kill" with the diffuse, "Thou shalt practise eugenics (if by some chance thou canst gain any adequate conception of the same)." This latter sort will not do—societal control must be more rude and peremptory, and more definite. It must make utterance more as follows: "Thou shalt not, being an idiot, marry and beget thine own kind; nor yet, being relatively sane, marry an idiot." Eugenic legislation must turn resolutely to the heavy-handed prohibition of the grosser, more obvious and undeniable phenomena of counterselection. Very likely an almost general consent could be gained to the prohibition of the union of imbeciles; in fact laws now exist forbidding it, and they are not so foreign to the feelings and prejudices of the masses as to be dead letter. Occasionally, to be sure, certain warm-hearted and soft-headed people will be found on the side of the idiots.

But when we try to do much more than this, we encounter, again, the limits set by the folkways, for the latter have a certain consistency among themselves, and an attempted alteration of certain conventions may wreck on the opposition of cer-

tain others, which are apparently, at times, only rather distantly correlated with the ones assailed. A recent law of Connecticut (reproduced by Dr. Carmalt in his valuable paper on Heredity and Crime) horrifies many sensible people; and to justify such a horror there is always a reservoir of argumentation, illustration, and interpretation, to be drawn upon. As the gross and obvious is left behind and an attempt is made, for example, to insist upon a physical examination of those who propose to contract matrimony, the ranks of the objectors (and so, of course, of the evaders) fill up. Plenty of good women, who would not send flowers to a desperate and condemned criminal and petition the governor to unleash him on society again, would, by reason of the sentiment of modesty implanted in them through the ages, revolt at the idea of the health certificate preliminary to marriage. Here are, again, the limits of eugenics as set down in the societal conventions or folkways. These limits are, after all, very narrow; and it is not needful to remind the present audience that they are not overcome when once the law is inscribed in the statute book.

To sum up: the inevitable limits of eugenics lie in these mysterious conventions, habitudes, and prejudices which seem to rise and to change with something of the elemental deliberation of the seasons—unhurried by man, and invulnerable to his argumentation. They are not rational in nature and as a consequence do not admit of rational discussion or alteration. The folkways are a matter of "second-nature"—of feeling—and the major folkways, *i. e.*, those connected with so elemental a function as the procreative, are very deep-seated. All fruitful agitation for change must confine its aspirations within discreet limits. It must enlist sentiment if it can, rather than reason; and the great compelling sentiment is fear. Fearlessness is not seldom the result of pure ignorance, and the discreetly fearful man is generally the wise one. By combatting the ignorance of the more highly endowed—the leaders—a beginning can be made. Now some men are able to fear and worry for the far generations of mankind, but not many of us can get up much excitement over the fate of even our great

grandchildren. Fear must be brought *home*; and to the individual. Here is where the doctor comes in; if any young man of reasonable sense knew what the doctor does about the manifold ills of, for example, sex-irregularities, fear would deter him from incurring many and serious dangers both for himself and for his descendants to come. One of the not unimpregnable limits of eugenics is the ignorance that nobody but the doctor can enlighten. Doctors need not name names, nor break professional reticence, but they should speak out. If certain of the counterselective factors are really injuring the race, their injurious action should be insisted upon and reiterated; if there is an error in these matters—if, for example, we are mistaken in listing certain items as counterselective—then they should be dropped off our list.

The medical men must have their duty and opportunity to promote societal betterment ever before them. Medical schools should educate their students to a realizing sense of their social responsibilities, and fit them to see, beyond the patient in the chair, into the perspective of the millions of human beings struggling to live, and of the other millions yet unborn. Eugenics is a grand idea. The barriers that lie before its even partial realization are certainly high, and perhaps insuperable. But there is one human instrument available for the assault upon any human difficulty, and recourse to its use is never fruitless—for even though the particular object fails it will be of use somewhere else—and that is *education*. The eugenics program at the very least opens up a series of questions on which light is needed; and this light can be given only by the enlightened, laborious, and fearless. People need to be made afraid of what is unwholesome and disastrous to society. The preacher used to inculcate this fear by various means now no longer available; his only effective successor in this societal function is the doctor. Let the doctor speak out what he knows!

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DISCUSSION.

Dr. Wm. H. Carmalt, of New Haven:

One cannot be expected in a five-minute discussion to take up this question in the scientific and philosophical way in which my predecessors have treated it. I can consider it in from but one point of view, *i. e.*, with relation to certain laws passed in this and other states looking to the limiting of the number of defective children born, though, in passing, I beg to correct Dr. Keller in saying that I introduced the bill in Connecticut. It was introduced by Mr. Tomlinson, the representative of Danbury, entirely without my knowledge. It so happened that about that time I wrote a paper for the Connecticut State Medical Society upon "Heredity and Crime," which he asked me to bring to the attention of the Judiciary Committee having charge of the bill. At his request I did this and that is all I had to do with its passage. At the same time I have no intention of shirking any responsibility there may be in supporting it; this I do most thoroughly, believing it to be worthy the attention of sociologists and law-makers.

It has been known from empirical observation for a long time that certain nervous diseases are prone to perpetuation by inheritance; Dr. Davenport has enunciated certain laws governing the transmission of various traits of character; we are yet to learn to apply them. In the discussion in the Connecticut State Medical Society on the paper above referred to, and in the presentation to the Judiciary Committee of the bill for the "Sterilization of the Unfit" every speaker who had to do with institutions for the feeble-minded, the epileptic, the imbecile and the insane called attention to the disproportionate increase of these classes of degenerates over the normal population. Dr. Van Aiken, a Dutch sociologist, in a thoughtful address recently delivered before the Sheffield Scientific School, stated emphatically that in this country criminality is increasing at a much faster rate than the population; it is evident, therefore, that we must do something to defend ourselves.

Criminality is but a single phase of physical and moral degeneracy; children are *not* born criminals. They become such by reason of their environment, *plus* the fact that they are born of degenerate forebears, by which their mental and moral forces are unable to resist the influences leading to crime. These people are weak intellectually and morally; they are from their nervous make-up indifferent, and too weak to make the fight against the impulses and passions that are incident to animal life, hence they yield to influences (environment) that the stronger intellect overcomes. These are the reasons that make it necessary to limit their number, to restrict the propagation of degenerates. These are the reasons that, in this and other states, have caused laws to be enacted to prevent marriages not only between certain defined nervous degenerates, but even if one of the contracting parties is thus affected: in order that children liable to such diseases shall not be

born; if, therefore, we may legislate to prevent their conception in one way why not in another? Have we any more right to interfere in one case than in the other? If we legislate to prevent certain marriages because the results are according to sociologic standards economically detrimental, I insist that we can, for like reasons, legislate to accomplish the same result in the manner proposed. It is as much an interference with natural laws in one case as in the other. The marriage ceremony itself is a restriction on the laws of nature, a necessity incident to civilized life; we legislate to compel its observance in order to prevent the evils incident to the propagation of children without legal protectors and caretakers during infancy and childhood. By natural laws the mother cares for the child during the infantile period but the laws of civilization as against natural laws demand that the male parent shall support and protect both mother and child during this same period. May we not legislate to prevent breeding a race that are physically incapable of thus supporting their offspring but when born throw them upon the community which has had nothing to do with their creation? I grant that according to Christian and civilized laws the incapable, physically or mentally, should be cared for, but should he be bred? It is frequently urged that these classes should be segregated to prevent breeding. I cannot, for the life of me, understand why this involuntary seclusion is not in the nature of a punishment for no crime; as reprehensible as to do a slight and painless surgical operation.

In this bill the word "criminal" does not occur. I do not advocate the sterilization of the criminal as such—it is to prevent the propagation of the *race* of imbeciles and degenerates, leading in later generations to the delinquent and criminal that I argue.

In this and some other states there are laws forbidding marriages between epileptics and other grave nervous affections because of the likelihood that the children of such unions will inherit like diseases, and become burdens on the community in which they live. Before this law was enacted it was shown that female paupers or imbeciles cared for in one town had been, through the influence of and abetted by the selectmen, married to some degenerate male of another more or less remote town—thus transferring the burden of caring for her and the children arising from the union to the second town. This sharp practice was regarded as quite a legitimate, if not a praiseworthy, transaction, quite in the nature of "good" horse trade until the law in spite of some opposition put the stamp of a felony upon it.

I beg to quote, without comment, as my time is about to expire, the following, *viz.*: In a cantonal asylum in Switzerland four persons, two females and two males, were confined who while not strictly insane were mentally defective, feeble-minded or imbecile, but physically vigorous, able and willing to work for themselves; there were no strictly medical reasons for keeping them under duress. Sexual inclinations were strong in all four. Both women, aged 25 and 36, respectively, had illegitimate children likewise

supported by the canton in which the asylum was located. One of the men, aged 31, physically robust, was a physical degenerate with thieving propensities, frequently a law-breaker; the fourth of the group, a man of 32 years, was mentally of stronger calibre, but a sexual pervert addicted to assaults on children. The asylum authorities wanted to discharge them but the municipal authorities, with four defective children already in their charge, strenuously objected to turning them loose with the prospect of breeding more defective children to be supported. The proposition to sterilize the whole four was made and "eagerly" accepted by all the patients. On being given their liberty after the operations all went to work, the women have both been earning their living; the male first mentioned still preserves his theiving propensities, but neither of the males has had sexual offenses charged to him.

Dr. F. A. Woods, of Boston, Lecturer, Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

What interests and pleases me most is the growing interest in the study of heredity that I have noticed in the last few years, and even from month to month. It is extraordinary the number of different societies that are taking up the subject, and increasing its interest and importance. We, who believe strongly in its force, seem to have got beyond the stage of having to defend ourselves on this point. It is not so long ago that people really doubted that there is much in heredity at all. Ten years ago there was scarcely anything on the subject except the writings of Francis Galton, who founded this great movement in eugenics. That was the beginning, and since then a great advance has been made. To-day we are in a position where we can say two things: the first is that heredity is extremely important, and the second is that alternative inheritance is very common indeed. There are in fact rather few exceptions to the alternative or non-blending form of heredity; that is, each separate trait or characteristic tends to be inherited almost entirely or not at all. Dr. Davenport's charts have clearly shown us this principle. But alternative inheritance is not necessarily Mendelian in its laws and predictions, and the difference is an important and practical one. For instance, it would be a matter of very great importance and comfort to an individual who is a member of a family that that has some such disease as diabetes or night-blindness, which Dr. Davenport has spoken of, to know that although some of his brothers and sisters have it, if he himself is free from it, he may marry and the disease will not appear again in later generations. It would also be a matter of much gratification to a physician to be able to disseminate knowledge of that kind. But in how many cases can we do this? Can we show that strict Mendelian laws govern the inheritance of *common* diseases or the inheritance of *important* human traits? If we look over the whole range of Mendelian heredity, we see it concerns itself especially with rather simple and usually unimportant