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EUGENIC IDEALS FOR WOMANHOOD

By ALICE RAVENHILL

It is not so long ago that the monarch of a neighbouring nation aroused considerable indignation in the minds of a proportion of the female population of which he is the titular head, by the announcement that, in his opinion, the sphere of feminine influence is and must be to all time circumscribed by a quadrangle of "Ks." These he defined as "Kirche, Küche, Kinder and Kleider"; inferring that, by meek submission to authority, by absorbed concentration on housewifely duties, and by perpetual self-sacrifice in the interests of her children, a woman fulfils her life mission, and must confine her intellectual aspirations within these limits. Upon reflection there is after all in this definition more truth and less intention to restrict than at first sight appears. The boundaries of this quadrangle may legitimately be recognised as of such extent that they are virtually commensurate with the whole conceivable range of female activities. Thus these circumscribing "Ks," or—when put into English—these circumscribing "Cs," are actually characterised by an elasticity sufficient to embrace all that exercises the intellect, as well as all that enriches and ennobles life under any aspect or in any of its phases.

To elevate and maintain a high standard of morality; to secure to every human being a full share of health, efficiency and happiness by wise attention to and intelligent gratification of the physical demands of mankind; to utilise in the right production and rearing of children all the knowledge, economic, scientific, and social, now at our disposal for the purpose; to cultivate and refine, without enervating, the æsthetic qualities and potentialities which make for physical, intellectual and moral progress—these purposes represent, in general terms, the influential, exacting and responsible duties entrusted to the women of the world, when

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the imperial fiat goes forth that womanhood is to confine its energies to a sphere of duty bounded by church, by children, by cooking, and by clothes; provided only that in this alliterative catalogue are included the clothing of the home as well as of the family, and the keeping of this same home in a condition which permits of life being both wholesome and cleanly.

When, therefore, the thoughtful woman, accepting the share assigned to her in the world's work, perceives herself to be invested with a mantle of responsibility so weighty and voluminous that she is disposed to feel leniently towards those of her sex who in the past have failed to appreciate the amplitude of its folds—when she realises that upon womanhood largely depends the standard attained by the world's ethical code, then it is that she sees the necessity of gaining some insight into the bases of ethics, religious and moral; of studying the influences which promote or prejudice their consistent practice or which menace their acceptance; and of not remaining ignorant of the true relation of morality to efficiency and hygiene—a relation constantly ignored from want of knowledge, or may I add by false modesty. When again she perceives that to her is entrusted the greatest of all human assets, the child, during those impressionable years, consecrated to character formation and physical development, she at once becomes alive to the fact that its immaturity calls for intelligent recognition, and its dependence demands skilful guidance. How few women have hitherto acted as if aware that in their hands they hold the health of the community; not only as regards the food consumed and the domestic cleanliness enjoyed, but because of the enormous influence they exercise on young and old alike in respect of the right regulation of rest and the quality, restorative or pernicious, of the recreations sanctioned by, and popular with, the community. That the significance of the part played by woman in matters economic and æsthetic is frequently overlooked is largely the result of woman's own failure to recognise her position as the greatest spender in the community, and the purchaser by whose demands is strictly regulated the supply of goods necessary to the equipment of the home and the wearing apparel of the family. The standard of provisions, the design of furniture and wall

decorations, the shades and textures of stuffs, afford but a few illustrations of the influence of woman upon the markets of the world and the intricate machinery of production by which these markets are furnished.

Does it then savour of exaggeration or of unbalanced enthusiasm to perceive in the above definition of a woman's duties no humiliating limitation to her progressive development, no retrogression in the sphere of her influence, no banishment from the intellectual life which sweetens labour and stimulates to the application of knowledge systematically acquired? Is it not rather a trumpet call to awaken woman to her weighty obligations, as much imperial as domestic or social, and to arouse her to the imperative necessity of preparation, intelligent and sustained, for their fulfilment?

But, it may be asked, what has all this to do with the subject chosen for this paper? I trace the connection thus: There is no question but that, at the present time, woman exercises a far-reaching influence upon human life, its quality, its customs and its conduct. She must be, therefore, a eugenicist, or she betrays her trust. Sir Francis Galton has defined eugenics as "the science which deals] with all the influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage." To exercise or even to comprehend these influences calls for the careful study of morals, hygiene and education. "The aim of eugenics," continues Sir Francis, "is to represent each class or sect by its best specimens"; a demand which opens up the whole question of marriage and parenthood. "Its practice," he says, "would result in a generally higher tone of domestic, social and political life." Is it not generally admitted that the web of civilised life is woven largely by women? "The race as a whole would then be less foolish, less frivolous, less excitable, and politically more provident than now"; . . . "finally," writes the Father of Eugenics, "we should be better fitted to fulfil our vast imperial responsibilities." Surely these words, at one and the same time, summarise my subject, "Eugenic Ideals for Womanhood," for what woman would not aspire to advance racial progress, and epitomise my attempt to indicate the full eugenic significance of a sphere,

thoughtlessly characterised as petty, powerless, unfruitful and restricted.

It remains to consider why these ideals remain unfulfilled ; nay, more, why they lie unrecognised by many women, and to suggest means which would promote their recognition and realisation.

Unquestionably a review of human struggles towards civilisation would, if I could here undertake the task, afford many illustrations of the partial realisation of these eugenic ideals by women, whether as mothers, or as single women whose maternal instincts have found free outlets in the service of others. In addition to these few brilliant examples there has been also a mass of unpretending, yet valuable work done and quiet influence exercised by women whose names are unknown to the historian and the biographer. On the other hand, there are thousands of women whose obligations and opportunities have remained unutilised ; either they have fluttered through life as irresponsible butterflies, or they have subsisted as sheltered pets ; while in the case of others, the deadly weariness of their daily lives has completely eclipsed these ideals, which would at least have served to illuminate the fog of harassing cares and unintelligent drudgery that too often obscured their horizon. There is also a third group of women, penetrated with enthusiasm for humanity, zealous to fulfil eugenic ideals, but who have also failed of their attainment, because their perspective has been inaccurate and their point of view ill-chosen ; not from intention, but probably for some of the same reasons which have underlain the indifference or the inertia of those already mentioned. Of these reasons, among the most important has been the absence of that leaven in the lump of educational provender which works to elevate ideals and to lighten duty, by indicating the object of all study, namely, the betterment of human life. Such an influence would stimulate pupils to apply their knowledge to the solution of vital problems and would incite them to dedicate the accumulated experience of the race to the service of mankind. This educational shortcoming is closely associated also with failure to direct attention at the right time to the social and imperial, as well as to the

purely personal, responsibilities of each unit of the population, whatever may be his or her present position, future interests and prospective career. In truth, the accurate adjustment in the scale of duty of the personal and the imperial and the reasons for preserving equilibrium have been constantly overlooked in the training of our young people. Faulty methods of education constitute, therefore, a potent cause for woman's blindness to her comprehensive opportunities and remarkable influence, and in their revision lies one means of concentrating her energies on eugenic practice. Perhaps, too, women's often self-imposed limitations are also a source of low aims and restricted ideals.

I am not competent to analyse the numerous factors, social, industrial and political, which gradually reduced the capable, expert and educated woman of the Middle Ages to the effeminate toy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The fact only concerns us here. Where man was quick to seize upon each new discovery and invention and adapt it to his professional or commercial advancement, woman lagged behind, bewildered apparently by the rapid changes in her economic environment, too conservative to apply to the problems of kitchen, storeroom, and nursery the methods which were lightening labour and promoting health in the industrial world, content to carry out by the light of empiricism the procedure originated in the baronial or manorial halls of past centuries, and accepting with pathetic inertia or perpetuating with ignorant indolence deviations from health and restrictions on efficiency long since surmounted by the gardener, farmer and stockbreeder. The intimate connection between home life and national prosperity was hardly perceived sixty years ago; the menace to the country of continued infant mortality, unchecked disease, and premature labour for children, only secured tardy attention much nearer our own time. The crime of perpetuating ignorance among young people, as well as their elders, on the subject of the transmission of debilitated or tainted constitutions, of failing to give timely instruction upon the influence of ante-natal conditions on the offspring, or of drawing attention to the immense importance of the early post-natal years, is still committed, and is palliated

by widely accepted excuses. Systematic instruction in the right conduct of physical life has hardly yet found a footing, and is in many respects inadequate and incomplete. Should not women have seen to it long ago that these blots on our civilisation were removed, and that these standing menaces to moral as well as to material prosperity ceased to prejudice progress? No sudden movement, no exaggerated actions will effect deep-seated reforms. For this purpose prolonged, quiet, intelligent methods of character formation and health promotion in family and institution life are needed, supplemented by wise, well-considered action in professional and philanthropic work. By such means influence of a sustained, far-reaching kind is exercised upon the national life.

The eugenic ideals for us women to-day may, it seems to me, be formulated as follows :

(1) To procure for boys and girls alike more general instruction in subjects hitherto accorded insufficient prominence in their home and school training. For instance, more systematic as well as well-organised and judicious suggestions are necessary upon the duty and advantages of applying to the betterment of the conditions of daily life the knowledge gained at school and college, associating this direct guidance in the practical utilisation of human experience with a careful inculcation of high standards grounded on religion and ethics. This will require of those responsible for the education of children, that is to say of parents and teachers, so sound a knowledge of hygiene and its operations, of morals and their application, that at the right time and in the right place they may season mental provender and manual activities with these eugenic salts. The enormous influence of women can only be rightly exercised with the support of and in co-operation with men ; therefore, this fundamental training must be given to boys as well as girls ; though, naturally, the selection of the material and subjects for application would not be identical in the two cases.

(2) For all young people, women must also secure suited instruction on the greatest power entrusted to mankind, and the considerations which make of marriage and parenthood intensely great responsibilities. The mystery of the transmission

of life and its sacred character, the marvels of development and the dependence of immaturity, should be gradually and imperceptibly absorbed during childhood; but further than this, at adolescence every young person has a right to be enlightened upon the eugenic aspects of parenthood, the significance of infancy, the educational demands of early life, the weighty doctrine of "deferred results," as well as the influences, economic and otherwise, which bear upon healthful maternity. Even the bald enumeration of these points suffices to suggest their overpowering significance—to define the method of their presentation is at present beside my mark.

(3) In addition to the broad curriculum of general subjects provided for all girls and to the opportunities for advanced study which such women who adopt professions will pursue, special provision should also be made for the preparation of women in the care of childhood and home. This means much more than technical classes in the domestic arts or than skilful correlated courses between these and the science work in schools. Man does not live by bread alone, important as bread—and particularly clean bread—is to efficient life. There should be what King's College and one or two other colleges are now attempting to provide, opportunities for able and skilful women to solve domestic enigmas by patient research; to follow up economic developments to their sources; to trace connections between social and industrial, even imperial, problems, and home or parental methods. Most urgent of all, the girl growing to womanhood, whether in the humblest or most exalted sphere of life, should study the needs of infancy and the art of the right rearing of children. Education begins, as Oliver Wendell Holmes has said, a hundred years before birth; the woman of to-day has a right to know the ancestry of both her child's parents, she must exact a health standard as well as a moral one; she must equip herself to be the mother or the guardian of healthy children, not only by skill in handling baby and alas! bottle, nor by art in stitching dainty and appropriate garments; but by acquainting herself with the nature of this bundle of possibilities; by studying the influence upon it of environment and the necessity of suitable stimulus. She should be aware that

educability is present from the hour of birth, that the exquisite plasticity of early life ensures a ready response to good management; she should understand also the enduring influence of early surroundings. Maternity is not the privilege of all women, but a knowledge of the needs of childhood and youth is indispensable to all; certainly it is to the maiden aunt, and also to the worker who is concerned with the preparation of food, clothing, toys or utensils; to the Inspector under any authority for whatever purpose; to the heads and subordinates in every institution, public or private; to nurse and teacher; to professional woman or philanthropist. In a greater or less degree, adapted to position, to prospective calling in life, and to standard of education, up-to-date knowledge on these points is essential to every woman. My experience is that on the one hand absence of education does not make for the intelligent care of children, and on the other hand that the possession of an Honours' Degree does not carry this knowledge with it.

(4) Another ideal to be firmly held until it is realised is the far more general employment of trained women as elected members of local governing bodies and their committees, or as officials of departments in every type of institution, but especially in those of which women, girls and children constitute a portion of the population. It is a grievous reflection on women that they have not yet convinced society of this necessity. As sick nurses and inspectors in some departments they have secured a footing, and of course as teachers; but in orphanages, asylums, prisons, schools, workhouses and elsewhere, trained women are rarely to be found, either in authority or as subordinates, though thousands of children and women of all ages suffer seriously from this defect. Is this due to woman's inefficiency or to her inertia and indifference?

(5) To influence for good the art, the literature and the recreations of her country—to train young people in the wise and fitting use of leisure, are other prominent eugenic ideals for every thinking woman; she has great opportunities for teaching the uses of civilisation; of showing how to enjoy its gifts so that they may refine, without emasculating; and how they may refresh and cheer without tending to license or excess.

Space fails me to make more than passing mention of other most important eugenic ideals for women ; such as, for instance, the permanent care of the feeble-minded ; the detention of those men or women who suffer from recurring insanity so that they shall not become parents in the intervals of emancipation from asylum care ; the determined tracing of paternity in cases of illegitimate birth ; the adoption of more varied, and, may I say, of more intelligent, methods of reformation in Rescue Homes ; the exercise of more sustained efforts to stamp out the cruellest disease in the world, which, unchecked, blights innocent lives ; last, but not least, the training of young people to be at least as provident as birds before rushing into marriage.

To turn to yet another type of eugenic ideal, women should interest themselves in all that promotes the health of the people ; they should concern themselves in the plans and erection of buildings—whether houses, schools, shops or offices, in their convenience, their decoration and labour-saving devices, in order to husband the energy and to increase the strength of their occupants. They should investigate the conditions under which food-stuffs are produced, packed, transported, distributed and cooked in order to control dirt and to check preventible disease. How many women ever dream of visiting the laundry to which they consign clothes to be washed, or the farm from which the milk for their household is supplied, or the workrooms where their garments are made. Yet such details have eugenic significance, are only perceived by trained eyes, and call, in many instances, for much courage and tact on the part of the visitor, whose sensibilities, be it said, would occasionally receive an unwelcome shock in the course of her investigations.

Obviously, there is no lack of eugenic ideals for womanhood ; neither is there any risk of restricting woman's intellectual development or influential work by confining them to the Kaiser's classical " Ks." Recognising, as we must, that it is the concern of woman to advance the happiness and to maintain the health of every human being ; that upon her standard depends to a great degree the manners and morals of her country ; that it is her privilege to raise the tone of life in all its relations and to

endeavour by every legitimate means to reduce crime and misery and to promote progress, is it not manifest that the more adequately she fits herself for this comprehensive sphere, the more completely will she fulfil the function and duties of an active eugenist ?