

Of the many circumstances which immediately affect a man's conduct and feelings none is more easily specified than his social position, and partly, indeed, in consequence of this, of all the objects which a man's instincts drive him to pursue, though many are higher esteemed, none are so universally sought as to establish and to enhance the social position of his family. This desire is approved almost as widely as it is obeyed, and may moreover, be advocated on grounds no less sacred than a man's affection for his wife or children. Why should the gratification of this desire be confined to the few? Why should not all, or almost all enjoy it? Our answer is that this desire of the individual for an improvement in his social position can only be widely gratified at a price which we may well shrink from paying; at the price of social degeneracy, and in particular of the degradations of those instincts which make men aspire. And this conclusion inexorable as we feel it to be, does not cast a shadow of discredit upon the desire for social advance, which is evidently better masked in the more admirable kinds of men, but, what is quite another matter, suggests that this desire ought to be very difficult to fulfill.

Let us consider our social system in the figure of a great and many featured hill, upon which a gigantic game of King of the Castle is being continually played. The great majority are ~~pushing~~ pushing upwards against opposition, and hostile competition; a lucky few are lifted forward by willing hands; some have leapt up quickly into an empty space; others lie in sloth at the bottom. There is plenty of luck, good and bad, and plenty of chances for all sorts. In some places the path to the summit seems short enough, but is barred by obstacles which few can scale; elsewhere there are long gentle paths, requiring no great skill, yet so crowded as to give little hope to the impatient. Everywhere there are other tendencies at work, but everywhere the pressure is steadily upwards. But there are things in life which have no place in this child's game, and of what concerns us most it gives us no idea. For to complete the picture fresh competitors should be continually appearing, joining awhile in the struggle, gaining or losing ground, then each one passing away and leaving space for

another. Each class produces its like, and wherever each class, the strong, the patient, the ambitious or the indolent are gathered most thickly then will their like be produced. Most important of all it is to observe that the children of the fertile are many and fertile, and those of the sterile, few and sterile. [ The words fertile and sterile are not used here in any absolute physiological sense, nor do they refer only to such fertility and sterility as is involuntary, but to all the mental, moral and physical factors which may predispose their bearer to the parentage of many or of few children. ]

At this point we are induced to ask a question of the first importance. On the whole does each individual end his life nearer to the summit than the point at which he begins it? In other words do the children of a number of men born into the same social class, commence their lives, on the average, at a higher or at a lower social position? It does not matter that we cannot say for certain of any two men, which is in the better situation; it is sufficient that there is a general stratification, and that the great majority of men are impelled to exert themselves if they wish to maintain themselves in the estimation of their fellows. We are not here concerned with the state of civilisation of society as a whole, which might be advancing or declining without any change in the relative situation of its members, nor are we concerned with the rapid migrations of fortunate and brilliant individuals on the one hand, and the unlucky and foolish on the other. Our query is independent of all these more apparent phenomena; we are considering the comparatively slow and gradual trend of whole classes of families upwards or downwards in the social scale.

The importance of any such general trend becomes clear upon consideration. In the first place any population whether stratified or not will flow away from those parts where fertility is greatest, and towards those where fertility is least. The upward or downward movement of a population in the social scale is a measure of the relative fertility of the upper and lower classes. Hence, then, the movement which we have been considering has an importance which

cannot be too strongly emphasised; if the upper social classes to which, among those born into the same class, the ambitious, the intelligent, the healthy, the courageous, the far-seeing and the beautiful tend to rise, is increasing less rapidly than the classes towards which the opposite qualities tend to descend, then the quality of the race as a whole, in all things which we most admire, as well as in those which most make for success, is steadily declining. If, on the other hand, fertility was highest among the highest social classes, the quality of our race would improve equally in brains, in body, and in moral form. We may say therefore that a society in which the history of the individual family is generally one of social advance is a dysgenic one, tending to degrade the species, while a society in which the majority of families occupy in company with other families of equal worth and culture, successively lower social positions is in the true sense of the word eugenic; it is noticeable that in this latter type of society it is of high importance that the best men and women, in all the many forms of human excellence, should have easy access to the highest social positions, in order that their qualities may be largely reproduced.

Although the effect upon the actual quality of the race is of far the greatest ultimate importance, there are secondary effects of considerable interest. For the most part people will value most that to which they owe their position; among rising families it is natural to attach great importance to the success of the individual, especially in making money, and we should expect people so situated to neglect the ties of kinship, to despise tradition, and to measure their prosperity primarily by material success; while in a society in which the majority could look back to distinguished ancestors, one would find the greater store set by the inheritance of noble characteristics, and the maintenance of ancient customs and ideals. On the one side we have a society in which every class is being vulgarised by the infusion of the population from below, and in which education, and such culture as can be acquired consciously and deliberately, is everywhere needed in an attempt to maintain old standards; on the other side every class has a superfluity of

high ideals, good breeding, traditional <sup>courtesy</sup> and wise conventions, since the majority are fit for a higher station than they are called upon to fill.

Again, wherever money is so highly esteemed that expenditure becomes the criterion of social position, there occurs, on a scale which it is impossible to exaggerate, the expenditure of money not for objects deliberately approved, and judged intrinsically desirable, but simply for the maintenance of social positions. At the present day, in all classes of society, from the highest to the lowest, one finds evidences of the enormous economic waste caused by this competitive and hopeless task of keeping up a position. Nor is this money spent unwisely in so far as it is necessary to spare oneself from being absorbed by an inferior class, though ~~one~~ may well ask if there is no means of obviating this useless and degrading source of economic pressure, which appears to be inherent in the dysgenic type of society.

The above considerations would be of negligible interest if societies were on the whole neutral as regards the flow of population up or down the social scale. Obviously they are of <sup>vital</sup> ~~initial~~ importance if there is any factor hitherto neglected which determines that flow. In the first place, that such a movement exists is suggested by the complaints heard in all civilisations during a certain period of their decadence that the upper classes are dying out, or that they are being ousted by men of ignoble birth, and commercial traditions; a state of things in strong contrast to the earlier period in which almost the humblest could boast of some streak of noble blood. But we have even stronger ground in some <sup>considerations</sup> ~~conditions~~ brought forward by Mr. J.A. Cobb in the *Eugenics Review* (Jan. 1913). The heritable qualities which go to make up fecundity may themselves be <sup>moved</sup> ~~sound~~, like all other qualities, up or down the social scale; in a society in which it is a social advantage to belong to a large family, these qualities will tend, other things being equal, to rise, and to become concentrated in the upper strata; whatever the previous conditions, it is obvious that sooner or later the upper strata will become the most fertile, the flow of population will be turned downwards, and the population will commence from that moment to improve in quality. If on the other hand, for

instance when social position depends largely upon the inheritance of money, it is a social advantage to belong to a relatively sterile family, implying that one has few brothers or sisters, or even cousins and more distant kin, the flow of population must sooner or later take an upward turn, and the individuals will thenceforth continually decline in vigour and attractiveness. In view of these facts the history of civilisation seems to follow a natural course; the first period of increasing vigour and capacity continues over such periods of comparative disorder as those depicted in the Icelandic sagas; success in farming or fishing, security of property against *marauding bands*, victory in war and law alike depended upon the strength of one's kinsmen and on the number of the powerful families to whom one was allied by marriage. With increasing order, and equitable law the disadvantages of sterility are diminished, until with the growth of urban life, and the rise of money as the chief social criterion, the upper classes become impregnated with infertile stocks, and commence to diminish. For a while the social structure continues to stand, but sooner or later, the mass of ineptitude artificially supported, combined with the lack of ability of the controlling classes makes dissolution inevitable.

The process which we have described above does not involve the total destruction of the race, and it is interesting to enquire what effects the process will have upon those races which undergo it; what will be the characteristics of a race which has survived the destruction of many civilisations; what sort of people flourish best in our cities, being best fitted by social experience to urban life. That such effects must involve a profound modification of the finer feelings associated with the sexual instincts will appear clearly if we consider how unfitted are the instincts and ambitions of a man of the earlier period, for the conditions of modern life. For example a man who finds in a certain woman his ideal of earthly beauty, if his instincts are sufficiently primitive, will perhaps spend his life working and devising in order to win for her that position and influence of which he considers her worthy; it is likely, too, that he will beget

children upon her, and be glad to think that such living images may carry her beauty in the world for ever; that the tale of their life may be reacted again and again with ever widening diversity of circumstance. But all this accords very ill with the conditions of a dysgenic society; by ~~raising~~<sup>raising</sup> the woman he loves to a high position he is tending to ~~hasten~~<sup>hasten</sup> the extinction of his type and hers; every step by which his situation is improved <sup>re</sup> presents a piece out of the probable duration of his race; whatever is a social advantage is by so much a biological disadvantage. A man wishing to make sure of a multitude of descendants should marry rather an ugly woman, lest his children should be beautiful and rise socially; he should be careful to see that they are repulsive in manner, voice and features, at any rate to the upper classes. He must have enough cunning to make money even among the very poorest, and will thrive best by some lucrative traffic which is generally despised, and considered in some measure dishonourable. By these means he will have a good chance of achieving biological success, and of leaving a numerous progeny to perpetuate his type so long as civilisation lasts, or at least so long as it is a social advantage to belong to small families.

Is it not clear, then, that this desire to rise socially presents an anomaly, unforeseen by the democrats of the 19th century, of a ~~desire~~<sup>desire</sup>, laudable and admirable in the individual, the widespread gratification of which, incurs the deepest injury to the race?