

TWISTED EUGENICS

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

IT is always a little difficult not to grow either exasperated or melancholy when good, able men are seen devoting their time to fighting shadows. It is even worse when the fight against the shadow is conducted in a way that would be partially harmful even if the shadow were not a shadow. But it is infinitely worse when the fight against the shadow diverts the attention of a man from fighting against real and very dangerous foes.

In a recent magazine there is an article called "Eugenics and Militarism," by a professor in a great university. I do not mention his name because I have no doubt he is an excellent and scholarly man, and my quarrel is not with him or with the magazine, but with the whole general tendency among philanthropists and scientists here in America to-day to blind themselves to the real dangers to our race in connection with eugenics. Eugenics is defined by Francis Galton as including "those agencies which humanity through social control may use for the improvement or the impairment of the racial qualities of future generations." In other words, it means good breeding of men and women so as to produce better men and women in the future; and, as every stock-

grower knows, the surest way to get good stock is to breed from the best stock, while, on the other hand, no possible care will save a race if the poorest stock is the building stock. It has recently been shown not only that the birth rate in Great Britain is falling, but that a quarter of the British married population, or one-sixth of the whole adult population, is producing one-half of the next generation, and that this quarter is that part of the population least able to give its offspring the care and general environment necessary to the best human nurture. This is another way of saying that the birth rate is not merely decreasing, but is decreasing selectively, and that the selection is of exactly the wrong kind, the tendency being to eliminate the thrifty, far-seeing, and able type of man and woman.

The magazine article in question is written to show that militarism is a chief factor in the selection of the fit for elimination. The author says, quite properly: "The most economical and most positive factor in human progress is good breeding. Race deterioration comes chiefly from its opposite, bad breeding." He then adds that militarism encourages bad breeding because the best men go to the war and are killed, while the

weak and timid remain at home and become the fathers of the next generation. Unquestionably there have been countries and periods of which this was true. Napoleonic France offers such an example, and republican Rome offered it in the two centuries before the Empire. But it is in no shape or way as universally true as the author makes out, and in America it has practically no application whatever.

A serious and unbiased study of the matter would undoubtedly show that in England, which for a century has not suffered from militarism at all, there has been a serious deterioration in the physical standard compared with Germany, which is the most military power of Europe. Apparently in England the substitution in a time of profound peace of a factory town population for an agricultural population has had an effect far more calamitous than that of any series of wars of which we have record in modern times. New England offers a case at least as marked, although of somewhat different type. The experience of Germany in recuperating after the literally incredible destruction of the Thirty Years' War is sufficient proof as to how few generations are needed in order to repair the ravages of excessive militarism. It remains to be seen whether there can be any such rapid recovery from the effects of an uncontrolled industrialism, or from the complicated tissue of evil causation which is responsible for New England's dwindling native population.

The professor in question, although a trained "Professor of Eugenics," forgets that a great war may do for the whole nation a service that incalculably outweighs all possible evil effects. The type example of this is our own Civil War. That war cost half a million lives. It is certainly a sad and evil thing that timid and weak people, the peace-at-any-price and anti-militarist people who stayed at home, should have left descendants to admire well-meaning, feeble articles against militarism, while their valiant comrades went to the front and perished. Yet the price paid, great though it was, was not too great to pay for the union of the Nation and the freedom of the slave. Worthy writers on eugenics must not forget that heroes serve as examples. It will not do to decry the leaders of exploration because gallant Scott perished at the South Pole and gallant Livingstone in Africa. It is of course a dreadful thing that men like Scott

and Livingstone should be selected for elimination; but they leave imperishable memories behind them to hearten all men forward as they struggle for the benefit of mankind. The three hundred at Thermopylæ, or the companions of Crockett and Bowie at the Alamo, by simply refusing to fight and going home would have preserved themselves from the action of the selective principle to which the eugenics professor in question objects. Yet all mankind would have been the losers if Thermopylæ had never been taken and the Alamo never stormed.

This Professor of Eugenics should not halt on the threshold. Firemen lead hazardous lives; the creation of a fire department means the "selective elimination" of a number of brave, able-bodied men. Does the professor think that there should be no fire departments? I suppose not. But it would be far more rational and less unpatriotic to advocate abolishing all the fire departments in the United States than to advocate abolishing the United States navy. But we can go much further. On an average, every year in the United States there are a thousandfold as many casualties in industry as in the army and navy. Ordinarily the deaths in industry every year outnumber the deaths in the bloodiest battle of the Civil War—those men who die as railway men, structural steel workers, bridge-builders, deep-sea fishermen, and the like. They are men far above the average in physical, mental, and moral power. Does the Professor of Eugenics therefore advocate that all such industries cease? It would be no more absurd than to say that all wars must cease, no matter how just. The only rational attitude to take is that there shall never be needless risk of life, and therefore never war unless war is demanded by the highest morality. But if war is so demanded, then the timid prig who shrinks from it, whether or not he covers his shrinking under the name of "eugenics," stands beside the man who will not risk his life to save women and children from a burning building, or the man who declines to work for his wife and children because there is danger in the work. Eugenics is an excellent thing; but not when carried to such a point as to teach men that love of life is to outweigh all else in the mind of man. The man worth calling such should always be willing to risk his life for an adequate object.

But all this only affects nations which do suffer from militarism. My concern is with

the United States, where militarism is an absolutely negligible factor from the standpoint of eugenics. Over a century and a quarter have gone by since it has been of the slightest effect whatever save in the case of the Civil War. To write about militarism as a danger to Americans from the standpoints of eugenics is precisely and exactly as if we should write about the eating of horse meat in honor of Odin as a danger to our spiritual life. Such eating of horse meat was at one time a serious problem to the missionaries who converted our ancestors from heathenism. Among these same ancestors militarism was also a problem. But in the America of to-day one is really no more a problem than the other. At any rate, as far as eugenics is concerned within the United States, militarism enters into the problem only to the degree that chemists would call a trace. It is a negligible quantity.

Now, if the writer in question were merely fighting a windmill there would be no earthly reason for interfering with his enjoyment. My point of objection is that it is a calamity for people of education and knowledge who understand what "good breeding" means to tilt at windmills and avoid, whether from ignorance or from fear, the really dangerous enemies. This is especially true with us because the average reformer is frightened at the mere mention of the most serious problems that confront us. To advocate reforms in land tenure, or the holding of property, or the use of railways, or the suffrage, is easy for any man; but to front the vital problem of the perpetuation of the best race elements seems to demand more courage and farsightedness than the reformer usually possesses. Take the recent book of Mr. Quick, called "The Good Ship Earth." It contains some wise—and a few unwise—suggestions as to the "ship" itself; but when it deals with the crew, it dares not speak plainly, and, by implication at least, praises sins far more evil in their ultimate effects than any connected with capitalism, extolling the French, New Englanders, and Australians because they are materially prosperous and intellectual—and are dying out. To preach, explicitly or implicitly, such doctrines is to do more harm than the rest of the book can possibly do good. But Mr. Quick reads us aright when he says that "there are people who I wish would have fewer children, and others who I wish would rear more children."

This is exactly my position. I wish very

much that the wrong people could be prevented entirely from breeding; and when the evil nature of these people is sufficiently flagrant, this should be done. Criminals should be sterilized, and feeble-minded persons forbidden to leave offspring behind them. But as yet there is no way possible to devise which could prevent all undesirable people from breeding. The emphasis should be laid on getting desirable people to breed. This is no question of having enormous families for which the man and woman are unable to provide. I do not believe in or advocate such families. I am not encouraging shiftless people, unfit to marry, who have huge families. I am speaking of the ordinary, every-day Americans, the decent men and women who do make good fathers and mothers, and who ought to have good-sized families.

The fundamental point to remember is that if there are not in the average family four children, the race goes back, and that the element which has three children is stationary, and that the group where the average family has two children or less represents a dying element in the race. I am of course speaking of averages, and not of exceptional cases. We have heard much of the New England conscience—the Puritan conscience. It is lamentable to see this Puritan conscience, this New England conscience, so atrophied, so diseased and warped, as not to recognize that the fundamental, the unpardonable crime against the race is the crime of race suicide. The New England of the future will belong, and ought to belong, to the descendants of the immigrants of yesterday and to-day, because the descendants of the Puritans "have lacked the courage to live," have lacked the conscience which ought to make men and women fulfill the primary law of their being.

It is not a good thing to see a poor and shiftless couple have a very large number of children, but it is a great deal better thing than seeing a prosperous, capable family with but one or two. After all, while there is life there is hope, whereas nothing can be done with the dead. If a race, or an element in a race, dies out, then that is the end of it. But if a race or an element of a race continues to exist, even though under unfavorable conditions and with results that are not what they ought to be, there is always the chance that something can be made out of it in the future. The evil or shiftless man who leaves children

behind him represents a bad element in the community. But the worst element in the community is that furnished by the men and women who ought to be good fathers and mothers of many healthy children, but who deliberately shirk their duty.

Professors of eugenics, and I may add all of the well-meaning unmarried philanthropists of both sexes who speak about education for motherhood and fatherhood, should remember that all efforts to educate the race necessarily amount to nothing if there be no race to educate. There is no use in educating a woman for motherhood unless she is educated to be a mother. No institution will take the place of a home, and all proposals for rearing and educating children outside the home and supplying the place of parents by "trained educators" indicate a morbid pathological condition in the woman making the proposal—a pathological condition as marked in her case as it is in the opposite case of the extremely foolish woman who, in her revolt against the vagaries of some advocates of progress, insists that we should go backward and holds up to us for admiration some such frightful system as that of Hindu family life.

I am a very firm believer in the new woman, but the only new woman in whom I believe is she who adds new qualities to, and does not try to substitute them for, the primal, the fundamental, virtues of the "old" woman—she who was the wife, the mother, the sweetheart, the sister, of the past. I am a very firm believer in democracy. But I believe in it in order to relieve the average man of unjust burdens, not to free him from the performance of vital duties. It is just the same way with a woman. I wish to see her freed from the unjust burdens so heavily laid upon her by man in the beginning, which have been gradually lightened in the slow progress of the ages. But neither man nor woman can be excused from the performance of the most vital and intimate of all duties, those connected with the home and the household. Let professors of eugenics turn their attention to making it plain to the average college graduates of either sex, the average sane and worthy philanthropists, the average men and women who lead in any branch of the higher life of our people, that it is their prime duty to the race to leave their seed after them to inherit the earth. The old Hebrews were right when they made this their prayer; and the race is doomed which does not feel the appeal of such a

prayer. Neither material prosperity, nor cultivation of mind, nor softness of life, nor philanthropic devotion to lesser duties, atones from the race standpoint, from the standpoint of humanity, for failure to perform the prime duty. Tell both man and woman that no "career" is more than a poor substitute for the career of married lovers who bring into the world, and rear as they should be reared, children sufficiently numerous so that the race shall go forward and not back.

I am well aware that there must be exceptions to this rule. But it is the rule; and when the exceptions become numerous it shows that there is something very wrong with society. Not once in a score of times is the man or woman entitled to justification if he or she shirks the most fundamental of all duties; and this whether the excuse be cold selfishness and fear of pain and discomfort, or a love of ease, or a mistaken sense of the importance of some outside career. No career is so useful and honorable, nor needs such self-sacrifice and wisdom, as the career of a good and wise mother. The best career for the man is to be the breadwinner for his wife and children; let his career outside of this be an addition to it and not a substitute for it.

Let me repeat that I am speaking of averages. Some of the men and women for whom I care most have remained single, and yet have done their duty in life well and nobly. Some of the best married couples I know have, to their great grief, no children, or but one or two. What I say cannot be taken as applying to each individual case. But it does apply to cases taken in the aggregate. A man or woman may remain single for good and adequate reason, just as in a time of mortal danger to a country some given man may for good and adequate reason not go to war. But whenever in any community the number of such men or women in one case, or of such men in the other case, becomes appreciable, then it is evident that the reason is neither good nor adequate. If, in a community of a thousand young and able-bodied men, eight or nine do not go to the war when the country's need is sorest, they may have an ample and just excuse. But if eight or nine hundred refuse to go, then it is evident that something is wrong, and very seriously wrong, in the community. So, if of men and women engaged in philanthropic or social work, if of men and women who are graduates of college and have had the higher edu-

cational advantages, the ones who marry are relatively so few and the children they have relatively so few that their descendants represent a smaller proportion of the population in the next generation—why, it is proof positive that their ideals and training are wrong, and that they need to look sharply to their own moral and mental shortcomings instead of spending so much time in improving their minds or attempting to look after other people's morals and bodies.

What I say applies exactly as much to the man as to the woman. It is no more the woman's business to be in the home than it is the man's business to make the home, and his crime if he refuses to make it is as grave as that of the woman who refuses to do her part in keeping it up. To talk of a wife or mother as an "economic parasite" is the veriest nonsense. If she is worth her salt, she is a full partner; and the man is not worth his salt unless he acknowledges this fact and welcomes it. And the more each partner loves and respects the other, the more anxious each is to share the other's burden, the less either will feel like encouraging the other to shirk any duty that ought to be faced. The duties are mutual and reciprocal.

What is more, when we envisage things rightly, when we look facts squarely in the face, there is no reason why the performance of the primary duty should render a man or a woman incapable of performing other duties. Undoubtedly the average man will always find earning his living his chief and most exacting occupation; and the average woman will find bearing, caring for, and bringing up in infancy her babies an occupation that demands all her strength and wisdom. Moreover, thrice blessed are the man and the woman to whom come these great duties and who perform them well. They are to be envied beyond all others. But the moment the strain somewhat lets up, each of the partners can do a great deal of outside work. Each can do the outside work, anyhow, if it is to him or to her the absorbing passion which can be felt just as strongly by

the duty-performing married man as by the unmarried man. Agassiz and Longfellow, Huxley and Darwin, Julia Ward Howe and Harriet Beecher Stowe, Alexander Hamilton, Grant, Sherman, and innumerable others like them, among the men and women of thought and action, illustrate the truth of what I say.

There is a woman prominent in the Mothers' Congress, whose name I will not mention, but with whom I have always worked, who is the mother of seven children. This has not prevented her from being—on the contrary, it has aided her in being—a vital factor in helping every cause for uplifting women and children; and incidentally I have always felt that I had to do anything she asked me to do, if it were possible, just because I so emphatically believe in the way her principles and her practices square one with the other. Let any woman who says that she prefers a career to marriage understand that she is preferring the less to the greater. The prime benefactors of humanity are the man and woman who leave to the next generation boys and girls who will turn out good and useful men and women. I honor the good man, I honor the good woman still more. I believe that the woman should have open to her everything that is open to man, every profession, every opportunity; and, furthermore, I believe with all my heart that no other woman and no man will ever have a career approaching in dignity, in usefulness to the whole community, in fine self-sacrifice and devotion, the career of the good mother who brings into the world and rears and trains as they should be reared and trained many healthy children.

This much at least is certain. If among the men and women who make up a people there is a selective elimination of the most fit, as a result of those men and women failing to marry and have children, the result must necessarily be race deterioration, unless the race is partly saved by the infusion into it of the blood of other races that have not lost the virile virtues.

