

THE FORUM SERIES

WHAT IS EUGENICS?

MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN

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WHAT IS EUGENICS?

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WHAT IS EUGENICS?

BY

MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN

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PREFACE

THE word "Eugenics" now often occurs in the newspapers, and there must be some who are asking, What is Eugenics? What is it all about? In the following pages an attempt is made to answer these questions in the fewest possible words. For the sake of brevity, a dogmatic tone has been adopted, all such expressions as "I believe," "I think," being omitted. Perhaps I may say that the arguments in favour of the views here set forth are stated at much greater length in my book on "The Need for Eugenic Reform" (Murray; 1926). Also that this is a subject which has been in my thoughts for more than half a century, and that during the last seventeen years of that period, whilst I have been President of the Eugenics Society, it has been my constant study.

Condensed writing is necessarily hard reading. If the reader would read only one chapter a night, and read it three times over, it might have a greater effect than reading a more verbose book three times the length and much more than three times as expensive.

L. D.

August, 1928.

*It I had to write this again
I should in Chap VII have
a more vivid picture.*

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CHAPTER I

Domestic Animals

WHEN the time comes for the old dog to die and when with sorrow we shall have to replace him, will not the breed of our new companion be our first thought? Farmers in all ages of which we have any records, and in all countries, have paid great attention to the breed of all their flocks and herds. Owners of cattle have always known that care in the selection of stock for breeding purposes will pay them well in the long run. Do not all who keep poultry discuss the relative merits of Leghorns and Light Sussex, or of whatever may be the favourite breeds at the time? Pigs, pigeons, canaries, bees, to say nothing about vegetables—ask those who take a practical interest in rearing them what would be the chance of anyone winning a prize who was careless as to breed. Lastly, the publication of stud books proves what careful consideration is given to the performances of the ancestors of existing horses. And if men, however savage or how ever cultivated, have always given so much time to the study of the breed of the animals they own, why have they not paid equal or more attention to their own breed? Before a marriage is contracted many questions may be asked as to the amount of money likely to be inherited by the bride, while no consideration is usually given to the qualities of mind or body which she is likely to pass on to her children—to her breed, in fact. The aim of eugenics is to prove that the breed of our own citizens is a matter of vital importance when considering the future welfare of our country.

First of all let us see what advantages have actually been gained for man by improving the breed of his domestic

animals, and how these improvements have been brought about. All our dogs are descended from some wild wolf-like ancestors, who had been captured when young and tamed. Those with the wildest natures often ran away, and became wild animals again. Some of the naturally tamer animals could be kept, but when they failed to follow our savage ancestors out hunting, or when they turned sulky or unsociable, or when they bit a child in the camp, they were often promptly killed. This may be described as unconscious or unpremeditated selection. It has been going on for several thousand years, and it has had wonderful effects. The wild ancestors of our dogs were ready enough to attack a man if found at a disadvantage. Our dogs of to-day, their descendants, are our most faithful companions. Their affection for men is so bred into them that they pay much more attention to us than to other dogs.

The effects of the *deliberate* efforts which have long been made to breed better animals have been even more remarkable than the effects of this *unpremeditated* selection. All savages are known to pay some attention to breed. As it was obvious that it was the swiftest hound of the pack which succeeded in running down the hare or the rabbit, it was that dog which was selected by primitive man for breeding purposes. This went on century after century, with the result that in time the greyhound of to-day made its appearance. When our ancestors wanted protection for themselves or their herds, they looked more to strength and weight when selecting for breeding; and in consequence many stronger kinds of dogs were produced at the same time as the greyhound. When it was a creature to pet that was desired, dogs like the Chinese chow slowly appeared as if in answer to this demand. The differences between all the innumerable breeds of dogs—bulldogs, pugs, mastiffs, terriers, bloodhounds, poodles, lapdogs, etc.—are probably partly the result of the differences between the wild animals which were tamed originally. But this extraordinary diversity of form is really mainly due to the different ideals in the minds of the men who bred them, and to the slight

differences in the individuals selected in consequence for breeding purposes generation after generation.

The contrast between cats and dogs is also instructive. The cat's nature leads it to wander out at night, and its habits make control over its breeding very difficult; and such breeding is, therefore, but little attended to. In consequence, as compared with dogs, fewer different breeds of cats have been produced, with less marked differences between them. Then, again, cats are chiefly useful for killing mice at home. This they can do in their master's absence, because he does not want to eat the mice himself. Hence obedience to a call has not been bred into them. Lastly, what brings the cat home in the morning after its wanderings in the dark is the desire for shelter and warmth. It was those cats which felt this desire for comfort most strongly who least often deserted the camp to become wild animals. The result of this unpremeditated selection going on for ages has been the production of the comforting, unsympathetic animal we all know so well.

The effects of selection in bygone times are also seen clearly in our cattle of to-day. In the days of our ancestors of long ago, the poor milker was often killed for food, while the cow producing more milk was retained to supply the family. It was only the better milkers, therefore, who had calves; and these calves passed on to their descendants their powers of producing milk in bigger quantities. No doubt this kind of unintentional selection in some degree improved the breed in regard to milk-giving. In our day, however, deliberate selection is being carried on with the greatest forethought and care. A bull is valued for breeding purposes in accordance with the milking qualities, not only of its female ancestors, but also of the cows which he has already produced as his offspring. African savages have tame cows which are known to have produced not more than two or three pints of milk a day; and this may be more than that produced by wild cattle. A good milker may now produce forty pints a day, this increase in amount being the result of deliberate care taken in breeding.

The egg-laying powers of poultry have been improved much in the same way as the amount of milk given by cows. The singing of canaries tells much the same story. The differences between the breeds of horses, with the cart horse and the pony at the two extremes, are with little doubt due in some measure to different wild animals having been caught and tamed in bygone ages. But the differences between these wild animals have been immensely increased by man. In the case of pigeons, the existing breeds, including such apparently different birds as the pouter and the fantail, have all descended directly from the one wild form, the rock dove. Why they now differ so greatly is because in breeding them the fancier had no useful purposes in view, and had only his fancy to guide him. A study of pigs, sheep, duck, and even bees, would also illustrate the wonders that can be accomplished by care in breeding.

Those who live in towns have not as good opportunities of studying animal life as have the farmers of to-day or as had their ancestors. Farmers learn much by their own personal experience. They may have learnt even more in consequence of the traditional knowledge acquired in their families in times gone by having been passed on to them by their fathers when they were lads. Farmers are not always right when they try to explain things; but when they talk about the advantage of attending to breed they are talking about what they know. It is not the business of farmers as such to apply to their fellow citizens their knowledge as to breed. But should not we ask ourselves why we should not try to improve mankind by somewhat the same methods as those which have worked such wonders with domestic animals? Is it not folly altogether to neglect the experience gained by breeders when we are thinking of the needs and the shortcomings of our own nation? These are the questions which eugenics aims at answering.

CHAPTER II

Man's Ancestors

SOME persons will reply to what has just been said by declaring that man is not an animal. They will add that it is, therefore, worse than useless to look to the breeding of pigs and sheep when seeking for guidance in our own affairs. A word or name is, however, in many ways, like a label. You can tie it on to anything or tear it off again, almost at your pleasure. If you choose to attach the label of "animal" only to what are generally called the lower animals, then you may say if you like that man is not an animal. You will, however, learn nothing whatever about man merely by considering the name you give to him. We must look at things themselves, and not at the labels attached to them. What we want to know about mankind is whether it is likely that the human race would be benefited in the future by care being taken in regard to breeding; that is, in the same way that domestic animals have certainly been improved in the past. This is the question to be asked and answered.

As to the lower animals, all students of science now believe that if we could trace their ancestry backwards, offspring to parent, generation after generation, for an immense time, we should see that they were all descended from some common stock. All the lower animals are, in fact, very distant cousins. And, being thus related, it is natural that they should all be improved in like manner by care being taken in the selection of the individuals that are allowed to breed. Is man their cousin also? There is no good reason why he should be excluded from this great family group, and he is not so excluded by those who have looked into the matter carefully. We are of