

# UN SOUNDNESS OF MIND, PUBLIC HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND EUGENICS.

All the intelligent and thoughtful members of any community who are anxious to ensure (1) the physical, mental, and moral progress of the race, (2) the elimination of all taint tending towards the deterioration of the race, will feel more than a passing interest in such important questions as the public health and education.

Dr. Clouston, in his recent work entitled "Unsoundness of Mind," states: "Mental unsoundness should be looked at not as an isolated fact in the history of mankind, but as one of the results of natural-law breaking—sometimes wilful, but more frequently through ignorance or want of the means of healthful living—on the part of former generations of mankind. If one-tenth of the thought and one-twentieth of the effort that has been wasted on political discussion and on unhealthful amusements were, for a few generations, given to health knowledge and the upbuilding of a "health conscience" among mankind we might make more progress. We need a genius and a few fiery enthusiasts to compel the attention of men and women to such questions." And again: "Soundness of mind is the master key to all human effort and progress."

If, then, we are more than casually interested in the progress—mental and moral—of the race, and if we would attempt to eliminate all that which tends towards the degeneration of the race, our first duty is to help to develop or build up a "health conscience" among mankind. If mental unsoundness is the result of "natural-law breaking" or "want of the means of healthful living" on the part of former generations—that which, through ignorance largely, we have had bequeathed to us—is there any reason why now, in the twentieth century and in this enlightened young country, this state of darkness, these sins of ignorance, should be handed on to future generations? Our first duty, then, clearly is to disseminate knowledge of the laws of health as widely as possible, and to point out the penalty Nature imposes on posterity when her laws are broken or unheeded. We establish mental hospitals for the insane, schools for mentally deficient, reformatory schools and prisons for the vicious and criminal imbecile, but to hope to stem the tide of national degeneracy we must go further back—we must begin with the child yet unborn, if possible, by spreading the knowledge to the parents that all forms of mental abnormality or mental unsoundness are not an isolated fact in the history of mankind, but one of the results of natural-law breaking.

A dissemination of such knowledge as will tend to lessen the chances of production or reproduction of unsoundness of mind in future generations, and the formation of a public opinion which will create a sense of responsibility in all matters pertaining to human parenthood, are questions of national importance, and demand the serious attention of not only eugenic education societies, but of our Public Health Departments. The definition of the new science of eugenics is "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally." All thoughtful people are, consciously or unconsciously, eugenists. It has been proved over and over again that the most fruitful cause of mental degeneracy is heredity.

Mental degeneracy in all its forms—insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, criminality, inebriety, &c.—is closely allied to the question of our public health. If that is admitted, is it not a question as to whether it is not the business of the State to set up a Department where such work as is now undertaken by eugenic societies could be dealt with? The State rightly interests itself now in "nurture," but by far the most important question is that of "nature." The education of the normal portion of our people is of paramount importance, seeing that our theory of education is now founded on a system which aims to bring the whole organism to such perfection as it is capable of, to train the brain-power in accordance with its capacity so as to avoid the straining of any power or faculty. Our trend now is to conduct the whole of our educative processes in such a way as to conduce towards general organic health. The ultimate aim of our educational system is to produce a healthy, moral, intellectual, and strong race. This, of course, is as it should be, but at the same time we should consider it our first duty to set on foot a scientific movement—which in time will become of true social value—to scientifically inquire into the questions of production or reproduction of those blots on public health and well-being—insanity, idiocy, imbecility, feeble-mindedness, &c.—which are now treated by separate Departments, but which are clearly portions of one vast question of national importance.

## EXTENSION OF THE PERIOD OF CONTROL.

The Education Amendment Act, 1910, which came into operation last year, provides for the compulsory education of afflicted children—i.e., blind, deaf, feeble-minded, and epileptic—between the ages of six and twenty-one years. Prior to the passing of this Act the education of such children was only compulsory up to the age of sixteen years. This of course meant that when a child of feeble mind reached the age of sixteen years he was free, despite his mental incapacity, to go forth into the world, where his presence would be a standing menace to the community, inasmuch as it would probably mean a perpetuation of the unfit. This extension of the period of legal control in the case of afflicted children up to the age of twenty-one years was clearly a step in the right direction, but had the framers of this Act hesitated at this point the gain to the community would have been but very small. The Act, however, wisely provides that when "a feeble-minded or epileptic child who is or is apparently twenty years and six months of age and is through mental or physical defect or otherwise not (in his own or the public interest) a proper person to be free from guidance and control in a special school," then an application may be made to a Magistrate for an order directing that the said child be kept under guidance and control for a further period. Such period of further detention may not exceed four years. If found to be necessary in the interests of the child and the community, further proceedings may be taken to again extend the period of control, and so on.

During the past year it has been found necessary to propose a period of further detention in five cases (four boys and one girl), who are pupils of this school and who have now reached the