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THE EUGENIC APPEAL IN MORAL EDUCATION.¹

By JOHN RUSSELL, M.A.

“THOU are young and wishest for child and marriage.
But I ask thee: are thou a man who darest to wish for a child?
Art thou the victorious one, the self-subduer, the commander of thy
senses, the master of thy virtues?
Or, in thy wish, doth there speak the animal, or necessity, or solitude,
or discord with thyself?
I would that thy victory and freedom were longing for a child.
Thou shalt build living monuments unto thy victory and liberation.
Thou shalt build beyond thyself.
But first thou must be built thyself square in body and soul.”

(NIETZSCHE.)

I AM beginning to regret the undue emphasis on “moral education,” as I have long regretted the undue emphasis on “Sunday.” All days are holy (or unholy), and all education moralises (or demoralises).

In this paper I shall speak of “education” only, although I have allowed “moral” to appear in the title.

I shall say little, too, of the Science of Eugenics except to restate (in my own words) what I understand to be its fundamental postulates: (1) That the quality, actual and potential, of a child at birth (the man or woman that is to be), depends almost entirely upon the inherent qualities of its father and mother (the man and woman that are), and (2) that this sequence in quality is a natural sequence, subject, in the measure of human knowledge and purpose, to understanding and control.

The law of cause and effect is too seldom taken seriously.

¹ Communicated to the Second International Moral Education Conference, The Hague, 1912.

Only a fool would seek grapes on a thorn-bush, but many of us in our spring-time sow our wild seed, and afterwards blame everything but ourselves for the worthless crop.

“Carefully select both soil and seed,” says Eugenics. “Good seed on good ground must (under good conditions) bring forth good fruit; bad seed or bad ground bad fruit.”

“Cultivate always wisely,” says the new Education, “but care above everything for the original quality of your material.”

If those broad truths be true (and what sort of man would he be who should go about to prove them false?) educators of all grades (parents, teachers, preachers, law-givers) have a clear duty—to bring them home as truths to the conscience (which is the educated imagination) not only of all potential parents, but, since we are all educators of each other, of all men and women. How are we to reach the conscience? That is always the supreme problem of education. In this particular case certainly not by postponement or mystification.

At the first psychological moment, and in terms that are intelligible, to the expanding child-mind must be presented the idea of physical parenthood. As the boy or girl grows older the idea will take more and more definite form, and if the information has been conveyed with tenderness and wisdom (all tender and wise hearts will easily find a way), the imagination will have been armoured against pruriency and sex-blasphemy.

Upon knowledge of the physical heritage will be based the Eugenic appeal. To young children it can only be indirect—implied, but unformulated in the general conception of service to the body. Someday, I think, my Duty towards my Body (when it has been set out in equally noble words), will become an integral part of my Duty towards my Neighbour, of which it is the essential basis. Even a little child can understand (because it can see) that damage to its own body never ends with itself, but always involves trouble, if not suffering, in the home circle. To turn this elementary understanding to account in the service of the home is the first step in the Eugenic appeal. To extend the understanding and to turn it to account in the service of the wider communities of school and country is a further step. The last step extends the understanding still further, and turns it to

account in the service of posterity, the children of the children of to-day.

Is there, indeed, any other ultimate moral appeal than this appeal for mutual service—co-operation each with each in the great task of learning the uses of the world and its secret of happiness?

Eugenics only asks that the great ideal (and increasing practice) of service shall be extended to include service to the neighbours that are yet unborn.

In all the great fields of human activity such extension is already made—nay, has been always made.

No great work has ever been undertaken for the sake of the living alone, least of all the begetting of children—except by the seducer. But that greatest work of all, even though consciously undertaken for posterity, has been too often marred by selfishness, by shame, by fear, and, above all, by an ignorance which is almost superstition! Children are not “sent.” They are made, and it is we who make them—in our own image. And the bodily act that makes them is not to be estimated in any terms of personal satisfaction, but in terms of blessing (or curse) to a world.

I am not here concerned with the manifold changes in manners and customs that would follow from a national acceptance of the Eugenic ideal, or with the personal problems of infinite complexity that would arise.

I will only remind any who need reminding that most of our personal problems are of infinite complexity already, and I will only add that a well-defined principle of action, and a clearer conception of duty, might help us to pick our way even through the pitfalls of sex with greater security to ourselves and to all men.

Nor do I propose to set out a syllabus of the sex-education (as it may be called) upon which the Eugenic appeal must be based. Syllabuses have their place in education, but in these intimate matters the teacher who really cares (and all others must be silent) will find his (or her) own best way.

I conclude with the following summary of opinion.

1. Sex-education is not mere information, not knowledge

of sex-functions for its own sake, but knowledge for the sake of the proper use of those functions in the interest of self and society.

2. Sex-education is necessary for four main reasons: (a) Because sex is the greatest factor in human progress. (b) Because the misuse of sex has been and is, the source of untold suffering and untold waste. (c) Because misuse arises chiefly from ignorance (or perverted knowledge), for which the best cure is education in right knowledge and right use. (d) Because in most cases sex-knowledge, if not wisely imparted by the proper persons, will be unwisely imparted by improper persons—often with disastrous results. A child's religion is not left to the ribald scoffer. Why, then, this other holy thing?

3. Sex-education must be begun by the parent in the home, continued by the teacher in the school, and perfected by an enlightened public opinion.

4. The task of the school depends upon whether proper foundations have been laid in the home, or whether that duty has been neglected. In the former case the task of the school is comparatively simple. Home has instructed, school will educate. The teacher, having the right attitude, and knowing that the child, boy or girl, has the essential knowledge, will reinforce the general moral appeal, whenever the occasion seems to serve, by references to what I venture to call the sex-sanctions:

(a) That quality (in all senses) at birth depends upon the qualities of fathers and mothers (to the ninth generation).

(b) That this quality is impaired by precocious use (or other misuse) of the parental sex-organs, and even by abandonment to sex-dreaming.

(c) That it is a clear social duty, not only to the present generation, but to future generations, to keep our bodies in health, the body being the chief servant (or master) of life.

(d) That it is always a duty to mate eugenically, and sometimes a duty not to mate at all.

In a word, the schoolmaster (or schoolmistress) must be free upon due occasion to say publicly, "Remember this thing I am asking you to do (or not to do) is not for your own sakes only, not even only for the sake of your neighbours (here in school or

presently in the world), but above all for the sake of the children that may some day be born of your own bodies.”

Upon due occasion also he (or she) must be free to talk privately of sex as frankly and as earnestly as a wise parent, a wise doctor, or a wise friend.

Such talk, whether public or private, would be one of the chief aspects (in school) of the Eugenic appeal in practice. The conceptions of responsibility upon which it is based are among the educator's chief sources of inspiration.

The task of the school, when home has neglected its duty, is a much more difficult problem. Any public appeal, except in the vaguest and most general terms, would scarcely be possible, and any private appeal based on frank information could only be made (consistently with the present view of the rights of parents), with consent from home.

And so the satisfactory education of the child in these supreme responsibilities must wait for the satisfactory education of public opinion. To that consummation this Congress (like all other plain speaking), will materially contribute.

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