

EDITORIAL

NATURAL SCIENCE SLOPPING OVER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the *Survey* of March 2, Dr. Henry H. Goddard, director of the Department of Research of the training school at Vineland, N.J., contributes an article that abounds in figures concerning the startling increase and startling percentage of the feeble-minded in the country.

The article sets forth that an army of feeble-minded, more than 300,000 strong, “furnishes the recruits for the ranks of the criminals, the paupers, the prostitutes, the drunkards, the ne’er-do-wells, and others of our social misfits”; and it advances the theory that a policy of segregation, carefully followed, will in a generation or two largely reduce our feeble-minded population “and thereby our problems of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness and crime.”

Whereat—that is, at the conclusion that by preventing procreation by the feeble-minded our problems of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness, and crime will be largely reduced—we exclaim with a sigh, mingled with indignation: “A sad instance of Natural Science slopping over!”

Inestimable is the assistance that Natural Science can lend to the race in checking, if not eliminating, disease with its train of manifold ills. By ascertaining the physical defects that are transmitted by heredity, hence, inferentially, also, the delinquencies that are likely to flow from physical and mental deformity, Natural Science places the human race under a debt of gratitude that can not be requited. When, however, Natural Science forgets that it is a Science; when it proceeds from imperfect premises to sweeping conclusions that Natural Science itself, besides Social Science, disproves, then Natural Science slops over. Then it cancels the debt to its credit, leaving a large indebtedness against it.

Such is the case with Dr. Goddard’s article.

Probably, it is an established scientific fact that mental feebleness is transmit-

ted by heredity. Quite certain, social delinquency, rather than social virtues, flow from mental feebleness. Finally, the conclusion is obvious, that by preventing procreation by the feeble-minded social delinquency would to that extent, be checked. So far so good. To conclude, however, that, by preventing procreation by the feeble-minded, the source of social delinquency could be largely dried up, or, in Dr. Goddard's own words, "our problems of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness and crime" would be largely reduced, so largely as to justify the admittedly large expenditure of time, mental effort and funds which the executing of the policy would demand—that is a parody on Science. It is to impute excessive causal powers to Heredity, and to belittle the tremendous influence of Environment.

Even if pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness and crime be, by scientific demonstration, fatedly transmitted by heredity, such pauperism, such prostitution, such disease, such drunkenness and crime is but a drop contributed to the ocean of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness, and crime in society.

The environment created by a social system, the stability of which is predicated upon a property-less class, and the prosperity of which is watered with the pauper-bitter waters of a "reserve army of unemployed";—the environment created by a social system with which prostitution is pivotal;—the environment created by a social system that, with the precariousness of existence which it foments, lays a nerve-racking strain upon the mass; that, with the unsanitary conditions under which it drives the masses to toil, superinduces the craving for "stimulants"; and that, with its necessity for sales and "profit," profits by these ills by satisfying the demand for "stimulants" with an ample and cheap supply;—the environment created by a social system, that, obedient to the imperious law of its, to-day, malefic existence to strain after "profits," quick "profits," large "profits," huddles the masses in unhygienic "homes," and lashes them to work, often from early infancy, into mills, mines, shops, factories and yards that undermine health;—the environment created by a social system, in which the struggle for existence has reached such a pitch that a New York Grand Jury recently declined to present indictments against the insurance Pillars of Society, not because they were innocent, but expressly because, if it indicted them, it would have to indict all the other managers of all other financial establishments, and in which the pace set by these Pillars of Society recommends

itself, by the impunity that generally attends it, as “cleverness”;—in short, the environment created by a social system which Marx pithily summarized as one in which “virtue, love, opinion, science, conscience, etc.,” all enter into commerce, and create “the period of general corruption; of universal venality; or, to speak in the terms of political economy, the time when everything moral or physical having become a salable commodity, is conveyed to market to be appraised at its proper value”;—the environment created by such a social system itself generates mass pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness, and crime.

To expect to “largely reduce our problems of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness, and crime” by preventing procreation by the feeble-minded is like expecting to bail dry a ship into which the water is pouring from a thousand leaks. Faster by far than the water could be bailed out, it would be rushing in. He who, in the robes of Science, promises a large reduction of “our problems of pauperism, prostitution, disease, drunkenness and crime” by the prevention of procreation by the feeble-minded sins doubly—

He sins against Science itself by queering it;

He sins, also, and above all, against the Social Question by acquitting, as, whether intentionally or unintentionally, he does, the real criminal at the bar—pauperism-nurtured, prostitution-sustained, drunkenness-sodden, disease-reeking, and crime-soaked CAPITALISM.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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slpns@slp.org