

WOMAN AND NATURAL SELECTION.

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DR. ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE has recently expressed his views upon this matter, through an interview to one of the London daily papers. For a scientific man, and especially for one of Dr. Wallace's eminence, this means of conveying his views upon any important matter is decidedly novel, and it is to be hoped the innovation will not be adopted by others. The interview is the least satisfactory conduit-pipe that could be chosen for the conveyance to the world of the opinions of men of science. The dangers of the public platform have before now been demonstrated, but these are altogether dwarfed when compared with those of the interviewer. In addressing a large audience, a man is always inspired with a certain sense of responsibility; but with the interviewer, the conversation in every case takes more or less of the character of a friendly chat, and the interviewed is led to express himself with a freedom and lack of accuracy in detail, which he could not be guilty of before a numerous audience, or at his desk. Moreover, any error made under either of the latter two conditions is had at first hand, and does not suffer in transit, as it is liable to do in the case of the interviewer. The interviewer does not record what is said, but what he thinks is said. It is, indeed, impossible to have accurate scientific information thus at second hand; for in the nature of things, the matter in hand must invariably take a certain bent or tinge from the mind of him who reduces it from a loose conversation to a more or less concentrated essay. Hence, those who in a moment of inadvertency have surrendered themselves into the hands of the interviewer, frequently have occasion to deny the accuracy of their conversations as reported. But no such error could have occurred in the present instance; for not only has Dr. Wallace allowed several weeks to go past without correction or retraction, but he has repeated the opinions, in almost the same words, to another interviewer whose paper appears in the February number of the HUMANITARIAN. Indeed, the reports in both cases bore evidence of their truth; for the same spirit pervades the whole, and nothing short of a repudiation of the whole could appease those

who view the question from the commonsense, practical standpoint, as opposed to that of the utopian dreamer. I would make bold to traverse almost every argument set forth in the interview as reported, and deny *in toto* the accuracy and soundness of the conclusions arrived at.

The position taken up by Dr. Wallace may be stated briefly thus: When woman, by education and the ability to earn her own living, is made a free agent in the matrimonial market, every form of the unfit will disappear, and that it is the absence of the female element in the making of marriages which is responsible for the vicious, the degraded, the weak in intellect, the deformed, and diseased in body, and every other form of the unfit which at present so freely contaminates our population. By itself this might be excused as a loose generalisation, made in casual conversation, by a sanguine enthusiast. But it is another matter when an attempt is made to justify the position, and arguments are advanced in all seriousness which will not bear a moment's consideration.

Speaking of the elimination of the unfit, Dr. Wallace says:—

“I believe that this improvement will be effected through the agency of female choice in marriage. As things are, women are constantly forced into marriage for a bare living or a comfortable home. They have, practically, no choice in the selection of their partners and the fathers of their children, and so long as this economic necessity for marriage presses upon the great bulk of women, men who are vicious, degraded, of feeble intellect and unsound bodies, will secure wives, and thus often perpetuate their infirmities and evil habits. But, in a reformed society, the vicious man, the man of degraded taste or of feeble intellect, will have little chance of finding a wife, and his bad qualities will die out with himself. . . . In a regenerated society, it would come to be considered a degradation for a woman to marry a man she did not both love and esteem; in consequence, many women would abstain from marriage altogether, or delay it till a worthy and sympathetic husband was encountered. . . . In order to cleanse society of the unfit, we must give to woman the power of selection in marriage, and the means by which this most important and desirable end can be attained will be brought about by giving her such training and education as shall render her economically independent.”*

Here we have Dr. Wallace's position set forth in his own words, and I am constrained to assert that it has no basis, either in acknowledged fact, or in plausible theory.

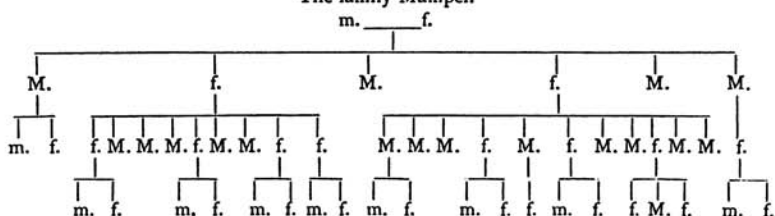
In the first place I would point out that the unfit at present appear in about equal numbers among males and females. Thus there were forty-thousand six hundred and eighty-two male, and forty-nine thousand one hundred and forty female “lunatics, idiots, and persons of unsound mind,” known to the Commissioners in

* *Daily Chronicle*, 4th December, 1893.

lunacy in England and Wales, on the 1st January, 1893. Cancer causes over fifty per cent. more deaths among females than males; while scrofula, phthisis, epilepsy, drunkenness, deafmutism, etc., are by no means confined to the males. Taking all the usual signs of family degeneration, we may put it down without exaggeration, that in the aggregate they appear about equally in the two sexes. This being so, I fail to see how the freedom of woman to contract marriage only with those she "loves and esteems" can be expected to lead to the disappearance of the unfit, even if we admit that educated woman will only love and esteem the fit among men; which, of course, we cannot admit. We are not even justified in assuming that the unfit would disappear from among the males under the conditions stated; for we know that all degenerate characters are liable to be transmitted to male and female children with about equal certainty from the mother; while some, which seldom or never actively affect the female, are transmitted with marvellous certainty to the male children of mothers in whom the evil character is latent.

A good example of this latter mode of transmission is seen in the case of the degenerate constitutional condition known as Hæmophilia. These people are called "Bleeders." Now few women are "bleeders"; indeed, the condition is almost unknown in the female, yet the pathological condition upon which the peculiarity depends is transmitted with terrible certainty to the male offspring of mothers who are members of "bleeder" families. Very often this diseased condition is transmitted through two, three, or even more generations of females, to re-appear in the males so soon as that sex appears in the family. This is well exemplified in the following family history, which was recorded by Dr. Lossen, and quoted by Sir William Turner in his address before the British Association in 1889. The members affected are represented by capital letters; and it will be noticed that in the family the abnormal condition did not affect a single female, while in the first, second and third generations, there were respectively three, thirteen and one, male sufferers.

The family Mampel.



This transmission to the sons, of characters latent in the mothers, is not peculiar to "bleeders." It is equally common and well-marked in the case of colour-blindness, and less so in gout, general paralysis, instinctive crime, and some other abnormal conditions.

It is clear, then, that men are not the sole propagators of unfitness; and that it is vain to hope for the elimination of the mental, moral and physical weakling so long as the female weakling is permitted to become a parent. To consign all male weaklings to the lethal chamber before they attain procreative power, would certainly reduce largely the number of the unfit born. But to remove the female weaklings in like manner would be at least equally effective. Dr. Wallace apparently assumes that "education and pecuniary independence" will kill the desire for marriage in women "of vicious habits, of degraded taste, feeble intellect and diseased bodies." By what line of reasoning, or upon what evidence this belief is arrived at it is impossible to imagine. We know that these conditions do not extinguish the desire in the normal woman, and to expect more favourable results among the vicious, degraded and diseased, than among the virtuous and healthy, is absurd on the face of it.

In the next place I would deny the correctness of the assertion that an "economic necessity for marriage presses upon the great bulk of women." The doctor says:—"As things are, women are constantly forced into marriage for a bare living or a comfortable home." This is certainly true of a considerable number of the marriages which take place. But here, and all through the conversation as reported, he fails to distinguish between coercion and voluntary surrender to temptation. When a woman is forced into marriage "for a bare living," coercion is the proper term to apply; but when she is tempted into marriage by a "desire for a comfortable home," we cannot by any stretch of language say that she has been coerced. The man who is actually starving is coerced into stealing a loaf of bread; but the man who has enough bread cannot successfully plead that he is coerced into stealing butter to improve his fare. It is true that some few women are actually coerced into marriage for a bare living; but to say that "the great bulk of women" are thus coerced is to make a groundless assertion. That the great bulk of women are actuated to a certain degree in marriage by "the desire for a comfortable home" is more correct; but we must include in this group women of all grades of society, from the lightest to those who can just gain a livelihood. The factory girl who can earn fifteen or sixteen shillings a week, and marries an artizan "for a comfortable home," is no more

coerced into marriage than is the wealthy young lady who marries some vicious or imbecile lordling for a title. The one marries to improve her position, and the other is actuated by exactly the same motive. Neither may be successful in attaining the object sought, but both voluntarily risk failure in the attempt.

After all, the "economic necessity for marriage" presses upon a very small proportion of our female population. Among the working classes the women are quite as capable of earning their livelihood as are the men. In Lancashire, Yorkshire, and almost every other manufacturing centre, the females often earn better wages, in comparison to their wants, than do the males. Yet these women marry as young and as unwisely as any others in the country.

A stage higher in the scale, our saleswomen, female clerks, milliners, dressmakers, nurses, &c. &c., are as independent pecuniarily as are the males in the same level of society; yet here, again, we find neither marked desire for single blessedness, nor any special display of wise discrimination in the choice of husbands. It may be said that in the classes just cited, only one of the two conditions necessary is enjoyed, and that when to pecuniary independence, education is added, abstinence from marriage and wise discretion in the choice of husbands will follow. But what right or authority have we to assume that it will be so? We have no evidence that education, either alone, or coupled with pecuniary independence, will have any more elevating effect upon woman than it has had upon man; nor is there a shadow of excuse for believing that it will affect the sexes differently. The education and pecuniary independence now claimed for women have been the lot of man for ages, and in his case no such change of nature has been effected as that looked for by the new school in the case of woman. Men possessed of "such training and education as render them pecuniarily independent" do not habitually ignore the promptings of their natural instincts. Unfortunately, they are not above marrying a plain wife for pelf, or a diseased one for love. Men of education far above the level we can hope the female "masses" to attain, and of wealth still further above the pecuniary independence hoped for, are every day to be found entering into marriages with women they neither love nor esteem, and among whose near relatives they are aware of the existence of insanity, epilepsy, idiocy, cancer, drunkenness, consumption, and every other disease tendency which is hereditary. These men marry for wealth or social position, or at the call of pride, passion, or some equally base motive. The fact cannot be blinked, that pecuniary independence, or even comparative wealth,

does not extinguish the desire for further riches. Too often "the appetite but grows on what it feeds on." Neither does education often smother the desire for social elevation, or make men masters of their natural passions, as some assume will be the case with women. This may depend upon a natural "cussedness," which has ever been a strictly male attribute. But if so, Dr. Wallace should have informed us of the fact; for without some explanation it is impossible to understand why we should anticipate other results in women from "education and pecuniary independence" than have taken place in man under the same conditions. With all his education and independence, pecuniarily and otherwise, in no social grade has man attained that level of development which enables him to ignore his natural passions and instinctive likes and dislikes; and to expect that woman, in whom the emotional is so much more strongly developed than in man, will attain a higher level of control of the passions by the means which have failed in man, is to court disappointment.

Let me now appeal to fact, and see whether the conclusion arrived at above be supported thereby or no. We have a sufficiently large number of women living under the conditions Dr. Wallace wishes all women to enjoy, and whose female ancestors for many generations have lived under the same favourable conditions, to illustrate the effect of these conditions upon the female. In the higher social circles the bulk, if not the whole, of the women are not only pecuniarily independent, but more or less wealthy; and they are educated at least as highly and as well as we can hope to educate the female "masses" in the near future. Now I venture to say, without fear of contradiction, that these women neither abstain from marriage, nor exercise to any appreciable degree the peculiar discrimination in the choice of husbands, which some would teach us to look for in women able to earn a precarious living by individual toil. No one can be oblivious of the fact that independent ladies of superior education are guided by passion, pride, cupidity, and other base motives in the choice of husbands, exactly as are their poorer and less educated sisters. Women of wealth and culture are daily entering into marriages with men they neither "love nor esteem"; with "men who are vicious, degraded, of feeble intellect, and unsound bodies." Ignorance of this fact is inexcusable in anyone who presumes to write or speak on the subject. It is notorious that women of fortune and culture much more frequently contract the *mariage de convenance* than those of any other class of the population. These marriages are considered a degradation; but it is only behind-backs, and in a

half-hearted manner, that they are denounced. When a woman of fortune and intelligence sells herself to a man who might be her grandfather for the sake of an empty title, there is a subdued murmur of disapprobation ; but good taste and the hope of favours to come silence the murmur, and everyone who desires to be thought well-bred is silent on the matter.

If a man be either rich or of noble family he must be extremely vicious and degraded, or very feeble indeed in intellect or body, if he cannot find a wife among women who are neither ignorant nor pecuniarily dependent. The rich lordling who is notoriously vicious, or semi-imbecile, does not find it necessary to stoop to the uneducated or the dependent to find a wife. He generally finds a superabundance of women of wealth and education perfectly willing to marry him. These educated and wealthy women suffer the same temptation, or coercion, in matters matrimonial, that their poorer sisters do. And this element can never be eliminated from marriage until a dead level of equality, both social and monetary, is arrived at, which even Mr. Bellamy never dreamed of. The rich and educated daughter of the banker or merchant marries some aristocratic booby or roué that she may gain a title and a social status above that of her own family, and it would appear hopeless to expect that she would do otherwise. Public opinion is opposed to her in this, as we are promised it will be in the "reformed society" of the future. She knows that people will talk behind her back of the sacrifice she has made to her own vanity and cupidity ; but she also knows she shall never hear of it. She is only doing what is being done every day by the best in the land ; and having a living faith in the virtues of the gods of her people—the golden calf and the moloch of rank—she goes forward fearlessly.

Notwithstanding the fact that the upper classes enjoy all the benefits which accrue from good dietetic and hygienic conditions, and can call to their aid all the best means devised by science to combat disease, the unfit appear among them almost as plentifully as they do among the toiling millions of our towns and cities. Insanity, epilepsy, cancer, gout, scrofula, moral obliquity, intellectual decay, and every other form of unfitness, are met with in royal, noble, and aristocratic families in plenty. This fact in itself is irrefragable proof that neither the education, nor the pecuniary independence of woman, nor both, will ever cause the disappearance of the unfit from a community.

Again, it is quite an erroneous idea to suppose that education or pecuniary independence, or both, will ever kill the natural desire for

marriage and motherhood in woman. Amongst all classes and all communities, there are always a few women who have no desire for marriage, just as there are always a few bent on suicide. But these abnormal creatures are so very few that they need not be reckoned with when estimating the vital chances of a people. These women themselves belong to the unfit. They are abnormal creatures who carry within themselves the extinction of their line, as surely as the man with the suicidal instinct or the germ of cancer in his constitution. Dr. Wallace thinks this particular abnormal specimen of humanity much more plentiful than it really is, and sets down far too large a proportion of our marriages to "economic necessity." If we look at what occurs among the women of the wealthy classes, we see the diminution of marriages, we might reasonably expect to occur if no one felt the economic necessity. How many of the women of the aristocracy have lost the maternal instinct—the desire for marriage: how many of those of our royal houses? Surely there can be no "economic necessity for marriage" in the case of royal princesses; yet how many of them feel no desire for marriage, how many refuse to marry men because they are "vicious, of degraded taste, of feeble intellect, or of unsound body"? These women are made pecuniarily independent by the State (possibly in the hope that this independence may have the effect Dr. Wallace ascribes to it), and they are said to be well educated, yet they all marry, many of them while mere girls, and their fecundity is prodigious. The most ardent optimist can hardly hope to raise the mass of women above the pecuniary and educational level of royal princesses; yet even this were possible, there is no evidence that any great number would renounce marriage, or that any remarkable discrimination in the choice of husbands would be exercised.

Of course it will be said that these royal princesses are in reality coerced into marriage; but if that be so, how can we expect their sisters living under infinitely less favourable conditions to escape. The only coercion these women experience is that exercised by their natural passions and their own cupidity. The first of these all healthy women must ever experience: the second, which is purely selfish, must remain in active operation until one dead level of equality, social and monetary, is attained; or until human nature be so changed, that the pomps, vanities and fleshly appetites which at present enter so largely into the human economy—and especially that of the female—shall disappear.

But there is no necessity for all this argument, for Dr. Wallace

asserts that "the only basis for marriage should be a disinterested love." Now, admitting for the sake of argument that love ever can be disinterested, what is there to prevent a woman falling in love with the imperfect and afflicted? In all honest hearts affliction awakens pity, and we know that "pity is akin to love." Many of those who are feeble, or who bear in their nature the seed of hereditary disease, are as loveable and as estimable as the majority of their more fortunate fellows, and some infinitely more so. Are we to teach woman that it is her duty to turn her back upon the weakling, the miserable, and the afflicted; tell her to

"Forget to pity him, lest her pity prove

A serpent that will sting her to the heart?"

And even we do adopt this heroic course, is there anything known which would go to make us hopeful of success? I am afraid not. Even the vicious could not thus be eliminated; for even that frightful monster

"If seen too oft, familiar with his face,

We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

And this of man. What then, of emotional woman?

If the unfit are to be eliminated it must be effected by coercing the existing unfit into living an asexual life, and by so improving the conditions under which all live, that the diseased and the degenerate may diminish with each succeeding generation. Of course there is something to be done by educating the people, and freeing their lives as far as possible from sordid necessity. But in every attempt in this direction, man, as the less emotional, and the stronger-willed animal, must be looked to for the earlier and larger enstalmment of the beneficent change.

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