

## **VI. SCIENCE AND THE EUGENISTS**

The key fact in the new development of plutocracy is that it will use its own blunder as an excuse for further crimes. Everywhere the very completeness of the impoverishment will be made a reason for the enslavement; though the men who impoverished were the same who enslaved. It is as if a highwayman not only took away a gentleman's horse and all his money, but then handed him over to the police for tramping without visible means of subsistence. And the most monstrous feature in this enormous meanness may be noted in the plutocratic appeal to science, or, rather, to the pseudo-science that they call Eugenics.

The Eugenists get the ear of the humane but rather hazy cliques by saying that the present "conditions" under which people work and breed are bad for the race; but the modern mind will not generally stretch beyond one step of reasoning, and the consequence which appears to follow on the consideration of these "conditions" is by no means what would originally have been expected. If somebody says: "A rickety cradle may mean a rickety baby," the natural deduction, one would think, would be to give the people a good cradle, or give them money enough to buy one. But that means higher wages and greater equalisation of wealth; and the plutocratic scientist, with a slightly troubled expression, turns his eyes and pince-nez in another direction. Reduced to brutal terms of truth, his difficulty is this and simply this: More food, leisure, and money for the workman would mean a better workman, better even from the point of view of anyone for whom he worked. But more food, leisure, and money would also mean a more independent workman. A house with a decent fire and a full pantry would be a better house to make a chair or mend a clock in, even from the customer's point of view, than a hovel with a leaky roof and a cold hearth. But a house with a decent fire and a full pantry would also be a better house in which to refuse to make a chair or mend a clock--a much better house to do nothing in--and doing nothing is sometimes one of the highest of the duties of man. All but the hard-hearted must be torn with pity for this pathetic dilemma of the rich man, who has to keep the poor man just stout enough to do the work and just thin enough to have to do it. As he stood gazing at the leaky roof and the rickety cradle in a pensive manner, there one day came into his mind a new and curious idea--one of the most strange, simple, and horrible ideas that have ever risen from the deep pit of original sin.

The roof could not be mended, or, at least, it could not be mended much, without upsetting the capitalist balance, or, rather, disproportion in society; for a man with a roof is a man with a house, and to that extent his house is his castle. The cradle could not be made to rock easier, or, at least, not much easier, without

strengthening the hands of the poor household, for the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world--to that extent. But it occurred to the capitalist that there was one sort of furniture in the house that could be altered. The husband and wife could be altered. Birth costs nothing, except in pain and valour and such old-fashioned things; and the merchant need pay no more for mating a strong miner to a healthy fishwife than he pays when the miner mates himself with a less robust female whom he has the sentimentality to prefer. Thus it might be possible, by keeping on certain broad lines of heredity, to have some physical improvement without any moral, political, or social improvement. It might be possible to keep a supply of strong and healthy slaves without coddling them with decent conditions. As the mill-owners use the wind and the water to drive their mills, they would use this natural force as something even cheaper; and turn their wheels by diverting from its channel the blood of a man in his youth. That is what Eugenics means; and that is all that it means.

Of the moral state of those who think of such things it does not become us to speak. The practical question is rather the intellectual one: of whether their calculations are well founded, and whether the men of science can or will guarantee them any such physical certainties. Fortunately, it becomes clearer every day that they are, scientifically speaking, building on the shifting sand. The theory of breeding slaves breaks down through what a democrat calls the equality of men, but which even an oligarchist will find himself forced to call the similarity of men. That is, that though it is not true that all men are normal, it is overwhelmingly certain that most men are normal. All the common Eugenic arguments are drawn from extreme cases, which, even if human honour and laughter allowed of their being eliminated, would not by their elimination greatly affect the mass. For the rest, there remains the enormous weakness in Eugenics, that if ordinary men's judgment or liberty is to be discounted in relation to heredity, the judgment of the judges must be discounted in relation to their heredity. The Eugenic professor may or may not succeed in choosing a baby's parents; it is quite certain that he cannot succeed in choosing his own parents. All his thoughts, including his Eugenic thoughts, are, by the very principle of those thoughts, flowing from a doubtful or tainted source. In short, we should need a perfectly Wise Man to do the thing at all. And if he were a Wise Man he would not do it.