

NOTES ON EUGENICS - II

Eugenics and the Jew

Sir Francis Galton

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Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911), the brilliant creator of the science of modern statistics who coined the term “eugenics,” is universally recognized as the father of the eugenics movement. The following interview is characteristic of the largely cordial and respectful relations that existed up until the late 1960s between the Jewish community and “eugenists,” a not insignificant number of whom were themselves Jewish. The interview is reprinted here as an historical document. For more information on the topic see the free online book *Future Human Evolution: Eugenics in the Twenty-First Century* at <http://whatwemaybe.org>, and also the page entitled *Jewish Eugenics* on the same website.

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The word “eugenics” will for ever be associated with the name of Sir Francis Galton, who has devoted a long life to the pursuance of a high ideal – that of improving the fitness of the human race and to striving to secure that children born into the world shall be well born in the sense that they shall not start life handicapped at the outset by physical defects due to the imperfect health or physique of their progenitors. It may be said that from the day of Moses Jews have been “eugenists” apart from the hygienic laws enjoined in the Mosaic Code, which affect the individual rather than a race. The intense love of children, and the idealisation of home-life have contributed in a notable degree to the production of a race that has withstood greater trials and tribulations than have befallen any other race in history. A representative of *The Jewish Chronicle*

recently visited Sir Francis, who is now in his eighty-ninth year, to seek his views concerning the bearing of eugenics on the Jewish race and the life of the Jewish people.

The Mosaic Code and Eugenics

How would you define eugenics? – was our representative’s first question.

“It is the study,” Sir Francis replied, “of the conditions under human control which improve or impair the inborn characteristics of the race.”

Do you think that the hygienic regulations of the Mosaic Code have contributed to the fitness of the Jewish race?

“I am willing to believe that their indirect influence has been great.”

Are they more responsible in your opinion, than the vicissitudes which the Jewish people has had to go through?

“Both have played a part in producing the fitness of the Jewish race. The wish of the Jewish woman to be married and have children is an important factor. It is one part of eugenics to encourage the idea of parental responsibility: the other part is to see that the children born are well born. It is a praiseworthy feature of the Jewish religion that, as a religion, it enjoins the multiplication of the human species. But it is still more important to determine that the children shall be born from the fit and not the unfit.

The Effect of Environment and Persecution.

Sir Francis advanced the modern and somewhat startling view that the environment has little effect on human development, but that nature counted for very much more.

What effect do you think persecution has had on the Jewish race?

“So far as persecution weeds out those who are unfit so far it tends to evolve a race suited to meet hard conditions. We in England have reaped the good effects of persecution in that we have benefited enormously from the immigration of the Huguenots, who were among the best of their race and who have handed down their qualities to many descendants.”

Is it not rather immoral to look with satisfaction to persecution as an aid to race culture?

“It is not immoral but unmoral – it has nothing to do with

morals. Persecution does not always produce good results. For instance, the Catholic persecutions in Spain seem to have destroyed the best part of the race, and the Napoleonic wars reduced the stature of Frenchmen to a notable degree. It is the aim of eugenics to supply many means by which the effects of these drastic and not always successful aids to race culture may be produced in a more scientific and kindly way.”

Do you think that the constant migrations of the Jewish people had any effect on their racial culture?

“I cannot speak generally. Each case must be judged on its own merits, and I am not enough of a historian to give any opinion worth having.”

Eugenics and Religion

From an earlier remark of yours I gather that in your view eugenics and religion may go hand-in-hand.

“I think that religious establishments may help forward the eugenic idea just as, in times past, they have thwarted it by celibate institutions.”

How can the movement best be assisted?

“The immediate work is to obtain an accurate knowledge of a large number of facts. Such work is being done by the Eugenic Laboratory, and it is very laborious. Institutions may help in keeping careful statistics and discussing them scientifically. It will then remain to popularize the results obtained by experts and to take further steps.”

Sir Francis at the Jews’ Free School.

Sir Francis recalled a visit which he paid many years ago to the Jews’ Free School, where he took a number of composite photographs for the purpose of determining whether it was possible to produce in that way a distinct Jewish type. The results of the experiment were treated in a paper read by Mr. Joseph Jacobs at the Anthropological Institute. In an article in the *Photographic News*, which published the portraits, Sir Francis wrote: –

“They are, I think, the best specimens of composites, I have ever produced... I may mention that the individual photographs were taken with hardly any exception, from among Jewish boys in the Jews’ Free School, Bell Lane...”

“They were children of poor parents, dirty little fellows

individually, but wonderfully beautiful, as I think, in these composites. The feature that struck me the most as I drove through the adjacent Jewish quarter was the cool scanning gaze of man, woman and child, and this was no less conspicuous among the schoolboys. There was no sign of diffidence in any of their looks, nor of surprise at the unwonted intrusion... I felt, rightly or wrongly, that every one of them was coolly appraising me at market value, without the slightest interest of any other kind."

The composites are reproduced in the "Jewish Encyclopedia." The paper read by Mr. Jacobs was published in the *Jewish Chronicle* on February 27th, 1885. Sir Francis presided at the meeting of the Institute of which he was then President.

To our representative he expressed the view that the discussion on that occasion was of a very high order. After a lapse of twenty-five years he re-called the fact that Dr. Adler and Mr. Marcus Adler spoke with great weight at the meeting.