

PARKER (E.H.)

HEREDITY AS A FACTOR IN
PAUPERISM AND CRIME.

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BY EDWARD H. PARKER, A. M., M. D., &c.
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

Read before the Medical Society of the State of New York, at Albany,
June 20th, 1877.



Compliments of the Author.

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THE studies which have been made by various persons as to the laws which govern hereditary influences are very instructive, as well as interesting. Peculiarities of person, of mind, of pathological tendencies, have been noted and their existence well established. But the lines of observation have been pushed beyond these limits, and we are called upon to consider how far hereditary influences are to be taken into account in devising plans for the solution of that great problem of social science, to wit, how to diminish crime and pauperism. And there is no problem which concerns the State (I do not mean by this word the territory which the geographies give with definite bounds, north, east, south, west; but the conglomeration of men for mutual protection and benefit) carrying with it more pecuniary or moral interest. Our prisons are full, our almshouses are crowded, the roads of the State swarm with tramps,* and the cry is, "Still they come."

The purpose of this paper is to review the question of heredity as an element in the production of crime and pauperism, and to do this simply as a physiologist with no sentimental notions biasing in either direction. It has not seemed to me to be necessary to go again over all the grounds of the discussion, or to make analyses of the ideas of Maudsley, Neilson, Beltrani-Scalia, because all the needed elements for the line of argument proposed by me can be obtained from two publications made recently under the authority of the State of New York. One

* I note here a fact which gives some information as to this *class*, for such they have become. In the month of March last application for help was made to the Almshouse of the city of Poughkeepsie by 459 tramps. April by its usual ratio of increase would have had 600, but printed notices that help would not be given reduced it to 50. Tramps can read.

of these is the "thirty-first annual report of the executive committee of the Prison Association of New York, with accompanying documents. Transmitted to the Legislature March 16, 1876." The other is entitled "Extract from the tenth annual report of the State Board of Charities of the State of New York, relating to the causes of pauperism. By Charles S. Hoyt, Secretary of the Board. Transmitted to the Legislature January 18, 1877." The fact that these publications are easily accessible to all the members of this society makes my limitation to their use the more desirable.

Of the report of the Prison Association more than one-half is contributed by Mr. Richard L. Dugdale, and it is this portion which is especially of interest in the present discussion. With great perseverance and shrewdness Mr. Dugdale has made investigations into the causes of crime by examining convicts in the State prisons and by making a correlative examination as to the habits, occupations and history of families from which many criminals and paupers have been furnished to the State. The results of his labors have become widely known, so that few persons interested in such subjects are ignorant of the race which he has made famous under the pseudonym of "the Jukes family." I am not aware of any reason to doubt any of Mr. Dugdale's statements of facts, and I do not wish to be understood in anything I have to say as questioning these as to their accuracy or truthfulness. The thanks of all who are interested in social science are due to Mr. D. for his laborious and careful work.

But it is not always the one who is the best collector of facts who draws the most accurate deductions from them; and while I venture to question those of this writer I do it with full consciousness of the difficulty of solving these questions of social science, as well as of the fact that it is a ground on which there is abundant room for debate.

I do not know that I can more readily or accurately define the position taken by those who claim that heredity is a great factor in crime and pauperism than by quoting a passage from Mr. Dugdale's second paper. He says: "It must be clearly understood, and practically accepted, that the whole question

“ of crime, vice and pauperism rests strictly and fundamentally upon a physiological basis, and not upon a sentimental or metaphysical one. These phenomena take place not because there is any aberration in the laws of nature, but in consequence of the operation of these laws; because disease, because unsanitary conditions, because educational neglects produce arrest of cerebral development at some point, so that the individual life fails to meet the exigencies of the civilization in which he finds himself placed, and that the cure for unbalanced lives is a training which will affect the cerebral tissue, producing a corresponding change of career. This process of atrophy, physical and social, is to be met by methods that will remove the disabilities which check the required cerebral growth, or, where the modification to be induced is profound, by the cumulative effect of training through successive generations, under conditions favorable to such strengthening.” *Op. cit.* pp. 170, 171.

In this paragraph there are three propositions, which may be thus enumerated:

1. “ It must be clearly understood, and practically accepted, that the whole question of crime, vice and pauperism rests strictly and fundamentally upon a physiological basis.”
2. That disease, unsanitary conditions and educational neglect produce arrest of cerebral development at some point.
3. “ That the cure for unbalanced lives is a training which will affect the cerebral tissue, producing a corresponding change in career.”

If now we add to these the proposition that this “ arrest of cerebral development at some point,” the physiological peculiarities and the “ unbalanced lives ” of the parents are transmissible to the offspring, we cover the whole ground of the claims of heredity in connection with this part of social science.

No one, I suppose, will think of denying that anatomical, physiological, mental and pathological peculiarities of parents may be transmitted to their offspring. That they *will* be is not absolutely certain. The extra toe, or the club foot of the parent is not certain to reappear in the child; the arithmetical

wonder does not find his son remarkably skilful in figures ; while, very fortunately, the children of tubercular, or cancerous, or insane parents are not condemned by inflexible laws to sink under these diseases. Whether the peculiarities reappear or not, it is undoubtedly true that “ these phenomena take place “ not because there is any aberration in the laws of nature, but “ in consequence of the operation of these laws.” It is precisely in the same direction that we must look for evidence of of heredity in crime and pauperism, or by the absence of such evidence be led to believe that it does not exist. No question of “ aberration of laws ” arises. The exceptional phenomenon, so far from establishing the rule, is to be noted as its exception, which sometimes, though by no means necessarily, tends to prove the truth of the rule.

In the line of argument which I propose to follow it will be best to consider the question of the heredity of crime and that of the heredity of pauperism separately, taking them up in the succession named.

First, then, we consider heredity as a factor of crime.

Here it will be necessary to define crime and to consider what connection it has with the peculiarities of the complex being we call *man* of which heredity can be predicated. There are three words—to wit: vice, crime and sin, which are very often used as synonyms and made to do duty the one for the others. They are however properly distinct and separate. Thus, vice is the fault, it may be of character, or habits, or methods ; crime is the disobedience of human laws either by omission or commission ; sin is the disobedience by omission or commission of the laws of God. A crime less than a felony is often called in law a *misdemeanor*, the two words being in reality synonyms but by a certain euphemism are made to represent a distinction without a difference.

To illustrate these three words we may say of the habit of using opium to excess that it is a *vice*. It is not forbidden by the State, therefore it is not a crime. It is not forbidden (unless it be indirectly) by God, therefore it cannot be called a sin.

To shoot a deer out of season is in New York a crime

(granted that it may be a small one) because it is forbidden by the law, and is a violation of law. This is not, however, a vice, and it is not a sin, unless it becomes so indirectly.

To worship graven images is a *sin*, a violation of a law of God. It is not a *crime* for it is not forbidden by the State, and it needs no proof to show that it is not a *vice*.

It needs only to be said to be understood that the great majority of crimes are offences against the person or against property. The former run all the way from assault and battery to mayhem, rape and murder. The latter go from petit larceny, picking pockets, shoplifting, arson, burglary, etc., to the examples of private, municipal, state and national peculation which day after day brings to us in fresh examples, and which by their reckless audacity, as well as the magnificence of the prizes, seem to be the *ultima thule* of this kind of iniquity.

In the class of offences against the person, there is on the part of the one committing them a disregard of the personal rights of others, a desire for revenge for some real or fancied injury, an utter disregard of the value of human life, the result of a quick and hot temper leading to the blow or the pistol shot, or the disabling at the risk of murder of any one who hinders the execution of the other class of offences, namely those against property.

In the other class of offences, the requirements on the part of the one committing them are as various as the ways in which property can be attacked. The man who sets a building on fire needs little more than a certain amount of cunning quite consistent with imbecility—the small thief, little more than adroitness and some practice—the sneak thief more of ingenuity in devising his story to make it plausible enough to give him admission to the house—the pickpocket requires training, consummate adroitness and quickness, a careful study of facial expression to conceal by that the true direction of his thoughts and fingers—the highway robber, whether of individuals, or of railroad trains, audacious bravery and reckless venture—the counterfeiter, knowledge and skill in chemistry, metallurgy or engraving and printing—the burglar, mechanical knowledge, familiarity with the principles of natural philoso-

phy, shrewdness in contriving, boldness and promptness in execution ; and so on though the whole list of offenders ; while all are actors of an assumed part, from the barefooted urchin who appears so intently looking across the street while he is in reality stealing a handful of peanuts, to him who serves the devil in the livery of heaven.

Let us now return, it may be with something more of definiteness of ideas as to crime, to the consideration of heredity in connection with it.

It must at once strike the mind that if crime is, as I have shown, simply violation of human law there can be no hereditariness in it. Grant at once, as I do, that all the peculiarities of mental or physical organization which fit a man to become a burglar may be transmitted from parent to child and no point has been gained in support of the heredity of the crime. The physical strength, the indomitable pluck, the intelligence which plans the method of attack which may all be inherited ; and the skill in planning and making tools to overcome the various obstacles, all serve, when turned in other directions, to make a skilled and useful mechanic. In point of fact safe breaking has come to be a contest between two classes of mechanics, the honest makers and the dishonest breakers. When one class by some device thwarts the criminal, it is only to find that after a time the ingenuity of the latter has succeeded in overcoming it, and new efforts on the part of the makers are again necessary to thwart their opponents. The mental characteristics of the two are very much the same, except that the burglar needs physical strength and reckless audacity, both of which the maker may inherit, but both of them he can do without. These qualities which may be attributed to heredity do not make the one a burglar any more than they make the other a safe-builder. The bank-note engraver and the counterfeiter possess the same qualities and the same knowledge, and it is not heredity that makes the difference between them. Many a man can imitate a signature as well as any forger. The most adroit pickpocket is surpassed at every point by such men as Heller and even far inferior prestidigitateurs. Most of the crimes against property, except highway

robbery, which is preceded by a crime against the person—the stunning blow or the levelled pistol—require more or less of training for their successful execution. And this very need of training, that is, in other words, of education, goes far to show the want of dependence upon heredity.

With crimes against the person the argument differs, but the conclusion is the same. The temper of the man who answers an insult with a blow, which may make him a murderer, is not a particle hotter than that of him whose flashing eyes, pale face, compressed lips, firm set jaws and clenched hands give a better idea of the struggle to overcome the demon within him than does the quiet, almost soft answer which he finally manages to utter. Revenge is sweet to many a man who does not indulge in it because he remembers to Whom vengeance belongs. It is not the stronger but the uncontrolled passion that leads to rape, while anything that lessens the appreciation of the value of human life, either in individuals or communities, increases the number of murders, and the injuries which arise from unsuccessful attempts to commit it.

But, it may be asked, is there not a certain base propensity—a lowness of character—which may be transmitted? And it must be answered that physiology knows of no such peculiarities in the human animal. My argument is as a physiologist, and as such I deny that “the whole question of crime rests strictly and fundamentally upon a physiological basis.”

But there is another point, more than once referred to by Mr. Dugdale, which is purely physiological, and which requires some notice. A few lines below the end of the quotation made in the early part of this paper, that being taken from the section on “the formation of character,” the writer says: “Men do not become moral by intuition. Indeed, the whole process of education is the building up of cerebral cells.” I have said that this is a purely physiological question. It may also be said that it is purely theoretical. That the use of the brain, as well as of other parts of the nervous system, is attended by a waste of cells which must be replaced is acknowledged as a physiological truth, but it is one that depends for its support upon the analogy of other tissues and from the materials found

in the urine and supposed to be derived from the destruction of these cells, rather than upon any direct evidence of the truth of the proposition. But that education is in its whole process "the building up of cerebral cells" is entirely without other than theoretical support. It is one of those phrases which often creep into scientific discussion, and are supposed to be of weight till peremptorily challenged. When, after long years of insanity, we find it almost impossible to show any departure from health in the brain tissues generally, to say nothing of the cerebral cells of the poor sufferer, it seems scarcely worth while to endeavor to establish a building up of such cells by education. For this reason, which my limits compel me to pass with this brief statement, I shall claim that the second and third propositions before drawn from Mr. Dugdale's paper are untenable. That the "cure for unbalanced lives" is a "training" I admit, but as to its affecting the cerebral tissue we have no evidence to that effect. But to argue the question with an author who holds with Maudsley that "instead of 'mind being a wondrous entity, . . . it is the highest development of force'" would lead us away from physiology and into topics for which this time and this place are not convenient.

It is proper that I should at once say that to my mind it seems clear that the explanation of such families of crime and of the general phenomena which are illustrated by "the Jukes" is that they are purely and simply due to their surroundings, or technically, using the word most common in these discussions, their environment.

Let me quote Mr. Dugdale's description of the physical and moral environment of the "Jukes:"

The ancestral breeding-spot of this family nestles along the forest-covered margin of five lakes, so rocky as to be at some parts inaccessible. It may be called one of the crime cradles of the State of New York, for in subsequent examinations of convicts in the different State prisons a number of them were found to be the descendants of families equivalent to the "Jukes," and emerging from this nest. Most of the ancestors were squatters upon the soil, lived in log or stone houses similar to slave hovels, all ages, sexes, relations and strangers "bunking in" indiscriminately, and, where not producing illicit relations, evolving an atmosphere of suggestiveness that fatally broke down habits of chastity. Even to this day some of them occupy the self-same shanties built nearly a century ago. Others of these habitations have two

* Is not this phrase "unbalanced lives" another of those which conveys no definite meaning, but by its indefiniteness leads to want of exactness of thought? They constitute a sort of *slang* in science.

rooms, but so firmly has habit established modes of living that in many cases only use one congregate dormitory. In many houses I found an overcrowding so close it suggested that these were the country equivalents of the city tenement houses. Domesticity is impossible. The older girls, finding no privacy within a house overrun with younger brothers and sisters, purchase privacy at the risk of prudence, and the night rambles through woods and tangles end too often in illegitimate offspring. During the last thirty years the establishment of cement mills through this section of country has brought about the building of houses better suited to secure domesticity, and with this change alone an accompanying change in personal habits is being introduced which would otherwise be impossible.

The origin of the stock of the "Jukes."—As the point of departure, and forming the first generation of the family which was found in the county jail, was a man who shall be called Max, born between 1720 and 1740. He was a descendant of the early Dutch settlers, and lived much as the back-woodsmen upon our frontiers now do. He is described as "a hunter and fisher, a hard drinker, jolly and companionable, averse to steady toil," working hard by spells and idling by turns, becoming blind in his old age, and enailing his blindness upon his children and grandchildren. He had a numerous progeny, some of them almost certainly illegitimate. Two of his sons married two out of six sisters, who were born between the year 1740 and 1770, but whose parentage has not been absolutely ascertained. The probability is they were not all full sisters; that some, if not all of them, were illegitimate. *Op. cit.* pp. 134, 135.

Now place in such a family an infant boy or girl from any parentage, however pure, however cultivated, however moral or religious, and let the training be the same, and there can be little or no doubt that the results will be equally melancholy. And this, it seems to me, Mr. Dugdale virtually confesses, for I find him saying on page 178 (*op. cit.*): "Where the conduct depends on the knowledge of moral obligation (excluding insanity and idiocy) the environment has more influence than the heredity; but he adds the very illogical and purely theoretical explanation: "because the development of the moral attributes is mainly a post-natal and not an ante-natal formation of cerebral cells." This is in turn followed by this very sensible observation: "The use to which capacity shall be put is largely governed by the impersonal training or agency of environment." Subsequently on the same page I find this illustration: "The licentious parent makes an example which greatly aids in fixing habits of debauchery in the child. The correction is change of environment." And again a little farther on, he says: "From the above considerations the logical deduction seems to be that environment is the ultimate controlling factor in determining careers," and with this I cordially agree. The environment makes generation after generation thieves, burglars, prostitutes, licentious men, criminals,

just as a different environment makes generation after generation: lawyers, doctors, clergymen, mechanics, tradesmen, sailors, merchants, as we see frequently to be the case.

Physiology teaches us that "capacity" (again I quote from Mr. Dugdale,) "is limited and determined mainly by heredity" but experience, observation, I had almost said common sense, teach that the environment determines for the most part how that capacity shall be trained and used.

One topic more and I have done with this branch of my subject. I have said that I find no evidence that this evil tendency to crime is to be corrected by building up cerebral cells. Neither have I any confidence in the training of a bare morality. Teach only that "honesty is the best policy" and as soon as it appears clear that money can be made otherwise more rapidly that policy will be abandoned. Teach only that "if one will be virtuous he will be happy" and too many instances will seem to prove the fallacy of the statement to let it have restraining influence in the moment of temptation. What the world will say has little control over us when we think the world will never know. My mature conviction is, that deep, profound religious training, not sentimentalism—not that impulsive excitement which is followed by its inevitable reaction—but that which goes down into the very depths of the soul, which makes it a part of one's self to know that certain things must not be done because they are sins—such teachings only can restrain men from crime. Till this is done our criminal classes will continue to be recruited from the avenues as well as the slums, and our newspapers will continue daily to report to us the crimes of those who stand high in social life as well as of those who are veritable pariahs. There is no way better than the old, old way.

Let us now pass to the consideration of our second topic—the influence of heredity on pauperism. Here the argument can be much more brief, partly because much that has been said before has cleared the way, and partly because the subject is in itself much more simple. On page 196 of his report, Dr. Hoyt says: "the element of heredity enters so largely in the "problem of pauperism that it should receive especial attention."

And again: "Few persons who have not given detailed attention to the subject realize how much of vice and pauperism, "idiocy and insanity is hereditary." Of vice I have spoken—idiocy and insanity are not now under discussion.

That which reduces persons to such poverty as to require the assistance of the State is anything which hinders them from obtaining their own means of support. Feebleness of mind and feebleness of body are the two great elements of this. Both of these may be hereditary, the former being so almost always. The latter may be due to old age, or sickness, and the sickness may be from causes that are inherited. Laziness, unwillingness to labor, bring many others to the same source for support, but it is very doubtful if these can be said to be inherited by able-bodied persons. That the environment may be such as to encourage idleness is self evident. Dr. Hoyt says on the page before quoted from that, "It appeared in the "course of inquiry that large numbers of those examined had "been trained and educated for the poor-house by out-door relief administered by law or by private charity. When persons, naturally idle and improvident, have for a few months "experienced the convenience of existing upon the labor of "others, they are very likely to resort to this means of living "as often and as continuously as possible." There are few if any of us who cannot recall notable instances of this exact type.

In Mr. Dugdale's studies of the "Jukes", certain lines are pointed out as developing most frequently a tendency to pauperism rather than to crime, and these are found to be uniformly lines in which feebleness of mind or body are inherited or produced by disease, while the reverse is true in those lines which give good physical development, that is, vigorous bodies. Certain inductions on the relations of crime and pauperism which he makes on page 166 (*op. cit.*) are so forcible that I quote them only making such reservations in my approval of them as must follow from my previous doctrines with regard to heredity.

1. Where a person oscillates between the poor-house and the jail it raises a presumption there is either constitutional disease or an entailment of mental weakness from the parents.

2. With true criminals pauperism either occurs in old age or in childhood, and is not synchronous with the term of the crime career.

3. The misfortune of one generation which throws the children into an alms house may lay the foundation for a criminal career for that generation if the children are of an enterprising temperament, but paupers it of low vitality and early licentious habits.

4. That the crime of one generation may lay the foundation for the pauperism of the next, especially if the children thrown into the alms house are girls and remain inmates long enough to become mothers.

5. Hereditary pauperism seems to be more fixed than hereditary crime, for very much of crime is the misdirection of faculty and is amenable to discipline, while very much of pauperism is due to the absence of vital power, the lines of pauperism being in many cases identical with such lines of organic disease of mind or body as insanity, consumption, syphilis, which cause the successive extinction of capacity, from generation to generation, till death supervenes.

6. Criminal careers are more easily modified by environment, because crime, more especially contrived crime, is an index of capacity, and wherever there is capacity there environment is most effective in producing modifications of career.

7. Rape, especially of little girls, is a crime of weakness, and, when occurring after the meridian of life has passed (from 35 to 45), marks the decadence of vitality and the consequent weakening of the will-power over the passions.

But for fear of wearying you I hasten to my conclusion, viz: that as a physiologist I find myself unable to see any heredity as a factor in pauperism with the exception before stated of the feeble mind and the feeble body, and these are rather indirect than direct factors. The environment is, I believe, in this, as in crime, the great factor, and the efforts of the State must be made to change this radically rather than to lament the impossibility of making physiological changes over which the State can, from the nature of things, have absolutely no control.

Let me finally urge all who have not done so already to make a careful study of both the documents which I have used so freely in my quotations. They are full of suggestive topics to which I have not referred, and the thanks of the State of New York are justly due to Mr. Dugdale and Mr. Hoyt for their laborious researches. If I have presumed to differ with them as to one point it is because I believe they have been led astray by able and fascinating writers to support a theory without a sufficient foundation, a theory which has a tendency to draw away the minds of those who adopt it from more important as well as more real sources of these two great evils.

