

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

EUGENICS AND OTHER
EVILS

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G. K. Chesterton

Eugenics and Other Evils

TO THE READER

I publish these essays at the present time for a particular reason connected with the present situation; a reason which I should like briefly to emphasise and make clear.

Though most of the conclusions, especially towards the end, are conceived with reference to recent events, the actual bulk of preliminary notes about the science of Eugenics were written before the war. It was a time when this theme was the topic of the hour; when eugenic babies (not visibly very distinguishable from other babies) sprawled all over the illustrated papers; when the evolutionary fancy of Nietzsche was the new cry among the intellectuals; and when Mr. Bernard Shaw and others were considering the idea that to breed a man like a cart-horse was the true way to attain that higher civilisation, of intellectual magnanimity and sympathetic insight, which may be found in cart-horses. It may therefore appear that I took the opinion too controversially, and it seems to me that I sometimes took it too seriously. But the criticism of Eugenics soon expanded of itself into a more general criticism of a modern craze for scientific officialism and strict social organisation.

And then the hour came when I felt, not without relief, that I might well fling all my notes into the fire. The fire was a very big one, and was burning up bigger things than such pedantic quackeries. And, anyhow, the issue itself was being settled in a very different style. Scientific officialism and organisation in the State which had specialised in them, had gone to war with the older culture of Christendom. Either Prussianism would win and the protest would be hopeless, or Prussianism would lose and the protest would be needless. As the war advanced from poison gas to piracy against neutrals, it grew more and more plain that the scientifically organised State was not increasing in popularity. Whatever happened, no Englishmen would ever again go nosing round the stinks of that low laboratory. So I thought all I had written irrelevant, and put it out of my mind.

I am greatly grieved to say that it is not irrelevant. It has gradually grown apparent, to my astounded gaze, that the ruling classes in England are still proceeding on the assumption that Prussia is a pattern for the whole world. If parts of my book are nearly nine years old, most of their principles and proceedings are a great deal older. They can offer us nothing but the same stuffy science, the same bullying bureaucracy and the same terrorism by tenth-rate professors that have led the German Empire to its recent conspicuous triumph. For that reason, three years after the war with Prussia, I collect and publish these papers.

G.K.C.

Part I

THE FALSE THEORY

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS EUGENICS?

The wisest thing in the world is to cry out before you are hurt. It is no good to cry out after you are hurt; especially after you are mortally hurt. People talk about the impatience of the populace; but sound historians know that most tyrannies have been possible because men moved too late. It is often essential to resist a tyranny before it exists. It is no answer to say, with a distant optimism, that the scheme is only in the air. A blow from a hatchet can only be parried while it is in the air.

There exists to-day a scheme of action, a school of thought, as collective and unmistakable as any of those by whose grouping alone we can make any outline of history. It is as firm a fact as the Oxford Movement, or the Puritans of the Long Parliament; or the Jansenists; or the Jesuits. It is a thing that can be pointed out; it is a thing that can be discussed; and it is a thing that can still be destroyed. It is called for convenience "Eugenics"; and that it ought to be destroyed I propose to prove in the pages that follow. I know that it means very different things

to different people; but that is only because evil always takes advantage of ambiguity. I know it is praised with high professions of idealism and benevolence; with silver-tongued rhetoric about purer motherhood and a happier posterity. But that is only because evil is always flattered, as the Furies were called "The Gracious Ones." I know that it numbers many disciples whose intentions are entirely innocent and humane; and who would be sincerely astonished at my describing it as I do. But that is only because evil always wins through the strength of its splendid dupes; and there has in all ages been a disastrous alliance between abnormal innocence and abnormal sin. Of these who are deceived I shall speak of course as we all do of such instruments; judging them by the good they think they are doing, and not by the evil which they really do. But Eugenics itself does exist for those who have sense enough to see that ideas exist; and Eugenics itself, in large quantities or small, coming quickly or coming slowly, urged from good motives or bad, applied to a thousand people or applied to three, Eugenics itself is a thing no more to be bargained about than poisoning.

It is not really difficult to sum up the essence of Eugenics: though some of the Eugenists seem to be rather vague about it. The movement consists of two parts: a moral basis, which is common to all, and a scheme of social application which varies a good deal. For the moral basis, it is obvious that man's ethical responsibility varies with his knowledge of consequences. If I were in charge of a baby (like Dr. Johnson in that tower of

vision), and if the baby was ill through having eaten the soap, I might possibly send for a doctor. I might be calling him away from much more serious cases, from the bedsides of babies whose diet had been far more deadly; but I should be justified. I could not be expected to know enough about his other patients to be obliged (or even entitled) to sacrifice to them the baby for whom I was primarily and directly responsible. Now the Eugenic moral basis is this; that the baby for whom we are primarily and directly responsible is the babe unborn. That is, that we know (or may come to know) enough of certain inevitable tendencies in biology to consider the fruit of some contemplated union in that direct and clear light of conscience which we can now only fix on the other partner in that union. The one duty can conceivably be as definite as or more definite than the other. The baby that does not exist can be considered even before the wife who does. Now it is essential to grasp that this is a comparatively new note in morality. Of course sane people always thought the aim of marriage was the procreation of children to the glory of God or according to the plan of Nature; but whether they counted such children as God's reward for service or Nature's premium on sanity, they always left the reward to God or the premium to Nature, as a less definable thing. The only person (and this is the point) towards whom one could have precise duties was the partner in the process. Directly considering the partner's claims was the nearest one could get to indirectly considering the claims of posterity. If the women of the harem sang praises

of the hero as the Moslem mounted his horse, it was because this was the due of a man; if the Christian knight helped his wife off her horse, it was because this was the due of a woman. Definite and detailed dues of this kind they did not predicate of the babe unborn; regarding him in that agnostic and opportunist light in which Mr. Browdie regarded the hypothetical child of Miss Squeers. Thinking these sex relations healthy, they naturally hoped they would produce healthy children; but that was all. The Moslem woman doubtless expected Allah to send beautiful sons to an obedient wife; but she would not have allowed any direct vision of such sons to alter the obedience itself. She would not have said, "I will now be a disobedient wife; as the learned leech informs me that great prophets are often the children of disobedient wives." The knight doubtless hoped that the saints would help him to strong children, if he did all the duties of his station, one of which might be helping his wife off her horse; but he would not have refrained from doing this because he had read in a book that a course of falling off horses often resulted in the birth of a genius. Both Moslem and Christian would have thought such speculations not only impious but utterly unpractical. I quite agree with them; but that is not the point here.

The point here is that a new school believes Eugenics *against* Ethics. And it is proved by one familiar fact: that the heroisms of history are actually the crimes of Eugenics. The Eugenists' books and articles are full of suggestions that non-eugenic unions should and may come to be regarded as we regard sins; that we should

really feel that marrying an invalid is a kind of cruelty to children. But history is full of the praises of people who have held sacred such ties to invalids; of cases like those of Colonel Hutchinson and Sir William Temple, who remained faithful to betrothals when beauty and health had been apparently blasted. And though the illnesses of Dorothy Osborne and Mrs. Hutchinson may not fall under the Eugenic speculations (I do not know), it is obvious that they might have done so; and certainly it would not have made any difference to men's moral opinion of the act. I do not discuss here which morality I favour; but I insist that they are opposite. The Eugenist really sets up as saints the very men whom hundreds of families have called sneaks. To be consistent, they ought to put up statues to the men who deserted their loves because of bodily misfortune; with inscriptions celebrating the good Eugenist who, on his fiancée falling off a bicycle, nobly refused to marry her; or to the young hero who, on hearing of an uncle with erysipelas, magnanimously broke his word. What is perfectly plain is this: that mankind have hitherto held the bond between man and woman so sacred, and the effect of it on the children so incalculable, that they have always admired the maintenance of honour more than the maintenance of safety. Doubtless they thought that even the children might be none the worse for not being the children of cowards and shirkers; but this was not the first thought, the first commandment. Briefly, we may say that while many moral systems have set restraints on sex almost as severe as any Eugenist could set, they have almost

always had the character of securing the fidelity of the two sexes to each other, and leaving the rest to God. To introduce an ethic which makes that fidelity or infidelity vary with some calculation about heredity is that rarest of all things, a revolution that has not happened before.

It is only right to say here, though the matter should only be touched on, that many Eugenists would contradict this, in so far as to claim that there was a consciously Eugenic reason for the horror of those unions which begin with the celebrated denial to man of the privilege of marrying his grandmother. Dr. S.R. Steinmetz, with that creepy simplicity of mind with which the Eugenists chill the blood, remarks that "we do not yet know quite certainly" what were "the motives for the horror of" that horrible thing which is the agony of Œdipus. With entirely amiable intention, I ask Dr. S.R. Steinmetz to speak for himself. I know the motives for regarding a mother or sister as separate from other women; nor have I reached them by any curious researches. I found them where I found an analogous aversion to eating a baby for breakfast. I found them in a rooted detestation in the human soul to liking a thing in one way, when you already like it in another quite incompatible way. Now it is perfectly true that this aversion may have acted eugenically; and so had a certain ultimate confirmation and basis in the laws of procreation. But there really cannot be any Eugenist quite so dull as not to see that this is not a defence of Eugenics but a direct denial of Eugenics. If something which has been discovered at last by the lamp of

learning is something which has been acted on from the first by the light of nature, this (so far as it goes) is plainly not an argument for pestering people, but an argument for letting them alone. If men did not marry their grandmothers when it was, for all they knew, a most hygienic habit; if we know now that they instinctly avoided scientific peril; that, so far as it goes, is a point in favour of letting people marry anyone they like. It is simply the statement that sexual selection, or what Christians call falling in love, is a part of man which in the rough and in the long run can be trusted. And that is the destruction of the whole of this science at a blow.

The second part of the definition, the persuasive or coercive methods to be employed, I shall deal with more fully in the second part of this book. But some such summary as the following may here be useful. Far into the unfathomable past of our race we find the assumption that the founding of a family is the personal adventure of a free man. Before slavery sank slowly out of sight under the new climate of Christianity, it may or may not be true that slaves were in some sense bred like cattle, valued as a promising stock for labour. If it was so it was so in a much looser and vaguer sense than the breeding of the Eugenists; and such modern philosophers read into the old paganism a fantastic pride and cruelty which are wholly modern. It may be, however, that pagan slaves had some shadow of the blessings of the Eugenicist's care. It is quite certain that the pagan freemen would have killed the first man that suggested it. I mean

suggested it seriously; for Plato was only a Bernard Shaw who unfortunately made his jokes in Greek. Among free men, the law, more often the creed, most commonly of all the custom, have laid all sorts of restrictions on sex for this reason or that. But law and creed and custom have never concentrated heavily except upon fixing and keeping the family when once it had been made. The act of founding the family, I repeat, was an individual adventure outside the frontiers of the State. Our first forgotten ancestors left this tradition behind them; and our own latest fathers and mothers a few years ago would have thought us lunatics to be discussing it. The shortest general definition of Eugenics on its practical side is that it does, in a more or less degree, propose to control some families at least as if they were families of pagan slaves. I shall discuss later the question of the people to whom this pressure may be applied; and the much more puzzling question of what people will apply it. But it is to be applied at the very least by somebody to somebody, and that on certain calculations about breeding which are affirmed to be demonstrable. So much for the subject itself. I say that this thing exists. I define it as closely as matters involving moral evidence can be defined; I call it Eugenics. If after that anyone chooses to say that Eugenics is not the Greek for this – I am content to answer that "chivalrous" is not the French for "horsy"; and that such controversial games are more horsy than chivalrous.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST OBSTACLES

Now before I set about arguing these things, there is a cloud of skirmishers, of harmless and confused modern sceptics, who ought to be cleared off or calmed down before we come to debate with the real doctors of the heresy. If I sum up my statement thus: "Eugenics, as discussed, evidently means the control of some men over the marriage and unmarried of others; and probably means the control of the few over the marriage and unmarried of the many," I shall first of all receive the sort of answers that float like skim on the surface of teacups and talk. I may very roughly and rapidly divide these preliminary objectors into five sects; whom I will call the Euphemists, the Casuists, the Autocrats, the Precedenters, and the Endeavourers. When we have answered the immediate protestation of all these good, shouting, short-sighted people, we can begin to do justice to those intelligences that are really behind the idea.

Most Eugenists are Euphemists. I mean merely that short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing. Say to them "The persuasive and even coercive powers of the citizen should enable him to make sure that the burden of longevity in the previous generation does not become disproportionate and intolerable, especially to

the females"; say this to them and they will sway slightly to and fro like babies sent to sleep in cradles. Say to them "Murder your mother," and they sit up quite suddenly. Yet the two sentences, in cold logic, are exactly the same. Say to them "It is not improbable that a period may arrive when the narrow if once useful distinction between the anthropoid *homo* and the other animals, which has been modified on so many moral points, may be modified also even in regard to the important question of the extension of human diet"; say this to them, and beauty born of murmuring sound will pass into their face. But say to them, in a simple, manly, hearty way "Let's eat a man!" and their surprise is quite surprising. Yet the sentences say just the same thing. Now, if anyone thinks these two instances extravagant, I will refer to two actual cases from the Eugenic discussions. When Sir Oliver Lodge spoke of the methods "of the stud-farm" many Eugenists exclaimed against the crudity of the suggestion. Yet long before that one of the ablest champions in the other interest had written "What nonsense this education is! Who could educate a racehorse or a greyhound?" Which most certainly either means nothing, or the human stud-farm. Or again, when I spoke of people "being married forcibly by the police," another distinguished Eugenist almost achieved high spirits in his hearty assurance that no such thing had ever come into their heads. Yet a few days after I saw a Eugenist pronouncement, to the effect that the State ought to extend its powers in this area. The State can only be that corporation which men permit to employ

compulsion; and this area can only be the area of sexual selection. I mean somewhat more than an idle jest when I say that the policeman will generally be found in that area. But I willingly admit that the policeman who looks after weddings will be like the policeman who looks after wedding-presents. He will be in plain clothes. I do not mean that a man in blue with a helmet will drag the bride and bridegroom to the altar. I do mean that nobody that man in blue is told to arrest will even dare to come near the church. Sir Oliver did not mean that men would be tied up in stables and scrubbed down by grooms. He meant that they would undergo a loss of liberty which to men is even more infamous. He meant that the only formula important to Eugenists would be "by Smith out of Jones." Such a formula is one of the shortest in the world; and is certainly the shortest way with the Euphemists.

The next sect of superficial objectors is even more irritating. I have called them, for immediate purposes, the Casuists. Suppose I say "I dislike this spread of Cannibalism in the West End restaurants." Somebody is sure to say "Well, after all, Queen Eleanor when she sucked blood from her husband's arm was a cannibal." What is one to say to such people? One can only say "Confine yourself to sucking poisoned blood from people's arms, and I permit you to call yourself by the glorious title of Cannibal." In this sense people say of Eugenics, "After all, whenever we discourage a schoolboy from marrying a mad negress with a hump back, we are really Eugenists." Again one can only answer, "Confine yourselves strictly to such schoolboys

as are naturally attracted to hump-backed negresses; and you may exult in the title of Eugenist, all the more proudly because that distinction will be rare." But surely anyone's common-sense must tell him that if Eugenics dealt only with such extravagant cases, it would be called common-sense – and not Eugenics. The human race has excluded such absurdities for unknown ages; and has never yet called it Eugenics. You may call it flogging when you hit a choking gentleman on the back; you may call it torture when a man unfreezes his fingers at the fire; but if you talk like that a little longer you will cease to live among living men. If nothing but this mad minimum of accident were involved, there would be no such thing as a Eugenic Congress, and certainly no such thing as this book.

I had thought of calling the next sort of superficial people the Idealists; but I think this implies a humility towards impersonal good they hardly show; so I call them the Autocrats. They are those who give us generally to understand that every modern reform will "work" all right, because they will be there to see. Where they will be, and for how long, they do not explain very clearly. I do not mind their looking forward to numberless lives in succession; for that is the shadow of a human or divine hope. But even a theosophist does not expect to be a vast number of people at once. And these people most certainly propose to be responsible for a whole movement after it has left their hands. Each man promises to be about a thousand policemen. If you ask them how this or that will work, they will answer, "Oh, I would

certainly insist on this"; or "I would never go so far as that"; as if they could return to this earth and do what no ghost has ever done quite successfully – force men to forsake their sins. Of these it is enough to say that they do not understand the nature of a law any more than the nature of a dog. If you let loose a law, it will do as a dog does. It will obey its own nature, not yours. Such sense as you have put into the law (or the dog) will be fulfilled. But you will not be able to fulfil a fragment of anything you have forgotten to put into it.

Along with such idealists should go the strange people who seem to think that you can consecrate and purify any campaign for ever by repeating the names of the abstract virtues that its better advocates had in mind. These people will say "So far from aiming at *slavery*, the Eugenists are seeking *true* liberty; liberty from disease and degeneracy, etc." Or they will say "We can assure Mr. Chesterton that the Eugenists have *no* intention of segregating the harmless; justice and mercy are the very motto of – " etc. To this kind of thing perhaps the shortest answer is this. Many of those who speak thus are agnostic or generally unsympathetic to official religion. Suppose one of them said "The Church of England is full of hypocrisy." What would he think of me if I answered, "I assure you that hypocrisy is condemned by every form of Christianity; and is particularly repudiated in the Prayer Book"? Suppose he said that the Church of Rome had been guilty of great cruelties. What would he think of me if I answered, "The Church is expressly bound to meekness

and charity; and therefore cannot be cruel"? This kind of people need not detain us long. Then there are others whom I may call the Precedenters; who flourish particularly in Parliament. They are best represented by the solemn official who said the other day that he could not understand the clamour against the Feeble-Minded Bill, as it only extended the principles of the old Lunacy Laws. To which again one can only answer "Quite so. It only extends the principles of the Lunacy Laws to persons without a trace of lunacy." This lucid politician finds an old law, let us say, about keeping lepers in quarantine. He simply alters the word "lepers" to "long-nosed people," and says blandly that the principle is the same.

Perhaps the weakest of all are those helpless persons whom I have called the Endeavourers. The prize specimen of them was another M.P. who defended the same Bill as "an honest attempt" to deal with a great evil: as if one had a right to dragoon and enslave one's fellow citizens as a kind of chemical experiment; in a state of reverent agnosticism about what would come of it. But with this fatuous notion that one can deliberately establish the Inquisition or the Terror, and then faintly trust the larger hope, I shall have to deal more seriously in a subsequent chapter. It is enough to say here that the best thing the honest Endeavourer could do would be to make an honest attempt to know what he is doing. And not to do anything else until he has found out. Lastly, there is a class of controversialists so hopeless and futile that I have really failed to find a name for them. But whenever

anyone attempts to argue rationally for or against any existent and recognisable *thing*, such as the Eugenic class of legislation, there are always people who begin to chop hay about Socialism and Individualism; and say "You object to all State interference; I am in favour of State interference. You are an Individualist, I, on the other hand," etc. To which I can only answer, with heart-broken patience, that I am not an Individualist, but a poor fallen but baptised journalist who is trying to write a book about Eugenists, several of whom he has met; whereas he never met an Individualist, and is by no means certain he would recognise him if he did. In short, I do not deny, but strongly affirm, the right of the State to interfere to cure a great evil. I say that in this case it would interfere to create a great evil; and I am not going to be turned from the discussion of that direct issue to bottomless botherations about Socialism and Individualism, or the relative advantages of always turning to the right and always turning to the left.

And for the rest, there is undoubtedly an enormous mass of sensible, rather thoughtless people, whose rooted sentiment it is that any deep change in our society must be in some way infinitely distant. They cannot believe that men in hats and coats like themselves can be preparing a revolution; all their Victorian philosophy has taught them that such transformations are always slow. Therefore, when I speak of Eugenic legislation, or the coming of the Eugenic State, they think of it as something like *The Time Machine* or *Looking Backward*: a thing that,

good or bad, will have to fit itself to their great-great-grandchild, who may be very different and may like it; and who in any case is rather a distant relative. To all this I have, to begin with, a very short and simple answer. The Eugenic State has begun. The first of the Eugenic Laws has already been adopted by the Government of this country; and passed with the applause of both parties through the dominant House of Parliament. This first Eugenic Law clears the ground and may be said to proclaim negative Eugenics; but it cannot be defended, and nobody has attempted to defend it, except on the Eugenic theory. I will call it the Feeble-Minded Bill both for brevity and because the description is strictly accurate. It is, quite simply and literally, a Bill for incarcerating as madmen those whom no doctor will consent to call mad. It is enough if some doctor or other may happen to call them weak-minded. Since there is scarcely any human being to whom this term has not been conversationally applied by his own friends and relatives on some occasion or other (unless his friends and relatives have been lamentably lacking in spirit), it can be clearly seen that this law, like the early Christian Church (to which, however, it presents points of dissimilarity), is a net drawing in of all kinds. It must not be supposed that we have a stricter definition incorporated in the Bill. Indeed, the first definition of "feeble-minded" in the Bill was much looser and vaguer than the phrase "feeble-minded" itself. It is a piece of yawning idiocy about "persons who though capable of earning their living

under favourable circumstances" (as if anyone could earn his living if circumstances were directly unfavourable to his doing so), are nevertheless "incapable of managing their affairs with proper prudence"; which is exactly what all the world and his wife are saying about their neighbours all over this planet. But as an incapacity for any kind of thought is now regarded as statesmanship, there is nothing so very novel about such slovenly drafting. What is novel and what is vital is this: that the *defence* of this crazy Coercion Act is a Eugenic defence. It is not only openly said, it is eagerly urged, that the aim of the measure is to prevent any person whom these propagandists do not happen to think intelligent from having any wife or children. Every tramp who is sulky, every labourer who is shy, every rustic who is eccentric, can quite easily be brought under such conditions as were designed for homicidal maniacs. That is the situation; and that is the point. England has forgotten the Feudal State; it is in the last anarchy of the Industrial State; there is much in Mr. Belloc's theory that it is approaching the Servile State; it cannot at present get at the Distributive State; it has almost certainly missed the Socialist State. But we are already under the Eugenic State; and nothing remains to us but rebellion.

CHAPTER III

THE ANARCHY FROM ABOVE

A silent anarchy is eating out our society. I must pause upon the expression; because the true nature of anarchy is mostly misapprehended. It is not in the least necessary that anarchy should be violent; nor is it necessary that it should come from below. A government may grow anarchic as much as a people. The more sentimental sort of Tory uses the word anarchy as a mere term of abuse for rebellion; but he misses a most important intellectual distinction. Rebellion may be wrong and disastrous; but even when rebellion is wrong, it is never anarchy. When it is not self-defence, it is usurpation. It aims at setting up a new rule in place of the old rule. And while it cannot be anarchic in essence (because it has an aim), it certainly cannot be anarchic in method; for men must be organised when they fight; and the discipline in a rebel army has to be as good as the discipline in the royal army. This deep principle of distinction must be clearly kept in mind. Take for the sake of symbolism those two great spiritual stories which, whether we count them myths or mysteries, have so long been the two hinges of all European morals. The Christian who is inclined to sympathise generally with constituted authority will think of rebellion under the image of Satan, the rebel against God. But Satan, though a traitor, was not an anarchist. He claimed the crown of the cosmos; and had

he prevailed, would have expected his rebel angels to give up rebelling. On the other hand, the Christian whose sympathies are more generally with just self-defence among the oppressed will think rather of Christ Himself defying the High Priests and scourging the rich traders. But whether or no Christ was (as some say) a Socialist, He most certainly was not an Anarchist. Christ, like Satan, claimed the throne. He set up a new authority against an old authority; but He set it up with positive commandments and a comprehensible scheme. In this light all mediæval people – indeed, all people until a little while ago – would have judged questions involving revolt. John Ball would have offered to pull down the government because it was a bad government, not because it was a government. Richard II. would have blamed Bolingbroke not as a disturber of the peace, but as a usurper. Anarchy, then, in the useful sense of the word, is a thing utterly distinct from any rebellion, right or wrong. It is not necessarily angry; it is not, in its first stages, at least, even necessarily painful. And, as I said before, it is often entirely silent.

Anarchy is that condition of mind or methods in which you cannot stop yourself. It is the loss of that self-control which can return to the normal. It is not anarchy because men are permitted to begin uproar, extravagance, experiment, peril. It is anarchy when people cannot *end* these things. It is not anarchy in the home if the whole family sits up all night on New Year's Eve. It is anarchy in the home if members of the family sit up later and later for months afterwards. It was not anarchy in the Roman

villa when, during the Saturnalia, the slaves turned masters or the masters slaves. It was (from the slave-owners' point of view) anarchy if, after the Saturnalia, the slaves continued to behave in a Saturnalian manner; but it is historically evident that they did not. It is not anarchy to have a picnic; but it is anarchy to lose all memory of mealtimes. It would, I think, be anarchy if (as is the disgusting suggestion of some) we all took what we liked off the sideboard. That is the way swine would eat if swine had sideboards; they have no immovable feasts; they are uncommonly progressive, are swine. It is this inability to return within rational limits after a legitimate extravagance that is the really dangerous disorder. The modern world is like Niagara. It is magnificent, but it is not strong. It is as weak as water – like Niagara. The objection to a cataract is not that it is deafening or dangerous or even destructive; it is that it cannot stop. Now it is plain that this sort of chaos can possess the powers that rule a society as easily as the society so ruled. And in modern England it is the powers that rule who are chiefly possessed by it – who are truly possessed by devils. The phrase, in its sound old psychological sense, is not too strong. The State has suddenly and quietly gone mad. It is talking nonsense; and it can't stop.

Now it is perfectly plain that government ought to have, and must have, the same sort of right to use exceptional methods occasionally that the private householder has to have a picnic or to sit up all night on New Year's Eve. The State, like the householder, is sane if it can treat such exceptions as exceptions.

Such desperate remedies may not even be right; but such remedies are enduring as long as they are admittedly desperate. Such cases, of course, are the communism of food in a besieged city; the official disavowal of an arrested spy; the subjection of a patch of civil life to martial law; the cutting of communication in a plague; or that deepest degradation of the commonwealth, the use of national soldiers not against foreign soldiers, but against their own brethren in revolt. Of these exceptions some are right and some wrong; but all are right in so far as they are taken as exceptions. The modern world is insane, not so much because it admits the abnormal as because it cannot recover the normal.

We see this in the vague extension of punishments like imprisonment; often the very reformers who admit that prison is bad for people propose to reform them by a little more of it. We see it in panic legislation like that after the White Slave scare, when the torture of flogging was revived for all sorts of ill defined and vague and variegated types of men. Our fathers were never so mad, even when they were torturers. They stretched the man out on the rack. They did not stretch the rack out, as we are doing. When men went witch-burning they may have seen witches everywhere – because their minds were fixed on witchcraft. But they did not see things to burn everywhere, because their minds were unfixed. While tying some very unpopular witch to the stake, with the firm conviction that she was a spiritual tyranny and pestilence, they did not say to each other, "A little burning is what my Aunt Susan wants, to cure her of back-biting," or

"Some of these faggots would do your Cousin James good, and teach him to play with poor girls' affections."

Now the name of all this is Anarchy. It not only does not know what it wants, but it does not even know what it hates. It multiplies excessively in the more American sort of English newspapers. When this new sort of New Englander burns a witch the whole prairie catches fire. These people have not the decision and detachment of the doctrinal ages. They cannot do a monstrous action and still see it is monstrous. Wherever they make a stride they make a rut. They cannot stop their own thoughts, though their thoughts are pouring into the pit.

A final instance, which can be sketched much more briefly, can be found in this general fact: that the definition of almost every crime has become more and more indefinite, and spreads like a flattening and thinning cloud over larger and larger landscapes. Cruelty to children, one would have thought, was a thing about as unmistakable, unusual and appalling as parricide. In its application it has come to cover almost every negligence that can occur in a needy household. The only distinction is, of course, that these negligences are punished in the poor, who generally can't help them, and not in the rich, who generally can. But that is not the point I am arguing just now. The point here is that a crime we all instinctively connect with Herod on the bloody night of Innocents has come precious near being attributable to Mary and Joseph when they lost their child in the Temple. In the light of a fairly recent case (the confessedly kind mother who

was lately jailed because her confessedly healthy children had no water to wash in) no one, I think, will call this an illegitimate literary exaggeration. Now this is exactly as if all the horror and heavy punishment, attached in the simplest tribes to parricide, could now be used against any son who had done any act that could colourably be supposed to have worried his father, and so affected his health. Few of us would be safe.

Another case out of hundreds is the loose extension of the idea of libel. Libel cases bear no more trace of the old and just anger against the man who bore false witness against his neighbour than "cruelty" cases do of the old and just horror of the parents that hated their own flesh. A libel case has become one of the sports of the less athletic rich – a variation on *baccarat*, a game of chance. A music-hall actress got damages for a song that was called "vulgar," which is as if I could fine or imprison my neighbour for calling my handwriting "rococo." A politician got huge damages because he was said to have spoken to children about Tariff Reform; as if that seductive topic would corrupt their virtue, like an indecent story. Sometimes libel is defined as anything calculated to hurt a man in his business; in which case any new tradesman calling himself a grocer slanders the grocer opposite. All this, I say, is Anarchy; for it is clear that its exponents possess no power of distinction, or sense of proportion, by which they can draw the line between calling a woman a popular singer and calling her a bad lot; or between charging a man with leading infants to Protection and leading

them to sin and shame. But the vital point to which to return is this. That it is not necessarily, nor even specially, an anarchy in the populace. It is an anarchy in the organ of government. It is the magistrates – voices of the governing class – who cannot distinguish between cruelty and carelessness. It is the judges (and their very submissive special juries) who cannot see the difference between opinion and slander. And it is the highly placed and highly paid experts who have brought in the first Eugenic Law, the Feeble-Minded Bill – thus showing that they can see no difference between a mad and a sane man.

That, to begin with, is the historic atmosphere in which this thing was born. It is a peculiar atmosphere, and luckily not likely to last. Real progress bears the same relation to it that a happy girl laughing bears to an hysterical girl who cannot stop laughing. But I have described this atmosphere first because it is the only atmosphere in which such a thing as the Eugenist legislation could be proposed among men. All other ages would have called it to some kind of logical account, however academic or narrow. The lowest sophist in the Greek schools would remember enough of Socrates to force the Eugenist to tell him (at least) whether Midias was segregated because he was curable or because he was incurable. The meanest Thomist of the mediæval monasteries would have the sense to see that you cannot discuss a madman when you have not discussed a man. The most owlsh Calvinist commentator in the seventeenth century would ask the Eugenist to reconcile such Bible texts as derided fools with the other Bible

texts that praised them. The dullest shopkeeper in Paris in 1790 would have asked what were the Rights of Man, if they did not include the rights of the lover, the husband, and the father. It is only in our own London Particular (as Mr. Guppy said of the fog) that small figures can loom so large in the vapour, and even mingle with quite different figures, and have the appearance of a mob. But, above all, I have dwelt on the telescopic quality in these twilight avenues, because unless the reader realises how elastic and unlimited they are, he simply will not believe in the abominations we have to combat.

One of those wise old fairy tales, that come from nowhere and flourish everywhere, tells how a man came to own a small magic machine like a coffee-mill, which would grind anything he wanted when he said one word and stop when he said another. After performing marvels (which I wish my conscience would let me put into this book for padding) the mill was merely asked to grind a few grains of salt at an officers' mess on board ship; for salt is the type everywhere of small luxury and exaggeration, and sailors' tales should be taken with a grain of it. The man remembered the word that started the salt mill, and then, touching the word that stopped it, suddenly remembered that he forgot. The tall ship sank, laden and sparkling to the topmasts with salt like Arctic snows; but the mad mill was still grinding at the ocean bottom, where all the men lay drowned. And that (so says this fairy tale) is why the great waters about our world have a bitter taste. For the fairy tales knew what the

modern mystics don't – that one should not let loose either the supernatural or the natural.

CHAPTER IV

THE LUNATIC AND THE LAW

The modern evil, we have said, greatly turns on this: that people do not see that the exception proves the rule. Thus it may or may not be right to kill a murderer; but it can only conceivably be right to kill a murderer because it is wrong to kill a man. If the hangman, having got his hand in, proceeded to hang friends and relatives to his taste and fancy, he would (intellectually) unhang the first man, though the first man might not think so. Or thus again, if you say an insane man is irresponsible, you imply that a sane man is responsible. He is responsible for the insane man. And the attempt of the Eugenists and other fatalists to treat all men as irresponsible is the largest and flattest folly in philosophy. The Eugenist has to treat everybody, including himself, as an exception to a rule that isn't there.

The Eugenists, as a first move, have extended the frontiers of the lunatic asylum: let us take this as our definite starting point, and ask ourselves what lunacy is, and what is its fundamental relation to human society. Now that raw juvenile scepticism that clogs all thought with catchwords may often be heard to remark that the mad are only the minority, the sane only the majority. There is a neat exactitude about such people's nonsense; they seem to miss the point by magic. The mad are not a minority because they are not a corporate body; and that is what their

madness means. The sane are not a majority; they are mankind. And mankind (as its name would seem to imply) is a *kind*, not a degree. In so far as the lunatic differs, he differs from all minorities and majorities in kind. The madman who thinks he is a knife cannot go into partnership with the other who thinks he is a fork. There is no trysting place outside reason; there is no inn on those wild roads that are beyond the world.

The madman is not he that defies the world. The saint, the criminal, the martyr, the cynic, the nihilist may all defy the world quite sanely. And even if such fanatics would destroy the world, the world owes them a strictly fair trial according to proof and public law. But the madman is not the man who defies the world; he is the man who *denies* it. Suppose we are all standing round a field and looking at a tree in the middle of it. It is perfectly true that we all see it (as the decadents say) in infinitely different aspects: that is not the point; the point is that we all say it is a tree. Suppose, if you will, that we are all poets, which seems improbable; so that each of us could turn his aspect into a vivid image distinct from a tree. Suppose one says it looks like a green cloud and another like a green fountain, and a third like a green dragon and the fourth like a green cheese. The fact remains: that they all say it *looks* like these things. It is a tree. Nor are any of the poets in the least mad because of any opinions they may form, however frenzied, about the functions or future of the tree. A conservative poet may wish to clip the tree; a revolutionary poet may wish to burn it. An optimist poet may want to make it a

Christmas tree and hang candles on it. A pessimist poet may want to hang himself on it. None of these are mad, because they are all talking about the same thing. But there is another man who is talking horribly about something else. There is a monstrous exception to mankind. Why he is so we know not; a new theory says it is heredity; an older theory says it is devils. But in any case, the spirit of it is the spirit that denies, the spirit that really denies realities. This is the man who looks at the tree and does not say it looks like a lion, but says that it *is* a lamp-post.

I do not mean that all mad delusions are as concrete as this, though some are more concrete. Believing your own body is glass is a more daring denial of reality than believing a tree is a glass lamp at the top of a pole. But all true delusions have in them this unalterable assertion – that what is not is. The difference between us and the maniac is not about how things look or how things ought to look, but about what they self-evidently are. The lunatic does not say that he ought to be King; Perkin Warbeck might say that. He says he is King. The lunatic does not say he is as wise as Shakespeare; Bernard Shaw might say that. The lunatic says he *is* Shakespeare. The lunatic does not say he is divine in the same sense as Christ; Mr. R.J. Campbell would say that. The lunatic says he *is* Christ. In all cases the difference is a difference about what is there; not a difference touching what should be done about it.

For this reason, and for this alone, the lunatic is outside public law. This is the abysmal difference between him and the criminal.

The criminal admits the facts, and therefore permits us to appeal to the facts. We can so arrange the facts around him that he may really understand that agreement is in his own interests. We can say to him, "Do not steal apples from this tree, or we will hang you on that tree." But if the man really thinks one tree is a lamp-post and the other tree a Trafalgar Square fountain, we simply cannot treat with him at all. It is obviously useless to say, "Do not steal apples from this lamp-post, or I will hang you on that fountain." If a man denies the facts, there is no answer but to lock him up. He cannot speak our language: not that varying verbal language which often misses fire even with us, but that enormous alphabet of sun and moon and green grass and blue sky in which alone we meet, and by which alone we can signal to each other. That unique man of genius, George Macdonald, described in one of his weird stories two systems of space coincident; so that where I knew there was a piano standing in a drawing-room you knew there was a rose-bush growing in a garden. Something of this sort is in small or great affairs the matter with the madman. He cannot have a vote, because he is the citizen of another country. He is a foreigner. Nay, he is an invader and an enemy; for the city he lives in has been superimposed on ours.

Now these two things are primarily to be noted in his case. First, that we can only condemn him to a *general* doom, because we only know his *general* nature. All criminals, who do particular things for particular reasons (things and reasons which, however

criminal, are always comprehensible), have been more and more tried for such separate actions under separate and suitable laws ever since Europe began to become a civilisation – and until the rare and recent re-incursions of barbarism in such things as the Indeterminate Sentence. Of that I shall speak later; it is enough for this argument to point out the plain facts. It is the plain fact that every savage, every sultan, every outlawed baron, every brigand-chief has always used this instrument of the Indeterminate Sentence, which has been recently offered us as something highly scientific and humane. All these people, in short, being barbarians, have always kept their captives captive until they (the barbarians) chose to think the captives were in a fit frame of mind to come out. It is also the plain fact that all that has been called civilisation or progress, justice or liberty, for nearly three thousand years, has had the general direction of treating even the captive as a free man, in so far as some clear case of some defined crime had to be shown against him. All law has meant allowing the criminal, within some limits or other, to argue with the law: as Job was allowed, or rather challenged, to argue with God. But the criminal is, among civilised men, tried by one law for one crime for a perfectly simple reason: that the motive of the crime, like the meaning of the law, is conceivable to the common intelligence. A man is punished specially as a burglar, and not generally as a bad man, because a man may be a burglar and in many other respects not be a bad man. The act of burglary is punishable because it is intelligible.

But when acts are unintelligible, we can only refer them to a general untrustworthiness, and guard against them by a general restraint. If a man breaks into a house to get a piece of bread, we can appeal to his reason in various ways. We can hang him for housebreaking; or again (as has occurred to some daring thinkers) we can give him a piece of bread. But if he breaks in, let us say, to steal the parings of other people's finger nails, then we are in a difficulty: we cannot imagine what he is going to do with them, and therefore cannot easily imagine what we are going to do with him. If a villain comes in, in cloak and mask, and puts a little arsenic in the soup, we can collar him and say to him distinctly, "You are guilty of Murder; and I will now consult the code of tribal law, under which we live, to see if this practice is not forbidden." But if a man in the same cloak and mask is found at midnight putting a little soda-water in the soup, what can we say? Our charge necessarily becomes a more general one. We can only observe, with a moderation almost amounting to weakness, "You seem to be the sort of person who will do this sort of thing." And then we can lock him up. The principle of the indeterminate sentence is the creation of the indeterminate mind. It does apply to the incomprehensible creature, the lunatic. And it applies to nobody else.

The second thing to be noted is this: that it is only by the unanimity of sane men that we can condemn this man as utterly separate. If he says a tree is a lamp-post he is mad; but only because all other men say it is a tree. If some men thought it

was a tree with a lamp on it, and others thought it was a lamp-post wreathed with branches and vegetation, then it would be a matter of opinion and degree; and he would not be mad, but merely extreme. Certainly he would not be mad if nobody but a botanist could see it was a tree. Certainly his enemies might be madder than he, if nobody but a lamplighter could see it was not a lamp-post. And similarly a man is not imbecile if only a Eugenist thinks so. The question then raised would not be his sanity, but the sanity of one botanist or one lamplighter or one Eugenist. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is not the abnormally clever, which is obviously a matter in dispute. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is the normally foolish. It is when he begins to say and do things that even stupid people do not say or do, that we have a right to treat him as the exception and not the rule. It is only because we none of us profess to be anything more than man that we have authority to treat him as something less.

Now the first principle behind Eugenics becomes plain enough. It is the proposal that somebody or something should criticise men with the same superiority with which men criticise madmen. It might exercise this right with great moderation; but I am not here talking about the exercise, but about the right. Its *claim* certainly is to bring all human life under the Lunacy Laws.

Now this is the first weakness in the case of the Eugenists: that they cannot define who is to control whom; they cannot say by what authority they do these things. They cannot see the

exception is different from the rule – even when it is misrule, even when it is an unruly rule. The sound sense in the old Lunacy Law was this: that you cannot deny that a man is a citizen until you are practically prepared to deny that he is a man. Men, and only men, can be the judges of whether he is a man. But any private club of prigs can be judges of whether he ought to be a citizen. When once we step down from that tall and splintered peak of pure insanity we step on to a tableland where one man is not so widely different from another. Outside the exception, what we find is the average. And the practical, legal shape of the quarrel is this: that unless the normal men have the right to expel the abnormal, what particular sort of abnormal men have the right to expel the normal men? If sanity is not good enough, what is there that is saner than sanity?

Without any grip of the notion of a rule and an exception, the general idea of judging people's heredity breaks down and is useless. For this reason: that if everything is the result of a doubtful heredity, the judgment itself is the result of a doubtful heredity also. Let it judge not that it be not judged. Eugenists, strange to say, have fathers and mothers like other people; and our opinion about their fathers and mothers is worth exactly as much as their opinions about ours. None of the parents were lunatics, and the rest is mere likes and dislikes. Suppose Dr. Saleeby had gone up to Byron and said, "My lord, I perceive you have a club-foot and inordinate passions: such are the hereditary results of a profligate soldier marrying a hot-tempered woman."

The poet might logically reply (with characteristic lucidity and impropriety), "Sir, I perceive you have a confused mind and an unphilosophic theory about other people's love affairs. Such are the hereditary delusions bred by a Syrian doctor marrying a Quaker lady from York." Suppose Dr. Karl Pearson had said to Shelley, "From what I see of your temperament, you are running great risks in forming a connection with the daughter of a fanatic and eccentric like Godwin." Shelley would be employing the strict rationalism of the older and stronger free thinkers, if he answered, "From what I observe of your mind, you are rushing on destruction in marrying the great-niece of an old corpse of a courtier and dilettante like Samuel Rogers." It is only opinion for opinion. Nobody can pretend that either Mary Godwin or Samuel Rogers was mad; and the general view a man may hold about the healthiness of inheriting their blood or type is simply the same sort of general view by which men do marry for love or liking. There is no reason to suppose that Dr. Karl Pearson is any better judge of a bridegroom than the bridegroom is of a bride.

An objection may be anticipated here, but it is very easily answered. It may be said that we do, in fact, call in medical specialists to settle whether a man is mad; and that these specialists go by technical and even secret tests that cannot be known to the mass of men. It is obvious that this is true; it is equally obvious that it does not affect our argument. When we ask the doctor whether our grandfather is going mad, we still mean mad by our own common human definition. We mean, is

he going to be a certain sort of person whom all men recognise when once he exists. That certain specialists can detect the approach of him, before he exists, does not alter the fact that it is of the practical and popular madman that we are talking, and of him alone. The doctor merely sees a certain fact potentially in the future, while we, with less information, can only see it in the present; but his fact is our fact and everybody's fact, or we should not bother about it at all. Here is no question of the doctor bringing an entirely new sort of person under coercion, as in the Feeble-Minded Bill. The doctor can say, "Tobacco is death to you," because the dislike of death can be taken for granted, being a highly democratic institution; and it is the same with the dislike of the indubitable exception called madness. The doctor can say, "Jones has that twitch in the nerves, and he may burn down the house." But it is not the medical detail we fear, but the moral upshot. We should say, "Let him twitch, as long as he doesn't burn down the house." The doctor may say, "He has that look in the eyes, and he may take the hatchet and brain you all." But we do not object to the look in the eyes as such; we object to consequences which, once come, we should all call insane if there were no doctors in the world. We should say, "Let him look how he likes; as long as he does not look for the hatchet."

Now, that specialists are valuable for this particular and practical purpose, of predicting the approach of enormous and admitted human calamities, nobody but a fool would deny. But that does not bring us one inch nearer to allowing them the right

to define what is a calamity; or to call things calamities which common sense does not call calamities. We call in the doctor to save us from death; and, death being admittedly an evil, he has the right to administer the queerest and most recondite pill which he may think is a cure for all such menaces of death. He has not the right to administer death, as the cure for all human ills. And as he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of happiness, so he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of sanity. He may know I am going mad; for madness is an isolated thing like leprosy; and I know nothing about leprosy. But if he merely thinks my mind is weak, I may happen to think the same of his. I often do.

In short, unless pilots are to be permitted to ram ships on to the rocks and then say that heaven is the only true harbour; unless judges are to be allowed to let murderers loose, and explain afterwards that the murder had done good on the whole; unless soldiers are to be allowed to lose battles and then point out that true glory is to be found in the valley of humiliation; unless cashiers are to rob a bank in order to give it an advertisement; or dentists to torture people to give them a contrast to their comforts; unless we are prepared to let loose all these private fancies against the public and accepted meaning of life or safety or prosperity or pleasure – then it is as plain as Punch's nose that no scientific man must be allowed to meddle with the public definition of madness. We call him in to tell us where it is or when it is. We could not do so, if we had not ourselves settled

what it is.

As I wish to confine myself in this chapter to the primary point of the plain existence of sanity and insanity, I will not be led along any of the attractive paths that open here. I shall endeavour to deal with them in the next chapter. Here I confine myself to a sort of summary. Suppose a man's throat has been cut, quite swiftly and suddenly, with a table knife, at a small table where we sit. The whole of civil law rests on the supposition that we are witnesses; that we saw it; and if we do not know about it, who does? Now suppose all the witnesses fall into a quarrel about degrees of eyesight. Suppose one says he had brought his reading-glasses instead of his usual glasses; and therefore did not see the man fall across the table and cover it with blood. Suppose another says he could not be certain it was blood, because a slight colour-blindness was hereditary in his family. Suppose a third says he cannot swear to the uplifted knife, because his oculist tells him he is astigmatic, and vertical lines do not affect him as do horizontal lines. Suppose another says that dots have often danced before his eyes in very fantastic combinations, many of which were very like one gentleman cutting another gentleman's throat at dinner. All these things refer to real experiences. There is such a thing as myopia; there is such a thing as colour-blindness; there is such a thing as astigmatism; there is such a thing as shifting shapes swimming before the eyes. But what should we think of a whole dinner party that could give nothing except these highly scientific explanations

when found in company with a corpse? I imagine there are only two things we could think: either that they were all drunk, or they were all murderers.

And yet there is an exception. If there were one man at table who was admittedly *blind*, should we not give him the benefit of the doubt? Should we not honestly feel that he was the exception that proved the rule? The very fact that he could not have seen would remind us that the other men must have seen. The very fact that he had no eyes must remind us of eyes. A man can be blind; a man can be dead; a man can be mad. But the comparison is necessarily weak, after all. For it is the essence of madness to be unlike anything else in the world: which is perhaps why so many men wiser than we have traced it to another.

Lastly, the literal maniac is different from all other persons in dispute in this vital respect: that he is the only person whom we can, with a final lucidity, declare that we do not want. He is almost always miserable himself, and he always makes others miserable. But this is not so with the mere invalid. The Eugenists would probably answer all my examples by taking the case of marrying into a family with consumption (or some such disease which they are fairly sure is hereditary) and asking whether such cases at least are not clear cases for a Eugenic intervention. Permit me to point out to them that they once more make a confusion of thought. The sickness or soundness of a consumptive may be a clear and calculable matter. The happiness or unhappiness of a consumptive is quite another

matter, and is not calculable at all. What is the good of telling people that if they marry for love, they may be punished by being the parents of Keats or the parents of Stevenson? Keats died young; but he had more pleasure in a minute than a Eugenist gets in a month. Stevenson had lung-trouble; and it may, for all I know, have been perceptible to the Eugenic eye even a generation before. But who would perform that illegal operation: the stopping of Stevenson? Intercepting a letter bursting with good news, confiscating a hamper full of presents and prizes, pouring torrents of intoxicating wine into the sea, all this is a faint approximation for the Eugenic inaction of the ancestors of Stevenson. This, however, is not the essential point; with Stevenson it is not merely a case of the pleasure we get, but of the pleasure he got. If he had died without writing a line, he would have had more red-hot joy than is given to most men. Shall I say of him, to whom I owe so much, let the day perish wherein he was born? Shall I pray that the stars of the twilight thereof be dark and it be not numbered among the days of the year, because it shut not up the doors of his mother's womb? I respectfully decline; like Job, I will put my hand upon my mouth.

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