

ON THE BREEDING OF ARYANS

And Other Genetic Problems of War-time Germany

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DURING a visit to Germany in the winter of 1939-40, I had an opportunity to meet some of my fellow geneticists, who seemed to be working undisturbed by the campaign and the "mopping up" in Poland, and by the hectic preparations for the assaults on a great many peaceful countries such as Denmark, Norway, Holland, and Belgium. The following unpretentious notes, written for laymen, may perhaps interest some of their many American friends.

Quite a few of them were busy treating or rather mistreating the sex cells of animals and plants in order to produce new varieties. I was introduced to all kinds of extraordinary creatures produced in that way, mice without toes or with corkscrew tails, flies that violated the very definition of a fly by having four wings instead of two, funny-looking moths, and strange plants.

Radiation, especially with X-rays, is the principal means of producing such new kinds, or rather monsters, of animals and plants, and the wizard in this business was a Russian, Dr. Timofeeff-Ressovsky, who has found an asylum at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research. An industrial concern has presented him with the enormous machines with which he radiates the minute sex cells of tiny little *Drosophila* flies.

Timofeeff is a fanatic and an enthusiast. I was really spellbound while he gave me a three-hour lecture on his work, incessantly gesticulating as he walked up and down the floor. The German staff of the Institute looked at this strange and temperamental Russian with amusement and sincere admiration. They even granted him a freedom of speech and opinion they would deny any other human being.

Genuine German thoroughness characterized Professor Nachtsheim's elaborate experiments on the heredity of disease. Since one can not very well make human patients mate and produce numerous babies to suit the analysis of a pathological problem, he had resorted to rabbits. These obliging and fertile animals suffer from a great many troubles like our own. It was a pathetic sight to look at the hundreds of incurables in the rabbit houses. But at that, our own institutions housing people afflicted with hereditary diseases are no less disconsolate.

When I went to see the famous old "Geheimrat" Fischer at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, an S.A. man in black uniform was present during the conversation. He was introduced as Dr. Abel, and the director afterwards asked him to show me around. The result was that we spent several days together.

Twins in the "New Order"

Twins have, of course, for a long time been a favorite material for the study of the relative importance of heredity and environment, of nature and nurture. It does, however, take a dictatorship to oblige some ten thousand pairs of twins, as well as triplets and even quadruplets, to report to a scientific institute at regular intervals for all kinds of recordings and tests.

I was particularly interested in their laboratory for the study of the inheritance of behavior and mental capacities. For this purpose, the twins were placed in two identical rooms, separated by a narrow corridor for the observer, who had a free view over both rooms through big windows in the walls. These, however, were fitted with that remarkable kind of glass through which you can see in one direction

only. From the other side, these windows looked like ordinary reflecting mirrors. This may serve as a warning that in Germany even an unbroken mirror may bring seven years' bad luck if it happens to conceal an observer who does not feel that one's behavior is up to proper Aryan standards.

If the observer wants a permanent record of the behavior of the twins, he can operate two concealed movie cameras with the lenses nicely camouflaged in the wall paper.

Racial Diagnosis

Dr. Abel's principal work was, however, in connection with the racial policy of the Nazi government.

In itself, the problem is a fairly simple one when it is first understood that the deliberate eradication of the Jewish element in Germany has nothing whatever to do with religious persecution. It is entirely a large-scale breeding project, with the purpose of eliminating from that nation the hereditary attributes of the Semitic race.

Whether this be desirable or not is a question that has nothing to do with science. It is a matter of policy and prejudice only. It is a problem similar to that Americans have solved to their own satisfaction with regard to their colored population. The story of the cruel ways in which life has been made unbearable for millions of unfortunate German Jews belongs exclusively in the shameful realm of human brutality. But when the problem arises as to how the breeding project may be carried out most effectively, after the politicians have decided upon its desirability, biological science can assist even the Nazis.

The first question that faced Dr. Abel was to find out exactly what are the hereditary peculiarities in which Jews and non-Jews, or "Aryans," as they are called, differ. It is a problem of exactly the same nature as if you were asked to record the exact hereditary differences between a bird dog and a hound. It has nothing whatever to do with your personal preference for one or the other.

It is a matter of common knowledge

that anybody can immediately recognize many Jews by simply looking at them. In other words, the Jew has a number of characteristic bodily features not often combined in a non-Jew or "Aryan." In addition, he may display certain mental characteristics you would soon notice by personal association. Leaving these aside, it becomes a matter of keen but fairly simple analysis to determine exactly what these Jewish features are, expressed quantitatively in numbers, measurements, and weights.

The next thing is to find out the behavior of such of these characteristics as are inherited in later generations following a cross between a Jew and an Aryan. Seen from the standpoint of a pedigreed dog, we are all mongrels, and some of us show recognizable inherited characteristics contributed from one or more Jewish ancestors. This is a plain fact, and has nothing to do with relative superiority or inferiority.

An amazing amount of unbiased information has accumulated dealing, for instance, with such features as the position of the ears, the shape of the nostrils, etc. As a result, it is quite possible, by studying the bodily features of a person and his relatives, to state, with considerable likelihood of being right, whether this person has Jewish ancestors or is a straight descendant from old man Wotan.

If it be decided by the Nazi politicians that persons with Jewish ancestors shall be prevented from mating with those who have not such ancestors, science can undoubtedly assist them in carrying out a reasonably correct labeling of every doubtful individual. The rest remains in the cruel hands of the S.S., the S.A., and the Gestapo.

What I saw in Germany often made me wonder whether the subtle idea behind the treatment of the Jews might be to discourage them from giving birth to children doomed to a life of horrors. If that were accomplished, the Jewish problem would solve itself in a generation, but it would have been a great deal more merciful to kill the unfortunates outright.

“Aryanizing” the Ancestry

As things are run in Nazi Germany, it is obviously a matter almost of life and death whether you carry the label Aryan or Jew. Since the authorities, however, are interested in biological rather than in legal parentage, their policy opens a possible loophole for children of an Aryan woman married to a Jewish man. If it can be proved that her child is actually the result of illegitimate sexual intercourse between the mother and an Aryan man, such a child will be registered as an Aryan despite the race of his legal father. The most talked of story of this kind deals with a famous Air-Marshal and right-hand man of General Field-Marshal Goring, who at least legally was supposed to be a Jew.

It is perhaps human that a very large number of such unhappy mothers, who tremble for the fate of their children, make frantic efforts to prove to the satisfaction of the authorities that they have committed adultery. If they want to submit to such an investigation, they have to apply to the pedigree office (“Sippen Amt”) of the Ministry of Interior, from where the case is sent to Dr. Abel’s department for investigation. All persons involved are obliged to appear personally. In case of death or absence from the country, photographs may also be offered as evidence. They are very often found to be falsified by retouch.

There was the rather amusing case of a young girl. Dr. Abel had been searching for a good illustration of an Aryan woman for a new book. He finally selected a really lovely picture from the files of a popular photographer, who laughed out loud and said:

“There we see how much you scientists know. This girl is a Jewess.”

Dr. Abel would not believe it. A few days later, the girl turned up in his office. The photographer had told her the story. Dr. Abel repeated that he believed her to be Aryan. So the girl went home and had a heart-to-heart talk with her Aryan mother, who finally burst into tears and told her that her real father was the brother of a French ambassador, and not her Jewish husband. The case was brought up through the regular channels, and all the detailed researches substantiated the admission of the mother.

A very able and highly respected high school teacher of mixed parentage made a similar effort. But, although his claim was supported by his Aryan mother, who produced a supposedly genuine Aryan father for her son, the extensive evidence permitted but one conclusion, that he was actually the son of his legal Jewish father. He of course lost his teaching job, and Dr. Abel added, as he put the case back in the file:

“I really felt awfully sorry for him. He was a good man.”

Genetics really seems to have an unlimited field of practical applications, but I am sure that the old priest Mendel would have had the shock of his life had he been told that seventy-five years after he planted his unpretentious peas in the monastery garden of Brünn, his new science would be called upon to “grade up” the “scrub” population of Greater Germany to new “standards of Aryan perfection.” I am sure he would have damned his peas, or at any rate those who rediscovered them in 1900.