



A Quiet Summer Afternoon on the Lagoon, Toronto Island

PHOTOGRAPH BY PRINGLE & BOOTH

THE BURDEN OF EMPIRE

By DR. C. W. SALEEBY, F.R.S.

IT is unfortunate that more attention is not paid in the current thought of our day to the all-important and little-recognised distinction between two kinds of human progress—racial or inherent and traditional or acquired. If, of any generation, individuals of a certain kind are chosen for survival and parentage, the character of the species will change. If what we call the best are chosen, their goodness will be transmitted in some degree, and the race will advance; but if what we call the worst are chosen their badness will be transmitted in some degree, and the race will degenerate. If the race degenerates—through, say, the selection of the worst for parentage—the time will come when its heritage is too much for it. The pearls of the ancestral art are now cast before swine, and are trampled on; statues, temples, books are destroyed or burnt or lost. If an empire has been built the degenerate race cannot sustain it. There is no wealth but life; and if the quality of the life fails, neither battleships, nor libraries, nor symphonies, nor anything else will save a nation.

FURTHER TO FALL.

THIS, of course, we all know, though no one who observed our legislation or read our Parliamentary debates would suspect that it had ever entered into our minds. Empires and civilisations, therefore, have fallen, despite the strength and magnitude of the superstructure, because the foundations became weak; and the bigger and heavier the superstructure the less could it survive the failure of the foundations. If the Fiji islanders degenerate there is little consequence; if the breed of Romans degenerate, all their vast mass of acquired progress and power crushes them into dramatic ruin. This image, I believe, truly expresses the relation between the two wholly distinct kinds of progress, which we have yet to learn to distinguish. Acquired progress will not compensate for racial or inherent decadence. If the race is going down it will not compensate to add another colony to your Empire; on the contrary, the bigger the Empire the stronger must be the race—the bigger the superstructure the stronger the foundations. Acquired progress is real progress, but it is always dependent for its maintenance upon racial or inherent progress, or, at least, upon racial maintenance.

I believe, then, that civilisations and empires

have succumbed because they represented only acquired or traditional or educational progress, and this availed not at all when the races that built them up began to degenerate. The only explanation of racial degeneration yet offered by the historians is the Lamarckian one of the transmission of habits of luxury and idleness from parent to child—an explanation which the modern study of heredity empowers us to repudiate. What theory of this alleged degeneration is there to offer in its place, and especially what theory which explains racial degeneration amongst not the conquered but the conquerors, amongst the successful, the Imperial, the cultured, the leisured, the well-catered for in all respects, bodily and mental? Why is it that not enslaved but imperial peoples degenerate? Why is it that nothing fails like success?

What I believe to be the true and sufficient answer has been given by no historian; the key to it is only forty-nine years old. The reason is that no race or species, vegetable, or animal, or human, can maintain its organic level, let alone raise it, unless its best be selected for parentage. It is true of a race as of an individual, that it must work for its living, and we know its degeneracy. Society works and hands over its pre-digested food to such social parasites amongst ourselves. You must struggle or you will degenerate, even if only with rhyme or counterpoint, and not necessarily for bread. "Work is the law," as Ruskin said, whether for a livelihood or for enjoyment. Living things are the product of the struggle for existence; we are thus evolved strugglers by constitution; and directly we cease to struggle we forfeit the possibilities of our birthright.

"REVERSED SELECTION."

THE case is the same with races. Directly the conditions become too easy, selection ceases, for it is as successful to be incompetent or lazy or vicious as to be worthy. The hard conditions that kept weeding out the unworthy are now relaxed, and the fine race they made goes back again. Finally, there occurs the phenomenon of "reversed selection," when it is fitter to be bad than good, cowardly than brave, as when religious persecution murders all who are true to themselves, and spares hypocrites and apostates, or when healthy children are killed in factories, whilst feeble-minded children or deaf-mutes are carefully tended until matur-

ity, and then sent into the world to reproduce their maladies. Under reversed selection such results are obtained as a breeder of race-horses, or plants, would obtain if he went to work on similar lines; the race degenerates rapidly, and if it be an imperial race its empire comes crashing down about its ears.

All empires and civilisations hitherto have involved the partial or complete arrest or reversal of the process of natural selection, and the racial degeneration which necessarily ensued has been the cause of their invariable doom. When a race is making its way by force, as by incessant war, selection is stringent. The weak, cowardly, diseased, stupid, are expunged from generation to generation. As civilisation advances, a higher ethical level is reached, all true civilisation tending to abrogate and ameliorate the struggle for existence. The diseased and weakly and feeble-minded are no longer left to pay the penalty sternly exacted by Nature for unfitness, they are allowed to survive and multiply. A successful race can, apparently, afford to permit this as a race that is fighting for its existence cannot. But in reality no race can afford this absolutely fatal process.

WHAT SHOULD EDUCATION DO?

THERE is thus a real risk involved in the accumulation of acquired, traditional, or educational progress. Not only does it tend to abrogate or even to reverse selection, but it serves to disguise the consequences of this abrogation. If a sub-human race degenerates the fact is evident; but such a nation as our own may quite well degenerate, whilst the accumulation of acquired progress, transmitted by education, almost completely cloaks the fact. We may be congratulating ourselves upon our progress, upon our knowledge, our science and art, our institutions, legal and charitable, whilst all the time the breed is undergoing retrogression. Here it may be suggested that education has a function for race-culture in addition to the obvious fact of its necessity in order to realise the inherent potentialities of the individual. Its function is to provide a level of public opinion and public taste, such that the finer specimens of each generation shall receive their due reward, and shall not be crushed out of existence or perverted.

So far as many kinds of genius and talent are concerned, our immediate business is, perhaps, less to endeavour to produce them by breeding, if that be possible, than to make the most of them when they are vouchsafed us. Lastly, a hope may be warranted which I will define. It is that, though education as such has never hitherto averted the ultimate failure of all civilisations, yet the case may be