THE RELATIONS OF RACE AND CULTURE TO
DEGENERATIONS OF THE REPRODUCTIVE
ORGANS AND FUNCTIONS IN WOMAN

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The results of degenerations of the reproductive organs are of equal interest to the physician and sociologist. The former finds in them the fertile sources of diseases involving the whole system as well as the special portions involved, while the latter must trace to them many of the pathological phenomena which appear in the body politic.

For many years the diminished fertility and increased ill-health of American women have attracted the attention of observant medical men in the United States, notably shown in the statistics published by Dr. Nathan Allen, of Massachusetts. In France the stationary character of the population or its actual retrogression in number has excited the alarm of patriotic men, as is illustrated by the work of the Marquis de Nadaillac, entitled The Nation's Danger (Le Peril National). It is an error to suppose that the small families or total childless-

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ness of many marriages among the wealthier classes of France and the United States is due mainly to Malthusian principles and "preventive checks." It occurs also where these are not adopted, and has a far deeper root than the love of ease and freedom from maternal care.

This has been recognized by not a few social philosophers, as, for instance, Herbert Spencer, Schaalhausen, and others, who have set up the maxim that the increased mental and moral development of women in modern times necessarily leads to degeneration of her reproductive powers by diverting from them the chief activity of her nervous system.

A comparison of the birth-rate between the married women of higher culture in France and the United States with that prevailing in primitive conditions seems to support this view. The observation of Dr. Boas among the native Indians and the half-breeds on our reservations shows that the married women of forty years of age have had as a rule seven to eight children apiece; whereas in the class of Aryan whites referred to five accouchements at term by that age would seem to be an average. To be sure, among the whites, there is a considerable difference between the upper and the lower classes, and between those of one stock and another; but these facts do not militate against the maxim above quoted.

It does not require arguments to prove the largely increased prevalence of uterine displacements and diseases in highly cultured women, both married and unmarried; nor to emphasize the well-known and remarkable ease of parturition enjoyed by the savage woman in contrast with her civilized sister. We must look upon these as parts of the complicated processes of domestication. The same contrast is seen in the lower animals. The high-bred Silesian ewes of Saxony can scarcely drop their lambs without artificial assistance; "pedigree" cows, bitches, and mares are always greater sufferers in natural labor than the lower and wild varieties, and the mortality among them from the sequelae is higher.

If we seek to analyze precisely what factors lead to this condition, we may classify them as follows:

1. The Pelvis. The shape of the pelvis of the two sexes differs but slightly before puberty. At that epoch the following changes should take place:
   1. The pubic arch of the female should assume a wider span, increasing from an angle of about 60°, which it retains in the male, to about 80°.
   2. The coccyx should retain its mobility, which becomes lost in the adult male.
   3. The horizontal diameters of the pelvic cavity should increase, giving the basin a more extended capacity.

In the perfectly developed modern white woman these changes take place; but they occur in a much less degree in the women of the lower races. Among the Australians and Indonesians it is often impossible to distinguish between the adult pelves of the two sexes. But in highly civilized conditions the development of pre-natal life is more rapid and complete, and space is demanded for its activities. Especially the head of the foetus at term is larger,
are common symptoms of parturition among cultivated classes and the higher races; scarcely known among the American Indians and the African negroes. This condition is related less to the general muscular force than it is to a diminished nerve- and blood-supply to the genito-urinary system.

Undeveloped and Adherent Clitoris. The clitoris is well developed in most anthropoid apes and also in the negro race. Among the Hottentots the labia minora and prepuce of the clitoris are sometimes eight to ten inches long, forming what is called the “Hottentot apron.” On the other hand, in Aryan American women the clitoris is very small, as a rule, and the prepuce often adherent. This fact has been recently pointed out by Dr. Robert T. Morris, of New York City, in a note to his “Lectures on Appendicitis.” His investigations prove that almost 80 per cent. of Aryan American women have preputial adhesions, and that this condition, through reflex action, tends to produce such an impression upon the nerve-centres that the whole sexual apparatus is influenced toward degeneration. The Semitic women in this country, on the other hand, show very little tendency to this condition, and Dr. Morris raises the inquiry whether this does not indicate that, as a rule, they are destined to outlast the Aryans?

Sexual Feeling. Deficient or absent sexual feeling predisposes to infertility, and must be regarded as a degenerative symptom. Whether or not the cultured women of the present day have materially lost this feeling, or only keep it more under subjection, it is not easy to decide. Special students

and a wider pubic arch is required if the child is to be born alive. Hence it is that the span of the pubic arch in woman becomes the criterion and the necessary condition of racial progress—of the evolution of the human species.

The Menstrual Function. It seems an accepted fact among gynecologists that a high moral and intellectual education tends to postpone the appearance of the menses. That there is also a positive increase in the number and severity of cases of dysmenorrhea and sympathetic catamenial disturbances among the higher classes is generally acknowledged. Especially may attention be directed to the prolonged and troublesome symptoms connected with the climacteric period. There can be no doubt that these, which incapacitate so many patients for years, are almost unknown in primitive and simple conditions of life. They are the reflex of debilitated function.

The Lacteal Function. A woman under her natural relations should suckle her own children, and is the better in health for doing so. Obstetricians are, however, well aware that it is by no means selfishness or lack of maternal feeling which obliges so many mothers among us to have recourse to wet-nurses or “the bottle.” It is that their milk is insufficient in quantity or deficient in quality, or the strain of lactation is too severe on their constitutions. There is, in other words, an obvious impairment in the function of lactation.

The Muscular Structure. Tense labor and inefficient pains are frequently caused by a lack of development of the uterine muscular fibres. They
of women, such as Ploss, Bartels, and Ellis, speak in favor of the latter view; while Spencer and many others assert that sexual passion in woman has decidedly diminished under civilization. The novelist, Henry James, an acute observer, calls the average New England girl "passionless." Certainly, compared with primitive life, the woman of to-day reveals few signs of sex-feeling. The American Indian women were often subject to epidemics of desire, and the Bacchantes of ancient Greece gave unrestrained liberty to their erotic longings. Only in sexual perverts and distinctly pathological instances do we see anything of the kind to-day. The inference is reasonable that not only has the sexual passion decreased in women, but often to such an extent as to render them indifferent or averse to marriage, and thus to reproduction.

The conclusion from such facts forced upon us is that a series of changes has been gradually taking place in the reproductive organs and functions of woman, the general tendency of which is to reduce her procreative capacity, and that these are more permanent and extended in the Aryan stock than elsewhere.