

HUMAN STERILIZATION TODAY*

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DURING the last twenty-eight years, California state institutions have sterilized nearly 12,000 insane and feeble-minded patients.

The following pages embody results shown by a case study of the first 10,000 of these sterilizations.

But first, what is sterilization?

It is a surgical operation that prevents parenthood *without unsexing the patient!*

This operation does not remove any gland or tissue. It does not interfere with any blood or nerve supply. It merely cuts and seals the tubes through which the germ cells—the spermatozoa and ova—must pass. It does not in any degree unsex the individual save to prevent parenthood. It is wholly different, therefore, from the crude and brutal operations of castration and asexualization. Primitive and pagan peoples castrated boys to produce eunuchs. Roman Catholics continued the practice until modern times, to provide male soprano voices for their cathedral choirs. Unlike these practices, modern sterilization is not a mutilation.

In men, the operation can be performed under a local anaesthetic in fifteen or twenty minutes. In women, the operation is more serious, involving the opening of the abdomen. It is thus comparable in severity to an uncomplicated operation for chronic appendicitis. It means a week or two in bed. In either sex, failures are almost unknown.

EUGENIC STERILIZATION IS NOT AN EXPERIMENT

Eugenic sterilization in this form represents one of the greatest advances in modern civilization. It is not a novelty or an experiment. It has been continuously used by American institutions since 1899, when the first sterilizations were performed in Indiana.

More than 130,000,000 people, including the citizens of twenty-nine American states, are now living under eugenic sterilization laws. Apart from the United States, the countries which have adopted such legislation are the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia; Norway; Sweden; Denmark; Finland; Esthonia; Germany; the Free City of Danzig; the state of Vera Cruz, Mexico; and the Canton of Vaud, Switzerland.

The following table shows the American states that now have sterilization laws in force, with the year of the adoption of the first statute:

| | | | |
|-------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| Alabama | 1919 | Nebraska | 1915 |
| Arizona | 1929 | New Hampshire | 1917 |
| California | 1909 | North Carolina | 1919 |
| Connecticut | 1909 | North Dakota | 1913 |
| Delaware | 1923 | Oklahoma | 1931 |
| Georgia | 1937 | Oregon | 1917 |
| Idaho | 1925 | South Carolina | 1935 |
| Indiana | 1907 | South Dakota | 1917 |
| Iowa | 1911 | Utah | 1925 |
| Kansas | 1913 | Vermont | 1931 |
| Maine | 1925 | Virginia | 1924 |
| Michigan | 1913 | Washington | 1909 |
| Minnesota | 1925 | West Virginia | 1929 |
| Mississippi | 1928 | Wisconsin | 1913 |
| Montana | 1923 | | |

* A reprint of a publication of the Human Betterment Foundation, 321 Pacific Southwest Building, Pasadena. See also article on "Human Betterment" in May, 1937, issue, page 296, by Dr. Edward M. Pallette, retiring president of the California Medical Association.

THE PROBLEMS BEFORE AMERICAN CITIZENS

The situation which has led all these commonwealths to adopt sterilization laws grows out of such facts as the following:

Births among families living on public charity are often 50 per cent higher than births among self-supporting families.

The families that contribute children to the state homes for the feeble-minded in California are multiplying about twice as rapidly as the rest of the population.

The burden of taxation due to the mentally diseased and mentally defective is at the same time steadily mounting.

Few of the feeble-minded are given institutional care, but their presence in the population at large is none the less expensive both in direct costs and in lowered efficiency of industry, in crime and delinquency, and in the deterioration of citizenship which is inevitable when a large number of the citizens are mentally abnormal.

Psychologists estimate that at least 1,000,000 persons in the United States are so feeble-minded as to need special care and supervision. If anyone with less than 70 per cent of average intelligence for his age is called mentally deficient, the number of such persons in the United States is found to be about 6,500,000.

The number of insane persons in hospitals is growing from year to year. Only 435,000 are cared for at any one time, but the turnover is rapid, 95,000 new admissions being reported each twelve months. Statisticians have calculated that nearly 5 per cent of the American population or 6,000,000 people will at some time during life be legally committed as insane. But there are many who break down to an equal degree, enough to prevent them from carrying on their regular work, but who are not committed to hospitals by the courts. Calculations by Dr. W. F. Ogburn of the University of Chicago show that these amount to an additional 5 per cent, making the total number of mentally diseased about 10 per cent of the entire population.

EUGENIC STERILIZATION IS NOT A PANACEA

Sterilization is no panacea for these ills of mankind, but it is one of the many measures indispensable to any far-sighted and humanitarian program for dealing with society's tremendous burden of mental disease, deficiency, and dependency.

The principle of compulsory sterilization by the state, under proper safeguards, was upheld as constitutional by the Supreme Court of the United States in the case of *Buck vs. Bell* (1927). In writing the decision, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked: "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."

Agreeing with this view, state after state is now extending the application of sterilization to such of its defectives as are legally committed to state institutions. In this practice, every state benefits by the experience of California, studied intensively and continuously since 1925 by the Human Betterment Foundation.

The first study (1926-1929) covered 6,000 California sterilizations. Its details were published in

a score of technical papers in various scientific journals. A bound volume of these, entitled "Collected Papers on Eugenic Sterilization in California," is accessible in most of the important libraries of America. A more popular digest of the facts was published in 1929 by The Macmillan Company, New York City. This book, entitled "Sterilization for Human Betterment," by E. S. Gosney and Paul Popenoe, can be had for \$2 through any bookstore or from this Foundation.

A second complete study (1932-1936) brought the subject up to date and confirmed the findings of the first study. Full results are reported in a booklet entitled "Twenty-eight Years of Sterilization in California," which is being published the middle of this year.

STERILIZATION IS APPROVED BY ALL

The most striking revelation from our studies is the extent to which the policy of eugenic sterilization is approved by those who know most about it.

Patients, relatives of patients, state officials, physicians and surgeons, parole and probation officers, social workers, agree on the value of this practice.

It is a protection, not a punishment, and therefore carries no stigma or humiliation.

It permits many patients to return to their homes without danger of producing handicapped children. It thus keeps homes together by removing the threat of defective offspring, prevents the break-up of families, and relieves the California taxpayers of a burden estimated at more than \$2,000,000 per year. Even among the feeble-minded, at least two-thirds of the sterilized and paroled patients adjust themselves successfully to life outside the institution.

SEX OFFENSES LESS FREQUENT

Sterilization has been followed by a marked decrease in sex offenses. This is not because the operation changes the sexual life, for it produces no such change. It is because of better health, educational discipline, careful placement, and supervision on parole. But the record once for all disposes of the charge that sterilization will result in increased promiscuity and the spread of venereal diseases. Just one illustration: Of 304 feeble-minded girls sterilized and paroled, nine out of every twelve had been sex offenders before commitment. After sterilization, only one out of every twelve became sex delinquent on parole.

Sterilization prevents the birth of children who, even if not defective, would otherwise be brought up in unfavorable environments by mentally diseased or mentally deficient parents or by the state. It enables many handicapped persons to marry and to have a life normal in most respects, whose marriage otherwise would be unwise if not disastrous. A study of marriages of 130 feeble-minded patients after sterilization and parole shows that two-thirds of them have been successful. This is as good as the record of all California marriages.

STERILIZATION IS HIGHLY SELECTIVE

It must be understood that not everyone who is sent to a state institution is sterilized. Mass sterilization has no place in this program. Each case is

judged on its own merits. Of the feeble-minded who have been paroled, about one-half have been sterilized. Of the persons admitted to state hospitals for the insane, one in six of the new admissions is sterilized before leaving. Selection of the patients for this operation is made after careful study by medical specialists, and usually with the written consent of the nearest relatives.

Sterilizations in California have been about equally divided between men and women. Two-thirds of the number sterilized were committed as insane, the remainder as feeble-minded.

The consistently careful administration of this measure in California is reflected by the fact that during the first six years sterilizations per year increased from 11 to 116; total, 577; a yearly average of 96. During the succeeding years they have gradually increased from 182 in 1915 to the peak of 874 in 1935. The average during the past two decades has been 537 per year.

WHAT IS THE HUMAN BETTERMENT FOUNDATION ?

The Human Betterment Foundation is a non-profit corporation, organized under the laws of California. Its members, eminent in a wide range of professional and business activities, are as follows (members of the Board of Trustees being marked with an asterisk) :

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- A. D. Shamel, Physiologist, United States Department of Agriculture, Riverside.
- Oscar Ford, Former Mayor of Riverside, Riverside.
- Paul McBride Perigord, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles.
- R. B. Von KleinSmid, President of University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

This organization is not designed to take up original scientific research work, but rather to investigate the results and possibilities for human betterment by a safe, conservative application of the discoveries made by scientists, and to give this information to the public.

Its first major problem is to investigate the possibilities for race betterment by eugenic steri-

lization, and to publish the results. When the public is familiar with these facts, some other major subject will be substituted. The scope of the Foundation is as broad as its name indicates. It is restricted only to conservative, preventive work for humanity as distinguished from ordinary charity relief work or patchwork. Its goal is the constructive, practical advancement and betterment of human life, character, and citizenship, in such manner as to make for human happiness and progress.

The possibilities of fundamental, constructive, preventive work along these lines are broad. They are limited only by the ability and number of workers.

This Foundation is not designed to perpetuate any name or to be a monument to any individual or family; but to be a center from which effective, constructive work can be carried on by all who feel the importance of such work and are in a position to help either by the contribution of capital or by the contribution of talent. The articles of incorporation leave the future free from undue limitations of organization and policy.

The officers and trustees of this Foundation will be glad to confer with anyone who is interested in the work above outlined, or who may wish to use the opportunity afforded by this organization to realize his own ideals in the promotion of race betterment.

Suite 321, Pacific Southwest Building.

*Eugenic Sterilizations Performed in State Institutions
Under State Laws Up to January 1, 1937*

| State | Male | Female | Total |
|----------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Alabama | 129 | 95 | 224 |
| Arizona | 10 | 10 | 20 |
| California | 5,933 | 5,551 | 11,484 |
| Connecticut | 23 | 372 | 395 |
| Delaware | 263 | 231 | 494 |
| Idaho | 4 | 10 | 14 |
| Indiana | 321 | 228 | 549 |
| Iowa | 61 | 46 | 107 |
| Kansas | 1,039 | 711 | 1,750 |
| Maine | 14 | 115 | 129 |
| Michigan | 381 | 1,315 | 1,696 |
| Minnesota | 224 | 1,054 | 1,278 |
| Mississippi | 99 | 223 | 322 |
| Montana | 34 | 62 | 96 |
| Nebraska | 123 | 189 | 312 |
| New Hampshire | 45 | 281 | 326 |
| *New York | 1 | 41 | 42 |
| North Carolina | 65 | 325 | 390 |
| North Dakota | 84 | 250 | 334 |
| Oklahoma | 42 | 113 | 155 |
| Oregon | 378 | 727 | 1,105 |
| South Carolina | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| South Dakota | 110 | 194 | 304 |
| Utah | 46 | 60 | 106 |
| Vermont | 41 | 98 | 139 |
| Virginia | 1,077 | 1,557 | 2,634 |
| Washington | 31 | 165 | 196 |
| West Virginia | 0 | 10 | 10 |
| Wisconsin | 96 | 696 | 792 |
| Totals | 10,674 | 14,729 | 25,403 |

1. The above figures were furnished by state authorities.

2. In many states lacking sterilization laws, the state institutions sterilize patients with consent. No account is here taken of such operations, nor of those that are primarily therapeutic, not eugenic, in purpose.

3. These reports show an increase of official sterilizations in the United States for the year 1936, of 2,241.

Georgia has just enacted (1937) a sterilization law.

* The New York law was declared unconstitutional in 1918.

Addenda

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN STERILIZATION AND "BIRTH CONTROL"

There is a wide difference between sterilization and "birth control" by contraception. Unless this difference is recognized in any study of the subject, no reliable conclusions involving both can be drawn.

Eugenic sterilization, primarily, is applied by the state or with its sanction, to persons who would be likely to produce defective children. It protects such persons, their potential children, the state, and posterity. Such persons may not have the intelligence, the foresight, or the self-control, to handle contraceptives successfully, nor the ability to care for children intelligently. Sterilization is practically irreversible—permanent—and 100 per cent effective. It is the only reliable method of birth control which many defectives can use.

Birth control by contraceptive methods is voluntary and applied by the individual for his own purposes. It requires extreme care, intelligence, and a practical biological understanding of the problem. When not applied under definite instructions from a competent, experienced physician or nurse, after examination, it frequently results in failure. At best, what succeeds with one may fail with another, especially with the young and inexperienced.

Both sterilization and contraception have a place in modern society. Both demand careful consideration, but they apply to different classes of people and for different reasons. They should never be confused as merely parts of one program. The best results of each will be promoted by a frank recognition of their differences and the limitations of each.

THE LURE OF MEDICAL HISTORY†

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FOUNDER OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND OF THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA; OLDEST LIVING GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA (TOLAND MEDICAL COLLEGE, 1866)

UNVEILING OF BRONZE BUST OF DOCTOR WIDNEY

A MOST unusual event took place at the Los Angeles County Medical Association Tuesday noon, May 11.

The founder of the Los Angeles County Medical Association, who also founded the School of Medicine of the University of Southern California—Joseph Pomeroy Widney, A. M., M. D., D. D., LL. D., physician, soldier, leader, scholar, statesman, and grand old man of medicine—now

† A Twenty-five Years Ago column, made up of excerpts from the official journal of the California Medical Association of twenty-five years ago, is printed in each issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE. The column is one of the regular features of the Miscellany department, and its page number will be found on the front cover.

* For biographical notes concerning Dr. Joseph P. Widney, readers are referred to CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE (April, 1936, page 292, and May, 1936, page 396).