

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A Law for Human Genetics

To the Editor

Dear Sir:

It has been apparent for a long time that human genetics has important social applications. Counseling in human genetics fills a practical need for those able to obtain it. Clients have come in person to the Dight Institute from practically every state for this service. Adequate facilities to meet the demand should be present in every state, and eventually they will be established.

In Minnesota the Genetics Research Program at the Rochester State Hospital has developed a state-wide interest in genetic research and counseling far beyond what might be expected considering the minor importance of the disease investigated, Huntington's chorea, in the total health picture. Only a momentary descent from our academic towers is necessary to discover the popular interest in the subject of heredity and its social implications, and the desire for some sort of action in the field for the benefit of everyone.

Laws concerning marriage, divorce, state guardianship, and other topics which may be related to genetic changes in the population are formulated at the state and county levels. This is also true for regulations of the more conventional sort concerned with water pollution, epidemics and health problems of every description. Each state has its Board of Health which is technically responsible for the genetic health of the population as well as environmental factors such as parasites and sanitation. The various Boards of Health have been highly successful in their struggles with the environment but the gene has eluded them completely.

Dr. John S. Pearson, chief psychologist at the Mayo Clinic and president of the Minnesota Human Genetics League, led a successful movement intended to interest the State Board of Health in the usefulness of a human genetics unit in the State Board of Health and to obtain authorization in the form of a law for initiating such a unit. All state agencies wish to have their powers and duties clearly defined by acts of the legislature and such action is prerequisite to success. Wonderful cooperation from everyone approached was obtained and a bill authorizing the State Board of Health to conduct a Program for Study of Human Genetic Problems, and establishing an advisory committee was passed unanimously by the Minnesota House and Senate. The bill became a law on the twenty fourth of April, 1959 with the signature of Governor Freeman.

The new law hardly elevates the gene to the same exalted status as *E. coli* but it is official recognition that man has genes and that something can be learned about them and that presumably the information can be utilized to advantage.

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CORRECTION

Correction to the article by CURT STERN, The Chromosomes of Man, Reprinted in Volume 11, Number 2, Part 2 from the Journal of Medical Education.

The idiogram as figured consists of only 45 instead of 46 chromosomes. The 46th was correctly included in the engraver's proof but cut off at the right of the chart when the final copy was arranged by the printer!