

COLL. CAT. REPORT OF SELECT COMMITTEE

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TO WHOM WAS REFERRED A BILL TO PREVENT THE

Bind this cover in front,

MARRIAGE OF FIRST COUSINS,

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1869

MADE TO

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FEB. 6, 1869.

Kentucky

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BY SMITH M. HOBBS, M. D.

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IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1869.

Mr. HOBBS, from a select committee, to whom was referred a "Bill to prevent the marriage of first cousins," made the following report, which was ordered to be printed, and made special order for Friday, February 12th, viz:

The prosperity of every community demands, that not only its physical, but also its mental, moral, and hygienic condition, be promoted in every possible manner. In a physical point of view, a country may be prosperous; its coffers may be filled with gold; its broad and well-improved farms and stately mansions may everywhere greet the delighted vision, whilst there may be great deficiency in all that pertains to mental, moral, or physical health, without which, there can be no happiness or real prosperity.

It is manifestly our duty as legislators to search out any evils that may be quietly at work in our midst, disturbing the prosperity and happiness of the community, and to apply such remedies as will most surely and quickly abate the cause of the trouble.

Kentuckians are, proverbially, a go-ahead people, and in the wild hunt for profit, in the disposition of the dollars and cents, it is too often the case that the mental and moral status of the community is overlooked, even by legislators.

No doubt there are many evils that walk abroad in our midst, and that cry aloud for redress, that we pass heedlessly by; but, to my mind, there is none fraught with more fearful importance to the community at large than the one now under consideration. "It is the pestilence that walketh in darkness." It is, peradventure, the "unclean beast in the house of Israel."

The great reason why the importance of this subject has escaped attention is, simply because it has not been properly investigated. In fact, it has had but little attention bestowed on it by either legislator or citizen; but, upon a proper presentation of the subject in all of its bearings, I presume that there are few who would not start back in utter amazement at the fearful facts that will be revealed.

The crying evil of consanguineous marriages is found to exist, not only in our midst, but it prevails everywhere and in every country, but in some places more than others. We find it creeping insidiously alike among the rich as well as the poor, among the educated as well as among the ignorant. In some instances, the institution of marriage is even regulated by law, and in others by custom or interest. In some countries, and especially among the titled nobility of Europe, the practice of intermarriage has been kept up almost from time immemorial, for the mercenary purpose of retaining titles and property in the family, until many of those high-born and-high bred families have well nigh become extinct.

For a number of years in our own country, as well as in Europe, this subject has merited the attention and obtained the investigation of some of the best and most learned men of the age, who have made the results of their labors known; and it is to be regretted that these results cannot be collected together in a condensed form and made known; for such an array of facts as could be thus furnished would tend to convince every candid mind of the terrible consequences of the violation of the laws of nature and of God.

In order to understand more thoroughly the bearings of this subject in all of its width and breadth, I propose to investigate its philosophy to some extent.

“Like begets like.” “Each after its kind,” is one of the elementary laws of reproduction—a law that is as unfailling in its operations as any of the laws of nature, and all of the laws of nature are fixed and immutable. If it were not so, then there would be neither uniformity nor order in the operations of any of her laws. If it were not for the uniformity of this law, that “like begets like,” some human beings might have heads or hearts and others none. Others still might be brutes, or trees, or stones, when as now, according to this law, all are certain to be human beings, having one common system of anatomical structure and mental elements. This great law is summed up in the arrangement, that all things “shall bring forth after its kind; cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth, each after its kind.”

The produce of the oak is an acorn, which in turn produces an oak, but nothing else; and thus the same of all seeds and fruits and beasts and human beings. But for the law of the resemblance of the products to their parents, the farmer might plant corn and reap thorns, might sow stones and raise cattle; and human beings would be as apt to be beasts as human beings having fixed characters. But this after-its-

kind law causes every vegetable and animal to resemble its first parents, and renders human offspring to be men and women, and all human beings to be substantially alike. It causes children to inherit the features and constitutional peculiarities of their parents; and, indeed, the minuteness and accuracy of this transfer is truly astonishing. The same uniformity and certainty obtain here which everywhere follow cause and effect.

The fact of the transmissibility of the lineaments, of the stature, of the disposition, of the temperament, is so well known, that it is useless to allude to it here; for every one knows how the parent is photographed in the child; and not only are form, countenance, &c., transmitted from parent to child, but there is no fact in the history of the human family better attested than that disease, in all its appalling horrors, is handed from parent to offspring with unerring certainty. Every one knows that consumption, and scrofula, and insanity, and all that terrible host of diseases, known to be transmissible from parent to offspring, is inherited with as much certainty as that darkness follows the setting of the sun.

There is no truth in the history of the human family more fully established than that there is, among all human beings, an unvarying and perpetual tendency for certain diseases to propagate themselves through hereditary descent. We see this fact daily exemplified in our own neighborhoods, and in our own families even, where the blood of the parent is not poisoned and weakened by any consanguineous taint. The fact that family peculiarities, infirmities, and tendencies, either of body or mind, which may be so slight, on the part of parents, as to remain latent, become so exaggerated by this multiplication, this doubling, this intensifying of the same blood, that they are, in the child, prominent and ruinous defects. Though the correctness of the general law, that offspring inherit the mental and physical characteristics of their parents, is unquestionable, yet it is modified by certain other hereditary principles, one of which is, that the children of near relatives either fall far below their parentage or are malformed, idiotic, deaf, or dumb.

That all kinds of domestic animals are improved by crossing the breed, but deteriorate by "breeding in-and-in," is a fact well known to every tyro in stock-raising. This law also governs seeds and all that propagates. There is no fact better known, among horticulturists and farmers, than that all the improved varieties of seeds and vegetables are the result of proper crossing.

That this ordinance also governs man, is rendered apparent by nature's absolute requisition that every human being should have two parents, four grandparents, eight great grandparents, sixteen great great grandparents, and so on, except where, and as far as, the offspring of one common ancestry marry each other.

The fact is incontestably established, that the offspring of consanguineous marriages degenerates the parental standard, and that it needs no proof at all to convince the popular mind of its truth. I presume that there is not a gentleman in this House who does not know of some offspring of such marriage who is afflicted by some hereditary or other disease—who is not either deaf or dumb, or weak in body or mind.

There are, within the bounds of my acquaintance, several families who have intermarried with some of the ramifications of the same family, generally cousins, and the consequence is, that the entire families, and they are large, have degenerated, intellectually and physically; the men have become effeminate; have nearly ceased to have beard, and have the voice and stature of women; are feeble in body and in mind; are nearly imbeciles; while they are afflicted with epilepsy, scrofula, and consumption.

It is not in every instance, where marriages of this kind have taken place, that it has been attended with the great evils alluded to in one generation, or, perhaps, even in the second; but the proportion of known cases is so great that it warrants us in stating, that that class of diseases, known as hereditary, afflicted the progeny of such unions in a much greater ratio than it does those not bound by the ties of consanguinity.

One of the ablest and most authentic papers ever prepared on this subject was by Dr. Bemiss, then of Kentucky, and was written with especial reference to the status of the subject in our own State. He states, and his opinion was based upon carefully prepared statistics, "that these calamities—idiocy, deafness, dumbness, consumption, scrofula, &c.—increase and diminish with the increase and decrease of relationship, so as to fix the conclusion in his mind that multiplication of the same blood, by in-and-in marrying, does, incontestably, lead to mental degeneration of the offspring."

He states: "That in two hundred families that were not related, but were subjects of constitutional idiosyncracies, the proportion of defective children was 19.4 per cent.; while in one hundred and fifty-five families that were related, it was 23.9 per cent., showing a dif-

ference of 4.5 per cent. in favor of the former. Taking these facts as data, we must be convinced that the defects in the offspring increase as the degrees of consanguinity increase; and, in addition to this, the fact that all the contingent circumstances of health, habits, and proclivities of constitution, &c., are as liable to affect the one class as the other, we cannot well deny the influence of consanguinity to increase the defects; nor can we forbear to lift our voice against the violation of one of the great principles for the perpetuity and happiness of our race by the All-wise Creator.”

In a letter from Mr. Jacobs, the able and experienced Superintendent for Deaf Mutes in our own State—and every one is forced to admit that his testimony is entitled to very great respect—he states, “that sixteen per cent. of the deaf and dumb children in that institution are the offspring of cousins.” He also says, “that he has never seen all the offspring of persons so related free from some mental or physical disease.”

In an article read by Professor Morris before the New York State Medical Society in 1867, and which was published by the Legislature of that State for general distribution, it is stated, that, in the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in New York city, in which there were three hundred and three pupils, forty-four, or fourteen and a half per cent., were the offspring of cousins, the per centum corresponding nearly exactly with that of our own institution as stated by Professor Jacobs.

The same author, Professor Morris, states, that, in the Institution for the Deaf and Dumb in Hartford, Conn., the proportion was thirty-three per cent.

Dr. Wilbur, a noted author, and quoted by the same writer, says five per cent. of the idiots in society are the result of intermarriage of near relations; but these bear but a small proportion to the whole number. Idiocy is not as frequently the result of intermarriage as deaf-dumbness, blindness, deformity, &c.

Our own ex-Governor Magoffin, of whom we felt so justly proud, in his annual message for 1862, while advocating the passage of a law of this kind, said that the imbeciles, insane, deaf and dumb, and blind, in the different asylums in the State, who are the offspring of cousins, are from sixteen to twenty per cent. of the whole number.

A paper that was read a few years since before the Academy of Medicine, in Paris, by Dr. Meniere, physician of the Imperial Institute for the Deaf and Dumb in that city, affords very satisfactory views

on this subject. He says, if there be countries that contain ten times more deaf and dumb than others, it is impossible not to believe that there may be local causes capable of producing such a result. In such regions, we do actually find more cretins, as well as other forms of affliction; and wherever there are many cretins; wherever children usually die before the first year; wherever the cases of physical disability among military conscripts are very numerous, there we also find many deaf mutes. It is impossible to not establish a relation between these two facts; they are concordant; the same general causes tend to produce them; there is coherence among all these manifestations of the same character, viz: the vitiation of the species; the domination of vitality among individuals. We thus reach the culminating point of this great question, the solution of the general causes which exert an injurious effect on the human organism. Among these causes, there is one which plays an important part. I refer to the marriage between relations; to the consanguinity of husband and wife. As a proof of the correctness of his views, he refers to the Canton of Berne, in Switzerland, as an example of an isolated community, where consanguineous marriages prevail, and where cretinism and idiocy and deaf-dumbness are of so frequent occurrence.

Dr. Stark, a learned British writer, after comparing various localities, races, &c., says: "Whatever, therefore, the proximate cause of idiocy and insanity may be, it must be one not dependent on climate, or soil, or exposure, or geological formation, or on race. What, then, is most likely to be the cause of idiocy and insanity? What will account for the much greater prevalence of idiocy and insanity in England and in Scotland than in Ireland and in most other countries of the globe?" Speaking of Scotland in particular, he says: "There is one peculiarity in the social condition of the people of Scotland, which appears to me to be quite adequate to explain the excessive tendency to idiocy and insanity among its population. That is, the marriage of blood relations. This prevails in England and Scotland to a greater extent than in any other country of the globe."

Now, it is a well-known fact, with which every medical man must be familiar, that the children resulting from the intermarriage of blood relations are not only more delicate, and more liable to scrofula and brain diseases than other children, but are much more frequently born idiotic, blind, deaf and dumb.

Can we, therefore, hesitate to believe that the delicacy of organization, which is the result of such unions, should manifest itself in the

production of a larger number of idiots at birth, or during childhood, or a greater tendency to insanity in riper years, than in those countries where intermarriages are not so common? I am inclined to regard it as the most likely proximate cause of idiocy at birth, of fatuity from the effects of brain disease in childhood, and of insanity in riper years.

Dr. Buxom, another noted English author, says, in speaking of some districts in England, Scotland, Norway, and Switzerland: "The proportion of children born deaf and dumb is very large; for here the natives intermarry from age to age; from the cradle to the grave, the same people are found fixed to the same spot, pursuing the same occupation; no enterprise leads them abroad; nothing tempts the native of other countries to come and cast his lot among them. It is a continual process of transmitting the same blood and sinew from generation to generation, and the lowering of the standard of the race is inevitable."

The apparent results of frequent marriages within a confined circle have been noted in some royal families, both in ancient and modern times. The fact is well known, that, for the purpose of retaining property, preserving titles, &c., in such families, it has been made a kind of necessity for marriages to be confined within the bounds of the family. A more striking example, perhaps, could not be selected of the evil effects of such a custom than is found to exist in the present ruling dynasty of England. Almost from time immemorial, at least as far back as the beginning of the House of Hanover, have the kings and queens of England married their cousins. George III, the grandfather of Victoria, and himself the son of cousins, is well known to have been the subject of the most terrible afflictions, both mental and physical. He was not only afflicted with scrofula, in one of its most appalling forms, but, as the shades of life began to close around him, he became a confirmed and hopeless imbecile, blind and deaf. He also married his cousin, of whom a number of children were born, who were also afflicted with scrofula, mental and bodily weakness. George IV, the eldest son of these cousins, with all of the advantages that the exalted position his royal father could give him in the way of education, books, travels, &c., was nothing more than a self-conceited simpleton. He, too, married his cousin, the Princess of Brunswick, and hence Victoria, of whom the report has been coming over the waters that she has frequent fits of mental derangement. Victoria, too, married her cousin, the Prince of Saxe-Coburg; and

what can be said of their progeny, with all the advantages that royalty can give them? There is not one of them of whom the people of England can feel any pride. They are afflicted with scrofula and consumption, and are weak in body and mind. It is this same old dynasty, the members of which, through a long lineage, have married and intermarried without interruption; and the kings and their families have become so universally affected with scrofula, in some of its multifarious forms, that that disease obtained the name of "king's evil," a name by which it even goes in this republican land.

But it is useless any further to quote authors upon this subject, or to recite cases, to prove the pernicious and enervating effect upon the offspring resulting from the intermarriage of near relations.

If it were necessary, hundreds of especial cases could be related, proving, beyond the possibility of a doubt, the truth of the position that we have taken. In the bounds of my own district, and immediately within my own acquaintance, I can enumerate several cases bearing immediately upon this question.

In one family, where the parents are cousins and entirely healthy in body and mind, one of the children is dumb.

In another family, where the parents are also cousins and entirely healthy, two (and all) of the children are deaf and dumb.

In another family, there are three deaf and dumb children, the offspring of cousins.

In another family, the heads of which are cousins, two, out of four children, are hopeless epileptics, and the third one has an incurable constitutional malady.

Some may say that these cases are entirely accidental; but I will ask if it would not be exceedingly strange that all the cases of deaf-dumbness, occurring in a prescribed bound, should be confined to families in which the parents are near relatives? No, it is not accident at work at all; but it is as clearly the legitimate sequence of a direct cause, as it is possible for anything to be.

From what has been said, is it not an indisputable fact that this evil is a manifest violation of the laws of nature, and one of so grave a character as to demand the attention of the philanthropist, the friend of sanitary reform, and the legislator?

The philanthropist should point out the evil consequences resulting from marriages of this kind, viz: Misery to the offspring and utter destruction of the fairest hopes of the parent. The friend of sanitary reform should warn all, that if they would secure a sound body, and,

consequently, an active mind, in their children, they must avoid this crying evil. And, as a last resort, inasmuch as the warnings of the philanthropist and the friend of health have been of no avail, it is now high time for the legislator to come down with the strong arm of the law, and put an end to this great evil.

On this subject, the learned Board of Commissioners for the Institution for the Education of Feeble-minded Children, after stating that, according to the most reliable statistics, from "ten to twenty per cent. of the idiotic, deaf, dumb, and blind are the result of this pernicious practice," use the following applicable and forcible words: "Shall the State continue to legalize matrimonial connections which, by the fixed and irresistible laws of nature, produce an afflicted offspring—deaf mutes, blind, or imbecile children—and then, at great expense, establish institutions for their relief? The idea is too preposterous to be entertained for a moment, when once the fact is ascertained and presented. We assert that reliable statistics will fully support the statement, that from ten to twenty per cent. of the deaf mutes and blind children, and a still larger proportion of the feeble in mind and body, or in both, are the children of near blood relations—most commonly of first cousins—occasionally of second or of third cousins."

Such is the language of these gentlemen, learned in their profession and of enlarged experience, and whose opportunities for observation on this subject enable them to speak with authority.

Will the people of Kentucky continue to countenance or sanction a practice fraught with such fearful results, and upon which God himself has placed so terrible a mark of condemnation?

The Committee cannot hesitate for one moment to urge, with all the earnestness that they possess, upon this Legislature the passage of this bill.

SMITH M. HOBBS, *Chairman.*



