

CHAPTER IX

A SHORT CHAPTER

ROUND about the year 1913 Eugenics was turned from a fad to a fashion. Then, if I may so summarise the situation, the joke began in earnest. The organising mind which we have seen considering the problem of slum population, the popular material and the possibility of protests, felt that the time had come to open the campaign. Eugenics began to appear in big headlines in the daily Press, and big pictures in the illustrated papers. A foreign gentleman named Bolce, living at Hampstead, was advertised on a huge scale as having every intention of being the father of the Superman. It turned out to be a Superwoman, and was called Eugénette. The parents were described as devoting themselves to the production of perfect pre-natal conditions. They "eliminated everything from their lives which did not tend towards complete happiness." Many might indeed be ready to do this ; but in the voluminous contemporary journalism on the subject I can find no detailed notes about how it is done. Communications were opened with Mr. H. G. Wells, with Dr. Saleeby, and apparently with Dr. Karl Pearson. Every quality desired in the ideal baby was carefully cultivated in the parents. The problem

of a sense of humour was felt to be a matter of great gravity. The Eugenist couple, naturally fearing they might be deficient on this side, were so truly scientific as to have resort to specialists. To cultivate a sense of fun, they visited Harry Lauder, and then Wilkie Bard, and afterwards George Robey ; but all, it would appear, in vain. To the newspaper reader, however, it looked as if the names of Metchnikoff and Steinmetz and Karl Pearson would soon be quite as familiar as those of Robey and Lauder and Bard. Arguments about these Eugenic authorities, reports of the controversies at the Eugenic Congress, filled countless columns. The fact that Mr. Bolce, the creator of perfect pre-natal conditions, was afterwards sued in a law-court for keeping his own flat in conditions of filth and neglect, cast but a slight and momentary shadow upon the splendid dawn of the science. It would be vain to record any of the thousand testimonies to its triumph. In the nature of things, this should be the longest chapter in the book, or rather the beginning of another book. It should record, in numberless examples, the triumphant popularisation of Eugenics in England. But as a matter of fact this is not the first chapter but the last. And this must be a very short chapter, because the whole of this story was cut short. A very curious thing happened. England went to war.

This would in itself have been a sufficiently irritating interruption in the early life of Eugenette, and in the early establishment of Eugenics. But a far more

dreadful and disconcerting fact must be noted. With whom, alas, did England go to war? England went to war with the Superman in his native home. She went to war with that very land of scientific culture from which the very ideal of a Superman had come. She went to war with the whole of Dr. Steinmetz, and presumably with at least half of Dr. Karl Pearson. She gave battle to the birthplace of nine-tenths of the professors who were the prophets of the new hope of humanity. In a few weeks the very name of a professor was a matter for hissing and low plebeian mirth. The very name of Nietzsche, who had held up this hope of something superhuman to humanity, was laughed at for all the world as if he had been touched with lunacy. A new mood came upon the whole people; a mood of marching, of spontaneous soldierly vigilance and democratic discipline, moving to the faint tune of bugles far away. Men began to talk strangely of old and common things, of the counties of England, of its quiet landscapes, of motherhood and the half-buried religion of the race. Death shone on the land like a new daylight, making all things vivid and visibly dear. And in the presence of this awful actuality it seemed, somehow or other, as if even Mr. Bolce and the Eugenic baby were things unaccountably far-away and almost, if one may say so, funny.

Such a revulsion requires explanation, and it may be briefly given. There was a province of Europe which had carried nearer to perfection than any other the type of order and foresight that are the subject

of this book. It had long been the model State of all those more rational moralists who saw in science the ordered salvation of society. It was admittedly ahead of all other States in social reform. All the systematic social reforms were professedly and proudly borrowed from it. Therefore when this province of Prussia found it convenient to extend its imperial system to the neighbouring and neutral State of Belgium, all these scientific enthusiasts had a privilege not always granted to mere theorists. They had the gratification of seeing their great Utopia at work, on a grand scale and very close at hand. They had not to wait, like other evolutionary idealists, for the slow approach of something nearer to their dreams; or to leave it merely as a promise to posterity. They had not to wait for it as for a distant thing like the vision of a future state; but in the flesh they had seen their Paradise. And they were very silent for five years.

The thing died at last, and the stench of it stank to the sky. It might be thought that so terrible a savour would never altogether leave the memories of men; but men's memories are unstable things. It may be that gradually these dazed dupes will gather again together, and attempt again to believe their dreams and disbelieve their eyes. There may be some whose love of slavery is so ideal and disinterested that they are loyal to it even in its defeat. Wherever a fragment of that broken chain is found, they will be found hugging it. But there are limits set in the everlasting mercy to him who has been once deceived and

a second time deceives himself. They have seen their paragons of science and organisation playing their part on land and sea ; showing their love of learning at Louvain and their love of humanity at Lille. For a time at least they have believed the testimony of their senses. And if they do not believe now, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead ; though all the millions who died to destroy Prussianism stood up and testified against it.