CHAPTER III

TRUE HISTORY OF A EUGENIST

He does not live in a dark lonely tower by the sea, from which are heard the screams of vivisected men and women. On the contrary, he lives in Mayfair. He does not wear great goblin spectacles that magnify his eyes to moons or diminish his neighbours to beetles. When he is more dignified he wears a single eyeglass; when more intelligent, a wink. He is not indeed wholly without interest in heredity and Eugenical biology; but his studies and experiments in this science have specialised almost exclusively in *equus celer*, the rapid or running horse. He is not a doctor; though he employs doctors to work up a case for Eugenics, just as he employs doctors to correct the errors of his dinner. He is not a lawyer, though unfortunately often a magistrate. He is not an author or a journalist; though he not infrequently owns a newspaper. He is not a soldier, though he may have a commission in the yeomanry; nor is he generally a gentleman, though often a nobleman. His wealth now commonly comes from a large staff of employed persons who scurry about in big buildings while he is playing golf. But he very often laid the foundations of his fortune in a very curious and poetical way, the nature of which
I have never fully understood. It consisted in his walking about the street without a hat and going up to another man and saying, "Suppose I have two hundred whales out of the North Sea." To which the other man replied, "And let us imagine that I am in possession of two thousand elephants' tusks." They then exchange, and the first man goes up to a third man and says, "Supposing me to have lately come into the possession of two thousand elephants' tusks, would you, etc.?" If you play this game well, you become very rich; if you play it badly you have to kill yourself or try your luck at the Bar. The man I am speaking about must have played it well, or at any rate successfully.

He was born about 1860; and has been a member of Parliament since about 1890. For the first half of his life he was a Liberal; for the second half he has been a Conservative; but his actual policy in Parliament has remained largely unchanged and consistent. His policy in Parliament is as follows: he takes a seat in a room downstairs at Westminster, and takes from his breast pocket an excellent cigar-case, from which in turn he takes an excellent cigar. This he lights, and converses with other owners of such cigars on *equus celer* or such matters as may afford him entertainment. Two or three times in the afternoon a bell rings; whereupon he deposits the cigar in an ashtray with great particularity, taking care not to break the ash, and proceeds to an upstairs room, flanked with two passages. He then walks into whichever of the two passages shall be indicated to him by a young
man of the upper classes, holding a slip of paper. Having gone into this passage he comes out of it again, is counted by the young man and proceeds downstairs again; where he takes up the cigar once more, being careful not to break the ash. This process, which is known as Representative Government, has never called for any great variety in the manner of his life. Nevertheless, while his Parliamentary policy is unchanged, his change from one side of the House to the other did correspond with a certain change in his general policy in commerce and social life. The change of the party label is by this time quite a trifling matter; but there was in his case a change of philosophy or at least a change of project; though it was not so much becoming a Tory, as becoming rather the wrong kind of Socialist. He is a man with a history. It is a sad history, for he is certainly a less good man than he was when he started. That is why he is the man who is really behind Eugenics. It is because he has degenerated that he has come to talking of Degeneration.

In his Radical days (to quote from one who corresponded in some ways to this type) he was a much better man, because he was a much less enlightened one. The hard impudence of his first Manchester Individualism was softened by two relatively humane qualities; the first was a much greater manliness in his pride; the second was a much greater sincerity in his optimism. For the first point, the modern capitalist is merely industrial; but this man was also industrious.
He was proud of hard work; nay, he was even proud of low work—if he could speak of it in the past and not the present. In fact, he invented a new kind of Victorian snobbishness, an inverted snobbishness. While the snobs of Thackeray turned Muggins into De Mogyns, while the snobs of Dickens wrote letters describing themselves as officers' daughters "accustomed to every luxury—except spelling," the Individualist spent his life in hiding his prosperous parents. He was more like an American plutocrat when he began; but he has since lost the American simplicity. The Frenchman works until he can play. The American works until he can't play; and then thanks the devil, his master, that he is donkey enough to die in harness. But the Englishman, as he has since become, works until he can pretend that he never worked at all. He becomes as far as possible another person—a country gentleman who has never heard of his shop; one whose left hand holding a gun knows not what his right hand doeth in a ledger. He uses a peerage as an alias, and a large estate as a sort of alibi. A stern Scotch minister remarked concerning the game of golf, with a terrible solemnity of manner, "the man who plays golf—he neglects his business, he forsakes his wife, he forgets his God." He did not seem to realise that it is the chief aim of many a modern capitalist's life to forget all three.

This abandonment of a boyish vanity in work, this substitution of a senile vanity in indolence, this is the
first respect in which the rich Englishman has fallen. He was more of a man when he was at least a master-workman and not merely a master. And the second important respect in which he was better at the beginning is this: that he did then, in some hazy way, half believe that he was enriching other people as well as himself. The optimism of the early Victorian Individualists was not wholly hypocritical. Some of the clearest-headed and blackest-hearted of them, such as Malthus, saw where things were going, and boldly based their Manchester city on pessimism instead of optimism. But this was not the general case; most of the decent rich of the Bright and Cobden sort did have a kind of confused faith that the economic conflict would work well in the long run for everybody. They thought the troubles of the poor were incurable by State action (they thought that of all troubles), but they did not cold-bloodedly contemplate the prospect of those troubles growing worse and worse. By one of those tricks or illusions of the brain to which the luxurious are subject in all ages, they sometimes seemed to feel as if the populace had triumphed symbolically in their own persons. They blasphemously thought about their thrones of gold what can only be said about a cross—that they, being lifted up, would draw all men after them. They were so full of the romance that anybody could be Lord Mayor, that they seemed to have slipped into thinking that everybody could. It seemed as if a hundred Dick Whittingtons, accompanied by a hundred cats, could all be accom-
modated at the Mansion House. It was all nonsense; but it was not (until later) all humbug.

Step by step, however, with a horrid and increasing clearness, this man discovered what he was doing. It is generally one of the worst discoveries a man can make. At the beginning, the British plutocrat was probably quite as honest in suggesting that every tramp carried a magic cat like Dick Whittington, as the Bonapartist patriot was in saying that every French soldier carried a marshal’s baton in his knapsack. But it is exactly here that the difference and the danger appears. There is no comparison between a well-managed thing like Napoleon’s army and an unmanageable thing like modern competition. Logically, doubtless, it was impossible that every soldier should carry a marshal’s baton; they could not all be marshals any more than they could all be mayors. But if the French soldier did not always have a baton in his knapsack, he always had a knapsack. But when that Self-Helper who bore the adorable name of Smiles told the English tramp that he carried a coronet in his bundle, the English tramp had an unanswerable answer. He pointed out that he had no bundle. The powers that ruled him had not fitted him with a knapsack, any more than they had fitted him with a future—or even a present. The destitute Englishman, so far from hoping to become anything, had never been allowed even to be anything. The French soldier’s ambition may have been in practice not only a short, but even a deliberately shortened ladder, in which
the top rungs were knocked out. But for the English it was the bottom rungs that were knocked out, so that they could not even begin to climb. And sooner or later, in exact proportion to his intelligence, the English plutocrat began to understand not only that the poor were impotent, but that their impotence had been his only power. The truth was not merely that his riches had left them poor; it was that nothing but their poverty could have been strong enough to make him rich. It is this paradox, as we shall see, that creates the curious difference between him and every other kind of robber.

I think it is no more than justice to him to say that the knowledge, where it has come to him, has come to him slowly; and I think it came (as most things of common sense come) rather vaguely and as in a vision—that is, by the mere look of things. The old Cobdenite employer was quite within his rights in arguing that earth is not heaven, that the best obtainable arrangement might contain many necessary evils; and that Liverpool and Belfast might be growing more prosperous as a whole in spite of pathetic things that might be seen there. But I simply do not believe he has been able to look at Liverpool and Belfast and continue to think this: that is why he has turned himself into a sham country gentleman. Earth is not heaven, but the nearest we can get to heaven ought not to look like hell; and Liverpool and Belfast look like hell, whether they are or not. Such cities might be growing prosperous as a whole, though a few citizens
were more miserable. But it was more and more broadly apparent that it was exactly and precisely as a whole that they were not growing more prosperous, but only the few citizens who were growing more prosperous by their increasing misery. You could not say a country was becoming a white man's country when there were more and more black men in it every day. You could not say a community was more and more masculine when it was producing more and more women. Nor can you say that a city is growing richer and richer when more and more of its inhabitants are very poor men. There might be a false agitation founded on the pathos of individual cases in a community pretty normal in bulk. But the fact is that no one can take a cab across Liverpool without having a quite complete and unified impression that the pathos is not a pathos of individual cases, but a pathos in bulk. People talk of the Celtic sadness; but there are very few things in Ireland that look so sad as the Irishman in Liverpool. The desolation of Tara is cheery compared with the desolation of Belfast. I recommend Mr. Yeats and his mournful friends to turn their attention to the pathos of Belfast. I think if they hung up the harp that once in Lord Furness's factory, there would be a chance of another string breaking.

Broadly, and as things bulk to the eye, towns like Leeds, if placed beside towns like Rouen or Florence, or Chartres, or Cologne, do actually look like beggars walking among burghers. After that overpowering I
and unpleasant impression it is really useless to argue that they are richer because a few of their parasites get rich enough to live somewhere else. The point may be put another way, thus: that it is not so much that these more modern cities have this or that monopoly of good or evil; it is that they have every good in its fourth-rate form and every evil in its worst form. For instance, that interesting weekly paper *The Nation* amiably rebuked Mr. Belloc and myself for suggesting that revelry and the praise of fermented liquor were more characteristic of Continental and Catholic communities than of communities with the religion and civilisation of Belfast. It said that if we would "cross the border" into Scotland, we should find out our mistake. Now, not only have I crossed the border, but I have had considerable difficulty in crossing the road in a Scotch town on a festive evening. Men were literally lying like piled-up corpses in the gutters, and from broken bottles whisky was pouring down the drains. I am not likely, therefore, to attribute a total and arid abstinence to the whole of industrial Scotland. But I never said that drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. I said that moderate drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. In other words, I say of the common type of Continental citizen, not that he is the only person who is drinking, but that he is the only person who knows how to drink. Doubtless gin is as much a feature of Hoxton as beer is a feature of Munich. But who is the connoisseur who prefers the gin of Hoxton to the beer of Munich?
Doubtless the Protestant Scotch ask for "Scotch," as the men of Burgundy ask for Burgundy. But do we find them lying in heaps on each side of the road when we walk through a Burgundian village? Do we find the French peasant ready to let Burgundy escape down a drain-pipe? Now this one point, on which I accept The Nation's challenge, can be exactly paralleled on almost every point by which we test a civilisation. It does not matter whether we are for alcohol or against it. On either argument Glasgow is more objectionable than Rouen. The French abstainer makes less fuss; the French drinker gives less offence. It is so with property, with war, with everything. I can understand a teetotaler being horrified, on his principles, at Italian wine-drinking. I simply cannot believe he could be more horrified at it than at Hoxton gin-drinking. I can understand a Pacifist, with his special scruples, disliking the militarism of Belfort. I flatly deny that he can dislike it more than the militarism of Berlin. I can understand a good Socialist hating the petty cares of the distributed peasant property. I deny that any good Socialist can hate them more than he hates the large cares of Rockefeller. That is the unique tragedy of the plutocratic state to-day; it has no successes to hold up against the failures it alleges to exist in Latin or other methods. You can (if you are well out of his reach) call the Irish rustic debased and superstitious. I defy you to contrast his debasement and superstition with the citizenship and enlightenment of the English rustic.
To-day the rich man knows in his heart that he is a cancer and not an organ of the State. He differs from all other thieves or parasites for this reason: that the brigand who takes by force wishes his victims to be rich. But he who wins by a one-sided contract actually wishes them to be poor. Rob Roy in a cavern, hearing a company approaching, will hope (or if in a pious mood, pray) that they may come laden with gold or goods. But Mr. Rockefeller, in his factory, knows that if those who pass are laden with goods they will pass on. He will therefore (if in a pious mood) pray that they may be destitute, and so be forced to work his factory for him for a starvation wage. It is said (and also, I believe, disputed) that Blücher riding through the richer parts of London exclaimed, "What a city to sack!" But Blücher was a soldier if he was a bandit. The true sweater feels quite otherwise. It is when he drives through the poorest parts of London that he finds the streets paved with gold, being paved with prostrate servants; it is when he sees the grey lean leagues of Bow and Poplar that his soul is uplifted and he knows he is secure. This is not rhetoric, but economics.

I repeat that up to a point the profiteer was innocent because he was ignorant; he had been lured on by easy and accommodating events. He was innocent as the new Thane of Glamis was innocent, as the new Thane of Cawdor was innocent; but the King—— The modern manufacturer, like Macbeth, decided to march on, under the mute menace of the
heavens. He knew that the spoil of the poor was in his houses; but he could not, after careful calculation, think of any way in which they could get it out of his houses without being arrested for housebreaking. He faced the future with a face flinty with pride and impenitence. This period can be dated practically by the period when the old and genuine Protestant religion of England began to fail; and the average business man began to be agnostic, not so much because he did not know where he was, as because he wanted to forget. Many of the rich took to scepticism exactly as the poor took to drink; because it was a way out. But in any case, the man who had made a mistake not only refused to unmake it, but decided to go on making it. But in this he made yet another most amusing mistake, which was the beginning of all Eugenics.