

The Midwife.

EUGENICS IN ANCIENT GREECE.

The British Medical Journal, in an interesting leading article, states that Dr. M. Moissidès, of Constantinople, has described in a recent number of a Greek contemporary "the measures adopted by the ancient Greeks to secure the health and vigour of the race. These show that they were a good deal more advanced and more thoroughgoing in the application of eugenic doctrine than we are even at the present day. Great attention was given to the matter by statesmen and philosophers, as well as physicians, and a keen interest in the matter was taken by women. In the regulation of marriage, careful selection, natural and artificial, was recommended by the great thinkers of ancient Greece, and this was enforced in some places with excessive rigour. In Crete the handsomest and most robust of each stock were compelled to intermarry, with the object of perpetuating a fine type. It was recognized that puericulture before procreation was the most important part of eugenics. Lycurgus forbade unions which might imperil the vigour of a military people or taint the purity of an aristocratic race. A heavy fine was imposed on King Archidamus because he had taken to wife a woman of short stature, and thus risked giving to Sparta 'kinglings in place of kings.' The authority for this is Plutarch, in his treatise on the education of children. The same author, in his life of Lycurgus (North's translation), says that 'Beginning afar off, he first considered the state of marriage and the generation of children. . . . First of all he willed that the maidens should harden their bodies with exercise of running, wrestling, throwing the bar, and casting the dart, to the end that the fruit wherewith they might be afterwards conceived, taking nourishment of a strong and lusty body, should shoot out and spread the better; and that they, by gathering strength thus by exercises, should more easily away with the pains of child-bearing.' The child was inspected after birth by the elders among his kindred, and if they found him 'deformed, misshapen, or lean, or pale, they sent him to be thrown in a deep pit of water which they commonly called Apothetas, and as a man would say the common house of office; holding opinion it was neither good for the

child nor yet for the common weal that it should live, considering from his birth he was not well made nor given to be strong, healthful, nor lusty of body all his life long.'

"Plato in his *Laws* says 'the State alone should regulate marriages, not according to the will of the parties, but solely in view of the general good of the nation.' He held that it was the duty of the magistrates to choose the bravest men and the most beautiful women so as to obtain specially good offspring. Aristotle wrote to the same effect.

"Although not exactly agreed as to the proper age for marriage, all the Greek authors condemn unions between parties either too young or too old. Too early marriage was considered very injurious for the species as well as the individual. Aristotle says the children of such unions are weakly, small, and bodily incomplete. On the other hand, he says that men advanced in years produce only beings incomplete in body and mind, while the offspring of very old men are weakly. At Athens, although the free consent of the contracting parties was necessary, a minute examination of the bodies of both was made before the union was sanctioned. Physical exercises were enjoined on women, especially in Sparta. At Teos there was co-education, the girls mingling with the boys not only in lessons, but in exercises. In other places they competed with the young men in the palæstra. It would appear that women ceased to devote themselves to gymnastics, at least in public, when they were married."

Midwives seem to have played a great part in arranging suitable marriages.

"Athenæus of Tarsus, a celebrated physician, insisted on a careful preparation of mind as well as body in those who wished to beget offspring. The mind must be calm, free from anxiety or weariness. The body required exercise, sufficient but not tiring, and good nourishing food, easy of digestion. Over-indulgence was condemned, and it was enjoined that women should be allowed an interval between conceptions sufficient to enable them to keep their health so that they might bring forth vigorous offspring. This was also insisted on by Soranus of Ephesus, the greatest gynæcologist of antiquity. . . . It would be difficult to better these instructions."

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