



THE TRIBE OF ISHMAEL

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In 1877 Dugdale published the story of the Jukes, calling it a study on Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity, and giving in it the sociological history of six hundred people, all descended from five sisters, showing how the same anti-social traits have continually appeared for six generations. He said that these "Jukes" were but a few of a big class.

A little later, in the same year, a minister of the gospel in Indianapolis, Indiana, read the Juke book and was very much impressed by the description of the folk and the generalization drawn by Dugdale. At about the same time he found the following case of destitution in that city. The following is quoted from his diary:

A family, composed of a man, two children, the woman's sister and child, the man's mother, blind, all in one room ten feet square. One bed, a stove, no other furniture. When found they had no coal, no food. Dirty, filthy, because of no fire, no soap, no towels. It was the most abject poverty. I have never seen anything like it. We carried supplies to them.

Two days later in his diary:

The case alluded to under the date of Friday seems to be a case similar to that of the "Jukes." I went to the office of the township trustee and found them under the name of the Ishmaelites.

The story of how the name "Ishmaelite" had come on the books of the township trustee is of interest. I may add at this point that in Indiana the township trustee is the official whose duty it is to oversee the giving of poor relief. From 1800 to 1850 many families from eastern Kentucky and southern Ohio for divers reasons were moving west. Many of these were the industrious, ambitious, hard-working peoples who were moving on to make a new home "further west." These are not of interest to us sociologically. Some of these had left their homes with no preparation for a journey across what was in those days almost a wilderness. And so many of them were forced to beg for food and sustenance when they came to a settlement. Indianapolis was the first big "stopping place," and the people

were generous. And so Indianapolis came to be noted as a place where the people were friendly and very willing to help others who too were moving west into new habitats. This friendliness and generosity were soon to be taken advantage of and wanderers came to Indianapolis knowing that they would be cared for. During this period then Indianapolis became the home of many families who were dissatisfied with the harder struggle for existence in the developing country in Kentucky and Ohio and those who had the restless wandering spirit. These latter could travel when the weather was good and return to Indianapolis for the winter and live through this period by begging in the city just as in the summer they begged their way on the roads. There were quite a number of these families who disregarded the law of the land, who did much as they wanted to do and cared little for the opinion of others. They wandered from place to place. The men were shiftless; the women, immoral, and the children, ill-fed and clothed, the typical feeble-minded people who are so easily recognized today. How many of these families there were is not known but a rough estimate would place it at not less than four hundred. It is these families and their offspring and interconnections that formed the greater part of the pauper population of Indianapolis of years ago.

The amount of poor relief given in Indianapolis had become so great that in 1876 a systematic effort was made to study this pauperism in the city and make plans to reduce it. A system of historical records was devised covering the names and social condition of these applicants for relief; making special note of all relatives, this for the purpose of finding any who might help the applicant. Visitors were also employed to call at the homes of the applicants to make careful investigations. The frequency with which the same names appeared in the lists of relatives of applicants and the family likenesses of individual applicants soon led to the conclusion that these paupers were one large closely related group and so received the name, "the Ishmaelites," from the Ishmael family, the name of the central and worst family of these paupers. It was at this time that the Rev. O. C. McCulloch became interested in these people as mentioned above, saw the similarity of them to the Jukes, noting, however, the difference that this large set of people came from several hundred different family heads whereas the Jukes had all come from the one mother with five daughters.

In 1888, McCulloch read a paper at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections at Buffalo, presenting a diagram where thirty different family groups of paupers had been traced out covering about two hundred and fifty separate families or households. He says,

The central family—that which gives its name to the Tribe of Ishmael—first appears in Indianapolis about 1840. The original family stem, of which we have scant records as far back as 1790, is then in Kentucky, having come from Maryland through Pennsylvania. John Ishmael married a half-breed woman and came to Marion County, Indiana, about 1840. He was diseased and could go no further. Three of his sons married three sisters from a pauper family named Smith.

Since 1840, this family has had a pauper record. They have been in the almshouse, the House of Refuge, the Woman's Reformatory, the penitentiaries and have received continuous aid from the township. They are intermarried with the other members of this group and with two hundred and fifty other families. In this family history are murders, a large number of illegitimacies and of prostitutes. They are generally diseased. The children die young. They live by petty stealing, begging, ash-gathering. In summer they "gypsy" or travel in wagons east or west. In the fall they return. They have been known to live in hollow trees or the river bottoms or in empty houses.

In this sketch three things will be evident: First, the wandering blood from the half-breed mother; in the second generation the poison and passion that probably came with her. Second, the licentiousness which characterizes all the men and women, and the diseased and physically weakened condition. From this result mental weakness, general incapacity and unfitness for hard work. And, third, this condition is met by the benevolent public with almost unlimited public and private aid, thus encouraging them in this idle, wandering life, and in the propagation of similarly disposed children.

Thus McCulloch tells of the conditions in 1888. Soon after this report McCulloch died and the study stopped at that point. Some of the original data have been lost; the official records are mainly extant. About 1915, the Eugenic Record Office took up the study of the Tribe of Ishmael at the point where it had been dropped at McCulloch's death and the work has been carried on to the present except during the time of the participation of the United States in the World War.

The present investigation has shown that the different families of the Tribe came to Indiana, separately in most cases, on the general tide of immigration west from the original thirteen colonies along the seaboard just following the War of the Revolution. The early immigration into Indiana was mainly from southwestern Ohio and Kentucky. These people in turn had come either from the Carolinas through the Cumberland Gap or Tennessee or from Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, overlaid by way of the Potomac River, over the mountains and then down the Ohio River. The make-up of the population of Virginia in Colonial days gives a clue to the origin of the Ishmaelites of Indiana. Labor was scarce in Virginia at that time and the Virginia Company to fulfil its contract brought to this country "idlers" and members of the classes in England who were "chargeable, dangerous and troublesome to the State," and youthful vagabonds and later convicted criminals, some political but more the common, the anti-social, these latter being sent here to serve out their terms and then to

be set free in this country. After 1650, the deportation of confirmed criminals, i.e., felons, to the American Colonies was a common practice.

That not all of these anti-social persons sent to the Colonies were men is shown by an entry, one of many, of a ship leaving Lieth, England, in 1692 "for Virginia, holding 50 lewd women out of the houses of correction and 30 others, who walked the streets after ten at night." This deportation continued until about 1770 but there are no figures as to the number who came here. In the lists of criminals that are now extant, some of the family names of the Tribe are found and very many more names are found in the lists of servants, i.e., people indentured or sold, because of criminal acts in England, for a term of years to planters. Although no actual lineage connection between these individual names and the Tribe family heads has been made the fact is interesting and suggestive of much. It is reasonable to assume that some of the Tribe families have gone back to these paupers, criminals and prostitutes sent to the Colonies. Some of the Ishmael names are very uncommon, which fact aids in this conclusion.

It is estimated that the Tribe numbered six thousand people in 1885, coming from about four hundred different family heads. Today no estimate of the number of Ishmaels can be made because many of the lines of descent have been lost and so cannot be traced, but the number would not be less than ten thousand. They are now found mainly in Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Iowa and Kansas.

There are three outstanding characteristics of the members of the Tribe; pauperism, licentiousness and gypsying. In a paper such as this, statistics and family histories are of little value to tell the story and are out of place. Cases could be cited endlessly where a family for generation after generation have been professional beggars and paupers, receiving both public and private relief. The names of these families are found year after year on the township trustee books and soon the children, now as parents, appear under their own names, asking for help. In the same way the professional beggars tour the town both in the residential and business districts with always a pitiful tale, which never bears investigation, sometimes the eyes washed with bluestone water to make them inflamed and the individual claiming blindness, or an injury to the hand or foot, kept irritated for months as a plea for help and an excuse for unemployment. There is hardly a family in the Tribe that has not had some beggars; in many of the families almost all the members are adept in the art of begging and have piled their trade for years. They always carried a basket, sometimes with dirty soap or bluing as a pretext to call, but the basket was ready to hold anything that would be given, either clothing, food or money. As blindness has been

quite common in several families of the Tribe, a familiar sight had been a blind man or woman led by others begging from house to house. Young children too have been taught to beg. The amount of the actual relief or help secured by the Tribe far exceeds anything given to the Jukes or the Nams. No estimate of this can ever be made. When the struggle has been too hard often indoor care for members of the Tribe has been furnished in poor asylums or other institutions. Many have spent the last years of their lives in almshouses. It has not been uncommon for three generations in one family to be in the poor house at the same time.

Licentiousness is perhaps the next interesting trait which has characterized the Tribe. The loose marriage relationship has been one of the outstanding features. A fair proportion of the marriages in the Tribe have been according to the law, both parties legally free, a license secured and the marriage ceremony performed either by a clergyman or a justice of the peace, with the two persons concerned remaining together until the death of one. There have been many cases where two people have merely cohabited under the common law marriage and children born under these conditions have been considered legitimate. Divorce has been very easy in Indiana. Many of the Ishmaels had no comprehension of or respect for the marriage vows and so their consorts were left or changed at will. One example of this will indicate the extent to which it existed in one family even though this is an extreme case. Four members of one fraternity, one man and three women, each had respectively, six, five, five, and seven marriages or matings; in no case death causing a separation, no divorce actions completed and only about half of the matings accompanied by a marriage ceremony. A daughter of the woman who had seven marriages was herself a prostitute, married ten times, several of these by ceremony—no divorce between any two marriages.

Prostitution as will be seen from the above was common in the Tribe. At one time the greater proportion of the women keeping houses of prostitution in Indianapolis belonged to the Tribe. Several of these houses were famous in this region of the state. The elegance of a few of these houses of prostitution in the late sixties, seventies and eighties of this past century in Indianapolis is often recalled by older police officials and newspaper reporters who were familiar with the inside of these establishments. The Ishmaels often used members of their own families as inmates of these houses. In one a woman and her two granddaughters, while in several cases a woman and her daughters, comprised the personnel of the bagnio. Many other Ishmaels frequented houses of prostitution merely as casual inmates. There were many homes among the Ishmaels where illicit relationships

occurred. Some incest has been found in the Tribe. No figures as to the number of people married, divorced, children born in or out of wedlock, etc., are presented because of the lack of official registration covering these points. It can be said that the illegitimacy is greater than in either the Jukes or Nams.

The other marked characteristic of the Tribe has been the wandering or "gypsying" as it is called by the Ishmaelites. The earliest known of these "American gypsies" as they were called, was John Ishmael, who had come to Indianapolis from Kentucky about 1825. In the next few years he made several gypsy trips towards the Ohio River and Cincinnati. As this country became settled these trips turned to the north part of Indiana into the Indian reservations. These reservations covered over fifteen hundred square miles and were open only to Indians but these gypsies, much more numerous by this time, seem to have been permitted at all times to enter them to hunt and fish. Here these people gypsied during the summer months, returning to Indianapolis for the winter. It was upon these trips that many of the early marriages of the Tribe have taken place. After 1845, northern Indiana was being settled rapidly and the Indians were gradually being pushed from the reservations. The gypsying therefore ceased in this direction and started out again in a land less highly developed. This time the route was to the plains of Illinois and sometimes as far as Iowa and Kansas.

Ordinarily these gypsying began in the spring and ended when "roasting ears were ripe." Sometimes however a family did not return in the fall but remained away that winter, returning to Indianapolis the next fall. When a family remained away over winter it is probable that it was most often spent in some county poor asylum. The asylum records in various counties in Illinois and one record in Iowa show that some of these winter sojourns were in those poor houses and thus the worst of the winter was tided over.

In the early spring the Ishmaels and many of the other related families put all their worldly possessions in a hand cart and started across the country; later they were able to acquire an old broken down horse or mule, often a retired street car horse too old to use in that service, and a more diapiated wagon in which to go on their wanderings. They would go often with several "wagons" in a party, sometimes alone. They camped in creek bottoms, near a settlement if possible, and lived off the country, begging and stealing. When they became tired of the place or, as often, were told to move on by the people who could no longer stand their deprivations, they travelled on to the next place to do the same again. The residents along

these routes still remember the gypsies; though they can call few by name. There were some places on these routes where the gypsies particularly liked to stay. At the first approach of cold weather the wagons were turned toward Indianapolis and they hurried back so as to get located in the city before winter set in and as it has been expressed "to get their names on the trustee's books before frost appeared."

As whole families went together, old and young, parents and children, sometimes three generations at once, the tricks and habits of the road were passed on from one to the other. Several wagons would often travel together and gypsies would then meet other travellers and in this way matings between the gypsies took place. Propinquity and like mating to like were the two factors controlling the matings in these groups.

Another group of the Ishmaels were the so-called winter gypsies. This group, much smaller in numbers than the other, went south from Indianapolis into southern Indiana at the beginning of fall, in wagons, swapping horses, gambling and living as best they might. These people had no particular routes of travel; they simply went where they listed, returning to Indianapolis in the early spring. Many of the laborers in these families worked in the brick yards and so were unemployed during the winter. This winter gypsying did not continue long and does not seem to have been carried on regularly by those who did "winter gypsying." These families were of a slightly higher mental level than the summer gypsies.

Such is the picture roughly and briefly of the Tribe of Ishmael. The individuals in this large group of feeble-minded folk are continuing to mate like to like, and are reproducing their own kind. Some few branches of the Tribe have mated into better stocks, but these are so few that they are hardly noticeable. The few placed in orphans' homes and new environments have in some cases done better, but this has not changed the whole mass to any extent. The greater portion are still the caecogenic folk as found by McCulloch and are breeding true to the type. These germ plasmas have now spread through the whole middle west and are continuing to spread the anti-social traits of their germ plasma with no check by society. The story of the Tribe of Ishmael is but another picture of the Kallikaks, the Nams and the Jukes.

HERITABLE FACTORS IN HUMAN FITNESS AND THEIR SOCIAL CONTROL

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The foundations of national power are, in the last analysis, biological. We no longer look upon the life of a people as something unfolding itself in a manner wholly mysterious, and then as certainly going down to decadence and death. The growing clearness with which the progress of science enables us to view all life phenomena has thrown light upon human development in its physical, mental and moral aspects. Increasingly, we are being won to the view that the elements of a nation's strength lie in the inherent traits and tendencies of its people. Passing events, as they crystallize into history, are but the interplay between such traits and tendencies and various external influences, chiefly those expressed through the science and art of the period. Breeding from the best elements of the population brings a growing preponderance of those best fitted to take highest advantage of these influences. But science and art, in so far as they are not borrowed, are of themselves the abiding effect of this breeding from the best. Since their refinement of method too often encourages the survival of the unfit, the question of a nation's continuing integrity resolves itself into a nice balance between certain genetic and social forces which inhere in the blood lines of its constituent peoples.

The chief concern of the eugenicist is then the production of better human strains. This involves the physical problems of heredity as conceived by the geneticist. But vastly more it involves the social and moral reactions as conditioned by our physical and mental constitution in relation to the complicated organism known as the social order of today. We thus glimpse at the outset the complexity of our problem and the necessarily one-sided treatment which any brief study must give.

We none of us need to be told how complex is the thing we call human personality. Still most of us are aware of outstanding capacities and dominating tendencies in conduct. In the analysis which follows, certain capacities and tendencies of this kind were selected for intensive study and their occurrence noted from generation to generation in relation to types of