

## Chapter 19 — The Backward Child

from *Race Decadence:*  
*An Examination of the Causes of Racial Degeneracy in the United States* (1922)

by William S. Sadler, M.D., F.A.C.S.

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### Sources for Chapter 19, in the order in which they first appear

- (1) George M. **Gould**, M.D., “Saving the Backward School Child,” in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. LX, Number 14, April 5, 1913
- (2) “Survey Shows Grave Defects in Children,” in **Chicago Tribune**, Jan. 1, 1917
- (3) “Fears Breakdown of Public School System of Nation,” in **Pasadena Star-News**, Feb. 24, 1920

[Note: Sadler probably would have read the article in a Chicago newspaper.]

- (4) William **Healy**, A.B., M.D., *The Individual Delinquent: A Text-Book of Diagnosis and Prognosis for All Concerned in Understanding Offenders* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1915)
- (5) Charles Benedict **Davenport**, *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1911)
- (6) J. E. Wallis **Wallin**, *Problems of Subnormality* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York: World Book Company, 1917)

### Key

- (a) **Green** indicates where a source author first appears, or where he/she reappears.
- (b) **Yellow** highlights most parallelisms.
- (c) **Tan** highlights parallelisms not occurring on the same row, or parallelisms separated by yellowed parallelisms.

- (d) An underlined word or words indicates where the source and Sadler pointedly differ from one another.
- (e) **Bold type** indicates passages which Sadler copied verbatim, or nearly verbatim, from an uncited source.
- (f) **Pink** indicates passages where Sadler specifically shares his own experiences, opinions, advice, etc.
- (g) **Light blue** indicates passages which strongly resemble something in the Urantia Book, or which allude to the Urantia phenomenon.
- (h) **Red** indicates an obvious mistake, in most cases brought about by Sadler's miscopying or misunderstanding his source.

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## XIX: THE BACKWARD CHILD

19:0.1 IN THE discussion of feeble-mindedness from time to time allusion has been made to the backward child—those cases which are not distinctly defective, but which are not strictly up to average par. Let us now give more definite attention to this large and growing class of youngsters in our public schools.

### THE BACKWARD CHILD AT SCHOOL

“RESTRAIN MORONS FOR LIFE IS DR. HICKSON’S PROPOSAL”  
 (*Chicago Tribune*, Mar. 25, 1918)

#### Many Defectives Doomed to Crime.

[contd] Among important facts set forth in [Hickson’s] report, as proved by laboratory research and experience, may be listed the following: ...

That 2 per cent of the population is defective mentally (*CT* 12). [*Note*: See 20:10.1-3.]

19:1.1 Two per cent of the pupils in the schools of Chicago are mentally defective, according to Dr. W. J. Hickson of the Municipal Court Psychopathic Laboratory.

The teacher is often handicapped at the start in her efforts to develop good character in the pupils because of their defective mentality.

19:1.2 In most large cities at the present time special provision is being made for examining and instructing the backward child. (See Fig. 16.)

## SOURCE

[Note: Wallin, in *Problems of Subnormality* (1917), discusses these special classes.]

### “SAVING THE BACKWARD SCHOOL CHILD” (Gould 1059)

Of late, it has been clearly seen that civilization multiplies enormously the causes of eye-strain, and that as a result nervous and mental diseases are rapidly increasing with a frightful growth in the general morbidity rates.

Suicide of children and also of adults in all countries is in exact proportion to the number of hours of study per week demanded of school children (G 1059).

[contd] According to a bulletin of 1912, the U. S. Bureau of Education says that

**25 per cent., or about five million, of the school children of our country have defective vision,**

**and about 75 per cent., or about fifteen million, of the school children in this country need attention to-day for physical defects which are prejudicial to health and which are partially or completely remediable (G 1059).**

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

Special classes are provided and, in many instances, manual training is arranged for those youths who cannot get along with their intellectual studies but who show promise of responding to efforts along the line of some vocational training which would prepare them to become self-sustaining.<sup>1</sup>

19:1.3 Dr. Gould thinks there is a direct relation between eye troubles, eyestrain, etc., and some phases of backwardness in school children. Gould asserts that:

19:1.4 Of late, it has been clearly seen that civilization multiplies enormously the causes of eyestrain, and that as a result nervous and mental diseases are rapidly increasing with a frightful growth in the general morbidity rates.

Suicide of children and also of adults in all countries is in exact proportion to the number of hours of study per week demanded of school children.

19:1.5 According to a bulletin of the United States Bureau of Education,

**25 per cent., or about 5,000,000, of the school children of our country have defective vision,**

**and about 75 per cent., or about 15,000,000, of the school children in this country need attention today for physical defects which are prejudicial to health and which are partially or completely remediable.**

## SOURCE

[contd] The [backward] school child ... is allowed to go on to utter failure mentally and physically, thus finally burdening the community ... What has been wanted all the time is a workmanlike testing the matter out on this, that, and another school child, and, so far as pertains to the eyes, actual relief of eye-strain and following up of results. This ... has at last been done by an oculist of New York City, Dr. William Martin Richards, who was himself carrying out the refraction work, supplying the spectacles, etc. (G 1059).

The clinical experiment was on thirty-eight pupils: thirty-two hyperopic, three myopic and three with mixed defects of the eyes (G 1059).

Of the thirty-eight children only three had approximately normal vision, which does not signify that even these three did not need spectacles (G 1059).

## SUMMARY OF THE RATINGS

[contd] The first record was taken in January, 1912, the second was taken in June, 1912 (G 1060).

**Among twenty-five deficient children from regular classes, nineteen were promoted (G 1060).**

[contd] **Among nine children from the ungraded classes one was promoted to a regular class (G 1060).**

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

19:1.6 The work of Dr. Richards in New York City

goes far towards confirming Dr. Gould's contention.

The former took thirty-eight backward children,

finding thirty-five of them needing glasses badly.

After about six months' use of properly fitted glasses the teachers of these children rendered reports of progress

which may be summarized as follows:

19:1.7 **Among twenty-five deficient children from regular classes, nineteen were promoted.**

19:1.8 **Among nine children from the ungraded classes one was promoted to a regular class.**

## SOURCE

[contd] An examination of the charts will show marked improvement in reading, arithmetic, spelling, and penmanship.

The very marked improvement in temper, irritability and power of concentration is a significant revelation (G 1060).

In the regular classes the number of those receiving specially pronounced benefit in the grammar grades is eight; of those in the primary grades four (G 1060).

The extraordinary results, markedly pronounced in so many cases, justify the hope that many similar experiments will be made.

The benefit derived by these children has been so great and of such a nature as not to be definitely measurable (G 1060).

Dr. Richards estimates that there are about 78,000 children with defective vision in the public schools of New York and that there is no valid excuse for the failure to prevent this evil in 80 per cent. of all such patients.

They are not prevented now, he thinks, because the principles and practice of refraction are not adequately and correctly taught in medical colleges.

He believes that in New York there is a divided responsibility in the government of the schools;

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

19:1.9 An examination of the charts will show marked improvement in reading, arithmetic, spelling, and penmanship.

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19:1.10 In the regular classes the number of those receiving specially pronounced benefit in the grammar grades is eight; of those in the primary grades, four.

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The benefit derived by these children has been so great and of such a nature as not to be definitely measurable.

19:1.12 Dr. Richards estimates that there are about 78,000 children with defective vision in the public schools of New York and that there is no valid excuse for the failure to prevent this evil in 80 per cent of all such patients.

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He believes that in New York there is a divided responsibility in the government of the schools;

## SOURCE

that a cycloplegic is not used to diagnose the errors of refraction in the 84 per cent of far-sighted defectives, and that small errors are ignored although they have great influence in determining effort, proficiency, and conduct.

The result is that the accurate measure of the refractive errors of the school children of the city is impossible, and, moreover, if it were done it would be impossible to get the requisite spectacles made, adjusted, and paid for.

Lastly, diagnosis and treatment of defects and diseases of other organs than the eyes is not, by any means, at present feasible (G 1061).

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## PHYSICAL DEFECTS IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

“SURVEY SHOWS GRAVE DEFECTS IN CHILDREN” (*Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 1, 1917)

[contd] Health department officials are alarmed over disclosures made through a survey of ear, ear, nose, and throat defects of the school children in Chicago (CT 17).

[contd] “The conditions we have discovered are amazing and the parents are in a measure to blame, for they do not grasp the importance and danger of defects of this kind,”

said Dr. Martin M. Ritter, director of the survey.

19:2.1 Health department officials are becoming alarmed over disclosures made through a survey of eye, ear, nose, and throat defects in the school children of Chicago.

A surprisingly large number of children have infected tonsils, adenoids, etc.

19:2.2 The conditions discovered are amazing and the parents are in a measure to blame, for they do not grasp the importance and danger of defects of this kind.

## SOURCE

“In many cases the child’s life is at stake,

but if we can get the coöperation of parents we can save the future of these children” (CT 17).

[contd] For the purposes of the survey different schools were classed according to neighborhoods.

The defects were classified in three groups—“deviations from normal without symptoms,” “deviations from normal with symptoms,” and “exaggerated cases” (CT 17).

Examine 86,000 Children.

[contd] A total of 86,000 boys and girls were examined among Chicago’s 450,000 school children.

The following is a summary of the statistics:

Defect	N o . o f Children
Defective vision only	11,973
Diseases of the eyes, not incl. defective vision	2,191
Defective hearing only	1,263
Ear discharges	663
Enlarged tonsils	29,642
Defective nasal breathing	6,214
Adenoids	14,262
Tonsils and adenoids combined	14,044

(CT 17)

Many Have Defective Eyes.

[contd] The health department physicians found an unusually large number of “exaggerated cases.”

There were 1,663 in this class who had defective vision and 1,559 who had enlarged tonsils.

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

In many cases the child’s life or health is at stake.

19:2.3 For the purposes of a recent Chicago school survey different schools were classed according to neighborhoods.

The defects were classified in three groups: “deviations from normal without symptoms,” “deviations from normal with symptoms,” and “exaggerated cases.”

A total of 86,000 boys and girls were examined among Chicago’s 450,000 school children.

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19:2.4 The health department physicians found an unusually large number of “exaggerated cases.”

There were 1,663 in this class who had defective vision and 1,559 who had enlarged tonsils.



## SOURCE

**In the less congested sections of the city conditions were found to be noticeably better than in other localities** (CT 17).

“FEARS BREAKDOWN OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM OF NATION”  
(*Pasadena Star-News*, Feb. 24, 1920)

CLEVELAND, Feb. 24.—**The burden of blame for the 16,000,000 physically defective children in the public schools of the country and the lack of teachers to man 35,000 of the schools was placed on the shoulders of the federal government and the taxpayers**

at the convention of the National Education Association here today (PSN 1).

[contd] “Of the 21,000,000 children in the public schools, 16,000,000 are suffering from defects detrimental to their health and education,”

Thomas D. Wood, New York, said in an address to the convention (PSN 1).

[contd] Mr. Wood deplored the expenditure of vast amounts of money in “safeguarding hogs and cattle, with little set aside for keeping the children in good physical repair.”

[contd] He advocated a system of universal compulsory health and physical care (PSN 1).

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

**In the less congested sections of the city conditions were found to be noticeably better than in other localities.**

19:2.5 **The burden of blame for the 16,000,000 physically defective children in the public schools of the country and the lack of teachers to man 35,000 of the schools was placed on the shoulders of the federal government and the taxpayers**

by Thomas D. Wood

at a recent convention of the National Educational Association,

who declared that:

“Of the 21,000,000 children in the public schools, 16,000,000 are suffering from defects detrimental to their health and education.”

19:2.6 **Wood deplored the expenditure of vast amounts of money in “safeguarding hogs and cattle, with little set aside for keeping the children in good physical repair.”**

**He advocated a system of universal compulsory health and physical care.**

## SOURCE

### XVIII: MENTAL DULLNESS FROM PHYSICAL CONDITIONS (Healy 546)

[contd] §282. **General Statement.**—In cases where defective mental capacity is found in the same individual with acquired physical conditions which may be rationally considered as a possible cause for the mental failure,

any correlation of the two should be intimately studied (H 546).

§286. **Mental Dullness from Debilitating Sex Habits.**—Probably no doubt will be expressed about

the existence of mental dullness or inefficiency from the effects of excessive indulgence in bad sex habits.

The effect is sometimes so marked that the individual in appearance and behavior seems to be genuinely a mental defective (H 559-60).

We are face to face with the old argument of thoughtful psychiatrists,

that those individuals who give way inordinately to self-weakening habits must in the first place have been defective.

We may at once acknowledge that, as we see them, it is often very hard to determine where cause leaves off and effect begins. In those instances where one has observed the extremely dragged-out, typical appearance popularly attributed to this trouble, bad sex habits have almost never been discovered to stand alone as a cause (H 560).

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

19:2.7 In some cases defective mental capacity is found in the same individual with acquired physical conditions which may be reasonably considered as a possible cause for the mental troubles.

19:2.8 Some authorities believe that

mental dullness or inefficiency may be produced by excessive indulgence in bad sex habits.

The effect sometimes is so marked that the individual in appearance and behavior seems to be genuinely defective.

Of course we are face to face with the old argument

that those individuals who give way inordinately to self-weakening habits must in the first place have been mentally defective.

Says one experienced observer:

“In those instances where one has observed the extremely dragged-out, typical appearance popularly attributed to this trouble, bad sex habits have almost never been discovered to stand alone as a cause.”

## MENTAL SUBNORMALITY AND BACKWARDNESS

XVI: MENTAL DEFECT—*Continued*  
(Healy 491)

MENTAL SUBNORMALITY (Healy 491)

### §274. Definition of Subnormality.—

In study of individuals who are not brought for examination because they are obviously feeble-minded

one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a clearly distinguishable group of defectives which stands between feeble-mindedness, as defined above, and normality.

For lack of a better word we have designated the members of this group as subnormal (H 491).

Leaving aside individuals who have specialized mental defects, we have found it advisable to include under the head of subnormals the following:

(a) Those who in spite of passing the Binet tests as required, still may be shown to have such lack of mental ability as may prevent their normal success (H 491).

(b) We find some who, notwithstanding they are unable to pass the Binet tests,

are socially able to take care of themselves because of certain other abilities not determinable by these tests (H 491).

19:3.1 In the study of individuals who are not obviously feeble-minded,

one cannot escape the conclusion that there is a clearly distinguishable group of defectives which stands between feeble-mindedness as already defined, and normality.

For lack of a better word the members of this group are usually designated as subnormal—

sometimes backward.

19:3.2 Healy includes the following classes in the subnormal group:

19:3.3 1. Those who in spite of passing the Binet tests, still may be shown to have such lack of mental ability as may prevent their normal success.

19:3.4 2. Those who are unable to pass the Binet tests,

but who are socially able to take care of themselves because of certain other abilities not determinable by these tests.

## SOURCE

(c) There is a class which, during school age at least, does not develop normally, but still does not show the three or four years of retardation

which in that period is the authoritative qualification for being considered feeble-minded (H 491-92).

(d) Then there is need for a class in which to put cases when we are temporarily not sure of anything except the fact that they are not up to normal in mental powers as shown by tests.

There is often considerable cause for doubt in the case of a young person as to whether the ultimate diagnosis will be feeble-mindedness or not.

Sensory disabilities or general physical conditions may perhaps be partly responsible for the poor showing (H 492).

XVII: MENTAL DEFECT—*Concluded* (Healy 515)

§281. **Defect in Self-control.**—

A class of individuals very important for the student of criminalistics is designated by naming their most important characteristic, deficiency in the power of self-control. It has been very hard for us to decide whether this characteristic properly belongs under the head of mental defect.

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

19:3.5 3. Those who during school age at least, do not develop normally, but still do not show the three or four years of retardation

which in that period is the authoritative qualification for being considered feeble-minded.

19:3.6 4. Then there is need for a class in which to put cases when we are temporarily not sure of anything except the fact that they are not up to normal in mental powers as shown by tests.

There is often considerable cause for doubt in the case of a backward young person as to whether the ultimate diagnosis will be feeble-mindedness or not.

Sensory disabilities or general physical conditions may perhaps be partly responsible for the poor showing—

for the apparent backwardness.

19:3.7 5. Defect in self-control.

It has been very difficult to decide whether this characteristic properly belongs under the head of mental defect.

## SOURCE

After long consideration of this problem and observation of the outcome in a number of cases it seems clear to us that a certain number of individuals have a special, definite, innate defect in the powers of self-control (H 533).

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

After long consideration of this problem and observation of the outcome in a number of cases it seems clear that a certain number of individuals have a special, definite, innate defect in the powers of self-control;

even as others seem to show defective judgment and reasoning powers.

## MARRIAGE AND THE BACKWARD CHILD

### VIII: EUGENICS AND EUTHENICS (Davenport 252)

#### 3. THE ELIMINATION OF UNDESIRABLE TRAITS (Davenport 255)

Secondly, the laws against the marriage of the feeble-minded are unscientific because they attempt no definition of the class.

If feeble-mindedness were always as clearly distinct from normality

as polydactylism

then there would be no objection to the law on this score.

But this is by no means the case.

**If we measure the mentality of 10,000 individuals by a quantitative test, such as that of Binet and Simon,**

**then we shall find that the retardation in mental development for 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, etc.,**

19:4.1 The laws against the marriage of the feeble-minded are essentially unscientific because they seldom attempt to define feeble-mindedness.

If feeble-mindedness were always as clearly distinct from normality

as are certain physical deformities, such as clubfoot,

then there could be no objection to the law on this score.

**If we measure the mentality of 10,000 individuals by a quantitative test, such as that of Binet and Simon,**

**then we shall find that the retardation in mental development for one year, two years, three years, etc.,**

## SOURCE

shows nowhere a sharp change indicating where the normal ceases and the abnormal begins.

Shall we sterilize or forbid marriage to all children whose mental development is retarded as much as one year?

That would include 38 per cent of all children,

and one of yours, O legislator!

Shall the limit be two years of retardation?

That would include 18 per cent of the children.

Shall the limit be three years?

That will still be over 8 per cent—full one-twelfth of the population to be sterile.

Is it not reckless to pass such serious legislation in such loose terms? (D 257-58).

[contd] Third, have we good ground for denying marriage, generally and under all circumstances, to persons who as school children were even four years behind their fellows?

Is it certain that the progeny of such a person will be four years older than their classmates at school, or three years, or two years or even one year?

Is it desirable to encourage non-legal and irregular unions to sustain a law passed without inquiry and based on no certain knowledge? (D 258)

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

shows nowhere a sharp change indicating where the normal ceases and the abnormal begins.

Shall we sterilize or forbid marriage to all children whose mental development is retarded as much as one year?

That would probably include 38 per cent of all children.

Shall the limit be two years of retardation?

That would include 18 per cent of the children.

Shall the limit be three years?

That will still cover over 8 per cent—fully one-twelfth of the population would be sterile.

19:4.2 One investigator asks:

“Have we even good ground for denying marriage, generally speaking and under all circumstances, to persons who as school children were even four years behind their fellows?

Is it certain that the progeny of such a person will be four years older than their classmates at school, or three years, or two years, or even one year?

Is it desirable to encourage non-legal and irregular unions to sustain a law passed without inquiry and based on no certain knowledge?”

## SOURCE

III: GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND FACTS TO BE RECOGNIZED IN THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK FOR MENTALLY AND PEDAGOGICALLY RETARDED CHILDREN (Wallin 278)

(3) *Doubtful cases*. These cases are on the borderline between backwardness and feeble-mindedness. When it is impossible to decide definitely at the time of the examination that the child is feeble-minded,

he should be given the benefit of the doubt and be assigned to an ungraded class where he can be given a large amount of individual instruction and a thorough trial in the literary work (W 295).

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

19:4.3 It must be clear to all that a child may be evidently backward without necessarily being feeble-minded.

When in doubt regarding such a case,

the child should unquestionably be given the benefit of the doubt.

19:4.4 In the case of laws relating either to segregation, or marriage—they should be very liberally interpreted when the suspected individual is regarded as being merely backward—when there exists any serious doubt of feeble-mindedness.

19:4.5 A careful survey of the whole country certainly indicates that backwardness among children is on the increase. Part of this apparent increase is due merely to “discovery” of the situation; but even when every allowance is made for interpretative errors of this sort—it can hardly be doubted that backwardness, in common with feeble-mindedness of the more manifest sort, is slowly increasing among the civilized races, not excepting the American people.

## SOURCE

[Note: Sadler is referring to his lecture, "Endocrines, Defective Germ-Plasm, and Hereditary Defectiveness," which he presented at the Second International Congress of Eugenics held at the American Museum of Natural History, New York, in September 1921. In the lecture he reports answers to questions he'd posed to various experts. Question 3 was, "Do you think it possible that certain forms of backwardness may be due to disturbances of internal secretions, rather than directly the result of defect in the germ-plasm?" The lecture appears in *Eugenics in Race and State, Volume II* (Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company, 1923).

## 19: RACE DECADENCE

Elsewhere, the author has called attention to the possibility of some phases of this backwardness being due to disturbances in the endocrine system—to abnormalities in the hormones of the ductless gland system.

## SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

1. The backward child is one who, while not discoverably defective, is in some measure so handicapped that it is not strictly up to average par.

2. Hickson thinks that 2 per cent of Chicago school children are backward or mentally deficient.

3. Dr. Gould believes there is a direct relation between eye troubles and backwardness in school children.

4. The United States Bureau of Education says 5,000,000 school children (25 per cent) have defective vision; and that 15,000,000 (75 per cent) are physically defective.

5. Dr. Richards demonstrated that properly fitted glasses contributed to the early improvement of the pupil's work.

6. It is contended that even minor errors of vision may be indirectly responsible for much backwardness and other seemingly abnormal mental attitudes.

7. A recent survey of 86,000 Chicago school children disclosed a formidable list of physical deficiencies ranging from defective vision down to adenoids and diseased tonsils.



**SOURCE**

**19: RACE DECADENCE**

8. Wood says that out of 21,000,000 school children in the United States, 16,000,000 are suffering from defects which are detrimental to health.

9. The backward child embraces a large group - a class which cannot be diagnosed as belonging to any class of the feeble-minded but who are, nevertheless, below the normal for some reason indefinable.

10. There are also those whose main defect is lack of self-control; while others seem to be defective only as regards the exercise of reason and judgment.

11. One-third of our school children show a retardation of one year; 18 per cent two years ; and 8 per cent three years.

12. Backwardness seems to be on the increase. Part of this is just "discovery," but some of it is actual and is also probably hereditary.

13. In case of laws regulating marriage and designed to control feeble-mindedness, a very liberal interpretation should be made in dealing with simple backwardness.

14. It is possible that some cases of apparent hereditary backwardness may be due to disturbances in the endocrine system - the ductless glands.

1. *Compare:*

Special schools must be established for the backward child; and for those who cannot be advanced mentally manual training must be provided (Sadler, *Worry and Nervousness* [1914], pp. 250-51).