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A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Causes of Idiocy

Although Dr Down's patients came from every variety of social rank, he could not draw any safe deductions as to the influence of various occupations of the parents on the causation of idiocy. He had collected 400 cases with fair social antecedents, and had found that 75 per cent were the children of merchants, country gentlemen, officers in the army and navy, gentlemen of independent means and liberal education, and members of the titled aristocracy. No less a proportion than 25 per cent were the children of members of one or other of the three *learned professions*. Of these, 18 per cent were children of members of the clerical profession. Mr Galton finds that the legal profession (which procreates fewest idiots) gives birth to 11 per cent of the foremost men of eminence; that the medical profession (which procreates 1 per cent more of idiots than the legal) gives origin to 9 per cent of scientific men; while the clerical profession, which procreates the maximum amount of idiocy, gives birth to only 6 per cent of men of science. These statistics illustrated the process of natural selection.

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