

**BIRMINGHAM STUDIES IN SOCIAL
ECONOMIC AND ADJACENT FIELDS. I.
ENVIRONMENT AND EFFICIENCY: A
STUDY IN THE RECORDS OF INDUSTRIAL
SCHOOLS AND ORPHANAGES**

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Birmingham Studies in Social Economic and Adjacent Fields. I. Environment and Efficiency: A Study in the Records of Industrial Schools and Orphanages by Mary Horner Thomson

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MARY HORNER THOMSON

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I

ENVIRONMENT AND EFFICIENCY

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THE Studies in this Series are the outcome of the inquiries of students working for the Social Study Higher Diploma or for the Higher Degrees of the University of Birmingham.

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AND ADJACENT FIELDS

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I

Environment and Efficiency

A Study in the Records of Industrial
Schools and Orphanages

BY

MARY HORNER THOMSON

WOODBROOKE SETTLEMENT

WITH A PREFACE BY

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PREFACE

THE essay which occupies the following pages is something more than an academic dissertation; it is, within its elected narrow limits, a real contribution to a very pressing problem. We are all of us anxious to solve, both theoretically and practically, the problem of the man that fell among thieves and was left, only half alive, *i.e.* only half a man, by the roadside; but while the spirit of the Good Samaritan is increasingly with us, and to that extent benedictions multiply on those who help and, to some extent, upon those who receive help, we are all of us also increasingly aware that it is not enough to take a stricken man to a shelter, nor even to produce the financial equivalents for his restoration. We want to be assured that he will not fall among thieves a second time, in view of the fact that his journey must be continued on the same road; and in order to satisfy ourselves on that point, we have to identify and, if possible, to catch the thieves. Thus the problem of life is expanded; it began with *Man, know thyself*; it was re-stated as *Man, know thy neighbour*: and it is now becoming a question of the *neighbour's ancestry* and the *neighbour's environment*. More than this, the problem has an added pathos for those who love their kind, in that the man by the wayside turns out to be a child, or, at all events, as in the present investigation, an intermediary between child and man. It might have been imagined that in a properly ordered world children would at least have been secure; on the contrary, they appear to be least secure; and it is darkly hinted by the Eugenists that the child's own parents are the robbers, and that they have pauperised the

child in mind and body; that no good Samaritan, however many may pass along the road, will ever prevail to find real shelter, or restoration, or healing for the wounded and the hurt and the incapacitated. It is even maintained that two robbers can be identified, chief outlaws on the high-road of human life, and that of these two, Heredity and Environment, the second is powerless against the first: if he should turn pitiful, as in the case of the man that was mildest of mood in the story of the Babes in the Wood, he will not be strong enough to stay his mate; we are dealing with factors, of which the first is irremediable, even if the second should be removable or capable of melioration. At least this appears to be the judgment of a certain very logical school of Eugenists. Miss Thomson, in the pages that follow, attempts to apply the test of statistical experiment to the problem, and to find out for us whether Environment is adequate to unsay what Heredity has been proclaiming *ore rotundo*; her close and careful investigations, not disfigured by undue optimism, will be encouraging to those who believe that both man and his world can be made demonstrably better, and do not insist that it shall be done all at once (in which plea for the help of adequate Time they appear to have the backing of the Intelligent part of the Universe itself).

The problem is not a new one, in any sense except that the study is closer, and the statistics more extended: all philosophers are at work upon it, and all saints. Here is a suggestive extract from the writings of Jacob Boehme, who qualifies both as philosopher and as saint. According to Jacob, what we have to know is the *Signatura Rerum*, the hidden quality which is expressing itself in Nature and especially in Organic Nature and Life; for, says he:—

“If an herb be transplanted out of a bad soil into a good, then it soon gets *a stronger body, and a more pleasant smell and power, and shows* the inward essence externally; and there is nothing created or born in nature, but it also manifests

its internal form externally, for the internal continually labours or works itself forth to manifestation; . . . therefore the greatest understanding lies in the signature wherein man (viz. the image of the greatest virtue) may not only learn to know himself, but therein he may learn to know the essence of all essences; . . . the fiat of that essence forms the quality of the essence in the voice or virtue which it sends forth."

It will be at once pointed out that Jacob Boehme's words may be taken in two opposite senses; for the *Essence* of which he speaks is elusive, and the *Signatura Rerum* may be our old enemy (or disguised friend), *Heredity*. Who shall decide? Who will tell us whether there is any certain road from the manifestation of the children of the drunkard and the dissolute to the manifestation of the sons of God? It is not for me to frame the answer: all I have to do is to ask for a proper scrutiny of the facts presented by Miss Thomson and the conclusions which she suggests.

RENDEL HARRIS.