

their place. Well, we exterminated these sparrows, and our birds came back.
C. I.
Oregon, Mo., Jan. 1.

The discussion of the merits of the English sparrow, as shown in the contributions to *Science*, indicates a wide difference of opinion. Some of the conclusions reached by your contributors are unwarranted by any facts based on a thorough knowledge of the bird's habits as known in this country. It is very convenient to join in the cry of enemy, thief, pest, and like epithets; but that is not a scientific method of reaching conclusions. We want a bill of particulars, more facts and less crusade against these 'assisted emigrants.'

They are charged with driving out other birds from our city. My home and place of observation being within twenty-five miles of New York City, I can speak from careful observation that this charge has but little value in this locality.

Very few birds care to dwell in cities, except in the suburbs. It is neither congenial to their taste nor adapted to their requirements, while the English sparrow is essentially a native of a city, finding comfortable shelter and abundant food wherever partially digested grain may be found, in stables or along the highways travelled by horses. Excepting in the spring and summer months, this waste material is the almost exclusive food of this bird. Now we will consider the country life of this sparrow.

They are charged with destroying our crops. Have the farmers of this country made this complaint, or must we echo the tirade from abroad? As a farmer, my observation is, that the amount of wheat this bird appropriates during the few days of harvesting is too insignificant for notice. I know of no other grain that is molested in the slightest degree. That they are large destroyers of insects during the summer months, every observer knows. The army-worm finds in the English sparrow one of its most vigilant enemies. As to the garden fruits, we find that it molests none, and kindly leaves all the cherries to the robins and cat-birds. I have many grape-vines trained against my buildings, with an abundance of sparrows roosting amid the clusters of grapes, and have wondered at the sparrow's poor judgment in not tasting a single bunch. Such is my observation of this bird: social in its habits, apparently of the most happy disposition, but at times pugnacious with his relatives, which encounters are never fatal in their consequences. Certainly it is no concern of ours; for they seem to possess, in a remarkable degree, the spirit of forgiveness, and live, on the whole, in great social harmony. We rightly know them as pest when they soil our piazzas and deface our window-casings.
J. D. HICKS.

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Equality in ability of the young of the human species.

"We have a pernicious habit in this country of supposing, that . . . all men . . . are born equal as to their abilities." "We have a different theory in regard to horses."

"It would, perhaps, be a good plan, if the young of the human species were divided into two groups at an early age,—one large, and one small; one composed of those of whom nothing more than plain

living is expected, and the other composed of the race-horses, of those whose ancestors, or whose chance endowments, give reason to hope that they may give some aid to learning or to culture. Any one whose destiny is to do difficult thinking in after-life should . . . dwell long among the geometrical concepts, should become thoroughly imbued with the bare and rigid form of reasoning, and should have the results as familiar as his mother-tongue."

A criticism of a recent book on geometry, in *Science supplement* of Jan. 1, gives occasion to the critic to give the above views of a topic much wider than that of geometry. He would differentiate the human species into two groups,—the race-horses and dray-horses,—and train them accordingly, and the basis of the differentiation would be 'ancestry,' or 'chance endowments.' Suppose this had been done in the past, what chance is there that Watt, Stephenson, or Ericsson would have become known as engineers; Franklin, Faraday, or Edison as electricians; Napoleon or Grant as soldiers; Lincoln or Garfield as statesmen; Livingston as an explorer; Carlyle as a writer? Is it not notorious that most great men have not been descended from distinguished ancestors, and that in most cases their chance endowments have not been discovered, either by themselves or by their friends, until the age of manhood? The habit in this country, of supposing all men born equal as to their abilities, has had ample justification in the past, and may have in the future. Among the poorest families in the farthest west there are many Grants, Lincolns, or Garfields; among callow-chandlers' clerks there are Franklins; among Scottish farmers there are Carlyles; the poorest weavers may produce another Livingston; and some obscure Corsican may be another Napoleon. We of the American branch of the Anglo-Saxon race have all a good ancestry. Six generations back, each of us had thirty-two male ancestors, at least one of whom must have been distinguished as a king, a statesman, a general, a thinker, or possibly as a 'gentlemanly scoundrel,' or freebooter; and all American babies are born with some 'chance endowment,' which, if given the proper environment, will develop into ability. But, alas! the chances are that the growing child will not be given the proper environment. He may have the ancestral traits or the chance endowments which would lead him to be a great soldier, an artist, an engineer, or a farmer; and he will be sent to school, where all these traits or endowments will be repressed, and his education will tend to make him a storekeeper or a politician; or he may not be sent to school at all, and ancestral poverty may be the cause of his remaining a coal-miner or a 'farmer's hand' all his life, and Gray's 'Elegy' may be used as his epitaph.

Whether the young of the human species will develop into race-horses or dray-horses is not generally determinable by ancestry or by 'chance endowment,' but rather by environment during youth and early manhood. The youth has the ancestry of both dray-horse and race-horse combined, and the 'chance endowments' are numerous enough to include some of the qualities of both. Better assume that the young are born equal in ability, and in their early training, beginning with the kindergarten, give them an equal chance to develop into mechanics, storekeepers, artists, farmers, or lawyers, than to differentiate them into the classes of race-horses and dray-horses at the beginning.
W. K.