

## FEEBLEMINDEDNESS AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT.

PETER H. BRYCE, M.A., M.D.,

Chief Medical Officer, Dept. of Immigration and Colonization, Ottawa, Ont.

EVERYWHERE, from earliest pre-historic man up to our most complex international politics of today, the essence of our problem then was and is now biological, and if we adopt the inductive methods of psychology we can build on a solid foundation our social ethics, since as explicitly stated by A. F. Tredgold, consulting physician to the National Association for the Feeble-minded: "Whatever may be the relation of mind to brain it is now fully recognized that the manifestation of mental activity is indissolubly connected with the cells of the cerebral cortex. Mind develops *pari passu* with their growth and fails with their decay." When John Stuart Mill urged that "Every man is a part of nature and subject to its laws as causation," we can agree that morality becomes necessarily social and based on man's relations to his environment, both human and non-human, since he is subject to the law of causation the same as Nature around him, and that as man evolves socially it will mean the rhythmic activation of all his energies toward one common end, namely, the liberty to will and to do in the pursuit of the highest good.

Accepting for ourselves biology as the basis of our experimental psychology, there rests upon us the peculiar duty of becoming the apostles of a social ethics, which ought to determine men's activities from those of the mere individual up to the highest functions of the state, and yet: How many of us have consciously adopted any such social creed? How many are convinced for instance in our communities that the greatest good in an election is not associated necessarily with the party having the longest purse? How many parents

have such clear ideas of their duty to the state that they are prepared to be inconvenienced in their pleasure by rearing a normal number of children? How many are willing to sacrifice their personal comfort or profit, it may be, through living in a smaller community or even in the country in order that they may rear a robust family of children for the state? Or finally how many have ever given serious thought to the problem of how we can best conserve our energies with a view to transmitting to the coming generation those high physical, mental and moral traditions of the Anglo-Saxon race which have distinguished this continent for three centuries?

Much has been written about what statistics prove, especially for the last half of the nineteenth century, as regards the superior people, especially of the New England and Atlantic States, in the matter of a birth-rate decline, amounting to a positive lessening of the population equilibrium of the old Anglo-Saxon stock; while intellectual Brahmins and cultured blue-stockings have boasted rather of their superiority to biological laws, or perhaps even believed in their ability to create higher and superior ones, when as a matter of biological certainty the egotism that boasts itself thus betrays an egoism which Dr. Nordau cleverly demonstrates as being but an early evidence of degeneracy. I do not remember to have met anywhere a more vivid picture of the effects of certain social conditions amongst the old eastern people than that contained in a study by Miss E. H. Irwin regarding certain families in a westside school in New York City. The study states that this Fifty-third Street school was chosen "because it was largely composed of American born chil-