

HEREDITY AND SOCIETY

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Heredity and Society by William Cecil Dampier Whetham & Catherine Durning Whetham

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**WILLIAM CECIL DAMPIER
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HEREDITY AND SOCIETY

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PREFACE

SINCE the appearance in 1909 of our book on *The Family and the Nation*, we have published occasional papers and articles extending some of the ideas therein contained. Although the present volume reproduces the substance of some of these papers, the larger portion of it consists of hitherto unprinted work. To prevent the need of reference to the former book, certain sections have been abstracted and re-written, such as the one on the scientific aspect of Variation, and the statistical portion of the chapter on the Birth-rate; but any one who desires to study these and kindred subjects in more detail must consult the earlier volume, especially the chapters on Inheritance and Variation in Mankind, the Inheritance of Mental Defect and Ability, and the Selective Birth-rate. The causes of the decline in the birth-rate are there likewise discussed.

We wish especially to guard against one misconception into which certain of our former readers and reviewers seem to have fallen. Both this book and its predecessor are written avowedly to draw attention to the problem of heredity, a conception which has hardly yet penetrated consciously into modern sociology, where the subject of environment has held hitherto almost limitless sway. We find it necessary continually to point out that improved conditions of life will not

by themselves alone secure certain and corresponding improvement in the inborn qualities of the race. Selection also is needed. We have deliberately concentrated our attention chiefly on one side of a very complex and involved problem. But it is not necessary in actual life to disregard the effects of a better environment in order to realize the importance of the workings of heredity ; and to point out that the present trend of modern civilization produces certain dangers, is not to discourage further attempts to improve the surroundings of mankind, whatever may be felt on the subject by impulsive philanthropists or unresting politicians.

It is clear that social and legislative action is continually changing the average composition of every race, for better or for worse ; yet, for the most part, people are unconscious of the fact. The nation whose rulers first grasp and act on the essential principles of the new knowledge will surely assume a leading position in the rivalry of states, and may quickly and rightfully establish a predominant influence in the realm of international affairs. From this aspect alone, it is desirable to draw attention to the connection between the structure of society and the workings of heredity.

We desire to thank those correspondents, at home, abroad and overseas, who have drawn our attention to various facts bearing on our inquiries, who have sent us pedigrees and notes of family history, and have encouraged by their appreciation, criticism and execration this new presentment of the ideas which we have endeavoured to bring into more general notice.

CAMBRIDGE, *December* 1911.

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