

# AN ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD?

HILDA M. RIDLEY

OF the many brilliant addresses delivered by members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which recently held its ninety-second session in Toronto, several contained appeals of special import to Canada. Among these was one delivered by Professor William McDougall, psychologist, of Harvard University, late of Oxford University, who in the course of his address laid emphasis upon a tremendously important question,—that of a danger which exists both in Great Britain and in the United States. This is the alarming but well established fact that there, as well as in other civilized countries, the fertile one-quarter of the adult generation that begets one-half of the succeeding generation tends to correspond with the percentage of humanity the least fit, from the point of view of desirable mental and moral qualities, to propagate the species. Only one result can follow from such a state of affairs,—the deterioration of human quality, and with this deterioration the decay of the nations that permit such racial decline.

In referring to the United States, Professor McDougall quoted a dramatic statement that he had made two years before in the introduction of one of his own books:

As I watch the American people speeding daily with an invincible optimism down the path that leads to destruction, I seem to be contemplating the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind.

No less serious was his estimate of the condition that exists in Great Britain:

I very much fear that, one or two hundred years hence, the name of a country that we all love will have to be added to the list of nations whose decline has been largely due to deterioration of human qualities—nations such as Persia, Egypt, Greece, Rome and Spain,—the name of England.

And he added: "It is just in order that the name of Canada shall not also be added to the list that we are here tonight."

There was something almost pathetic, indeed, on the occasion when this man and his eloquent companions spoke, in the "thin line" of grey-heads upon the platform. One by one they declared that it was their earnest desire to warn Canada of the pitfalls into which older nations had fallen. Professor McDougall went on thus:

When we see a vigorous young nation like Canada going ahead in every way, with every sign of increasing health and prosperity, we are too apt to assume that it will naturally go on for ever in that way. But history does not justify that assumption. History shows us not that nations go on progressing, growing stronger, happier, better and greater, but rather—in nearly every case when nations have attained greatness—that they have tarried there a little while and then have slowly declined, that they have gone down the hill rapidly sometimes and sometimes more slowly. We do not desire that that should continue to be the history of all nations. We hope that now we are gaining sufficient knowledge of the conditions that make for national prosperity and national greatness to be able to forestall that decline. . . And if we are to do that, it is only by coming to understand better what are the foundations of national greatness.

Who that heard such words could fail to be stirred by them? One feels sure that there is nothing the speaker and his comrades would like better than to have their views discussed, and therefore I make no apology for venturing to ventilate a few of the thoughts that came to my mind as I listened.

Several causes were admitted by the speakers to contribute to a result so unsatisfactory as the condition in which nearly every civilized country at the present time finds itself,—the tendency of the least desirable percentage of the adult generation to propagate the largest part of the succeeding generation. But the cause on which, directly and indirectly, Professor McDougall, Sir William Beveridge and other speakers laid particular stress was the economic.

There are large and desirable classes of the community in the Old World and the New whose financial rewards are not sufficient to maintain, according to a decent or a high standard, the orthodox family consisting of five members. Statistics, for example, reveal the fact that on our North American continent it is only, relatively, a few men who achieve an income sufficient for the adequate maintenance of this orthodox family. The study made by the American National Bureau of Economic Research in 1918 shows that 86 per cent of those gainfully employed receive incomes of less than \$2,000, which is equivalent to \$1,000 on the 1913 price level; 90 per cent get incomes of less than \$2,400 (equivalent to \$1,200

on the pre-war level), and 99 per cent of the people receive incomes of less than \$8,000, equivalent to \$4,000 on the same level. It is in the higher grades of these percentages that the men and women, who take thought for the future, hesitate to bring into the world children who cannot be adequately equipped to cope with the growing complexities of modern life. In other words, many men and women of high mental and moral qualifications are either refraining from marriage or taking steps to curtail the sizes of their families. The result is that a premium is being put upon bachelorhood and spinsterhood, and upon extremely small families.

Professor McDougall, in the course of his address, outlined a plan that he had formulated 20 years ago. Under this scheme, "wherever there was a selected class of workers within a nation, such as railway locomotive drivers, conductors, civil servants, college professors, army officers, and other highly trained workers, they should be remunerated not by a wage equal to that of men doing the same work, but according to the family needs of the individual worker." He thought it might safely be assumed that the majority of the men who occupy positions of trust and responsibility are among the worthier members of the community, and that a transmission of their good qualities to offspring would redound to the benefit of a country. Granted that heredity and environment are of the supreme importance in human life that they are conceded to be, one can see that it would be well to have as progenitors those who have demonstrated their fitness in callings which demand certain valuable qualifications.

But, naturally enough, the strong objection raised at the time to the McDougall plan was that it would tend to reinforce the premium upon bachelorhood, since employers would hesitate to employ married men, and especially married men with large families, when they could secure the same services from unmarried men at a much lower cost to themselves. It is at this point, also, that another objection to the plan arises just as naturally in the mind of one who has the interests of her own sex at heart,—and that is the entire omission from the scheme of any reference to the point of view of women. Now we know that in this age the woman's point of view cannot be ignored. For better or for worse, woman has become articulate, and the best types of men will always pay attention to what she has to say. Granted that the single woman, under some such plan as the McDougall one, might be satisfied to live upon the leavings of the matrimonial feast enjoyed by the men who had selected wives, and who accordingly advanced by means of the matrimonial ladder to a position wherein they were

able to display an augmented salary cheque for each child that they begot,—what about the attitude of the women who became the wives of these men? Being modern women and articulate, would they wholly approve of a plan whereby their husbands alone received practical recognition of the services rendered the State by both parents in propagating the species? Would they be satisfied to remain humbly in the background, while their husbands became the sole beneficiaries for services of which, after all, women perform no mean part?

Hardly. One knows that the whole trend of the modern woman is towards economic independence,—not merely on account of the higher standard of living that with such independence she is able to maintain, but quite as much on account of the moral principle implicit in it. She has discovered that, twist and turn it as one may, he or she who is economically dependent upon another human being, is under a profound disadvantage. She knows that the condition of a dependent in adult life does not conduce to proper pride or to a fine independence, and that it tends to engender unlovable qualities in the possessor of the means of existence. Hence the whole trend of the modern woman, as she has expressed herself in Great Britain and the United States, and to some extent in Canada, has been towards economic independence, and no plan can prosper that entirely ignores this trend.

One observes a further consideration. There is no Salic law in heredity. Children inherit qualities from both parents,—the sons frequently resembling the mothers, the daughters the fathers. Indeed in reading the biographies of great men one is struck by the fact that the biographers usually attach much importance to the qualities of the mother as affording the most satisfactory explanation of the qualities of the son. The great man frequently has or had a great mother. Yet one might infer from the McDougall plan that the professor thought the qualities of the man alone counted. Of course, he probably assumed that men in worthy callings would show good sense in choosing worthy women as wives,—but still we do know that sometimes very sensible men marry very silly women. His plan, unmodified, does not take into consideration the “worthy woman”, apart from the selective choice of individual men; but it should be emphasized that it is the women of the higher types, precisely those who are sensitive to the laws of progress, and precisely those whose prototypes in former days made great mothers (and who now, owing often to economic conditions, are seeking careers for themselves rather than husbands) who would be the suitable wives for the higher

types of men. It is these women whose opinions and tendencies it is worth while for us to study and endeavour to understand.

This brings me to the point I wish to make, namely, the suggestion of a plan that would modify somewhat the McDougall plan, principally because it would take into consideration the woman's point of view. Why should not in Canada a scheme be adopted which would not interfere directly with the scheme of salary schedules in the economic world, but which would, in a sense, work independently of it? Granted that there are certain classes of the community that tend to possess the most desirable qualities, why should not the State endow the *wives* and prospective wives of these valuable members of the community, and in that way give to them both a substantial degree of economic independence and a real recognition of the services which mothers (so often sentimentally lauded) perform for the State in bringing into the world its future citizens? While this plan would still be somewhat one-sided, in view of the fact that the worthy qualities of the men would be the primary consideration, it would at least not tend to bar from consideration of marriage with these men some of the more progressive, and, as I contend, higher types of women, who shrink from losing their economic independence.

Of course the McDougall plan, even thus modified, would be but a beginning, but it would be, undoubtedly, a step in the right direction, and among the immediate benefits that might be expected to ensue upon its adoption would be the following:—

It would put a premium upon matrimony on the part of the fit rather than upon bachelorhood; for many a thoughtful man, ambitious for a career, would marry when he found that it was not necessary to sacrifice his career on the altar of matrimony. We know that the higher a profession or calling, the longer and more arduous is the training incident to a successful following of it. Hence it is that, under our present system, many a young man of brilliant parts delays or refrains from marriage, because he realizes that for many years to come he will not be in a position to support a wife and children. Under our present system, if such a man does marry, he and his children are frequently lost as valuable assets to the community, in the struggle for an economic existence which causes the man to abandon the higher objectives of his career and to sink with his family to a relatively low level.

In the second place, the adoption of such a plan would tend to raise motherhood to the dignity of a profession,—and how far-reaching this might be in its effects, I have not space now to consider. Under our present system, motherhood cannot be said

to have much dignity,—left, as it so often is, to the vicissitudes of the economic existence of one individual in a very unstable economic world. The best women hesitate to contract the responsibilities of parenthood under such precarious conditions. Were motherhood endowed on a substantial scale, and raised to the dignity of a profession, one could conceive that for such a calling special courses of training might come into being, and that many women who now compete with men in the economic field would turn their minds to the study of those vital things which affect mother and child, or in other words, to the broad study of human welfare in every field.

What a splendid thing it would be if Canada could take the lead in the adoption of some such practical measure for promoting the marriage of the fit! Why should she follow blindly in the steps of older nations, repeat their mistakes, and learn nothing from the lessons that are writ large for those who have eyes to see them and the brains to comprehend them? Here in this new land, at present so thinly populated, is the opportunity for laying the foundation of a social order that will be an example to the world, and a real demonstration of the ability of the human race not only to learn from the failures and mistakes of the past, but to profit by the wonderful discoveries of the present.

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## AT THE GRAVE OF KEATS

G. H. CLARKE

Gulfed in the deep immensities of peace,  
 You, who were Keats, unknow desire and pain:  
*She* cannot burn upon your breast again,—  
 Her little wiles, her fitful sobbings, cease;  
 At last the long sweet languor and release  
 Of Death she likewise learned, and she was fain  
 To lay her down (ah, not where you were lain!),  
 Claspng the fringe of Fame, your Golden Fleece.

That skyey lyre, rich dyed in Dorian wine,  
 Blended the songs of brighter stars and this:  
 Lulling the dreams of dovelike Madeline,  
 Chanting in moonlit clouds Endymion's bliss;—  
 Love's very lyre, wingéd, but your young wings  
 Faltered, and failed . . . Slowly Love broke the strings.