

SCIENCE

VOL. 84

FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1936

No. 2173

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SCIENCE: A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science, edited by J. McKEEN CATTELL and published every Friday by

THE SCIENCE PRESS

New York City: Grand Central Terminal
Lancaster, Pa. Garrison, N. Y.
Annual Subscription, \$6.00 Single Copies, 15 Cts.

SCIENCE is the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Information regarding membership in the Association may be secured from the office of the permanent secretary, in the Smithsonian Institution Building, Washington, D. C.

SIMON NEWCOMB: A TRIBUTE¹ TO HIS PERSONALITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

By Dr. W. W. CAMPBELL

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SIMON NEWCOMB, the astronomer, was born in Canada, on the north coast of Nova Scotia, but he was almost wholly of New England descent, through many generations, and his entire adult life was lived in the United States. The first Simon Newcomb was born in Massachusetts or Maine about 1666. His descendants formed the habit of naming their eldest sons after him, and except for the fact that his father was a younger son, the astronomer would have been the sixth Simon Newcomb in unbroken lineal descent. His paternal grandfather, Simon Newcomb, migrated

from New England to Nova Scotia in 1761. He was a stonecutter, but he was credited "with unusual learning and with having at some time taught school." He possessed a small collection of books on serious subjects, including an algebra, a Euclid and a volume on navigation, which were destined to influence profoundly the life of the grandson.

The astronomer's father, John Newcomb, was by profession a country school teacher. He had the distinction of being an early exponent of the principles of eugenics. After careful consideration he concluded that a man should marry at the age of 25, and that the wife should have certain temperamental characteristics and be mentally gifted. When John Newcomb "found the age of 25 approaching he began to look about. There was no one in his village who satisfied

¹ Address at the unveiling of the bust of Simon Newcomb in the Hall of Fame at New York University, May 28, 1936. Many items in this tribute have been taken from my brief biography of Simon Newcomb published in *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, Volume XVII, 1924.—W. W. C.