A SOCIOLOGICAL FORMULA.

SIR,—In view of your welcome report of Mr. C. J. Bond's Galton Lecture on eugenics (February 25th, p. 315) I beg to submit a sociological formula which would serve for all countries and for all time. The fundamental consideration in sociology is the very strong tendency of population to press upon the means of subsistence. This tendency must be completely counteracted if a satisfactory standard of living is to be maintained, and three factors are necessary to counteract it completely—namely, high production, a low birth rate, and eugenic selection. Thus I arrive at my formula: People must work their best, and also must not have more than two children unless they are above the national average in the advantages for parenthood. I assume that if the less eugenic couples do not have more than two children the others will be proud to have larger families.—I am, etc.,

London, S.W.7, Feb. 25th. BINNIE DUNLOP, M.B., Ch.B.

POLYDACTYLISM AND REVERSION.

SIR,—The case of supernumerary thumbs reported by Dr. R. H. Mitchell (February 25th, p. 308) raises interesting points. Darwin in his work *The Descent of Man*, chapter ii, page 55, says:

"I attributed, though with much hesitation, the frequent cases of polydactylism in men and various animals to reversion. . . . I was chiefly led to the conclusion that the presence of supernumerary digits might be due to reversion from the fact that such digits not only are strongly inherited, but, as I then believed, had the power of regrowth after amputation, like the normal digits of the lower vertebrata. . . . But at present it is the safest course to give up altogether the idea that there is any relation between the development of supernumerary digits and reversion to some lowly organized progenitor of man."

As Dr. Mitchell remarks, the lack of hereditary influence in his case makes the occurrence somewhat remarkable. Since the patient underwent an operation it would be interesting to be informed later whether there was evidence of any power of regrowth.

Haeckel asserted that the five-toed amphibian foot was formed from the many-toed fish fin (*Evolution of Man*, p. 306). It is a long way back in the animal scale for such a reversion to recur in man; even the interval between one of the apes and a fish is immense. Personally I do not think that Darwin realized the fact that polydactylism is more common than the occurrence of a tail, since otherwise he would not have made this statement about reversion. The question naturally arises, Can a human tail be looked upon as a reversion?—I am, etc.,

REGINALD COCK, M.R.C.S.Eng., L.R.C.P.

London, E., Feb. 26th.

The Services.

DEATHS IN THE SERVICES.

SIR ROBERT PORTER.

Major-General Sir Robert Porter, K.C.B., Army Medical Service (retired), was taken ill during the memorial service to Lord Haig in Westminster Abbey, and died of pneumonia and pleurisy a week later at his residence at Beckenham, Kent, on February 27th, aged 70. He was born in County Donegal on January 31st, 1858, the son of the late Andrew Porter, and educated at Foyle College, Londonderry, at Glasgow University, where he graduated M.B. and C.M. in 1879, and in Paris. He entered the R.A.M.C. as surgeon on February 5th, 1881, attained the rank of colonel on January 14th, 1910, and, after a four years' tour of office, was placed on half-pay on January 14th, 1914. Recalled to duty at the beginning of the great war on August 5th, 1914, he was appointed temporary surgeon-general on November 2nd, 1914, and confirmed in that rank—the title of which was subsequently changed to major-general—on February 18th, 1915. He retired after the war on March 3rd, 1920. He had a very fine record of war service, before as well as during the great war. His first active service was in the Ashanti campaign of 1895–96, when he was mentioned in dispatches and received the star given for that campaign. He served throughout the whole South African war of 1899–1902, when he took part in operations in Natal, the Transvaal, the Orange River Colony, and Cape Colony, including the actions at Elandslaagte and Lombard's Nek, and the defence of Ladysmith, and received the Queen's medal with five clasps and the King's medal with two clasps. During the war of 1914–18 he was D.M.S., from 1914 to 1917, of the Second Army, the army which held Ypres throughout, and which maintained the long and bloody struggle of Passchendaele. Towards the end of this time this army had grown in strength to 800,000 men, and he had under his administration some twelve hundred medical officers, employed in twenty-eight Divisions, as well as in some thirteen casualty clearing stations, fourteen sanitary sections, three mobile laboratories, and five army schools of sanitation—a vast organization which he had himself built up. He was six times mentioned in dispatches—in the *London Gazette* of October 19th, 1914, February 17th, 1915, June 22nd, 1915, January 1st, 1916, May 29th, 1917, and December 24th, 1917. He was awarded the C.B. in 1916, and the Crown of Belgium, as commander, in the same year, the C.M.G. on June 3rd, 1919, and the K.C.B. on January 1st, 1921. He also had the Belgian Croix de Guerre. In 1903 he married Mary, daughter of the late John Johnstone of Barnard Castle, and leaves a widow and three sons.

Lieut.-Colonel Charles George Webster, Madras Medical Service (retired), died at Ryde, Isle of Wight, on January 26th, aged 56. He was born on July 5th, 1871, the son of the late John Henrie Webster, Government Telegraph Department, Chandanagore, Bengal, and took the Scottish triple qualification in 1892, and subsequently the F.R.C.S.Ed. in 1905. Entering the I.M.S. as surgeon lieutenant on July 29th, 1895, he became lieutenant-colonel on January 29th, 1915, and retired a year later on January 29th, 1916. He served in the China war of 1900, receiving the medal. He entered civil employment in the Madras Presidency in January, 1902; in 1909–10 he held the professorship of medical jurisprudence in Madras Medical College, and in June, 1914, was appointed surgeon of the 1st District of Madras City.

Universities and Colleges.

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE.

AT a congregation held on March 3rd the following medical degrees were conferred:

M.B., B.CHIR.—S. J. P. Gray, M. J. Harker, R. M. B. MacKenna, K. H. Uttley.
M.B.—J. Dockray, H. K. Goadby, H. B. Stallard.
B.CHIR.—W. J. H. M. Beattie, D. R. Tweedie.

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON.

AT the matriculation examination held in January there were 197 successful candidates in the first division and 880 in the second division; in addition 58 took the supplementary certificate for Latin.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND.

COUNCIL ELECTION.

THE Secretary of the Royal College of Surgeons has sent out the usual election notice, which on this occasion informs the Fellows of the College that on Thursday, July 5th, there will take place an election of four Fellows into the Council in the vacancies occasioned by the retirement in rotation of Sir Anthony Bowlby, Bt., Sir D'Arcy Power, and Mr. F. J. Steward, and by the death of Mr. W. Thelwall Thomas.

Blank forms of nomination and of the requisite notice from a candidate may be obtained on application to the Secretary, and the same must be received by him, duly filled up, not later than on Monday, March 19th. A voting paper will be sent by post on April 3rd to each Fellow whose address is registered at the College.

The candidate elected by the smallest number of votes will become substitute Member of Council for the late Mr. Thelwall Thomas until 1935.

Museum Demonstrations.

The following demonstrations of specimens in the museum will be given in the theatre of the Royal College of Surgeons of England by Professor Sir Arthur Keith. The demonstrations are open to advanced students and medical practitioners, and will be given on the dates indicated at 5 p.m.: March 9th—Variations and anomalies of the sacro-lumbar region of the spine and their bearing on surgical practice; March 16th—Variations and anomalies of the cervical and costal series of the vertebral column and their application in diagnosis and treatment; March 23rd—A review of the present state of knowledge regarding the innervation and movements of the intestine.