

THE INHERITANCE OF THE NAVAL OFFICER.¹

IT seems good sense to say that a man who dislikes the sea and all that therein is, who has no spirit of adventure, who is, in short, a low-spirited land-lubber, is not in the least likely to make a distinguished naval officer. You never can tell, of course, for Nelson was always sea-sick and often pessimistic, but the chances are against a man such as we have pictured becoming a bright and shining light in the Navy. And that is what Dr. Davenport and his assistant have said, only they have said it very learnedly with a lot of technicalities about "thalassophilia," "hyperkinetism," "nomadism," and "recessives." The study of heredity does not foster a sense of humour, and we cannot wonder. It is a rather dismal science.

But the memoir before us goes much further than we have indicated. It is argued from sixty-eight biographies that distinguished naval officers have clear-cut special gifts, which are more or less Mendelian characters. They are expressed in the lineage, direct or collateral, and likewise find appropriate expression in early youth. If the number sixty-eight affords a sufficiently broad basis for secure induction, and if such characters as a love for the sea are really crisply defined, non-blending, unit characters, then the conclusions reached are of high interest. Both for theory and for action it is very important to know how much a man is made and how much he is born, and this latest product of the industry and enthusiasm of the Cold Spring Harbour laboratory for the experimental study of evolution and heredity is a contribution to the answer to this question. We should notice that, apart from the non-inclusion of those distinguished officers whose biographies failed to furnish any details of lineage or of boyhood, no selection of names was made. Dr. Davenport set out without any theory save the preconception which previous studies have warranted, that the hereditary make-up of a distinguished man is likely to include definite traits, being not so much a mélange as a mosaic.

What, then, are the features which may be regarded as part of the natural inheritance of a distinguished naval officer, as contrasted with, let us say, a distinguished clergyman? The first is a love for the sea, a specific susceptibility to its call, a "thalassophilia." Unless this, or some analogous characteristic, such as nomadism, is in the blood, the chances are against the boy becoming a distinguished naval officer. Such is the verdict of biography. The second feature is some form of the spirit of adventure, a willingness to incur responsibilities, a capacity for rapid decision and action in face of difficulties. A few cases of persistent sea-sickness in admirals may be found—Nelson's is known to all but there seems to be no instance of a distinguished naval officer without some form of the spirit of adven-

ture. Very rarely has it taken the form of quarrelsome ness, or of pugnacity, or of devil-may-care rashness—though instances of these are well known—but a distinguished naval officer without the quality at all is a contradiction in terms. The third character that is normally present is the sanguine or buoyant temperament, which is technically described as hyperkinetic in contrast to the melancholic and fatalistic hypokinetic. Now, it is an interesting fact that a small minority among the sixty-eight were of the hypokinetic type—reserved, taciturn, melancholic, fatalistic—and that two or three of the greatest were strange mixtures of both, like Nelson, passing from the crests to the troughs of temperamental waves, probably enough correlated with changes in blood-pressure that would kill an ordinary man. But the great majority of the famous sea-captains have been markedly hyperkinetic, not only daring pilots when the waves ran high, but also positively defiant in danger.

As it seems to us, Dr. Davenport is too readily satisfied with the evidence that this or that character exhibits Mendelian inheritance, and that he attaches far too little importance to the family tradition and conversation in defining the lines of a boy's development; but he states a strong case in support of the view, which is more convincing in negative than in positive form, that "unless a love of the sea appears on at least one side of the house, hyperkinesis in at least one parent, or, in the case of an eminent naval man, among the male relatives of the mother, one is justified in doubting if the applicant for a naval commission will become an eminent officer." It is easy enough to make fun of this contribution to "the pedigree of the sea-dogs," but the number of round men in square holes is one of the tragedies of the world, and we wonder gravely how long it will be before wasteful methods of selection are replaced by those suggested by expert study of lineage and of childhood. As Mahan once said—and he had a great knowledge of naval officers—"Each man has his special gift, and to succeed must act in accordance with it." Dr. Davenport's memoir is a contribution to the art of discovering special gifts, or of estimating the probability of their presence.

NOTES.

THE newspapers have lately published a big-game hunter's report that a gigantic dinosaurian reptile related to the extinct Brontosaurus and Diplodocus has been seen living in the Congo region of Africa. Palaeontologists, however, receive the story with incredulity, and are decidedly of opinion that it must be founded on mistaken observations. The Dinosauria and all their gigantic reptilian contemporaries, whether on land, in the sea, or in the air, disappeared from every part of the world at the end of the Cretaceous period. If any had survived, some fragments of them would ere this have been found in the Tertiary formations which record the progress of life between that period and the present day. It is no contrary argument to quote Sir Harry Johnston's discovery of the okapi in the Congo forest, for this is merely a kind of ancestral giraffe which is known by fossils to have

¹ "Naval Officers: Their Heredity and Development." By Charles Benedict Davenport and Mary Theresa Scudder. Publication No. 259 P.D. iv-2 6. (Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1919.)