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Books of Special Interest

Problems of Heredity

HEREDITY AND PARENTHOOD. By SAMUEL CHRISTIAN SCHMUCKER. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by MAYNARD SHIPLEY.

IN spite of the flood of semi-popular scientific works—and also of popular semi-scientific works—on heredity, there is still room for a clear, succinct, and authoritative exposition of what really is known today on that complex subject. This Dr. Schmucker has given us, in what is really two books, bound as one; the first dealing with the problems of heredity in the most comprehensive sense, the second with the origin and evolution of sex and love, and the practical questions that all parents are called upon sooner or later to answer.

The first part of the work is a successful attempt to answer in simple language such questions as: Why are we what we are? Is our peculiar personal make-up the result of nature, or of nurture, or of a combination of both? How far is natural (hereditary) endowment subject to environmental (including educational) control or modification? "I suppose," says the author, "there is little doubt in the minds of most people, that, in a general way, most of our qualities can be accounted for by inheritance. 'He is a chip of the old block' is a common enough saying and belief. It is our peculiarities, our unexpected characteristics, that must be explained."

The modern study of "fraternal" and "identical" twins has thrown a flood of light upon the problem of heredity versus environment. Dr. Schmucker presents some highly interesting new data along these lines, derived from his own experiences with such twins, students at Teachers College.

The chapter on "The Problem of Alcohol," so vexed a question at this time, is discussed with the author's characteristic broad-mindedness and impartiality, and should be read with profit by all who are seeking light on this subject—which ought to mean all of us, for we are all vitally affected by it in one way or another. Closely connected with this same problem is the chapter "Is Criminality Inherited?" Both questions are highly complex, and no final answer can be given in so many words. There are almost as many theories of the cause of criminality as there are criminals; and the controversy anent alcohol is even more confused. "The one fundamental difficulty is," as Dr. Schmucker points out, "that the problem is so tied up with our long held opinions and with our emotions that many of us feel our convictions are religious, and hence cannot be mistaken. To doubt them is blameworthy. To hold them open is in itself irreligious. We are so convinced of the righteousness of our cause that we are anxious to emphasize everything that looks in our direction and to set aside everything that looks as if it might point the other way."

Important data on both sides are presented by our author, however, with apparent impartiality, and the reader is left to draw his own conclusions.

None of these questions can be dealt with intelligently unless due recognition is accorded the Mendelian laws and the general mechanism of transmission of heritable traits, so far as known. This question Dr. Schmucker handles admirably; if there has ever been written an easier approach to Mendelism than the one in this book, I, at least, have not found it. The same praise may be given the exposition of sexual evolution and the delicate human problems arising from the growing complexity of our modern life, where the author displays an open-mindedness and freedom from emotional bias that cannot be lauded too highly.

Very little fault can be found with this excellent popular work, aside from differences of opinion to which the author is as entitled as is the reviewer. It may, however, be mentioned that according to the latest researches Dr. Schmucker is in error in ascribing an actual lengthening of human life to "the sociologist and the hygienist." Professor C. H. Forsythe, of Dartmouth, has recently published graphs and data which show that this widely accepted view is a misconception—that "the average length of life in this country is now actually decreasing."

Another statement with which issue may properly be taken is Dr. Schmucker's fear of the social results of sterilization of the feeble-minded. As I pointed out recently in an article in *The American Mercury*, the researches of Popenoe and Gosney, the only real authorities on this subject, show no dire effects, at least in California, the

chief testing ground of such experimentation.

These, however, are minor defects, in no way detracting from the value of this remarkably well written book. The theistic bias of the author may even be regarded as a recommendation (though it is sometimes unnecessarily intruded into purely scientific discussion), since it is the already theistically-inclined lay reader who is being addressed. On the whole, "Heredity and Parenthood," fully illustrated and well indexed, is undoubtedly the best popular work of its kind now in English print. It is to be hoped that it will offset the unfortunate effects of some other more or less recent treatises which seem to have been written purely from their authors' prejudices and predilections, rather than from actual study of the subject, as Dr. Schmucker's has been.

An Extraordinary Episode

THE BLOCKING OF ZEEBRUGGE. By CAPTAIN A. F. B. CARPENTER. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co. 1929. \$2.50.

Reviewed by T. H. THOMAS

THE author trusts that the reader will be tolerant of omission and repetition, and will forgive the rather obvious shortcomings of a literary nature which appear all too frequently in the book. A judicious reader will take the author at his word, read straight ahead with the story, and enjoy the spirited details of one of the most extraordinary episodes of the war. Although undertaken for a carefully considered purpose and with the most thoroughgoing study and preparation of the seafaring problems it involved, the blocking of Zeebrugge was a splendid shindy of the sort an intricate and highly mechanized war could rarely offer: an old-fashioned adventure, recalling the Spanish Main rather than the wireless and submarine setting of 1918.

It having been decreed that the blocking of the tiny port would seriously hamper the operation of German U-boats in the Channel, the Dover Patrol had to face the problem of bringing good-sized vessels inside a harbor protected by mine-fields, torpedo boats, and fortress artillery, with a breakwater garnished with six-inch guns lying directly in front. Having achieved these impossibilities, the ships would have to steam in between the jetties of a narrow river entrance—again under artillery fire at close range—and sink themselves in such a way as to block the channel. It was altogether fitting that one of the three old cruisers chosen for the task bore the name of *Iphigenia*, and that the assault should be opened not by battleships but by motor boats and launches spreading smoke screens. Although attempted more than once in previous wars, no such thing had ever succeeded, and the layout of the ground in this case seemed to offer every reasonable prospect of failure. Nevertheless, one rainy night in the spring of 1918, the cruiser *Vindictive* appeared out of the darkness some three-hundred yards off the Zeebrugge mole, with motor boats shooting back and forth between distributing smoke screens, and with the 6-inch German battery at point blank range. In the resulting excitement, the *Vindictive* steamed past the battery, made fast to the mole and landed storming parties. With her hull sheltered by the mole, the cruiser thereupon engaged battle with everything in sight, and with every variety of weapon, from flame throwers to field howitzers, while for good measure an old submarine loaded with high explosive gently rammed herself in under the trestle connecting the mole with the mainland. Having emerged into lifeboats, her crew thereupon blew to pieces the submarine and the trestle over her. In the midst of these fireworks, the three old cruisers made their way in between the jetties and deftly blew out their bottoms across the channel, sealing up effectively the German submarines moored in the river—to cap the climax the crews made their way outside in rafts with almost no casualties. The smaller craft still covered by smoke screens then drew off from the fray to a rendezvous outside. The *Vindictive* having remained there for an hour, drew off from the mole with the help of two Liverpool ferry-boats and again at point blank range of the 6-inch guns, passed safely out to sea, joined up with the rest of the quaint Armada, and returned under her own steam to Dover.

It is as a dashing feat of arms that the story offers its main interest, but the author nevertheless discerns the true moral: even the most complete technical apparatus will collapse in the confusion and bewilderment of surprise and what happens then turns—as in the year 1—upon the human factor.

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