

I will, therefore, endeavor to assist in some measure in the solution of this problem, by calling attention to a guide to the individual nature through the subject of heredity.

From the earliest times heredity or the resemblance of offspring to parents has been admitted, in some vague way at least; and if this were now as clearly recognized for man as it is by breeders of our domestic animals, I would anticipate greater human progress than is likely till sound views on this subject are more widespread and more deeply impressed.

How few have ever seriously sat down and pondered upon such questions as these: Why is my nature such as it is? To what degree am I, and in what measure are ancestors concerned in my being what I am? What am I likely to become?

I presume one might safely affirm that most persons here never directly faced such considerations at all. Probably many would regard it as impossible to account in any approximately satisfactory way for their physical and mental make-up, and would be very apt to refer the latter in no small degree to what is commonly known as education.

But if we were to visit the establishment of some successful breeder of domestic animals, we would find no such hazy mental condition. The breeder does know why his stock is such as it is. You point to some admirable specimen and compare it with another of plainly inferior merit, and ask him the reason. He does not attempt to explain the difference by the pasture, but he tells you that the less valuable animal is a common cross-breed without extended pedigree, while the other is derived from ancestors that he can trace for generations, and the parents of which are now on his farm, the purchase price having been a large one.

The breeder would have been greatly puzzled if such ancestors had produced offspring entirely unworthy of themselves. The same applies to the vegetable world. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" But apparently we often expect this rule to be reversed in regard to human beings. The fact is, man was so much regarded as a creature apart by himself, with laws of his own, laws that were, every now and then at least, interfered with in some inexplicable way, that the public mind got demoralized; for nothing can be so disastrous as to believe that the laws of nature are subject to change.

We may require to modify our views as to what the laws of nature really are, but so far as the world has yet learned, these laws are invariable.

I must confess myself to have had at one time almost unbounded faith in the changes that the environment could work, and especially that part of it that we call education, in the narrower sense. But a close study of heredity, by observation and experiment, in breeding some of our domestic animals for a term of years, has very strongly impressed upon my mind the strength of heredity.