

**NAVAL OFFICERS,
THEIR HEREDITY
AND DEVELOPMENT**

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Naval officers, their heredity and development by Charles Benedict Davenport & Mary Theresa Scudder

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CHARLES BENEDICT DAVENPORT & MARY THERESA SCUDDER

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PART I.

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

A nation at the beginning of a great war, after prolonged peace, is executing a great increase of its naval and military forces. For these forces officers must be selected in large numbers, as many as 1,000 officers for each division of 20,000 men, or 50,000 officers for 1,000,000 men. So, too, in the naval organization every ship has its commander and lieutenants, and there are captains and admirals of the various grades for the command of groups of officers. Each of these officers holds in his hands, as it were, the lives of from 100 to 100,000 men. Obviously it is a matter of the gravest concern that they should be properly selected. Yet the number is so vast and the personal knowledge about the appointee on the part of those who must appoint is necessarily often so slight that every assistance in the general method of making the selection may well be carefully considered. In time of actual battling, selection for advancement is made on the ground of performance — the inferior officers fail, the successful ones are given the higher commands. Our Civil War showed this clearly. It also showed the melancholy fact that the selections made at the outset were often inadequate, and many a colonel and even general confidently appointed at the outbreak of the war was recalled as a failure. The method of selecting exclusively by trial and error is a sure method, but one that is frightfully wasteful of lives and property. What is the best method of selecting untried men for positions as officers?

Diverse methods of selecting *untried* officers have been employed in the past. In the navy those who have made good records at the Naval Academy have been selected. Admission to the Academy is ordinarily made on the recommendation of a congressman. The applicant undergoes a physical and perhaps a mental examination. No doubt it is true, as Filchett (1903, p. 3) says: "In these days where the foot rule and the stethoscope and the examination paper are the tests by which our embryo Nelsons and Wellingtons are chosen, the future hero of the Nile and of Trafalgar would infallibly have been rejected." A war may be lost by rejection on a physical examination as certainly as by inadequacy in the supply of men or munitions. All too much is made of the physical examination; all too little of temperament and intelligence. The modern psychological and psychiatric examinations of officers and recruits are excellent. I recall one instance in our Civil War when a colonel ordered a futile attack in which a regiment was nearly annihilated. Investigation quickly showed that the commander was insane and had been so for some time. On the other hand, the elimination of the feeble-minded must be made intelligently. There is at least one instance in our Civil War where a feeble-minded sharpshooter did great execution. A feeble-minded man *may* have fired the musket shot that killed the great Nelson. Fighting leaders must possess insight, judgment, audacity, and pertinacity. Sharpshooters require little of these qualities, but above all ability to aim

accurately and quickly. Each man should be selected for the qualities that fit him for the special rôle he has to play. Joseph Jefferson would have failed as Hamlet. Many a perfect physical specimen of a man would make a poor naval strategist.

It is undoubtedly true, also, that at the outbreak of our Civil War many untried men were chosen as officers merely because they had shown some interest in the organization of companies and, moreover, were friends of congressmen who urged their appointment upon the War Department. We are told that in selection for the present war no political influence is permitted. But political influence is a most insidious thing; often it comes to the harassed Army Department as a welcome and valued suggestion. With the best intentions in the world the recommender may be urging an utterly unfit appointment. It is the insufficiency of the method that is at fault. Is there any additional test of fitness?¹

II. AN IMPROVED METHOD OF TESTING THE FITNESS OF UNTRIED OFFICERS.

1. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

We start with the principle enunciated by Mahan: "Each man has his special gift and to succeed must act in accordance with it." Our problem is, then, how can we determine, in advance, what is a man's special gift? Or, in our special case, how can we tell whether or not an applicant for admission to the Naval Academy or for a naval commission has a gift for the place he seeks?

"The child is father of the man." Each well-marked trait of adult character passes through developmental stages. Its beginnings are already to be seen in the child. We recognize this fact in the case of physical traits. The dark skin-color of the negro develops rapidly, beginning a few hours after birth; curliness of hair shows in the first permanent coat; hair-color is slower in getting its final shade, but usually does so within the first decade. Mental traits, also, early show their quality. Imbeciles show retardation even at 5 or 6 years; idiots much earlier. On the other hand, Galton at 4 years had the intellectual advancement of a boy of 8 years. Special traits, as every experienced parent knows, may show at a very early age, such as neatness, altruism, frankness, jollity, cautiousness. Audacity in the adult is foreshadowed by adventurousness—a desire of the boy to "try stunts." The courageous man was fearless as a boy. In the early years of school special interests and capacities for drawing, arithmetical work, memorizing, reasoning, are clearly shown. The visualist and auditist are already differentiated long before adolescence. The significance of the combination of boyish traits may not be fully realized even by the parents or other close relatives; their interpretation has to be made by the expert. "What has poor little Horatio done," cried his uncle, Captain Suckling, when young Nelson was brought to him, at 12 years, to be taken on his ship, "that he, being so weak, should be sent to rough it at sea? But let him come, and if a cannon ball takes off his

¹ This book was written in the summer of 1917; hence certain anachronisms.

head, he will at least be provided for." He did not understand the significance of the introspective, brooding silence, that tenacious regard for his honor, that willingness to undertake hazardous enterprises without claiming any material reward, which Horatio Nelson had already shown and continued to show to the day of his death. We must test the hypothesis that the special gifts required for a naval fighter are foreshadowed in the child; for, if this prove to be correct, the principle should be utilized in making selection of untried officers.

The "special gift" is, as its name implies, something that has come, willynilly, through the germ plasm. Such hereditary traits are usually *family* traits and recur again and again in the family. We have, therefore, to note the indications of a special gift in the boy by an examination of the family, to see where that gift has been developed elsewhere. In the case of a few traits we know rather exactly the relationship that two or more persons in successive generations showing a "gift" may be expected to bear to each other. Such knowledge will be a useful check on the indications of juvenile promise.

2. SPECIAL PROCEDURE.

To get at the requisite facts for the present investigation into the juvenile promise shown by great naval commanders, and hereditary factors present in their families, the reading of a considerable number of biographies of naval men was undertaken. In some instances, as notably in the case of Nelson, several distinct "lives" were read; in most cases only one. In the case of British officers the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was found of assistance; in the case of American officers, the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* was used (with caution); also the American "Who's Who." For family histories research was made in the genealogical libraries of Greater New York, and for British families Burke's "Peerage and Landed Gentry" and other like official genealogies were found very useful. In all this work I had the assistance of my wife, Gertrude C. Davenport, and especially of my assistant, Miss Mary T. Scudder, who did most of the tracing of genealogies and arranged the pedigree charts. This work would hardly have been possible except for an arrangement with the Brooklyn Public Library, which generously mailed to us all the books that we desired from its extensive collections. The compilation of the facts has taken six or eight months of steady work.

In regard to the method of selection of officers. First of all, this was determined by the availability of full biographies. There are some naval officers quite as eminent as those included in our list about whom we could get few pertinent data. Many biographies gave little information about juvenile promise or family history and these could not be used. No selection, it need hardly be said, was made with the aim of supporting any preformed conclusions. Practically all the information that we gathered that would throw light on our problem has been set forth, nearly or exactly, in the words of the biographer. We have been always alive to the error introduced by substituting for the descriptive terms of the author terms of our own which could hardly avoid being

somewhat "colored" by our prepossessions. Naturally in the "Tables" it often becomes necessary to place individuals into certain categories not named by the biographer. For the full data that justify this assignment the reader must consult the work or works cited at the ends of the biographies in Part II. In a word, we have tried to approach this subject in the inductive spirit and to draw only such conclusions as the facts seem to warrant. How far the attempt has been successful each reader, being in possession of all of the facts, may judge for himself.

III. RESULTS OF STUDY.

I. TYPES OF NAVAL OFFICERS.

Successful naval officers are of various types. This is because, as Mahan (1901, p. 151) says: "Each man has his special gift, and to succeed must act in accordance with it." It is also true that different kinds of gifts can be utilized to advantage in the navy; for the navy needs not only fighters and tacticians, but also strategists, administrators, diplomats, explorers, and surveyors. It can make use of inventors, constructors, teachers, and writers. Indeed, especially in times of peace, advancement is made chiefly by seniority, and a naval officer may reach highest rank merely by longevity. The term "naval officers" consequently corresponds to a single trait no more than "officer," but a larger proportion of naval officers have a common trait than the group of "officers." The three commonest traits are: (1) love of sea; (2) capacity for fighting; (3) capacity for commanding or administering. One person may combine in himself all these three and even other important traits; so in studying a trait at a time we may consider an individual more than once. For example, Nelson was a great strategist and a great tactician, and had the traits that make a man a brilliant, gallant fighter.

2. TEMPERAMENT IN RELATION TO TYPE.

Temperament is the general quality of response shown by a person. Three principal kinds of temperament are recognized, and they are subdivided and combined in various ways. We may reckon the temperaments as overactive, *hyperkinetic*; underactive, *hypokinetic*, and intermediate or normal. The hyperkinetic temperaments are the choleric and the nervous (or sanguine). The hypokinetic temperaments are the phlegmatic and the melancholic. The intermediates are prevailingly calm and cheerful. "The *nervous* person is active, irritable, excitable, ambitious, given to planning, optimistic, usually talkative and jolly. The *choleric* person is overactive, starts on new lines of work before completing the old, brags, is usually hilarious, hypererotic, often profane, liable to fits of anger, destructive, assaultative, and even homicidal." "The *phlegmatic* temperament is characterized by quietness, seriousness, conservativeness, pessimism. The person of *melancholic* temperament is unresponsive (often mute), lachrymose, given to worry, weak and incapable, feels life a burden, often longs for death as a relief." The possessor of the *intermediate* or *normal* mood "works and plays moderately, laughs quietly, does