

DOING AS ONE LIKES

THERE is no higher aim than to do as we like, provided that we first know what we like and, secondly, can actually do it. But these are the difficulties: we do not know what we like, and, when we find out, we too often discover we cannot, in fact, do it—and not because people or circumstances forcibly restrain us, but for the lack of sufficient will or power or knowledge.

This is not to be wondered at, considering what we are and how we have come to be it. There are two people, so to say, in each of us—one derived by heredity from our parents and the other composed of all the influences we have received from the society in which we happen to have been born. By heredity we may be one sort of person; by training and education we may be quite another.

Consider any particular example, one's own or another's. Your parents belong to a stock that for hundreds of years has been rural; but owing to accidental circumstances over which certainly you have had no control, you yourself have been brought up all your life in a city and trained for a city occupation. All your heredity calls for a robust physical life with all its correspondent needs and wishes; but all your training disposes you to sedentary pursuits and the needs and wishes that accompany them. The problem is to find yourself between these two conflicting sides. Which is the real you, the you of heredity or the you of environment? Which are your own likes and dislikes? And which

of the two halves in you will do what you like?

We cannot say offhand which is the strongest, since individual cases vary. In some instances, environment has a less effect than heredity, or, as we say, blood tells. Sometimes it happens that a man or woman will suddenly throw up the career thrust upon them by education and revert to their hereditary inclinations. In other cases the forces of environment are too strong for the heredity; and the mould of society remains unbroken. Thousands of people, born men and women, die business men or society ladies, only because their education has been too much for their heredity. Sociology may be said in such instances to have got the better of biology. What nature intended society has frustrated.

Is it always, however, a matter for regret? Suppose that by heredity a man is of criminal propensities, the victory of society may be said to be for the best. It is only, in fact, when the hereditary tendencies are of a higher value than the tendencies due to training that there is any real loss.

But how shall we discover what our hereditary tendencies are? Since they certainly precede our superimposed social training, they may certainly be said to be more natural to us, that is to say, more nearly ourselves. But by the time we begin consciously to think about ourselves at all, the voice of heredity is already confused in the babble of voices due to environment. Our hereditary tendencies may be bad or they may be good; but if we have never had the chance of distinguishing them, we do not know which they are. And if we do not know which they are, we have no freedom of choice in indulging or restraining them. The struggle between our biology and our sociology goes on unconsciously. We are not masters in our own house, but servants, and victims.

As a first step towards discriminating between our native and our acquired likes and tendencies. it is best to begin with