

Venerable Chancellor,
Venerable Mahasanga and the Clergy of Other Religions,
Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties,
Members of the University Council and Senate,
Members of the Academic, Administrative and Non-academic Staff,
Invitees, Parents, Well-wishers and Graduates.

I consider it a great honour to be invited to deliver the convocation address of the Faculty of Graduate Studies. I thank the Dean and the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Graduate Studies for this honour.

It is indeed a pleasure to return to this University in which I spent the last fourteen years of an academic and professional career of nearly forty two years. I consider this the most productive part of my career and the part in which I came in to contact with a much broader cross section of the academia than I had done before. It was my good fortune that I had the opportunity to be associated with this seat of learning which in spite of its tumultuous history, has made an indelible imprint on our national identity and character.

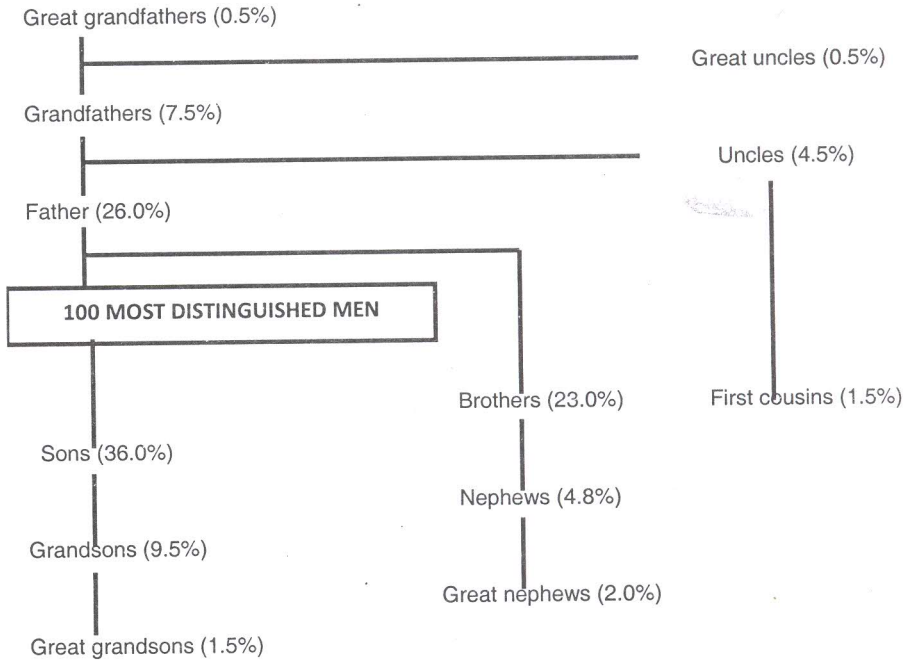
The Faculty of Graduate Studies though relatively young has contributed immensely to its post graduate programs and research. Having organized an academically impeccable 50th anniversary research conference it has progressed in the recent past in its infrastructure and in the content and quality of its programs. I am happy to note the establishment of a multidisciplinary board of study. I was pleasantly surprised at the high quality of participation and discussion at the recently conducted symposium on "Chronic kidney disease of unknown etiology in the North central province". To me it epitomized the intellectual discourse sans boundaries that we expect from a Faculty of this calibre.

As diplomates and graduates of this Faculty I consider you to be a relatively elite group even in the present Sri Lankan context cluttered with convocations of numerous state and private higher educational institutions. I wish you well in your future academic or professional career. I hope that you have acquired mastery not only of your subject but of your self, in order to guide your destiny as a productive member of this knowledge based society.

This afternoon I will be speaking on a question which has interested me as a paediatrician and a teacher for quite some time. Is cognitive ability inherited or acquired? During the next twenty minutes or so I will take you through the history of this debate and conclude with what appears to be the current consensus.

HEREDITARY GENIUS

Francis Galton



Cognition is defined as the mental act or process by which knowledge is acquired, including perception, intuition and reasoning. Intelligence is defined as the capacity for understanding, ability to perceive and comprehend meaning. In my address I will be focusing on general cognitive ability and I will treat it as synonymous with intelligence.

It was Francis Galton, a British polymath and a cousin of Charles Darwin who initiated the controversy on the relative role of “nature” or heredity and “nurture” or environment in determining human ability and behavior.

In an article in Macmillans magazine published in 1865 entitled “Hereditary Talent and Character” and in an expanded discussion published four years later under the title “Hereditary Genius: An Enquiry into its Laws and Consequences” he demonstrated that a greater number of able individuals is found among relatives of persons endowed with high mental ability than would be expected by chance. He also showed that closer the relationship higher was the incidence of superior individuals. On the basis of this data Galton concluded that nature or heredity prevails enormously over nurture or environment in determining human ability and genius.

