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RESPONSIBILITY IN PARENTAGE;

OR,

THE INFLUENCES OF HEREDITY.

A SERMON PREACHED IN THE DE KALB AVENUE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, BROOKLYN, N. Y.

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"The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge."
—JEREMIAH, xxxi. 29.

THE text is a proverbial expression, indicating the transmission of qualities from parents to children.

This transmission is now known as the law of heredity—a law by which all beings endowed with life tend to repeat themselves in their descendants.

"Heredity extends," says Ribout, "over all the elements and functions of organism, to its external and internal structure, its grades, its special characteristics, and its acquired modifications.

The subject is divided into two branches, viz: the physiological and the psychological. The first branch, the physiological, is so generally admitted as an unquestioned truth that no argument is necessary to establish it. But, in order to vivify our impressions of the truth, we cite a few notable illustrations of the law.

According to Haller, the Bentivoglios had on their bodies a slightly prominent tumor transmitted from father to son, which warned them of the changes in the weather, and which grew larger when a moist wind was coming.

In the Turgot family the fifty-ninth year was rarely passed. The man who made that family illustrious, when he saw that

fatal term approaching, remarked, "that although he might then have every appearance of health and strength, it was time for him to put his affairs in order, because in his family it was usual to die at that age." He died at the age of fifty-three.

Edward Lambert's whole body, with the exception of the face, the palms of the hands, and the soles of the feet, was covered with a horny excrescence, or scales, which rattled against each other when he was in motion. He had six children, all of whom, from the age of six weeks, had the same singularity. One of these survived, and transmitted it to all his sons; thus it was kept up through five generations.

The Colburn family presented the curious instance of sex-digitism—that is, six fingers and toes on each hand and foot. This family peculiarity continued through four generations.

Montaigne derived from his progenitors an invincible repugnance against medicines. His father lived seventy-four years, his grandfather sixty-nine years, his great-grandfather eighty years, and never tasted medicine. The very sight of drugs was an abomination. His paternal uncle, Signeur Gerviac, was sickly from his birth, yet lived to the age of sixty-seven. When suffering from a high and protracted fever the physician sent him word that he must certainly die if he would not take medicine. The good soul, affrighted at the horrible sentence, cried out: "Then, it is all over with me," for he regarded that alternative as an impossibility.

Frederick William I., father of Frederick the Great, was noted for his love of colossal men. He selected a body-guard of giants, and prohibited their marriage with women of stature inferior to their own. The result was a second generation of giant stature.

Diseases are subject to the same law of transmission, and, because of this, constitutional diseases may pass along and curse successive generations. Thus in one family, in three generations, thirty-seven became blind upon their seventeenth and eighteenth years. Life insurance companies habitually act with this fact in view; hence their careful interrogatories

concerning the diseases and longevity of the immediate ancestors and blood relatives of the applicant. For this reason, likewise, is the acknowledged superior competence of the family physician, whose thorough acquaintance with taints or peculiarities of heritage in the constitution of the patient, which might not be detected by a strange physician, especially fits him to treat the case with skill.

Passing to the psychological law of transmission, the philosophy of the law is found in the fact that the mental states depend upon organic conditions of the brain. Scientific experiments with drugs would lead us to anticipate such a truth. For example, says Maudsley: "We can suspend the action of the mind for a time by chloral or chloroform, and exalt its functions by small doses of opium, or moderate doses of alcohol; can pervert them, producing an artificial delirium by the administration of large enough doses of belladonna and Indian hemp."

If, then, the mind is subject to such physical conditions, it seems but reasonable to suppose that conditions of nativity should be likewise operative in modifying its developments. This presumption is greatly strengthened by the results of the treatment of domesticated animals by stock-breeders in their efforts to improve the quality of their stock. "Thus Lord Orfard," says Darwin, "crossed his famous grayhound, which failed in courage, with a bull-dog which had an excess of ferocity. The consequence was, that at the sixth or seventh generation of descendants there was not a vestige left of the form of the bull-dog, but his indomitable courage remained"—thus illustrating the fact that not merely physiological characteristics, but mental traits are transmissible.

Physiology regards every living body as an aggregation of multitudes of cells, each of which has a vitality of its own, possessing these essential properties of life, viz: Nutrition, evolution, and reproduction. Mr. Darwin's theory is (Variation, vol. 2, chap. 17) that each cell reproduces itself. The two grand laws, therefore, of such a reproduction, are uniformity and diversity, the latter a necessary consequence of

the admixture of two in the reproduction of one. This theory of physiological transmission is applied psychologically on this wise: Force or nerve-power exists in every nerve-cell. These cells, reproducing themselves, impart their own special characteristics to the progeny, and thus give mental heredity.

If this be true, it is not strange that acquired habits, as well as original constitutions, are hereditary. Indeed, acquired habits of vice are peculiarly liable to transmission, the reason probably being that we are so largely affected by impressions; an acquired vice is more apt to impress than a virtue, because usually more active and exacting. There are three periods of impression—first, that which embraces a few hours before, and the beginning of conceptive existence; second, that which intervenes from the seventh to the ninth month of pre-natal being; third, that which begins at birth and extends to death. The first two periods fix all constitutional biases, and determine the *nature* of the child, and are entirely within the sphere of the parents; the third begins, likewise, within their sphere, but gradually opens out into the area of individual freedom and independent action, and determines the *character* and *destiny*. But the influence of nature upon character is ordinarily so controlling that a heritage of acquired depravity in the first is likely to exhibit itself disastrously in the second. A striking physical illustration of the perpetuation of bodily peculiarities is afforded by the natives of Peru, several tribes of whom had each their particular way of deforming the heads of their children, the consequences of which still remain in the unnatural formation of the skulls of their children's children.

The small waists of our American women is another illustration of a transmitted physiological vice, as may readily be seen by comparison of the forms of our females with the statue of Venus, which is considered the crown of artistic perfection.

An important exception to this law should here be noticed, namely: *Varieties tend to return to the original type.* Thus,

in the Colburn family, already cited, according to Burdachs, the normal was steadily gaining on the abnormal in the ratio of 1 to 35 in the first generation, 1 to 14 in the second, and 1 to 3¼ in the third.

It is doubtless by the operation of this law of variation that nature finally eliminates diseased and other abnormal types of organization, and restores descendants after a time to the normal condition sacrificed by their progenitors.

While grateful for this beneficent provision, we must not forget, however, that there is a most important modification of this rule of exception in *the law of evolution*, which tends to fix the variety, and in "the survival of the fittest" does fix it, whether that survival be by nature or art.

The precocious and unbalanced development of brain-substance and nerve-force in the over-educated children of the present generation, suggests a question of painful interest to the philanthropist concerning the probable evolution of a nervo-cerebral type of humanity, which will be affected with diseases and pains already more than foreshadowed in the fearful *nerveism* of the present.

With this point in view, we would give special emphasis to the affirmation that instinct, passions, sentiments, and appetites all may be transmitted, as illustrated in the case of a lady of Boston, who was accustomed to read everything she could secure relating to Napoleon during his triumphant career. Her son, born at that time, inherited the most decided martial tastes, and is so enthusiastic an admirer of Napoleon that he has covered the walls of his house with pictures of him and his troops. Still more suggestive is the confession of a lady, who says: "From the age of two I saw that my eldest son's restlessness would ruin him, and it has been even so. Yet he was good, brave, and affectionate. The explanation is, I read the Iliad six months before he saw the light. He was actually an Achilles."

The victims of dipsomania, or alcoholism, are frequently such from the cradle. Says a writer: "I knew in Texas a young man who was heir to such a woful heritage. He was,

physically, one of the handsomest of men, and possessed of great and varied talents, which he had carefully cultivated. Moreover, he had served his country with distinguished bravery, and was then holding a high position of trust and honor. But with a regularity that was terrible there came to him—no matter where he was, over his ledger, in the church, by the side of the woman he loved—a craving for brandy, that possessed him like a demon, and drove him from among his fellows. With set lips and despairing face he would deliver to a friend the keys of his office and betake himself to his room—not as men go to a carousal, but as they go to meet a fearful reckoning—and for two or three days drink in sullen silence till the craving was appeased. A friend was one day praising, in his presence, his vast stores of acquired information and his delicate fancy as an artist. 'Yet I shall die like a brute!' he said, sadly; and the despairing look of a hunted animal came into his eyes as he added: 'My father died drunk; my mother—God forgive her—my grandfather shot himself in *delirium tremens*. You know, boys, how poor Patrick died; it will be the same with me.' His prophecy was too soon fulfilled."

"So," says Ribot, "the gambling propensity, the sexual appetite, avarice, the thieving tendency, all may be transmitted from parent to child."

A sad illustration of these facts is furnished in the last annual report from the New York Prison Association. In examinations of county jails the past year, Mr. R. L. Dugdale, an officer of the Prison Association, came upon one, in which were found six prisoners, under four family names, all blood relations, and belonging to a lineage that reached back to early Colonial times. These families had lived in the same locality for generations, and were universally odious and dreaded, the reason for which was soon manifest in the ascertained fact that, out of twenty-nine adult males, near relations of the above six persons, seventeen—or more than half—were convicted criminals. These significant facts put Mr. Dugdale upon continuous and careful inquiry. Aided by two resident

physicians of the county, the subjoined history was brought to light.

The first generation of the family found in jail—known and named—was a man born about the year 1725. He is described as having been a hunter and fisher; a hard drinker, who became blind in after life, entailing his blindness upon children and grandchildren. He had a numerous family, some of them illegitimate. Two of his sons married into a family of five sisters, who were born between the years 1740 and 1770. Three of these were harlots before their marriage; and of one other, it is recorded that her husband was a thief. The progeny of these sons and sisters is traced with more or less exactness through five succeeding generations, giving the number of descendants registered as 540, who were directly related by blood, and 169 related by marriage or cohabitation; in all, 709 persons, alive and dead. The total number of this lineage is believed to reach 1,200. Of the families of these two sons of the old hard-drinking and lecherous hunter, and the group of sisters into which they married, to and including the sixth generation, this is the record: Prostitutes, 74; cases of constitutional syphilis, 67; number of children dying at two years, about 300; paupers, 209; justly accused of crime, number unknown; convicted criminals, 76; cost of last generation to the county, at least $50,000 And with this last generation the race of direct descendants seems likely to perish, notwithstanding the infusion of purer blood through frequent union with stranger families. Not one marriage or birth is recorded or known in the sixth generation. *They appear to have rotted out of life!*

Is it not time that parents opened their eyes to the tremendous realities of that warning Scripture: "He visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth genertions?" The number of insane in South Australia is said to have been in 1861 one to 750 inhabitants, and in 1871 there was one to every 524 of the population, showing how terribly their convict heritage of crime was telling upon the perpetuity of the race.

At a meeting of the N. Y. State Charities Aid Association, Dr. Harris recently presented some of the most remarkable statistics regarding hereditary disposition to crime that have ever been collected.

His attention was attracted to a county on the upper Hudson, in which the proportion of crime and poverty to the entire population was extraordinarily great, there being about one criminal or pauper to every ten inhabitants. The recurrence of certain names among the list of unfortunates also excited his interest, and led him to genealogical investigations which have resulted in the following astonishing statement of facts. Seventy years ago, a child, having no other name than Margaret, was a vagrant about the locality. There was no almshouse, and the girl lived as a waif, occasionally helped by the charitable, but never educated and never given a home. Thus she reached womanhood, and gave birth to children, who became paupers like herself; they increased and multiplied until up to the present time nine hundred descendants of the friendless woman can be traced. Of this immense progeny, extending through six generations, two hundred of the more vigorous are recorded as criminals, and a large number as idiots, prostitutes, lunatics, and drunkards. In one single generation there were twenty children, three of whom died young, and the balance survived to maturity, but nine were sent to State's prison for aggregate terms of fifty years, and the rest were constantly inmates of penitentiaries.

The "hoodlum" classes of our cities—so named in the expressive vernacular of California—a race seemingly born of ruffianism, with no obvious means of support, and no linkings of association or desire with the beneficent institutions of society, is a forcible illustration of the same law of transmission of depravity as that, which, in the case of John Chretian, blasted his family hopes. He had three sons. These sons had four children; these four had eight children. Of these, four were murderers and seven were robbers, because cursed with a physiological and psychological taint of violence and aggression. These hoodlums—street corner loafers and bar-

room frequenters—present one of the greatest problems of the age to the Christian and philanthropist. To leave them in the festering slums which gave them birth and their first views of life, is to take them thence, by-and-by, as candidates for the State's prison and the gallows.

That the ranks of vice can breed criminals faster than our penal and reformatory institutions can dispose of them, is but too evident in the police reports of our cities. Heaven defend our liberties as our cities become still more populous, if some plan be not devised to meet the danger!

Still wider illustrations may be found of the same law in the SOCIAL EVIL of all civilized lands, and of which we will only say its magnitude is appalling, and its horrors inexpressible.

The vagrancy and thieveries of the gipsies, who are childish and purely animal in intellect, sentiments, and morality, furnish yet another illustration of this law of transmission. The strength of these propensities in their race was strikingly exhibited when Borrow, having translated St. Luke into their idiom especially for them, hoping thereby to regenerate and rescue them from their traditional vagabondage, they hung it about their necks as a talisman *when they went to steal.* —Ribot.

The reconstruction problem of the South is largely an outcome from the operation of the law of heredity. That problem now contains four constituent elements. First, the old slave-holders, proud, aristocratic, and domineering by birth and education, now depressed and embittered. The second, the ex-slaves, constitutionally and by education dispirited and hopeless, now psychologically inferior and depraved. The third, the poor whites, through generations demoralized but capable. The fourth, all sorts, but chiefly seekers of fortune's favors, amid unfavorable conditions. At least three of these four elements are made such as they are by the law of heredity. And a complete and permanent remedy can only be found in a reverse operation of the same forces.

National characteristics, likewise, reveal the proofs of the

same law, as, for example, the Combativeness of the Irish, the obstinate Conscientiousness of the Scotch, the persistence of the English, the home-love and freedom-love of the Swiss, the suavity and recklessness of the French, the perfidy of the Italians and Spanish, the stolidity and patience of the Germans, the thrift and enterprise of the Yankee, the exclusiveness and avarice of the Jews.

The wars of civilized and Christian nations, so opposed to all the better impulses of humanity and the teachings of morality and religion, seem largely the result of the same law. "In this country," says Nelson Sizer, "our history shows that the children born during war, have gone to war themselves when old enough to vote and fight. The great French and Indian war prevailed about 1750. The children born about that time were twenty-five years old when the Revolutionary War opened, lasting until 1783. Add twenty-nine years and we come to the war of 1812. Add twenty-one years more and we come to the warlike era of Nullification in 1833, and three years later the great wrangle about the Northeastern boundary. Old men were then in Congress, and by their sober councils war was barely averted. Add twenty-four years more, and we come to 1860. God pity the nation that provokes a quarrel with us in 1887–91! We have no doubt a similar state of facts might be traced in the history of France, England, Germany, and other nations. Children born during seasons of national peace do much to check the war-fury of those who are born during war, and sometimes, as in 1833–6, avert it."

Galton has assigned as a reason for this warlike propensity of modern times the fact "that in the Middle Ages celibacy was enjoined by religious orders upon their votaries. When a man or woman was possessed of a gentle nature, that fitted him or her for the duties of charity, meditation, literature, or art, no refuge was possible elsewhere than in the bosom of the Church. But the Church exacted celibacy, consequently these gentle natures had no continuance, while society was brutalized by their practical elimination from it.

It has been objected against this view that the Church was cruel, persecuting, and licentious; all of which may be admitted without vitiating Galton's conclusion in the least, for naturally the fiercer and more turbulent characters in the Church ruled it, while the gentle natures shrank away all the more completely into seclusion.

MEANS TO IMPROVE WITHIN OURSELVES.

Such being a brief exhibit of the grand law of heredity, together with its modifications, the important practical question arises, "If transmission has such a fearful power for evil, has it not a corresponding power for good? May not the virtues be inborn as well as the vices? Nay, is it not even possible that a religious temperament may be produced in the children of Christian parents that shall pre-incline them toward a Christian life? May not a religious tendency be thus imparted to the race that shall eventually place it upon a higher plane of possible virtues and of Christian attainments?"

In these days of analysis of agencies and weight and measurement of forces with utilitarian ends in view, these are questions which demand consideration. Certain it is that the highest possibilities of moral culture in the race lie not in supernatural regeneration *alone*, important as that is, but rather in the organized constitutional uplifting of the elements within humanity upon which grace works, and out of which it must shape its best specimens of redeemed men. Just here a question of personal responsibility presses upon our thought, viz., since every parent is projecting more or less of himself upon the coming generation, should not that which he thus transmits be his best and noblest? Here, the inferior is disgraceful, the vicious is criminal. To bring out of the mysterious unknown a being to run the fearful gauntlet of human and diabolical temptation, to expose him to the terrific liabilities of an unsought probation, and not to give him the best furnishment within our power, is downright cruelty;

while to load him with needless weights in the hazardous race for life, is as if the malice of demons inspired our course.

Dr. Bushnell has spoken forcibly of "the out-populating power of the Christian stock." Does he not mean by this precisely what we have mentioned as the parental transmission of the noblest and best? Surely God must hold all parents responsible, not merely for the religious training of their children, but for the very mold in which the child is cast, so far as that can be modified by their patient care and wisely-directed efforts.

Another inquiry of a social and judicial nature demands a moment's thought. Is there not a clear and legitimate distinction between those predispositions which only exist as strong tendencies within, but with a possible self-control, and those predispositions which are merged at times into fixed and dominant impulses in which responsibility has ceased?

Dr. W. A. Hammond has defined such morbid impulses as "a condition in which the affected individual is impelled consciously to commit an act which is contrary to his natural reason and against his normal inclinations;" and distinguishes this state from that of delirium, in which the subject "acts according to his reason, perverted though it be—*i. e.*, he is logical, reasons correctly from the premises, but the premises are false."

Dr. Thompson, of the general prison of Scotland, holds that there is among prisoners a distinct incurable class, and that crime is hereditary in the families of criminals belonging to this class. In view of this fact, there is no doubt that the treatment of criminals must sooner or later become a branch of psychological science, in which due credit will be given to all the forces which unite to make the man, and which in man crystallize in character or crop out in deeds.

If such be the force of the law of heredity, *where lies the grand hope of men?* We answer, first, in the fact that variation and the survival of the fittest are largely within men's own power. They can, by a wise choice, work variations that may be improvements to an indefinite extent.

It is a shame that the very race which has developed the noble pippin by culture from the crab-apple, the edible potato from the poisonous bulb, the fleet race-horse from the plodding pony, and the choice Devonshire from the almost worthless wild cattle of other ages, should leave its own organic destiny to the caprices of ignorance and the frenzy of passion.

By better begetting may we find a generation of better men!

THE SECOND AND GREATEST HOPE,

of man lies in the fact that evolution is aided by the Holy Ghost, so that all development in the line of rectitude may be stimulated and fixed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The same subjugation to the power of impression that renders the transmission of an acquired vice a peculiar liability, also opens to us this most glorious possibility of a regenerated manhood, viz., that by the special indwelling and impact of the Holy Spirit upon the nerve-cell, noble aspirations and upward tendencies shall be projected as impressions upon the forming nerve-cells of the embryo being, and become organized as constitutional predispositions within him.

From this subject we deduce a few practical rules, viz.: First, hold no sentiment, indulge no passions, form no habits that you would not have organized as a proclivity into your child. Your true policy should be to secure a birthright Christian predisposition in your child before acquired depravity becomes almost invincible. Hence, not reformation only should be your aim, but actually to so impart the positive tendencies of a religious life that the promise, "unto you and your children" shall be not only by inspiration, but by organism as well.

Second. The young should select such partners for life as by the laws of nature may work out the best results to the rising generation. They are to live, not in themselves only, but in their descendants; hence, in view of the tremendous reactions upon themselves of the lives which they originate,

for reasons of self-interest, if for none other, those lives should be conditioned in prudence, and the most scrupulous regard for the welfare of the race.

Third. If already a victim of any vice, or predisposition to vice, begin at once an educational process of emancipation. By long watchfulness and laborious training, aptitudes and qualities may be called forth which shall effectually check and control even constitutional predisposition to vice. The hereditary influence may be strong, but if not absolutely supreme, it may, after all, act only a secondary part in the weaving of life's destiny. The steady, tireless, persistent moldings of an education wisely chosen and patiently applied, may prune even deforming abnormalities into healthy growths, and from the curse of inherited perversities develop a noble manhood, that shall be all the grander for the fiery process of its evolution.

In conclusion, by whatever eating of sour grapes an entailment of conflict and heritage of weakness and demoralization may be yours, remember that the Omnipotent love of Jehovah rings out its challenge over all perversities, "Where sin has abounded, grace does much more abound!"

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