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HEREDITY IN THE WRITINGS

OF

HAWTHORNE, HOLMES AND HOWELLS

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin in partial fulfillmemt of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

by

CHARLES ERNEST BOEWE

Date May 17, 1955

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To MARY

For gladly did she teach that I might learn

Preface

In the fiction written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and William Dean Howells the frequent appearance of the words "heredity" and "inheritance," and the frequent occurrence of congenital similarities between characters related by blood, as well as the numerous direct author-comments about biological relationships indicate that a full understanding of what heredity meant to these authors should provide a valuable insight into the total meaning of their work. Further, since each of these writers places a somewhat different emphasis upon heredity, so far as this emphasis can be understood, their distinctive opinions about human nature are made clearer. And, since the time spanned by the lives of these writers is approximately a century, so far as each represents his own generation he represents chronological shifts that took place in American thought in the nineteenth century.

Each of the authors is intended to represent a distinct era in American thought, and the choice of these three rather than others is in part determined by this intention. Because the complex of ideas dealing with living things that we now call biology has one red-letter date in the nineteenth century, 1859, when Darwin's Origin of Species was published, Hawthorne may be said to stand for a pre-Darwinian era, Holmes for a Darwinian era (when controversy is at a peak), and

Howells for a post-Darwinian era (when most writers have made their peace, one way or another, with Darwin's unsettling theory).

The general subject of heredity in American writing was suggested to me by Professor Harry Hayden Clark as an area consonant with other interests of mine. My preliminary investigations of the general subject were entirely empirical. From this empirical sampling in the whole span of American literature, I gradually came to the conclusion that of major authors the three I have chosen are more concerned with heredity than any others, but to support this assertion would require another study longer than this one.

It is appropriate, I think, to say a word about the method of this study. To the extent that there is a rationale for the kind of thing I have attempted it is to be found in the first chapter of Arthur O. Lovejoy's The Great Chain of Being and in his essay "Reflections on the History of Ideas" (see General Bibliography). Thus I deal with the "unit-idea" that we now call heredity. Professor Lovejoy suggests that unit-ideas are often implicit assumptions or even unconscious habits of mind; heredity is used just that way sometimes by some of the writers, though, as will be seen, it is also used deliberately and explicitly. It is its deliberate and conscious use in fiction--what may be called its dynamic use--that is most elaborated here. Yet, in order to understand fully this dynamic use, it is necessary to try to determine the fundamental beliefs of the writers--what may be called

static heredity--and this, too, is considered. In brief, this is a study of the idea of heredity (with some attention to its polar associate, environment), especially of the idea in action in a social contexture, in the writings of three nineteenth-century American novelists.

It is important to state what I do not expect to accomplish. Since heredity is a factor one cannot control in himself, it may seem that this is an analysis of one kind of determinism. In some measure it is. A writer such as Holmes, who is interested in the problem of determinism and free will, quite naturally sees hereditary factors as deterministic elements in man's makeup. Hawthorne, with filaments of his thought coming down to him from the Puritan tradition, tends to use the idea of heredity as a kind of predestination. Howells, who depicts social environment with great clarity, often implies that the hereditary element is beyond the touch of environmental conditioning. Yet determinism is likely to be a conscious philosophy, a deliberate attempt at system-making. What is of more concern here is the unconscious truth that a writer feels in his bones and, because unconscious and because supposedly truth, puts to work in his fiction. It is a part of what Professor Lovejoy calls his "dialectical motives." While both Hawthorne and Howells make explicit statements which bear on determinism, both of them, like most men who are not professional philosophers, travel through the world the greater part of the time on the practical assumption of free will in ordinary events. And even Holmes says that

"after all the arguments of the metaphysicians. . . it is just all one as to any benefit or advantages as if a real self-determining power, and real responsibility for our acts of moral choice were existent in the same manner as is vulgarly thought." If one wishes to consider this study a footnote to the examination of determinism in these writers he may do so; but in general I have regarded systematic philosophical determinism as beyond the province of the present investigation.

My purpose throughout has been to interpret ideas, and, as a consequence, I have not indulged in aesthetic evaluation. The reputations of the three authors are sufficiently established to need no defense. The aesthetic appraisal of the works dealt with here has been going forward for a long while and can be expected to be continued by others.

Finally, I should mention that I have let the ideas of my authors determine the organization and emphasis of the study without attempting to force them into a rigid preconceived pattern. As far as possible, the three sections are kept roughly parallel; but changes in time, changes in opinion, changes in technique, and individual temperamental differences have made it impossible to treat exactly the same topics under each section.

There is yet the pleasant task of acknowledging aid I have had in my work. I am grateful to the staffs of several libraries for graciously if largely anonymously smoothing my

path. I would mention especially the Syracuse University Library, the New York Public Library, the Boston Medical Library, the University of Wisconsin Library, and the Wisconsin Historical Society Library.

I am particularly indebted to Professor Harry Hayden Clark, not only for his keen advice and willingly shared knowledge, but also--what is even more encouraging to a beginner--for his unflagging enthusiasm. My gratitude to my wife, Mary Scurrah Boewe, must receive inadequate expression but is nonetheless profound. She has typed the entire manuscript, has at every turn encouraged my work, and has throughout served me as a literary conscience.

Contents

Preface..... iii

I. Hawthorne: Heredity as Folk Opinion..... 1
The past in the light of the present, 1; Antiquity of "heredity," 2; Hawthorne's own heredity, 4; Conservative nature of heredity, 7; Family history, 8; Range of hereditary traits, 9; Folk idea of heredity, 14; Latent heredity, 15; Atavism, 17; Déjà vecu, 19; Differences between British and Americans, 24; Physical environment and heredity explain differences, 26; Doctrine of acquired characters, 28; Extent of environmental change, 31; Interpenetration of heredity and environment, 34; Hawthorne apart from the dominant strain of American thought about environment, 36; Races, 39; Mixed breeds, 43; Hawthorne's lack of race prejudice, 44.

II. Hawthorne: Heredity and Puritanism..... 50
Necessitarianism, 50; Debt to natural science, 53; Hawthorne not distrustful of science, 55; Hawthorne's relation to Puritanism, 59; Secularized predestination, 63; Heredity often represented as evil, 64; Symbolic and allegorical heredity, 65; Critical opinions on Hawthorne's relation to Puritanism, 69.

III. Hawthorne: Heredity in The House of the Seven Gables..... 73
Plot and theme of the novel, 73; Hereditary affinity of the Colonel and the Judge, 75; Hereditary attributes of other characters, 81; Heredity as symbol of evil, 85; The past, 87; The idea of progress, 92; Environmental conditioning of the Pyncheons, 95; Hereditary degeneracy, 97; Summation of the place of heredity and environment in the novel, 99; Heredity in Hawthorne's pattern of thought, 101; Reform, 102; Fundamental goodness of human nature, 105.

IV. Holmes: Heredity as Science..... 108
Holmes's scientific orientation, 108; The problem of sources for his knowledge of heredity, 113; Holmes's interest in heredity an outgrowth of physiological psychology, 117; Source of theory of reflex action, 120; Holmes's extension of the reflex theory, 122; The "medicated" novels as studies in reflex action, 126; Elsie Venner, 127; The Guardian Angel, 130; A Mortal Antipathy, 138.

V. Holmes: Heredity and Darwinism..... 151
Pre-Darwinian theories of evolution, 151; Heredity and environment as factors responsible for the transmutation of species, 156; Holmes an evolutionist before Darwin, 159; Holmes's 1857 theory of evolution, 161; The origin of man and the problem of free will, 167; The test of heredity, 171; Pragmatic solution of the problem of free will, 175; Holmes's acceptance of Darwinism during the 1870's, 177; Summary of reasons for believing Holmes a Darwinist by 1874, 180.

VI. Holmes: The Circumference of Heredity..... 184
Unsolved problems raised by heredity, 184; Heredity in medical practice, 187; The Brahmin Caste, 189; Holmes's biography of Emerson, 191; Hereditary degeneration, 195; Holmes's theory of heredity, 198; Latent heredity, 198; Inheritance of psychic traits and instincts, 201; Consequences of his theory of heredity, 205.

VII. Howells: Science and Criticism..... 207
Howells's points of contact with science, 207; Function of the critic and the novelist, 209; Chance, 211; Taine's theory of criticism, 213; The criterion of place, 214; The criterion of race, 218; The criterion of epoch, 220; Howells and evolution, 221; Howells's doctrine of complicity, 228.

VIII. Howells: Heredity and Fiction..... 232
Character established by hereditary clues, 232; An Imperative Duty and the Negro race, 234; The meaning of heredity in An Impera-

tive Duty, 239; The Quality of Mercy, 244; Environmentalism in The Quality of Mercy, 247; The influence of heredity and environment on character and motivation in The Landlord at Lion's Head and The Son of Royal Langbrith, 253; Jeff Durgin as savage "natural man," 256; The Son of Royal Langbrith, 258; Heredity and environment as integral materials of Howells's art, 262.

IX. Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells: Conclusion..... 265

Bibliography..... 275

Chapter I

Hawthorne: Heredity as Folk Opinion

There are two ways to read the Past. One way--undoubtedly the more important--is in terms of its own interests and attitudes. In so far as ages and eras are dominated by articulated patterns of thought, these distinctive patterns are indispensable in understanding individual thinkers representative of their times; thus to anatomize the thought of Cotton Mather, for instance, without reference to Puritan theology would be frivolous. But there is another way to look at a period or a generation of a former time, and that is in terms of interests and attitudes of the present. Surely if there <u>is</u> a twentieth-century intellectual preoccupation comparable to the seventeenth's theology, that interest is natural science. And--to continue the same illustration--it is this fact that has made Cotton Mather's relatively unmomentous activity in the smallpox-inoculation controversy seem so much more overpoweringly interesting to us than, perhaps, his zeal in carrying on his father's work of collecting Remarkable Providences--an activity that probably appeared to him to be the more solid accomplishment. We do have a legitimate right to employ this second way of reading the Past. Indeed, it is one of the main justifications for the study of the secondary interests and ideas of a former age, if such a

study is not to degenerate into mere antiquarianism.

The second point of view dominates the pages which follow. The word "heredity" as it is used here is a twentieth-century word. Like most of our words, it was not suddenly invented, or coined, or hatched. All the writers discussed here used it; and a reader comes to feel in reading one of them--Hawthorne--that in its adjectival form it was almost his favorite word. However, it is used here in its biological sense to mean the transmission, in living beings, of psychical and physical traits from parents to offspring. Such a meaning of the word is recorded no earlier than 1863 by the Oxford English Dictionary, the citation being from Herbert Spencer's Principles of Biology.

Yet we know after a moment's reflection that the essential meaning of the word is as old as speech itself. Men did not have to wait for Spencer to tell them that offspring resemble their parents or that the resemblance is fixed by birth and only to an extent modifiable by subsequent surroundings. Since the first domestication of animals, we have been aware of the general principles of genetics and have taken advantage of them for our own profit. The Christian concept of being "born in sin" is a recognition of at least the fact of heredity, as was the punishment meted out by the God of the Old Testament "unto the third and fourth generations." Perhaps the best known Classical expression of the idea of heredity occurs in the explanation of Hippocrates (400 B.C.) of how the Macrocephali

got their long and narrow heads.[1] Similarly, St. Augustine's doctrine of predestination owes something to the idea of heredity. These are all primitive recognitions of the fact that all of us, however consciously free we seem as individuals, are subject to a power not of our own making, a power that is antecedent to our individual existences and has some kind of continuing influence on us throughout our lives.

On the other hand, the OED's first citation of the adjective "hereditary," meaning "transmitted in a line of progeny; passing naturally from parents to offspring. . . especially of physical and mental characteristics, diseases, instincts, etc., that are or may be transmitted from generation to generation," is 1597. And it will be seen that Hawthorne most commonly makes use of this adjective form, as do the others discussed here.

It is enough to say at this point that Hawthorne does use the idea of heredity in its biological sense, as will be amply demonstrated, and to enter the provision that while

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[1]See Conway Zirkle, "The Early History of the Idea of the Inheritance of Acquired Characters and of Pangenesis," Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, n.s. XXXV (1945-1946), 91-151. In his discussion of the history of the idea of acquired characters, a special kind of heredity that will be touched on later, Mr. Zirkle mentions numerous ancient and early modern writers who acknowledged the concept of heredity, among them: Aristotle, Antigonus, Galen, Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Pierre Bersuire, Sir Thomas Elyot, Thomas Cogan, Polydore Vergil, Jerome Cardan, Jacques DuBois, Vesalius, Scaliger, Paré, Robert Burton, Sir Kenelm Digby, and John Ray. Others will be mentioned later.

he also uses the word "hereditary" in its legal and social sense, it is the idea of the biological transmission of physical and mental characteristics that is to be investigated here.

Possibly because of Hawthorne's avowed interest in heredity in his fiction, there has been considerable scholarly speculation about Hawthorne's own heredity. "The hereditary sense was preternaturally strong in Hawthorne," says Randall Stewart. "So deeply did he feel his own inheritance from his early New England ancestors, William Hathorne, the persecutor of the Quakers, and John Hathorne, the witch-judge, that, in The Scarlet Letter, he had taken shame upon himself for their sakes, and had prayed that any curse incurred by them might henceforth be removed."[2] In his biography of Hawthorne, Mr. Stewart is more explicit, suggesting that, while "the determination of ancestral influences is always conjectural," Hawthorne inherited through his father "a sternness," "a moodiness," and "a tendency to solitude." From his mother he inherited his "gray eyes," his "gentle manners," and his "reserve and thoughtfulness."[3] Stewart insists further that the Manning family's contribution accounted for the business acumen that the boy pos-

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[2]Randall Stewart (ed.), The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York, 1941), p. xxxviii.

[3]Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography (New Haven, 1948), p. 3. See also Manning Hawthorne, "Parental and Family Influences on Hawthorne," Essex Institute Historical Collections, LXXV (1939), 103-134, the essence of which is repeated in Stewart's biography.

sessed and the Hathornes lacked, and that "from the Mannings also, it would appear, was derived a trait even more important than practicality, namely, a sense of humor."[4] Vernon Loggins, in his study of seven generations of Hawthornes, seems to consider Nathaniel Hawthorne's determination to persevere as a writer an inheritance of his great-great-great-grandfather's "granite" will to "assist in the founding of God's State upon earth."[5] He sees this same driving determination recrudesce in Hawthorne's daughter, Rose, when she gave up her marriage to George Lathrop to become a Roman Catholic lay sister and found homes for the care of incurable victims of cancer: "For the third time in three hundred years a Hawthorne was in the control of a mighty will."[6] All this may be true, but most of it is not subject to proof. No geneticist would go farther out on the limb than to accept the color of Hawthorne's eyes as being strictly the result of inheritance. Certainly as regards the genetic contribution of William and John Hathorne, Newton Arvin is right when he says that "nothing here need be attributed to strict 'heredity'; too many other strains--Gardners and Phelpses and Mannings and so on--had diluted or sweetened the blood of William and John Hathorne before

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[4]Stewart, Biography, p. 4

[5]Vernon Loggins, The Hawthornes (New York, 1951), p. 237 and p. 241.

[6]Ibid., p. 321.

Nathaniel was born."[7] Yet these other characteristics are exactly the sort of things Hawthorne himself did consider hereditary, and it was his two seventeenth-century ancestors of somewhat nefarious memory whom he considered of greatest importance in the shaping of his own life. For example, he looked for hereditary character-traits in his own children, recording in his journal this observation:

> To-day Una is exceedingly ungracious in her mode of asking, or rather demanding favors. For instance, wishing to have a story read to her, she has just said, "Now I'm going to have some reading"; and she always seems to adopt the imperative mood, in this manner. She uses it to me, I think, more than to her mother, and from what I observe of some of her collateral predecessors, I believe it to be a hereditary trait to assume the government of her father.[8]

Shortly afterwards of Julian: "He has a natural passion for horses, which he certainly does not inherit from me."[9] And "the figure of that first ancestor," he says, in "The Custom House," the figure of William Hathorne, "still haunts me, and induces a sort of home-feeling with the past."[10] He is also haunted by the figure of William's son, John Hathorne, the magistrate of witchcraft noto-

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[7] Newton Arvin, Hawthorne (Boston, 1929), p. 6.

[8] Randall Stewart (ed.), The American Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (New Haven, 1932), p. 201. The passage is dated 28 Jan. 1849.

[9] Ibid., p. 203.

[10] Norman Holmes Pearson (ed.), The Complete Novels and Selected Tales of Nathaniel Hawthorne (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 88. Because of its general availability, this edition of Hawthorne's writings will be cited whenever possible. For materials not contained in it, the standard 13 vol. edition, edited by George P. Lathrop (Boston, 1883), will be cited.

riety.[11] The feeling of an hereditary connection with his ancestors, whether right or wrong according to modern genetics, surely accounts for a large part of Hawthorne's fascination with the past. That the feeling went even farther back than to seventeenth-century Salem will also be seen. It is necessary now to try to isolate the precise meaning of genetic inheritance for Hawthorne, and to see what he did with it.

One of the most impressive things about heredity is its conservative nature; it fixes and passes on to future generations elements of the genetic makeup of animals, plants, and men, making for continuity rather than change and variation.[12] Hawthorne found this aspect of heredity both compelling and dreary. "It is a little wearisome," he wrote, in 1857, "to think of people living from century to century in the same spot, going in and out of the same doors, cultivating the same fields, meeting the same faces, and marrying one another over and over again; and going to the same church, and lying down in the same churchyard--to appear again and go through the same monotonous round in

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[11] Judge Hathorne's part in the celebrated witchcraft delusion of 1692 is entertainingly discussed in Marion L. Starkey, The Devil in Massachusetts (New York, 1950), pp. 71-73, et passim.

[12] See Emanuel Rádl, The History of Biological Theories, trans. and adapted by E. J. Hatfield (London, 1930), pp. 245-246. Indeed, this conservative emphasis on continuity goes far to explain contemporary indifference to the experiments of Mendel on sweet peas; at a time when Darwinists were hot for variation, Mendel exhibited the laws of hereditary continuity.

the next generation."[13]

Unlike the young Emerson, who said it was his "humor to despise pedigree,"[14] Hawthorne was always very conscious of family history and ancestral influences, his own and others'. In "The Custom House" he refers to those "stern and black-browed Puritans" whose "strong traits of. . . nature" had "intertwined themselves" with his own.[15] And in one of his earliest published biographical sketches, a sketch of the life of John Adams, he is careful to note that his subject was "lineally descended from an old Puritan patriarch" and "had also the blood of the Plymouth pilgrims in his veins. . . ." To Hawthorne such a genealogy at once characterizes the man and at the same time establishes his responsibilities; for the "descendant of so honorable a lineage was bound, by peculiar obligations, to uphold those civil and

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[13] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 485. Hawthorne often uses the converse of this idea when he wants to emphasize freshness of children; thus, of Elsie and Ned he says that they "were of that class of children whose material seems fresh, not taken at second hand, full of disease, conceits, whims, and weaknesses, that have already served many people's turns, and been moulded up, with some little change of combination, to serve the turn of some poor spirit that could not get a better case." Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, ed. by Julian Hawthorne (Boston, 1892), pp. 4-5.

[14] The Heart of Emerson's Journals, ed. by Bliss Perry (Boston, 1926), p. 28. Emerson was only 21 when he confided this opinion to his journal, evidently in rebellion against his Aunt Mary, who had been recounting the virtues of his ancestors; he added, "my business is with the living." Later, as will be seen, he also became aware of how much the dead, by their hereditary influence, affect the living.

[15] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 89.

religious principles for which his ancestors had become exiles." The moral excuse for the sketch itself is that Adams "may be taken as an example of the primitive New England character, modified by time and circumstances, yet the same in its oaken substance as of old."[16] Twenty years later, in England, the physical appearance of the slum children seems to him visible proof of the fact of hereditary conditioning; no argument is needed: "it is only necessary to look at such an assemblage of children as I saw yesterday, to be convinced that birth and blood do produce certain characteristics."[17] What, then, are these characteristics?

Leaving aside those adjectival uses of the word "hereditary" when Hawthorne means only "transmitted through time"--as when he speaks, as he so often does, of "hereditary estates" or "hereditary customs"--we can see a wide range of characteristics, attitudes, aptitudes, and states of mind that he believes are transmitted by biological heredity. In The Scarlet Letter Pearl is said to have inherited Hester's passionate temperament;[18] Chillingworth asserts that Dimmesdale has inherited a strong animal nature;[19] and the New England Puritans have an "hereditary English taste" for

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[16] Arlin Turner (ed.), Hawthorne as Editor: Selections from His Writings in The American Magazine for Useful and Entertaining Knowledge (University, La., 1941), p. 42. Hawthorne edited this magazine in 1836.

[17] English Notebooks, p. 192.

[18] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 137 and p. 139.

[19] Ibid., p. 160.

gaiety which they have suppressed.[20] Zenobia and Priscilla, in The Blithedale Romance, are both to an extent the kind of women they are because, having the same father, their mothers were strikingly different. In the same novel, Westervelt remarks on "hereditary dyspepsia."[21] Hereditary deformities such as polydactylism are mentioned in The Marble Faun.[22] In The House of the Seven Gables, which is a storehouse of heredity lore, Colonel Pyncheon's "iron energy of purpose" is handed on to his descendants;[23] Judge Pyncheon inherits the family's "hard and grasping spirit"[24] as well as perhaps "the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime. . . ."[25] Likewise, Matthew Maule, the carpenter, was "popularly supposed to have inherited some of his ancestor's [his wizard grandfather's] questionable traits," such as the "strange power of getting into people's dreams. . . ."[26] The Gray Champion, in the tale by that name, is said by the author to be the "type of New England's hereditary spirit."[27] Hereditary insanity is alluded to in "The Wedding Knell."[28] In the same story, the widow, on the way to the altar to be married, recognizes the physical

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[20] Ibid., p. 220.
[21] Ibid., p. 495.
[22] Ibid., p. 724.
[23] Ibid., p. 246.
[24] Ibid., p. 386.
[25] Ibid., p. 314.
[26] Ibid., p. 356.
[27] Ibid., p. 866.
[28] Ibid., p. 867.

traits of her old friends in the faces of their children, the wedding guests, and realizes how old she really is.[29] Roderick Elliston, in "Egotism; or, the Bosom Serpent," even alleges that his unusual disability is a "family peculiarity."[30] And in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," the innkeeper is said to have inherited his courtesy from the French, while Americans are granted "a long hereditary claim" for their liking of the fruit of the vine, "the Good Creature."[31]

In the tale "The Antique Ring," Hawthorne alludes to the "hereditary rigor" of Queen Elizabeth,[32] and later again speaks of her "stern hereditary temper."[33] In the story of Queen Christina of Sweden, in "Biographical Stories" written for children, it is by their recognition in the child of "her father's brow. . . his piercing eye" that the citizens accept the infant Christina as their queen.[34] Septimius Felton derives an "hereditary mysticism" from his Indian ancestors,[35] and Septimius himself feels in his being "the wild, natural blood of the Indian, the instinctive, the animal nature, which has ways of warning that civilized life polishes away and cuts out. . . ."[36]

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[29] Ibid., p. 870. [30] Ibid., p. 1115. [31] Ibid., p. 1212.

[32] Tales, Sketches, and Other Papers (vol. XII of the Lathrop ed. of the Complete Works), p. 57.

[33] Ibid., p. 61. [34] Ibid., p. 208.

[35] The Dolliver Romance, Fanshawe, and Septimius Felton (vol. XI of the Lathrop ed. of the Complete Works), p. 294.

[36] Ibid., p. 424.

In Our Old Home Hawthorne implies his belief in "hereditary intelligence";[37] and he hopes he will not "compromise" his American patriotism by mentioning his "fervent hereditary attachment to the native soil of our forefathers," a condition which caused him to feel England to be "our own Old Home."[38] Referring to the celebrated episode of the debauched Doctor of Divinity whom he tried to put back on the straight and narrow path, Hawthorne says of his expostulations with the man: "finding. . . the hereditary Puritan waxing strong in my breast, I deemed it a matter of conscience not to let it pass entirely unimproved."[39] Similarly, remarking that James Boswell's grandson was "a little too familiar with the wine-cup," he thinks that "poor Bozzy's booziness would appear to have become hereditary in his ancient line. . . ."[40] He remarks on the "hereditary mirthfulness" of gravediggers in his notebooks.[41] And in England, after he meets Leigh Hunt, he records his impression of the "fineness, subtlety, and grace" that characterize Hunt, observing to his own satisfaction that it is "his American blood (his mother was a Pennsylvanian) that gives

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[37] Our Old Home (vol. VII of Lathrop's ed. of the Complete Works), p. 347.

[38] Ibid., p. 57. [39] Ibid., p. 44. [40] Ibid., p. 243.

[41] American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 88. As Stewart suggests in a note, Hawthorne probably had the gravediggers in Hamlet (V, i) in mind; so it is well not to place too heavy a burden on this citation.

him whatever excellence he has," and adding that "his person, too, is thoroughly American."[42] In Italy, offended by the filth he found everywhere, he wonders "whether the ancient Romans were as dirty a people as we everywhere find those who have succeeded them," concluding: "I think it must be an hereditary trait, probably weakened and robbed of a little of its horror by the influence of milder ages; . . . I am much afraid that Caesar trod narrower and fouler ways in his path to power than those of modern Rome, or even of this disgusting town of Bolsena."[43]

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[42] English Notebooks (Stewart, ed.), p. 255. It is of some value to see how Hawthorne modified his characterizations of people. In the notebook he said of Hunt: "There is not an English trait in him, from head to foot, nor either intellectually or physically; no beef, no ale or stout; and this is the reason that the English have appreciated him no better. . ." (p. 255). When the whole passage was reworked for inclusion in Our Old Home--by which time Hunt was dead--the quotation just mentioned was dropped out and the attribution of all of Hunt's virtues to his American heredity was toned down; he was made to represent a type of human being that Americans may ideally come to be. Thus:

"But the kind of excellence that distinguished him--his fineness, subtilty, and grace--was that which the richest cultivation has heretofore tended to develop in the happier examples of American genius, and which (though I say it reluctantly) is perhaps what our future intellectual advancement may make general among us. His person, at all events, was thoroughly American, and of the best type, as were likewise his manners; for we are the best as well as the worst mannered people in the world." Our Old Home, p. 323.

Hence despite the anguished cries of professional Anglophiles that were occasioned by Our Old Home, Hawthorne was trying to be fair, and at the same time he was far from being the Yankee-Doodle Dandy at this period that some recent scholars have made him out to be.

[43] Passages from the French and Italian Note-Books (vol. X of Lathrop's ed. of the Works), pp. 473-474. Curiously,

So much could be the result of heredity! Even good manners. Though "there are specialties and arbitrary rules of behavior which do not come by nature," as Hawthorne admits in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, yet "these are few; and beautiful, noble, and genial manners may almost be called a natural gift; and these, however he inherited them, soon proved to be an inherent possession of little Ned."[44] Many other examples might be adduced, examples almost without end; but as Hawthorne himself says, "it is too fruitful a subject, this of hereditary resemblances. . . ."[45] It is time now to stop and take stock.

It is evident from this brief summary that heredity is a kind of catch-all category for all sorts of fateful forces that are spontaneous in their effect on an individual and seemingly beyond the control of his will. In other words, Hawthorne's conception of heredity is essentially the folk idea of it. Physical appearance, character traits both good

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when this passage was revamped for inclusion in The Marble Faun (ed. cit., p. 814), the "hereditary trait" of dirtiness became a "classic trait"--indicating again how large heredity loomed in Hawthorne's first thoughts.

[44] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, ed. by Julian Hawthorne (Boston, 1892), p. 39. Hawthorne's use of the expression "natural gift" suggests Cooper's addiction to the term, especially in The Deerslayer (1841), a book which Hawthorne probably read. In that novel, however, Cooper distinguishes between nature, which, as Natty explains it, means "the creatur' itself; its wishes, wants, idees and feelin's, as all are born in him," and gifts which "come from sarcumstances" and account for the fact that "you expect different conduct from one in silks, and satins, from one in homespun. . . ." The Deerslayer (Everyman's Library ed.), pp. 430-431.

[45] The House of the Seven Gables (Complete Novels and Selected Tales), p. 317.

and bad, temperament, intelligence, insanity, physical and moral stamina, physical deformities, diseases, drunkenness, cleanliness or its lack, natural manners--all, he thinks, are or may be inheritable. Most of these character traits of course are not considered hereditary by modern geneticists.[46] They are traits that were, however, acceptable enough to Hawthorne's readers. As late as 1869, five years after Hawthorne's death, Francis Galton was exploring unknown territory in his attempt to show in Hereditary Genius that eminent judges, peers of the realm, scientists, divines, oarsmen, and wrestlers are likly to pass on their ability to their offspring. Since we now speak condescendingly of Galton's work as having only "historical" value, we should not expect Hawthorne's science to be in advance of that of the professionals.

Yet, because he was an excellent observer of the ways of men, Hawthorne had many very shrewd insights into the manner of hereditary transmission. One thing he noticed was that some traits require time for their development, that these traits apparently are present at birth but lie dormant until a later period of life. For example, in the fragmentary novel The Dolliver Romance, we are told that in his old age "an unrefined, and almost rustic simplicity, such as be-

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[46] See any reliable modern discussion, for instance: Laurence H. Snyder, The Principles of Heredity (New York, 1940); Edgar Altenburg, Genetics (New York, 1945); A. Scheinfeld and M. D. Schweitzer, You and Heredity (New York, 1939); or, for a reliable and readable primer, L. C. Dunn and Theodosius Dobzhansky, Heredity, Race and Society (New York, 1946).

longed to his humble ancestors, appeared to have taken possession of Doctor Dolliver, "as it often does of prettily mannered men in their late decay."[47] One of Darwin's "laws" of heredity (On the Variations of Animals and Plants under Domestication [1868]), interestingly, is that of "latent heredity," meaning characteristics which are not apparent at birth but develop later, usually at a particular age in later life--such as sexual desire, which is latent in childhood; the latent powers of song in young birds; or the frog-like characteristics that are latent in tadpoles.[48] The most fanciful use that Hawthorne makes of latent heredity--and at the same time perhaps also the most sincere, for it is himself he is explaining in the guise of a character of fiction--is in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret where he describes Redclyffe's emotions about being at last in England:

> he began to feel. . . the yearning of the blood within his veins for that from which it has been estranged; the half-fanciful regret that he should ever have been separated from. . . these natural features of scenery, to which his nature was moulded, from the men who are still so like himself, from these habits of life and thought which (though he may not have known them for two centuries) he still perceives to have remained in some mysterious way latent in the depths of his character, and soon to be reassumed, not as a foreigner would do it, but like habits native to him, and only suspended for a season.[49]

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[47] The Dolliver Romance (vol. XI, Lathrop ed.), pp. 28-29.

[48] See Rádl, op. cit., p. 244.

[49] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, pp. 180-181. For a detailed but moderate study of the changes in the notebook passages for their inclusion in this novel, see John A. Kouwenhoven, "Hawthorne's Notebooks and Doctor Grimshawe's Secret," American Literature, V (January, 1934), 349-358.

This idea of the cropping up of the remote past in the present is very important in the later writing of Hawthorne and is of paramount importance to an understanding of his life-long fascination with the past. He notes correctly, in the physical sense, the phenomenon of atavism; that is, the appearance of "qualities possessed by descendants, but not by their immediate ancestors";[50] in other words, hereditary characteristics that skip a generation or two. Thus, as a sort of aside in The Marble Faun, in the exposition of "The Pedigree of Monte Beni," Hawthorne says: "It is well known, however, that any hereditary peculiarity--as a supernumerary finger, or an anomalous shape of feature, like the Austrian lip--is wont to show itself in a family after a very wayward fashion. It skips at its own pleasure along

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[50]Rádl, op. cit., p. 244. Atavism (atavus = great-grandfather) was another of Darwin's "laws" of heredity. In its original usage, and still in its technical sense, it means no more than Hawthorne's observation does. "Darwin noted that the crossing of different strains of domestic rabbits or pigeons frequently gave rise to certain traits of their wild forebears, and it was long believed that at least part of the inheritance from remote ancestors lay dormant in the germinal stream only to be aroused to manifestation by the crossing of strains or by some environmental condition" (Frank H. Hankins, Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, II, 290). Then the criminologists took over the idea and made much of it as a "scientific" explanation for crime. Cesare Lombroso (1836-1909) announced in L'uomo delinquente his discovery of the "born" criminal who is to be known by the physical stigmata of atavistic traits. Max Nordau (1849-1923) made atavism and degeneracy identical in Entartung. (Hankins, pp. 290-291) Then the novelists got hold of the idea, notably Frank Norris and Jack London, and today the word "atavism" connotes to most people an image of a wolf-boy rolling and slavering on the ground. Actually Hawthorne, unaware of the sociologists or sensationalists--or even Darwin himself--correctly observed the phenomenon of atavism, even if he did not have a name for it.

the line, and, latent for half a century or so, crops out again in a great-grandson."[51] The same idea is alluded to in Septimius Felton. Aunt Keziah--like Septimius, the descendant of an ancestor who had come to America prior to the Puritans, who had married an Indian princess, and who had sired a wizard--has such a mottled pedigree that she is presented as something of a freak of nature. She sometimes "reverts" to the barbarism of her Indian ancestors: "For thus did the savage strain of the woman, mixed up as it was with the other weird and religious parts of her composition, sometimes snatch her back into barbarian life and its instincts; and in Septimius, though further diluted, and modified likewise by higher cultivation, there was the same tendency."[52]

Hawthorne's treatment of the past will be dealt with in greater detail in the chapter on The House of the Seven Gables. A recent critic[53] has argued with great persuasiveness that the denunciation of Holgrave in Seven Gables of "that odious and abominable Past" is largely the expression of Hawthorne's own feeling. In view of the fact that much of Hawthorne's best writing dealt with the past, this

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[51] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 724. This is by way of explanation of Donatello's curious ears.

[52] The Dolliver Romance, etc. (vol. XI of Lathrop ed.), p. 322. Septimius's heredity is discussed in Chapter Two.

[53] Lawrence Sargent Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944), passim, especially Chap. IV.

can hardly be the whole story; but that his attitude toward the past was an ambiguous one and that he continually turned to the past to refresh the wellsprings of his imagination can scarcely be doubted. Very likely the ambiguity of his attitude in part accounts for his continued fascination; he was never able to settle the problem of the past once and for all in his own mind.

At any rate, when he got to England in 1853 as United States Consul at Liverpool, Hawthorne found his mind deluged by ideas and speculations about the "hereditary" relationships of an American with "Our Old Home," and these ideas are recorded in the English notebooks, the abortive novels Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, Septimius Felton, The Ancestral Footstep, and the non-fiction study of England, Our Old Home.[54] One of the ideas that bears on heredity is a further extension of the phenomena of latent heredity and atavism. This is Hawthorne's expression of the feeling of having been in a place before when it was physically impossible for him to have been there; that is, the illusion of reliving a time anterior to his own birth. This is roughly the phenomenon psychologists have called the déjà vecu ex-

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[54] Our Old Home was published in 1863, a year before Hawthorne's death. Since the others were not published during their author's lifetime, publication dates are meaningless. The novels, including the very short scrap The Dolliver Romance, were all worked over repeatedly after Hawthorne returned to Wayside in 1860 and tried to pull together his projected "English Romance." About all that can be said for the date of the bulk of this material is that it shows what Hawthorne was thinking about during the last decade of his life.

perience: "an illusory feeling that a new experience has been previously encountered."[55]

As soon as he arrives in England, Hawthorne feels almost as though he were his own ancestor. "My ancestor left England in 1635. I return in 1853. I sometimes feel as if I myself had been absent these two hundred and eighteen years. . . . It brings the two far separated points of time very closely together, to view the matter thus."[56] Or, on his many visits to old English churches, he feels as though he had been there before; "I had a feeling as if I had seen this old church before, and dimly remembered."[57] This experience suggests an hereditary explanation: "perhaps the image of them [churches], impressed into the minds of my long-ago forefathers, was so deep that I have inherited it; and it answers to the reality."[58] The déjà vecu experience is so persistent and urgent in his consciousness that he gives it to the central characters of two of his English novels, to Middleton in The Ancestral Footstep and to Redclyffe in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret. Thus when Middleton reaches England he is said to feel "as if he were the original emigrant who, long resident on a foreign shore, had now returned, with a heart brimful of tenderness, to revisit the scenes of his youth, and renew his tender relations with those who

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[55] Dorland's American Illustrated Medical Dictionary (20th ed.).

[56] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 92.

[57] Ibid., p. 124. [58] Ibid.

shared his own blood."[59] When he first enters his ancestral mansion he has an intense feeling of having been there before--"that sense of being in one dream and recognizing the scenery and events of a former dream."[60] Similarly, when Redclyffe visits Braithwaite Hall, which he believes to be the ancient residence of his English ancestors, he has the feeling of "coming home after an absence of centuries."[61] He feels at home the minute he lands in England, "and every day seemed to make him more at home; so that it seemed as if he were gradually awakening to a former reality."[62]

Psychological explanations of déjà vecu are not very impressive; possibly Hawthorne's physical one is no better. He suggests in one place an explanation that is almost a folk equivalent of Ernst Haeckel's Biogenetic Law[63]--the idea that every animal, in its development from the egg to maturity, passes through the same stages of development that its species passed through in its evolution from a single cell.[64] He Makes it seem as though Middleton has in himself recapitulated

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[59] The Ancestral Footstep, printed as an appendix to The Dolliver Romance, etc. (vol. XI of Lathrop ed.), p. 493.

[60] Ibid., p. 460. See also p. 447.

[61] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, p. 273.

[62] Ibid., p. 181. See also p. 278, and all of Chap. XII.

[63] Memorably and polysyllabically expressed by Haeckel: "Ontogeny is a brief and incomplete recapitulation of phylogeny."

[64] Rádl, op. cit., p. 136.

the wanderings of his whole line of ancestors:

> He was now at home; yes, he had found his home, and was sheltered at last under the ancestral roof after all those long, long wanderings,--after the little log-built hut of the early settlement, after the straight roof of the American house, after all the many roofs of two hundred years, here he was at last under the one which he had left, on that fatal night, when the Bloody Footstep was so mysteriously impressed on the threshold. As he drew nearer and nearer towards sleep, it seemed more and more to him as if he were the very individual--the self-same one throughout the whole--who had done, seen, suffered, all these long toils and vicissitudes, and were now come back to rest, and found his weariness so great that there could be no rest.[65]

It may properly be objected that this is only fiction and that furthermore Middleton is said to be more than half asleep, so that Hawthorne's own belief is not necessarily involved in the passage. It is quite true that he is not wholly serious here; it is also quite true that he is not wholly facetious. He is toying with the idea--"turning it over," as Henry James would say--without necessarily committing himself to it.[66] It may be that the passage would have been drastically revised had Hawthorne ever brought the book to completion; he had far too commonsensical a mind to declare openly that an American's home-feeling for England was so deeply impressed into the minds of his English ancestors that he literally inherited it, as he had

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[65] The Ancestral Footstep, p. 510.

[66] For numerous examples of propositions only half-way endorsed by their author, see Alfred H. Marks, "German Romantic Irony in Hawthorne's Tales," Symposium, VII (November, 1953), 274-305.

confided to the privacy of his journal. The common sense asserts itself when he describes the same feeling in Our Old Home, and adds, matter-of-factly, "Of course, the explanation of the mystery was, that history, poetry, and fiction, books of travel, and the talk of tourists, had given me pretty accurate preconceptions of the common objects of English scenery, and these, being long ago vivified by a youthful fancy, had insensibly taken their places among the images of things actually seen."[67] An excellent explanation of déjà vecu, and an eminently sensible way for a practical-minded Yankee to talk. But the hunch about heredity will not down; in the next sentence Hawthorne adds: "Yet the illusion was often so powerful, that I almost doubted whether such airy remembrances might not be a sort of innate idea, the print of a recollection in some ancestral mind, transmitted, with fainter and fainter impress through several descents, to my own."[68] So much for common sense--"it is too fruitful a subject, this of hereditary resemblances"!

Whatever the degree of Hawthorne's seriousness about innate images inherited from long-dead ancestors, one thing the idea does suggest is that Americans--at any rate New Englanders[69]--are closely related genetically to English-

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[67] Our Old Home (vol. VII of Lathrop ed.), p. 83.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Hawthorne could feel little kinship with America at large, and always thought of himself as a citizen of New England. See Merle Curti's chapter on "The Loyalty of Time and Place," in The Roots of American Loyalty (New York, 1946), and especially p. 32.

men, a belief obviously more true in Hawthorne's time than in ours. Yet he was also acutely conscious of the differences between Americans and the British; Our Old Home was written to examine those differences and to explain the British to Americans. What were the differences and how could they be accounted for?

For one thing, it seemed to Hawthorne that Americans by and large were more refined than the typical middle and lower class English people whom he came into contact with in his consular duties. He dearly loved a gentleman, and he was sure you could recognize gentility by physiognomy alone. Redclyffe, supposedly a foundling, as a child has a face "so beautiful, nevertheless, that it seemed to possess all the characteristics which fine hereditary traits and culture, or many forefathers, could do in refining human stock."[70] And his guardian, Dr. Grimshawe, "was still but another ploughman, of a long race of such," though there was hope for his posterity, for his "son, if he left one, might be a little less of the ploughman; his grandson, provided the female element were well chosen, might approach to refinement; three generations--a century at least--would be required for the slow toil of hewing, chiselling, and polishing a gentleman out of this ponderous block, now rough from the quarry of nature."[71] The same idea, that the English lower classes

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[70] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, pp. 20-21.

[71] Ibid., p. 38.

can be improved only by breeding, occurs in the notebooks where, recording his impression of a group of work-house girls he has seen, he says:

> I should not have conceived it possible that so many children could have been collected together, without a single trace of beauty, or scarcely of intelligence, in so much as one individual; such mean, coarse, vulgar features and figures, betraying unmistakably a low origin, and ignorant and brutal parents. They did not appear wicked, but only stupid, animal, and soulless. It must require many generations of better life to elicit a soul in them. All America could not show the like.[72]

Not even the higher classes escaped his censure, for too often they failed to measure up to his expectation. "An Englishman can hardly be a gentleman, unless he enjoys one or the other of these advantages [of high rank or remarkable intellect]; and perhaps the surest way to give him good manners is, to make a lord of him--or rather, of his grandfather, or great-grandfather."[73]

But Americans, though of the same stock, have been radically modified. Hawthorne loved to play upon the contrast that he puts into the mouth of Dr. Portsoaken in Septimius Felton, that two branches of a family separate, the one to go up in America while the other goes down, often to extinction, in England:

> "Often the last heir of some respectable name dies in England, and we say that the family is extinct; whereas, very possibly, it may be abundantly flourishing in the New World, revived by the rich infusion of new

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[72] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 13

[73] Ibid., p. 383.

> blood in a new soil, instead of growing feebler, heavier, stupider, each year by sticking to an old soil, inter-marrying over and over again with the same respectable families, till it has made common stock of all their vices, weaknesses, madnesses."[74]

Casting about for ways to explain to himself the difference between the people of the two nations, Hawthorne lit on the factor of physical environment--an explanation that he uses along with heredity. Especially as concerns women, the majority of whom he thought to be gross and unappealing in England,[75] he stresses the environmental factor. In Our Old Home he says that he does not want to give offense, "but, since the plain truth must be told, the soil and climate of England produce feminine beauty as rarely as they do delicate fruit. . . ."[76] And, though he admits to having seen

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[74] Septimius Felton, p. 376.

[75] Hawthorne's avowed preference for blonde, willowy, introverted clinging-vines (such as Hilda, Priscilla, Phoebe, and Ellen Langton), despite his evident fascination with dark, full-bodied, exotic beauties (such as Beatrice Rappaccini, Miriam, Zenobia, and Hester), is well known and ably attested to in scholarship. See especially Chap. III of Stewart's introduction to the American Notebooks, and such monographic studies as Morton Cronin, "Hawthorne on Romantic Love and the Status of Women," PMLA, LXIX (March, 1954), 89-98. See also Frederic I. Carpenter, "Puritans Preferred Blondes," New England Quarterly, IX (June, 1936), 253-272. Possibly it is a tribute to Mrs. Hawthorne that so much praise is lavished in Hawthorne's writing on what Stewart calls "the wholesome New England girl." One feels, however, that Hawthorne's constant implication that svelte beauties are reeking with sin has a touch of the Susannah-and-the-Elders about it.

[76] His wish to be courteous did not prevent him, however, from going on to say that while men are manly, "the women are not beautiful, though the female Bull be well enough adapted to the male." (P. 285)

excellent specimens of both delicate English fruit and delicate English women, "they are the hot-house ameliorations of refined society, and apt, moreover, to relapse into the coarseness of the original stock."[77] We see the twin factors of environment and heredity used further to the same end in the notebooks "Climate, no doubt, has most to do with diffusing a slender elegance over American young-womanhood; but something, perhaps, is also due to the circumstances that classes are not kept apart there, as they are here; they cross-breed together, amid the continual ups-and-downs of our social life; and so, in the lowest stratum of life, you may see the refining influence of gentle blood."[78] Nor are only American women conditioned by the New World environment; the whole American nation, men and women, are different from their English counterparts, and the difference is due partly to climate and circumstance, partly to the mixture of bloods. "These two hundred years of a different climate and circumstances--" says the old pensioner to Middleton, "of life on a broad continent instead of in an island, to say nothing of the endless intermixture of nationalities in every part of the United States, except New England--have created a new and decidedly original type of national character."[79] When Englishmen paid him "the highest compliment that an Englishman

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[77] Our Old Home, pp. 284-285.

[78] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 192.

[79] The Ancestral Footstep, p. 466. Later Middleton expresses the same idea but emphasizes the common biological

can pay to an American," Hawthorne was both pleased and amused to be taken for a native of the island. The situation is translated into fiction when the Warden compliments Redclyffe on being "just like an Englishman," and here Hawthorne offers his most pointed statement about the roles of heredity and environment in shaping a man's character:

> the old progenitor (whose blood, moreover, was mixed with a hundred other streams equally English) was still there, under this young man's shape, but with a vast difference. Climate, sun, cold, heat, soil, institutions, had made a change in him before he was born, and all the life that he had lived since (so unlike any that he could have lived in England) had developed it more strikingly.[80]

Hawthorne recognizes, then, the importance of both heredity and environment in the shaping of human character. Without entering upon the question of which is more important--since it never occurred to laymen of Hawthorne's generation as a problem--it can be said that he sees the two acting together, heredity as the force for continuity, environment as the force for change. He seems to believe, like Lamarck, that changes wrought by the physical environment are or can be perpetuated by heredity, thus accepting what is called technically the doctrine of "acquired char-

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stock: "We send queer specimens abroad; but Englishmen should consider that we spring from them, and that we present after all only a picture of their own characteristics, a little varied by climate and situation." (Ibid., p. 498.)

[80] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, p. 207.

acters," a folk idea as old as that of heredity itself.[81]

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[81]This, of course, is the basis of Lamarck's evolutionary theory. Hawthorne is an "evolutionist" in that he firmly believes human character can be refined by the interaction of heredity and environment; but this is amelioration of the human race, not the transmutation of species. In 1855, eleven years after Robert Chambers's Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation had caused widespread recognition of at least the possibility that men and apes were not the result of separate acts of creation, Hawthorne felt that the monkey is a parody of man, and resolved that in "a future state of being" he would inquire into why monkeys were ever created (English Notebooks, p. 209). As early as 1836 he had been concerned about the relation of man to monkey; of Linnaeus's classification of animals he wrote that "the pride of Homo Sapiens [sic] certainly revolts at the idea of being placed so nearly on a level with these great monkies [sic]; but when the claims of the latter [orangutans] are fairly considered, we might almost allow them to be our cousins, though we deny them the name of brethren" (Turner [ed.], Hawthorne as Editor, p. 209). This, incidentally, is a wiser view than that of those who, like Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, raised the monkey-cry in connection with Darwinism. For Hawthorne's hesitant acceptance of cousinship with monkeys does not mean "descent from" monkeys; one does not descend from his cousin, but both descend from a common ancestor. However, Hawthorne is hardly dealing with the idea of transmutation of species here. He goes on to remark on the essential distinction of man, saying: "But, however close upon our heels the inferior tribes of creation may seem to tread, there is one great and invariable mark of distinction between the Man with a soul, and the Animal without one. The latter cannot communicate his intelligence to succeeding generations, nor accumulate it from age to age. . ." (Ibid., pp. 209-210).

To the extent that he thought about species at all, his conception was essentially the great-chain-of-being idea. It seemed to him when he saw the Faun of Praxiteles that "the faun is a natural and delightful link betwixt human and brute life, with something of a divine character intermingled" (French and Italian Note-Books [vol. X of Lathrop ed.], p. 167). It is trivial, no doubt, but it might also be mentioned that Hawthorne, who loved almost as much as Mark Twain to record the manners of dogs, was impressed not by variation among dogs but by continuity of species: "All dogs, of whatever sizes and dissimilar varieties, acknowledge the common bond of species among themselves; and the largest one does not disdain

The basic idea of acquired characters can be seen in nearly any of the previous quotations. The "old progenitor" of Redclyffe who, though an amalgam of many strains of English blood, was modified by his residence in the New World, passed on his modifications to his offspring, and they in turn passed it on to theirs, all of these changes being inherited by Redclyffe. In a like manner, Doctor Grimshawe's "hardy set of nerves" are attributed to their not having been "refined by careful treatment in himself or his ancestors"; instead, his ancestors were "accustomed from of old to be drummed on by harsh voices, rude sounds, and the clatter and clamor of household life among homely, uncultivated, strongly animal people"[82]--and, as a result, Doctor Grimshawe inherits the rudeness that has been built up in his family for generations. The process is not limited to man or even to animals; Hawthorne suggests that in England there are flowers "that had been merely field or wayside flowers when first they came into the garden; but by long cultivation and hereditary care"--each gain in refinement being passed on to the next crop--"they had acquired a new richness and beauty, so that you would scarcely recognize the daisy or the violet."[83] In the absence of any idea of

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to suffer his tail to be smelt of, nor to reciprocate that courtesy, to the smallest" (American Notebooks, p. 40).

[82]Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, p. 35.

[83]Ibid., p. 236. As will be shown in the chapter on The House of the Seven Gables, the reverse of the process also occurs; for that is exactly what happens to the Pyncheon hens.

mutations, and in view of the practical results obtained by stock breeders, it is only common sense to suppose that changes do take place in living things as a result of environmental influence, and to suppose that these changes are passed on by heredity. Hawthorne was merely accepting a commonplace of folk wisdom.[84]

Unlike those reformers who believed that if you merely change the environment you change the man, Hawthorne was always skeptical about the extent to which a deliberately rigged environment could effect desirable changes. He was willing to agree with Margaret Fuller that the experiences of early childhood remain as an influence "upon the character after the recollection of them has passed away;[85] and, visiting Blenheim Castle, he noted that he would "love to think that noblemen lead noble lives, and that all this stately and beautiful environment[86] may

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[84]It is worth recording that while among those who had occasion to think constructively about the subject, "the inheritance of acquired characters was a most ancient, honorable and dominant doctrine," still there was always some skepticism about it. Among those who did not deny heredity but did deny acquired characters were Lucretius, St. Thomas Acquinas, Vincent de Beauvais, Charles Bonnet, Lord Kames, Immanuel Kant, and Charles White. Darwin and Spencer both tacitly accepted the idea of acquired characters, and Darwin offered a hazy explanation of how it works--his theory of pangenesis. Zirkle, op. cit., p. 146.

[85]American Notebooks, p. 160. The date is 1842. His strictures on Margaret's own nature will be noted later.

[86]Hawthorne seldom uses the word "environment," though he often talks about the idea. The OED attributes the earliest use of it--meaning the "sum-total of influences which modify and determine the development of life or char-

serve to elevate them a little above the rest of us."[87] But he doubted that much positive good ever comes from environmental conditioning, least of all from that which is deliberately contrived by man himself. It is true, of course, that he sees the American environment as an ameliorating factor in the refinement of Americans; but when the idea is further examined (especially in The House of the Seven Gables) it is apparent that the American environment does not invigorate but attenuates. The fact that he prefers bloodless beauties with more than a little suggestion of the tubercular about them gives to his conception of ideal American women whatever grace environment can bestow. If the English are characterized by their animal grossness, the Americans are characterized by their unsubstantial spirituality; and these characteristics result from the climate and circumstances of the respective countries. Both characteristics have value; but either developed to excess can spell ruin, and, all things considered, the English are nearer ruin than the Americans. A curious expression of the whole attitude appears in one of the unfinished novels where, speaking of a New England graveyard, Hawthorne says that the people buried there had

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acter"--to Carlyle in 1827. Probably Herbert Spencer's Principles of Psychology (1855) did most to spread the technical meaning of the word among the English-speaking people.

[87] English Notebooks, p. 410. In the park, Hawthorne thought that "even a hog, eating the acorns under those magnificent oaks, would be cleanlier and of better habits than common hogs"; yet, in the midst of this splendid environment lived the "besotted Duke" who owned it.

> contributed their rich Saxon mould to tame and Christianize the wild forest earth of the new world. In this point of view--as holding the bones and dust of the primeval ancestor--the cemetery was more English than anything else in the neighborhood, and might probably have nourished English oaks and English elms,[88] and whatever else is of English growth, without the tendency to spindle upwards and lose their sturdy breadth, which is said to be the ordinary characteristic both of human and vegetable productions when transplanted hither.[89]

Like Crevecoeur, Hawthorne is fond of musing on the analogies between men and plants. He is especially attracted by the fact that plants in an artificial environment have

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[88] Oddly enough, Mark Twain used the same macabre idea of the vegetation of a cemetery as an indication of the kind of people buried in it; the way he used it is a striking example of the vast difference between the men's minds. In the Raftsmen Passage omitted from Huckleberry Finn there is a debate over the relative wholesomeness of muddy Mississippi water and clear Ohio water. Says the Child of Calamity: "You look at the graveyards; that tells the tale. Trees won't grow worth shucks in a Cincinnati graveyard, but in a Sent Louis graveyard they grow upwards of eight hundred foot high. It's all on account of the water the people drunk before they laid up. A Cincinnati corpse don't richen a soil any." Bernard DeVoto (ed.), The Portable Mark Twain (New York, 1946), pp. 297-298.

[89] Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, p. 3. The idea of a decay of nature in the new world is of long ancestry. Hawthorne seems to imply that this tendency of vegetation and animals to spindle, the condition "said to be" characteristic in the new world, is a commonplace idea. It surely owes something in its American vogue to Buffon, whom Jefferson found it necessary to refute in Notes on Virginia (1781-82), and to the great Ancients and Moderns controversy of the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

In at least one place in his fiction (The Marble Faun) Hawthorne denies through the mouth of his spokesman character that there has been any decay in nature, at any time, in any place. The sculptor Kenyon is given this opinion: "Nature, in beast, fowl, and tree, and earth, flood, and sky, is what it was of old; but sin, care, and self-consciousness have set the human portion of the world askew" (Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 727).

to be replaced periodically. Noting, when he visits Paris, that the trees in the gardens of the Tuileries are dug up at intervals and new ones put in their places, he imagines that "the same is true of the human race,--families becoming extinct after a generation or two of residence in Paris."[90] The plant analogy also figures in the way heredity is capable of acting through, or despite, a hostile environment. In the lilies that he found growing wild in the Concord River back of the Old Manse he could see the emblem of heredity and environment in man:

> It is a marvel whence it ["the fragrant white pond-lily"] derives its loveliness and perfume, sprouting as it does from the black mud over which the river sleeps, and from which, likewise, the yellow lily draws its unclean life and noisome perfume. So it is with many people in this world;--the same soil and circumstances may produce the good and beautiful, and the wicked and ugly;--some have the faculty of assimilating to themselves only what is evil, and so they become as noisome as the yellow water-lily. A few assimilate none but good influences; and their emblem is the spotless and fragrant pond-lily, whose very breath is a blessing to all the region round-about.[91]

The flower symbol represents Hawthorne's short-range view of the interpenetration of heredity and environment. Man taken as an individual is pretty much controlled by his inherited character; and, for good or evil, he acts

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[90] French and Italian Note-Books, p. 38.

[91] American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 147. This passage is dated August 6, 1842. As an indication that Hawthorne's thoughts on such subjects did not change much, we may note that it reappeared slightly modified in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, where it must have been written sometime between 1860 and 1864: "[Elsie and Ned] were cheery

out his part despite the aid or hindrance of his environment. In the long view, however, environment does have a pronounced effect of modification on whole nations of men; they all tend in the direction climate, soil, moisture, society, and institutions force them. For example, in Our Old Home, Hawthorne says that Americans, "in our dry atmosphere, are getting too nervous, haggard, dyspeptic, extenuated, unsubstantial, theoretic, and need to be made grosser."[92] On the other hand, "John Bull. . . has grown bulbous, long-bodied, short-legged, heavy-witted, material, and, in a word, too intensely English. In a few more centuries he will be the earthliest creature that ever the earth saw."[93] No matter how much he may approve of unsubstantiality in beautiful women, Hawthorne recognizes the danger of the tendency of each environment. He says that in the past, conquests have improved the English people by providing new intermixtures with the old stock, "so that each successive conquest of England has proved a victory by the revivification and improvement of its native manhood."[94] Now, he wonders, would it not be beneficial to both nations if some sort of exchange of citizens could take place? "For

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little imps, who sucked up fragrance and pleasantness out of their surroundings, dreary as these looked; even as a flower can find its proper perfume in any soil where its seed happens to fall." (P. 12)

[92] Our Old Home, p. 84.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

my part, I used to wish that we could annex it [England], transferring their thirty millions of inhabitants to some convenient wilderness in the great West, and putting half or a quarter as many of ourselves into their places."[95] But obviously such an exchange cannot take place on a large scale, and the idea is important here merely as an indication of Hawthorne's recognition of the interrelationships of heredity and environment when considered in a long-range view.

One of the most significant aspects of Hawthorne's opinion on environment is that it sets him apart from the dominant stream of American thought; for ever since Crèvecoeur, at least, Americans had liked to believe that their

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[95] Ibid. The idea is given to two different Englishmen in Doctor Grimshawe's Secret; in both instances the American, Redclyffe, smiles at the notion or regrets that the English, dull as he admits them to be, should be changed. Hawthorne does say above that he "used" to wish the exchange could be made; it is more likely that he abandoned the scheme because of its impractical frivolity than that he changed his mind about it entirely.

The idea as given to the "white-bearded palmer" deserves to be quoted in full because it sums up so many related ideas and shows so clearly Hawthorne's conception of the interpenetration of heredity and environment, an idea which never changed. The old man maintained that "it would be good for the whole people of England now, if it could at once be transported to America, where its fatness, its sleepiness, its too great beefiness, its preponderant animal character, would be rectified by a different air and soil; and equally good, on the other hand, for the whole American people to be transplanted back to the original island, where their nervousness might be weighted with heavier influences, where their little women might grow bigger, where their thin, dry men might get a burden of flesh and good stomachs, where their children might, with the air, draw in reverence for age, forms, and usage." (Pp. 238-239) See also pp. 260-261, where Lord Braithwaite, an English landowner though by birth and culture an Italian, elaborates the same idea.

unique environment made them unique men. If they were not better than others, they were at any rate different; and they thought they had a pretty shrewd notion of who was better and who worse. A patriotic historian such as David Ramsay could proclaim that "the difference between nations is not so much owing to nature, as to education and circumstances,"[96] and it was obvious to him and to the people for whom he wrote his History of the American Revolution (1789) that the American nation was in the best circumstances of all. Even such a hard-bitten conservative as Timothy Dwight was sure that "people, who live on a pleasant surface, and on a soil, fertile and easy of cultivation, usually possess softer dispositions, and manners, and feel themselves, entitled to a higher character, than those, who from inhabiting rougher grounds acquire rougher minds, and form coarser habits."[97] And of course Crèvecoeur's melting-pot image of America, and his insistence that "men are like plants," and that "the goodness and flavor of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow"

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[96] Quoted from American Issues (ed. by Thorp, Curti, Baker), I, 111.

[97] Travels in New-England and New York (1821), selections in Spiller and Blodgett, The Roots of National Culture (New York, 1949), pp. 459-460. It is all the more emphatic to find Dwight backing such an environmentalist position, for conservatives in general--especially at this time--tend to stress innate (hereditary) differences between men. See the chapter "The Conservative Reaction" in Merle Curti's Growth of American Thought (New York, 1951), especially p. 189.

(1793)[98] have become American shibboleths.

Even Emerson, whose optimistic opinion of the present state of mankind is in such marked contrast to Hawthorne's, held like Hawthorne for an "amelioration in nature" by environment, but believed that the amelioration is in progress everywhere and is not an amelioration by attenuation. He wrote in 1844 that the people in the world "are not the best, but the best that could live in the existing state of soils, gases, animals and morals: the best that could yet live; there shall be better, please God."[99] Whether or not citizens at any given time are the best human beings permitted by the environment, most Americans have found environmentalism an attractive doctrine. In a country lacking aristocratic distinctions and possessing through most of its history unprecedented opportunities for personal advancement from rags to riches, we have tended to attribute to the general environment of the country our opportunities, to the specific environment of the individual the patent inequalities that do exist.[100] So far as there has been philosophical support for such cheerful environmentalism it has

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[98] Letters from an American Farmer, quoted from the selection in Thorp, Curti, Baker, op. cit., I, 106.

[99] Frederic I. Carpenter (ed.), Ralph Waldo Emerson, American Writers Series (New York, 1934), p. 157.

[100] For a study of the environmentalist basis for humanitarianism in the early nationalist period, see Harry Hayden Clark, "The Influence of Science on American Ideas, from 1775 to 1809," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, XXXV (1944), 334-339.

come largely from "Locke's theory that human nature, being plastic at birth, is shaped by the surroundings," a position in social thought that "became increasingly popular in the eighteenth century,"[101] and continued strong until rudely checked by social Darwinism in the early sixties.

Hawthorne, however, stood out against this general tradition. Convinced as he was that environment produces slow changes in whole nations of men, he could not believe that the changes were automatically for the better, though he thought that if a judicious choice could be made among environments some progress toward a golden mean might be established. Rather, it was the force of heredity that impressed him most. Both nations as wholes and men as individuals seemed to him to be what they are largely because of their hereditary background. And so strong is the force of heredity in individual men that their destinies are directed by it despite the particular environment they find themselves born into.

It may be supposed that one so concerned with heredity would also be interested in questions of race--what may be called heredity in depth. And indeed Hawthorne was, though here again we will see that his ideas are essentially folk ideas, common-sense beliefs that can hardly be located in time or place.

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[101] Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought, p. 122. See also Merle Curti, "The Great Mr. Locke: America's Philosopher, 1783-1861," Huntington Library Bulletin, XI (April, 1937), 107-151.

It was in the year of Hawthorne's appointment to the consulship at Liverpool (1853) that Count Joseph Arthur de Gobineau launched his celebrated attack on the conception of the brotherhood of man, and declared the supremacy of the white race in all things--physically, morally, culturally, intellectually. From that time we must date our present unpleasant connotations of the word "race." If Hawthorne ever heard of Gobineau or other proponents of the social theory of racial superiority,[102] he was quite unaffected by their theorizing. He generally uses the word "race" in a very inexact way, meaning by it only a group of people related by blood.[103] Often he speaks of a family as

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[102] Most of the more flamboyant speculation came after Hawthorne's death (1864). It was Edward A. Freeman who, as much as anyone, was responsible for the notion among English-speaking peoples of the superiority of Anglo-Saxons to the "lesser breeds." See his History of the Norman Conquest (1867-79). Matthew Arnold's On the Study of Celtic Literature (1867) leaned heavily on the belief that English temper can be neatly parceled out to Celtic, Saxon, and Norman racial influences. (See Frederick E. Faverty, Matthew Arnold the Ethnologist [Evanston, 1951].) In America, Josiah Strong wrote Our Country (1885), in which he influentially promoted the belief that the Anglo-Saxon is peculiarly the exponent of civil liberty and Christianity. Most notorious of all was Houston Stewart Chamberlain's Foundations of the Nineteenth Century (1899), the first book to confuse genetics with linguistics in hailing the superiority of the "Aryans." The whole question of the modern race myth is entertainingly discussed in a chapter called "The Skin Game" in Bergen Evans' The Natural History of Nonsense (New York, 1946).

[103] Satisfactory studies of the development of the word "race" are lacking. The OED lists 1842 as the earliest use of it to mean "a group of several tribes or peoples, forming a distinct ethnical stock"; but it also cites Goldsmith's Animated Nature (1774) as the source for the earliest meaning of "one of the great divisions of mankind, having certain physical peculiarities in common." However,

a race--as he does when he notes that the English Lucies "seem to be a kindly race of people"[104] or records of the Clopton family that "the race is now extinct."[105] When he writes in The Marble Faun that "once in a century, or oftener, a son of Monte Beni gathered into himself the scattered qualities of his race"[106] he does not mean the human race, nor the Caucasoid division of it, nor the Mediterranean sub-group of that, nor even what is loosely referred to as the Italian race--he means the Monte Beni family. In fact, he once declared that he had no interest at all in the ethnological distinctions that the word "race" has come to imply. After visiting the British Museum in 1857 he wrote: "Lastly, I passed through Ethnographical rooms; but I care little for the varieties of the human race, all that is really important and interesting being found in

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Linnaeus surely recognized the idea of race if he did not use the word when, in Systema Naturae (1735), he classified five varieties of Homo sapiens as Wild man, European, American, Asiatic, and African. The earliest clear and unequivocal use of the idea that the present writer has found is that of Tacitus: "For myself I accept the view that the peoples of Germany have never been tainted by intermarriage with other peoples, and stand out as a nation peculiar, pure and unique of its kind. Hence the physical type, if one may generalize at all about so vast a population, is everywhere the same--wild, blue eyes, reddish hair and huge frames that excel only in violent effort." Germania, trans. by H. Mattingly (English Penguin ed.), pp. 103-104. The translator of this edition remarks that even this (A.D. 97-98) is not the earliest claim for the purity of a race, that claim having been made earlier for the Egyptians and the Scythians. (P. 152)

[104] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 135.

[105] Ibid., p. 134.

[106] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 724.

our own variety."[107]

Not too much importance should be attached to the literal meaning of his statement about caring little for varieties of the human race. Human nature is his profound study, and he is far too sensible to suppose that human nature varies because of skin color; yet he is very much interested in the superficial differences between groups of men, however little these differences may affect fundamental human nature. In Scotland, for instance, he "looked for the high-cheeked bones, which have been attributed as a characteristic feature to the Scotch," and if he could not distinguish this sign he did nonetheless learn to recognize what he took to be the typical Scottish face, which, "when not too Scotch," is "a handsome one."[108] In one of his earliest notebooks he records his observation of a man at North Adams who is part Indian, enough so to have "straight black hair, something of the tawny skin, and the quick shining eye of the Indian." This man interests Hawthorne because there is "so much of the white in him, that he gives the impression of belonging to a civilized race--which gives the more strange sensation, on discovering that he has a wild lineage."[109]

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[107] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 611.

[108] Ibid., pp. 329-330.

[109] American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 54.

As this suggests, Hawthorne has the folk suspicion that a mixture of bloods is not desirable (in spite of the almost universal opinion that mongrel dogs have greater hardihood than purebreds), and that half-breeds are biologically inferior. He holds on the one hand that close in-breeding of cousins is deleterious to the offspring of the union[110] and on the other that a wide racial separation of progenitors makes for a "wild, mixed nature" like that of Septimius Felton, whose "monstrousness . . . had grown out of his hybrid race";[111] and he never seems to

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[110] Of the child of a Mr. and Mrs. Tupper, who were cousins: "this poor boy was the sickly offspring of a union on which Nature laid a curse. . . ." English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 303.

Like any good Victorian parent, Hawthorne was adept at discussing biology in the inoffensive language of flowers. Of the flowers in Dr. Rappaccini's garden he says that several "would have shocked a delicate instinct by an appearance of artificialness indicating that there had been such commixture, and, as it were, adultery, of various vegetable species, that the production was no longer of God's making, but the monstrous offspring of man's depraved fancy. . . ." (Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 1054.) The flowers symbolize Beatrice's unnatural aspect, and, one supposes, Hawthorne believes that in-breeding is also unnatural.

[111] The Dolliver Romance, etc., p. 269. Septimius, it will be remembered, is part Indian.

There is not room to rehearse here the long history of European antipathy to Indian-Caucasian half-breeds; it can be pointed out however that even those commentators who exalt the Indian as a Noble Savage almost universally condemn him when his ancestry is mixed with whites, insisting usually that the mixture brings out deviltry unknown to either "pure" race. Alexis de Tocqueville has an excellent chapter on the attitude toward the Indian in his Democracy in America, vol. I. See especially I, 358-363 (Vintage ed.), where he discusses the fact that the French tended to inter-

feel any contradiction in the two points of view.

Whatever his acceptance of common folk-opinion about races, Hawthorne had no touch of modern race prejudice, in the sense of thinking Jews or Negroes biologically inferior to himself.[112] He was interested in the physical characteristics of races, and he wrote one of his most fervid descriptions of a woman when he described for his journal the young Jewish lady who sat opposite him at the Lord Mayor's banquet in 1856:

> She was, I suppose, dark, and yet not dark, but rather seemed to be of pure white marble, yet not white; but the purest and finest complexion, (with-

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breed with the Indians, the English to remain aloof. The resulting half-breeds derived "intelligence from the father's side without entirely losing the savage customs of the mother" (p. 358), making them, presumably, not only devils but intelligent devils.

In most such discussions the poor Indians are never consulted about their opinions. It is a pleasure to report that they did not think highly of half-breeds either; but, according to the Delawares, it is the whites who are half-breeds. "They will not admit that the whites are superior beings. They say that. . . they [whites] are not like themselves Lenni Lenape. . . a race of men that has existed unchanged from the beginning of time; but they are a mixed race, and therefore a troublesome one; . . . the Great Spirit, knowing the wickedness of their disposition, found it necessary to give them a great Book. . . ." The Indians need no such book, because they are pure in heart. John Heckewelder, A Narrative of the Mission. . . among the Delaware. . . (Philadelphia, 1820), p. 187.

[112] Strictly speaking, race prejudice against Jews is a recent phenomenon, owing most to Houston Chamberlain. Jews have been persecuted for centuries, of course; but the alleged reason was not racial inferiority, but because they had killed Christ, or were infidels, or were usurers. In medieval representations of the Nine Worthies, three are usually Jews; generally Joshua, David, and Judas Maccabaeus were chosen. And repulsive as Shylock might be, Lorenzo had no qualms about marrying his daughter Jessica once the girl was properly baptized.

> out a shade of color in it, yet anything but sallow or sickly) that I ever beheld. Her hair was a wonderful deep, raven black, black as night, black as death; not raven black, for that has a shiny gloss, and her's [sic] had not; but it was hair never to be painted, nor described--wonderful hair, Jewish hair. Her nose had a beautiful outline, though I could see that it was Jewish too; and that, and all her features, were so fine that sculpture seemed a despicable art beside her; and certainly my pen is good for nothing.[113]

It was as regards Negroes that a person of Hawthorne's generation had to take a stand on the race question; it is in his campaign biography of Franklin Pierce that Hawthorne took his stand.[114] There is no dodging the fact that he said of John Brown: "Nobody was ever more justly hanged."[115] There is no shrugging off his sincere praise of Pierce when he said of him: "Nor did he ever shun the obloquy that sometimes threatened to pursue the northern man who dared to

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[113] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 321. The young lady is thought to be the original for Miriam in The Marble Faun. In the same place Hawthorne launched a tirade against her disagreeable husband--Jewish beauty in contrast to Jewish ugliness.

[114] It is difficult to discuss the issue of abolition without entering into the related issue of secession. The first is partly political, the second wholly so; but the problem under examination here (Hawthorne's opinion about the Negro race) is made clearer if kept divorced from politics. Lawrence Hall (Hawthorne: Critic of Society) devotes an excellent chapter to the political aspects of Hawthorne's viewpoint (pp. 147-159). Admitting that the question of slavery was not a simple choice between right and wrong, Mr. Hall nevertheless believes that this is "an instance unique in Hawthorne's thinking, where he seems to have been more concerned with the external than with the internal development of virtue." (P. 154)

[115] Tales, Sketches, and Other Papers (vol. XII of Lathrop ed.), p. 327. Hereafter cited as Sketches. Cf. Emerson's eulogy of Brown: "the new saint awaiting his martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer, will make the gallows glorious like the cross." Quoted by Hall, op. cit., p. 151, and alluded to by Hawthorne, same page as above.

love that great and sacred reality--his whole, united, native country--better than the mistiness of a philanthropic theory."[116] This is the point, exactly. It is not that Hawthorne harbors any strong beliefs of essential Negro inferiority--indeed, he very early feels a pronounced sympathy with the race as fellow human beings[117]--but abolition is a misty philanthropic theory, and Hawthorne will have none of such theories;[118] his Brook Farm experience had already disenchanted him with misty philanthropy. Further, he is by now thoroughly convinced that in the long reach of time evils can be rectified, but rectified only by the reformation of the individual human heart; merely correct the external maladjustments of society and a dozen new evils spring up in the vacated place of the old. In keeping with his satisfaction in the gradual change wrought in human beings by heredity and environment, he is satisfied that in the long run Providence will direct things for the best and

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[116] Life of Franklin Pierce (1852), in Sketches, p. 371. In passing it may be said that Hawthorne appealed to heredity in justifying Pierce's stand on abolition: "inheriting his father's [General Benjamin Pierce's] love of country, mindful of the old patriot's valor in so many conflicts of the Revolution. . . . Such a man, with such hereditary recollections, and such a personal experience, must not narrow himself to adopt the cause of one section of his native country against another." Ibid., p. 416.

[117] Observing the pathetic attempts of a group of Negroes to find amusement at a Williams College commencement, he wrote, in 1838, that: "On the whole, I find myself rather more of an abolitionist in feeling than in principle." American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 48.

[118] See Arlin Turner, "Hawthorne and Reform," New England Quarterly, XV (December, 1942), 700-714. Mr. Turner emphasizes Hawthorne's "fatalism" as the basis for his rejection of reform.

will accomplish ends unattainable by the hand of man. The whole point of view is succinctly indicated when he says that despite the contentions of those Northerners who "conceive that the world stands still" except as abolition is advanced,

> there is still another view, and probably a wise one. It looks upon slavery as one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated, but of the simplest and easiest operation, when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream. There is no instance, in all history, of the human will and intellect having perfected any great moral reform by methods which it adapted to that end; but the progress of the world, at every step, leaves some evil or wrong on the path behind it, which the wisest of mankind, of their own set purpose, could never have found the way to rectify. Whatever contributes to the great cause of good, contributes to all its subdivisions and varieties. . . ."[119]

Nowhere does Hawthorne insist on any innate inferiority of Negroes to whites, as such Southern apologists as Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon (Types of Mankind, 1854) were doing. Everywhere he seems personally sympathetic with Negroes. Nor does he have recourse to such an argument as

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[119] Sketches, p. 417. Hawthorne himself appreciated the irony of the fact that it took a writer of romances to present Pierce to the voters. But there is no doubt of sincerity on the matter of slavery. In the biographical sketch affixed to this volume, the editor, George Parsons Lathrop, quotes from a letter Hawthorne wrote his friend Bridge in 1852: "the biography has cost me hundreds of friends here at the North, who had a purer regard for me than Frank Pierce or any other politician ever gained, and who drop off from me like autumn leaves, in consequence of what I say on the slavery question. But they are my real sentiments, and I do not now regret that they are on record." Ibid., p. 510.

that of Samuel Stanhope Smith (Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species [1789]), the argument that races have developed because of differences in climate, and that some have been debased because of the handicap of severe climates--and this is all the more remarkable, since Hawthorne was convinced of the effect of modification by environment over long periods of time. Slavery as a social institution he would not presume to eradicate at once by violence. Yet when hostilities had actually begun he loyally supported the Northern cause, and was grieved only that so many young men had to die, carrying with them to the grave all promise of the homes they might have founded. He wished, he said in "Chiefly About War Matters" (July, 1862), that old worn-out men such as himself might carry on the bloody business of war. It was also in this essay that he made one of his last significant pronouncements on the Negro race, a statement that embodies his kindliness toward Negroes as people and at the same time voices his opinion that Southern Negroes are a breed apart from the rest of mankind, though he sees "the manhood which is latent in them."[120] Because of their "crust of primeval simplicity," the Negroes fleeing northward "seemed a kind of creature by themselves, not altogether human, but perhaps quite as good, and akin to the fauns and rustic deities of olden times."[121] While he per-

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[120] Sketches, p. 319.

[121] Ibid., pp. 318-319.

sonally "felt most kindly towards these poor fugitives," he did not know what he could do for them; and he was sure that, "whoever may be benefited by the results of this war, it will not be the present generation of negroes, the childhood of whose race is now gone forever." [122] His only hope was that "an inscrutable Providence means good to both parties."[123]

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[122] Ibid., p. 319.

[123] Ibid.

Chapter II

Hawthorne: Heredity and Puritanism

It should be clear from what has been said about Hawthorne's uses of heredity that his salient attitude toward genetic continuity is the folk-attitude which considers heredity as a fixed, unchanging, nearly immutable element of human make-up. Hawthorne was very early convinced of a kind of philosophical necessitarianism; writing in "Wakefield" (1835), he said that if he had a folio at his command instead of the dozen pages of an article: "Then might I exemplify how an influence beyond our control lays its strong hand on every deed which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity."[1] Heredity, as he often uses it, does in part exemplify this "iron tissue of necessity." In The Marble Faun (1860) he uses the conventional organic theory of art[2] for the same purpose, asserting in his own person that "it was impossible not to

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[1] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 924.

[2] As Coleridge expressed it: "The organic form. . . is innate; it shapes, as it develops, itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form." "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to His Genius," in Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce, ed. by Gay Wilson Allen and Harry Hayden Clark (New York, 1941), p. 239. A recent study to consider Hawthorne's use of the organic theory is Roy R. Male, Jr., "Hawthorne and the Concept of Sympathy," PMLA, LXVIII (March, 1953), 138-149.

think," as the sculptor's chisel bit into a block of marble, that "the outer marble was merely an extraneous environment; the human countenance within its embrace must have existed there since the limestone ledges of Carrara were first made."[3] And in the character of Miriam the moral application of the idea is made clear. "As these busts in the block of marble, . . . so does our individual fate exist in the limestone of time," she thinks. She goes on to muse: "We fancy that we carve it out; but its ultimate shape is prior to all our action."[4]

Whether we call such an attitude determinism, fatalism, or necessitarianism is probably of small importance; since Hawthorne is an artist and not a metaphysician, in general he does not attempt the nice distinctions that philosophers would demand. He himself disliked the connotations of "fatalism," for he has Kenyon dissatisfied with an image of himself and Donatello wandering about Italy like "winged

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[3] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 656. Cf. Longfellow's Michael Angelo: "in every block of marble/ I see a statue. . ./ I have only/ To hew away the stone walls that imprison/ The lovely apparition. . . ." Poetical Works (Boston, 1891). p. 329.

[4] Ibid. Numerous commentators have had something to say about Hawthorne's "fatalism." There is little point in compounding instances of it here, since the main examples are conveniently assembled and ably interpreted by Newton Arvin, Hawthorne (Boston, 1929), pp. 218-220. Mr. Arvin believes that Hawthorne's tendency "to think of personal tragedy as the product of mysterious agencies outside the personality" (p. 218) "takes on a solemn grandeur" in The Scarlet Letter, where "it is exemplified so austerely and with a poetic energy so unmistakable that we can scarcely lament its abstract falsity." (P. 220)

seeds": "there was an idea of fatality implied in the simile. . . which did not altogether suit Kenyon's fancy; for, if you look closely into the matter, it will be seen that whatever appears most vagrant, and utterly purposeless, turns out, in the end, to have been impelled the most surely on a preordained and unswerving track."[5] Yet the fact that winged seeds, seemingly moving in as capricious a manner as anything can in nature, suggest fatality to Hawthorne is an indication that he sees fate where most people would see mere chance. Indeed, he notices the paradox of his own observation, for he further suggests that "If we desire unexpected and unimaginable events, we should contrive an iron framework, such as we fancy may compel the future to take one inevitable shape; then comes in the unexpected, and shatters our design in fragments."[6] Perhaps the best term for this cast of mind is the one Hawthorne himself uses most often, the relatively colorless word "necessity." This, for instance, is the term given to Chillingworth when he tells Hester that it is not in his power to pardon her: "By thy first step awry thou didst plant the germ of evil; but since that moment, it has all been a dark necessity."[7]

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[5] Ibid., p. 757. [6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 187. This quotation alone indicates Hawthorne's lack of any systematic expression of determinism. Hester is free to choose wrongly, but she is not free to undo her choice. Thus Hawthorne avoids the dilemma of the determinists, who, if they admit the existence of wrongdoing at all, cannot logically demand punishment for it.

A major problem raised by Hawthorne's use of heredity as a factor in this necessitarian view of life is that of his debt to natural science. One thing is clear: the science and the scientists in his fiction are mostly anachronistic to Hawthorne's own age.[8] Sometimes the scientists are anachronisms even in the novels in which they appear. It is possible for Chillingworth to be an alchemist in seventeenth-century Boston (though his Paracelsian science is hardly forward-looking), but it seems quite unlikely that someone at the time of the American Revolution, such as Septimius Felton, should be preoccupied with a search for an Elixir of Life, especially so deep a scholar as Septimius is supposed to be. And even when Hawthorne writes about his own time, as he does in The House of the Seven Gables, the science that he deals with directly is as apt to be a pseudo-science such as mesmerism as it is to be a study that his contemporaries would universally agree to as exact knowledge.[9] One notices further that the scientific passages Hawthorne chose to print in the American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge tend

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[8]Dorothy Scarborough, The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction (New York, 1917), places Hawthorne's narratives "between the old and new types of science" (p. 252).

[9]See Elizabeth R. Hosmer, "Science and Pseudo-Science in the Writings of Nathaniel Hawthorne," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Illinois, 1948. Holgrave, in Seven Gables, is of course by profession a daguerreotypist; he dabbles in mesmerism. Mesmerism and spiritualism also figure in the contemporaneously-set Blithedale Romance.

more to the entertaining than the useful, and may be classified largely as oddities of science.[10] His use of science in the totality of his writing has led at least one student of his thought to conclude that Hawthorne distrusted science in general and medical science in particular.[11]

On the other hand, the fact that Hawthorne did not write an Arrowsmith does not of itself prove that he distrusted science. Even his frequent use of scientists and physicians as moral monsters shows no more than that men in these professions are subject to great dangers and temptations which people who lack scientific knowledge are not called on to face. For whatever it is worth, it may be remarked that in "The Great Carbuncle," the poet mistakes a piece of ice for the great gem as surely as Doctor Cacaphodel mistakes a chunk of granite for it--thus neither of them is more discerning than the Seeker, the merchant, or the cynic. And if most of Hawthorne's scientists and physicians seem as grim as Doctor Grimshawe, one of them, the apothecary Doctor Dolliver, apparently was projected as a genial and kindly old man, so far as can be judged from the fragment of the novel that remains. It would seem to be nearer the mark to say that Hawthorne uses men of science

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[10] Miss Hosmer, who has studied the entire run of the magazine, comments on this aspect of Hawthorne's editorship. (Ibid., p. 83.) Even in Arlin Turner's book of selections from the magazine the same tendency is evident.

[11] Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, p. 237, and p. 249. See also idem, "The Concord Group," Sewanee Review, XLIV (October-December, 1936), 439-440.

to stand for hyperdevelopment of intellectuality at the expense of emotional sympathy, rather than to say that he condemns science itself. Of his contempt for this kind of personality there can be no doubt; the whole of "Ethan Brand" stands witness to his despair over the "sin of an intellect that triumphed over the sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God"[12] which is "the Unpardonable Sin."

If Hawthorne uses the more picturesque oddities of science it is largely because he is a romanticist interested in the picturesque, and because the naked factualism of science lends itself poorly to the moral symbolism of his art. There is little suggestive value in a gleaming workaday laboratory; there is much in a dim, cobweb-draped alchemist's alcove with its bubbling retorts and acrid fumes and its air of expectation of sinister miracles about to be performed. Nor should it be thought that Hawthorne was unequipped to make use of legitimate science had he chosen to do so. The natural sciences played an important part in the required curriculum at Bowdoin when Hawthorne studied there,[13] and it becomes increasingly clear as more

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[12] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 1189. For a study of further ramifications of the Unpardonable Sin in Hawthorne's writing, see James E. Miller, Jr., "Hawthorne and Melville: the Unpardonable Sin," PMLA, LXX (March, 1955), 91-114.

[13] See Hosmer, op. cit., pp. 69-76, for the scientific studies required of Bowdoin students in the 1820's.

studies are made of Hawthorne's reading[14] that he had a better-than-average layman's knowledge of the science of his time.

Yet it cannot be claimed that Hawthorne's knowledge of heredity owed much to technical science. Though he had at least scanned such books as Buffon's Historie Naturelle, numerous books on zoology, a few on botany, had withdrawn from the library Cuvier's The Animal Kingdom, and had read no one knows how many issues of the Transactions of the Royal Society and of Benjamin Silliman's American Journal of Science and Arts[15]--nevertheless, what he says about heredity is largely common-sense knowledge. There is little reason to expect anything else, since the genuine scientific attempt to investigate heredity did not begin until Darwin forced its necessity upon students of nature. Hawthorne was probably aware of the pre-Darwinian speculation about relationships of species to species, but it seems not to

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[14] To date, the more important of these that include science are George Parsons Lathrop, A Study of Hawthorne (Boston, 1876), pp. 340-343; "Books Read by Hawthorne, 1828-50: From the 'Charge Books' of the Salem Athenaeum," Essex Institute Historical Collections, LXVIII (1932), 65-87; Arlin Turner, Hawthorne as Editor (University, La., 1941), appendix; Austin Warren, "Hawthorne's Reading," New England Quarterly, VIII (December, 1935), 480-497; Marion L. Kesselring, "Hawthorne's Reading, 1825-50," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, LIII (February, March, April, 1949), 55-71, 121-138, 173-194.

[15] All these outstanding sources are mentioned in one or more of the studies and lists given in the previous note. Kesselring, op. cit., p. 58, estimates that about 4% of Hawthorne's reading at the Salem Athenaeum was in science.

have interested him.[16] If he did not care to worry about the vestiges of creation, it is all the less likely that he would be concerned about scientific theories of heredity. Nevertheless, his great preoccupation with heredity ought to be explained, if not as an impulse from science then from something else.

Some progress toward such an explanation is made when it is noticed that Hawthorne seldom uses heredity merely for the purpose of establishing the physical appearance of a character or even for showing resemblance of physical appearance between characters related by blood.[17] It will be seen that Holmes and Howells use heredity in their fiction

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[16] For example, in 1857, after visiting the British Museum, he wrote: "I went through the halls of fossil-remains (which I care little for, though one of them is a human skeleton in lime-stone). . . ." English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 610. One can scarcely imagine the same apathy toward fossil remains in Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was so eager to behold fossils that he pronounced the spurious Cardiff Giant wonderful in anatomical development. James Taylor Dunn, Cardiff Giant Hoax (Cooperstown, N. Y., n.d.), p. 9.

[17] One exceptional instance of this use of heredity, however, occurs in The Dolliver Romance. There it is said of little Pansie, "the one earthly creature that inherited a drop of the Dolliver blood," that, to Dr. Dolliver, the child "seemed the baby of a past age oftener than she seemed Pansie. A whole family of grand-aunts (one of whom had perished in her cradle, never so mature as Pansie now, another in her virgin bloom, another in autumnal maidenhood, yellow and shrivelled, with vinegar in her blood, and still another, a forlorn widow, whose grief outlasted even its vitality, and grew to be merely a torpid habit, and was saddest then),--all their hitherto forgotten features peeped through the face of the great-grandchild, and their long-inaudible voices sobbed, shouted, or laughed, in their familiar tones." (P. 24) This is similar to the practice of Howells in The Rise of Silas Lapham and to that of Holmes in The Guardian Angel.

for both of these purposes. Rather, Hawthorne uses heredity to explain individual moral character, to establish deep-seated casts of mind, to account for distinctive attitudes or attributes of whole groups of people. For example, he explains that the characters who populate The Scarlet Letter were made of coarser stuff than the readers of his own age who might question the treatment of Hester. "Morally, as well as materially," he writes, "there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding, than in their fair descendants, separated from them by a series of six or seven generations; for, throughout that chain of ancestry, every successive mother has transmitted to her child a fainter bloom, a more delicate and briefer beauty, and a slighter physical frame, if not a character of less force and solidity, than her own."[18] In keeping with this necessitarian philosophical position, Hawthorne makes heredity (with environment) function as one of the great determinants of human motives, a determinant that goes so far as to set the bounds of the area in which human activity, in the mass, at a given time can operate. It does the same for the individual. Priscilla, in The Blithedale Romance, is "a tremulous little creature, shrinking involuntarily from all mankind," like her mother, "a

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[18] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 114. Hence the women of seventeenth-century Boston are less like their mid-nineteenth century descendants than like contemporary English women, who have not resulted from the amelioration that has blessed the Americans.

forlorn, meek-spirited, feeble young woman," from whom she nevertheless "had inherited a profound and still capacity of affection"[19]--all of which is the exact opposite of her half-sister Zenobia, the offspring of a different mother.

Even if this manner of using heredity seems to owe little to science, there is one source of articulated thought in Hawthorne's background that does appear to be its origin; and that of course is Puritanism.

It is not the purpose of the present study to argue the extent of Hawthorne's sympathy with Puritanism. At least there can be no doubt of his interest in Puritan ways and Puritan beliefs; one of the largest single subject entries in any concordance to Hawthorne's works must necessarily be titled "Puritans."[20] But the older view that Hawthorne is somehow a misplaced Puritan--misplaced by at least a century--is not tenable, either.[21] He was alternately attract-

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[19] Ibid., p. 548.

[20] See [E. M. O'Connor], An Analytical Index to the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne (Boston, 1882). There is no good concordance, but this work at least gives a tabular indication of the subjects that interested Hawthorne most.

[21] See Lloyd Morris, The Rebellious Puritan: Portrait of Mr. Hawthorne (New York, 1927). Mr. Morris's undocumented book does not push the thesis quite so far as the title implies. A representative example of its interpretation is this: "As Nathaniel [the boy] brooded upon the lives led by his ancestors, the conviction grew upon him that his line was set apart, though not only by the indelible stain of the witch's curse, to which every misfortune was traditionally ascribed. Through the mist of their hazardous exploits, cruelties, renunciations and their diminishing fortune, he became aware of their common temperament. . . ." (Pp. 27-28.)

ed and repelled by the character of his Puritan ancestors and that of their contemporaries. He certainly possessed something of their temperament. His sympathy with them was indeed much greater than some later ages would feel. But Hawthorne believed *in* Calvinistic Puritanism no more than he believed *in* witchcraft.[22] Rather, he thought much *about* both. As good as any brief example of Hawthorne's attitude toward Puritans is the short tale "The May-Pole of Merry Mount," where, though Hawthorne delights in the joyfulness and innocence of the youthful Lord and Lady of May, he acknowledges that "the moral gloom of the world overpowers all systematic gayety," and he is seemingly content

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[22] Possibly the wisest thing to be said for the older Hawthorne-as-Puritan view is what George Woodberry once wrote: Hawthorne "was the child of the old Puritanism, and. . . was emancipated from its bonds from boyhood; but something stayed in his blood. . . . It might also be said that for him heredity had become environment, so much did the past oversway the present in his moral temperament, his outlook on life and his probings of its mysteries; his genius, in its most concentrated and intense work, was deeply engaged in this inherited subject-matter, this reluctant, repellent, stubborn Puritan stuff, the dark hard ore . . . ." George E. Woodberry, "The Literary Age of Boston," *Harper's Magazine*, CVI (February, 1903), pp. 428-429.

Cf. Newton Arvin: "Guilt was to become, out of all right proportion, his [Hawthorne's] monotonous theme. . . . And was this but the consequence of his having Puritan blood in his veins and the gloomy dogmas of the Puritans in his hereditary memory? The explanation holds water no better than a sieve. He had no more Puritan blood than Emerson and hundreds of other New Englanders of his time: and who will say that they were obsessed with the spectral presence of guilt? No: there are more things to sunder Hawthorne from the Puritans than to link him with them; and if, like them, he brooded on the black fatalities of human error and vice, it was the result not of any Calvinist theology, but of his own somber consciousness of separation from the ways of his fellow men. . . ." Arvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59.

that the Puritans' moral gloom should destroy the festivities of Merry Mount, for as a consequence of the Puritans' action the two lovers "went heavenward, supporting each other along the difficult path which it was their lot to tread, and never wasted one regretful thought on the vanities of Merry Mount."[23]

Surely Hawthorne's preoccupation with the psychological ramifications of sin links him, at least temperamentally, with Puritan thought.[24] If he often acknowledges the harshness of his "grave, bearded, sable-cloaked and steeple-crowned" Puritan ancestors--as he does so memorably in "The Gentle Boy"[25]--he also is ever ready to applaud their tough-mindedness, particularly their tough-minded acceptance of

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[23] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, pp. 889-890.

[24] Randall Stewart points up this aspect of Hawthorne's thought, saying that "Hawthorne and the Puritans were in complete agreement. . . in the belief that human nature is radically sinful. In 'Fancy's Show Box' (1837), the doctrine of universal depravity is stated with sufficient explicitness to satisfy the most rigorous theologian of the puritanical school: 'Man must not disclaim his brotherhood, even with the guiltiest, since, though his hand be clean, his heart has surely been polluted by the flitting phantoms of iniquity.'" American Notebooks, p. lxxii.

[25] It is but fair to note that Hawthorne's son-in-law, George Parsons Lathrop, could explain away even such condemnations of Puritan behavior: "The touch of assumed repugnance toward his [Hawthorne's] Puritan forefathers, which appear here and there in his writings, are not only related to his ingrained shyness. . . but are the ensigns of a proper modesty in discoursing of his own race, his own family, as it were. He shields an actual veneration and a sort of personal attachment for those brave earlier generations under a harmless pretence that he does not think at all too tenderly of them." George P. Lathrop, A Study of Hawthorne (Boston, 1876), p. 45.

the fact of human wickedness. Whether this means that Hawthorne literally believed in the doctrine of natural depravity, or whether, like most thinking persons of our enlightened but saddened age, he merely accepted the fact of evil without assigning a source for it is a question difficult to answer. Probably it is a question that needs no answer. So far as his practice as a writer is concerned, the significant thing is that he made use of certain Puritan concepts, as modified by time and temperament. "He did not need to believe in Puritanism, for he understood it," says one student of American philosophical history; "he saw the empirical truth behind the Calvinist symbols."[26]

It has been said that Hawthorne was drawn to the Puritans by his "ancestral ties," by his "patriotic and democratic sympathies," and by "his perception of certain basic truths in their doctrine";[27] it can be added that one of those basic truths is the kind of necessitarianism that, expressed in theological terms, the Puritans called predes-

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[26]Herbert W. Schneider, The Puritan Mind (New York, 1930), p. 262. One historian of the American novel asserts that certainly Hawthorne "harbored Calvinistic thoughts from time to time, but to what extent he endorsed them intellectually it is hard to estimate because, like Milton, he had artistic uses for outmoded systems of thought." Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1951), p. 356.

[27]Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, p. 243. Stewart sets down the following basic truths: "Evil is a reality in the world; the depravity of the unregenerate man is no myth. There seems to be in human affairs a kind of predestination, which Hawthorne calls (depending on whether its manifestation is malignant or benevolent) now Fate, now Providence." (P. 244)

tination. Admittedly, this is to use the term predestination loosely; Thomas Hooker[28] would not have recognized Hawthorne's idea as predestination at all. Yet it is not merely using the term metaphorically to say that Hawthorne is dealing with a kind of secularized predestination when he uses heredity to account for individual or mass character. The theological connotations have dropped off, but the stubborn empirical truth remains: man is not his own maker; his essential nature derives from some source outside his being; and it is a nature that can be modified little, if at all, by the individual himself. No better example of this view of human nature can be found in Hawthorne's writing than his comment on Margaret Fuller's unseemly affair with Count Ossoli in Italy, a comment on secularized predestination in this instance couched even in religious terms:

> She took credit to herself for having been her own Redeemer, if not her own Creator; and, indeed, she was far more a work of art than any of Mr. Mozier's statues. But she was not working on inanimate substance, like marble or clay; there was something within her that she could not possibly come at, to re-create it and refine it; and, by and by, this rude old potency bestirred itself, and undid all her labor in the twinkling of an eye. On the whole, I do not know but I like her the better for it--the better, because she proved herself a very woman, after all, and fell as

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28 Hooker's account of predestination may be taken as typical: "The Lord to shew the soveraign freedom of his pleasure, that he may do with his own what he wil, and yet do wrong to none, he denyes pardon and acceptance to those who seek it with some importunity and earnestness. . . and yet bestowes mercy and makes known himself unto some who never sought him." The Application of Redemption. . . (1659), quoted by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans (New York, 1938), p. 56.

the weakest of her sisters might.[29]

This "rude old potency" that cannot be refined is heredity; its effect, whether for good or evil, is as irresistible as Grace, as preordained as Original Sin.

To a certain extent Hawthorne's use of heredity is also related to the Puritan conception of original sin. More often than not, when heredity is emphasized in his writings it is an evil heredity. Of an illegitimate son of Robert Burns he notes that the "son seems to have inherited his father's failings, with but a shadow of the great qualities that make the world tender of his vices and weaknesses."[30] Robert Browning's son, Pennini, impresses Hawthorne by his beauty and intelligence, but more by his fragility, which Hawthorne says "I suppose he inherits" from his mother.[31]

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[29]The italics are mine. This passage was omitted by Mrs. Hawthorne from her edition of the French and Italian Note-books and is here quoted from Randall Stewart, Nathaniel Hawthorne: A Biography, p. 195. Stewart says of this passage that "it would be difficult to find a better parable of Calvinism in the literature of New England" (p. 195), and he adds that "the view of Margaret. . . is broadly representative of Hawthorne's view of human nature generally, and the difficulty of transforming it by an artificial culture." (P. 196)

[30]English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 501. Reference has been made to Hawthorne's belief that Boswell's grandson inherited "booziness" from his grandfather (Our Old Home, p. 243) and to his belief that insanity can be inherited (Complete Novels, p. 867).

[31]Quoted by Stewart, Hawthorne: A Biography, p. 200. The passage differs somewhat in Mrs. Hawthorne's edition of the French and Italian Note-Books. Hawthorne adds of Pennini: "I should not quite like to be the father of such a boy" (p. 201).

The suggestion of heredity as a kind of original sin occurs again and again in the fiction, notably in The Scarlet Letter, in the sprite-like character of Pearl. The elements of Pearl's being are "all in disorder," because "in giving her existence, a great law had been broken," and in consequence the child "could not be made amenable to rules." Since Hester's "impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life," "the warfare of Hester's spirit, at that epoch, was perpetuated in Pearl." In Pearl, Hester "could recognize her wild, desperate, defiant mood, the flightiness of her temper, and even some of the very cloud-shapes of gloom and despondency that had brooded in her heart."[32] Hester could discern in Pearl "a shadowy reflection of the evil that had existed in herself." And the expression of inherited wickedness is underscored when Hawthorne concludes that "all this enmity and passion had Pearl inherited, by inalienable right, out of Hester's heart."[33]

Pearl, of course, is apparently redeemed at the end of the novel, if marrying well abroad and sending back letters bearing quaint armorial seals is to be thought of as redemption. But Hawthorne also uses heredity in his fiction in a manner reminiscent of original sin and has the hered-

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[32] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 137.

[33] Ibid., p. 139.

itary element--the "rude old potency"--extend through many generations.[34] The predestined nature of hereditary evil, and its slow but incomplete amelioration through time, is brought out forcibly in Septimius Felton. According to the legend of Septimius's Aunt Keziah, Septimius "had reason to believe that his first ancestor came over at a somewhat earlier date than the first Puritan settlers, and dwelt among the Indians, where. . . he had intermarried with the daughter of a sagamore, and succeeded to his rule."[35] When the Puritans reached New England they found the son of this union, possessing some knowledge of the English language, having inherited his father's power. The Puritans tried to Christianize and educate the youth, but their success was

> limited to winning the half-Indian from the wild ways of his mother's people, into a certain partial, but decent accommodation to those of the English. A tendency to civilization was brought out in his character by their rigid training; at least, his savage wildness was broken. He built a house among them, with a good deal of the wigwam, no doubt, in its style of architecture, but still a permanent house. . . and became farmer enough to be entitled to ask the hand of a Puritan maiden. . . . [O]n the whole, the race had been redeemed from barbarism in his person, and in the succeeding generations had been tamed more and more. The second generation had been distinguished in the Indian wars of the provinces, and then intermarried with the stock of a distinguished Puritan divine, by which means Septimius could reckon great and learned men, scholars of Old Cambridge, among his ancestry on one side, while on the other it ran up to the early emigrants, who

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[34]The most memorable example is The House of the Seven Gables. This is discussed in Chapter Three.

[35]Septimius Felton (in vol. XI of Lathrop ed. of Works), p. 374.

> seemed to have been remarkable men, and to that strange wild lineage of Indian chiefs, whose blood was like that of persons not quite human, intermixed with civilized blood.[36]

Yet despite the influence of Cambridge scholars in his ancestry, there is "something in Septimius, in his wild, mixed nature, the monstrousness that had grown out of his hybrid race, the black infusions, too, which melancholic men had left there, the devilishness that had been symbolized in the popular regard about his family"[37] that makes other characters turn from him in fright, and which he himself attributes to "the wild, natural blood of the Indian."[38] Through all the softening influences of civilized generations, this "rude old potency" has remained.[39]

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[36] Ibid., p. 375. It should be noted that Septimius's Indian ancestry is apparently Hawthorne's happy afterthought, for no mention of the Indian background appears until the novel is well along, though from the beginning Septimius's "natural turn for study" is attributed to his inheritance from ancestors who "possessed all the erudition that the universities of England could bestow" (p. 231). The novel, however, is to develop the theme of a search for the Elixir of Life, and to account for Septimius's abandonment of his ministerial studies and his wild pursuit of the chimera of eternal life, Hawthorne provides the motivation of "the hereditary mysticism of his [Indian] race" (p. 294). Septimius's great-grandfather had been a wizard and had been hanged for it. (P. 319)

[37] Ibid., p. 269. [38] Ibid., p. 424.

[39] R. B. Heilman has argued that the birthmark that Aylmer tries to remove from his wife's cheek in the story "The Birthmark" is to be understood as the symbol of original sin, and that Aylmer himself stands for the "romantic scientist" who lacks the tragic view of life and has "no thought of the problem of perfecting himself." R. B. Heilman, "Hawthorne's 'The Birthmark': Science as Religion," South Atlantic Quarterly, XLVIII (October, 1949), 575-583.

That the hereditary potency which passes through many generations is not always entirely evil may be seen in The Marble Faun in the pedigree of Donatello's family. According to legends of the Monte Beni family, a demigod had been a progenitor of the line; but "the Faun's wild blood had necessarily been attempered with constant intermixtures from the more ordinary streams of human life," so that it had "served, for the most part, only to bestow an unconquerable vigor" to the line, with the result that a Monte Beni was likely to be "beautiful, strong, brave, kindly, sincere, of honest impulses, and endowed with simple tastes and the love of homely pleasures. . . ."[40] Nevertheless, even in the midst of such virtues "there were deficiencies both of intellect and heart, and especially, as it seemed, in the development of the higher portion of man's nature."[41]

Whatever the extent of Hawthorne's sympathy with or antipathy to the theology of Puritanism, there can be little doubt about the identification of heredity with the inclusive view of human destiny that we have called secularized

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[40] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 724.

[41] Ibid., p. 725. Hawthorne brings to bear all of his knowledge of heredity in creating the character of Donatello. In the germ for the story he writes: "It seems to me that a story, with all sorts of fun and pathos in it, might be contrived on the idea of their [fauns'] species having become intermingled with the human race. . . . The tail might have disappeared, by the dint of constant intermarriages with ordinary mortals [idea of acquired characters]; but the pretty hairy ears should occasionally reappear in members of the family" [idea of atavism] (French and Italian Note-Books, pp. 172-173). In the novel he also uses the idea of latent heredity: "These defects [deficiencies of intellect and heart] were less perceptible in early youth, but showed themselves more strongly with advancing age" (Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 725).

predestination. Heredity, in Hawthorne's fiction, is the symbolic representation of those fateful forces that Hawthorne and the Puritans mutually recognized but discussed with different terminology. Like the Puritans, Hawthorne was convinced that man does not make himself but is the product of forces originating from outside his individual being. Like them, he believed that these forces are often deleterious to the welfare of man. And like them, he observed that these impulses continue through many generations, sometimes seemingly obscured only to burst forth later with renewed vigor. Another generation would recognize the same forces and would attempt to make a scientific study of them. Hawthorne described the forces of the "rude old potency," he used them symbolically in his fiction, and, lacking a scientific vocabulary for heredity, he employed the language of everyday life in his discussion.

It has become increasingly evident to a number of contemporary critics that the relation of Hawthorne to Puritanism is not the simple matter of acceptance or rejection that it was once thought to be, or even of partial acceptance or rejection. F. O. Matthiessen believed that if Hawthorne's "art was to fulfil its function by remaining true to what his deepest intuitions had known, there must inevitably have been woven into the texture of his style some thinness and bleakness, the consequences of the long domination of Puritan thought, and of the lack of any

developed artistic tradition from which he could start."[42] On the other hand, Yvor Winters sees the Puritan tradition itself as Hawthorne's literary tradition: "The method of allegorization is that of the Puritans. . . . Hawthorne's point of view was naturally more enlightened than that of the Puritans. . . yet it was insufficiently so to enable him to recover the traditional Christian ethics except in the most general terms and by way of historical sympathy. . . ."[43] Mr. Winters accounts for the greatness of The Scarlet Letter on the ground that in it Hawthorne had reduced the problem of sin to general terms and had "brought his allegory to perfect literary form"; having done this, Hawthorne "had, properly speaking, dealt with sin once and for all; there was nothing further to be said about it."[44] Then Mr. Winters accounts for Hawthorne's failure to complete any of his attempts to write an English romance on the ground that "in turning his back upon the excessively simplified conceptions of his Puritan ancestors, he abandoned the only orderly concepts, whatever their limitations,

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[42] F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (New York, 1941), p. 235.

[43] Yvor Winters, Maule's Curse: Seven Studies in the History of American Obscurantism (Norfolk, Conn., 1938), p. 16. An even more recent critic to emphasize the Puritan tendency to allegorize is Richard H. Fogle, who writes: "Allegory is organic to Hawthorne, an innate quality of his vision. It is his disposition to find spiritual meaning in all things natural and human. This faculty is an inheritance from the Puritans. . . ." Hawthorne's Fiction: The Light and the Dark (Norman, Okla., 1952), p. 7.

[44] Ibid.

to which he had access, and in his last work he is restless and dissatisfied."[45]

The analysis of Lionel Trilling is still more subtle. Mr. Trilling declares that "religion in its decline leaves a detritus of pieties, of strong assumptions, which afford a particularly fortunate condition for certain kinds of literature; these pieties carry a strong charge of intellect, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they tend to stimulate the mind in a powerful way." By this argument, religious orthodoxy in decay has a more profound effect on literature than it does in its pristine vigor. Hence, though "Hawthorne and Melville,[46] for example, lived at a time when religion was in decline and they were not drawn to support it"; nevertheless, "from religion they inherited a body of pieties, a body of issues, if you will, which engaged their hearts and their minds to the very bottom."[47]

So then, Puritan thought accounts for a bleakness in the literary tradition available to Hawthorne; it is the very tradition from which his best work springs, and his rejection of it doomed his writing to failure; it provided a debris of pieties that made his work possible, but only so

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[45] Ibid., p. 22.

[46] A somewhat similar view controls Lawrance Thompson's Melville's Quarrel with God (Princeton, 1952).

[47] Lionel Trilling, "The Meaning of a Literary Idea," in The Liberal Imagination (Doubleday Anchor ed., Garden City, 1953), p. 285.

long as he did not literally believe any of the pieties. One can take his choice among critical theories. At any rate, Hawthorne's relation to Puritanism is not a settled issue.[48] On one thing there can at least be agreement, and that is that Hawthorne--whatever the extent of his literal belief--did use Puritan concepts in his fiction to aid the representation of his own attitude toward human nature, an attitude in which heredity plays a large part.

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[48] Barriss Mills, "Hawthorne and Puritanism," New England Quarterly, XXI (March, 1948), 78-102, argues convincingly for a middle way; seeing many Puritan attitudes in Hawthorne, he nevertheless is emphatic that Hawthorne "did not swallow Puritanism whole." (P. 102)

Chapter III

Hawthorne: Heredity in The House of the Seven Gables

It is in The House of the Seven Gables (1851), more than in any other single place, that Hawthorne brings together his major ideas relating to heredity, and it is in this novel that he puts these ideas to their most significant artistic use. The fact that heredity figures so largely does not in any way imply that The House of the Seven Gables is necessarily superior to the other novels, though there have never been lacking readers who do prefer it to the others. That it happens to make greater use of heredity is merely the result of the exigencies of plot and theme.

The avowed moral of the novel, according to Hawthorne's preface, is "that the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones, and, divesting itself of every temporary advantage, becomes a pure and uncontrollable mischief. . . ."[1] The wrong-doing is of course the action taken by the Puritan Colonel Pyncheon against the humble cottager Matthew Maule. Colonel Pyncheon not only caused Maule to be hanged on the charge of witchcraft but usurped his meagre landholdings in the old New England town, and on the land the Colonel erected the House of the Seven Gables.

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[1] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 243. Subsequent references to The House of the Seven Gables will be to this edition and will be indicated simply by the word House.

Therein he founded his dynasty. Despite its shaky claim to the house (and its shakier claim to large holdings in Maine), the family clung to the property for the next two centuries, grasping it as a symbol of inherited social superiority. On the scaffold the condemned Matthew Maule cursed his accuser and seemingly his whole progeny when he pointed his finger at the grim Colonel and solemnly prophesied that "God will give him blood to drink!"[2] Thus the enmity between the Maules and Pyncheons is established; and the wrong-doing of Colonel Pyncheon in the seventeenth century is handed down as pure malignancy to Judge Pyncheon, his nineteenth-century descendant.

The plot involves the nineteenth-century descendants of Matthew Maule and Colonel Pyncheon; specifically it is the manipulation needed to bring about a merger of the two hostile families in the marriage of Phoebe (a Pyncheon) and Holgrave (a Maule). The theme is the sin of pride in mere ancestry and the evil of a wicked past exerting an unwholesome influence on the present. To elaborate such a plot and to develop such a theme, Hawthorne draws on all the major elements of his lore of heredity, using heredity never merely for decoration, not alone for the purpose of establishing physical appearance or even character, or even as a device to account for action--but as the very fulcrum on which the plot turns and especially as moral symbol to

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[2] House, p. 247.

control the meaning of the novel.

Colonel Pyncheon not only deeply wronged Matthew Maule; of even greater moment to his descendants was the fact that he built the ancestral house "in pride, not modesty."[3] Along with his haughty pride he bequeathed to them an "impalpable claim" to an immense and supposedly valuable tract of land in Maine,[4] which led them "to cherish, from generation to generation, an absurd delusion of family importance,"[5] with the result that the delusion

> caused the poorest member of the race to feel as if he inherited a kind of nobility, and might yet come into the possession of princely wealth to support it. In the better specimens of the breed, this peculiarity threw an ideal grace over the hard material of human life, without stealing away any truly valuable quality. In the baser sort, its effect was to increase the liability to sluggishness and dependence, and induce the victim of a shadowy hope to remit all self-effort. . . .[6]

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[3] Ibid., p. 249.

[4] Randall Stewart's note, American Notebooks, p. 287, identifies the land with the Maine patent of General Henry Knox. For an attempt to derive the character of Colonel Pyncheon from actual people associated with Maine land-holdings (Knox and Brigadier General Samuel Waldo), see Thomas Morgan Griffiths, Maine Sources in The House of the Seven Gables (Waterville, Maine, 1945). Griffiths goes so far as to identify Gervayse Pyncheon (an intermediate between the Colonel and the Judge) with the historical personage Thomas Flucker, and Alice Pyncheon with Flucker's natural daughter Sally. (Pp. 25-44)

[5] Briefer analogues to this theme are "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure," "Old Esther Dudley," and "Lady Eleanore's Mantle." Both The Ancestral Footstep and Dr. Grimshawe's Secret also make use of it. Within his own family, Hawthorne found examples of unwholesome pride of ancestry; there was the venerable Susy Ingersoll, "proud of being proud" (American Notebooks, p. 27), and Eben Hathorne, of whom Hawthorne remarked: "The pride of ancestry seems to be his great hobby" (ibid., p. 26).

[6] House, p. 253.

In the nineteenth century, it is Judge Pyncheon in particular who has inherited the Colonel's wickedness, Hepzibah who has inherited his overweening pride. When Phoebe Pyncheon, the daughter of a dead cousin of the Judge, comes to live at the House of the Seven Gables, the house is occupied by Hepzibah, who is awaiting the arrival of her brother Clifford (due to be released from prison); and, though living in penury, Hepzibah agrees to let their country cousin share their house. A fact to be noted in the way heredity is handled here is that not all Pyncheons possess hereditary traits of the Colonel. Phoebe, as heroine, is quite free from undesirable traits, though she is of course only a collateral descendant. Clifford--as it turns out, wrongly accused of murder--is an hereditary Pyncheon only in that his extreme sensitivity may be ascribed in part to his pride and to the abrasion of that pride by his false imprisonment. But then, Hawthorne does not claim that every Pyncheon is a genetic reincarnation of the Colonel. He says that "in almost every generation. . . there happened to be some one descendant of the family gifted with a portion of the hard, keen sense, and practical energy, that had so remarkably distinguished the original founder."[7] The Judge is the recipient of this keen sense and practical energy as well as of the ancestral curse, while both Hepzibah and

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[7] Ibid., p. 254.

Clifford are innocent of either. Despite variations from the type, the Pyncheons, "possessing very distinctive traits of their own" even if they did take on "the general characteristics of the little community in which they dwelt,"[8] so often repeated the personality of the Colonel that his "character, indeed, might be traced all the way down, as distinctly as if the Colonel himself, a little diluted, had been gifted with a sort of intermittent immortality on earth."[9] However, Hawthorne does not propose to exhibit all the links in the chain of descent.

By filling in the intermediate generations by light strokes of exposition, Hawthorne is able to use his characteristic "penumbra" device[10] as regards Maule's curse, letting the reader choose between a rational naturalistic explanation and a literal belief in its mystical potency.[11] Thus he says that the curse was remembered, "with the very important addition, that it had become a part of the Pyncheon inheritance. If one of the family did but gurgle in his throat, a bystander would be likely enough to whisper,

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[8] Ibid., p. 255. [9] Ibid., p. 254.

[10] See Austin Warren, Nathaniel Hawthorne, American Writers Series (New York, 1934), p. lxix, where the device is discussed, its origin suggested, and further references for its interpretation are given.

[11] Hawthorne surely has greater personal need for the penumbra device of multiple interpretations here than he has elsewhere; for example, "Young Goodman Brown." His son-in-law, who should have known, insisted that there was a tradition in the Hawthorne family that the "malediction that fell on Justice [John] Hathorne's head might with some reason have been thought to still hang over his race" (Lathrop, A Study of Hawthorne, p. 57).

between jest and earnest, 'He has Maule's blood to drink!'"[12] The death of an unnamed Pyncheon, a hundred years before the action of the story proper begins, under circumstances similar to the death of Colonel Pyncheon, reinforced the tradition. Jaffrey Pyncheon, uncle of the Judge and of Clifford, died in a similar manner. And Judge Pyncheon, near the end of the novel, dies in the same way--all of them vomiting blood. However, Holgrave, the daguerreotypist, explains to Phoebe that the mode of death is apparently a form of apoplexy, an "idiosyncrasy" with the family, "not often occurring, indeed, but, when it does occur, usually attacking individuals about the Judge's time of life, and generally in the tension of some mental crisis, or, perhaps, in an access of wrath. Old Maule's prophecy was probably founded on a knowledge of this physical predisposition in the Pyncheon race."[13] Physical predisposition or curse--whichever it is, it is nevertheless inherited by certain males of the Pyncheon family.

The closest hereditary affinity is that between Colonel Pyncheon and Judge Pyncheon. "The similarity, intellectual and moral, between the Judge and his ancestor appears to have been at least as strong as the resemblance of mien and fea-

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[12] House, p. 255.

[13] Ibid., p. 426. In narrating events following the Judge's death, Hawthorne says, apparently in his own person, that "the event was a natural, and--except for some unimportant particulars, denoting a slight idiosyncrasy--by no means an unusual form of death" (p. 430).

ture would afford reason to anticipate."[14]

> For example: tradition affirmed that the Puritan had been greedy of wealth; the Judge, too, with all the show of liberal expenditure, was said to be as close-fisted as if his gripe [sic] were of iron. The ancestor had clothed himself in a grim assumption of kindliness, a rough heartiness of word and manner, which most people took to be the genuine warmth of nature, making its way through the thick and inflexible hide of a manly character. His descendant, in compliance with the requirements of a nicer age, had etherealized this rude benevolence into that broad benignity of smile, wherewith he shone like a noonday sun along the streets, or glowed like a household fire in the drawing-rooms of his private acquaintance. The Puritan--if not belied by some singular stories, murmured, even at this day, under the narrator's breath--had fallen into certain transgressions to which men of his great animal development, whatever their faith or principles, must continue liable, until they put off impurity, along with the gross earthly substance that involves it. We must not stain our page with any contemporary scandal, to a similar purport, that may have been whispered against the Judge. The Puritan, again, an autocrat in his own household, had worn out three wives, and, merely by the remorseless weight and hardness of his character in the conjugal relation, had sent them, one after another, broken-hearted, to their graves. Here the parallel in some sort, fails. The Judge had wedded but a single wife, and lost her in the third or fourth year of their marriage. There was a fable, however, . . . that the lady got her death-blow in the honeymoon, and never smiled again, because her husband compelled her to serve him with coffee every morning at his bedside, in token of fealty to her liege-lord and master.[15]

Here we see Hawthorne using heredity in a fashion typical of him; not to portray physical appearance (actually, whatever the resemblance of the two Pyncheons in mien and feature, we are left to imagine what they look like) but to

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[14] Ibid., p. 316. In at least one place Hawthorne toys with the neo-Platonic idea that "the physical frame" "is but the shadow of" the "moral system." "Egotism; Or, the Bosom Serpent," Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 1108.

[15] Ibid., pp. 316-317.

establish character. In this instance it is the character of a villain; but in one sense the Judge is the most important personage in the novel, for it is he who is the mainspring of most of the action.

It may be that Hawthorne feels he is attributing a bit too much to heredity, for it is at this point that he exclaims that "it is too fruitful a subject, this of hereditary resemblances" and goes on skeptically to admit that hereditary resemblance "is truly unaccountable, when we consider how large an accumulation of ancestry lies behind every man at the distance of one or two centuries."[16] Accountable or not, however, Hawthorne doubts neither the truth of hereditary nature nor its artistic efficacy in presenting character. He puts his last touch to the character of the Colonel by saying that according to "chimney-corner tradition" he was "bold, imperious, relentless, crafty; laying his purposes deep, and following them out with an inveteracy of pursuit that knew neither rest nor conscience; trampling on the weak, and, when essential to his ends, doing his utmost to beat down the strong." And he adds ironically: "Whether the Judge in any degree resembled him the further progress of our narrative may show."[17]

The further progress of the narrative does indeed show the moral resemblance of the Judge to the Colonel; it is

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[16] Ibid., p. 317.

[17] Ibid.

revealed that it was the Judge who blighted the life of his cousin Clifford, and that he stands in his own person as a symbol for the whole baneful influence of the past. But, lest it should be forgotten that the Judge is the man he is because of his heredity, Hawthorne provides two explicit comments near the end of the novel. When the Judge, still hoping to come into more wealth by gaining access to papers which he believes Clifford to possess, demands an interview with Clifford and engages in a heated exchange of words with Hepzibah, Hawthorne writes: "Never did a man show stronger proof of the lineage attributed to him than Judge Pyncheon, at this crisis, by his unmistakable resemblance to the picture [of Colonel Pyncheon] in the inner room."[18] And Hepzibah is given the statement of the moral application when she cries out to the Judge: "this hard and grasping spirit has run in our blood these two hundred years. You are but doing over again, in another shape, what your ancestor before you did, and sending down to your posterity the curse inherited from him!"[19]

In view of the terrible Pyncheon hereditary nature exhibited by Judge Pyncheon, it is necessary for Hawthorne to find some means of softening the burden of heredity that rests on Phoebe and Clifford. (No such need obtains with Hepzibah who, meant to be pathetic and not sympathetic, has the hereditary Pyncheon pride in family and is vain about

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[18] Ibid., p. 383.

[19] Ibid., p. 386.

her streak of impracticality, which she regards as "an hereditary trait" of the Pyncheons.[20]) He does this simply, but rather lamely, by asserting that they do not possess Pyncheon characteristics. Hepzibah says of her brother: "He never was a Pyncheon!"[21] And, similarly, she says of Phoebe: "Phoebe is no Pyncheon. She takes everything from her mother."[22] From her mother, Phoebe is alleged to have received her housekeeping ability, her turn for study, and her ability to manage the cent shop efficiently. Hepzibah, however, with her perverted sense of family pride, is sure that these very virtues shut Phoebe off from the possibility of being a lady.[23] Likewise Hepzibah sees Clifford, in contrast with Judge Pyncheon's grossness, as "Soft, mild, and cheerfully contemplative, with full, red lips, just on the verge of a smile, which the eyes seemed to herald by a gentle kindling-up of their orbs! Feminine traits, moulded inseparably with those of the other sex!"[24]

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[20] Ibid., p. 289. Hawthorne adds that perhaps Hepzibah's "native inapplicability" was an hereditary trait, "but, unfortunately, a morbid one, such as is often generated in families that remain long above the surface of society." It seems somehow hard to connect Colonel Pyncheon's ability to amass wealth with Hepzibah's inability to operate a cent shop at a profit.

[21] Ibid., p. 278.

[22] Ibid., p. 291

[23] Ibid., pp. 289-291.

[24] Ibid., p. 278. The attribution of rougher traits to inheritance from the male and softer ones to inheritance from the female sides of the hereditary equation is of course a commonplace. It occurs frequently in Hawthorne's fiction. Hawthorne does not, however, use the idea sometimes associ-

Even more gingerly treated is the heredity of Holgrave, the sole surviving member of the Maule family. Holgrave says to Phoebe: "I am somewhat of a mystic, it must be confessed. The tendency is in my blood, together with the faculty of mesmerism, which might have brought me to Gallows Hill, in the good old times of witchcraft."[25] Beyond such tendencies, nothing more is made of his heredity. In the story that Holgrave tells Phoebe about the ill-fated Alice Pyncheon, he says that young Matthew Maule, the grandson of the wizard, "was popularly supposed to have inherited some of his ancestor's questionable traits," such as "a strange power of getting into people's dreams,"[26] and he was supposed to possess the evil eye, and the occult power of looking into people's minds. But Holgrave is too much the skeptic to accept any such notions. He suggests, as he does for the Pyncheon curse, a simple naturalistic explanation: "what worked most to the young carpenter's disadvantage was, first, the reserve and sternness of his natural disposition, and next, the fact of his not being a church-communicant, and the suspicion of his holding heretical tenets in matters of religion and polity."[27] Yet it is apparently this hered-

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ated with it (which Howells does use), that the Mother's hereditary contribution is greatest to her sons, the father's to his daughters.

[25] Ibid., pp. 373-374. By mystic, Holgrave means he dabbles in mysterious studies, such as mesmerism and photography. As will be seen, he is always given open-minded skeptical opinions.

[26] Ibid., p. 356.

[27] Ibid., p. 357.

itary Maule reserve that causes Holgrave himself, shut away in his remote room in the House of the Seven Gables, to be the mysterious figure he is. There is an explicit comment in this connection when Hawthorne writes: "So long as any of the race [of Maules] were to be found, they had been marked out from other men--not strikingly, nor as with a sharp line, but with an effect that was felt rather than spoken of--by an hereditary character of reserve."[28] Thus, in the instance of this novel, is the character of the detached observer who appears so often in Hawthorne's fiction accounted for by heredity. But we are told no more about Holgrave's heredity than that it makes him aloof and reserved. Since Hawthorne seems incapable of providing good heredities in this novel, and Holgrave must marry Phoebe, we can hardly expect more.[29]

So much for the individual heredities of the chief actors in the drama. When we turn our attention to the theme they portray, we see more strongly Hawthorne's predisposition

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[28] Ibid., p. 258.

[29] There is good reason to believe that Hawthorne drew the character of Judge Pyncheon from the model of the Rev. Charles Wentworth Upham, Oliver Wendell Holmes's brother-in-law and the politician who secured Hawthorne's dismissal from his Salem Surveyorship. See the letter by Elizabeth Hawthorne quoted in Julian Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife (Boston, 1885), I, 438. For details of the political machinations see Robert Cantwell, Nathaniel Hawthorne, the American Years (New York, 1948), pp. 420-425. Considering Hawthorne's personal animosity toward Upham, it seems that he regarded the hereditary decay of old families an especially appropriate theme to damn his ancestry-proud enemy.

to make heredity the symbol of evil.[30]

The extent to which Holgrave represents Hawthorne's own opinions is open to debate, but what Holgrave has to say about heredity is surely Hawthorne himself speaking, for much of it is repeated elsewhere, both in fictional and non-fictional form.[31] Clifford, too, is given statements which help to carry the intended meaning of the novel. What both of them have to say about the hereditary continuity of the past into the present is essential to Hawthorne's explanation of how "the wrong-doing of one generation lives into the successive ones."

Holgrave shares Hawthorne's skepticism of mystical explanations.[32] He tells Phoebe that there is no doubt of the truth of Maule's curse, but he does not believe the super-

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[30] Woodberry's judgment is apposite: "The theme [of The House of the Seven Gables], the idea, is of the Puritan moral scheme--especially in the element of inheritance involved--and thus was native to Hawthorne; but in his generation its reality was hardly sufficiently felt to make it effective in fiction without a delicate touch and much management. At the end, indeed, the inherited curse of the house is the most tenuous part of the tale. . . ." George E. Woodberry, Nathaniel Hawthorne, How to Know Him (Indianapolis, 1918), pp. 107-108.

[31] It can be mentioned, moreover, that Holgrave shares something of the two recurring character types in Hawthorne's fiction that Randall Stewart has called the scholar-idealist and the detached observer. Both of these, if not always spokesmen for Hawthorne, at least represent his sympathies to a degree.

[32] Vernon Parrington, to point up his interpretation of Hawthorne's thought, titles a chapter of Main Currents in American Thought "Nathaniel Hawthorne: Skeptic." Whatever Parrington's deficiencies as an aesthetic critic in this chapter and elsewhere, he goes straight to the center of Hawthorne's intellectual adjustment.

stitious version of it. What Matthew Maule said on the scaffold could in no way affect the descendants of Colonel Pyncheon two hundred years later; yet that the Pyncheon family had been declining--as though under the shadow of a curse--was an empirical fact. During the whole term of its existence in the house built by the Colonel, there had been in the family a "perpetual remorse of conscience, a constantly defeated hope, strife amongst kindred, various misery, a strange form of death, dark suspicion, unspeakable disgrace," and all this calamity was to be traced "to the old Puritan's inordinate desire to plant and endow a family"[33]--a wicked desire that had been kept alive and constantly festering by the Pyncheons' overweening pride in ancestry. The curse of the Pyncheons, then, is not an external curse imposed from outside by Matthew Maule; it is the Pyncheons' own inner, hereditary flaw. "To plant a family!" Holgrave exclaims.

> "This idea is at the bottom of most of the wrong and mischief which men do. The truth is, that, once in every half-century, at longest, a family should be merged into the great, obscure mass of humanity, and forget all about its ancestors. Human blood, in order to keep its freshness, should run in hidden streams, as the water of an aqueduct is conveyed in subterranean pipes. In the family existence of these Pyncheons, for instance,--forgive me, Phoebe; but I cannot think of you as one of them,--in their brief New England pedigree, there has been time enough to infect them all with one kind of lunacy or another."[34]

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[33] House, p. 354.

[34] Ibid.

Holgrave's opinions on heredity are Hawthorne's opinions. As has been shown earlier, Hawthorne was convinced that close inbreeding brings nothing but disaster. He thought it would be advantageous for both nations if parts of the population of Britain and America could be interchanged. He believed Americans superior to Englishmen because of the greater diffusion of desirable genetic qualities among all classes in America. And he had an almost pathological interest in recording the decay of families of aristocratic pretentions.[35] He had no doubt that "human blood, in order to keep its freshness, should run in hidden streams."

Yet Holgrave's attitude toward the past and his attitude toward family identification do not exactly match Hawthorne's, point for point.[36] Holgrave's great denunciation of the past,

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[35] As early as 1836, entries on the decay of old families appear in Hawthorne's notebooks. Among those commented on are the Copinger, the Gardiner, the Knox, and--most significantly--his own. See the introduction to American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), pp. lxxvi-lxxxi. Stewart claims that "Hawthorne's belief that the disintegration of old families is for the good of society may be explained partly as a result of his democratic sympathies." (P. lxxx)

[36] Family identification was important to Hawthorne personally, and he is sympathetic to it elsewhere in his fiction. "Of all things," he wrote from England, to James T. Fields, "I should like to find a gravestone in one of these old churchyards, with my own name upon it. . . ." James T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors (Boston, 1879), p. 74.

In Doctor Grimshawe's Secret, Redclyffe says: "Age is our novelty; therefore it attracts and absorbs us. And as for genealogies, I know not what necessary repulsion there may be between it and democracy. A line of respectable connections, being harder to preserve where there is nothing in the laws to defend it, is therefore the more precious when we have it really to boast of." To this the Warden assents, saying that "when a race keeps itself distinguished among the grimy order of your commonalty. . . it must needs be because there is a force and efficacy in the blood." (Pp.

one of the most memorable passages in the novel, occurs, like the previous comment on family, in a conversation with Phoebe. He cries out:

> "Shall we never, never get rid of this Past? . . . It lies upon the Present like a giant's dead body! In fact, the case is just as if a young giant were compelled to waste all his strength in carrying about the corpse of the old giant, his grandfather, who died a long while ago, and only needs to be decently buried. Just think a moment, and it will startle you to see what slaves we are to bygone times,--to Death, if we give the matter the right word!"[37]

In a passage in his English notebooks, dated March 27, 1856, Hawthorne recorded a similar reaction to the past, using the same image of weight and pressure:

> Yesterday, I went out at about twelve, and visited the British Museum; an exceedingly tiresome affair. It quite crushes a person to see so much at once; and I wandered from hall to hall, with a weary and heavy heart, wishing (Heaven forgive me!) that the Elgin marbles and the frieze of the Parthenon were all burnt into lime, and that the granite Egyptian statues were hewn and squared into building-stones, and that the mummies had all turned to dust, two thousand years ago; and, in fine, that all the material relics of so many successive ages had disappeared with the generations that produced them. The present is burthened too much with the past. We have not time, in our earthly existence, to appreciate what is warm with life, and immediately around us; yet we heap up all these old shells, out of which human life has long emerged, casting them off forever. I do not see how future ages are to stagger onward under all this dead weight, with the additions that will be continually made to it.[38]

182-183) Later Redclyffe expresses his emotional need for a family connection: "I cannot overcome the natural horror of being a creature floating in the air, attached to nothing. . . ." (P. 276)

[37] House, p. 352. According to Stanley T. Williams, Holgrave's speech makes the book "a modern cancellation of the freedom of the will." Literary History of the United States (ed. Robert E. Spiller, et al.), I, 432.

[38] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 294.

Such an outburst has the ring of sincerity and cannot be lightly dismissed. It does not, however, mean that Hawthorne had an unqualified hatred for the past and an infinite delight in the present. It can even be read as no more than a denunciation of the practice of preserving lifeless artifacts in museums, for Hawthorne had no such feeling about the ancient English churches, and indeed wrote some of his most soaring description about them. Yet, Hawthorne was troubled about the dead weight of the past; in his own mind he was unsure of his own feeling at times. He could write: "Rather than such monotony of sluggish ages, . . . let us welcome whatever change may come,--changes of place, social customs, political institutions, modes of worship,--trusting that, if all present things shall vanish, they will but make room for better systems, and for a higher type of man to clothe his life in them, and to fling off in turn."[39] But he could also write: "The people [seventeenth-century colonists] possessed, by hereditary right, the quality of reverence; which, in their descendants, if it survive at all, exists in smaller proportion, and with a vastly diminished force, in the selection and estimate of public men. The change may be for good or evil, and is partly, perhaps, for both. In that old day, the English settler. . . while still the faculty and necessity of reverence were strong in him, bestowed it

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[39] Our Old Home, p. 79. "Old Esther Dudley," Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 989, has a similar passage on the need for a revolt from the past.

on the white hair and venerable brow of age; on long-tried integrity; on solid wisdom and sad-colored experience; on endowments of that grave and weighty order which gives the idea of permanence. . . ."[40] Probably that was as close as he could come to an answer to the problem of the past. If his own time no longer reverenced the experience of the past, it was a change that worked, perhaps, for both good and evil.

This fluctuation of attitude is shown somewhat in Holgrave also. Following his comparison of the past to a dead giant, Holgrave goes on to say that "If each generation were allowed and expected to build its own houses, that single change, comparatively unimportant in itself, would imply almost every reform which society is now suffering for."[41] Hawthorne apparently liked the idea that each generation should build its own houses (though he himself was never financially able to build a house), for he repeats it later in The Marble Faun, this time as a direct author-comment.

> All towns should be made capable of purification by fire, or of decay, within each half-century. Otherwise, they become the hereditary haunts of vermin and noisomeness. . . . It is beautiful, no doubt, and exceedingly satisfactory to some of our natural instincts, to imagine our far posterity dwelling under the same roof-tree as ourselves. Still, when people insist on building indestructible houses, they incur, or their children do, a misfortune analogous to that of the Sibyl, when she obtained the grievous boon of immortality.[42]

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[40] The Scarlet Letter, in Complete Novels and Selected Tales, pp. 224-225.

[41] House, p. 353.

[42] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 764.

But it is easy to overlook Holgrave's recantation at the end of the novel, after he has won Phoebe. He says to her there: "I have a presentiment that, hereafter, it will be my lot to set out trees, to make fences,--perhaps, even, in due time, to build a house for another generation,--in a word, to conform myself to laws, and the peaceful practice of society."[43] This confession is appropriately pitched in a lower key than the passage that rails against the past; but when Holgrave qualifies his incendiary attitude toward houses, he qualifies his whole attitude toward the past, and toward the institution of the family as well. That Hawthorne found it desirable to give him such a speech is in itself an indication that Hawthorne's own feeling about the past was far from one of thoroughgoing dislike.

Clifford too--and considering the events, with somewhat more justice than Holgrave--is given a speech about destroying old houses: "Morbid influences, in a thousand-fold variety, gather about hearths, and pollute the life of households," and in consequence "it were a relief to me if that house [of the seven gables] could be torn down, or burnt up, and so the earth be rid of it, and grass be sown abundantly over its foundation."[44] Unlike Holgrave, who irrationally hates all that is old, it is given to Clifford to know why symbols of the past depress him. If Holgrave represents Hawthorne's skepticism of preternatural phenomena, Clifford rep-

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[43] House, p. 428. [44] Ibid., p. 400.

resents his qualified skepticism of unlimited human progress.[45] "My impression is," says Clifford, "that our wonderfully increased and still increasing facilities of locomotion are destined to bring us round again to the nomadic state."[46] It is Clifford's observation that

> all human progress is in a circle; or, to use a more accurate and beautiful figure, in an ascending spiral curve. While we fancy ourselves going straight forward, and attaining, at every step, an entirely new position of affairs, we do actually return to something long ago tried and abandoned, but which we now find etherealized, refined, and perfected to its ideal. The past is but a coarse and sensual prophecy of the present and future.[47]

The idea of the past etherealized into the present is Hawthorne's own; he repeats it in many other places, as we have seen. The peculiar view of progress is also Hawthorne's own. He admits a degree of progress, but it is not a straight-line, onward and upward forever, kind of progress. He himself is not at all convinced, however, as Clifford is, that when events come round the spiral of development to the spot analogous to the same thing in the past we then automatically possess something "perfected to its ideal." And, characteristically, he undercuts Clifford's position by

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[45] The standard histories of the idea are: J. B. Bury, The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth (London, 1920), and Arthur A. Ekirch, The Idea of Progress in America, 1815-1860 (New York, 1944).

[46] Cf. "The Celestial Railroad," where a method of speeded-up transportation is effectively used to satirize speeded-up salvation.

[47] House, p. 399.

having him ramble on to great lengths of absurdity, praising the railroads because "they spiritualize travel," hailing mesmerism as the harbinger of "a better era," praising electricity as "the all-pervading intelligence," and the spirit-rappings of mediums as "the messengers of the spiritual world, knocking at the door of substance."[48] All this theorizing, be it noted, has taken place during the wild flight of Clifford and Hepzibah in their attempt to escape from the Judge. At the end of it, Clifford, shivering from head to foot, collapses upon the strength of Hepzibah: "The wild effervescence of his mood--which had so readily supplied thoughts, fantasies, and a strange aptitude of words. . . --had entirely subsided." "O God,--our Father,--are we not thy children?" prays Hepzibah. "Have mercy on us!"[49]

So again Hawthorne refuses to reveal himself entirely in the person of one of his characters. Nevertheless, this much has been established: there is a recurrence in human life, and in a general sort of way there is progress. As we have already seen, heredity stands for the recurrence, and environment sometimes stands for those minute but perceptible qualifications that make for progress when it occurs, at other times for attenuation and weakening--in either event, for change. One thing--Hawthorne seems to say--we can be sure of, and that is that the force for continuity, whether we call it the past or heredity or the rude old potency of

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[48] Ibid., pp. 399-402. [49] Ibid., p. 403.

human nature, always flows through life in a deep, dark channel; and, while it can work for human betterment, and sometimes does, there is no doubt at all that it can work for evil, and often does. When, at her first interview with Judge Pyncheon, Phoebe is impressed by the Judge's resemblance to the portrait of Colonel Pyncheon and wonders if the Judge's "settled temper" has been "transmitted down. . . from that bearded ancestor," Hawthorne remarks:

> A deeper philosopher than Phoebe might have found something very terrible in this idea. It implied that the weaknesses and defects, the bad passions, the mean tendencies, and the moral diseases which lead to crime are handed down from one generation to another, by a far surer process of transmission than human law has been able to establish in respect to the riches and honors which it seeks to entail upon society.[50]

Hawthorne is a deep enough philosopher to accept the idea, terrible as it may be; The House of the Seven Gables is his demonstration of it.[51]

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[50] Ibid., p. 314.

[51] This view is somewhat qualified in The Marble Faun (1860). Donatello has a good heredity except for some "deficiencies both of intellect and heart," and these deficiencies are supplied, apparently, as a result of the educative effect of his sin. It can be said, without doing too much violence to the terms, that The House of the Seven Gables develops mainly by means of heredity, The Marble Faun by environment; thus Hilda gives an environmental explanation for the idea of a community of guilt that might have been used in Seven Gables: "now I understand," she says, after becoming aware of Miriam's secret, "how the sins of generations past have created an atmosphere of sin for those that follow. While there is a single guilty person in the universe, each innocent one must feel his innocence tortured by that guilt." (Pp. 711-712) Hence, in keeping with Hawthorne's general view of the relationship of heredity and environment, the positive hereditary evils in the Seven Gables admit of little environmental modification, but the hereditary deficiencies in The Marble Faun can be supplied by the environmental experience of humanizing sin.

If, as we have seen earlier, Hawthorne could approve of the environmental attenuation of physical robustness that spiritualizes men and beautifies women (admitting at the same time its danger when carried too far), he could also recognize the same end-effect of heredity, but to this he could not grant his approval. Environmental conditioning is used also in The House of the Seven Gables.

Judge Pyncheon, strong as the hereditary Pyncheon nature may be in him, is nevertheless a different man, physically, from Colonel Pyncheon, from whom the wicked nature derived. "The long lapse of intervening years, in a climate so unlike that which had fostered the ancestral Englishman, must inevitably have wrought important changes in the physical system of his descendant."[52] Three changes which Hawthorne feels must have occurred are: "the Judge's volume of muscle could hardly be the same as the Colonel's," "the Judge's face had lost the ruddy English hue," and "a certain quality of nervousness had become more or less manifest"[53]--all changes tending to soften and "spiritualize" the gross animal nature. "This process, for aught we know," says Hawthorne, "may belong to the great system of human progress, which, with every ascending footstep, as it diminishes the necessity for animal force, may be destined gradually to spiritualize us, by refining away our grosser attributes of body."[54]

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[52] Ibid., p. 315. [53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., pp. 315-316. There is no danger, though, that

For aught we know the slow refining action of environment may contribute to human progress, and for aught we know it may not. It is obvious which Hawthorne would like to believe; but he cannot be sure. When he revised the notebook passage, cited earlier, about how the beautiful environment of Blenheim should elevate noblemen "a little above the rest of us," he added to it, significantly: "If it fail to do so, the disgrace falls equally upon the whole race of mortals as on themselves; because it proves that no more favorable conditions of existence would eradicate our vices and weaknesses. How sad, if this be so!"[55] In the final analysis, we cannot know how nature is modified by nurture, though we can be sure that some kind of modification does take place. The experimenter Aylmer, in "The Birthmark," "had investigated the secrets of the highest cloud region and of the profoundest mines," and "he had studied the wonders of the human frame, and attempted to fathom the very process by which Nature assimilates all her precious influences from earth and air, and from the spiritual world, to create and foster man"; but in the end he had to come to an "unwilling recognition of the great truth--against which all seekers sooner or later stumble--that our great creative Mother, while she amuses us with apparently working in the broadest sunshine, is yet

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the Judge is overly spiritualized; Hawthorne builds up the proposition to let down the Judge: "Judge Pyncheon could endure a century or two more of such refinement as well as most other men." (P. 316)

[55] Our Old Home, p. 212.

severely careful to keep her own secrets, and, in spite of her pretended openness, shows us nothing but results."[56] And in the death of his wife by his unwise tampering with nature, Aylmer is forced to face the fact that we, by our puny efforts, cannot even slightly modify nature's product without disrupting the balance of elements that is life itself.

If there has been environmental attenuation of the Pyncheon physique as it is represented by the Judge, there has also been what amounts to hereditary degeneracy. The way the Pyncheon family has degenerated is illustrated less by the physical aspect of any of its members than by the parallel physical degeneration of the family poultry, in the exquisite little parable of Chanticleer, his two wives, and the lone chicken.[57]

When Phoebe picks up the chicken to examine its hereditary marks--"the peculiar speckle of its plumage, the funny tuft of its head, and a knob on each of its legs"--it is Holgrave who hints to her that the marks suggest "the oddities of the Pyncheon family, and that the chicken itself was a symbol of the life of the old house, embodying its

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[56] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, pp. 1024-1025.

[57] Hepzibah's ungainly appearance may be taken to be physical degeneration, but if such is intended it is not emphasized. Her appearance is no more than the stock representation of an ancient spinster. However, she is obviously intended to be the symbolic link between the fowls and the family, because the "distinguishing mark of the hens was a crest of lamentably scanty growth, . . . oddly and wickedly analogous to Hepzibah's turban. . . ." (P. 296)

interpretation, likewise, although an unintelligible one, as such clews generally are."[58] The clews of course are not at all obscure, nor are they really intended to be. The fowls, the symbol of pride in breeding, of blood that has run too long in an unmixed stream, show more conclusively than the human characters the attenuating effect of prolonged hereditary integrity. Once the Pyncheon hens had been "almost the size of turkeys," but now, with the passage of generation after generation, they were "scarcely larger than pigeons, and had a queer, rusty, withered aspect, and a gouty kind of movement, and a sleepy and melancholy tone throughout all the variations of their clucking and cackling."[59] Hawthorne knew that a comparable degree of physical diminution could not be applied to human characters with anything but ludicrous results; the hens, however, could symbolize the parallel moral degeneration of the family which owned them.[60]

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[58] House, p. 334. [59] Ibid., p. 296.

[60] Randall Stewart, commenting on how "the Pyncheon hens must symbolize the depleted family who owned them and they must therefore be described as abnormally diminutive and withered specimens of their kind," says that "such a sacrificing of realism to symbolism is, of course, characteristic of Hawthorne's method" (American Notebooks, p. xxviii). It was not as great a sacrifice as it seems, however. If Hawthorne had tried to make the same symbolic use of people, he would have ended up with elves on his hands. He could hardly do better than choose birds, for within historic time, in the hands of systematic breeders they have undergone enormous changes. It will be remembered that Darwin chose pigeons to illustrate the wide spectrum of variation possible as the result of artificial selection.

Hawthorne concisely points the moral of the tale when he writes:

> It was evident that the race had degenerated, like many a noble race besides, in consequence of too strict a watchfulness to keep it pure. These feathered people had existed too long in their distinct variety; a fact of which the present representatives, judging by their lugubrious deportment, seemed to be aware. They kept themselves alive, unquestionably, and laid now and then an egg, and hatched a chicken; not for any pleasure of their own, but that the world might not absolutely lose what had once been so admirable a breed of fowls.[61]

And he rounds out the details of the parable when he writes a few pages later on:

> Their generally quiet, yet often brisk, and constantly diversified talk, one to another, or sometimes in soliloquy. . . had such a domestic tone, that it was almost a wonder why you could not establish a regular interchange of ideas about household matters, human and gallinaceous. All hens are well worth studying for the piquancy and rich variety of their manners;[62] but by no possibility can there have been other fowls of such odd appearance and deportment as these ancestral ones. They probably embodied the traditionary peculiarities of their whole line of progenitors, derived through an unbroken succession of eggs. . . .[63]

In The House of the Seven Gables we see once more that Hawthorne instinctively attributes to heredity the greatest power in shaping man's destiny. We see again how he thinks

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[61] House, p. 296.

[62] Hawthorne's study of the hens in his poultry yard at Lenox is recorded in his notebooks and is apparently the germ of this episode. "A speckled black & white and tufted hen" that seemed to think her egg was "the most important thing that has been brought to pass since the world began" evidently suggested to him that chickens might well symbolize pride. He adds of the hen's performance: "there is something laughably womanish in it, too." American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 130.

[63] House, p. 333.

of heredity and environment interacting upon one another, with the character of an individual largely fixed by heredity and incapable of modification by the immediate physical environment, but heredity over a long span of time quite subject to environmental modification--a modification often for the worse, which, in keeping with the doctrine of acquired characters, can become fixed in turn and be handed down by heredity to blight untold generations of posterity. The New England environment has made changes in the breed of Pyncheons over the years, and perhaps, as Clifford suggests, such an attenuating change does make for a kind of progress. Morally, as shown by the symbolic chickens, the pure strain represented by Judge Pyncheon has only degenerated downward and downward, while at the same time the Judge's lineage has undergone an environmental amelioration in the direction of ideality as Hawthorne imagines the ideal physique. But if the Judge still has far to go to reach ideal refinement, Americans by and large, as is shown elsewhere, are already hovering on the edge of a nervous refinement that is itself unwholesome, and they would do well to recapture some of their former English beefiness. Yet, on a larger view, Hawthorne is not wholly dissatisfied with the genetic make-up of his fellow citizens. If he is convinced on the one hand that mean tendencies and moral diseases are sure to be passed down by heredity, he is convinced on the other that the deleterious effects of bad heredity can be kept submerged if blood is made to run in

hidden streams; the tale of the House of Pyncheon is an object lesson in what can happen when aristocratic pretension insists upon thwarting the natural tendency to mix and mingle.

It remains to inquire briefly how heredity fits into the design of Hawthorne's general pattern of thought. In politics he was a Democrat, but that in itself does not mean that he was in every sense a democrat. If the words "conservative" and "liberal" have any meanings that can be agreed on, he was in many things conservative and in some liberal; like most people who do not make a fetish of intellectual consistency, he could hold opposing views in different parts of his mind without getting a headache from them. As a consequence, one writer finds that "the most influential conservative thinker of this transitional New England period. . . was Nathaniel Hawthorne,"[64] while another says that "certainly he believed in social progress and to a degree in man's perfectibility."[65] A good case can be made for either proposition.

By and large, however, it can be taken as a sort of rule of thumb that conservatives will emphasize heredity and liberals will emphasize environment. The converse may not always be true; yet it can be said that there is a

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[64]Russell Kirk, The Conservative Mind (Chicago, 1953), p. 218.

[65]Lawrence Hall, Hawthorne: Critic of Society (New Haven, 1944), p. 30.

relationship far from fortuitous between Hawthorne's thought about heredity and his skeptical but essentially conservative cast of mind.

Despite his spirited satire on reformers in "Earth's Holocaust," Hawthorne was not wholly antipathetic to reform, provided he was convinced of the practicality of the reform.[66] It seems that Hawthorne was sincerely interested in discovering for himself the benefits of communal living when he joined Brook Farm; but it scarcely needs to be said that The Blithedale Romance is no tract for socialism.[67] Hawthorne went to Brook Farm, much as Thoreau went to Walden, to try an experiment in living; perhaps he was a bit saddened that the experiment failed; at any rate it convinced him that such a radical reform of the structure of society was not for his own best interests.[68]

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[66] Mr. Hall of course makes much of this, and he has done a good job of assembling all the evidence and arguing with great persuasiveness for his thesis. However, the only reform that Hawthorne really threw his weight into was his attempt, during his consulship, to better the lot of American seamen. In this he had little success. Mr. Hall insists, however, that Hawthorne's "satire, his criticism of society, his very strictures upon philanthropy itself are reformatory" (Ibid.). Perhaps.

[67] The standard sources for the history of socialistic experiments in America are Charles Nordhoff, Communistic Societies of the United States (London, 1875); Mark Holloway, Heavens on Earth (New York, 1951); and especially Arthur E. Bestor, Backwoods Utopias (Philadelphia, 1950).

[68] He wrote to David Mack, in May, 1842, the year following his Brook Farm experience: "I confess to you, my dear Sir, it is my present belief that I can best attain the higher ends of my life by retaining the ordinary relation to society." Manning Hawthorne, "Hawthorne and Utopian Socialism," New England Quarterly, XII (December, 1939), 730.

Hawthorne saw very clearly that reforms such as Brook Farm secured their intellectual justification on the belief that human beings can be radically changed by a changed environment. Thus Coverdale, the spokesman-character of The Blithedale Romance (1852), exclaims to his fellows that "our posterity will really be far stronger than ourselves, after several generations of a simple, natural, and active life."[69] In this belief Hawthorne could place some credence, for he had already shown a degree of environmental amelioration in the character of the wicked Judge Pyncheon. But it seemed likely that such a process had to extend over many generations to produce desirable results; it could have no effect upon him personally. At the very end of the novel Coverdale draws the general conclusion that "the experiment, so far as its original projectors were concerned, proved, long ago, a failure,"[70] a conclusion he had reached emotionally much earlier, when he had stolen away to go back to the city because he felt a sagacious man will not long keep "his sagacity, if he live exclusively among reformers and progressive people," and says:

> It was now time for me, therefore, to go and hold a little talk with the conservatives, the writers of 'The North American Review," the merchants, the politicians, the Cambridge men, and all those respectable old blockheads, who still, in this intangibility and mistiness of affairs, kept a death-grip on one or two ideas, which had not come into vogue since yesterday morning.[71]

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[69] Complete Novels and Selected Tales, p. 515.

[70] Ibid., p. 584.

[71] Ibid., p. 522. Parrington says of this passage: "In this suggestive pronouncement the intellectual position of

If one is skeptical enough of theoretical schemes for human betterment, he is basically a conservative in outlook; he may not be wholly satisfied with existing social conditions, but he is not willing to abandon them merely for the untried promises of glittering substitutes.[72] Despite the fact that Hawthorne saw fit to write "let us welcome whatever change may come,--changes of place, social customs, political institutions, modes of worship,"[73] he was convinced that fundamentals do remain. "If mankind were all intellect, they would be continually changing, so that one age would be entirely unlike another," he set down in his notebook. "The great conservative is the heart, which remains the same in all ages; so that common-places of a thousand years standing are as effective as ever."[74] And the heart itself, the great conservative, he most frequently pictures:

> to be allegorized as a cavern; at the entrance there is sunshine, and flowers growing about it. You step within, but a short distance, and begin to find yourself surrounded with a terrible gloom, and monsters of divers kinds; it seems like Hell itself. You are

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Hawthorne is revealed. . . . One after another he weighed the several faiths of New England, conservative and transcendental and radical, and ended skeptic." Main Currents in American Thought, II, 422.

[72] See Arlin Turner, "Hawthorne and Reform," New England Quarterly, XV (December, 1942), 700-714. Mr. Turner emphasizes both Hawthorne's skepticism and his fatalism.

[73] Our Old Home, p. 79.

[74] English Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 45. The passage was written in 1854.

> bewildered, and wander long without hope. At last a light strikes upon you. You peep towards it, and find yourself in a region that seems, in some sort, to reproduce the flowers and sunny beauty of the entrance, but all perfect. These are the depths of the heart, or of human nature, bright and peaceful; the gloom and terror may lie deep; but deeper still is the eternal beauty.[75]

According to Hawthorne, the fundamental nature of man, then, is good; but the goodness lies so very deep and is so overlaid with evil that Hawthorne himself seldom got to the "eternal beauty" in his fictional explorations of the heart. He did discover in the course of his travels that this fundamental nature could be changed very little by external circumstances; and he did discover that whatever may happen to the good, the conservative nature of the heart is such that the bad will surely be passed on, heredity serving as a convenient symbol for this continuity. In those rare instances when he chose a character in whose heart there lurked no gloom and terror, such as Ernest in "The Great Stone Face," heredity and environment could be shown acting together for the greater good of the individual. Yet Hawthorne could not positively attribute good and evil to either heredity or environment. If evil is surely passed on, good appears astonishingly in places where it is least expected. He carefully re-worked the notebook passage mentioned earlier about the pond lilies, tightening and brightening the style, and set

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[75] American Notebooks (Stewart ed.), p. 98. For a wide-ranging study of this pervasive Hawthorne symbol, see John W. Shroeder, "'That Inward Sphere': Notes on Hawthorne's Heart Imagery and Symbolism," PMLA, LXV (March, 1950), 106-119.

it down in Mosses from an Old Manse as follows:

> It is a marvel whence this perfect flower [the white pond lily] derives its loveliness and perfume, springing as it does from the black mud over which the river sleeps, and where lurk the slimy eel and speckled frog and the mud turtle, whom continual washing cannot cleanse. It is the very same black mud out of which the yellow lily sucks its obscene life and noisome odor.[76]

"So it is with many people in this world," he had concluded in the notebook; "the same soil and circumstances may produce the good and beautiful, and the wicked and ugly;--some have the faculty of assimilating to themselves only what is evil. . . . A few assimilate none but good influences. . . ."[77] But in Mosses he drew a specifically moral conclusion that transcends either kind of biological conditioning: "some persons assimilate only what is ugly and evil from the same moral circumstances which supply good and beautiful results--the fragrance of celestial flowers--to the daily life of others."[78] Yet even those who assimilate evil are not absolutely constrained to do so. Let the "tawny hue and the muddiness" of the river bed "be a symbol that the earthliest human soul has an infinite spiritual capacity and may contain the better world within its depths."[79] From this belief in a fundamental goodness, an "eternal beauty" within the depths of the heart, Haw-

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[76] Mosses from an Old Manse (vol. II of Lathrop ed.), p. 15

[77] See p. 34.

[78] Mosses, p. 15. [79] Ibid., p. 16.

thorne never departed, even in his farthest excursions into gloom. And it is this core of optimism that makes The House of the Seven Gables, his most thorough investigation of hereditary evil, the essentially cheerful book that he himself claimed it to be.

Chapter IV

Holmes: Heredity as Science

On the memorial tablet to Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes in King's Chapel in Boston, the words "Teacher of Anatomy" precede those which record the fact that he was also an essayist and poet. The significance implied by this arrangement has been noted by one physician who has studied Holmes's career;[1] it is a significance that has acquired increasing importance in recent studies of Holmes's life and writings.[2] Whatever the merit of his essays, poems, and novels, Holmes will surely continue to be important as a representative spokesman for a science-oriented point of view in a crucial period of American intellectual history.[3]

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[1]Henry R. Viets, "Oliver Wendell Holmes, Physician," American Scholar, III (Winter, 1934), 5.

[2]Eleanor Tilton's biography, the most recent and best, properly emphasizes the scientific side of Holmes's thought. See her Amiable Autocrat: A Biography of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes (New York, 1947). When this book appeared, the Saturday Review of Literature (November 8, 1947, p. 25) remarked editorially that it "seems probable" that Holmes's "work as a doctor may be judged more important than the flash of his tongue and his verse."

[3]"He is first the spokesman of the relatively reactionary, traditional, and Federalistic point of view in social, political, and literary thought. He is also the spokesman, in religious and philosophic terms, of an attitude which might be described as being at once rational, scientific, progressive, and humanitarian, and partially monistic and deterministic. This second Holmes perhaps represents better than any other of our nineteenth-century figures one of the most momentous conflicts of the age, the conflict between religion of a Calvinistic cast and science." Harry Hayden Clark, "Dr. Holmes: A Re-interpretation," New England Quarterly, XII (March, 1939), 19.

After his graduation from Harvard in the famous class of '29, Holmes studied law for a year, only to find himself unsuited to the legal profession and to give it up for a wholehearted absorption in medical science. His medical education was accomplished in a private medical school operated by a number of distinguished Boston physicians,[4] in the lecture rooms of the Harvard Medical School, and in Paris, where he studied under the direction of one of the most brilliant galaxies of medical talent available anywhere at that time.[5] Early in 1836 Holmes took his M.D. at Harvard; in the same year he joined the Massachusetts Medical Society and won a Boylston Medical Essay Prize for his study of "The Utility and Importance of Direct Exploration in Medical Practice." By 1839 he had written two more prize-winning essays and had gathered all three into a volume.[6] He had also associated himself with the Boston Dispensary as a visiting physician, and had joined with two friends to found another private medical

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[4]Doctors Walter Channing, James Jackson, Winslow Lewis, George Otis, and John Ware.

[5]See Holmes's own graceful acknowledgement of his debt to his teachers and his witty characterizations of each in "Some of My Early Teachers," in The Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes (Standard Library Edition; Boston, 1892), IX, 420-440. Hereafter these volumes will be cited as Works, but titles of individual volumes will be given when they are significant.

[6]"Facts and Traditions Respecting the Existence of Indigenous Intermittent Fever in New England" (1836) and "On the Nature and Treatment of Neuralgia" (1837). His reputation as a medical essayist was soon so high that a Boston professional journal exclaimed that "it is almost useless to contend with him in an enterprise of this kind." Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, XVI (May, 1837), 258.

school, the Tremont Medical School, which was affiliated with the Massachusetts General Hospital, the Eye and Ear Infirmary of Boston, and the Boston Lying-In Hospital. And he had been engaged to teach anatomy and physiology at Dartmouth College.[7]

His reputation among his colleagues grew so fast that he was appointed to the Parkman Professorship in anatomy and physiology at Harvard in 1846, and the following year he was made Dean of the reorganized Medical School of the university. He served as Dean for six years, 1847-1853. However highly his professional acquaintances regarded him,[8] Holmes did not

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[7] These and other pertinent biographical facts of Holmes's medical life may be found arranged and interpreted in the present writer's M.A. thesis, "A Study of the Medical Career of Oliver Wendell Holmes," Syracuse University, 1949, available in manuscript from the Syracuse University Library. They may also be arrived at by consultation of the standard biographies, Miss Tilton's Amiable Autocrat and the earlier work by John T. Morse, Jr., Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes (2 vols.; Boston, 1896). Noteworthy shorter studies of Holmes's medical career and its scientific background include: Edgar M. Bick, "A Note on the Medical Works of Oliver Wendell Holmes," Annals of Medical History, IV (1932), 487-490; David W. Cheever, "Oliver Wendell Holmes the Anatomist," Harvard Graduates' Magazine, III (December, 1894), 154-159; Thomas Dwight, "Reminiscences of Dr. Holmes as Professor of Anatomy," Scribner's Magazine, XVII (January, 1895), 121-128; J. H. M. Knox, "The Medical Life of Oliver Wendell Holmes," Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin, XVIII (February, 1907), 45-51; "Oliver Wendell Holmes" [an obituary], Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, CXXXI (October, 1894), 375-376; Sir William Osler, "Oliver Wendell Holmes," Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin, V (October, 1894), 85-88; Edward O. Otis, "The Medical Achievements of Oliver Wendell Holmes," Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, CLXI (December, 1909), 951-957; and K. M. Vogel, "Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Medical Student," Medical Record [of New York], XCVII (1920), 1067-1071.

[8] See Neille Shoemaker, "The Contemporaneous Medical Reputation of Oliver Wendell Holmes," New England Quarterly, XXVI (December, 1953), 477-493.

have a very successful private practice, the result perhaps, as he himself thought, of his being also a poet and a wit. He gave up private practice in 1849, thereafter to devote himself entirely to his lectures, both at the Medical School and on the lyceum stage, and to his writing, which with the founding of the Atlantic Monthly in 1857 rapidly gained him a national audience.

Though his volume Poems had appeared in 1836, the year he became an M.D., it was the serial publication of The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, beginning with the first number of the Atlantic and extending through issues of 1857 and part of 1858, that first presented Dr. Holmes to a wide public as an unusual kind of new author, an author who, in keeping with one of the dominant interests of his age, would use science as freely for illustration and allusion as an earlier writer might have used the classics or the Christian religion. In the Autocrat alone there are no fewer than sixty-four obvious medical and scientific allusions, ranging from an explicit comment on one of the muscles that cause smiling, the risorious Santorini,[9] to a casual anatomical description of a woman whose waist plunges "downward into the rocking pelvis at every heavy footfall."[10] Science is always at the Autocrat's fingertips to be used for illustrative purposes. The fact that a fool can bring a wise man to his own level in a heated argument is "the hydrostatic paradox of contro-

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[9] Works, I, 194.

[10] Ibid., p. 100.

versy."[11] His knowledge of one of the physicist's favorite demonstrations of stress and strain suggests that celebrities are like Prince-Rupert's drops;[12] he expects his reader to understand the allusion and hurries along without bothering to explain that Prince-Rupert's drops are little tear-shaped blobs of glass which, when irritated properly, explode into hundreds of tiny pieces. When he mentions bad poems he puts a new twist to an old metaphor; they become "strings of verses, candidates for the Orthopedic Infirmary."[13] Even the title of a poem such as the famed "Cacoethes Scribendi" probably owes less to the Autocrat's familiarity with Classic Greek authors[14] than to Dr. Holmes's delight in the antiquities of his profession, for it echoes the old medical term cacoethes operandi, an expression of disapprobation once much used to apply to surgeons who are unduly eager to perform needless operations.

Holmes's scientific interests went far beyond his own specialties in medicine and anatomy, and much of the science in his writings that seems most valuable today owes less to the exact knowledge of the time in which it was written than it does to Holmes's ability to speculate correctly in the direction science was moving. Though he did much to further the practice of such medical techniques as percussion, aus-

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[11] Ibid., p. 114. [12] Ibid., p. 38. [13] Ibid., p. 293.

[14] However, Holmes prided himself on his knowledge of Latin authors, especially Horace, to whom he frequently alludes. See J. P. Pritchard, "The Autocrat and Horace," Classical Weekly, XXV (May 16, 1932), 217-223.

cultation, and microscopy, and though his scientific interests ranged from microscopic anatomy to comparative zoology, Holmes has long been recognized as a leading student of heredity, a special study which was just becoming a science when he was most interested in it. His official biographer remarks that "a large part of Dr. Holmes's literary work was devoted to the enforcement and illustration of the controlling influence of inherited tendencies,"[15] and a recent anthologist who has sought to present the essential aphoristic Holmes found it necessary to title one of his fifteen categories of selections "Heredity."[16]

Yet it is very difficult to establish any exact sources for Holmes's scientific knowledge of heredity. There are a few significant references to heredity in the Autocrat; they begin to appear more frequently in The Professor at the Breakfast-Table (1860) and they continue throughout the following works, reaching something of a peak in the novel The Guardian Angel (1867), and end with Holmes's last volume, Over the Teacups (1891). However, it is said that it was "Darwin's and Wallace's discoveries, and. . . the independent arguments of Mr. Herbert Spencer" that "brought prominently before the thinking naturalist" "the great problems of Inheritance and Adaptation," and the "first who seems to have

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[15]Morse, op. cit., I, 3.

[16]Lester E. Denoun, The Wit and Wisdom of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Father and Son (Boston, 1953), p. 10.

fully grasped the Darwinian problem from this point of view is Mr. Francis Galton. . . ."[17] Holmes does not seem to mention Wallace, but of course the theory of biological evolution was associated with Darwin's name from the first, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, Holmes does have much to say about Darwin. Holmes reviewed Spencer's The Study of Sociology,[18] but by this time The Guardian Angel had been in print for more than six years. It has been suggested that one of the earliest sources for Holmes's interest in heredity may be Gabriel Andral, one of his teachers in Paris, who speculated "on the possibility of hereditary characteristics and weaknesses" and "perceived a relationship between sex and hysteria."[19] Other possibilities are Robert Knox, author of The Races of Men (1862), whom Holmes visited when he was studying abroad;[20] Henry Thomas Buckle, whose History of Civilization (1857), though largely environmentalist, makes some use of heredity; Prosper Despine, whose Psychologie naturelle is ostensibly under review in Holmes's essay "Crime and Automatism"; and Henry Maudsley, whose writing has been mentioned

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[17] John Theodore Merz, A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century (Edinburgh, 1896-1914), II, 608-609.

[18] Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, LXXXIX (December, 1873), 587-589.

[19] Tilton, op. cit., p. 105.

[20] Later, however, Holmes called him "poor fantastic" Robert Knox. Works, VIII, 357.

as paralleling the heredity in The Guardian Angel.[21] Of all the major possibilities of influence, though, Galton's claim seems the strongest, not only because Holmes refers to him so often and so approvingly but because Holmes's explanation of the mechanism of heredity in many ways resembles Galton's own. We may, for example, compare the ideas in the following passages:

Galton	Holmes
The world is beginning to awaken to the fact that the life of the individual is in some real sense a prolongation of those of his ancestry. His vigour, his character, and his diseases are principally derived from theirs; sometimes his faculties are blends of ancestral qualities; but more frequently they are mosaics, patches of resemblance to one or other of them showing now here and now there. The life histories of our relatives are prophetic of our own futures. . . .[22]	Two and two do not always make four, in this matter of hereditary descent of qualities. Sometimes they make three, and sometimes five. It seems as if the parental traits at one time showed separate, at another blended,--that occasionally the force of two natures is represented in the derivative one by a diagonal of greater value than either original line of living movement,--that sometimes there is a loss of vitality hardly to be accounted for, and again a forward impulse of variable intensity in some new and unforeseen direction.[23]

When we glance at the dates we see that Holmes was twenty-three years ahead of Galton, for the Professor was published in 1860.

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[21] Maudsley's books are Physiology and Pathology of the Mind (1867) and Body and Mind (1870). See Tilton, op. cit., pp. 289-290.

[22] Francis Galton, Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development (London, 1883), pp. 43-44.

[23] The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, Works, II, 68.

Galton rightly enjoys the reputation for having begun the scientific study of heredity, for he was the first to apply statistics to it thereby attempting to reduce it to an exact science; but a great many of his principles were anticipated in Holmes's speculation. Galton's first book, Hereditary Genius, the first study to investigate seriously the inheritance of intelligence and talent,[24] did not appear until 1869, and it is, incidentally, a book which contains no such clear-cut statement of the visible effect of heredity as the two parallel passages quoted above. What apparently happened was that Holmes read Galton to reaffirm opinions he had already settled for himself. "Francis Galton's studies in heredity pleased him," says Miss Tilton; for instance, "he was delighted to find in the modern investigator's Hereditary Genius that 'there is a frequent correlation between an unusually devout disposition and a weak constitution.'[25] The doctor had thought so all along and was excited to find his notions of 'pathological piety' confirmed."[26] Holmes was always happy to find himself or other

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[24]Even Darwin, Galton's cousin, found the idea a novel one; in a letter to Galton he said: "You have made a convert of an opponent in one sense, for I have always maintained that, excepting fools, men did not differ much in intellect, only in zeal and hard work." Quoted in an editorial, The Eugenics Review, XLIII (April, 1951), 5.

[25]Holmes's quotation, Works, III, 303. Cf. Galton, Hereditary Genius (2nd. ed.; London, 1914), pp. 256-272.

[26]Tilton, op. cit., pp. 314-315. As would be expected, Holmes gladly turned to Galton's authority when he discussed the pathological piety of Jonathan Edwards in his essay of 1880 on Edwards. Works, VIII, 397.

writers anticipating advances in science; he remarked of Emerson's lines about the worm "striving to be man" that it seemed as though "Emerson had a warning from the poetic instinct which, when it does not precede the movement of the scientific intellect, is the first to catch the hint of its discoveries."[27] He was always more than happy to find his own speculations about heredity confirmed by the careful scientific studies of others.

The source of Holmes's interest in heredity seems to be less attributable to literary origins than to his work in physiology, of which it is an outgrowth, and to his lifelong attack on Calvinism. As regards the second, it was natural for him to substitute current views on heredity for the Calvinists' stress of the sins of the fathers visited on the children. These two aspects on Holmes's thought, involving physiology and anti-Calvinism, are more closely linked than might be supposed at first glance, and they form the nucleus of what he has to say about the nature of man. His study of the first is in reality a groping toward a science of psychology; his opinions on the second, intimately connected with his ideas about free will and determinism, are his application of this psychology to morality. It will be well to analyze Holmes's "physiological psychology" in some detail--especially as it appears in his three novels--before we go on to see what he does with heredity, of which it forms

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[27] Works, XI, 81.

an intellectual substratum.

Holmes's Phi Beta Kappa address, "Mechanism in Thought and Morals," which was delivered almost at the mid-point of his career as professor of anatomy, is "a brilliant anticipation of Dr. Freud," says Van Wyck Brooks.[28] Indeed, in that essay Holmes does recognize the existence of a kind of unconscious mental action, automatic and beyond the control of the will, when he asks, "What happens when one idea brings up another? Some internal movement, of which we are wholly unconscious, and which we only know by its effect.[29] Ten years earlier, in The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, he had also alluded to a sensation we all have experienced: "that a deep layer of thought sometimes makes itself felt through the superincumbent strata. . . .[30] However, the unconscious mental actions which he noted seemed to him to be nothing new or astonishing--"that there are such," he said, "is laid down in the strongest terms by Leibnitz, whose doctrine reverses the axiom of Descartes into sum,

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[28]"Dr. Holmes: Forerunner of the Moderns," Saturday Review of Literature, XIV (June 27, 1936), 14. Others have also praised Holmes as a precursor of Freud, notably Clarence P. Oberndorf, a professor of psychiatry. See his Psychiatric Novels of Oliver Wendell Holmes (New York, 1943), an abridgment of the novels, with running commentary.

[29]Pages from an Old Volume of Life, Works, VIII, 285.

[30]Works, II, 37.

ergo cogito."[31] While we may acknowledge that Holmes anticipated Freud in the recognition of the unconscious, still we cannot say that his psychology was Freudian. As is so often true, Holmes himself provides the best terminology. In 1874, in his essay "Crime and Automatism," he said that the prison reforms which he advocated--"these newer modes of thought," as he called them--"are to a large extent outgrowths of what we may call physiological psychology."[32] "Physiological" is the correct qualifier for his psychology. He clearly saw that "the foundations of this [science] were laid in those studies of individual character made by the phrenologists, much in the same way that the foundations of chemistry were laid by the alchemists."[33] This is the psychology which supports the plots of Holmes's three novels, a physiological psychology based on the concept of mechanical reflex action.

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[31] Ibid., VIII, 276.

[32] Ibid., p. 329.

[33] Ibid. Holmes was acquainted with the work of Johann Spurzheim and Franz Joseph Gall, from which phrenology had derived; but so far as his own physiological psychology was concerned, phrenology had little to do with it. While ever eager to praise the social results phrenology had obtained, he nevertheless deprecated its lack of scientific method. "I consider phrenology, as taught, a pseudo-science, and not a branch of positive knowledge," says the Professor in Elsie Venner, "but, for all that, we owe it an immense debt. It has melted the world's conscience in its crucible, and cast it in a new mould. . . ." (Pp. 226-227.) See Robert E. Riegel, "Early Phrenology in the United States," Medical Life, XXXVI (July, 1930), 361-376.

Holmes was primarily indebted for his theory of reflex action to the experiments of the English physician and physiologist Marshall Hall (1790-1857), though it had been at least implied in the theory of mechanical animal action of Descartes and in David Hartley's psychology of association.[34] Hall experimented on frogs, turtles, snakes, and hedgehogs. His method was to destroy various parts of the living animal's nervous system and then carefully to observe and record its altered reactions to stimuli. His experiments led him to conclude that there are four distinct kinds of muscular action in animals and human beings; not three, as had been supposed formerly. In his report to the Royal Society of his initial findings and conclusions, Hall wrote:

> There are, in the animal economy, four modes of muscular action. . . . The first is that designated voluntary. . . . The second is that of respiration. . . . The third kind of muscular action in the animal economy is that termed involuntary. . . . There is, however, a fourth, which subsists, in part, after the voluntary and respiratory motions have ceased, by the removal of the cerebrum and medulla oblongata, and which is attached to the medulla spinalis, ceasing itself when this is removed, and leaving the irritability undimin-

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[34] He had also read a monograph by Dr. T. M. Laycock, "On the Reflex Function of the Brain," from which he quotes in a footnote in Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 274. Of Hartley he says that he "had anticipated many of the doctrines which have since been systematized into the theory of reflex actions. . . ." Medical Essays, Works, IX, 248. On Hartley's vogue at Harvard, where Holmes surely first encountered his writings, see J. J. Kwiat, "Thoreau's Philosophical Apprenticeship," New England Quarterly, XVIII (March, 1945), 51-69. And for political implications of Hartley's thesis, see Harry Hayden Clark, "The Influence of Science on American Ideas, from 1775 to 1809," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters, XXXV (1944), 317-323.

> ished. In this kind of muscular motion, the motive influence does not originate in any central part of the nervous system, but at a distance from that centre: it is neither spontaneous in its action, nor direct in its course; it is, on the contrary, excited by the application of appropriate stimuli, which are not, however, applied immediately to the muscular or nervo-muscular fibre, but to certain membranous parts, whence the impression is carried to the medulla, reflected, and reconducted to the part impressed, or conducted to a part remote from it, in which muscular contraction is effected.[35]

This fourth group of muscular actions--reflected or reflex action--was Hall's discovery; his account of it is the original description of the gross mechanism of the reflex arc[36] now known to every student of elementary psychology and physiology. As Holmes was to describe it, reflex action is "the mechanical sympathy. . . of distant parts. . . ."[37] Surely what made the discovery attractive to Holmes was that Hall "furnished the basis for that conception of the reflex as a neural arc which functions independently of the brain. . . ."[38] Thus Holmes learned that the cause for action may sidestep the brain, and consequently sidestep volition; here was scientific justification for his cherished belief that

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[35]"On the Reflex Function of the Medulla Oblongata and Medulla Spinalis," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, CXXIII (1833), 638.

[36]Hall coined the term "reflex arc" in a later paper: "Synopsis of the Diastaltic Nervous System: Or the System of the Spinal Marrow, and its Reflex Arcs. . . ." (London, 1850). Holmes may have read his Lectures on the Nervous System and its Diseases (London, 1836), which also considers reflex action.

[37]Medical Essays, pp. 246-247.

[38]Franklin Fearing, Reflex Action: A Study of Physiological Psychology (Baltimore, 1930), p. 141.

man's free will is no freer than a drop of water imprisoned in a crystal: "One little fluid particle in the crystalline prism of the solid universe!"[39]

The first contact of Holmes and Marshall Hall was probably in 1834, the year after Hall's Royal Society report, when they met at a gathering of the Société médicale d'observation in Paris, where Holmes was then a medical student. Soon afterwards, Pierre Charles Alexandre Louis, Holmes's favorite professor, asked him for a report on a work by Hall--possibly the one on "Reflex Function"--because he hoped to use material from it in a book of his own.[40] Whether Holmes learned of Hall's discovery at this time matters little; certainly he became thoroughly familiar with it in 1839, after his return to America, when he and Jacob Bigelow prepared and sent to the press the first American edition of Marshall Hall's Principles of the Theory and Practice of Medicine, the original edition of which had been published in London two years earlier.

At any rate, Holmes soon became so enamored with the idea of reflex action that he found reflexes everywhere. He studied the "apparent transfer of impressions from one retina to the other"[41]--as he described certain optical illusions

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[39] The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, Works, I, 86.

[40] Tilton, op. cit., pp. 119-120.

[41] Medical Essays, p. 248.

produced by binocular vision--and he wrote a paper in terms of Hall's theory in which he tried to explain these phenomena, designating them by the term "reflex vision."[42] He was not content to let the reflex arc remain no more than the explanation for how we perform simple mechanical acts without recourse to conscious thought--such as drawing a burned finger almost instantaneously away from a flame. For Holmes, reflex action took on grand proportions. "Now the observation of certain exceptional natures," he exclaimed in "Crime and Automatism," "tends to show that a very large portion of their apparent self-determinations or voluntary actions, such as we consider that we should hold ourselves responsible for, are in reality nothing more or less than reflex movements, automatic consequences of practically irresistible causes existing in the inherited organization and in preceding conditions."[43] This scientific principle, he had already explained, "started from the fact of the twitching of a decapitated frog's hind legs,"[44] and it "has grown to such dimensions that it claims to solve some of the gravest questions in psychology, and to deal, in the face of

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[42]"Reflex Vision," Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, IV (1857-1860), 373-375.

[43]Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 330.

[44]Holmes may have been thinking of Galvani's experiments with frogs rather than the experiments of Marshall Hall. See A Mortal Antipathy, pp. 241-242, for a similar allusion to twitching frogs' legs, where Galvani is specifically mentioned. In any event, Holmes was correct in seeing that Galvani had also demonstrated reflex action, though Galvani, of course, did not recognize it as such.

the great endowed and incorporated beliefs, with the most serious problems of responsibility and retribution."[45] And when he wrote his 1867 preface to The Guardian Angel, he confessed that both it and Elsie Venner could be called "Studies of the Reflex Function in its higher sphere"--although, with characteristic inability to abstain from a joke, he said that he hesitated to call them that for fear of frightening away "all but the professors and the learned ladies."[46]

The study of reflex function in its higher sphere of course is its application to morality. But, one asks, did Holmes think morality depends upon nothing more than the well-oiled automatic functioning of the mechanisms Marshall Hall had called reflex arcs? Holmes was not prepared to say. Though he was one of America's first serious microscopists, the study of microscopic neuro-anatomy, which would one day show the actual neural arcs, was still in its infancy.[47] He had only Hall's theory to go on, a theory which satisfactorily explained certain experimental data that had been collected about the behavior of mutilated turtles and hedgehogs, a theory which he confidently assumed should apply equally to human beings--one which fitted nicely with his preconceived

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[45] Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 329.

[46] The Guardian Angel, Works, VI, viii.

[47] "My dealing with the instrument," Holmes wrote, "has been principally as a teacher, and not of microscopy as a specialty, but as a fractional portion of long-extended courses on anatomy, delivered to large classes." Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, XCVI (May, 1877), 606. See Edgar M. Bick, "A Note on the Medical Works of Oliver Wendell

idea of free will.[48] The study of reflex action seemed to him to offer a fruitful method in the exploration of human behavior, but he realized how much remained to be done. In Elsie Venner, the Professor, like the Autocrat, Holmes's thinly disguised self, says that "the limitations of human responsibility have never been properly studied. . . ."[49] Marshall Hall had shown how that sort of study could be conducted by means of relatively simple physiological experiments in the realm of animal life; it remained for someone else to do a similar thing for man, in the much more complicated regions of psychology. Such a study would give morality a scientific footing. "Automatic action in the moral world," the Professor muses, "the reflex movement which seems to be self-determination, and has been hanged and howled at as such (metaphorically) for nobody knows how many centuries: until somebody shall study this as Marshall Hall has studied reflex nervous action in the bodily system, I would not give much for men's judgments of each others' characters."[50] Meanwhile he could speculate, and the speculation could be

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Holmes," Annals of Medical History, IV (1932), 487-490, for an appraisal of Holmes's influence on microscopy.

[48] Holmes made clear the direction of his speculation when he said in "Crime and Automatism" that "the development of the connection of motive and determination has been, in the main, an expansion of the doctrine of reflex action." Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 329.

[49] Elsie Venner, Works, V, 226.

[50] Ibid., p. 227.

safely expressed in novels, which no one supposed to be literally true anyway.

Holmes suggests, then, that his first two novels, Elsie Venner (1860-1861) and The Guardian Angel (1867), may be considered studies of reflex action in the sphere of morality. The third, A Mortal Antipathy (1885), is even more concerned with reflex action. The method of his studies, however, is less demonstration than persuasion.

Hence it is that the characters of his protagonists in all three novels are drawn to make the reader as sympathetic with them as possible. Elsie Venner in the novel which bears her name, Myrtle Hazard in The Guardian Angel, and Maurice Kirkwood in A Mortal Antipathy all had lost their mothers before the age of two. All are withdrawn from society. All are strange people whom society, though it tolerates them, is unwilling to accept without reservations; and, to hammer home the point of each story more convincingly, all are provided with limitations unlikely to be met with in the ordinary drawing room. Since their moral actions have not been explained by a Marshall Hall, how can anyone judge them harshly? Or more particularly, how can anyone judge a normal person harshly?

Elsie Venner, a young lady being educated at the Apollinean Female Institute, falls in love with Bernard Langdon, a medical student protege of the Professor and temporarily teaching at the Institute to earn funds to continue with his medical training. Her love is not returned; but Elsie's

cousin, Dick Venner, who wants to marry Elsie for her money, believing there is more between the girl and her handsome teacher than there actually is, tries to murder Bernard, and is prevented by Abel, the hired man. Dick escapes to South America and Elsie, after vainly declaring her love for Bernard, comes down with what was once called a "nervous fever" which ends her life.

The important element of Elsie Venner is the prearranged restriction of Elsie's will. Her personality illustrates the theory of reflex action, as Holmes understood it, on its most physiological level. Since the "reflex movement which seems to be self-determination" operates in all of us, Holmes was able, by providing Elsie with a special physiological constitution, to contrast her unique reflexes with the normal.

Elsie's mother had been bitten by a rattlesnake while her daughter was in utero; the venom, coming through the physical placental contact of the child and the mother, has the hereditary effect of causing Elsie to be part snake and part girl. It makes little difference whether or not Holmes truly believed such prenatal conditioning possible; he said in the preface to the novel that he used "this doctrine as a part of the machinery. . . without pledging his absolute belief in it to the extent to which it is asserted or implied."[51] But having committed himself to such a proposition, he did determine to keep his account of Elsie as scientifically probable

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[51] Ibid., p. vii. There are several allusions to the analogues in Coleridge's "Christabel" and Keats's "Lamia."

as he could. He kept a live rattlesnake in a glass jar to study its habits while he was writing the novel,[52] and, as he always followed the reports of his fellow Boston physicians, he may have remembered reading an article on "A Case of Destitution of the Moral Feelings" which described a person who had snake-like characteristics.[53]

Elsie is depicted quite convincingly in terms of a rattlesnake: she has a sinuous neck and diamond-shaped eyes; her clothing suggests snake-like qualities; she has compulsions to writhe in orgiastic dances, and even her ordinary walk is slithering; she experiences torpor in the winter; her unblinking eyes have a hypnotic ability; and she is literally cold-blooded. She does not suffer from the delusion that she is part snake; she actually is part snake. She becomes ill when the rattlesnake side of her nature suppresses the human, and she dies when the natural term of the snake's existence is done.

Elsie's story is a study of the will limited by chemical agents. It becomes apparent as the novel unfolds that she cannot be held responsible for behavior that depends upon venom introduced into her blood stream before her birth, though the mechanism of her reflexes is left unexplained--no Marshall Hall had yet studied reflex actions in the moral

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[52]David W. Cheever, "Oliver Wendell Holmes the Anatomist," Harvard Graduates' Magazine, III (December, 1894), 154.

[53]Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, XXXV (October, 1846), 235. For reference to this and other possible sources for Elsie Venner, see Miss Tilton's Amiable Autocrat, p. 423.

world. Yet, how Elsie's sad history disproves the doctrine of original sin is still a little confusing, for she cannot be said to sin at all, in the ordinary sense of the word.[54] Her "sin" is her unconventional behavior. Holmes, always an optimist, assumes that people tend naturally toward goodness and that they tend naturally toward the conventional in social behavior; a deviation from goodness correlates with a deviation from correct behavior. If carefully reared young ladies do not customarily go about acting like serpents, when we find one like Elsie deviating from the normal we must explain her aberrations in terms of forces over which her will has no control. Likewise, we must explain deviations from the normal in moral behavior in similar terms.[55] So, near the end of the novel, Holmes presents this challenge to his readers: "if, while the will lies sealed in its fountain, it may be poisoned at its very source, so that it shall flow dark and deadly through its whole course, who are we that we should judge our fellow-creatures by ourselves?"[56]

As an anatomist and poet, Holmes had no reluctance to

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[54]As a child she maliciously bites her cousin Dick, and other characters express fear that such behavior may be repeated (see pp. 152-153 and p. 244); but this aspect of her character is not greatly emphasized.

[55]But cf. S. I. Hayakawa and Howard Mumford Jones: "Holmes's failure in these novels is that he arouses neither terror nor pity, nor even a strong sense of the pathetic. . . . [Elsie Venner] leads a singularly blameless life, and dies conveniently before she has done any harm. The moral of the story, therefore, misses fire." Oliver Wendell Holmes (American Writers Series), pp. 1-11.

[56]Elsie Venner, p. 435.

celebrate the human body's magnificent mechanics:

> Look in upon thy wondrous frame,--
> Eternal wisdom still the same![57]

But as a physician called upon to treat the body's multitude of ills, he readily saw its shortcomings. He argued that as one has no right to expect to find a perfect body in this imperfect world, he has no right to expect to find a perfect moral nature. "'Sin,' or the failure of an imperfectly made and imperfectly guided being to keep a perfect law," he wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe, "seems to me to be given in the mere statement of the conditions of humanity, and could not be a surprise or a disappointment to a Creator with reasoning powers no greater than those of a human being of ordinary wisdom."[58]

In The Guardian Angel Holmes came closer to the higher sphere of reflex action which he claimed both it and Elsie Venner dealt with. No chemical agent controls Myrtle Hazard's will; rather, her destiny is determined by inherited traits from four female ancestors. The first of these is Ann Holyoake, a sixteenth-century martyr. The next (though we are not given Myrtle's complete genealogy), is Ruth Bradford, who was accused of sorcery during the New England witchcraft delusion. She is of somewhat less importance than the others. Then comes Judith Pride, a great beauty, who was Myrtle's great-grandmother. And last, Myrtle's

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[57]"The Living Temple," Works, XII, 253.

[58]Quoted by Morse, Life and Letters, II, 242.

grandmother, Virginia Wild, who was part Indian.[59] All of these women exercise varying degrees of influence on the growing heroine of the novel, and these influences are made to illustrate the author's somewhat hesitantly-put thesis: "It is by no means certain that our individual personality is the single inhabitant of these our corporeal frames."[60] Of course it is by no means certain that we do share our corporeal frames with guests, and Holmes makes no great effort to contradict common sense; again he had chosen a biological hypothesis--a rather wild one for the time, but one that curiously anticipates Morton Prince's famous "Beauchamp Case"[61]--as part of the machinery of the novel, "without pledging his absolute belief in it."

Myrtle is born in India, where her parents both die, and is returned to America under the care of a friend of her father, and placed in the household of her Uncle Malachi and Aunt Silence Withers. After Malachi hangs himself, she is left entirely in the hands of Silence, a spinster who believes children's instincts should be eradicated not educated, and Cynthia Badlam, Silence's poor relative who seconds her every move. Silence and Cynthia are unable to "break the will" of Myrtle, though they make life so unpleasant for her that she

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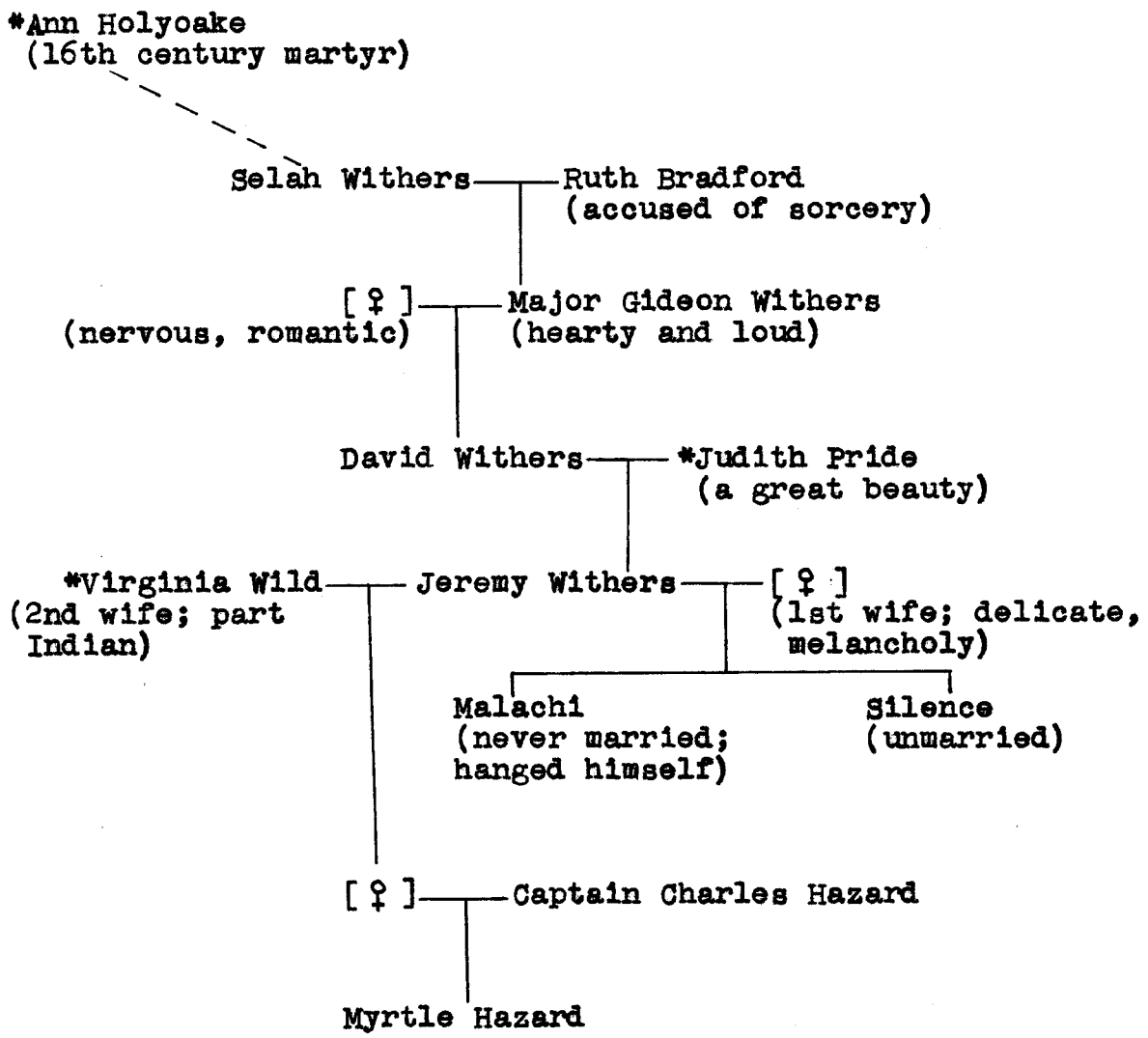
[59] A schematic representation of Myrtle's genealogy, as complete as it can be inferred from the novel, appears on the next page.

[60] The Guardian Angel, p. 22.

[61] This very early account of a "split personality" is described in Prince's The Dissociation of a Personality (1906).

Genealogy of Myrtle Hazard[62]



[62]Asterisks mark the three women who have the greatest influence on Myrtle's life. The symbol ♀ marks women whose names are not given.

sets out to escape them by disguising herself as a boy and trying to slip away by small boat to Boston. The plan fails when the boat goes through the rapids, a disaster which surely would have taken Myrtle's life had it not been for the heroic action of Clement Lindsay, a young sculptor living near the river. Clement's good mother cares for the girl until Byles Gridley, a retired scholar from Myrtle's home, Oxbow Village, takes a kindly interest in the girl, deduces the facts of her disappearance, and returns her to her home in such a discreet manner that no one suspects the real reason for her going away.

Meanwhile, the roots of several romantic entanglements have been entwining Myrtle. After she is returned home she is forced to remain in bed for many weeks, for she is thoroughly shaken up by her experience and is sometimes hysterical; her medical attendant fears she may go into "brain fever." Dr. Fordyce Hurlbut, a widower not yet forty years old, is the first to succumb to her charms. His potent magnetic touch has such efficacy in stilling her hysterical fits, and her seizures become so numerous, that Byles Gridley is forced to step in and read the Hippocratic Oath to the doctor to remind him that a more than professional attachment is growing up between him and his patient. The doctor promptly concedes as much, and turns the case over to his ninety-two year old physician father, thinking it best that he go away for a summer trip. But Myrtle is scarcely through this hazard when the Rev. Bellamy Stoker

begins to attempt a more than spiritual influence over her life, this despite the fact that he has a child and sickly wife at home. Again Byles Gridley comes to the rescue and dissuades the minister, only to open the field to the young lawyer Murray Bradshaw. Murray Bradshaw is the most sinister of Myrtle's suitors, for his appreciation of her beauty is not a little intensified by his knowledge that she stands a good chance of inheriting a large fortune from her Uncle Malachi's estate, though Myrtle, like her friends, is unaware that she may become an heiress.

Partly to get Myrtle away from the baleful influences that surround her, and partly to give her the polish that Oxbow Village could never provide, old Byles Gridley sees to it that she is enrolled in Boston in Madam Delacoste's boarding school for young ladies. Myrtle remains in school a year, meets again the young Clement Lindsay who (unknown to her) had saved her life, and finds herself strangely drawn to him. Clement happens to be promised to a simple little girl back in Oxbow Village, but, as they are hopelessly mismatched, this obstacle is soon overcome and it becomes evident that true love will finally triumph. Meanwhile, Murray Bradshaw does what he can to thwart the match, and failing to prevent the inevitable he forces Myrtle to watch him burn the document which he believes to be the will that grants her inheritance. Fortunately, Byles Gridley has anticipated this attempted villainy all along and has prepared a packet of blank papers to resemble the will; it

is this fake which Bradshaw burns.

The Civil War comes along conveniently to dispose of all the characters, to punish the wicked and reward the virtuous. Murray Bradshaw is ushered from the world in more or less honorable fashion, but not before he confesses his evil doing to the object of his guile. Mortally wounded in the war, he is fortuitously discovered by Myrtle, now following her officer-husband Clement from battle to battle. With his dying breath he begs her to forgive him, which she graciously does. Clement is honorably wounded and leaves the army as Colonel Lindsay. The young couple settle down in the old ancestral house in Oxbow Village, and in due season a baby named Charles Hazard Lindsay is christened at the village church. Everyone else in the story is disposed of, and the novel ends with Clement unveiling a bust of his wife's "guardian angel"--its features are those of Byles Gridley, A.M.

The exact scheme of heredity which Holmes adopts will be discussed in detail in a later chapter. It is enough to say here that Myrtle is made to believe that sometimes the spirits of her departed ancestors take actual possession of her material body; at other times they merely guide her conduct. For the rationalist reader there is sufficient evidence in the story to explain Myrtle's visions (in which the ancestors enter her body) entirely in terms of hysteria. Holmes never commits himself to anything that is scientifically disreputable; he skates carefully on the thin ice between the unlikely and the improbable, letting the reader choose his own interpreta-

tion. The author's concern, after all, is to persuade the reader to believe that reflex functions operate in the higher sphere--that is, that his heroine is not responsible for her actions, and the method he chooses to relieve her of responsibility is to have her subject to uncontrollable hereditary influences. Near the middle of the novel he stops his narrative to admonish that "the reader, if such there be, who believes in the absolute independence and self-determination of the will, and the consequent total responsibility of every human being for every irregular nervous action and ill-governed muscular contraction, may as well lay down this narrative, or he may lose all faith in poor Myrtle Hazard, and all patience with the writer who tells her story."[63]

It may be that one begins to lose patience with a novelist who takes the simple twitching of a frog's hind leg, magnifies it to explain the abnormal twitching of a snake-girl, and then asks his readers to believe the baby inherited its grandmother's blue eyes according to the same principle. The fact is that once Holmes started using the reflex-action theory for fictional purposes his conception of it entirely outgrew the bounds of Marshall Hall's unpretentious discovery; by this time it stood for any kind of force beyond human control--for anything for which we cannot hold ourselves responsible. In his essay on Jonathan Edwards (1880), for instance, Holmes makes out the inexorable "laws" of history

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[63] The Guardian Angel, p. 131.

to be a kind of reflex action:

> As the study of the individual reduces his seemingly self-determined actions more and more to reflex action, to mechanism, in short, so we find that the study of mankind in communities, which constitutes history, resolves itself more and more into manifestations of the same reflex function. Why else does history "repeat itself," but that communities of men, like those of bees and ants, act in the same way under the same conditions? And in the last analysis, what are the laws of human nature but a generalized expression of the fact that every organ obeys its proper stimulus, and every act of volition follows its motive as inevitably as the weight falls if unsupported, and the spring recoils if bent?[64]

Just so, the "laws" of heredity, whatever they may be, are other kinds of reflex action. Holmes is not especially concerned to argue the manner in which characteristics are transmitted by heredity; he only demands freedom to explore the consequences of this kind of automatic action, even if his exploration takes him into dangerous territory: "If we cannot follow the automatic machinery of nature into the mental and moral world, where it plays its part as much as in the bodily functions, . . . we had better return at once to our old demonology, and reinstate the Leader of the Lower House in his time-honored prerogatives."[65]

If any further evidence is needed to show that the theory of reflex action was uppermost in Holmes's mind when he wrote The Guardian Angel, one has only to notice the frequent allusions to physical reflexes and to automatic thought processes that are scattered through the novel.[66]

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[64] Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 379.

[65] The Guardian Angel, p. ix.

[66] For example: The Rev. Mr. Stoker "delighted in the

Critical opinion has been almost uniformly harsh toward Holmes's third novel, A Mortal Antipathy; it has tended to side with John T. Morse, Jr., who wrote: "From Elsie Venner, with her mysteriously envenomed nature, to that absurd young man Maurice Kirkwood. . . the downward step was indeed a long one."[67] Yet, of the three, this novel contains the most carefully worked out exposition of the reflex theory, and the most advanced speculations in terms of it. Moreover, A Mortal Antipathy uses the theory more in the spirit of Marshall Hall's actual accomplishments than the others, and less as a catch-all for uncontrollable hereditary forces. It is Holmes's only attempt to use reflex action as the sole supporting framework of a novel, and it is the only place where he tries to give an explanation for the mechanism of the reflex involved. That the novel is an unsatisfactory artistic performance cannot be argued away; but as a serious attempt to utilize and extend the fringe of exact knowledge in a work of fiction, it deserves to be understood on its own terms.

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reflex stimulus of the excitement produced in others by working on their feelings." (P. 158) "Myrtle found herself in a rose-colored atmosphere, not from Murray Bradshaw's admiration, as it seemed, but only reflected by his mind from another source." (P. 397) The maid, Kitty, sat down, "first making a catch at her apron to dust the chair with, and then remembering that she had left that part of her costume at home.--Automatic movements, curious." (P. 341) See also p. 127, p. 180, and pp. 237-238.

[67] Life and Letters, I, 266-267. One of the most recent to agree is Arthur H. Quinn, who writes: "The plot of A Mortal Antipathy is so absurd that it hardly bears repetition and it falls so far below the others that Dr. Holmes must have been deserted by his sense of humor when he allowed it to be published." The Literature of the American People, ed. by Arthur H. Quinn (New York, 1951), p. 372.

Though the novel rambles like the Autocrat, essentially it is the story of Maurice Kirkwood. Maurice is an enigma to the residents of Arrowhead Village, where he is a summer visitor. He is evidently a gentleman (the landlord's wife vouches for the quality of the underwear he has given her to wash), but he is completely withdrawn from society, preferring the company of his Italian manservant Paolo to that of the villagers.

Maurice is brought into the narrative when he appears, alone in a birchbark canoe, to watch from a distance a boat race in progress between members of Stoughton University, an institution unknown to co-education, and Corinna Institute, a female seminary. Considerable space is devoted to the outcome of this race--the whole question of female suffrage seems to depend on it--before we hear further of the interested spectator in the canoe. But the race does introduce two other leading characters of the novel. The coxswain of the girls' boat is Miss Lurida Vincent, "a large-headed, large-eyed, long-eyelashed, slender-necked, slightly developed young woman," a brilliant student at the Institute, known to the other students, because of her indefatigable love for study, as "The Terror." Contrasted to Lurida is the girl who pulls the bow oar, Miss Euthymia Tower, Lurida's best friend. Euthymia, an accomplished gymnast, beautiful, not behind her fellow students in mathematics and classical studies and one of the best students in the natural sciences and in sketching from nature, is called by her classmates "The

Wonder."

Both girls soon graduate from the Institute, and Lurida becomes a major intellectual force in the village when she assumes the secretaryship of the Pansophian Society. In her official capacity she takes it upon herself to invite Maurice to contribute a paper to the society; but he refuses, though she believes it was he who had submitted an anonymous essay titled "My Three Companions," a paper dealing with the language of nature as spoken by the ocean, the river, and the lake. Meanwhile, the village physician, Dr. Butts, has learned from Paolo that his master suffers from "una antipatia." The doctor confides this information to his wife, she repeats it to her sister-in-law, and within twenty-four hours the whole village knows that the mystery-man has an antipathy. Speculation is rampant. What kind of antipathy is it? Suggestions range all the way from dogs to a particular color, the hypotheses presumably intended to explain why Maurice shuns society.

The doctor's professional curiosity has been aroused, and he begins a search through his private and the public library for information bearing on antipathies. This allows Holmes to introduce some comments on the subject. Dr. Butts begins his study with those antipathies that concern the sense of taste, and he goes on to consider those that have to do with sound. His initial conclusion is that those aversions to certain objects, or colors, or sounds, that are called antipathies are "produced by impressions on the organs

of sense, seemingly by direct agency on certain nerve centres."[68] But Dr. Butts is not done thinking about the mechanism of antipathies; his cogitation has only begun.

Meanwhile, the duties of the secretaryship of the Pansophian Society have not proved sufficient to occupy the busy brain of Lurida Vincent. Now, in part motivated by her feminist's desire to smash convention, she determines to study medicine. She goes to Dr. Butts to ask his advice, and to ask him also to lend her medical books. It soon becomes evident to the wise old doctor, however, that regardless of Lurida's ostensible reasons for wanting to become a physician, her chief--and perhaps unconscious--reason is that she hopes to solve the mystery of Maurice's antipathy. Kindly old Dr. Butts allows her to follow her whims, but he realizes that in her zeal for truth she is liable to compromise herself by forgetting or ignoring the social proprieties, and he resolves to keep a careful watch over her activities and to enlist the aid of Euthymia to help him.

After several minor episodes, such as the difficulties a reporter has in trying to interview Maurice and the development of Lurida's false theory that Maurice is suffering from the bite of a tarantula, the plot picks up again with Lurida's writing a long letter to Maurice begging him to take her into his confidence and tell her all about his strange condition. Lurida is so much the feminist that she can see nothing wrong

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[68] A Mortal Antipathy, Works, VIII, 89.

with her taking such a personal interest in her ailing brother, but when Euthymia sees the letter she is shocked by its audacity and begs her friend to destroy it immediately, or at least to permit Dr. Butts to pass judgment on its propriety. Lurida reluctantly agrees to the latter; but when the two girls reach the doctor's house they learn that he has just been called to the bedside of Mr. Kirkwood, who has suddenly come down with typhoid fever. This disposes of the problem of the letter, for Maurice remains so near death for some time that there is no possibility of written communication with him.

It is while Maurice is in this critical condition that he commits to the doctor's care a manuscript in which he tells the story of his life, so that in the event of his death his strange seclusion will be explained. This document and an accompanying report on Maurice's condition, purportedly a memoir of the "Royal Academy of the Biological Sciences," make up two chapters of the novel.

In his biographical sketch, Maurice tells how he was accidentally dropped into a thorn bush by his beautiful cousin Laura. Ever after that, whenever he came into the presence of a beautiful girl, he fell into a faint, much like the one when he had been picked out of the thorn bush, supposedly dead. When he grew up, Maurice read all he could about antipathies, and he came to understand the nature of his malady. He wrote this account of his life "for the instruction of others, and especially for the light it throws

on certain peculiarities of human character often wrongly interpreted as due to moral perversion, when they are in reality the results of misdirected or reversed actions in some of the closely connected nervous centres."[69] This autobiography, one notes, is written only to instruct others; it serves no cathartic function for the writer, for Holmes's psychology is still a physiological psychology--in no way does he anticipate the psychiatric couch.

In his autogiographical sketch, Maurice is given the use of the facts of reflex action as Holmes himself understood them; the explanation is reserved for the savants of the Royal Academy of the Biological Sciences, the speculation for Dr. Butts. Maurice, as a layman, is permitted to remark that:

> It is enough to say here, without entering into the explanation of the fact, which will be found simple enough as seen by the light of modern physiological science, that the "nervous disturbance" which the presence of a woman in the flower of her age produced in my system was a sense of impending death, sudden, overwhelming, unconquerable, appalling. It was a reversed action of the nervous centres,--the opposite of that which flushes the young lover's cheek and hurries his bounding pulses as he comes into the presence of the object of his passion. No one who has ever felt the sensation can have failed to recognize it as an imperative summons, which commands instant and terrified submission.[70]

Maurice's father had tried everything he could find to cure his son, and when Maurice grew up he himself continued the search for a cure. He even let an old gypsy exercise her black art on him. She gave him whatever consolation he

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[69] Ibid., p. 223.

[70] Ibid., p. 215.

could find in this verse:

> Fair lady cast a spell on thee,
> Fair lady's hand shall set thee free.[71]

Maurice, of course, placed no credence in such fanciful prophecies. Gypsy hocus-pocus might be very well to excite the flagging attention of the reader, but Maurice, like his creator, looked for a scientific explanation. He found it in physiological psychology, the "newer mode of thought" that had long ago attracted the attention of Dr. Holmes and had since made such satisfactory progress in the laboratory. "It was too evident," Maurice says, "that a chain of nervous disturbances had been set up in my system which repeated itself whenever the original impression gave the first impulse."[72] In other words, here is a succinct description of the conditioned reflex, a term Pavlov would give the world in 1897, but here expressed in 1885.

Though Maurice may think his nervous disturbance is simple "as seen by the light of modern physiological science," Holmes nevertheless does go into considerable detail explaining what that light is supposed to be. This is the Royal Academy's report, titled: "Account of a Case of Gynophobia." Holmes remarks that both it and Dr. Butts's reflections which follow may not interest the reader who expects to be entertained, excited, or amused by a novel. Such a reader can leave these chapters to those who "relish a slight flavor of science. But if he does so leave them he will very probably

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[71] Ibid., p. 219.

[72] Ibid., p. 211.

remain sceptical as to the truth of the story to which they are meant to furnish him with a key."[73] They are indeed essential to understanding what Holmes is getting at.

The gist of the Royal Academy's report follows:

> Between it [the heart] and the brain there is the closest relation. The emotions, which act upon it as we have seen, govern it by a mechanism only of late years thoroughly understood. This mechanism can be made plain enough to the reader who is not afraid to believe that he can understand it.
>
> The brain, as we all know, is the seat of ideas, emotions, volition. It is the great central telegraphic station with which many lesser centres are in close relation, from which they receive, and to which they transmit, their messages. The heart has its own little brains, so to speak,--small collections of nervous substance which govern its rhythmical motions under ordinary conditions. But these lesser nervous centres are to a large extent dominated by influences transmitted from certain groups of nerve-cells in the brain and its immediate dependencies.
>
> There are two among the special groups of nerve-cells which produce directly opposite effects. One of these has the power of accelerating the action of the heart, while the other has the power of retarding or arresting this action. One acts as the spur, the other as the bridle. According as one or the other predominates, the action of the heart will be stimulated or restrained. Among the great modern discoveries in physiology is that of the existence of a distinct centre of inhibition, as the restraining influence over the heart is called.[74]

How is an antipathy set up?

> A single impression, in a very early period of atmospheric existence,--perhaps, indirectly, before that period, as was said to have happened in the case of James the First of England,--may establish a communication between this centre and the heart which will remain open ever afterwards. How does a footpath across a field establish itself? Its curves are arbitrary, and what we call accidental, but one after another follows it as if he were guided by a chart on which it was laid down. So it is with this dangerous

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[73] Ibid., p. 228.

[74] Ibid., pp. 234-235.

> transit between the centre of inhibition and the great organ of life. If once the path is opened by the track of some profound impression, that same impression, if repeated, or a similar one, is likely to find the old footmarks and follow them. Habit only makes the path easier to traverse, and thus the unreasoning terror of a child, of an infant, may perpetuate itself in a timidity which shames the manhood of its subject.[75]

The report adds that: "In the case before us it is an involuntary impulse transmitted from the brain to the inhibiting centre, which arrests the cardiac movements."[76] It goes on to predict that it may be possible to reverse the chain of nervous disturbances and effect a permanent cure in the patient, but that is a task that cannot yet be accomplished by medical science and must be left to fortunate accident.

> If once the nervous impression which falls on the centre of inhibition can be made to change its course, so as to follow its natural channel, it will probably keep to that channel ever afterwards. And this will, it is most likely, be effected by some sudden, unexpected impression. If he were drowning, and a young woman should rescue him, it is by no means impossible that the change in the nervous current we have referred to might be brought about as rapidly, as easily, as the reversal of the poles in a magnet, which is effected in an instant. . . . Accident may effect the cure which art seems incompetent to perform. It would not be strange if in some future seizure he should never come back to consciousness. But it is quite conceivable, on the other hand, that a happier event may occur,--that in a single moment the nervous polarity may be reversed, the whole course of his life changed, and his past terrible experiences be to him like a scarce-remembered dream.[77]

In the next chapter, Dr. Butts reflects upon the contents of the report, and here we see his thoughts (or Holmes's) constantly centering around a physiological--not psychological--interpretation of the antipathy. Dr. Butts

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[75] Ibid., p. 236. [76] Ibid., p. 237. [77] Ibid., p. 238.

elaborates on the electrical and magnetic analogies suggested by the report. He thinks back to the beginnings of the study of electricity and physiology: "From the kick of a frog's hind leg to the amazing triumphs which began with that seemingly trivial incident is a long, a very long stride."[78] Thinking about electricity, he is led to speculate on the reason for the fact that Maurice can look on a beautiful girl from a distance without ill effects but cannot tolerate her approach. There must be an analogy here, he thinks, to the stories about people who have phobias for cats and are so sensitive to their presence that they can detect them even in a room where no cat is visible.

> It may be through some emanation. It may be through the medium of some electrical disturbance. What if the nerve-thrills passing through the whole system of the animal propagate themselves to a certain distance without any more regard to intervening solids than is shown by magnetism?[79]

And if a cat can do this, why not a human being? There are stories, in fact, about people who possess a strange sort of animal magnetism. From this point on the doctor's speculations get even more nebulous. What is the meaning of the halo pictured around the heads of saints? he asks. Can it be that the painters recognize something like magnetic emanation? He even enlists the aid of philology: "The common use of the term <u>in</u>fluence would seem to imply the existence of its correlative, <u>ef</u>fluence."[80] Dr. Butts finally con-

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[78] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 241.

[79] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 243. Faraday had discovered electro-magnetic induction in 1832. Holmes chose, therefore, a well-established and seemingly likely analogy.

[80] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 244.

cludes that: "There is no good reason that I can see. . . why among the forces which work upon the nervous centres there should not be one which acts at various distances from its source."[81] This was an idea Holmes entertained with more than a little seriousness. In Over the Teacups (1891), his last major work, he returned to cerebricity, as he called mental power capable of being transferred through distances without visible means of transmission. "Brain action through space without material symbolism, such as speech, expression, etc., is analogous to electrical induction," says Number Seven, the cracked teacup.[82] But Holmes also takes credit for the idea in his own person; he mentions it as one of his ventures into "metaphysics," along with his favorites the squinting brain, the idiotic area of the thinking-marrow, and I-My-Self & Co.[83]

In A Mortal Antipathy, Holmes wisely foresaw and correctly described the conditioned reflex in a human being; his description leaves little to be asked. It is only when he lets his speculation run unchecked that he goes farther than available knowledge warranted. Getting off on the wrong track of the analogy with magnetism, he ended with a mystical conception of the working of the mind that was naturally a cul-de-sac as far as experimentation could be concerned. His physiology could not do the work that demanded a science of

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Over the Teacups, Works, IV, 15.

[83] Ibid., p. 166.

psychology. But at the end of his life he was very much impressed by the studies of William James; he was, he said, "fully in sympathy with the psychological investigators."[84]

So far as his last novel was concerned, physiological psychology could still turn the trick. Maurice recovers from his antipathy when he is saved from a burning house by the young and beautiful Euthymia Tower. "The change which had taken place in the vital currents of Maurice Kirkwood's system was as simple and solid a fact as the change in a magnetic needle when the boreal becomes the austral pole, and the austral the boreal."[85] All the characters are neatly disposed of; Lurida faints at the scene of the fire and comes to realize that she lacks the stamina to be a physician after all, and in due time Maurice marries Euthymia--fair lady's hand had set him free. When Maurice and Euthymia have a son, they begin to wonder if the child has inherited his father's antipathy to beautiful women. It happens that Laura, who originally caused the father's antipathy, is in the neighborhood, so Maurice asks her to visit them. She is still young and beautiful (the explanation for this phenomenon of nature is not given), and when the elder Maurice sees her for the first time he pales a little but soon recovers, and he knows that his cure is permanent. Maurice, Jr., is brought in, and he evidences no trace of the antipathy; he goes to Laura at once. Thus we know that the antipathy was not inheritable. We know also, incidentally, that at this time

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[84] Ibid., p. 16. [85] A Mortal Antipathy, p. 281.

Holmes placed little stock in the idea of the inheritance of acquired characters.

As we noted at the outset of this analysis of reflex function, Holmes considered "reflex movements" to be "automatic consequences of practically irresistible causes existing in the inherited organization."[86] The inherited organization which makes for reflex movements is the organization that we possess individually and that accounts for our individual variations, and it is also the organization which we possess in common with other human beings. This second kind of organization is of course that which has developed through biological evolution, if it is true that biological evolution has indeed taken place. Since there is some question about Holmes's stand on evolution and since the advent of Darwinism threw the whole problem of heredity into a new perspective, it is well to consider at this point Holmes's exact relation to Darwinism. Holmes and Darwinism, then, is the subject of the next chapter.

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[86] Pages from an Old Volume of Life, p. 330.

Chapter V

Holmes: Heredity and Darwinism

That the theory of biological evolution did not spring Minerva-like from the brain of Charles Darwin in 1859 is a truism which needs no repetition; over and over scholars have emphasized the proto-evolutionary theories of earlier naturalists: Buffon, Lamarck, De Candolle, Erasmus Darwin, A. R. Wallace, and the like. The list could be greatly extended if we included not only naturalists but philosophers.[1]

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[1]The best study of the idea of evolution, from the earliest speculation of the ancient Greeks to the empirical study of Darwin, still is that of Henry Fairfield Osborn, From the Greeks to Darwin (New York, 1894). Bert J. Loewenberg's "Darwinism Comes to America, 1859-1900," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVIII (December, 1941), 339-368, is a valuable scholarly study of the reception of Darwinism among significant American thinkers; his essay, "The Controversy over Evolution in New England, 1859-1873," New England Quarterly, VIII (June, 1935), 232-257, considers the relations of religion and Darwinism; and his essay, "The Reaction of American Scientists to Darwinism," American Historical Review, XXXVIII (July, 1933), 687-701, is a close study of the reactions of Louis Agassiz, Asa Gray, and James Dwight Dana. Both of the following contain excellent brief introductions to the scientific research and speculation that made Darwin's work possible: Richard Hofstadter, Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915 (Philadelphia, 1944), pp. 1-17; and Leo J. Henkin, Darwinism in the English Novel, 1860-1910 (New York, 1940), pp. 13-30. Lionel Stevenson's Darwin Among the Poets (Chicago, 1932) deals only with British poets. A valuable but somewhat specialized study in the relationship of Darwinism to literature is Arthur E. Jones, Jr., "Darwinism and Its Relationship to Realism and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1860-1900," Drew University Bulletin, XXXVIII (December, 1950), 1-21. The symposium Evolutionary Thought in America, ed. by Stow Persons (New Haven, 1950), is valuable for the intellectual ramifications of Darwinism.

Quite rightly this emphasis has fallen upon European naturalists. However, it is important to consider, in assessing Holmes's pre-Darwinian evolutionary theories, that there were several American naturalists who had at least hinted at evolutionary ideas before the 1850's.

To mention only three outstanding instances, we may note that in 1829 John Godman, a member of the staff of the Peale Museum in Philadelphia, pointed out that "a greater or less degree of resemblance to an original type or model, may be traced throughout the variations of animal existence, from the most perfectly organized, down to the lowest in the scale." And he was clever enough to see that "this observation at a very early period, led to the belief in a chain of existence throughout the universe. . . ."[2] In 1833, Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, the indefatigable describer of new species, some of which existed only in his own surcharged imagination, was clear-sighted enough to observe that "Species and perhaps Genera also are forming in organized beings by gradual deviations of shapes, forms and organs, taking place in the lapse of time."[3] Samuel Haldeman, later professor of natural history at the University of Pennsylvania, declared in 1844 that "it would be a hasty inference to suppose that a physical agent,

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[2]Quoted by W. M. Smallwood, Natural History and the American Mind (New York, 1941), p. 140. The standard study of the chain-of-being concept is Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Cambridge, Mass., 1936).

[3]Quoted by Bernard Jaffe, Men of Science in America (New York, 1944), p. 126.

acting gradually for ages, could not carry a variation step by step, so that instead of the original, we will say, four varieties [of a plant or animal species], they might amount to six, the sixth being sufficiently unlike the earlier ones to induce a naturalist to consider it distinct."[4]

From the beginning of exploration in the New World, the multiplicity of species of animals and plants had been noted with wonder. One cannot avoid remarking this wonder as he flips through the pages of the earliest description of North American flora and fauna, Thomas Hariot's Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia (1588). As a consequence of the availability of such an immense stock of natural history source-material, neither botany nor zoology advanced much beyond the stage of classification in America until the nineteenth century was well along.

Taxonomy was a game anybody could play, and it was not limited to professionals alone. Constantine Rafinesque inserted advertisements in newspapers asking all persons interested in the advancement of science to send aim any odd-looking fish they came across. Not even women were debarred from the game; Jane Colden, the daughter of the Lieutenant Governor of New York, botanized in odd moments and sent the results of her efforts to Dr. Charles Alston in Edinburgh--this before the Revolutionary War. It was undoubtedly this willingness of amateurs and professionals, such as Alexander

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[4] Ibid., p. 245.

Garden and the Bartrams, father and son, to send specimens and notes to leading naturalists in Europe that helped bring about the formulation of the great taxonomic systems, culminating in the sexual system of Linnaeus. But this collecting zeal had another consequence. In the Baconian scheme of science, the mere collection of facts is not enough; facts must be used to formulate hypotheses, and hypotheses must be tested in the endeavor to discover natural laws. The idea of the chain of being was one ready-made unifying concept. Along with it, another idea had long been shaping up from the evidence--a modification of the original idea of a static chain, a dynamic conception of movement upward through the categories of being. For example, Emerson's "subtle chain of countless rings" in 1836 is no static thing, for

> . . .striving to be man, the worm
> Mounts through all the spires of form.[5]

The natural scientists, of course, were less inclined to grant the worm such soaring ambition; but, so widespread had the idea of the chain of being become,[6] poets and some of the more daring of natural scientists were able to express, long before 1859, the idea that existing species might develop into new ones according to some sort of scheme of a dynamic chain of being.

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[5]On Emerson's relation to science, including his ideas about evolution and possible sources for them, see Harry Hayden Clark, "Emerson and Science," Philological Quarterly, X (July, 1931), 225-260.

[6]Fifth grade readers of McGuffey, for example, were being indoctrinated with the static chain idea in 1844. See McGuffey's Rhetorical Guide: Or Fifth Reader (New York, 1844), p. 411.

Into this milieu we have to place Dr. Holmes, a man growing up when it was at least possible for radical thinkers to toy with the idea of evolution, a man reaching maturity when evolutionary ideas had already received expression in poetry, himself a man who took pride in being always in the vanguard of science. Holmes does not argue the issues of Darwinism anywhere in his writings, but he does often mention Darwin, once indicating that he considered it an honor to have been born in the same year as Darwin. It has seemed, therefore, to most students of Holmes that he experienced no profound doubts about evolution the way some of his compatriots did and that, considering his liberal attitude toward both science and religion, he calmly took it in his stride. Typical of this view is that found in the American Writers Series Holmes: "By the time Holmes got to writing about Darwin at all, the controversy was, to him, settled and won, and he accepted Darwinism complacently."[7] However, since a recent writer has turned a very searching light on the whole question of Holmes's relation to Darwinism and has concluded that Holmes "was extremely chary of Darwinism,"[8] it will be well to investigate in some detail the issues involved.

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[7] Hayakawa and Jones, Oliver Wendell Holmes: Representative Selections, p. lvii. See also Harry Hayden Clark, "Dr. Holmes: A Re-interpretation," New England Quarterly, XII (March, 1939), p31 and p. 33. And see Tilton, op. cit., p. 314. Morse never mentions Darwin at all.

[8] Frederick William Conner, Cosmic Optimism (Gainesville, Fla., 1949), p. 211.

In the first place, it has become increasingly evident as the Darwinian hypothesis has undergone modification since Darwin's time that one of the important unanswered questions raised by Darwinism was this: If species do undergo transmutation, is the factor responsible traceable to heredity or to environment? Darwin himself, so far as he recognized the importance of the question and tried to provide an answer, cast his lot mainly with environment. This environmentalist explanation is part of the so-called Lamarckian element in Darwinism as it originally existed. Darwin was forced to accept an environmentalist position because it was the only principle available to him; he himself was aware of its inadequacy.

The word "environment" had not yet come into popular usage in its present technical sense when Darwin published the Origin of Species in 1859, and consequently it does not appear in the index of even the sixth edition of the Origin. But whenever Darwin spoke of conditions which promote variation he spoke of climate, food, and "conditions of life"--all of which we would lump together today under the term environment. Thus he remarks that "variability is generally related to the conditions of life to which each species has been exposed during several successive generations."[9] He

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[9] Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species (London, 1920), p. 99. The particular edition to which this reference is made--the sixth--indicates all additions of text and footnotes to the original 1859 edition. All passages here referred to were part of the text of the original edition.

was too close an observer, however, to believe that environment alone can bring about such drastic changes as transmutation of species. He says:

> innumerable instances are known to every naturalist, of species keeping true, or not varying at all, although living under the most opposite climates. Such considerations as these incline me to lay less weight on the direct action of the surrounding conditions, than on a tendency to vary, due to causes of which we are quite ignorant.[10]

And there Darwin leaves the matter. If evolution is to take place at all there must be great variation among individuals, but just what causes this variation he could not explain, the existing state of knowledge being what it was. He suggests environment as a partial cause, but his own caution forbids him to make it the sole cause. That there are others he is confident, but they are causes "of which we are quite ignorant."

Today, blessed with the vision of hindsight, we can easily see what these other causes are. Darwin was unaware of the turn toward heredity that evolutionary theory would take; he was of necessity ignorant of the fact that Huge De Vries would demonstrate the principle of mutation in 1900 and that Thomas Hunt Morgan would prove it with his fruit flies; it was impossible for him to know that August Weis-

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[10] Ibid., p. 100. "Nowadays, we feel that Darwin's doctrine should have been split into two, evolution, which, in some shape or other, is not doubtful, and natural selection, which merely shifts back one place the real question--the cause of the variations. Certainly Darwin did not so split it." H. T. Pledge, Science Since 1500 (London, 1947), p. 158.

mann would construct a theory of the germ plasm as a logical explanation of the vehicle of heredity, thus replacing Darwin's own cumbersome theory of hereditary gemmules.

Coming back to Holmes now, we can postulate that, so far as he observed the common nineteenth-century dichotomy between heredity and environment and felt that he must make a choice between the two poles, if his thought was heredity-centered he might logically find Darwinism unacceptable,[11] and if it was environment-centered he might find no logical difficulties with Darwinism. Surely there can be no doubt of Holmes's profound interest in heredity from a very early date, and of his relatively slight interest in environment at the same time. But on the other hand, if it can be shown that Holmes's attitude shifted during any period in his career in the direction of a greater awareness of the force of environment, then it is not unreasonable to suppose that after that date he was at least more receptive to Darwin's theory.

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[11] This was central to his friend Louis Agassiz's refusal to accept the Darwinian theory. In his very important critique of Darwinism, Agassiz wrote: "As to the influence of climate and physical conditions, we all know their power for evil and for good upon living beings. But there is, nevertheless, nothing more striking in the whole book of nature than the power shown by types and species to resist physical conditions." "Evolution and Permanence of Type," Atlantic Monthly, XXXIII (January, 1874), 99. Elsewhere in the same essay he wrote: "The whole subject of inheritance is exceedingly intricate, working often in a seemingly capricious and fitful way. Qualities, both good and bad, are dropped as well as acquired, and the process ends sometimes in the degradation of the type and the survival of the unfit rather than the fittest." Ibid., pp. 98-99.

The case is somewhat complicated by the fact that Holmes was an evolutionist (but not a Darwinist) at least two years before The Origin of Species was published. In 1857 he published an essay, "The Mechanism of Vital Actions,"[12] in which he elaborated an evolutionary theory based to a considerable degree on discoveries in organic chemistry of Wöhler and Liebig and on the cell theory of life advanced by Schleiden and Schwann. Since the appearance of Cosmic Optimism, "The Mechanism of Vital Actions" has assumed a new importance in any consideration of Holmes's Darwinism. Students of Holmes owe Mr. Conner a debt of gratitude especially for his demonstration of the importance of the Wöhler-Liebig, Schleiden-Schwann background of Holmes's theory. Since his summary of the essay is a good one, it would be pointless to rework the same ground in this place. He concludes that Holmes's essay may be reduced to these elements:

> (1) that the various forms of life have emerged successively and progressively over a vast period of time, but that this succession has not been accomplished by the transformation of species; (2) that life is a property of certain elements existing in certain combinations under certain conditions, and that therefore it may conceivably have arisen directly out of nonliving matter under 'natural, but exceptional' conditions; (3) that all the known species of life may have been thus derived--probably by some such process as Schwann's theory of cell-formation--out of their constituent substances, vegetable out of nonliving matter and animal

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[12] North American Review, LXXXV (July, 1857), 39-77. This does not appear in Holmes's Works--which is odd, considering that he thought highly of it, a fact that suggests that he had seriously modified his views by the time his writings were collected in 1891. It is reprinted in Currents and Counter-Currents in Medical Science (Boston, 1861).

> out of vegetable, but that this does not deny the efficacy of the divine creative will, because this will operates immanently; (4) that the free spirit of man cannot be accounted for by any such natural process but only by the direct intervention of its Creator, with whom its relations are different from those of nature.[13]

Even though he did not reprint the essay in his Works, Holmes looked back on it with considerable affection; writing to Arthur Gilman he said that it "had more thought in it than anything I had previously published."[14] Possibly he was willing to discount the thought in his first volume of poems, but this was surely a serious estimation considering that in 1843 he had published his article on "The Contagiousness of Puerperal Fever," a work that even in his own lifetime had assured Dr. Holmes of a permanent reputation in medical circles and has since come to be recognized as an exemplary piece of clinical reasoning.[15]

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[13] Conner, op. cit., pp. 222-223. Mr. Conner's analysis of "The Mechanism of Vital Actions" is stimulating, incisive, and a model of clarity. His discussion of Holmes's later thought as seen by the light of this essay seems to this writer, however, wide of the mark.

[14] "A Letter from Dr. Holmes," Atlantic Monthly, C (November, 1907), 715.

[15] The Puerperal Fever essay was first published in the short-lived New England Quarterly Journal of Medicine and Surgery, I (April, 1843), 503 ff., and it was reprinted as a pamphlet titled "Puerperal Fever as a Private Pestilence" in 1855. It is included in the Works, IX, 103-172. An index to its importance is the fact that it is reprinted in C. N. B. Camac's Epoch-Making Contributions to Medicine, Surgery and the Allied Sciences (Philadelphia, 1909), where it shares space with the writings of Lister on the antiseptic principle, Harvey on the circulation of the blood, Auenbrugger on the techniques of percussion, Laënnec on the use of the stethoscope, Jenner on cow-pox, and Morton and Simpson on anesthesia.

"The Mechanism of Vital Actions," evolutionary as it was, did not so completely anticipate Darwinism that there is any question of the need to place Holmes in Darwin's seat. Mr. Conner contends that the essential difference between Holmes in 1857 and Darwin (whose Origin of course did not appear until two years later) is that Holmes "was thoroughly convinced of the fixity of species";[16] "plainly, in 1857 Holmes was not. . . a rebel against the principle of immutability."[17] As much might be said for Asa Gray in 1857, though he later became one of Darwin's firmest supporters in America. More important are the many ways Holmes's theory prepared him to be sympathetic with what Darwin was to publish in 1859.

In the first place, Holmes was eager to establish at the outset his belief that the newer theories of science were in no necessary conflict with religion. "The apparent uniformity of force, and the seeming independent existence of matter, lead us to speak of them as if their laws, as we term them, were absolutely and eternally inherent." And he hastens to add that "a law which an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent Being enforces, is plainly nothing more than the Lawgiver himself at work."[18] This is the kind of admission Asa Gray later wished he could get Darwin to make.[19] Now,

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[16] Conner, op. cit., p. 212. [17] Ibid., p. 214.

[18] Holmes, "The Mechanism of Vital Actions," North American Review, LXXXV (July, 1857), 46.

[19] Gray wrote in 1863: "Under my hearty congratulations of Darwin for his striking contributions to teleology, there

says Holmes, if we once recognize that a natural law is a secondary manifestation of God,

> if the student of nature and the student of divinity can once agree that all the forces of the universe, as well as all its power, are immediately dependent upon its Creator,--that He is not only omnipotent, but omnimovent,--we have no longer any fear of nebular theories, or doctrines of equivocal generation, or of progressive development. If we saw a new planet actually formed in the field of the telescope, or the imaginary 'Acarus Crossii' put together 'de toutes pièces' under the microscope, true to its alleged pedigree,--out of Silex, by Galvanism,--it would no more turn us into atheists, than a sight of the mint would make us doubt the national credit.[20]

So it is readily seen that one who could so easily "spiritualize" the nebular hypothesis, the theory of spontaneous generation, and the already elaborated theories of evolution that existed in 1857, such as Chambers's Vestiges, should have had no religious scruples about accepting Darwinism.

Holmes's understanding of the homologies to be found throughout the universe also fitted him to see the value of Darwin's explanation of how those resemblances came about in the world of plants and animals. It has been "the tendency of increasing knowledge," Holmes says, "to show that the rules of creation are simplicity of material, economy of inventive effort, and thrift in the expenditure of

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is a vein of petite malice, from my knowing well that he rejects the idea of design, while all the while he is bringing out the neatest illustrations of it!" Letters of Asa Gray, Jane Loring Gray ed. (Boston, 1893), II, 498. And again in 1876: "If I can. . . reestablish the evidence of design on the basis it ought to stand upon, I shall be satisfied and happy." (P. 658)

[20] "Mechanism of Vital Actions," p. 47.

force"[21]--generalizations which he illustrates by pointing to the relatively small number of chemical elements which exist; to the fact that the basic pattern of the vertebra is found, though modified, in all beasts, reptiles, birds, and fishes; that the principle which accounts for the dropping of an apple from a tree causes also the rolling of the planets in space; and that even the head of a snake and the head of Plato follow the same creative design.

Like Darwin himself, he was impressed by the "evidence of Geology," which

> has made it plain that new forms of life have been called into being at many different periods of the earth's history. The multitude of distinct floras and faunas in different regions and strata of the earth sufficiently proves that the formation of new organisms has been as much a part of the regular order of things in creation as the procession of the equinoxes, or upheavals and depressions, or any of those changes that work out their great results in the longer cycles of time. No one who observes the manner in which new specific forms are gradually introduced among those already existing, can help seeing that such new formations may have been quietly intercalated in the midst of their predecessors by a series of operations in which, as in the mighty processes by which new continents are uplifted, nothing but secondary agencies were apparent.[22]

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid., pp. 66-67. In 1860 Holmes ridiculed the idea advanced by Philip Henry Gosse in Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot (1857), asserting, in a letter to James William Kimball, his profound trust in the geological record and in the truthfulness of its author: "If you choose to accept that hypothesis I mentioned, and which seems to have struck you, viz., that the world was created with mock skeletons of almost innumerable mock genera and species, many of them holding the remains of mock food in their mock interiors, and with their teeth ground down as if by long use; in other words, if you choose to believe the Creator the

Though a sentence such as the last one in this passage certainly seems to imply a conception similar to Darwinian evolution (there is recognition of the introduction of new species, these species come into being gradually, and only secondary agencies or natural forces bring about their formation), very likely Mr. Conner's cautious observation is well taken that the actual idea of transmutation of species is not involved. Certainly, whatever Holmes thought about the fixity of species, his secondary agencies are not Darwin's principle of natural selection; as Mr. Conner points out, he drew his ideas for the actual process of creation from his knowledge of organic and inorganic chemistry, and he described the formation of the first living cell in terms of crystal-precipitation from a saturated solution. But this is relatively unimportant, and proves, if it proves anything, only that Holmes did not anticipate Darwin's theory of natural selection. Holmes made no particular claim for the validity of his ideas; he admitted that in the absence of any empirical evidence of the way life comes into being "we are reduced to barren speculation." It was his hope that "by feeling our way up, through what is possible, or at least conceivable, from the laws of the inorganic world to the simplest manifestations of life, we may construct a theory of the evolution of life by means of the existing forces of nature, acting in

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prototype of charlatans and jugglers, I shall have to say again, always with perfect respect and courtesy: 'Good-morning, Mr. Kimball.'" Morse, Life and Letters, II, 141.

different degree or intensity from their present ordinary mode of operation."[23]

Here we see the difference between Holmes in 1857 and Darwin in 1859 that is of greater moment than the issue of fixity of species. Holmes's uniformitarianism did not go far enough; he developed his theory in terms of "the existing forces of nature," but he lacked Darwin's audacity, he could not go all the way and argue that these existing forces, acting as we now know them, are sufficient to explain the multiplicity of organic being.[24] Instead, he had to fall back on the hypothesis that an intensification, or difference of degree, of existing forces must initiate the formation of a distinct species. He suggests that this might be "an influx of alien elements from some distant source, or an alteration of temperature, for instance."[25]

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[23]"Mechanism of Vital Actions," p. 67.

[24] Darwin's theory of natural selection--even if greatly modified in present day thinking--was the "flood of light" that Alfred Russel Wallace claimed it to be because for the first time it offered a reasonable explanation for the way one species could be transmuted into another, the belief in the fact of transmutation being in no way original. "Notwithstanding the vast knowledge and ingenious reasoning of Lamarck," wrote Wallace, "and the more general exposition of the subject by the author of the 'Vestiges of Creation,' the first step had not been taken towards a satisfactory explanation of the derivation of any one species from any other. Such eminent naturalists as Geoffrey St. Hilaire, Dean Herbert, Professor Grant, von Buch, and some others, had expressed their belief that species arose as simple varieties, and that the species of each genus were all descended from a common ancestor; but none of them gave a clue as to the law or the method by which the change had been effected." Quoted by J. T. Merz, A History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century, II, 330-331.

[25]"Mechanism of Vital Actions," p. 70.

Going a step further, he postulates that the precipitation of living substance from a saturated solution of its constituents produced "what we may call indifferent germs, that is, assimilating and self-developing centres, determinable, but not yet determined; bearing the same relation to vegetable growths generally, which the seed of an apple or pear bears to the many possible varieties that may spring from it."[26] And at this point he expresses just how fixed he considered species to be.

> This hypothesis is by no means identical with that of progressive development. It supposes the existence of permanent types, but conceives each type to represent the plastic diagonal of two forces,--a general organizing principle and a local determining one. The line of direction once fixed persists indefinitely, self-perpetuating, in the individual and the species, a vital movement parallel to its own axis.[27]

This is not at all the idea of species that holds that every distinct species is and always has been the same from the moment of its creation. This vector theory, as it may be called, recognizes the influence of a primary hereditary force (the general organizing principle) and a secondary environmental one (the local determining principle); once these two forces exert their influence, the resultant is fixed and remains permanent from then on. It is the resultant which becomes the hereditary determinant of every individual of the species.[28] Thus Holmes acknowledges the im-

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[26] Ibid., p. 71. [27] Ibid.

[28] This conception of heredity will be discussed in detail in the following chapter, where it will be shown that the heredity resultant of an individual does not necessarily become fixed at birth.

portance of environment, but in an unusual fashion; its influence is exerted only at the emergence of a species; after that the species remains fixed and the individuals of the species follow their type. It may be said, then, that in 1857 Holmes shared Darwin's faith in the power of environment to modify, but only in a very special sense, not at all as a factor to account for variation among extant species. For practical purposes, Holmes's environment exerts no influence at all on species already established.

So far we can see the following five ways in which Holmes's thinking was similar enough to Darwin's to establish at least a basis for his sympathetic understanding of Darwin's theory: Holmes had no religious bias that would have made him reticent about Darwinism; he recognized that the existence of striking homologies in nature called for a unifying theory to explain them; he was impressed by the geological record; he himself tried to develop a theory in terms of "the existing forces of nature," though as we have seen he was not wholly successful; and he accorded at least a minor importance to environment.

It was when he came to discuss the origin of man that Holmes revealed his widest divergence from the new biology. It was all very well to speculate upon the precipitation of indifferent vegetable germs from a saturated solution of their constituents and to imagine that later "the accumulations of vegetable matter" furnished the materials for the creation of

simple animal life,[29] but it was something else to apply the same principles to the origin of man. We recognize, says Holmes, two great divisions in created things. "To the first class of his creatures the Deity sustains only active relations." That is, the stamp of God is on all creation, and He actively controls all of it but man. "Every specific form," "every elemental movement is the Sovereign's self in action."[30] But "to the second class of his creatures the Creator stands in passive as well as active relations."[31] Thus Holmes saves the principle of free will, for these creatures "have the great prerogative of self-determination, which, with knowledge of the moral relations of their acts, constitutes them responsible beings."[32] However, conceding the free will of man raises more problems than it solves, problems for which Holmes has no solution in 1857. First there is the problem of how the introduction of self-determined beings came about:

> Now, if our previous view of matter and of elemental force as continuous Divine manifestations is correct, they could not in the nature of things become self-determining existences. The creation of independent centres of will and action involves a change in the character of the formative agencies hitherto at work in the portion of the universe with which we are acquainted. And here we come at once upon that mystery of mysteries: How and when are these spiritual natures called into being, and what is their relation to the material frames whose fundamental vital action we have alone considered?[33]

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[29] "Mechanism of Vital Actions," pp. 72-74.

[30] Ibid., p. 74.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., pp. 74-75.

[33] Ibid., p. 75.

To this question Holmes has no answer, though he remarks upon these offered by Plato, Lucretius, Aristotle, and Tennyson. He concludes that "we have followed the physical view of life upward until we have reached an impassible limit." This implies that a shift in point of view might give a different conclusion, so "it is but fair to indicate briefly the reversed aspect of living nature, when viewed from above downward, by taking, as the point of departure, its spiritual apex, instead of its material base."[34] And this point of view raises a problem even more difficult of solution.

> The introduction of self-determining existence, or sub-creative centres, into the order of things, marks, as we have said, the great change of action by which Omnipotence saw fit to assume passive, as well as active, relations to its creatures. There is nothing in light or heat, or electricity, or chemical or mechanical force, that gives any account of spiritual existence. When the first human soul was introduced to earthly being, if not before the date of this last birth of creation, there was a new force put forth which was not any of these. And so, whenever a new soul takes mortal shape, we recognize it as an emanation from its Maker by some other channel than through the elemental substances or influences that wait upon its secondary and simply organic necessities.
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> We could not think it strange that, at the period of this spiritual evolution, a force running parallel with it in the material world,--a force not identical with any of the ordinary physical agencies,--should combine the elements of the bodily form, and shape it to the wants of the immaterial principle. We should not therefore be constrained to throw upon the common forces of Nature that wonderful development from simple to complex, from general to special, which carries a translucent vesicle through a series of evolutions and differentiations, until it wears the shape of the august being to whom the Deity has delegated a portion of his omnipotence. But this conclusion would oblige us to argue backward from it to the lower animals, whose

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[34] Ibid.

> material frames and food-needing existence are essentially identical in their composition and mode of being with our own. And conceding that a special change of character in the forces of Nature marks the appearance of animal life, there would be strong reason for extending the same supposition to the vegetable kingdom. This is only one instance of the difference between our conclusions when we look from the higher sphere, and those which we naturally accept from the workshops of material philosophy. We must be content to remain in doubt on many details of creation not revealed to us, on which we can only shape a few half-shadowed hypotheses.[35]

So it is that no matter how he views it, Holmes can advance no rational explanation for man's free will; viewed from below upward, nature seems to demand that somewhere the principle of uniformitarianism be scrapped, while viewed from above downward the same principle extends free will even to the vegetable kingdom. Certainly the second alternative is untenable; therefore, in his summary at the end of the essay, Holmes concludes that "we are obliged to recognize a special intervention of creative power in the introduction of spiritual existence in the midst of the pre-existing unconscious creation."[36] That there might no be free will, he is not prepared in 1857 even to consider.

Now to the question of whether Holmes ever came to accept Darwinism we can apply three tests. The first, that his own theory of 1857 was compatible with biological evolution to the extent that he would not have to undergo a serious intellectual reorientation, ought to be sufficiently established. It does not lend itself to a genetic use; but the other two do. The second, the test of heredity, is helpful; and

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[35] Ibid., pp. 75-76. [36] Ibid., p. 77.

the third, the test of free will, is perhaps even more helpful.

As we have already seen, Holmes had much to say about heredity throughout his writings. In one of his earliest appearances in print, in the second of the two New England Magazine Autocrat papers, in 1832, he developed the opinion that minds are not born equal, and especially that women's minds are not equal to men's.[37] That woman's inferiority is due to her inborn nature and not to environmental influences such as education or its lack he was confident. A Madame de Staël is only an exception to the general rule of nature; "a natural law is not disproved by a pickled monster."[38] While he claimed to be for equality in political matters, socially, he said, he preferred "the quality."[39] As we have observed, social conservatism and heredity go hand in hand. And at the very time the Darwinian controversy was getting under way in New England, Holmes articulated his predisposition toward an hereditary intellectual aristocracy in the chapter on the Brahmin Caste which prefaces his novel Elsie Venner.

Yet it can be shown that the relative importance which he attached to heredity did change. The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, which he began the same year "Mechanism of Vital Actions" was published, contains some references to

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[37] In Oliver Wendell Holmes: Representative Selections, Hayakawa and Jones eds. (New York, 1939), pp. 445-446.

[38] Ibid. [39] Works, II, 133.

heredity and also a humorous anticipation of the essential concept of Darwin's principle of sexual selection:

> Money kept for two or three generations transforms a race,--I don't mean merely in manners and hereditary culture, but in blood and bone. Money buys air and sunshine, in which children grow up more kindly, of course, than in close, back streets; it buys country places to give them happy and healthy summers, good nursing, good doctoring, and the best cuts of beef and mutton. When the spring-chickens come to market ----I beg your pardon,--that is not what was I [sic] going to speak of. As the youngest females of each successive season come on, the finest specimens among them, other things being equal, are apt to attract those who can afford the expensive luxury of beauty. The physical character of the next generation rises in consequence. It is plain that certain families have in this way acquired an elevated type of face and figure, and that in a small circle of city-connections one may sometimes find models of both sexes which one of the rural counties would find it hard to match from all its townships put together. Because there is a good deal of running down, of degeneration and waste of life, among the richer classes, you must not overlook the equally obvious fact I have spoken of,--which in one or two generations more will be, I think, much more patent than just now.[40]

And in the book which followed, The Professor at the Breakfast-Table (1860), Holmes describes the struggle for existence as it is found in human beings. Speaking of the character Little Boston, the Professor says:

> Yes, yes,--I said, thoughtfully,--the strong hate the weak. It's all right. The arrangement has reference to the race, and not to the individual. Infirmity must be kicked out, or the stock run down. Wholesale moral arrangements are so different from retail!--I understand the instinct, my friend,--it is cosmic,--it is planetary,--it is a conservative principle in creation.[41]

He continues:

> men, as temporary occupants of a permanent abode called human life, which is improved or injured by

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[40] Works, I, 260. [41] Works, II, 19.

> occupancy, according to the style of the tenant, have a natural dislike to those who, if they live the life of the race as well as of the individual, will leave lasting injurious effects upon the abode spoken of, which is to be occupied by countless future generations. This is the final cause of the underlying brute instinct which we have in common with the herds.[42]

Yet the Professor does not neglect environmental influences on human life. As he sees it, however, environment is not so much a positive determinant of type as a modifier which represses growth that might otherwise have occurred. "There is no question," he says,

> that certain persons who are born among us find themselves many degrees too far north. Tropical by organization, they cannot fight for life with our eastern and northwestern breezes without losing the color and fragrance into which their lives would have blossomed in the latitude of myrtles and oranges. Strange effects are produced by suffering any living thing to be developed under conditions such as Nature had not intended for it. A French physiologist confined some tadpoles under water in the dark. Removed from the natural stimulus of light, they did not develop legs and arms at the proper period of their growth, and so become frogs; they swelled and spread into gigantic tadpoles. I have seen a hundred colossal <u>human</u> tadpoles,--overgrown <u>larvae</u> or embryos. . . .[43]

The strongest of Holmes's many comments on heredity are his first two novels, <u>Elsie Venner</u> (1861) and <u>The Guardian Angel</u> (1867). Both are outspoken dissertations on the prop-

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[42] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 19-20. Holmes came back to this idea in <u>Over the Teacups</u> (1891): "The very idea of humanity seems to be that it shall take care of itself and develop its powers in the 'struggle for life.'" (P. 55.) He described the same biological concept at the social level in <u>Elsie Venner</u> (1861): "you have got to learn that the 'struggle for life' Mr. Charles Darwin talks about reaches to vertebrates clad in crinoline, as well as to mollusks in shells, or articulates in jointed scales, or anything that fights for breathing-room and food and love in any coat of fur or feather!" (P. 94.)

[43] <u>Works</u>, II, 242.

osition that human beings are not wholly responsible for their own actions, their choices being determined by hereditary forces over which they have no control. It is true, of course, that Holmes did not write his novels to explain heredity; but the fact that this device was used illustrates his cast of mind in the 1860's when he was thinking a good deal about heredity. Even his ineptness in handling the details of the heredity themes may reflect a conviction that the importance of human heredity is sufficiently self-evident to require little special pleading.[44] And we notice a very different emphasis when, nearly twenty years later, he sat down to illustrate the same subject of limited responsibility in A Mortal Antipathy (1885). Maurice Kirkwood, too, lacks personal responsibility for his odd behavior; but no hereditary forces have shaped his life. Maurice's obsessive fear of women dates from the moment that he was dropped from his nurse's arms into a bramble. Clearly his troubles are of environmental origin.

Somewhere between 1867 and 1885, Holmes's thinking seems to have changed from an emphasis on heredity to one on en-

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[44] To Harriet Beecher Stowe he spelled out in detail his exact intentions in Elsie Venner: "to write a story with enough of interest in its characters and incidents to attract a certain amount of popular attention. Under cover of this to stir that mighty question of automatic agency in its relation to self-determination. To do this by means of a palpable outside agency, predetermining certain traits of character and certain apparently voluntary acts. . . . Not exactly insanity. . . but rather an unconscious intuitive tendency, dating from a powerful ante-natal influence, which modifies the whole organization." Morse, Life and Letters, I, 263-264.

vironment, if these novels give a true reflection of his mind. But the situation is not as simple as that. Five years before the publication of A Mortal Antipathy, Holmes wrote in his essay on Jonathan Edwards (1880) that "we are getting to be predestinarians as much as Edwards or Calvin was, only instead of universal corruption of nature derived from Adam, we recognize inherited congenital tendencies,--some good, some bad,--for which the subject of them is in no sense responsible."[45] And in 1874, in "Crime and Automatism," he asserted that "crime can be shown to run in the blood,"[46] and asked: "if genius and talent are inherited, as Mr. Galton has so conclusively shown. . . why should not deep-rooted moral defects and obliquities show themselves, as well as other qualities, in the descendants of moral monsters?"[47] Yet he did not overlook environmental causes of crime, for he noted particularly that of intoxication, which "suspends the influence of the will."[48]

The fact is, Holmes himself vacillated for some time on the question of free will, and with it on the question of heredity or environment--or neither. In the 1860's his own evolutionary theory and his stress on heredity may well have been the deciding factors which kept him from an open avowal of Darwinism. Through the 1870's the problem of free will caused him much unrest, and we sometimes find him directly

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[45] Works, VIII, 380.

[46] Ibid., p. 343.

[47] Ibid., pp. 343-344.

[48] Ibid., p. 339.

contradicting himself. For instance, in "Mechanism in Thought and Morals" (1870), he says: "I reject, therefore, the mechanical doctrine which makes me the slave of outside influences, whether it work with the logic of Edwards, or the averages of Buckle. . . ."[49] But four years later he wrote:

> In place of the question of the Deity's foreknowledge as limiting human freedom, we have under discussion the statistician's tables showing that the seeming contingencies of what we call voluntary action are so much matters of certainty that they can be confidently predicted. . . . The wind, be it not irreverently spoken, by no means literally bloweth where it listeth, but where it must. . . . The will, like the wind, is anything but free; it is so largely governed by organic conditions and surrounding circumstances that we calculate upon it as on sunrise, and all the provisions are made for its anticipated decisions. . . .[50]

He seems to have settled the problem for himself by 1880, the date of the essay on Jonathan Edwards, by coming essentially to the position Samuel Johnson took, that while all theory is in favor of determinism all experience is to the contrary. Holmes says: "In spite of the strongest-motive necessitarian doctrine, we do certainly have a feeling, amounting to a working belief, that we are free to choose before we have made our choice."[51] And he asserts that "after all the arguments of the metaphysicians, all the uniform averages of statisticians, it is just all one as to any benefit or advantage as if a real self-determining power, and real responsibility for our acts of moral choice were existent in the same manner as is vulgarly thought."[52]

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[49] Ibid., p. 303.
[50] Ibid., pp. 326-327.
[51] Ibid., p. 381.
[52] Ibid., p. 382.

This pragmatic solution of the problem of free will released Holmes from one of the hindrances to his acceptance of Darwinism that had been placed on him by his own theory of 1857. If Darwinism implied determinism, very well; we still have a working belief in our ability to choose, and that is all that matters. Holmes himself could write another novel, A Mortal Antipathy, to illustrate the limitation of the will and thus pound away once again at Calvinism, for his relativist position made it possible for him to adopt determinism on one level of thought, oppose it another.

It is significant that Holmes settled the problem of free will, as far as he was ever able to, during the decade of the 1870's; for, according to Bert J. Loewenberg,[53] 1880, or thereabout, marked the end of the "probationary" period of Darwinism in America. It also marked the end of Holmes's doubts about Darwinism. He was therefore typical of his time.

Perhaps by "bracketing," as artillery pieces do a target, we can narrow the time down to less than a decade. In 1872, Holmes took a cautious, if humorous, view of Darwinism:

> Do you [the Master] accept Mr. Darwin's notions about the origin of the race?--said I.
>
> The Master looked at me with that twinkle in his eye which means that he is going to parry a question.
>
> --Better stick to Blair's Chronology; that settles it. Adam and Eve, created Friday, October 28th, B.C.

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[53] "Darwinism Comes to America, 1859-1900," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXVIII (December, 1941), 339-368.

> 4004. You've been in a ship for a good while, and here comes Mr. Darwin on deck with an armful of sticks and says, 'Let's build a raft, and trust ourselves to that.'
> If your ship springs a leak, what would you do?
> He looked me straight in the eyes for about half a minute.--If I heard the pumps going, I'd look and see whether they were gaining on the leak or not. If they were gaining I'd stay where I was.[54]

In 1891, he came back to the same figure of the shipwreck, cautious it is true to add the qualifier "so far as it is accepted" when he spoke of Darwinism, but describing its social effects in language unlikely to occur to one who found Darwinism reprehensible.

> In due season, the growth of knowledge, chiefly under the form of that part of knowledge called science, so changes the view of the universe that many of its long-unchallenged legends become no more than nursery tales. The text-books of astronomy and geology work their way in between the questions and answers of the time-honored catechisms. The doctrine of evolution, so far as it is accepted, changes the whole relations of man to the creative power. It substitutes infinite hope in place of infinite despair for the vast majority of mankind. Instead of a shipwreck, from which a few cabin passengers and others are to be saved in the long-boat, it gives mankind a vessel built to endure the tempests, and at last to reach a port where at the worst the passengers can find rest, and where they may hope for a home better than any which they ever had in their old country.[55]

But in 1873, he said at the home of James T. Fields that "at present the Darwinian theory can be nothing but an hypothesis; the important links of proof are missing and cannot be supplied; but in the myriad ages there may be new developments."[56] Yet in 1886, he announced himself an admirer of

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[54] The Poet at the Breakfast-Table, pp. 82-83.

[55] Over the Teacups, p. 256.

[56] Annie Fields, Memories of a Hostess, ed. by M. A. DeWolfe Howe (Boston, 1922), p. 48. It must be noted that

Darwin when he wrote: "the year 1809, which introduced me to atmospheric existence, was the birth-year of Gladstone, Tennyson, Lord Houghton, and Darwin. It seems like an honor to have come into the world in such company, but it is more likely to promote humility than vanity in a common mortal to find himself coeval with such illustrious personages."[57] In his 1884 book on Emerson, Holmes finds it commendable that Emerson's poem on the worm "striving to be man" was in effect an expression of evolution:

> There is nothing more audacious in the poet's conception of the worm looking up towards humanity, than the naturalist's theory that the progenitor of the human race was an acephalous mollusk. "I will not be sworn," says Benedick, "but love may transform me to an oyster." For "love" read "science."[58]

And in 1874, in "Crime and Automatism," one of the "newer modes of thought" which he commends--which "we have to fight for or against"--is that which comprises "the iconoclastic doctrines of the evolutionists."[59]

It can be said, then, that Holmes was generally convinced of the soundness of Darwinism by 1874, for he placed it among the "newer modes of thought"[60] which he applauded, and he

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the conversation which provoked this comment had been about Agassiz's refusal to accept Darwinism. Holmes was a great admirer of Agassiz.

[57] Our Hundred Days in Europe, pp. 43-44.

[58] Works, XI, 81.

[59] Ibid., VIII, 328.

[60] These are all the changed attitudes and new ways of looking at wrong-doing that make for sympathy and understanding toward offenders rather than righteous indignation. Included are the statistical study of behavior, the study of heredity, the attempt to rehabilitate criminals--all "outgrowths of what we may call physiological psychology," which in turn is based on and is "an expansion of the doctrine of reflex action." Ibid., pp. 326-329.

agreed that one had to take a stand for or against it. He did not take a stand in "Crime and Automatism," of course, and it would not have been agreeable to his purpose in that essay to do so; but his implied stand seems clear enough. Why he did not endorse Darwinism sooner can be explained in part at least by his high opinion of Agassiz and his respect for Agassiz's scientific knowledge.[61] Furthermore, they were close personal friends and fellow members of the Saturday Club. But Agassiz died in 1873, and after that there was not even the pull of friendship to make silence discreet.

It seems reasonable to believe that by 1874 Holmes was tacitly a Darwinist. We can see how receptive he was to the theory even in 1872, when he wrote, near the end of The Poet at the Breakfast Table:

> What is the secret of the profound interest which "Darwinism" has excited in the minds and hearts of more persons than dare to confess their doubts and hopes? It is because it restores "Nature" to its place as a true divine manifestation. It is that it removes the traditional curse from that helpless infant lying in its mother's arms. It is that it lifts from the shoulders of man the responsibility for the fact of death. It is that, if it is true, woman can no longer

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[61] Holmes had praised Agassiz's concept of a static order of being on the eve of the publication of The Origin of Species. Reviewing a book on botany prepared by Asa Gray for children, he wrote: "until we had read this little child's book, 'How Plants Grow,' we had always suspected Dr. Gray of leaning towards that old error, so finely exposed by Agassiz in zoölogy [in Contributions to the Natural History of the United States (1857)], of considering genera, families, etc. as divisions made by human skill, for human convenience,--instead of as divisions belonging to the Creator's plan, as yet but partially understood by human students." "Dr. Gray's Botanical Series," Atlantic Monthly, II (1858), 384.

> be taunted with having brought down on herself the pangs which make her sex a martyrdom. If development upward is the general law of the race; if we have grown by natural evolution out of the cave-man, and even less human forms of life, we have everything to hope from the future. That the question can be discussed without offense shows that we are entering on a new era, a Revival greater than that of Letters, the Revival of Humanity.[62]

When it is considered how often Holmes himself labored to restore Nature[63] to its true place and to remove the traditional curse from the helpless infant, there can be little doubt that he is talking about his own "profound interest."[64]

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[62] Works, III, 304-305.

[63] The restorative virtue of nature is the bulwark of his thought on therapeutics. He denounced the tendency toward excessive drugging prevalent when he was in practice and, like his best teachers, insisted that to cure a patient means literally to care for him. "We who are on the side of 'Nature,'" he wrote, "please ourselves with the idea that we are in the great current in which the true intelligence of the time is moving." Works, IX, 183.

[64] It is but fair to indicate that Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. once suggested that his father was undecided about Darwinism. It will be noted, however, that the younger Holmes, writing in 1919, is referring to the period immediately following the publication of The Origin of Species, not the 1870's. The passage, from a letter written by the son to Morris R. Cohen, is here given as an example of the difference in outlook of the two generations and also as an indication of the open-mindedness of the elder Holmes.

"My father was brought up scientifically--i.e. he studied medicine in France--and I was not. Yet there was with him as with the rest of his generation a certain softness of attitude toward the interstitial miracle--the phenomenon without phenomenonal antecedents, that I did not feel. The difference was in the air, although perhaps only the few of my time felt it. The Origin of Species I think came out while I was in college--H. Spencer had announced his intention to put the universe into our pockets--I hadn't read either of them to be sure, but as I say it was in the air. I did read Buckle--now almost forgotten--but making a noise in his day. . . . Probably a sceptical temperament that I got from my mother had something to do with my way of thinking. . . . Of course my father was by no means orthodox, but

It seems likely, then, that though Holmes did not accept Darwinism complacently he did, nevertheless, accept it in the long run.[65] Several elements conspired to bring him to the point of acceptance about the year 1874. From his earliest speculations on evolution he had long ago arrived at a point of view that did not prohibit his seeing the reasonableness of some sort of evolutionary theory. Yet the very theory he had himself constructed imposed the problem of free will which first had to be got around. That once accomplished by pragmatic relativism, the implied determinism of Darwinism was no longer a stumbling block. The very fact that Darwinism was the direction toward which biological science was heading was enough to make Holmes, who prided himself on his scientific modernity, take serious stock of his beliefs. Yet heredity meant a great deal to him. If he ever questioned the environmental basis of Dar-

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like other even lax Unitarians there were questions that he didn't like to have asked--and he always spoke of keeping his mind open on matters like spiritualism or whether Bacon wrote Shakespeare--so that when I wanted to be disagreeable I told him that he straddled, in order to be able to say, whatever might be accepted, well I always have recognized etc., which was not just on my part." Felix S. Cohen, "The Holmes-Cohen Correspondence," Journal of the History of Ideas, IX (January, 1948), 14-15.

[65] Holmes's acceptance of Darwinism ought not to be pushed beyond its importance to his personal thought. In his Boston University dissertation, "Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Genesis of Naturalism" (1951), Arthur Kreisman has argued that Holmes "acted as one of the indigenous sources for the early and widespread dissemination of philosophic naturalism" (p. 1). This is an ingenious theory, and, in view of the close relationship between Darwin and naturalism, it is a theory worthy of investigation. Mr. Kreisman, however, fails to convince that Holmes had any such widespread influence.

winism, that ceased to be an impediment once he himself began using environmental arguments to support his relativist contention of limited responsibility on one level of thought. And it is further worth noting that in the 1870's the doctrine of evolution began taking on the hereditary overtones that were later to distinguish it--Galton's Hereditary Genius appeared in 1869 and Dugdale's The Jukes in 1877, though not until De Vries's announcement of his observations on mutation in 1900 was it fully evident that the basic Darwinian environmental premise would have to be scrapped. The fact still remains, however, that until the early 1870's there is insufficient evidence in Holmes's writings to place him definitely on the side of Darwin, though he was undoubtedly open-minded about the theory some years before that.

Chapter VI

Holmes: The Circumference of Heredity

Darwin's theory of evolution might satisfactorily explain how man got placed on this globe, but it did not explain why he was placed here, nor did it explain how he came to be the self-contradictory creature that he is. There are questions perhaps for which we cannot expect to find answers. Hawthorne said, jokingly no doubt, that he intended to inquire in a future state of existence why the monkey had been made to resemble man. Holmes, too, had questions which he knew could not be answered in this world, but he was confident that in another world, "if the ways of the Supreme Being are ever really to be 'justified to men,' . . . every human being may expect an exhaustive explanation of himself."[1] Holmes wrote these words when he was 81 years old. The volume in which he wrote them is generally conceded to be one of his weakest books, as well it might be considering the age of its author; but this was the last book he published before his death in 1894, and the ideas of any man who has lived so long deserve respectful attention.

One of the questions that troubled Holmes in Over the Teacups was a question he had raised twenty years earlier in

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[1] Over the Teacups, Works, IV, 312.

his poem "Dorothy Q" when he addressed the portrait of his great-grandmother as follows:

> What if a hundred years ago
> Those close-shut lips had answered No,
> When forth the tremulous question came
> That cost the maiden her Norman name,
> And under the folds that look so still
> The bodice swelled with the bosom's thrill?
> Should I be I, or would it be
> One tenth another, to nine tenths me?[2]

Like the great problem of free will, the problem of heredity, which is a corollary to it, could have no final answers. Once the genetic make-up was established, the human personality that resulted was to a large extent fixed and incapable of being changed; given a different genetic constitution, presumably there would have resulted a different personality. The consequences were open to study; the causes were beyond comprehension.

Assuming that we do have a working belief in our own responsibility, still we can know ourselves only as the end product of the hereditary process--we cannot know ourselves as the resultant of all the antecedents that made us. Man "himself is unconscious of the agencies which made him what he is. Self-determining he may be, if you will, but who determines the self which is the proximate source of the determination? Why was the A self like his good uncle in bodily aspect and mental and moral qualities, and the B self like the bad uncle in look and character?"[3] To Holmes, these are

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[2] Works, XIII, 48-49.

[3] Over the Teacups, pp. 312-313.

great abiding questions, questions that cannot be answered in this world, but, "if the Allwise wishes to satisfy his reasonable and reasoning creatures, it will not be by a display of elemental convulsions, but by the still small voice, which treats him as a dependent entitled to know the meaning of his existence. . . ."[4]

Since what man is "by nature is not determined by himself, but by his parentage,"[5] Holmes, as a student of human nature both in his professional capacity as physician and in his avocation as novelist, does what he can to promote understanding of how man is so determined. Thus the Professor in Elsie Venner, like Holmes himself, advises his student to avoid bad people if he can, tie them hand and foot if it is necessary to prevent their doing violence, but above all to "contemplate them charitably, remembering that nine tenths of their perversity comes from outside influences, drunken ancestors, abuse in childhood, bad company, from which you have happily been preserved, and for some of which you, as a member of society, may be fractionally responsible."[6] As there are physical anomalies born into the world from time to time--their origin apparently the obscure result of a poor heredity--so we can expect that there will be moral anomalies, apparently the result of similar causes. When you are confronted by a moral monster, says the Master in The Poet at

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[4] Ibid., p. 313.

[5] Ibid., p. 256.

[6] Works, V, 228.

the Breakfast-Table, "I say hang him and welcome, if that is the best thing for society; hate him, in a certain sense, as you hate a rattlesnake, but, if you pretend to be a philosopher, recognize the fact that what you hate in him is chiefly misfortune, and that if you had been born with his villanous [sic] low forehead and poisoned instincts, and bred among creatures of the Races Maudites whose natural history has to be studied like that of beasts of prey and vermin, you would not have been sitting there in your gold-bowed spectacles and passing judgment on the peccadilloes of your fellow-creatures."[7]

If an awareness of hereditary perversity can make us passively sympathetic with wrong-doers and cause us to accept philosophically the evil we find in the world, it can also have certain more active values. To the physician, Holmes believed, a knowledge of hereditary peculiarities within a family is of the greatest importance. In his later years he liked to make fun of excessively narrow specialists such as the Scarabee in The Poet at the Breakfast-Table, a student of insects who refused to attach to himself so wide-ranging a term as entomologist, or even Coleopterist, but thought he might best be described as a Scarabeeist, because he restricted his study to the genus Scarabaeus, the beetles. Holmes believed all the sciences were becoming too narrowly specialized, medicine among them. "The 'old-fogy'

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[7] Ibid., III, 226.

doctor, who knows the family tendencies of his patient, who 'understands his constitution,' will often treat him better than the famous specialist, who sees him for the first time, and has to guess at many things 'the old doctor' knows from his previous experience with the same patient and the family to which he belongs."[8]

One of the places where Holmes uses this idea in fiction most effectively is in The Guardian Angel, to establish Myrtle Hazard's likelihood of going into "brain fever." Myrtle's physician, Dr. Fordyce Hurlbut, thinks she is in little danger, but his ninety-two year old father, Dr. Lemuel Hurlbut, though he knows the old Withers stock has a good constitution, remembers that Myrtle's ancestors were likely to be of a nervous temperament, especially on her mother's side. When he looks at Myrtle in her coma he says:

> "I've seen that look on another face of the same blood,--it's a great many years ago, and she was dead before you were born, my boy,--but I've seen that look, and it meant trouble then, and I'm afraid it means trouble now. I see some danger of a brain fever. And if she doesn't have that, then look out for some hysteric fits that will make mischief. . . . Live folks are only dead folks warmed over. I can see 'em all in that girl's face. ...
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> "Four generations--four generations, man and wife,--yes, five generations, for old Selah Withers took me in his arms when I was a child, and called me 'little gal,' for I was in girl's clothes,--five generations before this Hazard child I've looked on with these old eyes. And it seems to me that I can see something of almost every one of 'em in this child's face,--it's the forehead of this one, and it's the eyes of that one, and it's

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[8] Over the Teacups, p. 130.

> that other's mouth, and the look that I remember in another, and when she speaks, why, I've heard that same voice before. . . ."[9]

And he treats her according to his knowledge of her ancestry.

In addition to its value in medicine, heredity also has other positive contributions. For one thing, longevity, barring accidental death, is largely the result of heredity. If you would live to be "a last leaf" like Major Melville, "the first thing to be done is, some years before birth, to advertise for a couple of parents both belonging to long-lived families. Especially let the mother come of a race in which octogenarians and nonagenarians are very common phenomena."[10]

Further, whole complexes of desirable traits and abilities, Holmes believed, may be passed on by heredity. The Brahmin Caste of New England, which he described and named, is characterized not only by its intellectual ability but by its distinctive physical appearance as well; "by the repetition of the same influences, generation after generation, it has acquired a distinct organization and physiognomy, which not to recognize is mere stupidity. . . ."[11] This "race" of scholars, whose aptitude for study is "congenital and hereditary"[12] is to be recognized typically as a youth whose "face is smooth, and apt to be pallid,--his features are reg-

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[9] Works, VI, 128-129. See also Elsie Venner, pp. 319-326, where Dr. Kittredge expresses much the same view.

[10] Over the Teacups, p. 181.

[11] Elsie Venner, Works, V, 3. [12] Ibid., p. 4.

ular and of a certain delicacy,--his eye is bright and quick,--his lips play over the thought he utters as a pianist's fingers dance over their music,--and his whole air, though it may be timid, and even awkward, has nothing clownish."[13] It may be that notions of republicanism are not compatible with the concept of an intellectual elite,[14] but "republicanism doesn't alter the laws of physiology. We have a native aristocracy, a superior race, just as plainly marked by nature as of a higher and finer grade than the common run of people as the white pine is marked in its form, its stature, its bark, its delicate foliage. . . [from] the pitch pine, stubbed, rough, coarse-haired. . . ."[15]

Yet Holmes does not get so carried away by the Brahmins that he believes such an hereditary group continually perpetuates itself to the exclusion of all others. He recognizes that occasionally an outsider is capable of out-Brahmining the Brahmins themselves. But even when this happens, it too is the result of a fortunate hereditary accident; "a series of felicitous crosses develops an improved strain of blood, and reaches its maximum perfection at last in the large uncombed youth who goes to college and startles the

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[13] Ibid., p. 3.

[14] Holmes had to fend off criticism of his Brahmins. To one "critic in ground-glass spectacles" who had confounded them with the moneyed aristocracy he made the reply that they are "very commonly pallid, undervitalized, shy, sensitive creatures, whose only birthright is an aptitude for learning" (Works, VIII, 9).

[15] The Poet at the Breakfast-Table, p. 276. This is the Master speaking, one of Holmes's many alter egos.

hereditary class-leaders by striding past them all."[16] His gifts may be permanent and capable of being passed on to his descendants. He is, in other words, to use a term not yet invented when Holmes wrote, a biological sport or a mutation, like the Morgan horse. Though Holmes is aware of the existence of valuable mutants (he mentions the variety of apple, the Northern Spy, which seemingly sprang from nowhere), he nevertheless believes that in the long run it is the old and long-established strains which produce the best fruit. When a large uncombed youth appears to stride past the Brahmins "that is Nature's republicanism; thank God for it, but do not let it make you illogical."[17]

Such hereditarian conservatism is a foundation for nearly every one of Holmes's biological sketches of his friends, the most notable of which is that of Emerson, the Brahmin of Brahmins. The rationalist Holmes could have little real sympathy for Emerson's transcendentalism, but he did respect Emerson's intellectual integrity, and he labored mightily to explain the complex personality that he recognized Emerson to be.

It was Holmes who first emphasized the seven generations of clerical ancestry of which Emerson was the culmination. He was not ignorant of the dangers of pushing an heredity thesis too far. "A genealogical table," he wrote, "is very apt to illustrate the 'survival of the fittest,'--in the estimate of the descendants. It is inclined to remember and

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[16] Elsie Venner, p. 5. [17] Ibid.

record those ancestors who do most honor to the living heirs of the family name and traditions."[18] Nor did he emphasize the effect of heredity at the expense of a beneficent environment in accounting for Emerson's ability: "The nest is made ready long beforehand for the bird which is to be bred in it and to fly from it. The intellectual atmosphere into which a scholar is born, and from which he draws the breath of his early mental life, must be studied if we could hope to understand him thoroughly."[19]

Holmes's method of getting his biography under way, then, is to give brief sketches of the temperaments and accomplishments of all of Emerson's ancestors about whom he can find reliable information. On the basis of this information he concludes that "so far as hereditary and family influences can account for the character and intellect of Ralph Waldo Emerson, we could hardly ask for a better inborn inheritance, or better counsels and examples."[20] He quite naturally places the Emerson family among those "Academic Races" that he had already called the Brahmin Caste.

Holmes was, however, undecided about how many intellectual characteristics could be attributed to strict heredi-

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[18] Ralph Waldo Emerson (1884), Works, XI, 2-3.

[19] Ibid., p. 19. Holmes accounted for himself in the same manner; he had, he said, "a right to be grateful for a probable inheritance of good instincts, a good name, and a bringing up in a library where he bumped about among books from the time he was hardly taller than one of his father's or grandfather's folios." Morse, op. cit., I, 17.

[20] Works, XI, 14.

tary origins. He was willing to allow that "if the ideas of parents survive as impressions or tendencies in their descendants, no man had a better right to an inheritance of theological instincts than this representative of a long line of ministers."[21] And he thought it was likely that "the same trains of thought and feeling might naturally gain in force from another association of near family relationship, though not of blood."[22] But he seriously doubted that ideas could be literally inherited. Much as he admired the poetry of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, he could not resist parodying its title as "Gaspings for Immortality."[23] In the Emerson biography he says of this poem and of Emerson's comment on it, "these are beautiful fancies, but the philosopher will naturally ask the poet what are the truths which the child has lost between its cradle and the age of eight years. . . ?"[24] Actually, Holmes says, "the cloud of glory which the babe brings with it into the world is a good set of instincts, which dispose it to accept moral and intellectual truths,--not the truths themselves."[25] Therefore, he concludes that Emerson's belief in this kind of intuitive knowledge leads him to such mystical excesses as "Brahma," a poem which to "the average Western mind. . . is the nearest approach to a Torricellian vacuum of intelligibility that language can pump out of itself."[26]

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[21] Ibid., p. 11.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Works, IV, 88.

[24] Emerson, p. 303.

[25] Ibid., p. 304.

[26] Ibid., p. 307.

On the other hand, when he wrote about Jonathan Edwards (1880) he was willing to believe that "we can in part account for what he was when we remember his natural inherited instincts, his training, his faith, and the conditions by which he was surrounded. His ancestors had fed on sermons so long that he must have been born with Scriptural texts lying latent in his embryonic thinking-marrow, like the undeveloped picture in a film of collodion,"[27] thus turning the weapon of heredity against Edwards's own predestinarian Calvinism.

Actually, when his passions are not aroused as they are in the essay on Edwards, Holmes is very careful to attribute no more to heredity than a predisposition for the acquisition of knowledge. "That the organ of the mind brings with it inherited aptitudes," he says in the Emerson biography, "is a

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[27] Works, VIII, 366-367. The problem of the extent to which ideas are inherited was more important in the latter part of the last century than it is today. Mark Twain, for instance, speaking far more emphatically, said that we are "the tail end of a tapeworm of eternity of ancestors extending in linked procession back and back and back--to our source in the monkeys, with this so-called individualism of ours a decayed and rancid mush of inherited instincts and teachings derived, atom by atom, stench by stench, from the entire line of that sorry column, and not so much new and original matter in it as you could balance on a needle point and examine under a microscope." Mark Twain's Autobiography, ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine (New York, 1924), II, 9. H. H. Waggoner, "Science in the Thought of Mark Twain," American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 357-370, explains Twain's attitude as one which holds that "the mind comes into the world like a blank tablet--what the mind will become depends solely on the stimuli to which its inherited patterns are subjected." The problem came especially into prominence after the doctrine of evolution became widespread, but it probably owes less to Darwin than to Spencer, whose theory of social evolution presupposed that children inherit the level of culture attained by their parents. See Bury, The Idea of Progress, pp. 241-242.

simple matter of observation. That it inherits truths is a different proposition. The eye does not bring landscapes into the world on its retina,--why should the brain bring thoughts?"[28] These aptitudes make genius possible, but they do not assure it. As he said of Thoreau, quoting E. P. Whipple, "Some traits of his mind and character may be traced back to his ancestors, but what doctrine of heredity can give us the genesis of his genius?"[29] In the final analysis there is no accounting for genius, and whatever Holmes's quibbles over Emerson's intuitive notions he did appreciate that the man was a genius. This is the last of the four elements which he had said at the outset of the biography we should wish to know about the subject: "We wish to know of what race he came, what were the conditions into which he was born, what educational and social influences helped to mould his character, and what new elements Nature added to make him Ralph Waldo Emerson."[30] We can know these new elements; we cannot explain them.

On the purely physical level, Holmes, as a physician, can speak of heredity with considerably more authority. Thus he tells one of his audiences at the Massachusetts Medical Society that "there are two opposite movements of life to be seen in cities and elsewhere, belonging to races which, from various persistent causes, are breeding down and tend-

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[28] *Works*, XI, 303.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 301.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 1.

ing to run out, and to races which are breeding up, or accumulating vital capital,--a descending and an ascending series."[31] His recognition of biological degeneration[32] led him almost to the hard-hearted point of view of eugenicist Francis Galton. Holmes, however, did not advocate that the unfit should be prevented from breeding, because he thought man need not interfere where nature was already doing well enough by herself. "No doubt there are many individuals, and some families, that would do best to let their infirmities die with them, rather than add them to the already sufficiently ample stock belonging to the race," he said. "Un-

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[31] "Currents and Counter-Currents in Medical Science" (1860), in Medical Essays, Works, IX, 198. Here as elsewhere, Holmes uses the word "race" to mean family. He had very little to say about races as ethnic groups. He did imply that he found it difficult to be sympathetic with Jews (Over the Teacups, pp. 193-199) because he "grew up inheriting the traditional idea that they were a race lying under a curse for their obstinacy in refusing the gospel," an attitude which he acknowledged to be bad, and which he hoped his Christian charity had helped him overcome. But he thinks of Jews primarily as a religious group rather than a race. One reason he could not be an ardent abolitionist was that as late as 1855, but before Darwin's Origin of Species, he had no doubt that the white race was superior to the Negro: "The Creator has hung out the colors that form the two rallying points, so that they shall be unmistakable, eternal; nay, there is hardly a single sense that does not bear witness to the ineffaceable distinction of blood, only prevented from producing open opposition by the unchallenged supremacy of the higher of the two races." New England Society Orations (New York, 1901), II, 298-299. Holmes did not republish this speech. For his complete defense of his lukewarm interest in abolition, see his letter to James Russell Lowell (November 29, 1846) in Morse, Life and Letters, I, 295-303.

[32] See Holmes's reference to the Jukes family in "Crime and Automatism": "If genius and talent are inherited, as Mr. Galton has so conclusively shown. . . why should not deep-rooted moral defects and obliquities show themselves, as well as other qualities, in the descendants of moral monsters?" Works, VIII, 343-344.

fortunately, they do not commonly think so, and nature has at last to interfere with the gentle violence of what we call disease, but which is often a mere incapacity for living."[33] Yet there is hope even for these, for "infirmities may be bred out of a race by fortunate alliances and improved conditions. . . ."[34]

Such opinions seem to imply that Holmes sometimes accepted the popular idea of acquired characters as susceptible of hereditary transmission. We have already seen that in his novel A Mortal Antipathy, at any rate, a characteristic acquired by the father is not passed on to the son. In other places he seems to suggest the opposite. For example, speaking of Emerson's habitual facial expression, he says that he had a "look of refinement, centring about the lips, which is rarely found in the male New Englander, unless the family features have been for two or three cultivated generations the battle-field and the playground of varied thoughts and complex emotions as well as the sensuous and nutritive port of entry."[35] Since acquired characters are vaguely handled by both Darwin and Galton, it is not surprising that Holmes had no clear-cut answer to the problem they raise.

Now, in view of the ways Holmes used heredity that have been shown in the previous two chapters, and the limitations

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[33] "The Human Body and Its Management," Works, VIII, 205.

[34] Ibid. [35] Works, XI, 278.

and problems suggested by it as shown in this chapter, it is time to try to articulate a theory of heredity from the hints and implications dropped throughout his writings.

Holmes's purpose in using heredity, especially in his fiction, is very different from Hawthorne's. He does not use it as moral symbol, as Hawthorne does, though he does sometimes use it, as we shall see Howells doing, for the purpose of showing the physical appearance of a character--for example, Myrtle Hazard--but this is relatively minor. His principal reason for invoking heredity at all is the philosophical one of showing restriction of personal responsibility, thus to encourage humanitarian treatment of social misfits.

To do this he readily draws on the Darwinian idea of latent heredity (which is also accepted by Galton in Natural Inheritance), as in the following passage where Myrtle Hazard's destiny is foreshadowed:

> The instincts and qualities belonging to the ancestral traits which predominated in the conflict of mingled lives lay in this child in embryo, waiting to come to maturity. It was as when several grafts, bearing fruit that ripens at different times, are growing upon the same stock. Her earlier impulses may have been derived directly from her father and mother, but all the ancestors who have been mentioned, and more or less obscurely many others, came uppermost in their time, before the absolute and total result of their several forces had found its equilibrium in the character by which she was to be known as an individual. These inherited impulses were therefore many, conflicting, some of them dangerous.[36]

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[36] The Guardian Angel, pp. 26-27.

This image of fruit ripening at different times upon one tree is Holmes's favorite representation of latent heredity.[37] He expressed it even more forcefully in The Poet at the Breakfast-Table, where he wrote:

> You have seen a tree with different grafts upon it, an apple or a pear tree we will say. . . . It is the same thing with ourselves, but it takes us a long while to find it out. The various inherited instincts ripen in succession. You may be nine tenths paternal at one period of your life, and nine tenths maternal at another. All at once the traits of some immediate ancestor may come to maturity unexpectedly on one of the branches of your character, just as your features at different periods of your life betray different resemblances to your nearer or more remote relatives.[38]

Myrtle's latent psychic traits appear as units similar to the blocks in which Holmes believed physical traits appear.[39] At different times there come uppermost in her mind such instincts as a desire to be a captivating beauty like her great-grandmother Judith Pride; to revert to the character of

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[37]His opinion on this was somewhat in advance of Galton's and nearer Mendel's. "Galton believed that every individual is influenced, in a greater or less degree, by all his ancestors, so that no ancestor can reappear pure in any descendant. According to Mendel, however, the characters of the parents are combined in the descendants, but do not fuse, so that they exist there side by side, and can separate again in future generations. No fusion of characters takes place, and hence the ancestor can reappear unadulterated in one of his descendants." Rádl, History of Biological Theories, pp. 338-339.

[38]Works, III, 165-166. It will be noted that this is not atavism. An atavistic trait is present from birth; latent traits appear during maturation--as for example, song in birds. Darwin and Galton, however, both held that when latent traits do appear they then remain fixed.

[39]Of physical traits: "Thus, at one moment we detect the look, at another the tone of voice, at another some characteristic movement of this or that ancestor, in our relations or others." The Guardian Angel, p. 22. For another striking example see Elsie Venner, p. 271.

her grandmother Virginia Wild and stab, or perhaps scalp, a schoolmate; and at other times to resist tyranny as her remote ancestor, the sixteenth-century Ann Holyoake, had done. In the end, when all these conflicting impulses have found their equilibrium, she does not exactly resemble any of these women but is rather a wholly distinct personality combining the best qualities of each.

We have already seen in a passage quoted early in the first chapter of this section on Holmes that he recognized what Galton called "blended inheritance."[40] To Galton blended inheritance meant characteristics which so perfectly submerge themselves in each other that their distinctiveness is soon lost in the line of descent and can never be recovered pure.[41] Holmes, however, insists that the blend comes within the individual when, through maturation, all the warring hereditary elements at last reach a state of peace with each other and "the force of two natures is represented in the derivative one by a diagonal of greater value than either original line of living movement. . . ."[42] This

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[40] See above, p. 115.

[41] See Natural Inheritance (London, 1889), pp. 12-13.

[42] The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, p. 68. This diagonal movement of descent, or resultant of heredity, harks back to Holmes's 1857 essay, "The Mechanism of Vital Actions." There, as we have seen in the previous chapter, he lets the hereditary continuity of species be represented as a resultant of two vector forces working at right angles to each other, a general organizing principle and a local determining one. The diagonal movement here is an elaboration on the earlier idea.

new diagonal can in turn be represented again in the descendants. But just how this happens is a mystery.

> Inherited qualities move along their several paths not unlike the pieces in the game of chess. Sometimes the character of the son can be traced directly to that of the father or of the mother, as the pawn's move carries him from one square to the next. Sometimes a series of distinguished fathers follows in a line, or a succession of superior mothers, as the black or white bishop sweeps the board on his own color. Sometimes the distinguishing characters pass from one sex to the other indifferently, as the castle strides over the black and white squares. Sometimes an uncle or aunt lives over again in a nephew or niece, as if the knight's move were repeated on the squares of human individuality.[43]

As Holmes sees the mechanism of heredity, both physical and psychic characteristics combine into blocks of traits, these traits often appearing at different intervals in a person's life.[44] He is never precise about these terms, but

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The idea in itself is not original with Holmes. "According to Galton, who in this respect was only expressing the views of his time, the characteristics of the parents have a resultant effect on the descendant, like that of two forces working simultaneously on one body. The result is uniform, and nobody could resolve it into its components unless he knew the nature of those components from some other source." Rádl, History of Biological Theories, p. 338. Holmes differs from Galton to this extent: as he uses heredity in The Guardian Angel and elsewhere, characteristics not only reappear pure but it seems almost as though an ancestor is reliving his life in the body of his descendant.

[43] Ralph Waldo Emerson, Works, XI, 3-4.

[44] Without suggesting any direct influence one way or the other, it may be remarked that Emerson's idea of heredity, though never worked out so carefully, was astonishingly similar to Holmes's. In his essay "Fate" he wrote: "It often appears in a family as if all the qualities of the progenitors were potted in several jars,--some ruling quality in each son or daughter of the house: and sometimes the unmixed temperament, the rank unmitigated elixir, the family vice is drawn off in a separate individual and the others are proportionally relieved. We sometimes see a change of ex-

one comes to understand that when he speaks of instincts he means psychic traits. On its lowest, most mechanical level, an instinct is identical with a reflex action. When we say that human beings have an instinct for self-preservation we mean that when they are confronted by dangers their sub-volitional reflex arcs go into action to remove them, automatically, without conscious thought, from the danger. If one's finger accidentally touches the sharp point of a needle he does not have to think to pull his finger away, his spinal cord and muscles do it for him. From this simple fact Holmes evolves an elaborate theory of other acts and reactions as due to the same or a similar process. As we have seen, he maintains that criminal and other anti-social acts are reflex actions taking place in a "higher sphere"--in both the act of avoiding pain and the act for which society condemns a criminal a movement has taken place without the volition of the subject being engaged, though as regards the second he can offer no precise explanation because a Marshall Hall has not yet studied reflex actions in the moral sphere.

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pression in our companion and say his father or his mother comes to the windows of his eyes, and sometimes a remote relative. In different hours a man represents each of several of his ancestors, as if there were seven or eight of us rolled up in each man's skin" (Emerson: Representative Selections, p. 320). He also uses Holmes's figure of a fruit tree, applying it to Holmes's development: "Holmes came out late in life with a strong sustained growth for two or three years, like old pear trees which have done nothing for ten years, and at last begin and grow great. The Lowells came forward slowly, and Henry Thoreau remarks that men may have two growths like pears." The Heart of Emerson's Journals (Bliss Perry ed.), p. 291.

Reflex actions, whether on a simple physical level or the more complicated moral one, result apparently from the inherited organization of the individual. They can be socially good, or socially bad; but in either event, the person possessing them is not personally responsible for what he has inherited, and he can do nothing to change it.[45] Certainly, he believes, "the misfortune of perverse instincts, which adhere to us as congenital inheritances, should go to our side of the account, if the books of heaven are kept, as the great Church of Christendom maintains they are, by double entry."[46] He wholly approves, then, that Prosper Despine, in Psychologie Naturelle, "substitutes mental automatic action for exercise of the will in the very cases commonly thought to involve the largest amount of responsibility. . . the unfortunate subject of moral idiocy is just as innocently acting out the tendencies he inherits as the rattlesnake. . . ."[47]

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[45]Holmes recognized that this theory carried to its logical conclusion made praise meaningless. Writing to John Lothrop Motley to congratulate him on his publication of The Rise of the Dutch Republic he said (1874): "Our self-determination is, I suspect, much more limited than we are in the habit of considering it. Schopenhauer says that if a cannon-ball in its flight suddenly became conscious, it would think it was moving of its own free-will." Realizing this was hardly the way to commend a man who thought he had been prodding himself through years of tedious scholarship, Holmes went on to turn determinism to his own advantage: "I must not let my metaphysics take away the merit of your labors, but still I think you were in a certain sense predestined and forced by some mysterious and irresistible impulse to give Holland a history, and make yourself a name in the world of letters." Morse, op. cit., II, 206-207.

[46]"Mechanism in Thought and Morals," Works, VIII, 304-305.

[47]"Crime and Automatism," Works, VIII, 336.

Holmes is never so explicit about good instincts, for he is not concerned to justify inherited good tendencies. When he speaks of the heredity of Bernard Langdon, the hero of Elsie Venner, he attributes Bernard's ability to the "Brahmin blood which came from his grandfather," and to that from his grandmother, who was a Wentworth, a strain of blood "which had. . . generous elements mingled with it," and to that from his mother, "a direct descendant of the old Flynt family, well known by the famous tutor, Henry Flynt."[48] Bernard's father is a man of no distinction, a member of the "slack-water gentry." We notice from this that Holmes does not attribute a mathematically exact portion of one's hereditary make-up to particular ancestors. In The Guardian Angel, for example, the growing Myrtle Hazard is at one period of her life as greatly influenced by the sixteenth-century martyr as she is by her grandmother; and in the end, when her character has become fixed, she is a blend of all the good qualities of her ancestors, with the addition of whatever increment it is that makes her distinctively herself. "Two and two do not always make four, in this matter of hereditary descent of qualities. Sometimes they make three, and sometimes five."[49] A "Note by the Friend," which

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[48] Works, V, 27-28. Henry Flynt, Fellow and Tutor of Harvard College, 1699-1754, was an unimpeachable ancestral relative to give Bernard, for he was an ornament on Holmes's own family tree. He was the bachelor uncle of Dorothy Quincy, Holmes's great-grandmother. See Over the Teacups, p. 1.

[49] The Professor at the Breakfast-Table, p. 68.

gives a rationalistic explanation of Myrtle Hazard's visions, says that "the lives of our progenitors are, as we know, reproduced in different proportions in ourselves." It goes on to summarize tersely Holmes's theory of heredity: "many of those whose blood flows in our veins struggle for the mastery, and by and by one or more get the predominance, so that we grow to be like father, or mother, or remoter ancestor, or two or more are blended in us, not to the exclusion, however, it must be understood, of a special personality of our own, about which these others are grouped."[50]

The conclusion to be drawn from such a theory of heredity is the one that Holmes never tired of drawing. "Independently of any possible scientific value," says the "Note by the Friend," this view of human nature is important because it "is not sufficiently weighed by most moralists."[51] To some extent we are free; "God lets me move my limbs--these he would trust me with," he wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe. "But he shut my heart and my breathing organs and all the wondrous mechanisms by which I live, in a casket beyond my rash meddling, of which he keeps the key." Likewise,

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[50] The Guardian Angel, p. 94. Here Holmes differs markedly from Galton. Galton held that "all characters merely represent quantitative deviations from some mean value, and that, in any cross, these will be combined in the descendant according to the mathematical theory of probability. Calculations into which we need not enter led him to the conclusion that the descendant always inherits a quarter of his characteristics from each parent, one-sixteenth from each grandparent, one-sixty-fourth from each great-grandparent, and so on." Rádl, op. cit., p. 336.

[51] Ibid.

as Holmes had argued so eloquently elsewhere, God has provided each of us with hereditary instincts, sealed up beyond our meddling in the same casket. Since it is God who has so endowed us, surely he will not condemn the least of his heirs for the inheritance he has given them--"I know that he has entrusted me with many precious interests which I can use well or ill; but I will not believe that he has ever trusted the immortal destiny of my soul out of his own hands."[52]

Heredity could explain only so much, and no more. Evolution could not explain why man is here; heredity could not entirely account for his nature. To the extent that he could formulate a theory of heredity, Holmes could make use of his theory to justify his deep-seated humanitarian aims for the improvement of society's treatment of unfortunates; but, practical man of common sense that he was, he held himself and his fellow Brahmins accountable for the use or disuse of the talents God had given them.

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[52]Quoted by Morse, op. cit., II, 252.

Chapter VII

Howells: Science and Criticism

Taking Hawthorne as a representative of the folk wisdom of heredity, of heredity relatively uninfluenced by exact science, and taking Holmes as a representative of scientific knowledge of heredity, especially of heredity in the light of Darwinian evolution, we still need to measure our findings against some neutral standard, to have, in the methodology of science, some "control" as a basis for judgment. William Dean Howells, who was born in the year Hawthorne's first important book, Twice-Told Tales, was published (1837) and became an assistant editor of the Atlantic Monthly a year previous to the publication of Holmes's The Guardian Angel in that magazine (1867), will serve admirably as this control.

Howells's most important novels, beginning with A Chance Acquaintance (1873), all appeared after the Darwinian controversy had lost most of its force; all were written under the Darwinian dispensation and at a time when Darwinism was less a subject for controversy than an element of common knowledge. Howells was personally acquainted with Holmes and lived beside him (1884-88) on Beacon Street in Boston. Howells was even more intimately acquainted with John Fiske, the celebrated popularizer of Darwin, and invited his contributions to the Atlantic. But at the same time Howells did not have Holmes's professional training in science, and he

lacked Holmes's keen interest in it. He was, like Hawthorne, a professional man of letters and a sensitive barometer to the intellectual pressures of his time. A careful study of heredity in some of his major works ought to throw the thought of both Hawthorne and Holmes into clear perspective, as well as contribute toward a better understanding of Howells himself.

Both as a novelist and as a critic, Howells passed through periods of genetic development.[1] It is, however, Howells from about 1867 (the year he met Fiske) to 1904 (the date of publication of The Son of Royal Langbrith) that is of most concern here. For purposes of contrast, it will not be necessary to study even this portion of Howells's career exhaustively; no attempt will be made to touch on everything he wrote. He lived on until 1920, the honored Dean of American Letters, but his work in the latter period, so far as ideas are concerned, added little to what he had accomplished before. While there are shifts of emphases in his novels of the period of thirty-odd years here considered,[2] his funda-

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[1] "Intensive study" of Howells's thought "would show four significant periods through which his mind passed: an early one of romantic melancholy and sensibility; a second one of maturing talent and command of the resources of the novelist which culminated with his first devotion to realism; the soul-stirring conversion to Tolstoian attitudes toward religion, society, and art; the final slackening of idealism and withdrawal toward comfort and convention which comes to most men in old age." Edwin Harrison Cady, The Gentleman in America (Syracuse, 1949), p. 200.

[2] "He found a convenient home in the 'social novel' where he lived for about ten years, writing the novels on which his fame largely rests. . . . By the end of this decade [the

mental ideas are sufficiently uniform to permit the treatment of his work in a logical rather than chronological order.

Logically, then, Howells may best be approached in his capacity as practicing novelist, one of the most comprehensive novelists of his time, and in his capacity as literary critic, both as a commentator on the writing of others and as a theorist for the realist school of fiction which he more than any one else has come to represent.[3]

In his voluminous magazine reviewing, Howells often liked to compare the function of the literary critic with that of the botanist. Even though he sometimes forgot his own rule against evaluation (as when he once absently suggested that three-fifths of the classics ought to be forgotten[4]), he thought it the function of the critic to classify,

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1880's] he again abandoned this home for a much less lasting abode, borrowed from [Edward] Bellamy, in which he housed A Traveler from Altruria (1894), and Through the Eye of a Needle (1907). Having expressed in these two 'romances,' as he carefully subtitles them, his ideas of social right and wrong as completely as he was ever to express them, Howells moved back into the home which he had enjoyed in his first days of novel writing, that of the psychological novel, and here, in fact, he lived very comfortably until his death. . . ." Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk, William Dean Howells: Representative Selections (New York, 1950), p. xcii.

[3]Howells's theory of realism may be conveniently studied in E. S. Carter, "William Dean Howells' Theory of Critical Realism," ELH, XVI (June, 1949), 151-166, and his Howells and the Age of Realism (Philadelphia, 1954); and also in Kirk and Kirk, American Writers Series Howells, pp. cxxxi-clxvii. For qualifications of the view of Howells as thorough-going realist, see Louis J. Budd, "W. D. Howells' Defense of the Romance," PMLA, LXVII (March, 1952), 32-42.

[4]This was in connection with romantic classics, particularly the writing of Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens; for, he

to order, to recognize the genus of a book, and to assign it to its proper species.[5] Some such taxonomic cast of mind probably is necessary equipment also for a novelist; for a novelist's study is people, and even a Howellsian realist, though he will avoid casting his characters as types, nevertheless must have fundamental conclusions about the forces that govern human motivation. Since Howells defined realism once as "fidelity to experience and probability of motive,"[6] we may justly ask how he meant motive to be understood. Assuming that he as accurately portrayed the choices and decisions human beings are called on to make as he did the surface details of their actions, we may ask how he saw the problem of choice itself. That is to say, did he believe that men have unlimited choice, or did he, like Holmes, see some kinds of restrictions or guiding forces? And if the latter, what were they?

There are two places in Howells's writings where important answers are given to these questions--The World of Chance and The Son of Royal Langbrith, both rather late productions, but neither contradicted by the earlier novels.

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said, "at least three-fifths of the literature called classic, in all languages, no more lives than the poems and stories that perish monthly in our magazines. It is all printed and reprinted, generation after generation, century after century; but it is not alive; it is as dead as the people who wrote it and read it. . . ." "Editor's Study," Harper's Magazine, LXXV (September, 1887), 641.

[5] See D. G. Cooke, William Dean Howells, A Critical Study (New York, 1922), p. 50.

[6] Howells, My Literary Passions and Criticism and Fiction (Library edition, 1911), p. 200.

The protagonist of The World of Chance (1893) is a young novelist with the unlikely name of Percy Bysshe Shelley Ray. The theme of Howells's novel is simply that chance governs most of the things that happen in life. One may presumably will his own actions, but the things that happen to him appear to happen wholly by capricious chance. If there is any law controlling chance--such as the mathematical law of averages that accounts for the behavior of the roll of a pair of dice--it is not evident. By chance Ray's novel is selected for publication rather than another author's; by chance it becomes a success.[7]

This fortuitous chance seems to be roughly parallel to that which governs Darwinian natural selection.[8] The world, as Howells sees it, is in its present form a world of luck, not cunning. This is not to say that Howells endorses such a world but only that he faithfully reports it.

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[7]Howells, The World of Chance (New York: Harper and Bros., 1893), p. 353, pp. 358-359. See also on chance in retail trade, pp. 21-22, p. 339; on chance in publishing, p. 71; on chance in society, p. 184; on chance in love, p. 374.

Since the projected collection of Howells's writings reached only six volumes, the problem of documentation is complicated. Hereafter, first-publication dates will be indicated parenthetically in the text, and place, date, and publisher of the volume actually examined will be given in the footnotes the first time each book is cited.

[8]For Howells's relation to Darwinism, see Harry Hayden Clark, "The Role of Science in the Thought of W. D. Howells," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLII (1953), 264-270. There is an unpublished University of Texas Ph.D. thesis (1952) by Elton R. Miles on "William Dean Howells: The Impact of Science" which the present writer has been unable to see.

The idea of chance permeates the novel The World of Chance. A more succinct expression of the same idea occurs at the beginning of Chapter 30 in The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904) where, in order to get the chapter under way, Howells reveals himself for a moment and apparently speaks in his own person for a paragraph before he picks up the narrative again. He says:

> Life is never the logical and consequent thing we argue from the moral and intellectual premises. There ought always to be evident reason in it; but such reason as it has is often crossed and obscured by perverse events, which, in our brief perspective, give it the aspect of a helpless craze. Obvious effect does not follow obvious cause; there is sometimes no perceptible cause for the effects we see. The law that we find at work in the material world is, apparently, absent from the moral world; not, imaginably, because it is without law, but because the law is of such cosmical vastness in its operation that it is only once or twice sensible to any man's experience. The seasons come and go in orderly course, but the incidents of human life have not the orderly procession of the seasons; so far as the sages or the saints are able convincingly to affirm, they have only the capricious vicissitudes of weather.[9]

Perhaps it is not extending Howells's metaphor too far to say that even a realistic novelist must, to be true to the vicissitudes of the weather, write novels like The World of Chance. Yet, if the cosmical laws can occasionally be discerned, then they too might appropriately turn up now and then in Howells's fiction. It is not placing too much weight on this passage to suppose that his doctrine of "complicity"

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[9]Howells, The Son of Royal Langbrith (New York: Harper & Bros., 1905), p. 282. The World of Chance ends by concluding: "Nothing. . . that seemed chance was really chance. It was the operation of a law so large that we caught a glimpse of its vast orbit once or twice in a lifetime." (P. 375)

was to Howells's way of thinking one of those rare insights. Further, since with the exception of his promotion of realism, Howells can hardly be said to have transcended his age, there is reason to suppose that he found in his intellectual milieu other ideas that tended to make motives plausible and chance less capricious.

Two such intellectual configurations which no educated person in the eighties and nineties could have helped deriving from the post-Darwin atmosphere were those centering around heredity and environment, and it can be shown that Howells made rather extensive use of hereditary and environmental clues both in his characterizations and motivations. Probably he himself would not have considered these ideas "cosmical," but they were nevertheless of great importance in his thought and in his practice as a novelist. They figure largely in four of the novels (An Imperative Duty, The Quality of Mercy, The Landlord at Lion's Head, and The Son of Royal Langbrith) as well as to a lesser degree in several others. Yet, as these four are all relatively late novels, it would falsify the picture to go directly to them without first glancing at several aspects of Howells's thinking that appear earlier: his doctrine of complicity and his Taine-oriented criticism, as well as the relation of these to his socialism and to his attitude toward social Darwinism.

It is well to consider the closeness of Howells's mature thinking to that of H. A. Taine, whose famous criteria of epoch, surroundings, and race,--or, as they are more frequently

expressed, time, place, race--are often paralleled both in Howells's theory and his practice. "In line with Taine," says one commentator on Howells's criticism, he "accepted a deterministic interpretation of literature and demanded that the critic should proceed as a botanist treats a plant."[10] Perhaps in the long run Taine was no more of a foreign influence than either Turgenev or Tolstoy; yet, whether he took the ideas directly, or whether they were a part of the air he breathed, Howells constantly made use of Taine's three great points of reference.[11]

The sense of place had long been developing in America in the work of the local color writers; the importance of immediate physical environment needed no emphasis from France to make American writers aware of its usefulness as a foil against which to develop character. In only one novel, The Landlord of Lion's Head, does Howells really go very far toward making the physical environment an actual determinant of character, and even there he does no more than Hawthorne had done in "The Great Stone Face," and does in fact allude to Hawthorne's story at the beginning of the novel. But if one distinguishes an environment in social terms, then almost any novel might be selected to document Howells's use

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[10]Harry Hayden Clark, Literary Criticism: Pope to Croce, edited by Gay Wilson Allen and Harry Hayden Clark (New York, 1941), p. 564.

[11]These three criteria were elaborated in the introduction to Taine's History of English Literature (1864), an English translation of which appeared in 1871. Howells reviewed the translation in the Atlantic Monthly, XXIX (February, 1872), 236-242.

of it.[12] Perhaps as good an example as any is Indian Summer (1886). In this novel, Mr. Waters, a retired New England clergyman who has come to Florence to warm his old bones at the glowing embers of history and write a life of Savonarola, probably represents the author's views if any character in the novel can be said to do so.[13] It is his function to give counsel to Theodore Colville, an interesting parallel to Henry James's Strether, who gives up his newspaper business in Indiana, has a mild flirtation with a girl half his age, comes to his senses, and marries the widowed Mrs. Bowen who has loved him all along. After Imogene, the young girl, has broken her ill-advised engagement to Colville, Mr. Waters says to him:

> "I don't know that I blame people for things. There are times when it seems as if we were all puppets, pulled this way or that, without control of our own movements. Hamlet was able to browbeat Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with his business of the pipe; but if they had been in a position to answer they might have told him that it required far less skill to play upon a man than any other instrument. Most of us, in fact, go sounding on without any special application of breath or fingers, repeating the tunes that were played originally upon other men."[14]

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[12] Taine had written that "physical or social circumstances disturb or confirm the character committed to their charge." Introduction to History of English Literature in the Allen-Clark anthology, p. 488. The character committed to the charge of environment is the heredity compnment, the part which Taine attributes to race.

[13] Because of Howells's enormous output of criticism and reviews, his ideas can usually be documented from non-fiction as well as fiction. Thus he suggested that despite George Eliot's excellence as a novelist, she did not "account largely enough for motive from social environment." My Literary Passions and Criticism and Fiction, pp. 138-139.

[14] Howells, Indian Summer (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1952), p. 302.

This way of handling the social environment[15] is the most frequent method by which Howells gets his characters into their complications. They drift along, doing as their society expects them to do, even thinking as it expects them to think, until suddenly they are caught up by circumstances and the plot complications, such as they are, ensue. Or there is the other kind of environmental conditioning such as that which helps to cause the clash between Bartley Hubbard and his wife Marcia in A Modern Instance (1882). The opening chapters of this novel are devoted to a minute anatomy of the village environment which has produced Marcia Gaylord.[16] Given the fact that she is pampered by her father, one hardly expects that her life will flow smoothly when she marries Bartley, himself an orphan who has had to make his way in the world as much by low cunning as by ability, and who thinks of her village as but a way station on his road to success. Take them both, put them down in the radically new environment of Boston, where Bartley's driving, pushing ambition finds an outlet and Marcia's village-bred personality is swallowed up, and their trials become the plot of one of Howells's best novels.

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[15]Howells's friend Henry James is of course the great master of the use of social environment as a determining force. One of the best examples of James's technique is seen in The Awkward Age (1899), where three generations are, in the words of one of the characters, "simply a collection of natural affinities. . . governed. . . in our myterious ebbs and flows, very much as the tides are governed by the moon." (P. 103)

[16]"Differentiation by environment," Howells claimed in Heroines of Fiction (2 vols., 1901), "is one of the subtle triumphs of the author's art" (I, 75).

Howells naturally believed an author could write best about what he knew best. Thus he commended Edward Bellamy's village types but thought Bellamy was less successful with urban people, though he did not hold this to be a serious flaw, for "we [Americans] are village people far more than we are country people or city people."[17] And in the same way he thought Taine himself sometimes let his generalizations outstrip his factual knowledge.[18] Yet even when he believed Taine was wrong, Howells could speak of his "sparkling errors"--in regard to Dickens and Thackeray. He liked Taine's Art in Greece better than his History of English Literature. Speaking of the former, he said:

> His method of showing the influences of daily life upon art is admirably brilliant and effective, but the reader will do well to guard himself against the author's too inflexible and exclusive application of his theory. Stated in rather an extreme form, it is this: given the time and the climate of a people, their art can be accurately deduced therefrom, without reference to their artistic production,--just as Agassiz can sketch you off a portrait of our affectionate forefathers the ichthyosaurus or the pterodactyl, after glancing at their fossilized foot-tracks. M. Taine's method does not take into sufficient account the element of individuality in the artist. Rigorously applied, it would make us expect to find all the artists of a given people at a given time cast in one mould, good or bad as the case might be. In the history of art it should be borne in mind that, beside study of art proper, not only the general circumstances of the time and people are to be considered, but the personal circumstances of each great artist. . . . M. Taine's method is only one side of a complete view.[19]

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[17]Howells, "Edward Bellamy," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXXII (August, 1898), 255.

[18]Howells, Review of Taine's Art in the Netherlands, The Atlantic Monthly, XXVII (March, 1871), 396.

[19]Howells, Review of H. van Laun's translation of Taine's

Since Howells speaks only of time and climate in the review, it appears that he failed to appreciate fully the importance Taine attached to race, which Taine himself defined as "the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him into the world and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body,"[20] a definition which at once recognizes individual differences as well as those relating to an entire people. It will be seen, however, that whether or not Howells commended this important segment of Taine's theory, he himself made extensive use of it in his own fiction.

An example from an earlier novel where heredity figures both temperamentally and physically in establishing character, but not in the conduct of the plot, is found in The Rise of Silas Lapham (1885). Here of course race is understood to mean a family or clan rather than an ethnic group. The example is the Corey family. Bromfield Corey, a dilettante and bon vivant who has devoted his life to leisurely contemplation of the arts and has supported his family on the ever dwindling fortune left him by his father, says to his son Tom, "you never could draw, but this scheme of going into the mineral-paint business [with Colonel Lapham] shows that you

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History of English Literature, The Atlantic Monthly, XXIX (February, 1872), 241.

[20] Allen-Clark anthology, p. 487.

have inherited something of my feeling for colour."[21] Bromfield Corey, one of Howells's men of wit, like Theodore Colville, is permitted his little joke; but there can be no doubt that Howells intends the physical resemblance between Tom and his grandfather to be taken seriously as a symbol of their temperamental affinity when he goes on in a narrative passage to say that

> Over the mantel in the elder Corey's room hung a portrait which he had painted of his own father, and now he stood a moment and looked at this as if struck by something novel in it. The resemblance between his son and the old India merchant, who had followed the trade from Salem to Boston when the larger city drew it away from the smaller, must have been what struck him. Grandfather and grandson had both the Roman nose which appears to have flourished chiefly at the formative period of the republic, and which occurs more rarely in the descendants of the conscript fathers, though it still characterizes the profiles of a good many Boston ladies. Bromfield Corey had not inherited it, and he had made his straight nose his defense when the old merchant accused him of want of energy. He said, "What could a man do whose unnatural father had left his own nose away from him?" This amused but did not satisfy the merchant. "You must do something," he said; "and it's for you to choose. If you don't like the India trade, go into something else. Or, take up law or medicine. No Corey yet ever proposed to do nothing." "Ah, then, it's quite time one of us made a beginning," urged the man who was then young, and who was now old, looking into the somewhat fierce eyes of his father's portrait. He had inherited as little of the fierceness as of the nose, and there was nothing predatory in his son either, though the aquiline beak had come down to him in such force. Bromfield Corey liked his son Tom for the gentleness which tempered his energy.[22]

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[21] Howells, The Rise of Silas Lapham (New York: Rinehart and Co., 1949), p. 71. James gave serious attention to the question of the inheritance of artistic ability and made adroit use of it in both The Tragic Muse (1890) and The Spoils of Poynton (1897).

[22] The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. 72. The idea of an inheritable characteristic skipping a generation and appearing

Thus, while Howells knows too well that realism demands points of dissimilarity between the young man and his grandfather, he knows too that a single physical characteristic in common can be made to foreshadow the desire to make money and get on in the world that characterizes them both.

The third element, epoch or time, was one that Howells accepted wholeheartedly. "The great historical currents are formed by this law," Taine had said--"the long dominations of one intellectual pattern, or master idea, such as the period of spontaneous creations called the Renaissance, or the period of oratorical models called the Classical Age, or the series of mystical systems called the Alexandrian and Christian eras, or the series of mythological efflorescences which we meet with in the infancy of the German people, of the Indian, and the Greek."[23] And Howells was willing to go even farther by cutting the significant time periods down to single centuries. Writing in 1904, from the vantage point of his Editor's Easy Chair, he asserted

> that each [century] has its distinctive spirit. . . , and there are some of the wisest and best who hold that the spirit of the eighteenth century was on the whole civilizing and the spirit of the nineteenth was on the whole barbarizing. The one tended to unite, to fraternize, and to civilize mankind, and the other tended to divide, to provincialize, and to brutalize mankind. Under the specious show of struggles for nationality, for the unification of races, at one time, and at a later time in the guise of conquests for the exploitation of the weaker peoples by the stronger in every part of the world, especially in the free and en-

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in a third--technically, atavism--is a favorite with Howells, as will be seen later.

[23] Allen-Clark anthology, p. 487.

> lightened part, the nineteenth century was false to the example of the eighteenth, in which the greatest thoughts and deeds of men were for freedom.[24]

Taine's theory of literature was in part a product of the intellectual ferment brought about by the theory of biological evolution. Howells traced his own religious skepticism if not to Darwin at least to Herbert Spencer, who paved the way for him. Writing as an old man he had his alter ego, a nameless professor, say: "I got caught in the wave of agnosticism in the survival-of-the-fittest times, and I found I couldn't put up a prayer in the old gospel terms. So I left off."[25] And Howells ever had a good word for Darwin; writing a review of the current crop of children's books at Christmas time in 1880, he could manage to recommend Mr. Darwin to parents as "the great master in the literature of science"[26] --a significant endorsement from Howells, who guarded so zealously the innocence of youth.[27]

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[24]Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, CVIII (March, 1904), 642.

[25]Howells, "Editor's Easy Chair," Harper's Monthly, CXXX (January, 1915), 309. See also the story "A Difficult Case," where Howells has a young minister try to bring an agnostic to a belief in immortality but in the argument loses his own faith. The Atlantic Monthly, LXXXVI (July, August, 1900), 24-36; 205-217.

[26]Howells, "Holiday Books," The Atlantic Monthly, XLV (January, 1880), 131. For the various channels by which Darwinian evolution became known to Howells, and especially for the importance of A. R. Wallace and John Fiske, see Harry Hayden Clark, "The Role of Science in the Thought of W. D. Howells," Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLII (1953), 263-303.

[27]On the question of Howells's squeamishness as related to his own "reticent realism," as he himself called it, and

Because of the connection with Taine, and because of the emphasis on heredity and environment during the great evolutionary debates of the sixties, seventies, and eighties,[28] it is worth asking how Howells used such propositions as the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest in his novels. One can make out a very good case that in novels of his middle period, such as The Rise of Silas Lapham, he is depicting a struggle for existence on a social level. The Laphams and the Coreys are distinct classes--almost species apart, socially--and the Laphams' struggle to establish themselves in the Coreys' Boston parallels on the social plane the struggle of one animal species to supplant another on the plane of nature.[29] In other words, one can say that Howells is carrying out Holmes's jocular suggestion, made in Elsie Venner (1861), that "you have got to learn that the 'struggle for life' Mr. Charles Darwin talks about reaches to vertebrates clad in crinoline, as well as to mollusks in shells, or articulates in jointed scales, or anything that fights for

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the psychological reasons for such an attitude, see E. H. Cady, "The Neuroticism of William Dean Howells," PMLA, LXI (March, 1946), 229-238.

[28]Harry Hayden Clark treats heredity and environment taken together as one aspect of Howells's thought. He finds that "by 1885" Howells's "familiarity with the contemporary developments of evolutionary science" had so widened that after this date his novels "become studies of the interaction of character and environment"; and he leaves Howells's specific use of heredity and environment, considered separately, as problems for further investigation. Trans. Wis. Academy, XLII (1953), 292-293.

[29]Harry Hayden Clark suggests such a reading of the

breathing-room and food and love in any coat of fur or feather!"[30]

By the nineties, at any rate, Howells made explicit use of the idea of a struggle for survival on the social plane. This appears, for instance, in his novel A Hazard of New Fortunes (1890), where the protagonist, Basil March, goes from Boston to New York to edit a magazine, as Howells himself had done. Struck by the confusion of architecture of the city, of "certain audacities of the prevailing hideousness," March believes that

> Accident and then exigency seemed the forces at work to this extraordinary effect; the play of energies as free and planless as those that force the forest from the soil to the sky; and then the fierce struggle for survival, with the stronger life persisting over the deformity, the mutilation, the destruction, the decay of the weaker. The whole at moments seemed to him lawless, godless; the absence of intelligent, comprehensive purpose in the huge disorder, and the violent struggle to subordinate the result to the greater good, penetrated with its dumb appeal the consciousness of a man who had always been too self-enwrapped to perceive the chaos to which the individual selfishness must always lead.[31]

It would be possible to see the outline of full-blown social Darwinism in a passage such as this. But read in the context of the rest of the novel it is seen rather as an expression of Howells's stress on capricious chance, this time with

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novel in his introduction to the Modern Library College edition of The Rise of Silas Lapham, p. viii.

[30]Holmes, Works, V, 94.

[31]Howells, A Hazard of New Fortunes (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1952), pp. 199-200. The most incisive critical analysis of the economic and social meaning of this novel is Everett Carter's in Howells and the Age of Realism, pp. 201-224.

chance placed in a new (biological) setting. "What is it that changes us?" asks Mrs. March. The answer her husband supplies is not that we are changed by external events but that we develop from the internal, or hereditary, possibilities we already possess:

> "Well, it won't do to say, the Holy Spirit indwelling. That would sound like cant at this day. But the old fellows that used to say that had some glimpses of the truth. They knew that it is the still, small voice that the soul heeds, not the deafening blasts of doom. I suppose I should have to say that we didn't change at all. We develop. There's the making of several characters in each of us; we are each several characters, and sometimes this character has the lead in us, and sometimes that."[32]

Actually, says Basil March, "conditions make character," the character or characters lying latent waiting to be worked on by external conditions, and the character which results has a direct relationship to the kind of conditions that produced it: "people are greedy and foolish, and wish to have and to shine, because having and shining are held up to them by civilization as the chief good of life."[33] And the whole point is that such a situation is no justification for uninhibited competition; it is rather a recommendation that man be lifted above the struggle for mere economic survival by having better goals than having and shining placed before his eyes.[34]

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[32] A Hazard of New Fortunes, p. 540.

[33] Ibid., pp. 486-487.

[34] The standard sourcebook for the complexities of American social-Darwinist thought and its criticism is Richard Hofstadter's very fine Social Darwinism in American Thought

It seems that what Howells took from Darwin direct was mostly that which confirmed his already pre-established convictions.[35] It was in much the same manner that Howells was influenced by Tolstoy, whom he first read in 1886.[36] These influences are seen particularly as they relate to socialism, toward which A Hazard of New Fortunes points, and toward which Howells turned increasingly after 1888 from a previous liberal Republicanism.[37] Earlier he could joke about Darwinism, as when he says of Squire Gaylord in A Modern Instance that he might have found agnostic friends in the village of Equity had they not "begun to make such fools of themselves about Darwinism and the brotherhood of all men in the monkey."[38] But by 1894, when A Traveler from Altruria was published, Darwinism seemed to Howells a useable hook from which to hang his socialist utopia. By 1894 scarcely anyone outside Dayton, Tennessee, any longer had qualms about the theory.

(Philadelphia, 1945). Limitations of space prevent Mr. Hofstadter from treating the ramifications of social Darwinism in fiction.

[35]Howells got his Darwinism more through secondary sources than from the fountain. See Harry Hayden Clark's Wisconsin Academy article, previously cited, and see also Hannah G. Belcher, "Howells's Opinions on the Religious Conflicts of His Age as Exhibited in Magazine Articles," American Literature, XV (November, 1943), 262-278.

[36]D. G. Cooke, op. cit., p. 33.

[37]See Louis John Budd's unpublished University of Wisconsin Ph.D. thesis, "William Dean Howells's Relations with Political Parties," and see also his "Howells, the Atlantic Monthly, and Republicanism," American Literature, XXIV (May, 1952), 139-156.

[38]Howells, A Modern Instance (Riverside College Classics ed., n.d.), p. 37.

How expedient, then, to show the progress of the United States toward Altruria as the result of the law of natural selection, and at the same time to point up the ironic moral that this was the very justification used by social-Darwinist apologists for the continuance of the status quo. Thus we have, near the beginning of A Traveler from Altruria,[39] the American telling Mr. Homos, the man from Altruria, that the class structure of American society is the result of natural selection:

> "The divisions among us are rather a process of natural selection. You will see, as you get better acquainted with the workings of our institutions, that there are no arbitrary distinctions here, but the fitness of the work for the man and the man for the work determines the social rank that each one holds. . . . You know we are a sort of fatalists here in America. We are great believers in the doctrine that it will come out right in the end."
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> "Ah, I don't wonder at that," said the Altrurian, "if the process of natural selection works so perfectly among you as you say."[40]

Of course, the whole meaning is that natural selection does not work that perfectly. The utopian Altruria has achieved its eminence by the process of evolution, it is

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[39] The next most important of Howells's "romances"--as he calls them--dealing with social and economic criticism is Through the Eye of a Needle (1907). Concerning this group of novels, see Walter F. Taylor, "On the Origin of Howells's Interest in Economic Reform," American Literature, II (March, 1930), 3-14, and for orientation in the genre, his The Economic Novel in America (Chapel Hill, 1942). See also George Arms, "The Literary Background of Howells's Social Criticism," American Literature, XIV (November, 1942), 260-276.

[40] Howells, A Traveler from Altruria (New York: Harper & Bros., 1894), pp. 12-13.

true; but Altrurian history splits cleanly into two sections: the period of the Accumulation, Altruria's Dark Age; and the Evolution, its Renaissance. And the Evolution did not begin except by the conscious effort of men to replace competition by cooperation. At the core is Howells's conception of Tolstoian Christian brotherhood as well as a subtle reading of Darwin (partly as interpreted by A. R. Wallace) that sees social life as best furthered by mutual aid rather than independent struggle.

Indeed, had Howells intended his Altruria to picture social development that must follow upon tooth-and-claw Darwinian principles rather than to criticize the existing state of American society and to point at the same time to what could follow, he would have been repeating the work of Edward Bellamy, whose Looking Backward (1888) had already been in the hands of readers for six years.[41] Bellamy had written that "Looking Backward, although in form a fanciful romance, is intended, in all seriousness, as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity, especially in this country; and no part of it is believed by the author to be

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[41]Holmes satirized Looking Backward in Number Five's dream in Over the Teacups (1891). In the miniature utopia of Saturn there depicted, people are born equal, live equal, die equal: "All Saturnians are born free,--free, that is, to obey the rules laid down for the regulation of their conduct, pursuits, and opinions, free to be married to the person selected for them by the physiological section of the government, and free to die at such proper period of life as may best suit the convenience and general welfare of the community." Holmes's Works, IV, 62-63.

better supported by the indications of probability than the implied prediction that the dawn of the new era is already near at hand, and that the full day will swiftly follow."[42] Howells was never so naive; when he came to eulogize Bellamy after his death, he commended the excellence of the famous analogy of the coach drawn by slaves and he applauded Julian West's nightmare at the end of Looking Backward--both, it will be seen, dealing with the squalors of actuality--but praise of the deterministic Darwinian thesis of the book is conspicuously absent.[43]

Darwinism, and especially the current social theories projected on Darwinian principles, surely deepened Howells's concern about the moral interrelationships of man to man. Howells had an almost neural sensitivity to such relationships. This consciousness, usually called his doctrine of complicity, has been defined as meaning that "all lives are involved with all others, the sum total of which is God."[44] This single idea of Howells has probably received more discussion than any other idea ever expressed by him. It is

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[42]Bellamy, Postscript to Looking Backward (Modern Library College ed.), pp. 273-274.

[43]Howells, "Edward Bellamy," The Atlantic Monthly, LXXXII (August, 1898), 254.

[44]Kirk and Kirk, op. cit., p. cxiii. See also Arnold B. Fox, "Howells' Doctrine of Complicity," Modern Language Quarterly, XIII (March, 1952), 56-60, where the interesting interpretation is offered that Howells developed the idea to offset the determinism of literary naturalism, which he found too brutal. Oscar W. Firkins, William Dean Howells, A Study (Cambridge, 1924) says (p. 120) that Carlyle and Emerson anticipated Howells in using the word "complicity" in this sense.

well known that it owes something to Tolstoy, though Tolstoy probably served more to fix it in Howells's belief than to provide the original germ. The emphasis of conservative social Darwinists such as William Graham Sumner on the tooth-and-claw theory of society probably also had something to do with intensifying Howells's opposite convictions.

It is commonly pointed out that Howells's first extended treatment of the idea occurs in The Minister's Charge (1887), where a country boy, Lemuel Barker, goes to the big city of Boston because of the insincere praise the Rev. Mr. Sewell has given his poetry, finds himself in a series of disagreeable experiences as the result of his coming, thus forcing the minister to conclude that he really is his brother's keeper and that Lemuel's problems are his own. The conclusion brought about by these events occurs in Mr. Sewell's sermon, the nexus of which is "that no one for good or for evil, for sorrow or joy, for sickness or health, stood apart from his fellows, but each was bound to the highest and lowest ties that centered in the hand of God."[45] The doctrine of complicity occurs again in the novel following, Annie Kilburn (1889), and it has been shown[46] that it is hinted at also in earlier novels, principally in The Rise of Silas Lapham and A Modern Instance. One of the most interesting

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[45]Howells, The Minister's Charge (Boston: Ticknor, 1887), p. 458.

[46]By Louis Budd, in his Wisconsin Ph.D. thesis (1949), "William Dean Howells's Relations with Political Parties."

expressions of it appears in the latter, when Mr. Atherton says:

> "You know how I hate anything that sins against order, and this whole thing is disorderly [Bartley's abandonment of Marcia]. It's intolerable, as you say. But we must bear our share of it. We're all bound together. No one sins or suffers to himself in a civilized state,--or religious state; it's the same thing. Every link in the chain feels the effect of the violence, more or less intimately. We rise or fall together in Christian society. It's strange that it should be so hard to realize a thing that every experience of life teaches. We keep on thinking of offenses against the common good as if they were abstractions."[47]

This passage suggests how Howells's socialism--his Christian socialism, as it is usually called--relates directly to the doctrine of complicity. For, Howells would say, are we any less our brothers' keepers in social and economic affairs than we are in the moral? Once we recognize how intimately bound up we are with each other, we see that two of the physical ties are those of heredity and environment--the one we share with those to whom we are immediately related by blood, the other we share with those to whom we are related by geographical circumstance. The relationships do not stop there; they extend in ever widening circles. We are related forward and backward in time; as there are influences and affinities within families, there are corresponding relationships within whole races, and the races themselves are bound up in one great human family. As there is the accidental fact of geographical location, there is the no less influential fact of location in time--we should not expect a

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[47]Howells, A Modern Instance, p. 474.

man of one century to react in the same fashion as one of another.

Thus, in his novels, Howells knits a web of ties and affiliations, of duties and responsibilities. This central core of his thought, while complex, even sometimes confused, and never diagrammatically lucid, is really a rather remarkable piece of thinking and planning. Enshrined in it and occupying a key place are the two elements heredity and environment. It is the expression of these ideas in four of the later novels that will be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter VIII

Howells: Heredity and Fiction

We have seen how Howells uses heredity for the purpose of characterization in earlier novels such as The Rise of Silas Lapham. Similar illustrations could be drawn from many others. At the beginning of A Modern Instance, for example, we find Howells carefully establishing character by means of hereditary clues. Bartley Hubbard, later characterized by his friend Ben Halleck as "a fellow with no more moral nature than a baseball,"[1] is described as having a "chin, deep-cut below his mouth, [which] failed to come strenuously forward,"[2] a characteristic associated in popular physiognomy with a weak will, an example of an innate moral flaw shadowed forth by a physical inheritable trait. It has been suggested by one critic[3] that Bartley's downfall can be explained only as the result of his inherent defects; though it might be argued with equal force that the environmental circumstances of his being orphaned at an early age are of as great importance. An even better example from the same novel is the heredity-keyed description of Marcia that establishes her

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[1] Howells, A Modern Instance (ed. cit.), p. 243.

[2] Ibid., p. 7.

[3] Alexander Cowie, The Rise of the American Novel (New York, 1948), p. 666.

spiritual as well as physical affinity with her father, the squire:

> as they [Marcia and her father] stood confronted, their consanguinity came out in vivid resemblances and contrasts; his high, hawk-like profile was translated into the fine aquiline outline of hers; the harsh rings of black hair, now grizzled with age, which clustered tightly over his head, except where they had retreated from his deeply seamed and wrinkled forehead, were the crinkled flow above her smooth white brow; and the line of the bristly tufts that overhung his eyes was the same as that of the low arches above hers. Her complexion was from her mother; his skin was dusky yellow; but they had the same mouth, and hers showed how sweet his mouth must have been in his youth. His eyes, deep sunk in their cavernous sockets, had rekindled their dark fires in hers; his whole visage, softened to her sex and girlish years, looked up at him in his daughter's face.[4]

It is noteworthy that the only physical trait Marcia has received from her mother is her complexion, an external and superficial characteristic that even in the days when painted women were found only under gaslamps was of small symbolic value in the portrayal of character. The important traits--the sharpness of her profile, the softness of her eyes, the sweetness of her mouth--are from her father, to whom she is most closely related in character as well. It is also of some interest to notice that Howells points up the father-daughter relationship which is popularly believed to be closer than that of a daughter to her mother, an idea to which he alludes also in An Imperative Duty.[5]

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[4] A Modern Instance, pp. 16-17.

[5] The young minister's father had left a "distinct. . . record of himself in his son, and not in his daughters, as fathers are supposed usually to do." An Imperative Duty, p. 116. In The Son of Royal Langbrith the mother-son affinity is emphasized.

An Imperative Duty (1892), while hardly more than a novelette, beautifully illustrates many of Howells's excellences as a novelist and is a key document in a study of his use of heredity. In this novel heredity serves to establish character only incidentally. There are little touches such as the fact that the chief male character has hereditary baldness, but he is said to feel that while the young lady of the novel had inherited her facial appearance, her "character seemed to be of Miss Aldgate's own invention, and expressed itself in the sunny sparkle of her looks, that ran over with a willingness to please and to be pleased, and to consist in effect of a succession of flashing, childlike smiles, showing between her red lips teeth of the milkiest whiteness, small, even and perfect."[6] But, most important, heredity does play an important part in the motivation of the characters of the novel.

The man Miss Aldgate smiles upon so devastatingly is Dr. Olney, a specialist in nervous diseases, forty, balding, and an agnostic. Olney returns to Boston from a trip abroad, and no sooner establishes himself in his hotel than he is summoned to the room of an aging female guest who turns out to be his old friend Mrs. Meredith, whom he had last seen the previous winter in Florence. Mrs. Meredith is the aunt and duenna of Miss Aldgate. Add that Mrs. Meredith's chief complaint is an "inflated and inflamed conscience"[7] and her

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[6]Howells, An Imperative Duty (New York: Harper & Bros., 1893), p. 17.

[7]Oscar W. Firkins, William Dean Howells, p. 138.

characterization is complete. Add that Miss Aldgate is being wooed from afar by the Rev. Mr. Bloomingdale, the dutiful son of a masterful mother, and the cast of characters is complete.

Olney soon discovers that Mrs. Meredith needs a confidant more than a physician. He prescribes a soporific for her and recalls that he

> had already theorized her as one of those women, commoner amongst us than any other people, perhaps, to whom life, in spite of all experience, remains a sealed book, and who are always trying to unlock its mysteries with the keys furnished them by fiction. . . . Such women get a tone of mind that is very tiresome to every one but other women like them, and that is peculiarly repulsive to such men as Olney, if not repulsive, then very ridiculous. . . . He fancied her hopelessly muddled as to her plain, every-day obligations, by a morbid sympathy with the duty-ridden creatures of the novelist's brain. . . . She would exaggerate as well as idealize, and he tried to find comfort now in thinking that what she had on her mind was very likely a thing of bulk out of all proportion to its weight. Very likely it was something with reference to her niece. . . . She might be wanting to study medicine, or law, or divinity; perhaps she wanted to go on the stage. More probably, it was a question of whom she should marry. . . .[8]

The aunt continues reluctant about revealing to Olney her weighty problem but keeps hinting at it in her daily talks with him, while Olney can give her but half of his attention, for the other half is gradually being usurped by the beauteous Rhoda Aldgate.

Finally, when she and the doctor are alone together, Mrs. Meredith can contain her secret no longer. "Do you believe in heredity?" she gasps out--as though a belief in heredity

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[8] An Imperative Duty, pp. 33-34.

were the same order of faith as a belief in transubstantiation. To her heredity is "the persistence of ancestral traits; the transmission of character and tendency; the reappearance of types after several generations"[9]--none of it desirable, we gather--in a word, atavism.[10] Olney, an agnostic in more than the theological sense, replies that "heredity is a good deal like the germ theory.[11] There's a

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[9] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

[10] As early as 1874, Howells's close friend Henry James, in an Atlantic Monthly short story, "The Last of the Valerii," exploited "the strange ineffaceability of race-characteristics" in an Italian count called Valerii, of whom the narrator says that "the unholy passions of his forefathers stirred blindly in his untaught nature and clamored dumbly for an issue." James, The Passionate Pilgrim and Other Tales (New York, 1907), p. 161 and p. 154.

[11] The fact that Dr. Olney is given doubts about the germ theory of disease is one of the many indications that though Howells is interested in science he makes no attempt to keep up with latest findings from the laboratory. The date of this novel is 1892. Oliver Wendell Holmes had suggested the contagious nature of puerperal fever in 1843; and in 1846 Semmelweis in Vienna proved it. Lister promoted surgical antisepsis during the Crimean War, 1853 and following; but the notion of spontaneous generation of micro-organisms lingered on until 1861, when Pasteur convincingly disproved it. Koch published on the spores of anthrax in 1876, and in 1882 discovered the tubercle bacillus. Yet in 1892 Dr. Olney thinks there is but "a large amount of truth" in the germ theory. One cannot imagine Holmes giving a physician such an opinion --unless it were a homeopathic physician. In Dr. Breen's Practice (1881) the question of the relative virtues of homeopathy and allopathy is in fact raised, but Howells remains noncommittal. Holmes denounced homeopathy in 1842, spearheaded the faction of the Massachusetts Medical Society that got the homeopaths expelled from the Society, and peppered the pages of his Breakfast-Table series with attacks on "the monstrous fiction" of homeopathy. On the suitability of women for medical practice, however, Howells and Holmes seem in near agreement. Certainly Dr. Grace Breen comes off poorly in contrast to her male colleagues; and Holmes, as Dean of the Harvard Medical School, urged that women be permitted to study medicine if they want to but felt that in general

large amount of truth in it, no doubt; but it's truth in a state of solution, and nobody knows just how much of it there is."[12]

Olney goes on to cite examples of children of mixed parentage in which the child of a white parent and a mulatto parent "reverts"--if that is the word--to the dominant characteristics of the Negro race, though he says that he himself does not put much faith in such stories. He continues blithely to pile up examples and is only momentarily startled to learn that Miss Aldgate has been favored with the offer of Mr. Bloomingdale's soft white hand, from which fact he infers that Mrs. Meredith's problem must relate to her niece. Perhaps Rhoda is not her niece at all, he thinks; perhaps she is a foundling, or "the daughter of some man or woman whose vices or crimes might find her out with their shame if not their propensity some day."[13] This, Olney assures himself, would be of small importance to him if he were in the place of the fortunate young clergyman; "if the case were his. . . there could be no question in it, except the question of her willingness to marry him."[14]

It is then that Mrs. Meredith drops her bombshell. "My niece," she says, "is of negro descent."

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you spoil a good nurse to make a poor physician in giving women medical training.

[12] An Imperative Duty, p. 37.

[13] Ibid., p. 42.

[14] Ibid., p. 43.

Now we understand Mrs. Meredith's imperative duty: it is no less than the duty of initiating Rhoda into the mystery of her own parentage, or, failing the courage to do that, of telling Mr. Bloomingdale and his snooty mother that they face the possibility of having pickaninnies in the parsonage. It needs to be added quickly that though Rhoda is of "negro descent," she has descended far. Her mother was but one-eighth Negro; the daughter of a Creole, she had been educated in the best Northern convents. Rhoda's father, Mrs. Meredith's brother, had gone South after the Civil War, had fallen in love with this Creole octoroon whom he met at her father's deathbed, and had married her though he knew he would be ruined as a physician--which he was. Even Rhoda's maternal great-grandmother, a slave who never acquired the social dignity of the wedding ring, was, we are told, loved by the white man who was her undoing--a gentleman whose name unfortunately seems to have been misplaced in the family genealogy. Thus Howells assures us that whatever Rhoda's ancestors lacked in their observance of the conventionalities they made up for in terms of love and honor.

Mrs. Meredith finally decides it is her duty to tell Rhoda, but only after quite a few pages of soul-searching on her part and ambiguous advice from Olney. Rhoda at first is revolted by the idea, but, after spitting out some hateful words to her aunt for not telling her sooner, she resigns herself to the fact and decides that if she is a Negro she might as well associate with other members of her race.

She goes alone one night to a Negro church, and there surrounded by genuine Negroes decides that being one-sixteenth is not so bad after all; it is brought to even her muddled mind that fifteen-sixteenths is the larger fraction. Meanwhile, Mrs. Meredith, her duty accomplished, in despair over her quarrel with Rhoda, apparently takes an overdose of Dr. Olney's sleeping potion and never wakes up again. Mr. Bloomingdale arrives with his mother and sisters, and the ladies without ever learning of Rhoda's taint decide that she is not the one for their son and brother after all. Bloomingdale, ever the dutiful son, cheerfully acquiesces when Rhoda turns him down. This leaves Rhoda with no one in the world to look after her, so Olney, at last aware that he loves her, does the honorable thing. They settle in Rome, where--a sunburned look not yet having become a mark of American women--Rhoda easily passes for an Italian. One might quibble that Italy is an unlikely place to parade an ersatz Italian, but at least the device gets the novel ended.

Now, what are the meanings attached to heredity? Howells himself once wrote that the novel was intended to show that a "man who really loved a woman would find his love settling any 'race question' involved."[15] This seems to have been a hindsight intention. As one reads the novel he is struck with the fact that whatever power the book has--and it

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[15]Unpublished Howells letter in the Rutgers University Library, dated Oct. 3, 1913. Quoted by Louis Budd in his University of Wisconsin dissertation, p. 438.

is considerable--comes from Mrs. Meredith's problem of carrying out her duty to her niece, to Mr. Bloomingdale, and to society at large. Though we may find her a foolish woman, we cannot help being sympathetic with her as she turns this way and that, trying to find a satisfactory solution to what was for her an almost unsolvable problem.

While Howells undoubtedly believed that Negroes should be given their rights as human beings, he really did not believe they are the equals of white men. Both Mrs. Meredith and Olney are agreed on this point, and there is no author-intrusion to suggest any other point of view. The paramount question raised is whether or not the child of an octoroon and a white would have enough Negro characteristics to be objectionable to whites. Olney thinks of the Negro as an inferior type; he tells Mrs. Meredith that "the natural tendency is all. . . to the permanent effacement of the inferior type. . . . The chances of atavism, or reversion to the black great-great-great-grandfather are so remote that they may be said hardly to exist at all."[16] And he adds:

> "I've been more and more struck with the fact that sooner or later our race must absorb the colored race; and I believe that it will obliterate not only its color, but its qualities. The tame man, the civilized man, is stronger than the wild man; and I believe that in those cases within any one race where there are very strong ancestral proclivities on one side especially toward evil, they will die out before the good tendencies on the other side, for much the same reason, that is, because vice is savage and virtue is civilized."[17]

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[16] An Imperative Duty, p. 38. [17] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

The idea that the less civilized man is the more savage because nature herself is savage we meet with earlier, in Mr. Waters's conversation in Indian Summer,[18] and this idea can doubtless be taken as the author's own opinion. It squares also with his emphasis on cooperation as the cement of society and on the cohesive force of complicity. An even more emphatic statement of Howells's belief that goodness is acquired through one's culture is given to Atherton, in A Modern Instance, who says that

> "The natural goodness doesn't count. The natural man is a wild beast, and his natural goodness is the amiability of a beast basking in the sun when his stomach is full. . . .it's the implanted goodness that saves,--the seed of righteousness treasured from generation to generation, and carefully watched and tended by disciplined fathers and mothers in the hearts where they have dropped it. The flower of this implanted goodness is what we call civilization. . . ."[19]

Mrs. Meredith, with her melodramatic cast of mind, sees far more Negro characteristics in Rhoda than Olney does, and presumably more than the author intends the reader to see. Mrs. Meredith says:

> "I can hear it in her voice at times--it's a black voice! I can see it in her looks! I can feel it in her character--so easy, so irresponsible, so fond of what is soft and pleasant! . . . She cannot forecast consequences; she's a creature of the present hour; she's like them all!"[20]

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[18] Howells, Indian Summer (ed. cit.), p. 181.

[19] Howells, A Modern Instance (ed. cit.), p. 472.

[20] An Imperative Duty, p. 53.

Mrs. Meredith understands the physical and spiritual complicity involved in family relationships. Speaking of Mr. Bloomingdale, she says, "You can't separate him from his family, Rhoda. You must remember that. Each of us is bound by a thousand mysterious ties to our kindred, our ancestors; we can't get away from them---"[21] But Olney from the first finds no more than the hints of facial characteristics betraying Rhoda's parentage. When he first thinks of her, he is reminded of the following salient features of her appearance, features which gain importance only later when we learn of her origin:

> he recalled the particulars of her beauty; her slender height, her rich complexion of olive, with a sort of understain of red, and the inky blackness of her eyes and hair. Her face was of almost classic perfection, and the hair, crinkling away to either temple, grew low upon the forehead. . . . In profile the mouth was firmly accented, with a deep cut outlining the full lower lip, and a fine jut forward of the delicate chin; and the regularity of the mask was farther relieved from insipidity by the sharp winglike curve in the sides of the sensitive nostrils. Olney recalled it as a mask, and he recalled his sense of her wearing this family face, with its somewhat tragic beauty, over a personality that was at once gentle and gay.[22]

Fortunately for all concerned, this is just the sort of beauty that makes Olney forget his own receding hairline, and when he learns the truth about Rhoda he is doubly delighted with her. "It was the elder world, the beauty of antiquity, which appealed to him in the lustre and sparkle of this girl; and the remote taint of her servile and savage origin gave her a kind of fascination which refuses to let

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[21] Ibid., p. 59.

[22] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

itself be put in words: it was like the grace of a limp, the occult, indefinable lovableness of a deformity, but transcending these by its allurement in infinite degree, and going for the reason of its effect deep into the mysterious places of being where the spirit and animal meet and part in us"[23]--a passage that must have sent little shivers of vicarious ecstasy up the spines of Howells's large following of female readers as they read his latest novel in their summer-hotel porch rockers.

"Everything's heredity with you, Aunt Caroline!" says Rhoda, and nearly the same might be said for the novel. Heredity provides the plot complication, and it establishes the motives. Rhoda's sympathy with individual Negroes, a sympathy not paralleled by anyone else in the book, is surely intended to be the result of her heredity. Olney's willingness to overlook her hereditary endowments, or rather to find beauty in them, is Howells's conclusion that we are not to be condemned for what we are not responsible for; we are all in this business of living, bound each to each by ties too complex ever to be traced out completely, and we need to make the best of things. But it is not to be supposed that Howells attaches little importance to heredity. It is the strongest and most ineradicable of human ties. When Olney first arrives in Boston he is astonished by the great numbers of Negroes he sees on the streets, and he observes that

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[23] Ibid., p. 133.

"their environment had made as little impression on the older [Negro] inhabitants. . . as Time himself makes upon the persons of their race."[24] He confesses to Mrs. Meredith that, while he himself can have no personal relations with the black people, "if the negroes ever have their turn--and if the meek are to inherit the earth they must come to it--we shall have a civilization of such sweetness and good-will as the world has never known yet. Perhaps we shall have to wait their turn for any real Christian civilization."[25] Surely Howells, who was also waiting for a real Christian civilization, was not putting idle words into the mouth of his protagonist.

Later in the same year Howells published The Quality of Mercy (1892), a novel nearly as environmentalist in scope as An Imperative Duty is heredity-centered. It was almost as though he wanted to give both sides of the coin at the same time.

The Quality of Mercy is a long and involved novel that lacks the incisiveness of An Imperative Duty and fails to achieve the richness of the comparably long novel Indian Summer. It is composed of a double plot--the one a study of character in a business man, the other Howells's standard equipment of the young lovers united after numerous vicissitudes--a plot combination that is reminiscent of the structure of The Rise of Silas Lapham. The twin plots can be

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[24] Ibid., p. 6. [25] Ibid., p. 29.

summarized in somewhat the following fashion: John Milton Northwick, fifty-nine years old, the father of two grown daughters, and Treasurer of a milling company, after an apparently exemplary career in business absconds to Canada with a large sum of his company's funds. Before he leaves he tricks his daughters--the spinsterish Adeline and her younger sister Suzette--into thinking that he is going away on a routine business trip. Fearful that he is being followed, for the President of the Board, Eben Hilary, has learned of his "borrowings" and has called him a thief to his face, Northwick changes his plans, takes a train other than the one on which he had made Pullman reservations, and makes good his escape. The first train is wrecked, and the bodies of its passengers are so mangled as to make their identification impossible.

The sisters are grief-stricken when they learn of the accident, but their friend, Louise Hilary, daughter of the president of Northwick's corporation, comes to comfort them, bringing with her her handsome brother Matt. Matt is a philanthropic gentleman-farmer who distrusts finance capitalism as much as his father delights in it. In trying to comfort Suzette, the prettier of the two girls, and ascertain whether or not her father actually is dead, Matt falls in love with her. Now two newspaper reporters come onto the scene. Pinney, of the Boston Events, is carrying on the tradition of yellow journalism that Bartley Hubbard had established on that paper; he gets wind of Northwick's em-

bezzlement and publishes a lurid account of it. Maxwell, "a ravenous reader of philosophy and sociology," writes a more dignified and interpretative account for the Abstract, in which he sees the blame for the deed attributable partly to a money-mad society. Northwick's creditors bring suit against his property, and though Suzette is determined to make no legal move to protect her interest, her frightened sister seeks aid from Lawyer Putney, a shrewd man though a sometime drunkard, who hated their father as much as he is pleased to help his daughters.

Part II brings the narrative back to Northwick, who is followed with meticulous detail on a long journey into the wilds of Canada, where he is ostensibly searching for openings to invest his ill-gotten money in order to make restitution, salvage his reputation, and bring his daughters to live with him in Quebec. Unable for some inexplicable reason to bring himself to act, Northwick drifts, rapidly aging, still clutching his money with a miser's grip. At last he writes a letter to the Events admitting his guilt, promising restitution of the money, and begging the public not to attach his shame to his innocent daughters. The letter is the first positive knowledge the girls have of their father's guilt, a blow slightly softened by the fact that it is also the first positive knowledge they have that he is still alive. Knowing his guilt, they voluntarily relinquish the small estate they have inherited from their mother in order to appease the creditors in some measure, though of course

they are not legally bound to do so.

The enterprising reporter Pinney goes to Canada, finds Northwick, and paints him such a graphic word picture of his daughters that the broken old man makes a secret visit to the United States to be with them for less than an hour. Shaken with shame for his crime, he returns to Quebec and surrenders himself to Pinney to be taken back to the law under custody. This event, however, does not take place; Northwick dies of a heart attack shortly after the train crosses the border. The other principals are disposed of in the same definitive fashion; Suzette marries Matt Hilary, Matt's father finishes paying off Northwick's debts and then resigns from the company, and Adeline--whom nobody wants to marry--conveniently dies.

The principal question raised by the story is why did Northwick steal the money? Some commentators[26] have seen the book as a tract on the general question of crime and its social causes; but, since Northwick is the only wrongdoer in the novel, it seems more to the point to study his character and his motivations first. If they can be shown to be common to all or most criminals, then perhaps the book is a study of crime.

Howells has not forgotten the usefulness of heredity tags. He begins by suggesting that Northwick "had been respectable ever since he was born; if he was born with any in-

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[26]See especially Firkins, op. cit., p. 152, and Cooke, op. cit., p. 233.

stinct it was the instinct of respectability, the wish to be honored for what he seemed. It was all the stronger in him, because his father had never had it; perhaps an hereditary trait found expression in him after passing over one generation; perhaps an antenatal influence formed him to that type."[27] These are perhapses, Howells says; he is not committing himself to any strong statement on Northwick's hereditary respectability, for this respectability is to be modified by other forces--a situation entirely unlike that in An Imperative Duty. The only other use of heredity is curiously back-handed; Eben Hilary admits that Northwick cannot be wholly bad, for "if there's anything to heredity, the father of such a girl [as Suzette] must have some good in him."[28]

But now for the other half of the picture. In the first place, Northwick's instinct for respectability is not an unmixed blessing. What the world did not know was that he had always lived behind a false façade. Rebelling against his father's scholarly inefficiency, he determined from the first to get ahead in the world. Though he had little knowledge of books, he had a sufficient command of the "mere exterior of literature" to "pass for a man of education"; his Harvard-trained associates were always pleased to put him down for at least a Dartmouth man or a Williams man, and Northwick made no move to correct them. "It was believed in

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[27] Howells, The Quality of Mercy (New York: Harper & Bros., 1903), p. 14.

[28] Ibid., p. 309.

like manner, partly on account of his name, that he was from one of those old ministerial families that you find up in the hills, where the whole brood study Greek while they are sugaring off in the spring"[29] when in fact his father was a penniless physician who preferred to limit himself to the practice of pharmacy, a profession which he carried on when he was not arguing religion with his cronies--until one night, "when denying the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, he went to the wrong jar for an ingredient of the prescription he was making up; the patient died of his mistake."[30] Even Northwick's modest fortune had been founded less because of his own efforts and ability than by the circumstance that his wife had brought him an ample dowry. It is somewhat difficult to see that Northwick is typical of either businessmen or criminals.

Several explanations are tentatively suggested for Northwick's behavior. At one place Matt Hilary ventures the hypothesis that there is "a taint of insanity in every wrongdoer,"[31] an idea which may have had some attractiveness to Howells, for he has the Rev. Mr. Sewell say at another place, "You know the Swedenborgians believe that insanity is the last state of the wicked."[32] A more important hypothesis is

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[29] Ibid., pp. 16-17. [30] Ibid., p. 14.

[31] Ibid., p. 363. The idea reminds one that Dr. Holmes advised that bad men should be treated as if they were insane; "they are in-sane, out of health, morally." Holmes, Works, V, 228.

[32] Quality of Mercy, p. 277.

that contained in Maxwell's newspaper analysis. In this article, Howells tells us, Maxwell "aimed at the historical attitude, and with some imitation of Taine's method and manner, he achieved it."[33] His point was that "there must be something rotten. . . at the core of our civilization, when every morning brought the story of a defalcation, great or small, in some part of our country: not the peculations of such poor clerks and messengers as their employers could be insured against, but of officials, public and corporate, for whom we had no guaranty but the average morality of our commercial life."[34] Evidently, then, Maxwell saw the time and place elements of Taine's theory--the environmental elements --as most important in explaining Northwick. It is true, of course, that these same elements exist for other people--"He dwelt upon the fact that the case, so far from being isolated or exceptional, was without peculiarities, was quite normal"[35]--and so far as the society makes these conditions possible, the novel is a protest against existing economic conditions, and thus dovetails with the rest of Howells's socialist writings, though the book itself does not offer socialism as a remedy--The Traveler from Altruria was still to come, two years later.

Nevertheless, though Northwick is a typical defaulter, he is made to be neither a typical businessman nor a typical criminal. His is a very special case, for Howells as realist

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[33] Ibid., p. 158. [34] Ibid., pp. 157-158.

[35] Ibid., p. 160.

knew that each man is unique. We must remember that Maxwell's analysis of Northwick's character is filtered through his own personality, and he himself has had a background even less salutary than his subject. When there appears some likelihood that Louise Hilary is falling in love with him, this is what her brother Matt, his friend and benefactor, has to say of Maxwell:

> "The self-made man can never be the society equal of the society-made man. He may have more brains, more money, more virtue, but he's a kind of inferior, and he betrays his inferiority in every worldly exigency. And if he's successful, he's so because he's been stronger, fiercer, harder than others in the battle of life. That's one reason why I say there oughtn't to be any battle of life. Maxwell has the defects of his disadvantages--I see that. He's often bitter, and cynical, and cruel because he has had to fight for his bread. . . . I'm sorry for Maxwell, but I don't pity him, especially. He bears the penalty of his misfortunes; but he is strong enough to bear it. Let him stand it!"[36]

Such a man can hardly be taken to represent the totality of the author's point of view, though he may well represent a portion of it.

The one character in the novel who does most nearly stand for the author is the dryly witty lawyer, Putney, a disenchanted sort of person, the kind Howells delights to have make his most incisive comments. As Putney's analysis of Northwick comes at the very end of the novel, even its position argues its importance. Putney at first is in amused agreement with Matt Hilary's insanity theory. "If the pressure of our life produces insanity of the homicidal

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[36] Ibid., p. 368.

and suicidal type, there's no reason why it shouldn't produce insanity of the defalcational type," he says. "The conditions tend to produce it in a proportion that is simply incalculable, and I think it's time that jurisprudence recognized the fact of such mental disease, say, as defalcomania."[37] On the last page of the novel Putney brings out the full implications of Northwick's environment; it was of such importance in shaping his life that there was nothing to him that was not environment. He almost says as Stephen Crane does in "The Blue Hotel" that "this poor fellow wasn't even a noun; he was sort of an adverb." Here are Putney's words:

> "I don't know that he's much of a warning. He just seems to be a kind of--incident; and a pretty common kind. He was a mere creature of circumstances--like the rest of us! His environment made him rich, and his environment made him a rogue. Sometimes I think there was nothing to Northwick, except what happened to him. He's a puzzle. But what do you say, Doc., to a world where we fellows keep fuming and fizzing away, with our little aims and purposes, and the great ball of life seems to roll calmly along, and get where it's going without the slightest reference to what we do or don't do? I suppose it's wicked to be a fatalist, but I'll go a few aeons of eternal punishment more, and keep my private opinion that it's all Fate."
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> "Why not call it Law?" the doctor suggested.
>
> "Well, I don't like to be too bold. But taking it by and large, and seeing that most things seem to turn out pretty well in the end, I'll split the difference with you and call it Mercy."[38]

So much for the environmentalism of The Quality of Mercy. The book was followed the next year by The World of Chance

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[37] Ibid., pp. 454-455. [38] Ibid., p. 474.

(1893). Other novels and tracts followed, including A Traveler from Altruria (1894) and the paste-up job My Literary Passions (1895), written on order as a series of magazine articles. Neither of the two novels to be taken up next--The Landlord at Lion's Head and The Son of Royal Langbrith--needs to be analyzed at great length to show Howells's later use of a balanced heredity-environment determinant in character and motivation. Both of them are among Howells's best work; it is to be regretted that they are not more widely known.

Jeff Durgin, who becomes the landlord at Lion's Head, is one of Howells's most convincing characters. How should he be described in a word? As a boy he is impish; as a young man he is lazy; in the full strength of manhood he is not a villain, yet not a hero, not really a sinner, yet certainly not a saint--since he is a Howells creation, it is enough to say that he is merely a boor.

We first meet Jeff when a Boston painter named Westover comes to Lion's Head Farm to paint a picture of the picturesque outcropping of stone that tops a nearby mountain and gives the farm its name. The stone is in the form of a lion, couchant; if this suggests Hawthorne's fiction to any reader, Howells is not disappointed: "Lion's Head was a part of the landscape, as imperative and importunate as the Great Stone Face itself."[39] The farm and the region surrounding it have

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[39]Howells, The Landlord at Lion's Head (New York: Harper & Bros., 1908), p. 3.

"remained almost primitively solitary and savage."[40] This is the physical environment in which Jeff, son of a tubercular father and a stalwart mother, has lived during his thirteen years of existence.

Westover, a sort of Jamesian reflector character in the novel, tries to make friends with the lad and finds himself alternately loved and repulsed. Jeff likes to watch the progress of his paintings, likes to help him carry his equipment; but when the painting is finished, Westover leaves the farm under a rain of hard green apples, carrying away with him the memory of Jeff's impish face leering at him over the top of a tombstone in the family burying ground.

When the painter returns several years later, he finds that Mrs. Durgin has turned the farmhouse into a modest summer hotel that she may have the money to send Jeff to Harvard--a prospect toward which Jeff is more or less indifferent. At Harvard, Jeff, who has not had the advantage of a socially correct preparatory school, finds himself a "jay," and lacking the sense to associate with other studious jays, he soon finds himself being taken up by a crowd of idlers. He gets into a little squabble with the Boston police over breaking a streetlamp and spends a night at the police station. During vacation he works his way to Europe, is more impressed by the artistry of Swiss hotel keeping than the collections of the Louvre, and returns with the idea that he might be able to turn Lion's Head into a really first-class

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[40] Ibid.

summer hotel. On the boat he catches a glimpse of Mrs. and Miss Vostrand, two of those Europeanized American females of the world of James and Howells who are forever voyaging from port to port without the encumbrance of husband or father. Back in Boston, he manages to meet Miss Vostrand through the agency of Westover, and after a decent interval proposes marriage to her. Such an alliance is impossible, because Mrs. Vostrand has already marked out an Italian count for her daughter, a marriage that is quickly carried through when Mr. Vostrand--who is piling up money somewhere in the hinterland--finally takes time to wire enough cash to pay off the count's debts and make an honest man of him.

Jeff is not one to suffer long from a broken heart. He goes back to Lion's Head and offers himself to Cynthia Whitwell, a lass with whom he grew up and who has always had a special fondness for him because he used to sic his mongrel dog on her and because he cribbed all his homework from her when he was preparing for college. Cynthia at least understands Jeff; she agrees with him on the plan of operating a hotel, but she forces him to go back and finish college first.

By this time, Jeff has gained a slender toehold in Boston society, largely through Westover's reluctant endorsement of him. Now back in college, he easily forgets Cynthia when he has a chance to flirt with Bessie Lynde, a Proper Bostonian who tries to ease her ennui by picking up jays, much as her brother Alan diverts himself with the bottle. Poor Jeff! He gets Alan roaring drunk one night and has to

take him home. Alan is so far gone that he must be helped into the house, and once inside the door he collapses into an alcoholic heap. The aunt with whom the Lyndes live is already asleep upstairs. Thus Jeff and Bessie are left alone, unchaperoned, at 3 a.m. Of course Jeff tips his hat and leaves, but it is understood between them that now they must necessarily be engaged. The affair drifts along, reaching a minor crisis when Jeff has the temerity to kiss Bessie, making her realize that "she had been kissed as once she had happened to see one of the maids kissed by the grocer's boy at the basement door."[41] But she lacks the will to break off the affair; it remains for her brother to stay away from the bottle long enough to give Jeff a good horse-whipping in splendid Victorian fashion, after which Jeff knows that he is no longer wanted around the Lynde household.

Mrs. Durgin dies, and the hotel passes to Jeff. Once more he starts to Europe to study hotel management, but before he leaves he has an opportunity to revenge himself on Alan Lynde. Jeff, whose generosity always asserts itself sooner or later, chokes Alan to within an inch of his death and then magnanimously lets him go. In Florence, he runs into the Vostrands again, and the daughter, by this time having divorced the count, at last consents to marry him. And Cynthia? She marries Westover, the painter.

Jeff reflects the "primitively solitary and savage" en-

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[41]Howells, Landlord at Lion's Head, p. 300.

vironment that nurtured him, and on this level he is partly the product of his physical environment--a reverse, we might say, of Ernest in "The Great Stone Face." Even his physique reflects his savage animality. Westover muses that

> there was something in Jeff's figure which did not lend itself to. . . formal fashion; something of herculean proportion which would have marked him of a classic beauty perhaps if he had not been in clothes at all, or of a yeomanly vigor and force if he had been clad for work, but which seemed to threaten the more worldly conceptions of the tailor with danger. It was as if he were about to burst out of his clothes, not because he wore them tight, but because there was somehow more of the man than the citizen in him; something native, primitive, something that Westover could not find quite a word for, characterized him physically and spiritually.[42]

And Bessie notes the same characteristics in him even before he kisses her grocerboy-fashion. "His face is so rude and strong," she tells her aunt, "and he has such a primitive effect in his clothes, that you feel as if you were coming down the street with a prehistoric man that the barbers and tailors had put a fin de siècle surface on." She feels, she says, "as if he were really carrying me off to his cave."[43]

Cynthia's father, a garrulous old fellow who amuses the lady boarders at the hotel by conducting nature walks for them, reiterates time after time that "It's the way the feller's built, I presume, as much as anything,"[44] but he him-

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[42] Ibid., p. 114.

[43] Ibid., p. 207. Jeff's bestiality invites us to compare the date of the novel with two other famous examples of vivid atavism (in the popular meaning of the term) that occur in American literature. Howells's novel (1897) preceded Jack London's Call of the Wild (1903) but was conceived after Frank Norris's Vandover (written 1894-5; published 1914).

[44] Ibid., p. 361.

self acknowledges that "you got to account in all these here heredity cases for counteractin' influences."[45] Perhaps we should not place too much reliance on Whitwell's testimony, for his conception of the highest work of science is foretelling the future with a sort of Ouija board outfit.

Yet, it is evident, as one goes through the novel, that Howells intends Jeff to be understood in terms of both his heredity and environment, and not of his physical environment alone but the social as well. Though the following thoughts are attributed to Jeff himself, because they express in another form the theory of complicity, they can also be taken as Howells's as well.

> Life had, so far, not been what he meant it, and just now it occurred to him that he might not have wholly made it what it had been. It seemed to him that a good many other people had come in and taken a hand in making his own life what it had been; and if he had meddled with theirs more than he was wanted, it was about an even thing. As far as he could make out, he was a sort of ingredient in the general mixture. He had probably done his share of the flavoring, but he had had very little to do with the mixing. There were different ways of looking at the thing. Westover had his way, but it struck Jeff that it put too much responsibility on the ingredient, and too little on the power that chose it. He believed that he could prove a clear case in his own favor, as far as the question of final justice was concerned, but he had no complaints to make. Things had fallen out very much to his mind. He was the Landlord at Lion's Head. . . .[46]

The Son of Royal Langbrith (1904) is a good example of how Howells could begin a novel with a situation of almost ludicrous triviality and still end up with a good story. The opening situation is this: Dr. Anther, a successful village

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[45] Ibid., p. 149.

[46] Ibid., p. 364.

physician well past the prime of life, asks the widow of Royal Langbrith to marry him. Mrs. Langbrith has been widowed fourteen years and has known all along that someday Anther would propose marriage. Her late husband, a hypocritical plutocrat who had a kept woman in Boston while he lived, had tyrannized over her. She hated him. She has always admired and respected Anther; yet when he asks her to marry him, she blushingly declines, and the reason she gives is that her grown son, James, a student at Harvard, would be displeased.

Once we get over the hurdle of believing such a situation possible, we find it not only possible but inevitable. Royal Langbrith, were he not dead when the story opens, would be the most sinister character in Howells's gallery. Even from the grave he continues to exert such influence that his widow is still terrorized by his portrait over the mantel.

While he lived Langbrith was so consummately wicked that he drove his partner, Hawberk, to opium eating. Ironically, now that he is dead, the whole village acknowledges him as its benefactor, because he once endowed the village library. Hawberk is so far gone in his habit that even he has come to think of Langbrith as his best friend. And the son, James, has grown up believing his father one of the best and greatest men who ever lived. Only Amelia--Mrs. Langbrith--and Dr. Anther know the truth, and she cannot speak for fear of wounding her son; Dr. Anther cannot speak for fear of wounding her. John Langbrith, Royal's brother, knows part of the truth, but he is a man given wholly to business and keeps so

close to it that he eats and sleeps in his office and has hardly spoken even to his nephew.

When James comes home from college to unveil a plaque to his father's memory, Anther thinks he cannot go through the mockery of eulogizing the dead man, and tries to get Judge Garley and the Episcopalian Rev. Dr. Enderby, whom he lets into his secret, to join him in revealing the truth. But it is too late, and the ceremony is carried out.

It is wholly by chance--just as the thesis of The World of Chance would have it--that James learns the true facts about his father. His uncle, coming upon him on a train at a moment when his stomach ulcers are giving his disposition an especially nasty turn, is enraged by the sight of the indolent young fellow, and blurts out enough of the facts so that James is convinced of their truth and is prompted to extract the rest of the story from his mother. The characters are all neatly disposed of by death or marriage, with James marrying Hope Hawberk, the daughter of the man his father drove to opium--and the novel ends.

Since Royal Langbrith is really not a character in the novel, his wickedness does not have to be explained; the real subject is the study of the environmental effect of his life on the lives of those who outlived him. Nevertheless, Dr. Anther, who hated him most, does reach a conclusion about Langbrith before he himself dies. He accounts for Royal Langbrith "with a scientific largeness in which Enderby could not

join him."[47]

> [Anther] regarded him, apparently, with no more resentment than some treacherous and cruel beast whose propensities imply its prey, and which has satisfied them with a moral responsibility difficult or impossible for our ethics to adjust. In these speculations, Royal Langbrith seemed for him a part of the vast sum of evil, not personally detachable and punishable. . . . He alleged the attitude of Hawberk. . . . Hawberk once said that he guessed Royal Langbrith was built that way, and that it was too late to give him a realizing sense that there was anything out of order in his machinery.[48]

So Langbrith was disposed of by saying that he was built that way; that is, his evil was apparently innate, though we notice that it does not pass down to his son. Once again the explanation of character goes back to Howells's often repeated idea that the natural is inferior, even evil, and that goodness is achieved only by conscious effort.

As for the effect Langbrith's evil nature produced on those about him, the Rev. Dr. Enderby--who could not join in Anther's scientific largeness--says to his wife:

> "How do we know but that in that mystical legislation, as to whose application to our conduct we have to make our guesses and inferences, there may not be a law of limitations by which the debts overdue through time are the same as forgiven? . . . It may be the complicity of all mortal being is such that the pain he [Royal Langbrith] inflicted was endured to his behoof, and that it has helped him atone for his sins as an acceptable offering in the sort of vicarious atonement which has always been in the world."[49]

It may be so, says the minister; and surely Howells does not intend the statement to be put more positively. It may be,

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[47]Howells, The Son of Royal Langbrith (New York: Harper & Bros., 1905), pp. 355-356.

[48]Ibid., p. 356. [49]Ibid., p. 369.

then, that ultimate good can come from immediate evil, but we do not know. This is the moral conclusion that Howells feels obliged to tack on at the end of the story. The purpose of the novel has been rather to present a realistic study of the interrelationships of human lives, and as in so many of Howells's novels, two of the interrelationships that figure prominently in character and plot can conveniently be labeled heredity and environment. Heredity, so far as any explanation of Langbrith's wickedness is given, is the root of the evil; environment, in this instance, is to some extent its amelioration.

In The Son of Royal Langbrith we see Howells the conscious literary artist using heredity and environment as integral materials of his art, not as the framework for a problem novel as he had done with heredity in An Imperative Duty. By and large this is the sort of use he makes of these ideas in most of his novels; it would be a gross misrepresentation of Howells to insist that heredity and environment are more than useful materials to him. By means of these relationships he gives depth to characters and, in some novels, controls plot and motivation. But much the same can be said for most modern novelists. It is only because of his theory of complicity, in which heredity and environment figure so handily as two of the natural ties, that a study such as the present one is justified. Insofar as complicity is a sort of leitmotif in Howells's fiction, his views on natural human ties become important.

He reflected biological commonplaces of his time, and in no way was particularly original. In common with most of his fellow Americans, he thought in terms of superior and inferior races, and it is to his credit that despite his belief in Negro inferiority he fully appreciated the gentle and pacific nature of that race. His opinion concerning races related to his belief that the natural man--the uncivilized man --is weaker and more wicked than the civilized. He tended to grant the natural man no benevolent environmental conditioning but that provided by the physical environment, and this led to the implication that hereditary endowments in the main are apt to be socially undesirable traits--but it is impossible to insist that this is a personal belief of Howells, for in the nature of the novel evil is likely to appear innate, goodness to be acquired by training and effort.

In a very general sense, it can be said that Howells, like most civilized men, does believe the civilizing forces of the world are essentially environmental, else there would be no need for the careful safeguard and transmission of the fruits of civilization. But he rides no thesis. When it serves his purpose to do so he can utilize the inheritance of desirable traits to fix a character; James Langbrith, for instance, inherits none of his father's despicable character but much of his mother's sweetness and gentleness--it is only the wicked environmental influence of his father that makes him the snob and weakling he is at the opening of the novel. As the natural man is generally conditioned adversely by his

physical environment, so a civilized man may receive deleterious effects from his social environment. As Heredity may bless, it also may damn. Howells draws no easy generalizations. His view of human relations is at once old and at the same time compellingly modern. We submit to the verity of the complicity of life whether we assent with John Donne that "no man is an Iland, intire of it selfe" or humble ourselves with T. S. Eliot that so far as the possibilities of life go, "the best of a bad job is all any of us make of it."

Chapter IX

Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells: Conclusion

As contrasted with Holmes, neither Hawthorne nor Howells attempted any theorizing of their own about heredity. When they made use of heredity in their fiction they chose ideas acceptable to their readers by reason of their familiarity. Both of them thought of heredity as a force relatively unaffected by other pressures, and they tended to use it to account for otherwise inexplicable facets of character, frequently character socially undesirable. Hawthorne, writing before the scientific study of heredity had begun but in the light of the Puritan tradition with its stress on the sins of the fathers visited on the children, drew on the folk wisdom of the ages, sharpening his insights by his own profound study of the nature of man. Howells, writing after Darwinism had thrown the problem of heredity into bold relief and much progress toward a scientific understanding of heredity had been accomplished, drew on the scientific knowledge available to intelligent laymen and, without trying to crowd his pages with gratuitous scientific facts, enriched his expositions of motivation by reference to the new scientific knowledge of human nature.

Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells all grant far more power and influence to heredity than geneticists would today. None

of them tries to distinguish exactly what may be inherited and what not. In various places Hawthorne affirms the hereditary nature of physical appearance, intelligence, insanity, moral stamina, temperament, disease, a whole spectrum of character traits both good and bad--even manners. Howells is never so specific, but he frequently relates characters by physical appearance, the physical resemblance being understood to body forth intellectual, moral, or temperamental similarities. Holmes, as a physician, dwells on the therapeutic value of a doctor's knowing the hereditary constitutional patterns of his patients, and, as a novelist, he takes advantage of heredity to indicate physical appearance and especially to show temperamental affinities between related characters.

In many ways the practice of Hawthorne and Howells stands apart from that of Holmes. Not only because they were better novelists (they were artists of the novel; Holmes was a talented amateur), but also because they were concerned with manner as well as matter, they used their knowledge of heredity as part of their craft. Holmes, on the other hand, used heredity to argue a thesis, and the argument would have been much the same had he chosen to argue in a form other than fiction.

Consequently, it is proper that Holmes should have the the more perfectly developed theory of heredity. His interest in heredity originated in his ancestral Calvinism, but it is in his own studies of physiological psychology that he finds

the germ of a unified theory, and it is this theory that he brings to bear in his later onslaught on Calvinism in his argument for limited responsibility for antisocial actions. From Marshall Hall's concept of the reflex arc he learned that there are many simple automatic muscular responses which are not under the control of the brain, hence not under the control of the will. These responses, such as a baby's automatic recoil from a source of pain, are born in us as part of the protective mechanism which guards us from injury. Since we have no choice but to obey their imperative demands, obviously we cannot be held accountable for our obedience. They are, in a word, instincts.

Holmes willingly supposes that in the less cultivated sections of society instinct plays a major part in human motivation--though he and such fellow Brahmins as Emerson, Motley, and Harriet Beecher Stowe are strictly accountable for their actions. If these instincts are inherited, as he is confident they are, then antisocial actions will not be eliminated by the punishment of the offenders. To illustrate such inheritances, Holmes wrote his first two novels, choosing, somewhat ineptly perhaps, in the first to show the effects of the inheritance of a foreign poison, in the second the effects of compelling ancestral traits.

As his study of instinctive reflex action deepened his understanding of the psychic nature of man, he came to see that not all reflexes are established by the time of birth but some may be produced by traumatic environmental experi-

ences early in life. This is developed in the third novel, and it is what we now call the conditioned reflex. Such an idea was in keeping with the other part of his theory of heredity that had been developing since 1857 at least, when he wrote what amounted to a defense of biological evolution. In 1857 Holmes was not prepared to accept all the implications of Darwinism that was to come two years later, because he thought of evolution as requiring some kind of intensification of existing forces to begin it, and because he was unwilling to abandon the idea of free will. By 1874, however, he saw the truth of Darwinian uniformitarianism and he had reached a pragmatic stand on free will that recognized it on one level of thought, rejected it on another. In his own 1857 evolutionary theory he had posited two forces as responsible for the integrity of existing species: a primary hereditary force (a general organizing principle) and a secondary environmental one (a local determining principle). From the interaction of these two forces, he believed, there issues a third: a resultant that combines both and is itself the guide to the direction that will be followed by both the species and the individual. Such a theory implies fixity of species and absolute hereditary determinism.

Social conservative that he might be, Holmes stood ever on the liberal side in science. Once he saw that Darwinism made his own evolutionary theory untenable, he quietly abandoned it (he never reprinted the 1857 essay though he believed it contained some of his best thought), but he sal-

vaged the basic pattern of the idea for his heredity theory. He could give up the idea of fixity of species readily enough, and he could adapt the idea of absolute hereditary determinism by changing the time when character becomes fixed, from birth to a later period of life. This is the view of heredity that appears in the second novel and the later collections of essays. Myrtle Hazard is made up of warring hereditary elements, and it is not until she has passed through adolescence that they make their peace with each other and her character is substantially established. And even then, as Maurice Kirkwood bears witness, character is still somewhat plastic, at least to the extent that conditioned reflexes established early in life may be removed much later.

Holmes pushed his scientific speculation farther than exact knowledge of the time actually warranted, and he was remarkably fortunate in finding paths that later would be marked out definitively by actual experimentation. He anticipated several of Galton's ideas about heredity, ideas which Galton earned for himself by cautious if plodding statistical work. Similarly Holmes anticipated Pavlov's discovery of the conditioned reflex, with the important difference that Pavlov proved it by experimentation on dogs while Holmes guessed it in a novel. But his theory did save him from Galton's mistake of trying to find an arithmetical formula for inheritance; Holmes was completely aware that heredity is far too complicated to be reduced to an easy formula.

Hawthorne had no theory of heredity, but he shared with his Puritan ancestors the conviction that man does not create his own personality and character but is the product of forces originating outside himself and over which he has very little control. Where the Puritans would have spoken of predestination, Hawthorne speaks of fate or providence (depending on whether the force seems evil or benevolent), and when he attempts to show these forces in action in the lives of men he unconsciously turns to hereditary motifs. His observation of life leads him to recognize, if not to so name, the conditions of latent heredity, of acquired characteristics, and of atavism. He is aware of the significance of the environment somewhat more than Holmes. He makes little use of a distinctively social environment, but he considers that an individual is a joint product of his physical environment and his heredity. These two factors interact to make a man what he is--the hereditary one predominating in efficacy--and once so made the individual is not subject to further change. In a long range view, however, Hawthorne does grant considerable significance to environment, for over many years it makes pronounced changes in whole families and races, accounting for the differences between the British and the Americans, who are otherwise of the same genetic stock.

If Hawthorne, unlike both Holmes and Howells, seldom uses heredity clues for the purpose of indicating the physical appearance of his fictional characters, he does use heredity to indicate their moral nature. Seeing the modifying effect

of environment as working only through long periods of time as he does, he cannot believe that a change of the physical environment can have much immediate effect upon an individual, therefore the moral nature of a Judge Pyncheon is accounted for by his heredity--his acquisition of advantages in life has made him no better, and probably no worse, than he would have been without them. Holmes acknowledges the possibility of what he calls "Nature's republicanism," but by and large he is convinced that ability runs in families and that blood streams ought to be kept pure. Hawthorne's stand is exactly the reverse: Judge Pyncheon, and to a lesser extent his kinswoman Hepzibah, ought not to exist; their aristocratic pride in family has kept pure too long a blood line which should have been submerged in the great stream of common humanity long ago. Hawthorne's scheming politician Judge Pyncheon and Holmes's Brahmin Bernard Langdon--in them are objectified the poles of opinion on hereditary continuity.

Hawthorne, as a symbolist, turns heredity to the purpose of portraying moral nature by means of physical symbols. Howells, as a realist, both in critical theory and artistic practice, turns heredity to the purpose of investigating man in his social contexture. No more directly concerned with technical science than Hawthorne, Howells nevertheless cannot escape the scientific temper of his time, and this is nowhere more evident than in his carefully balanced treatment of both heredity and environment in the nature of man. Because he derives his scientific knowledge from such secondary

sources as the writings of his friend Fiske and from elaborations and extensions of Darwinism such as the critical theory of Taine, Howells has no theory of his own to advance. He did think of his doctrine of complicity as a unifying concept in his study of man, and to this his knowledge of both heredity and environment contributed.

Writing as he did after Darwin and especially the expounders of Darwin had placed such a heavy emphasis upon chance as a factor in natural selection, Howells saw chance where Hawthorne might have seen fate, and Holmes might have seen inherited instinct. Yet, even in a world of chance, Howells found that so far as fiction was concerned human motivation could be made understandable and even logical by reference to heredity and environment. Going further, he found that the physical environment alone is not enough to account for human actions; human beings are largely independent of their physical environments but their range of activity is limited by the social environments in which they find themselves. If, as he discovered when he began to consider economic problems, the social environment is such that it makes decent life impossible, then the obvious remedy is to change the environment, and it is to this end that his Christian socialism is aimed.

Howells's doctrine of complicity gives focus to his social criticism. If it is true that all human beings are intimately bound together by ties of heredity, environment, political allegiance, social groupings, economic interests,

race, and even time, then whatever affects one part of the human race to some extent must affect all. But at the same time, Howells is confident that all men are not equal; particularly he considers Negroes and other "natural men" inferior to those who have had the benefits of culture and refinement. It is not that he believes these people innately inferior, but he refuses to shut his eyes to the disparity between them and persons whose advantages have given them greater possibilities for achievement. So long as such inequality remains, he insists, we must all expect to suffer for it.

Though he uses heredity to indicate temperament, to show physical appearance, and to a degree in the motivation of his characters, Howells does tend to stress environment more. This is partly accounted for by his desire to better the lot of mankind, for social environment is a factor that can be changed. Yet it is also true that during the time spanned by the careers of Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells there was an increase of awareness among writers of the importance of environment, culminating in the naturalistic novelists who often presented man as wholly at the mercy of his environment. It is noteworthy, though, that none of these three takes any such dismal view.

It is not too large a generalization to say that in the main Holmes raised the problem of heredity for the humanitarian purpose of provoking sympathetic rehabilitation of social outcasts; Hawthorne dipped into the stream of folk

knowledge of heredity to draw forth ideas that could be put to artistic use as moral symbols; and Howells selected from the scientific study of man whatever he could use in his critical study of society. The questions raised by these men are still far from solved. The scientific study of human nature will surely continue to provide answers, and will as surely continue to find new problems. So far as heredity helps us to understand ourselves, Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells each contributes a mite to our self-knowledge of our own being, and they help us realize, as they themselves were fully aware, how much there is yet to learn.

Still, considerable as may be the contributions to knowledge possible in a novel, it is the novel as art which remains. To call the roll of novels by these writers in which heredity figures prominently is to mention some of the most distinguished fiction written in America, several titles of which are sure to remain long to the honor of American literature. A study of heredity in these novels would be justified if it did no more than illuminate The House of the Seven Gables. But the practice of all three novelists--Hawthorne, Holmes, and Howells--shows what has been done with heredity in the past and points to what can still be done as long as novelists write to portray imaginatively the fundamental nature of man.

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