OF THE NEW GENEALOGY;

ITS ENLARGED FIELD OF STUDY.

How Genealogy as a Science May Help Us to Help Ourselves.

[From an Address at the 60th Anniversary of the New England Historic, Genealogist Society by Charles K. Bolton. Printed in the Boston Transcript.]

Genealogy touches life in its most momentous relations. Why, then, does not our subject appeal more strongly to scholars? Why is it not more often called a science? I think we can answer this by saying that genealogy as it is customarily studied or developed does not closely ally itself with other fields of serious research. In this genealogy is weak. If it is to receive honor from the historian, the anthropologist, or the sociologist, it must contribute something to the sciences into which these men delve. For every true science does contribute to every other true science. Genealogy has done much to make people happy, a little perhaps to make people better. But in so far as it merely contributes to vanity and self-satisfaction it is unworthy to rank as a science.

Our subject comes nearest to doing its duty worthily in its alliance with history. A few family books tell of political events contemporary with the lives depicted, although too often they give much space to descriptions of wars and to the parts played in them by the members of the family. Did these soldiers never have political views? Were their lives never influenced by current events, by an inflated currency, a shortage in the bread supply, a scarcity of maid servants, or if these events are not enough, by the acts, outrageous or otherwise, of the governor of a colony or of a king across the water? Does our genealogist never say that in such a year Thomson's Seasons or Addison's Spectator was discussed at the village lyceum or sewing circle, and that his family led in the discussion? A large library frequently receives books and newspapers of early date which bear familiar names written on the flyleaf or margin. Our ancestors, therefore, did have their books and papers. Does a genealogy mention what books long ago members of the family owned, or read as they sat about the hearth in the fitful light of evening? Here are subjects for research. "Titles of early books and by whom owned," "Titles of early newspapers and their subscribers." Shall we not some day find a great, great-grandson who will take more pride in the fact that his log-cabin ancestor owned a copy of "Paradise Lost" than that he fought at Louisburg?

It would be of value to the student if he could find in a genealogy much about early customs and methods of work.

Farming out the paupers, paying the minister in produce, co-operation in building and in reaping, the work of the middle man in buying and selling cattle—these are subjects on which family papers throw light. To the student of economics they are of value. If he finds his facts summarized in a family history and is not forced to search for them himself, genealogical study has become the handmaid of economics, and is a science.

In very few of our volumes have I seen any statement in regard to the domestic life of the people who are recorded in the family book. The average reader today does not stop to think that Jeremiah and Samantha, Seaborn and Mind-well settled down to married life with cornmeal instead of white flour, pork instead of beef, cider instead of coffee, and the all-useful knife instead of a fork. Does a genealogy mention under the proper generation the coming into use of white sugar, the introduction of the Irish potato, the stove and the carriage, or the craze for the growing of flax and the founding of the Boston spinning school? These events influenced the lives of our ancestors. In short, are we genealogists writing the lives of people or are we copying records?

Genealogy, again, owes a debt to anthropology and to sociology. What is the effect of environment on life? It is said that the second generation on American soil suffered from the struggle to subsist. That is, it was weaker and less well educated. The historian of a famous New England stock wrote that the men of this second generation, living in hardship and privation, all died early from the excessive use of alcoholic liquor. The author at least was frank in his desire to picture the life of his ancestors. But most of our family histories expected us to assume that we are reading the lives of the saints.

The great contribution which we can make to science is along the line of heredity. Where so surely may the student expect to find his basic facts as in the family history? And yet the biographical dictionary is almost his sole reliance, although this source gives him a picked class only on which to base his conclusions. If he had half a dozen scientifically prepared genealogies, describing old stock, what a mine of information would be his! One good family the Jonathan Edwards line—and several of a criminal bent have been described in books, but not by a family historian. In order that we may write a pleasant genealogy are we to omit all that might aid the student of heredity? If your family is composed of saints, add to the study of saints by writing a scientific genealogy of them. If it is not, spare your parents, if you must be filial to the point of canonizing them, but do not canonize the whole family.

In the study of the factors which go to make up environment there is comfort in the conclusions reached by Mendel, the great Austrian monk whose researches are now the only sure foundations which we have for the study of heredity. His disciple Bateson says that "whereas our experience of what constitutes the extremes of unfitness is fairly reliable and definite," so that society may work to eliminate the unfit strains, "any attempt to distinguish certain strains as superior and to give special encouragement to them would be unsafe, since we have as yet so little to guide us in estimating the qualities for which society has or may have a use. So elusive is the origin of what we call genius!"

Few books of the kind we have under review speak much of physical inheritances. At every point I find that scientists differ as to the significance of the facts thus far made available, perhaps because so little evidence is to be had. Do you find long lines of descent bearing light hair and blue eyes, with other lines of dark eyes and hair? In England the upper classes tend to light hair and eyes. Does it follow that as stock improves through several generations the color of hair and eyes tends to lighten? I fear no family history can tell us. Do certain diseases run in certain lines? Is it not for us to furnish much of the material for which science calls in the further study of these problems? In Bateson's work on Mendel's principles of heredity, published at Cambridge, Eng., this year, you will find a series of questions to be answered by a study of families. A man who is color-blind has, we will say, a normal sister who marries. It is said to be an even chance whether any of her children will be color-blind at all; but if they are, then the sons will be color-blind-and-normal in equal numbers, and her daughters will all be normal.

Again, a color-blind man marries a normal woman, and the children will show no trace of the defect. But if we reverse the conditions, and the man be normal and the wife color blind, the sons will all be color blind, and the daughters, while all normal, will be capable of transmitting color blindness to the next generation. When scientists are enunciating such theories, is it not for us to apply them, to reaffirm what proves to be truth and to put a stop to error?

The law of heredity laid down by Galton and partially confirmed by observation should interest every genealogist. He says that half of the sum of our inheritance is from our parents and one-fourth from our grandparents. Nevertheless, slight as the thread of descent becomes back of one's grandparents, a woolly head or a deformed hand may reappear in each generation for two centuries. This being true, we may with equal hope of success look for the persistence of a valuable inheritance through many generations.

This transmission of habits and mental endowments must prove of interest to every one of us. The Puritan is called sober-minded and hardy, the Scotchman witty and thrifty, the Irish emigrant adaptable and ambitious. These and other conceptions of race peculiarity seem sure. What, then, of the inheritance of the individual? It seems that the average family in England consists of about five children, although some statistics put the number as high as six. In families where there is abnormal ability the average number of children rises from six to seven. The same tendency to raise the average is observable in criminal stock, also, showing that genius and degeneracy appear to be allied, and that size of family may be significant. Has any genealogist ever found the average size of family in his book and then examined those children where the family group exceeds the normal to see whether the group tendency is toward genius or degeneracy?

Again, the oldest child has a much greater likelihood of a distinguished career than his brothers and sisters. Next to him in importance comes the youngest child. Is this theory, which is deduced from lives in the great English Dictionary of National Biography, true in New England?

Statistics seem to indicate that ability is democratic. It goes to the man who uses his hands almost as often as to the lawyer to bestow its laurels, oftener indeed to the farm than to the army or to the medical school. The two great sources of ability, says Havelock Ellis, have been the church and trade. What changes will our new environment bring forth. The church no longer seems to dominate the town, and trade, once the cherished vocation of the proud squire's younger son, is now less admired. Are the law and medicine to have their day in nurturing the world's leaders?

We who are here this evening have a right to be interested in the distribution and inheritance of ability, for John Winthrop's company with many others of our early ancestors came from Norfolk and Suffolk, the east county land of England, which has produced more great men than any other part of the British isles.

In trying to set for ourselves a higher standard of genealogical excellence, we do not forget the splendid work that has been done. Genealogy has been a blessing wherever its influence has gone. It makes for accuracy and order. It makes for sound reasoning. It has raised up in every city and frontier town an eager advocate for the preservation of records, so that volumes that once lay neglected are now in good repair and secure against fire. The old house going to decay receives a new covering of shingles because a study of old records reveals its part in history. Genealogy brings back to the hilltown the city daughter, reverencing the old surroundings, and eager to save memorials of her ancestral days from destruction.

To know of right living in our ancestors encourages us to higher ideals. To learn of ancestral weakness or disease prepares us to work intelligently to overcome unfortunate inheritances. Genealogy as a science helps us, therefore, to help ourselves. But it must also aid workers in other fields of science to help the race to which we all belong.