




# The Home



## The Child's Heritage

HE traits of children are either inborn or acquired. The inborn characteristics are present from the beginning of life; the acquired factors develop with the use of the bodily and mental powers. Leaving aside the consideration of the latter set of influences, let us take up the problem of innate characteristics, those namely, that the child has derived from his parents or the more remote members of his stock. Here we approach the science of heredity.

Though the manner and range in which heredity works have occasioned much discussion and disagreement, the fact of heredity is obvious and admitted by all. It means simply this: that the child is like his parents in nature, and derives from them certain definite characteristics both of body and mind. It is plain then that in the study of heredity we proceed not from parents to offspring, as people ordinarily think, but from offspring to parents.

Men speak today of social heredity which has only an analogy to biological heredity of which we are here speaking. Undoubtedly the child comes into the world nowadays with a richer social inheritance than in former times. He can profit by circumstances that did not exist previously. Conditions are always varying as the world progresses; new factors result which strongly influence the child's development.

But we are dealing here with biological heredity. Stating the case in its simplest terms it may be said that both physical and mental traits are inheritable. Thus we find types of features and other marked bodily resemblances prevailing among the members of a family. Similarly, the manifestation of mental abilities may be very largely of the same order throughout a single family. These characteristics may be either normal or abnormal, accordingly as they measure up to the average type. It is a well recognized fact that feeble-minded children are born

from feeble-minded parents. In such cases, the defect is usually explained by an inherited failure of organic development.

Note well, however, that resemblance is not always a proof of heredity. A child, for example, may be born with a disease from which the parents are suffering. This does not prove that he inherited the disease. He may have acquired it by infection, due to his intimate contact with the mother before or after birth. Again, he may have inherited a weak constitution with powers of resistance so enfeebled as to render it extremely liable to germ-infection from the parents. There is a general opinion to-day among doctors against the inheritance of disease. Almost any child, irrespective of parents, has a fair chance of sufficient health and strength to enable him to do his work in life, provided the environment in which he is raised be free from unhealthy contacts. To secure this end, it may be necessary to remove temporarily the infant from the immediate care of its parents. But surely the diseased mother or father who has the real welfare of the child at heart will be willing to sacrifice the tender offices of parenthood if this be the only resource for assuring the tender life of the little one.

The characteristics which are inherited do not of course appear in a completely expanded form, but rather as aptitudes or tendencies which in time and under proper conditions will gradually unfold and begin to influence the child's conduct. We know these traits only in the light of their later development. That they are present in the germ-cells from which the offspring is derived is certain, for otherwise the child would not have them. It is possible that some of these tendencies, latent in the seed, are stifled or modified by surroundings or by education. That this frequently happens is evident from the study of many characteristics undoubtedly inherited from parents, though not found in the parents themselves in a developed state. We rightly infer then that heredity is not the fatal endowment that many suppose it to be; and that undesirable qualities may be considerably modified for the better by favorable environment and training. Taking account of this fact, we raise the status of human society to a saner and a happier level by improving the conditions surrounding the birth and education of children.