

The Alpha.

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Human Rights before all Laws and Constitutions.—Gerrit Smith.
The Divine Right of Every Child to be Well Born.

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PARENTAL LEGACIES.

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE INSTITUTE OF HEREDITY, CONVENED IN BOSTON, MAY 25, 1881.

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To a toil-worn reformer this goodly meeting is truly a most cheering event—a green oasis in a vast desert of perversion, ignorance and hap-hazard discord. That ere the close of the nineteenth century, this congregation of philanthropists and reformers, men and women have met, to take counsel one of another and solemnly consider the most wise and legitimate methods of improving our common humanity, the most reasonable means whereby the world may become healthier, happier, purer, truer, through a knowledge of the laws of hereditary transmission.

Heredity means (according to Webster) descended by inheritance, ancestral, patrimonial, inheritable. But to use a more familiar definition, "The science that treats of the transmission of physical, mental and moral traits to descendants."

Many sided and perplexing as is a successful study of our subject, with its centuries of accumulated crookedness and mystery, we believe, with the aid of inspiration and the light of science, human intelligence and beneficence will be found competent to unravel this tangled mass of evidence and patiently arrange into order, testimony of the most valuable character, and evolve lessons of wisdom that will essentially advance the interests of the human race. Of course we are only seed sowers, and can only work with the implements and materials produced by our generation. We must begin with those already born and those that will be born in our day. It will be a vast benefit to posterity if we can so enlighten the rising generation that they will realize the necessity of studying their own patrimony, and that of the one they propose selecting for life companionship. If only this is accomplished the tide of human wisdom will have turned its efforts in the right direction and the opportunity for developing the most sublime traits of human characters will be afforded. For I predict our coming heroes will not be battle-stained and blood-stained men with maimed and crippled bodies, but men and women who will be canonized for their self-renunciation and the wise ordering of their lives for the good of others, for good works, diligence and skill.

Self-conquest will be an achievement recognized and honored by all men, and will become the power

which shall marshal their hosts against such spiritual enemies as tyranny, selfishness, ignorance and lust.

With such noble ends to be accomplished we look with great interest and solicitude to this new departure, this Institute of Heredity, and inquire what are the methods and plans by which such desirable results will be brought about?

If, by familiarity with our inherited traits and an inventory of possibilities, *ought* is discovered that cannot be satisfactorily transmitted to prove a joy and blessing to progeny, individual responsibility will be so patent that an irremediable defeat will settle the question of parentage at once, and an heroic resolution taken that their plague-spot shall die off from the face of the earth and be known no more forever. But if by knowledge of the laws governing development and a wise application of the law of selection, whereby the virtues and defects of contemplated partners may complement each other, with the sustaining praise and stimulating joy of establishing a new grade that shall lead to a desirable pedigree, and doing one's best toward redeeming the mistakes and blunders of the past, the results cannot fail of being most happy.

When fathers and mothers become as solicitous for the mental and moral qualities they leave behind them as they do of houses and lands, government bonds, promissory notes, articles of *virtu*, and other worldly and perishable possessions; when they strive to bequeath such priceless treasures as a healthy physique and well developed brain to their heirs, "the last will and testament" of progenitors will be less liable to litigation, legacies will be of more permanent value, and become objects of profound veneration. The spendthrift will not forget the sacredness of his inheritance; the man or woman, tempted by appetite will possess a double incentive to resistance. That rich, pure blood, may be transmitted untainted by any voluntary self-indulgence, and what of taint or discord we detect in ourselves will become a life-work to eradicate and conquer by the persevering observance of physical and moral hygiene; that only grace, health, and beauty be handed down to crown with joy the lives of coming ages of men. Then the unfortunate victim of malformation, of feeble intellectual and moral sense, with scrofula, syphilis, or insanity poisoning his blood, will be looked after and cared for by legal but humane authority, and will not be permitted to transmit his curse to posterity. The restraint imposed by legal enactment, reason and conscience, will be the tender but effectual means used to check this class

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