Why wooden legs? There was a sea-going family on the south coast, famous for many generations for its naval captains and admirals. They were in many hard sea fights, and often came home mutilated, and required the carpenter's help to enable them to walk. Hence it came to be said that "wooden legs ran in the family."

Jeremy Bentham even held that snoring was hereditary. "If a Bentham," said he, "does not snore, he is not legitimate. My father snored, my mother snored, and if my nephew does not snore, he is an impostor."* But what is of even more importance than snoring, idiocy is hereditary, "We know," says Haller, in his *Elements of Physiology*,† "a very remarkable instance of two noble females who got husbands on account of their wealth, although they were nearly idiots, and from whom the mental defect has extended for a century into several families, so that some of all their descendants still continue idiots in the fourth and even the fifth generation."

A more ludicrous case is that of a rich tradesman, who with his wealth, introduced his manners into an aristocratic family. When anything mean or shabby was done by his successors, the common remark was, "Oh! it is only the old skinner cropping up." In Smollett's novel of *Peregrine Pickle*, the hero finds a pretty young gipsy on the road, takes her home, dresses her like a lady, educates her, takes her to balls and dances with her. At last she was thought to be perfect. She went to a card party, where she found a distinguished lady cheating her; and then the virulence of her nature broke out at a rush; she abused her antagonist, cursed and swore at her, and left the room with abominable words and gestures—all in the old gypsy manner. "You cannot make a silken purse out of a sow's ear."

There is one thing that heredity does not influence; and

*Bowring, *Memoirs of Bentham*, p. 567.
† *Elem. Physiol.*, lib. xxiv. sect. 2, § 8

that is genius, especially poetical genius. Though talent is hereditary in many families, genius is in others merely a life possession, like a knighthood. In the case of men of the greatest genius there does not seem to have been anything remarkable, either in father or mother. These isolated geniuses stand out solitary and alone amidst the generations to which they belong. Though they may have left descendants, the latter have sunk into the line of common men. There has been nothing before them in their race, and nothing after. Intellectually, they seem to have had neither father nor mother. They have been the makers of their own brains, and, like Marshal Junot, have been their own ancestors. The circumstances in which they were born, and amidst which they were trained and brought up, may have been more propitious for the development of their genius than their actual parentage. At the same time it must be admitted that genius defies analysis, and cannot be traced to its source. This has especially been the case with the great poets. They come like comets depart on their course, and leave us wondering. Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, came and went. Shakespeare was the one man of his time—no Shakespeare before, none after, So we have only one Milton. Wordsworth's father and mother were ordinary persons. Byron was the one man of genius in his line. Shelley's origin was aristocratic but undistinguished. This poet was a practical contradiction to the hereditary theory. He was the one man of his race—a poetic ganglion, a throbbing nerve, an almost ethereal being. If genius were hereditary, what might we not expect from this son of Shelley the poet? Henry Crabb Robinson, in his *Diary** says: "Mrs. Shelley came in with her son. If talent descended, what might he not be? —he, who is of the blood of Godwin, Mary Woolstonecraft,

* *Diary, Reminisences, and Correspondence*, iii. p. 174.

Shelley, and Mrs. Shelley! What a romance is the history of his birth!" Keats had no poetic lineage. His father was a livery-stable keeper, and his mother was only distinguished for her love of pleasure, which, indeed, occasioned the premature birth of the poet.

The cases are very numerous where men of illustrious birth have shown no indications of the talent and genius which distinguished their progenitors. Indeed they have often displayed an exactly opposite character. The ancients, notwithstanding their regard for birth and nobility, were not insensible to the facts which stood against their theory. "Noble sons do not always spring from noble fathers," said Sophocles, "nor evil from evil; but there is no trusting to anything mortal." Themistocles was able to make his son a good horseman, but he failed to make him a good man. Aristides, Pericles, and Thucydides, alike failed with their sons. Germanicus, one of the wisest and most virtuous of Roman generals, and Agrippina, his wife, one of the most noble and virtuous of women, had six children, not one of whom displayed a particle of the goodness of their parents. Two of them—a son, Caius Caesar, better known as Caligula; and a daughter, Agrippina,—earned an exceptional infamy by the baseness of their crimes. Agrippina was the mother of Nero, one of the greatest monsters of antiquity: yet Nero had Seneca for his tutor. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius, was a model of virtue and learning; while his son, the Emperor Commodus, was a monster of cruelty. Young Scipio, the son of Africanus, was a fool and a prodigal. Marcus, the drunkard, was the son of Cicero, who dedicated to him the famous work *De Officiis*. Arcadius and Honorius were the weak and unhappy sons of the great Theodosius.

To come to more recent times. No Paladin was more

*Lord Houghton, *Life of Keats* (edition 1867), p 3.

renowned for heroic piety than Count Jocelline of France, and yet he was succeeded by a son infamous for his drunkenness and luxury; who lost his father's principality, and died of hunger. The virtuous and warlike Edward I. of England was succeeded by his son, Edward II., the vicious and pusillanimous. The brother of the pious Saint Louis was the cruel Charles of Anjou.

For some years after Sir Thomas More's marriage his wife had only daughters, and prayed anxiously for a boy. At last the boy came, who, on arriving at man's estate, proved weak and simple. Sir Thomas said to his wife: "Thou prayedst so long for a boy, that he will be a boy so long as he lives." Tully, the controversial divine, had a boy who was a sorry fool, and was quite the reverse of his father. The son may strive to live on his sire's renown, yet forfeits all chance of obtaining any himself, except for his arrogant folly. A French proverb says: "Happy are the children whose fathers are d——d;" a rough way of saying, "Lucky are the sons who do not depend for respect on the virtues of their fathers."

Luther's son completely disappointed him. He was unruly and disobedient. Waller's eldest son was disinherited and sent to New Jersey as "wanting in common understanding." Richard Cromwell—Oliver's son—was wholly unlike his father and mother; he was indolent and apathetic, and glad to lay aside the great office of state to which he succeeded. The son of William Penn, the Quaker was a roysterer, or what is commonly called a scamp. The son of John Howard, the philanthropist, was a vicious profligate, and his life was closed by the premature extinction of reason. Addison's only survivor was a daughter, of weak intellect. Lord Chesterfield wrote some remarkable letters to his son, enjoining politeness and good manners; and yet the son grew up ill-bred and a boor. Sir Walter Scott's son was a cavalry officer, who was ashamed of his

father's literary reputation, and boasted that he had never read his novels. Among other anomalies of descent, it may be added that Tom Paine (of the *Age of Reason*) had for his father a worthy Quaker of Thetford; William Godwin was the son of an Independent minister of Lowestoft; and Franklin's son was a loyalist, and died a pensioner of the British Government.

Even in art, the same anomalies prevail. Voltaire has observed in his *Life of Moliére*,—"on a remarqué que presque tous ceux qui de sont fait un nom dans les beaux-arts les ont cultivés malgré leurs parents, et que la nature a toujours été en eux plus forte que l'education." It is quite true, that in the greater number of cases, artists have had to force their way up amidst the greatest obstacles; Claude Lorraine, the pastry cook; Tintoretto, the dyer; Giotto, the peasant-boy; Zingaro, the gypsy; and artists in our own country, such as Opie and Romney, who were carpenters; Northcote, a watchmaker; Jackson, a tailor; Etty, a printer; and Lough, a stone-mason. Reynolds said that it was not birth that made the artist, but opportunity, application, and industry. Nature must, it is true, supply the gift; but it is only continuous labor that can develop it. Rembrandt, one of the greatest of artists, had a son, Titus, whom he carefully trained to be a painter; but all his efforts were failures, and the only reputation that Titus achieved was—that he was the son of his father.

When Blanquini, the musician, was at Milan, he desired to pay his respects to the son of the celebrated Mozart. He found him in his office, saluted him, and congratulated him upon his glorious birth. Young Mozart was somewhat gruff, and answered only with monosyllables. "But really, sir," said the visitor, "is it true that you are the son of the great Mozart?"—"Yes."—"You have come then into this country of the arts, protected by the shadow of your father."—"Umph!"—"I hope, sir, you take great pleasure in the piano or the violin?"—"What the devil do you take me for? I don't love music." "What? are not you a musician?"—"No sir, I am a banker. This is the music that I like;" and thrusting his hand into a pile of louis d'ors, he let them fall, jingling with the sound of gold, upon the counter. "That," he said, "is the music that I like." Blanquini left his presence in disgust.

The ignominious end of great lines is common. The noble line of Hastings,—descended from kings, with the blood of Plantagenet in its veins, as well as that of the pious Countess of Huntingdon,—expired in the person of a companion of blacklegs. "The tenth transmittor of a foolish face," as Byron says, "amounts to little." The old line of Staffords was last traced to a cobbler who never went *ultra crepidam*. The De Veres closed in a twentieth earl, who tainted his noble blood with shame. A descendant of the Dudleys took toll at a turnpike within sight of the towers that gave name to the barony of which he was co-heir. The last of the Plantagenets officiated as a sexton at a West End church. The *Newgate Calendar* contains the end of one noble lord whose ancestors "came in with the conqueror." The lineal descendant of Dermott MacMurrough, the last traitor-king of Leinster, was recently found working, under the name of Doyle, as a stone-mason at Liverpool. The representative of the Earl of Ulster, who flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, was recently a policeman in the Liverpool force. The grandson of one of the most eminent members of the Irish Parliament, who was not only distinguished as an orator but as a beautiful lyric poet, was recently acting as barman in a spirit vault near the Liverpool Exchange. The last descendant of Vasco de Gama acted as a butler. Such are a few among the many instances of degradation of lineage, as well as of the mutabilities of fortune.

"The king," says Landor, "may scatter titles and

dignities till lords, like the swarm of Dons in Sancho's Island, shall become troublesome as so many flesh-flies; but he may not save those amongst whom he scatters them from rottenness and oblivion." "The Emperor," said Gregory the Great, "can make an ape be called a Lion, but he cannot make him become one." An illustrious birth can only be ennobled by virtue, and that is a title of nobility which the king cannot bestow. James I. sold his peerages for cash, at the same time declaring, "Na! na! I can mak a man a lord, but I canna mak him a gentleman!"

The noble chivalry of the heart must be held as an inalienable privilege, which is the gift of God alone. Hence the best among our great men are what are called *parvenus*. Persons of low origin may have noble minds, and become noble by their goodness, virtue, and works. The grand distinction which alone merits love and admiration is wholly independent of that adventitious splendor which, however it may adorn and assist, can never of itself constitute greatness. The son of a wool-stapler is the most distinguished man in English story, and the son of a butcher one of the most graceful of gentlemen in the round of English verse. Genius is like the wind, that bloweth where it listeth. Genius bursts through circumstances, and makes a way for itself. Patience seeks a way, but genius makes one.

The highest minds have been created rather than developed. We have seen families comparatively low in intellect, rise and bring out of their line a great genius. How is it that genius is breathed into one man, while it was dormant in his obscure father and mother? Is this by the law of development or by the law of creation? It has been by the law of growth, as well as of development and creation. We breathe the breath of an independent life according to existing laws; and when the inspiration of

genius begins, the law of creation acts as it has done from the beginning.

It is true that every man's mind is more or less influenced by circumstances and surroundings. Men are made by the times in which they live. Provided they inherit energy and force of will, their powers are developed by encounters with difficulty and obstruction, and they become famous. In the case of their sons the circumstances are different. They have not been influenced by encounter with difficulty; their way of life has been made too easy for them; they are satisfied to enjoy the celebrity of their fathers, and at length sink into the herd of common men.*

How many parvenus and adventurers have there been? Among the greatest—Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton, Dryden, Pope, Burns, and Wordsworth, among poets; Newton, Davy, Watt, and Faraday, among philosophers; Themistocles, Cæsar, William the Conqueror. Pizarro, Cortes, and Buonaparte among warriors; Burke, Sheridan, Canning, Peel, Lyndhurst, Cobden, and D'Israeli, among statesmen; Jeremy Taylor, Bunyan, Tillotson, Dr. Johnson, Richardson, Carlyle, among literary men and divines; Arkwright, Brindley, Maudslay, the Brunels, the Stephensons, among mechanics and engineers; and nearly all the artists and sculptors.

America also is a country of parvenus. Though many men there have achieved greatness, very few of the more distinguished have been inheritors of fame and fortune.

* "Je me bornerai à faire remarquer que le fils d'un homme distingué dans les sciences ou les lettres est rarement placé au milieu des circumstances qui ont concouru a la célébrité de son pére, et qu'il lui est ordinairement plus agréable de jouier des résultats avantageux de cette célébrité, que de faire des efforts pour en acquérir une qui lui soit personnelle; et qu enfin, il est plus commun de voir le fils d'un savant marcher dignement sur les traces de son père, que le fils d'un poéte s'illustre dans le culte des muses: l'imagination est-elle donc moins héréditaire que le jugement?" Tissot, *De le Santé des Gens de Lettres.* Edité par Boisseau, p. 87.

Washington, though a country farmer and surveyor, was almost the only gentleman by right of birth in that astonishing company of thinkers and actors. Franklin was originally a printer; Sherman, a shoemaker; Knox, a bookbinder; Green, a blacksmith; John Adams and Marshall, the sons of poor farmers; and Hamilton, the most subtle, fiery, and electrical genius of them all, was originally the clerk to a shopkeeper. Daniel Webster, the son of a farmer, was rescued from the occupation of a drover by the sagacity of Christopher Gore. Calhoun was the son of a tanner and currier; and the father of Henry Clay was of the poorest class of Baptist ministers; Thomas Corwin was a waggoner; Silas Wright, a mechanic; Abraham Lincoln, a rail-splitter, and then a worker on the flat boats which navigated the Mississippi; and the present President of the United States was originally a schoolmaster. De Bruyère finely said of such illustrious persons: "These men have neither ancestors nor posterity; they alone compose their whole race."

There is no doubt about the parvenus. They are the men who do the great work of the world. They quarry out its grandest thoughts, write the most enduring works, do the greatest deeds, paint the finest pictures, and carve the noblest statues. For the parvenus are of the people, belong to them, and spring from them. Indeed, they are the people themselves. In recognizing the great parvenu spirit of this age we merely recognize what, in other words, is designated as the dignity of labor, the right of industry, the power of intellect. For real honor is due to the man who honestly carves out for himself, by his own native energy, a name and a fortune, diligently exercising the powers and faculties which belong to him as a man.

It has frequently been remarked that men of genius are for the most part childless. Many remain unmarried, and even when married they have left few children, and these

soon die off. Mr. Croker, in his edition of the *Life of Johnson*, says: "It is remarkable that none of our great, and few even of our second-rate poets, have left posterity,—Shakespeare, Jonson, Otway, Milton, Dryden, Rowe, Addison, Pope, Swift, Gay, Johnson, Goldsmith, Cowper, have left no inheritors of their names." To these might be added Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott, who have no male survivors. It seems as if it were ordained that the children of the brain are the only progeny of great men which are destined to endure. Sir Isaac Newton left no heir. The male branch of Sir Christopher Wren's family is extinct. The races of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr. Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, Brindley, Telford, Faraday, have ceased to exist. George Stephenson and his son Robert left no direct successor. Some of the great men abovementioned were unmarried, so that no other issue remains but their Children of the Brain. "Surely," says Bacon, "a man shall see the Noblest works and Foundations have proceeded from Childless men; which have sought to express the Images of their Minds, when those of their Bodies have failed. So the care of Posterity is most in them that have no Posterity." *

* Essay VII: "Of Parents and Children."