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A S K E T C H
OF THE LIFE OF
C A S P A R W I S T E R, M. D.,
WITH NOTICES OF HIS ANCESTORS.
By W. S. W. RUSCHENBERGER, M.D.

[Read November 5, 1890.]

THEORIES of heredity imply that the foundation of the natural characteristics of a man, structural and mental, is laid and gradually evolved by his ancestors very many decades before his birth; and that a detailed record of the natural qualities of his lineal predecessors might enable an expert in the premises to foretell the general character, if not the fortune of the newly-born infant, as satisfactorily at least as any forecast made by astrologers of old. In the present state of our knowledge of the complex operations of heredity, this suggestion is manifestly premature, and not likely to be realized.

Professor James H. Stoller says, in an essay on *Human Heredity*, "All the qualities of our human nature come to us by inheritance."¹ And Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes says—*Over the Tea cups*—"What he is by nature is not determined by himself, but by his parentage."

The accuracy of this assumption may be questioned. Even if exact, the inheritance is unequally and irregularly transmitted. Of many children of the same parentage, born and reared under the same circumstances, all may be of normal stature and intelligence or above; but sometimes one is unaccountably an ingenious dwarf, or an idiot physically well developed, or misshaped, "scarce half made up."

Dr. August Weismann says, in his essay on the *Duration of Life*, "We know that long life is hereditary." And yet all the children of

¹ Popular Science Monthly, July, 1890.