

on during three or even more generations in several members of the same family at the same age, especially in the case of rare affections in which the coincidence cannot be attributed to chance, and to doubt that there is a strong tendency to inheritance in disease at corresponding periods of life. When the rule fails, the disease is apt to come on earlier in the child than in the parent; the exceptions in the other direction being very much rarer. Dr. Lucas<sup>45</sup> alludes to several cases of inherited diseases coming on at an earlier period. I have already given one striking instance with blindness during three generations; and Mr. Bowman remarks that this frequently occurs with cataract. With cancer there seems to be a peculiar liability to earlier inheritance: Sir J. Paget, who has particularly attended to this subject, and tabulated a large number of cases, informs me that he believes that in nine cases out of ten the later generation suffers from the disease at an earlier period than the previous generation. He adds, "In the instances in which the opposite relation holds, and the members of later generations have cancer at a later age than their predecessors, I think it will be found that the non-cancerous parents have lived to extreme old ages." So that the longevity of a non-affected parent seems to have the power of influencing the fatal period in the offspring; and we thus apparently get another element of complexity in inheritance.

The facts, showing that with certain diseases the period of inheritance occasionally or even frequently advances, are important with respect to the general descent-theory, for they render it probable that the same thing would occur with ordinary modifications of structure. The final result of a long series of such advances would be the gradual obliteration of characters proper to the embryo and larva, which would thus come to resemble more and more closely the mature parent-form. But any structure which was of service to the embryo or larva would be preserved by the destruction at this stage of growth of each individual which manifested any tendency to lose its proper character at too early an age.

<sup>45</sup> 'Héréd. Nat.,' tom. ii. p. 852.