

CHAPTER 19 - The Genealogical Craze

Chapter 19 of "The Ways of Men" titled "The Genealogical Craze" explores America's extreme fascination with genealogy and social orders. The chapter opens with an observation on the American penchant for not doing things in moderation, attributing it to the lack of established social standards. This has led to a surge in genealogical interests, with people vying for membership in exclusive societies based on ancestral connections to historical events or figures.

The narrative then moves to discuss how this craze began with the formation of the "Daughters of the Revolution," for descendants of officers in Washington's army, and expanded rapidly as other similar societies emerged. These include the "Colonial Dames," the "Aztec" society for descendants of Mexican War officers, the "Social Order of Foreign Wars," and the "Children of 1812." This escalation in creating exclusive societies is seen as a manifestation of Americans' desire to not feel left out and to assert a social standing based on ancestry.

Men joined in with the "Sons of the Revolution," and women responded by creating the "Granddaughters of the Revolution" and "The Mayflower Order," signaling a descent from passengers of the Mayflower. The chapter portrays these developments as part of the American obsession with genealogy, leading to the formation of even more exclusive societies like the "Royal Order of the Crown," requiring proof of descent from royalty, and the "Circle of Holland Dames of the New Netherlands," focused on Dutch sovereign descent.

The author humorously compares this societal phenomenon to his school days when he and his classmates formed a society to feel important, underscoring the absurdity and vanity underlying these genealogical societies. The chapter concludes by criticising how these societies exploit individuals' desires for social recognition, with many exploiting the craze for personal gain. It suggests that this genealogical frenzy reflects a broader societal issue of prioritizing superficial distinctions over genuine connections and contributions.