1 Background and Origins

John Maurice Clark, who became a leading American Economist in the mid-twentieth century, was born on 30 November 1884 in Northampton, Massachusetts. He was the third son of John Bates Clark, himself the leader of the mainstream in American economics towards the close of the nineteenth century, and Myra Almeda (Smith) Clark, a graduate of Vassar College. As a member of this family, the young Clark had a number of unusual opportunities to make a decisive impact on the American intellectual and social tradition.

That he did so in fact is still remarkable. As the historian of American economics has noted: “There have been few cases of successive generations of a family substantially contributing to the advancement of knowledge. Certainly in the field of economics it has been rare.” However, “The United States can . . . boast of that rarest of cases: a father and son both of whom achieve[d] the rank of seminal thinkers. This was the fate of John Bates Clark and John Maurice Clark, both of Columbia University.”

THE CLARK FAMILY BACKGROUND

His place of birth is indicative, since the Clark family had deep roots in the soil of Puritan New England. Throughout the writings and actions of both the younger Clark and his father, the themes of those Puritan pioneers who had struggled to build a “Zion in the wilderness” run intensely and steadily. On the eve of his eightieth birthday, John Bates Clark remarked to an audience of friends and colleagues assembled in his honor that he had once visited one of his great-grandfathers who fought in the Revolutionary War. “I saw him,” Clark said, “conversed with him, . . . and I have his journal, kept during the war.” The elder Clark then emphasized, “at second hand, I remember the American Revolution.” The father’s theme of continuity with the past was characteristic of the son as well. John Maurice Clark was, to the end of his life, to frequently underscore the notion that the direction and significance of his labors were to be seen as a continuation of his father’s work. Indeed, “Throughout his career [J.M.] Clark proclaimed his debt to

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his father. Even in his sharpest advances beyond the frontiers of tradition he insisted that the seeds were to be found in his father's works, particularly *The Philosophy of Wealth.*

The Clark family heritage, issuing as it did from the Colonial New England culture, "represented a combination of qualities which is not always well understood," as the children of John Bates Clark observed at the time of his death in 1938. With historical perspective somewhat clouded by lurid descriptions of witch trials and such, some fail to gain an impression of a hard-headed and hard-working people maintaining a deep religious conviction arising from the Hebraic concept of a chosen people, who were called upon to express God's work through His (Divine) Laws. If the light and the way revealed through Martin Luther and later John Calvin pointed to the need for attention to this world and matters of a practical bent, this was but part of a grander scheme:

The sense of heroic mission, of the destiny of New England, brought to the faithful a witness of hope. "Do you realize," asked President Sterns [of Amherst College] . . . , "that in building the Earth, your Creator selected North Central America, for his best adaptations to the human race? . . . it was treasured up and hidden by the covering of the Almighty's hand, till, for our fathers and for us, the time of its showing should come." The "time" was, of course, the accomplishment of the Protestant Reformation. The mission of America was to convert the world.

Historians have recorded the undertakings of other groups filled with a similar sense of mission. But certainly the Puritan experiment was no less compelling in import. On these shores, "New England was to be a New Israel – a covenanted community."

Piety, temperance, industry, thrift – the list could be extended – were no meaningless abstractions plucked at random from Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard*. They were traits coexistent with the widespread use of money; the quickened pace of technological innovation; and later, the extensive utilization of inorganic converters which was so profoundly reshaping the institutional fabric.

The variegated developments of the nineteenth century involved substantial qualifications of this early zealouslyness and direction. Extensive intra- and interregional development brought numerous problems to the growing business system. One of the decisive books in shaping the thought of the century was *The Origin of Species.*