WALTER BAGEHOT

PHYSICS AND POLITICS, OR, THOUGHTS ON THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF "NATURAL SELECTION" AND "INHERITANCE" TO POLITICAL SOCIETY

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NO. I
THE PRELIMINARY AGE

One peculiarity of this age is the sudden acquisition of much physical knowledge. There is scarcely a department of science or art which is the same, or at all the same, as it was fifty years ago. A new world of inventions—of railways and of telegraphs—has grown up around us which we cannot help seeing; a new world of ideas is in the air and affects us, though we do not see it. A full estimate of these effects would require a great book, and I am sure I could not write it; but I think I may usefully, in a few papers, show how, upon one or two great points, the new ideas are modifying two old sciences—politics and political economy.

Even upon these points my ideas must be incomplete, for the subject is novel; but, at any rate, I may suggest some conclusions, and so show what is requisite even if I do not supply it.

If we wanted to describe one of the most marked results, perhaps the most marked result, of late thought, we should say that by it everything is made 'an antiquity.' When, in former times; our ancestors thought of an antiquarian, they described him as occupied with coins, and medals, and Druids' stones; these were then the characteristic records of the decipherable past, and it was with these that decipherers busied themselves. But now there are other relics; indeed, all matter is become such. Science tries to find in each bit of earth the record of the causes which made it precisely what it is; those forces have left their trace, she knows, as much as the tact and hand of the artist left their mark on a classical gem. It would be tedious (and it is not in my way) to reckon up the ingenious questionings by which geology has made part of the earth, at least, tell part of its tale; and the answers would have been meaningless if physiology and conchology and a hundred similar sciences had not brought their aid. Such subsidiary sciences are to the decipherer of the present day what old languages were to the antiquary of other days; they construe for him the words which he discovers, they give a richness and a truth-like complexity to the picture which he paints, even in cases where the particular detail they tell is not much. But what here concerns me is that man himself has, to the eye of science, become 'an antiquity.' She tries to read, is

beginning to read, knows she ought to read, in the frame of each man the result of a whole history of all his life, of what he is and what makes him so,—of all his fore-fathers, of what they were and of what made them so. Each nerve has a sort of memory of its past life, is trained or not trained, dulled or quickened, as the case may be; each feature is shaped and characterised, or left loose and meaningless, as may happen; each hand is marked with its trade and life, subdued to what it works in;—IF WE COULD BUT SEE IT.

It may be answered that in this there is nothing new; that we always knew how much a man's past modified a man's future; that we all knew how much, a man is apt to be like his ancestors; that the existence of national character is the greatest commonplace in the world; that when a philosopher cannot account for anything in any other manner, he boldly ascribes it to an occult quality in some race. But what physical science does is, not to discover the hereditary element, but to render it distinct, —to give us an accurate conception of what we may expect, and a good account of the evidence by which we are led to expect it. Let us see what that science teaches on the subject; and, as far as may be, I will give it in the words of those who have made it a professional study, both that I may be more sure to state it rightly and vividly, and because—as I am about to apply these principles to subjects which are my own pursuit—I would rather have it quite clear that I have not made my premises to suit my own conclusions.

1st, then, as respects the individual, we learn as follows: 'Even while the cerebral hemispheres are entire, and in full possession of their powers, the brain gives rise to actions which are as completely reflex as those of the spinal cord.

'When the eyelids wink at a flash of light, or a threatened blow, a reflex action takes place, in which the afferent nerves are the optic, the efferent, the facial. When a bad smell causes a grimace, there is a reflex action through the same motor nerve, while the olfactory nerves constitute the afferent channels. In these cases, therefore, reflex action must be effected through the brain, all the nerves involved being cerebral. 'When the whole body starts at a loud noise, the afferent auditory nerve gives rise to an impulse which passes to the medulla oblongata, and thence affects the great majority of the motor nerves of the body. 'It may be said that these are mere mechanical actions, and have nothing to do with the acts which we associate with intelligence. But let us consider what takes place in such an act as reading aloud. In this case, the whole attention of the mind is, or ought to be, bent upon the subject-matter of the book; while a multitude of most delicate muscular actions are going on, of which the reader is not in the slightest degree aware. Thus the book is held in the hand, at the right distance from the eyes; the eyes are moved, from side to side, over the lines, and up and down the pages. Further, the most delicately adjusted and rapid movements of the muscles of the lips, tongue, and throat, of laryngeal and respiratory muscles, are involved in the production of speech.

Perhaps the reader is standing up and accompanying the lecture with appropriate gestures. And yet every one of these muscular acts may be performed with utter unconsciousness, on his part, of anything but the sense of the words in the book. In other words, they are reflex acts.

'The reflex actions proper to the spinal cord itself are NATURAL, and are involved in the structure of the cord and the properties of its constituents. By the help of the brain we may acquire an affinity of ARTIFICIAL reflex actions. That is to say, an action may require all our attention and all our volition for its first, or second, or third performance, but by frequent repetition it becomes, in a manner, part our organisation, and is performed without volition, or even consciousness.

'As everyone knows, it takes a soldier a very long time to learn his drill—to put himself, for instance, into the attitude of 'attention' at the instant the word of command is heard. But, after a time, the sound of the word gives rise to the act, whether the soldier be thinking of it or not. There is a story, which is credible enough, though it may not be true, of a practical joker, who, seeing a discharged veteran carrying home his dinner, suddenly called out 'Attention!' whereupon the man instantly brought his hands down, and lost his mutton and potatoes in the gutter. The drill had been gone through, and its effects had become embodied in the man's nervous structure.

'The possibility of all education (of which military drill is only one particular form) is based upon, the existence of this power

which the nervous system possesses, of organising conscious actions into more or less unconscious, or reflex, operations. It may be laid down as a rule, that if any two mental states be called up together, or in succession, with due frequency and vividness, the subsequent production of the one of them will suffice to call up the other, and that whether we desire it or not.'[1]

The body of the accomplished man has thus become by training different from what it once was, and different from that of the rude man; it is charged with stored virtue and acquired faculty which come away from it unconsciously.

Again, as to race, another authority teaches:—'Man's life truly represents a progressive development of the nervous system, none the less so because it takes place out of the womb instead of in it. The regular transmutation of motions which are at first voluntary into secondary automatic motions, as Hartley calls them, is due to a gradually effected organisation; and we may rest assured of this, that co-ordinate activity always testifies to stored-up power, either innate or acquired.

'The way in which an acquired faculty of the parent animal is sometimes distinctly transmitted to the progeny as a heritage, instinct, or innate endowment, furnishes a striking confirmation of the foregoing observations. Power that has been laboriously acquired and stored up as statical in one generation manifestly in such case becomes the inborn faculty of the next; and the development takes place in accordance with that law of

[1] Huxley's Elementary Physiology, pp. 284-286.

increasing speciality and complexity of adaptation to external nature which is traceable through the animal kingdom; or, in other words, that law, of progress from the general to the special in development which the appearance of nerve force amongst natural forces and the complexity of the nervous system of man both illustrate. As the vital force gathers up, as it were, into itself inferior forces, and might be said to be a development of them, or, as in the appearance of nerve force, simpler and more general forces are gathered up and concentrated in a more special and complex mode of energy; so again a further specialisation takes place in the development of the nervous system, whether watched through generations or through individual life. It is not by limiting our observations to the life of the individual, however, who is but a link in the chain of organic beings connecting the past with the future, that we shall come at the full truth; the present individual is the inevitable consequence of his antecedents in the past, and in the examination of these alone do we arrive at the adequate explanation of him. It behoves us, then, having found any faculty to be innate, not to rest content there, but steadily to follow backwards the line of causation, and thus to display, if possible, its manner of origin. This is the more necessary with the lower animals, where so much is innate.'[2]

The special laws of inheritance are indeed as yet unknown. All which is clear, and all which is to my purpose is, that there is a tendency, a probability, greater or less according to

[2] Maudsley on the Physiology and Pathology of the Mind, p. 73.

circumstances, but always considerable, that the descendants of cultivated parents will have, by born nervous organisation, a greater aptitude for cultivation than the descendants of such as are not cultivated; and that this tendency augments, in some enhanced ratio, for many generations.

I do not think any who do not acquire—and it takes a hard effort to acquire—this notion of a transmitted nerve element will ever understand 'the connective tissue' of civilisation. We have here the continuous force which binds age to age, which enables each to begin with some improvement on the last, if the last did itself improve; which makes each civilisation not a set of detached dots, but a line of colour, surely enhancing shade by shade. There is, by this doctrine, a physical cause of improvement from generation to generation: and no imagination which has apprehended it can forget it; but unless you appreciate that cause in its subtle materialism, unless you see it, as it were, playing upon the nerves of men, and, age after age, making nicer music from finer chords, you cannot comprehend the principle of inheritance either in its mystery or its power.

These principles are quite independent of any theory as to the nature of matter, or the nature of mind. They are as true upon the theory that mind acts on matter—though separate and altogether different from it—as upon the theory of Bishop Berkeley that there is no matter, but only mind; or upon the contrary theory —that there is no mind, but only matter; or upon the yet subtler theory now often held—that both mind and matter are different

modifications of some one tertium quid, some hidden thing or force. All these theories admit—indeed they are but various theories to account for—the fact that what we call matter has consequences in what we call mind, and that what we call mind produces results in what we call matter; and the doctrines I quote assume only that. Our mind in some strange way acts on our nerves, and our nerves in some equally strange way store up the consequences, and somehow the result, as a rule and commonly enough, goes down to our descendants; these primitive facts all theories admit, and all of them labour to explain.

Nor have these plain principles any relation to the old difficulties of necessity and freewill. Every Freewillist holds that the special force of free volition is applied to the pre-existing forces of our corporeal structure; he does not consider it as an agency acting in vacuo, but as an agency acting upon other agencies. Every Freewillist holds that, upon the whole, if you strengthen the motive in a given direction, mankind tend more to act in that direction. Better motives—better impulses, rather—come from a good body: worse motives or worse impulses come from a bad body. A Freewillist may admit as much as a Necessarian that such improved conditions tend to improve human action, and that deteriorated conditions tend to deprave human action. No Freewillist ever expects as much from St. Giles's as he expects from Belgravia: he admits an hereditary nervous system as a datum for the will, though he holds the will to be an extraordinary incoming 'something.' No doubt the modern

doctrine of the 'Conservation of Force,' if applied to decision, is inconsistent with free will; if you hold that force 'is never lost or gained,' you cannot hold that there is a real gain—a sort of new creation of it in free volition. But I have nothing to do here with the universal 'Conservation of Force.' The conception of the nervous organs as stores of will-made power does not raise or need so vast a discussion.

Still less are these principles to be confounded with Mr. Buckle's idea that material forces have been the main-springs of progress, and moral causes secondary, and, in comparison, not to be thought of. On the contrary, moral causes are the first here. It is the action of the will that causes the unconscious habit; it is the continual effort of the beginning that creates the hoarded energy of the end; it is the silent toil of the first generation that becomes the transmitted aptitude of the next. Here physical causes do not create the moral, but moral create the physical; here the beginning is by the higher energy, the conservation and propagation only by the lower. But we thus perceive how a science of history is possible, as Mr. Buckle said,—a science to teach the laws of tendencies—created by the mind, and transmitted by the body—which act upon and incline the will of man from age to age.

II

But how do these principles change the philosophy of our politics? I think in many ways; and first, in one particularly. Political economy is the most systematised and most accurate part of political philosophy; and yet, by the help of what has been laid down, I think we may travel back to a sort of 'pre-economic age,' when the very assumptions of political economy did not exist, when its precepts would have been ruinous, and when the very contrary precepts were requisite and wise.

For this purpose I do not need to deal with the dim ages which ethnology just reveals to us—with the stone age, and the flint implements, and the refuse-heaps. The time to which I would go back is only that just before the dawn of history—coeval with the dawn, perhaps, it would be right to say—for the first historians saw such a state of society, though they saw other and more advanced states too: a period of which we have distinct descriptions from eye-witnesses, and of which the traces and consequences abound in the oldest law. 'The effect,' says Sir Henry Maine, the greatest of our living jurists—the only one, perhaps, whose writings are in keeping with our best philosophy—'of the evidence derived from comparative jurisprudence is to establish that view of the primeval condition of the human race which is known as the Patriarchal Theory. There is no doubt, of course, that this theory was originally based

on the Scriptural history of the Hebrew patriarchs in Lower Asia; but, as has been explained already, its connection with Scripture rather militated than otherwise against its reception as a complete theory, since the majority of the inquirers who till recently addressed themselves with most earnestness to the colligation of social phenomena, were either influenced by the strongest prejudice against Hebrew antiquities or by the strongest desire to construct their system without the assistance of religious records. Even now there is perhaps a disposition to undervalue these accounts, or rather to decline generalising from them, as forming part of the traditions of a Semitic people. It is to be noted, however, that the legal testimony comes nearly exclusively from the institutions of societies belonging to the Indo-European stock, the Romans, Hindoos, and Sclavonians supplying the greater part of it; and indeed the difficulty, at the present stage of the inquiry, is to know where to stop, to say of what races of men it is NOT allowable to lay down that the society in which they are united was originally organised on the patriarchal model. The chief lineaments of such a society, as collected from the early chapters in Genesis, I need not attempt to depict with any minuteness, both because they are familiar to most of us from our earliest childhood, and because, from the interest once attaching to the controversy which takes its name from the debate between Locke and Filmer, they fill a whole chapter, though not a very profitable one, in English literature. The points which lie on the surface of the history are these:—The

eldest male parent—the eldest ascendant—is absolutely supreme in his household. His dominion extends to life and death, and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves; indeed the relations of sonship and serfdom appear to differ in little beyond the higher capacity which the child in blood possesses of becoming one day the head of a family himself. The flocks and herds of the children are the flocks and herds of the father, and the possessions of the parent, which he holds in a representative rather than in a proprietary character, are equally divided at his death among his descendants in the first degree, the eldest son sometimes receiving a double share under the name of birthright, but more generally endowed with no hereditary advantage beyond an honorary precedence. A less obvious inference from the Scriptural accounts is that they seem to plant us on the traces of the breach which is first effected in the empire of the parent. The families of Jacob and Esau separate and form two nations; but the families of Jacob's children hold together and become a people. This looks like the immature germ of a state or commonwealth, and of an order of rights superior to the claims of family relation.

'If I were attempting for the more special purposes of the jurist to express compendiously the characteristics, of the situation in which mankind disclose themselves at the dawn of their history, I should be satisfied to quote a few verses from the "Odyssee" of Homer:—

"'Toîsin d' out' agorai boulêphóroi oute thémistes,
themisteúei dè hékastos
paídôn ed alóchôn, out' allélôn alégousin.'"

'"They have neither assemblies for consultation nor THEMISTES, but everyone exercises jurisdiction over his wives and his children, and they pay no regard to one another."' And this description of the beginnings of history is confirmed by what may be called the last lesson of prehistoric ethnology. Perhaps it is the most valuable, as it is clearly the most sure result of that science, that it has dispelled the dreams of other days as to a primitive high civilisation. History catches man as he emerges, from the patriarchal state: ethnology shows how he lived, grew, and improved in that state. The conclusive arguments against the imagined original civilisation are indeed plain to everyone. Nothing is more intelligible than a moral deterioration of mankind—nothing than an aesthetic degradation—nothing than a political degradation. But you cannot imagine mankind giving up the plain utensils of personal comfort, if they once knew them; still less can you imagine them giving up good weapons—say bows and arrows—if they once knew them. Yet if there were a primitive civilisation these things MUST have been forgotten, for tribes can be found in every degree of ignorance, and every grade of knowledge as to pottery, as to the metals, as to the means of comfort, as to the instruments of war. And what is more, these savages have not failed from stupidity; they are,

in various degrees of originality, inventive about these matters. You cannot trace the roots of an old perfect system variously maimed and variously dying; you cannot find it, as you find the trace of the Latin language in the mediaeval dialects. On the contrary, you find it beginning—as new scientific discoveries and inventions now begin—here a little and there a little, the same thing half-done in various half-ways, and so as no one who knew the best way would ever have begun. An idea used to prevail that bows and arrows were the 'primitive weapons'—the weapons of universal savages; but modern science has made a table,[3] and some savages have them and some have not, and some have substitutes of one sort and some have substitutes of another—several of these substitutes being like the 'boomerang,' so much more difficult to hit on or to use than the bow, as well as so much less effectual. And not only may the miscellaneous races of the world be justly described as being upon various edges of industrial civilisation, approaching it by various sides, and falling short of it in various particulars, but the moment they see the real thing they know how to use it as well, or better, than civilised man. The South American uses the horse which the European brought better than the European. Many races use the rifle—the especial and very complicated weapon of civilised man—better, upon an average, than he can use it. The savage with simple tools—tools he appreciates—is like a child, quick to learn, not like an

[3] See the very careful table and admirable discussion in Sir John Lubbock's Pre-Historic Times.

old man, who has once forgotten and who cannot acquire again. Again, if there had been an excellent aboriginal civilisation in Australia and America, where, botanists and zoologists, ask, are its vestiges? If these savages did care to cultivate wheat, where is the wild wheat gone which their abandoned culture must have left? if they did give up using good domestic animals, what has become of the wild ones which would, according to all natural laws, have sprung up out of them? This much is certain, that the domestic animals of Europe have, since what may be called the discovery of the WORLD during the last hundred years, run up and down it. The English rat—not the pleasantest of our domestic creatures—has gone everywhere; to Australia, to New Zealand, to America: nothing but a complicated rat-miracle could ever root him out. Nor could a common force expel the horse from South America since the Spaniards took him thither; if we did not know the contrary we should suppose him a principal aboriginal animal. Where then, so to say, are the rats and horses of the primitive civilisation? Not only can we not find them, but zoological science tells us that they never existed, for the 'feebly pronounced,' the ineffectual, marsupials of Australia and New Zealand could never have survived a competition with better creatures, such as that by which they are now perishing. We catch then a first glimpse of patriarchal man, not with any industrial relics of a primitive civilisation, but with some gradually learnt knowledge of the simpler arts, with some tamed animals and some little knowledge of the course of nature as far as it tells upon

the seasons and affects the condition of simple tribes. This is what, according to ethnology, we should expect the first historic man to be, and this is what we in fact find him. But what was his mind; how are we to describe that?

I believe the general description in which Sir John Lubbock sums up his estimate of the savage mind suits the patriarchal mind. 'Savages,' he says, 'unite the character of childhood with the passions and strength of men.' And if we open the first record of the pagan world—the poems of Homer—how much do we find that suits this description better than any other. Civilisation has indeed already gone forward ages beyond the time at which any such description is complete. Man, in Homer, is as good at oratory, Mr. Gladstone seems to say, as he has ever been, and, much as that means, other and better things might be added to it. But after all, how much of the 'splendid savage' there is in Achilles, and how much of the 'spoiled child sulking in his tent.' Impressibility and excitability are the main characteristics of the oldest Greek history, and if we turn to the east, the 'simple and violent' world, as Mr. Kinglake calls it, of the first times meets us every moment.

And this is precisely what we should expect. An 'inherited drill,' science says, 'makes modern nations what they are; their born structure bears the trace of the laws of their fathers;' but the ancient nations came into no such inheritance; they were the descendants of people who did what was right in their own eyes; they were born to no tutored habits, no preservative bonds, and

therefore they were at the mercy of every impulse and blown by every passion.

The condition of the primitive man, if we conceive of him rightly, is, in several respects, different from any we know. We unconsciously assume around us the existence of a great miscellaneous social machine working to our hands, and not only supplying our wants, but even telling and deciding when those wants shall come. No one can now without difficulty conceive how people got on before there were clocks and watches; as Sir G. Lewis said, 'it takes a vigorous effort of the imagination' to realise a period when it was a serious difficulty to know the hour of day. And much more is it difficult to fancy the unstable minds of such men as neither knew nature, which is the clock-work of material civilisation, nor possessed a polity, which is a kind of clock-work to moral civilisation. They never could have known what to expect; the whole habit of steady but varied anticipation, which makes our minds what they are, must have been wholly foreign to theirs.

Again, I at least cannot call up to myself the loose conceptions (as they must have been) of morals which then existed. If we set aside all the element derived from law and polity which runs through our current moral notions, I hardly know what we shall have left. The residuum was somehow, and in some vague way, intelligible to the ante-political man, but it must have been uncertain, wavering, and unfit to be depended upon. In the best cases it existed much as the vague feeling of beauty now exists

in minds sensitive but untaught; a still small voice of uncertain meaning; an unknown something modifying everything else, and higher than anything else, yet in form so indistinct that when you looked for it, it was gone—or if this be thought the delicate fiction of a later fancy, then morality was at least to be found in the wild spasms of 'wild justice,' half punishment, half outrage, —but anyhow, being unfixed by steady law, it was intermittent, vague, and hard for us to imagine. Everybody who has studied mathematics knows how many shadowy difficulties he seemed to have before he understood the problem, and how impossible it was when once the demonstration had flashed upon him, ever to comprehend those indistinct difficulties again, or to call up the mental confusion, that admitted them. So in these days, when we cannot by any effort drive out of our minds the notion of law, we cannot imagine the mind of one who had never known it, and who could not by any effort have conceived it.

Again, the primitive man could not have imagined what we mean by a nation. We on the other hand cannot imagine those to whom it is a difficulty; 'we know what it is when you do not ask us,' but we cannot very quickly explain or define it. But so much as this is plain, a nation means a LIKE body of men, because of that likeness capable of acting together, and because of that likeness inclined to obey similar rules; and even this Homer's Cyclops—used only to sparse human beings—could not have conceived.

To sum up—LAW—rigid, definite, concise law—is the

primary want of early mankind; that which they need above anything else, that which is requisite before they can gain anything else. But it is their greatest difficulty, as well as their first requisite; the thing most out of their reach, as well as that most beneficial to them if they reach it. In later ages many races have gained much of this discipline quickly, though painfully; a loose set of scattered clans has been often and often forced to substantial settlement by a rigid conqueror; the Romans did half the work for above half Europe. But where could the first ages find Romans or a conqueror? Men conquer by the power of government, and it was exactly government which then was not. The first ascent of civilisation was at a steep gradient, though when now we look down upon it, it seems almost nothing.

III

How the step from polity to no polity was made distinct, history does not record,—on this point Sir Henry Maine has drawn a most interesting conclusion from his peculiar studies:—

'It would be,' he tells us, 'a very simple explanation of the origin of society if we could base a general conclusion on the hint furnished us by the scriptural example already adverted to, and could suppose that communities began to exist wherever a family held together instead of separating at the death of its patriarchal chieftain. In most of the Greek states and in Rome there long remained the vestiges of an ascending series of groups out of which the state was at first constituted. The family, house, and tribe of the Romans may be taken as a type of them, and they are so described to us that we can scarcely help conceiving them as a system of concentric circles which have gradually expanded from the same point. The elementary group is the family, connected by common subjection to the highest male ascendant. The aggregation of families forms the gens, or house. The aggregation of houses makes the tribe. The aggregation of tribes constitutes the commonwealth. Are we at liberty to follow these indications, and to lay down that the commonwealth is a collection of persons united by common descent from the progenitor of an original family? Of this we may at least be certain, that all ancient societies regarded themselves as having

proceeded from one original stock, and even laboured under an incapacity for comprehending any reason except this for their holding together in political union. The history of political ideas begins, in fact, with the assumption that kinship in blood is the sole possible ground of community in political functions; nor is there any of those subversions of feeling, which we term emphatically revolutions, so startling and so complete as the change which is accomplished when some other principle—such as that, for instance, of LOCAL CONTIGUITY—establishes itself for the first time as the basis of common political action.'

If this theory were true, the origin of politics would not seem a great change, or, in early days, be really a great change. The primacy of the elder brother, in tribes casually cohesive, would be slight; it would be the beginning of much, but it would be nothing in itself; it would be—to take an illustration from the opposite end of the political series—it would be like the headship of a weak parliamentary leader over adherents who may divide from him in a moment; it was the germ of sovereignty,—it was hardly yet sovereignty itself.

I do not myself believe that the suggestion of Sir Henry Maine—for he does not, it will be seen, offer it as a confident theory—is an adequate account of the true origin of politics. I shall in a subsequent essay show that there are, as it seems to me, abundant evidences of a time still older than that which he speaks of. But the theory of Sir Henry Maine serves my present purpose well. It describes, and truly describes, a kind of life antecedent to our

present politics, and the conclusion I have drawn from it will be strengthened, not weakened, when we come to examine and deal with an age yet older, and a social bond far more rudimentary.

But when once polities were began, there is no difficulty in explaining why they lasted. Whatever may be said against the principle of 'natural selection' in other departments, there is no doubt of its predominance in early human history. The strongest killed out the weakest, as they could. And I need not pause to prove that any form of politics more efficient than none; that an aggregate of families owning even a slippery allegiance to a single head, would be sure to have the better of a set of families acknowledging no obedience to anyone, but scattering loose about the world and fighting where they stood. Homer's Cyclops would be powerless against the feeblest band; so far from its being singular that we find no other record of that state of man, so unstable and sure to perish was it that we should rather wonder at even a single vestige lasting down to the age when for picturesqueness it became valuable in poetry.

But, though the origin of polity is dubious, we are upon the terra firma of actual records when we speak of the preservation of polities. Perhaps every young Englishman who comes now-a-days to Aristotle or Plato is struck with their conservatism: fresh from the liberal doctrines of the present age, he wonders at finding in those recognised teachers so much contrary teaching. They both—unlike as they are—hold with Xenophon—so unlike both—that man is the 'hardest of all animals to govern.' Of

Plato it might indeed be plausibly said that the adherents of an intuitive philosophy, being 'the tories of speculation,' have commonly been prone to conservatism in government; but Aristotle, the founder of the experience philosophy, ought, according to that doctrine, to have been a liberal, if anyone ever was a liberal. In fact, both of these men lived when men had not 'had time to forget' the difficulties of government. We have forgotten them altogether. We reckon, as the basis of our culture, upon an amount of order, of tacit obedience, of prescriptive governability, which these philosophers hoped to get as a principal result of their culture. We take without thought as a datum, what they hunted as a quaesilum.

In early times the quantity of government is much more important than its quality. What you want is a comprehensive rule binding men together, making them do much the same things, telling them what to expect of each other—fashioning them alike, and keeping them so. What this rule is does not matter so much. A good rule is better than a bad one, but any rule is better than none; while, for reasons which a jurist will appreciate, none can be very good. But to gain that rule, what may be called the impressive elements of a polity are incomparably more important than its useful elements. How to get the obedience of men is the hard problem; what you do with that obedience is less critical.

To gain that obedience, the primary condition is the identity —not the union, but the sameness—of what we now call Church and State. Dr. Arnold, fresh from the study of Greek thought and

Roman history, used to preach that this identity was the great cure for the misguided modern world. But he spoke to ears filled with other sounds and minds filled with other thoughts, and they hardly knew his meaning, much less heeded it. But though the teaching was wrong for the modern age to which it was applied, it was excellent for the old world from which it was learnt. What is there requisite is a single government—call it Church or State, as you like—regulating the whole of human life. No division of power is then endurable without danger—probably without destruction; the priest must not teach one thing and the king another; king must be priest, and prophet king: the two must say the same, because they are the same. The idea of difference between spiritual penalties and legal penalties must never be awakened. Indeed, early Greek thought or early Roman thought would never have comprehended it. There was a kind of rough public opinion and there were rough, very rough, hands which acted on it. We now talk of political penalties and ecclesiastical prohibition, and the social censure, but they were all one then. Nothing is very like those old communities now, but perhaps a 'trade's union' is as near as most things; to work cheap is thought to be a 'wicked' thing, and so some Broadhead puts it down.

The object of such organisations is to create what may be called a cake of custom. All the actions of life are to be submitted to a single rule for a single object; that gradually created the 'hereditary drill' which science teaches to be essential, and which the early instinct of men saw to be essential too. That this regime

forbids free thought is not an evil; or rather, though an evil, it is the necessary basis for the greatest good; it is necessary for making the mould of civilisation, and hardening the soft fibre of early man.

The first recorded history of the Aryan race shows everywhere a king, a council, and, as the necessity of early conflicts required, the king in much prominence and with much power. That there could be in such ages anything like an oriental despotism, or a Caesarean despotism, was impossible; the outside extra-political army which maintains them could not exist when the tribe was the nation, and when all the men in the tribe were warriors. Hence, in the time of Homer, in the first times of Rome, in the first times of ancient Germany, the king is the most visible part of the polity, because for momentary welfare he is the most useful. The close oligarchy, the patriciate, which alone could know the fixed law, alone could apply the fixed law, which was recognised as the authorised custodian of the fixed law, had then sole command over the primary social want. It alone knew the code of drill; it alone was obeyed; it alone could drill. Mr. Grote has admirably described the rise of the primitive oligarchies upon the face of the first monarchy, but perhaps because he so much loves historic Athens, he has not sympathised with pre-historic Athens. He has not shown us the need of a fixed life when all else was unfixed life.

It would be schoolboyish to explain at length how well the two great republics, the two winning republics of the ancient

world, embody these conclusions. Rome and Sparta were drilling aristocracies, and succeeded because they were such. Athens was indeed of another and higher order; at least to us instructed moderns who know her and have been taught by her. But to the 'Philistines' of those days Athens was of a lower order. She was beaten; she lost the great visible game which is all that short-sighted contemporaries know. She was the great 'free failure' of the ancient world. She began, she announced, the good things that were to come; but she was too weak to display and enjoy them; she was trodden down by those of coarser make and better trained frame.

How much these principles are confirmed by Jewish history is obvious. There was doubtless much else in Jewish history—whole elements with which I am not here concerned. But so much is plain. The Jews were in the beginning the most unstable of nations; they were submitted to their law, and they came out the most stable of nations. Their polity was indeed defective in unity. After they asked for a king the spiritual and the secular powers (as we should speak) were never at peace, and never agreed. And the ten tribes who lapsed from their law, melted away into the neighbouring nations. Jeroboam has been called the 'first Liberal;' and, religion apart, there is a meaning in the phrase. He began to break up the binding polity which was what men wanted in that age, though eager and inventive minds always dislike it. But the Jews who adhered to their law became the Jews of the day, a nation of a firm set if ever there was one.

It is connected with this fixity that jurists tell us that the title 'contract' is hardly to be discovered in the oldest law. In modern days, in civilised days, men's choice determines nearly all they do. But in early times that choice determined scarcely anything. The guiding rule was the law of STATUS. Everybody was born to a place in the community: in that place he had to stay: in that place he found certain duties which he had to fulfil, and which were all he needed to think of. The net of custom caught men in distinct spots, and kept each where he stood.

What are called in European politics the principles of 1789, are therefore inconsistent with the early world; they are fitted only to the new world in which society has gone through its early task; when the inherited organisation is already confirmed and fixed; when the soft minds and strong passions of youthful nations are fixed and guided by hard transmitted instincts. Till then not equality before the law is necessary but inequality, for what is most wanted is an elevated elite who know the law: not a good government seeking the happiness of its subjects, but a dignified and overawing government getting its subjects to obey: not a good law, but a comprehensive law binding all life to one routine. Later are the ages of freedom; first are the ages of servitude. In 1789, when the great men of the Constituent Assembly looked on the long past, they hardly saw anything in it which could be praised, or admired, or imitated: all seemed a blunder—a complex error to be got rid of as soon as might be. But that error had made themselves. On their very physical

organisation the hereditary mark of old times was fixed; their brains were hardened and their nerves were steadied by the transmitted results of tedious usages. The ages of monotony had their use, for they trained men for ages when they need not be monotonous.

IV

But even yet we have not realised the full benefit of those early polities and those early laws. They not only 'bound up' men in groups, not only impressed on men a certain set of common usages, but often, at least in an indirect way, suggested, if I may use the expression, national character.

We cannot yet explain—I am sure, at least, I cannot attempt to explain—all the singular phenomena of national character: how completely and perfectly they seem to be at first framed; how slowly, how gradually they can alone be altered, if they can be altered at all. But there is one analogous fact which may help us to see, at least dimly, how such phenomena are caused. There is a character of ages, as well as of nations; and as we have full histories of many such periods, we can examine exactly when and how the mental peculiarity of each began, and also exactly when and how that mental peculiarity passed away. We have an idea of Queen Anne's time, for example, or of Queen Elizabeth's time, or George II.'s time; or again of the age of Louis XIV., or Louis XV., or the French Revolution; an idea more or less accurate in proportion as we study, but probably even in the minds who know these ages best and most minutely, more special, more simple, more unique than the truth was. We throw aside too much, in making up our images of eras, that which is common to all eras. The English character was much the same in many

great respects in Chaucer's time as it was in Elizabeth's time or Anne's time, or as it is now; But some qualities were added to this common element in one era and some in another; some qualities seemed to overshadow and eclipse it in one era, and others in another. We overlook and half forget the constant while we see and watch the variable. But—for that is the present point—why is there this variable? Everyone must, I think, have been puzzled about it. Suddenly, in a quiet time—say, in Queen Anne's time—arises a special literature, a marked variety of human expression, pervading what is then written and peculiar to it: surely this is singular.

The true explanation is, I think, something like this. One considerable writer gets a sort of start because what he writes is somewhat more—only a little more very often, as I believe—congenial to the minds around him than any other sort. This writer is very often not the one whom posterity remembers—not the one who carries the style of the age farthest towards its ideal type, and gives it its charm and its perfection. It was not Addison who began the essay-writing of Queen Anne's time, but Steele; it was the vigorous forward man who struck out the rough notion, though it was the wise and meditative man who improved upon it and elaborated it, and whom posterity reads. Some strong writer, or group of writers, thus seize on the public mind, and a curious process soon assimilates other writers in appearance to them. To some extent, no doubt, this assimilation is effected by a process most intelligible, and not at all curious—

the process of conscious imitation; A sees that B's style of writing answers, and he imitates it. But definitely aimed mimicry like this is always rare; original men who like their own thoughts do not willingly clothe them in words they feel they borrow. No man, indeed, can think to much purpose when he is studying to write a style not his own. After all, very few men are at all equal to the steady labour, the stupid and mistaken labour mostly, of making a style. Most men catch the words that are in the air, and the rhythm which comes to them they do not know from whence; an unconscious imitation determines their words, and makes them say what of themselves they would never have thought of saying. Everyone who has written in more than one newspaper knows how invariably his style catches the tone of each paper while he is writing for it, and changes to the tone of another when in turn he begins to write for that. He probably would rather write the traditional style to which the readers of the journal are used, but he does not set himself to copy it; he would have to force himself in order NOT to write it if that was what he wanted. Exactly in this way, just as a writer for a journal without a distinctly framed purpose gives the readers of the journal the sort of words and the sort of thoughts they are used to—so, on a larger scale, the writers of an age, without thinking of it, give to the readers of the age the sort of words and the sort of thoughts—the special literature, in fact—which those readers like and prize. And not only does the writer, without thinking, choose the sort of style and meaning which are most in vogue, but the writer is himself

chosen. A writer does not begin to write in the traditional rhythm of an age unless he feels, or fancies he feels, a sort of aptitude for writing it, any more than a writer tries to write in a journal in which the style is uncongenial or impossible to him. Indeed if he mistakes he is soon weeded out; the editor rejects, the age will not read his compositions. How painfully this traditional style cramps great writers whom it happens not to suit, is curiously seen in Wordsworth, who was bold enough to break through it, and, at the risk of contemporary neglect, to frame a style of his own. But he did so knowingly, and he did so with an effort. 'It is supposed,' he says, 'that by the act of writing in verse an author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only then apprizes the reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully eschewed. The exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must, in different ages of literature, have excited very different expectations; for example, in the age of Catullus, Terence, or Lucretius, and that of Statius or Claudian; and in our own country, in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Metcher, and that of Donne and Cowley, or Pope.' And then, in a kind of vexed way, Wordsworth goes on to explain that he himself can't and won't do what is expected from him, but that he will write his own words, and only his own words. A strict, I was going to say a Puritan, genius will act thus, but most men of genius are susceptible and versatile, and fall into the style of their age. One very unapt at the assimilating process,

but on that account the more curious about it, says:—

> How we
> Track a livelong day, great heaven, and watch our shadows!
> What our shadows seem, forsooth, we will ourselves be.
> Do I look like that? You think me that: then I AM that.

What writers are expected to write, they write; or else they do not write at all; but, like the writer of these lines, stop discouraged, live disheartened, and die leaving fragments which their friends treasure, but which a rushing world never heeds. The Nonconformist writers are neglected, the Conformist writers are encouraged, until perhaps on a sudden the fashion shifts. And as with the writers, so in a less degree with readers. Many men—most men—get to like or think they like that which is ever before them, and which those around them like, and which received opinion says they ought to like; or if their minds are too marked and oddly made to get into the mould, they give up reading altogether, or read old books and foreign books, formed under another code and appealing to a different taste. The principle of 'elimination,' the 'use and disuse' of organs which naturalists speak of, works here. What is used strengthens; what is disused weakens: 'to those who have, more is given;' and so a sort of style settles upon an age, and imprinting itself more than anything else in men's memories becomes all that is thought of about it.

I believe that what we call national character arose in very much the same way. At first a sort of 'chance predominance'

made a model, and then invincible attraction, the necessity which rules all but the strongest men to imitate what is before their eyes, and to be what they are expected to be, moulded men by that model. This is, I think, the very process by which new national characters are being made in our own time. In America and in Australia a new modification of what we call Anglo-Saxonism is growing. A sort of type of character arose from the difficulties of colonial life—the difficulty of struggling with the wilderness; and this type has given its shape to the mass of characters because the mass of characters have unconsciously imitated it. Many of the American characteristics are plainly useful in such a life, and consequent on such a life. The eager restlessness, the highly-strung nervous organisation are useful in continual struggle, and also are promoted by it. These traits seem to be arising in Australia, too, and wherever else the English race is placed in like circumstances. But even in these useful particulars the innate tendency of the human mind to become like what is around it, has effected much: a sluggish Englishman will often catch the eager American look in a few years; an Irishman or even a German will catch it, too, even in all English particulars. And as to a hundred minor points—in so many that go to mark the typical Yankee—usefulness has had no share either in their origin or their propagation. The accident of some predominant person possessing them set the fashion, and it has been imitated to this day. Anybody who inquires will find even in England, and even in these days of assimilation, parish peculiarities which

arose, no doubt, from some old accident, and have been heedfully preserved by customary copying. A national character is but the successful parish character; just as the national speech is but the successful parish dialect, the dialect, that is, of the district which came to be more—in many cases but a little more—influential than other districts, and so set its yoke on books and on society. I could enlarge much on this, for I believe this unconscious imitation to be the principal force in the making of national characters; but I have already said more about it than I need. Everybody who weighs even half these arguments will admit that it is a great force in the matter, a principal agency to be acknowledged and watched; and for my present purpose I want no more. I have only to show the efficacy of the tight early polity (so to speak) and the strict early law on the creation of corporate characters. These settled the predominant type, set up a sort of model, made a sort of idol; this was worshipped, copied, and observed, from all manner of mingled feelings, but most of all because it was the 'thing to do,' the then accepted form of human action. When once the predominant type was determined, the copying propensity of man did the rest. The tradition ascribing Spartan legislation to Lycurgus was literally untrue, but its spirit was quite true. In the origin of states strong and eager individuals got hold of small knots of men, and made for them a fashion which they were attached to and kept.

It is only after duly apprehending the silent manner in which national characters thus form themselves, that we can rightly

appreciate the dislike which old Governments had to trade. There must have been something peculiar about it, for the best philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, shared it. They regarded commerce as the source of corruption as naturally as a modern economist considers it the spring of industry, and all the old Governments acted in this respect upon the philosophers' maxims. 'Well,' said Dr. Arnold, speaking ironically and in the spirit of modern times—'Well, indeed, might the policy of the old priest-nobles of Egypt and India endeavour to divert their people from becoming familiar with the sea, and represent the occupation of a seaman as incompatible with the purity of the highest castes. The sea deserved to be hated by the old aristocracies, inasmuch as it has been the mightiest instrument in the civilisation of mankind.' But the old oligarchies had their own work, as we now know. They were imposing a fashioning yoke; they were making the human nature which after times employ. They were at their labours, we have entered into these labours. And to the unconscious imitation which was their principal tool, no impediment was so formidable as foreign intercourse. Men imitate what is before their eyes, if it is before their eyes alone, but they do not imitate it if it is only one among many present things—one competitor among others, all of which are equal and some of which seem better. 'Whoever speaks two languages is a rascal,' says the saying, and it rightly represents the feeling of primitive communities when the sudden impact of new thoughts and new examples breaks down the compact despotism of the

single consecrated code, and leaves pliant and impressible man—such as he then is—to follow his unpleasant will without distinct guidance by hereditary morality and hereditary religion. The old oligarchies wanted to keep their type perfect, and for that end they were right not to allow foreigners to touch it. 'Distinctions of race,' says Arnold himself elsewhere in a remarkable essay—for it was his last on Greek history, his farewell words on a long favourite subject—'were not of that odious and fantastic character which they have been in modern times; they implied real differences of the most important kind, religious and moral.' And after exemplifying this at length he goes on, 'It is not then to be wondered at that Thucydides, when speaking of a city founded jointly by Ionians and Dorians, should have thought it right to add "that the prevailing institutions of the two were Ionian," for according as they were derived from one or the other the prevailing type would be different. And therefore the mixture of persons of different race in the same commonwealth, unless one race had a complete ascendancy, tended to confuse all the relations of human life, and all men's notions of right and wrong; or by compelling men to tolerate in so near a relation as that of fellow-citizens differences upon the main points of human life, led to a general carelessness and scepticism, and encouraged the notion that right and wrong had no real existence, but were mere creatures of human opinion.' But if this be so, the oligarchies were right. Commerce brings this mingling of ideas, this breaking down of old creeds, and brings it inevitably. It is

now-a-days its greatest good that it does so; the change is what we call 'enlargement of mind'. But in early times Providence 'set apart the nations;' and it is not till the frame of their morals is set by long ages of transmitted discipline, that such enlargement can be borne. The ages of isolation had their use, for they trained men for ages when they were not to be isolated.

NO. II
THE USE OF CONFLICT

'The difference between progression and stationary inaction,' says one of our greatest living writers, 'is one of the great secrets which science has yet to penetrate.' I am sure I do not pretend that I can completely penetrate it; but it undoubtedly seems to me that the problem is on the verge of solution, and that scientific successes in kindred fields by analogy suggest some principles —which wholly remove many of its difficulties, and indicate the sort of way in which those which remain may hereafter be removed too.

But what is the problem? Common English, I might perhaps say common civilised thought, ignores it. Our habitual instructors, our ordinary conversation, our inevitable and ineradicable prejudices tend to make us think that 'Progress' is the normal fact in human society, the fact which we should expect to see, the fact which we should be surprised if we did not see. But history refutes this. The ancients had no conception of progress; they did not so much as reject the idea; they did not even entertain the idea. Oriental nations are just the same now. Since history began they have always been what they are. Savages, again, do not improve; they hardly seem to have the basis on which to build, much less the material to put up anything

worth having. Only a few nations, and those of European origin, advance; and yet these think—seem irresistibly compelled to think—such advance to be inevitable, natural, and eternal. Why then is this great contrast? Before we can answer, we must investigate more accurately. No doubt history shows that most nations are stationary now; but it affords reason to think that all nations once advanced. Their progress was arrested at various points; but nowhere, probably not even in the hill tribes of India, not even in the Andaman Islanders, not even in the savages of Terra del Fuego, do we find men who have not got some way. They have made their little progress in a hundred different ways; they have framed with infinite assiduity a hundred curious habits; they have, so to say, screwed themselves into the uncomfortable corners of a complex life, which is odd and dreary, but yet is possible. And the corners are never the same in any two parts of the world. Our record begins with a thousand unchanging edifices, but it shows traces of previous building. In historic times there has been little progress; in prehistoric times there must have been much. In solving, or trying to solve, the question, we must take notice of this remarkable difference, and explain it, too, or else we may be sure our principles are utterly incomplete, and perhaps altogether unsound. But what then is that solution, or what are the principles which tend towards it? Three laws, or approximate laws, may, I think, be laid down, with only one of which I can deal in this paper, but all three of which it will be best to state, that it may be seen what I am aiming at.

First. In every particular state of the world, those nations which are strongest tend to prevail over the others; and in certain marked peculiarities the strongest tend to be the best. Secondly. Within every particular nation the type or types of character then and there most attractive tend to prevail; and, the most attractive, though with exceptions, is what we call the best character. Thirdly. Neither of these competitions is in most historic conditions intensified by extrinsic forces, but in some conditions, such as those now prevailing in the most influential part of the world, both are so intensified.

These are the sort of doctrines with which, under the name of 'natural selection' in physical science, we have become familiar; and as every great scientific conception tends to advance its boundaries and to be of use in solving problems not thought of when it was started, so here, what was put forward for mere animal history may, with a change of form, but an identical essence, be applied to human history. At first some objection was raised to the principle of 'natural selection' in physical science upon religious grounds; it was to be expected that so active an idea and so large a shifting of thought would seem to imperil much which men valued. But in this, as in other cases, the objection is, I think, passing away; the new principle is more and more seen to be fatal to mere outworks of religion, not to religion itself. At all events, to the sort of application here made of it, which only amounts to searching out and following up an analogy suggested by it, there is plainly no objection.

Everyone now admits that human history is guided by certain laws, and all that is here aimed at is to indicate, in a more or less distinct way, an infinitesimally small portion of such laws. The discussion of these three principles cannot be kept quite apart except by pedantry; but it is almost exclusively with the first—that of the competition between nation and nation, or tribe and tribe (for I must use these words in their largest sense, and so as to include every cohering aggregate of human beings)—that I can deal now; and even as to that I can but set down a few principal considerations. The progress of the military art is the most conspicuous, I was about to say the most SHOWY, fact in human history. Ancient civilisation may be compared with modern in many respects, and plausible arguments constructed to show that it is better; but you cannot compare the two in military power. Napoleon could indisputably have conquered Alexander; our Indian army would not think much of the Retreat of the Ten Thousand. And I suppose the improvement has been continuous: I have not the slightest pretence to special knowledge; but, looking at the mere surface of the facts, it seems likely that the aggregate battle array, so to say, of mankind, the fighting force of the human race, has constantly and invariably grown. It is true that the ancient civilisation long resisted the 'barbarians,' and was then destroyed by the barbarians. But the barbarians had improved. 'By degrees,' says a most accomplished writer,[4] 'barbarian mercenaries came to form the largest, or at least the

[4] Mr. Bryce

most effective, part of the Roman armies. The body-guard of Augustus had been so composed; the praetorians were generally selected from the bravest frontier troops, most of them Germans.' 'Thus,' he continues, 'in many ways was the old antagonism broken down, Romans admitting barbarians to rank and office; barbarians catching something of the manners and culture of their neighbours. And thus, when the final movement came, the Teutonic tribes slowly established themselves through the provinces, knowing something of the system to which they came, and not unwilling to be considered its members.' Taking friend and foe together, it may be doubted whether the fighting capacity of the two armies was not as great at last, when the Empire fell, as ever it was in the long period while the Empire prevailed. During the Middle Ages the combining power of men often failed; in a divided time you cannot collect as many soldiers as in a concentrated time. But this difficulty is political, not military. If you added up the many little hosts of any century of separation, they would perhaps be found equal or greater than the single host, or the fewer hosts, of previous centuries which were more united. Taken as a whole, and allowing for possible exceptions, the aggregate fighting power of mankind has grown immensely, and has been growing continuously since we knew anything about it.

Again, this force has tended to concentrate itself more and more in certain groups which we call 'civilised nations.' The literati of the last century were for ever in fear of a new

conquest of the barbarians, but only because their imagination was overshadowed and frightened by the old conquests. A very little consideration would have shown them that, since the monopoly of military inventions by cultivated states, real and effective military power tends to confine itself to those states. The barbarians are no longer so much as vanquished competitors; they have ceased to compete at all. The military vices, too, of civilisation seem to decline just as its military strength augments. Somehow or other civilisation does not make men effeminate or unwarlike now as it once did. There is an improvement in our fibre—moral, if not physical. In ancient times city people could not be got to fight—seemingly could not fight; they lost their mental courage, perhaps their bodily nerve. But now-a-days in all countries the great cities could pour out multitudes wanting nothing but practice to make good soldiers, and abounding in bravery and vigour. This was so in America; it was so in Prussia; and it would be so in England too. The breed of ancient times was impaired for war by trade and luxury, but the modern breed is not so impaired.

A curious fact indicates the same thing probably, if not certainly. Savages waste away before modern civilisation; they seem to have held their ground before the ancient. There is no lament in any classical writer for the barbarians. The New Zealanders say that the land will depart from their children; the Australians are vanishing; the Tasmanians have vanished. If anything like this had happened in antiquity, the classical

moralists would have been sure to muse over it; for it is just the large solemn kind of fact that suited them. On the contrary, in Gaul, in Spain, in Sicily—everywhere that we know of—the barbarian endured the contact of the Roman, and the Roman allied himself to the barbarian. Modern science explains the wasting away of savage men; it says that we have diseases which we can bear, though they cannot, and that they die away before them as our fatted and protected cattle died out before the rinderpest, which is innocuous, in comparison, to the hardy cattle of the Steppes. Savages in the first year of the Christian era were pretty much what they were in the 1800th; and if they stood the contact of ancient civilised men, and cannot stand ours, it follows that our race is presumably tougher than the ancient; for we have to bear, and do bear, the seeds of greater diseases than those the ancients carried with them. We may use, perhaps, the unvarying savage as a metre to gauge the vigour of the constitutions to whose contact he is exposed.

Particular consequences may be dubious, but as to the main fact there is no doubt: the military strength of man has been growing from the earliest time known to our history, straight on till now. And we must not look at times known by written records only; we must travel back to older ages, known to us only by what lawyers call REAL evidence—the evidence of things. Before history began, there was at least as much progress in the military art as there has been since. The Roman legionaries or Homeric Greeks were about as superior to the men of the shell

mounds and the flint implements as we are superior to them. There has been a constant acquisition of military strength by man since we know anything of him, either by the documents he has composed or the indications he has left.

The cause of this military growth is very plain. The strongest nation has always been conquering the weaker; sometimes even subduing it, but always prevailing over it. Every intellectual gain, so to speak, that a nation possessed was in the earliest times made use of—was INVESTED and taken out—in war; all else perished. Each nation tried constantly to be the stronger, and so made or copied the best weapons; by conscious and unconscious imitation each nation formed a type of character suitable to war and conquest. Conquest improved mankind by the intermixture of strengths; the armed truce, which was then called peace, improved them by the competition of training and the consequent creation of new power. Since the long-headed men first drove the short-headed men out of the best land in Europe, all European history has been the history of the superposition of the more military races over the less military of the efforts, sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful, of each race to get more military; and so the art of war has constantly improved. But why is one nation stronger than another? In the answer to that, I believe, lies the key to the principal progress of early civilisation, and to some of the progress of all civilisation. The answer is that there are very many advantages—some small and some great—every one of which tends to make the nation which

has it superior to the nation which has it not; that many of these advantages can be imparted to subjugated races, or imitated by competing races; and that, though some of these advantages may be perishable or inimitable, yet, on the whole, the energy of civilisation grows by the coalescence of strengths and by the competition of strengths.

II

By far the greatest advantage is that on which I observed before—that to which I drew all the attention I was able by making the first of these essays an essay on the Preliminary Age. The first thing to acquire is if I may so express it, the LEGAL FIBRE; a polity first—what sort of polity is immaterial; a law first—what kind of law is secondary; a person or set of persons to pay deference to—though who he is, or they are, by comparison scarcely signifies. 'There is,' it has been said, 'hardly any exaggerating the difference between civilised and uncivilised men; it is greater than the difference between a tame and a wild animal,' because man can improve more. But the difference at first was gained in much the same way. The taming of animals as it now goes on among savage nations, and as travellers who have seen it describe it, is a kind of selection. The most wild are killed when food is wanted, and the most tame and easy to manage kept, because they are more agreeable to human indolence, and so the keeper likes them best. Captain Galton, who has often seen strange scenes of savage and of animal life, had better describe the process:—'The irreclaimably wild members of every flock would escape and be utterly lost; the wilder of those that remained would assuredly be selected for slaughter—whenever it was necessary that one of the flock should be killed. The tamest cattle—those which seldom ran

away, that kept the flocks together, and those which led them homeward—would be preserved alive longer than any of the others. It is, therefore, these that chiefly become the parents of stock and bequeath their domestic aptitudes to the future herd. I have constantly witnessed this process of selection among the pastoral savages of South Africa. I believe it to be a very important one on account of its rigour and its regularity. It must have existed from the earliest times, and have been, in continuous operation, generation after generation, down to the present day.'[5]

Man, being the strongest of all animals, differs from the rest; he was obliged to be his own domesticator; he had to tame himself. And the way in which it happened was, that the most obedient, the tamest tribes are, at the first stage in the real struggle of life, the strongest and the conquerors. All are very wild then; the animal vigour, the savage virtue of the race has died out in none, and all have enough of it. But what makes one tribe—one incipient tribe, one bit of a tribe—to differ from another is their relative faculty of coherence. The slightest symptom of legal development, the least indication of a military bond, is then enough to turn the scale. The compact tribes win, and the compact tribes are the tamest. Civilisation begins, because the beginning of civilisation is a military advantage. Probably if we had historic records of the ante-historic ages—if some superhuman power had set down the thoughts and actions of men ages before they could set them down for themselves—

[5] Ethnological Society's Transactions, vol. iii. p. 137.

we should know that this first step in civilisation was the hardest step. But when we come to history as it is, we are more struck with the difficulty of the next step. All the absolutely incoherent men—all the 'Cyclopes'—have been cleared away long before there was an authentic account of them. And the least coherent only remain in the 'protected' parts of the world, as we may call them. Ordinary civilisation begins near the Mediterranean Sea; the best, doubtless, of the ante-historic civilisations were not far off. From this centre the conquering SWARM—for such it is—has grown and grown; has widened its subject territories steadily, though not equably, age by age. But geography long defied it. An Atlantic Ocean, a Pacific Ocean, an Australian Ocean, an unapproachable interior Africa, an inaccessible and undesirable hill India, were beyond its range. In such remote places there was no real competition, and on them inferior, half-combined men continued to exist. But in the regions of rivalry—the regions where the better man pressed upon the worse man—such half-made associations could not last. They died out and history did not begin till after they were gone. The great difficulty which history records is not that of the first step, but that of the second step. What is most evident is not the difficulty of getting a fixed law, but getting out of a fixed law; not of cementing (as upon a former occasion I phrased it) a cake of custom, but of breaking the cake of custom; not of making the first preservative habit, but of breaking through it, and reaching something better.

This is the precise case with the whole family of arrested

civilisations. A large part, a very large part, of the world seems to be ready to advance to something good—to have prepared all the means to advance to something good,—and then to have stopped, and not advanced. India, Japan, China, almost every sort of Oriental civilisation, though differing in nearly all other things, are in this alike. They look as if they had paused when there was no reason for pausing—when a mere observer from without would say they were likely not to pause.

The reason is, that only those nations can progress which preserve and use the fundamental peculiarity which was given by nature to man's organism as to all other organisms. By a law of which we know no reason, but which, is among the first by which Providence guides and governs the world, there is a tendency in descendants to be like their progenitors, and yet a tendency also in descendants to DIFFER from their progenitors. The work of nature in making generations is a patchwork—part resemblance, part contrast. In certain respects each born generation is not like the last born; and in certain other respects it is like the last. But the peculiarity of arrested civilisation is to kill out varieties at birth almost; that is, in early childhood, and before they can develop. The fixed custom which public opinion alone tolerates is imposed on all minds, whether it suits them or not. In that case the community feel that this custom is the only shelter from bare tyranny, and the only security for they value. Most Oriental communities live on land which in theory is the property of a despotic sovereign, and neither they nor their families could have

the elements of decent existence unless they held the land upon some sort of fixed terms. Land in that state of society is (for all but a petty skilled minority) a necessary of life, and all the unincreasable land being occupied, a man who is turned out of his holding is turned out of this world, and must die. And our notion of written leases is as out of place in a world without writing and without reading as a House of Commons among Andaman Islanders. Only one check, one sole shield for life and good, is then possible;—usage. And it is but too plain how in such places and periods men cling to customs because customs alone stand between them and starvation.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.