

## CHAPTER II THE USE OF CONFLICT

### Part I

THE difference between progression and stationary action," 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 civilized 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 pre-historic 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 tends 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 "nat-

ural 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 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 civilization 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 civilization long resisted the "barbarians," and was then destroyed by the barbarians. But the barbarians had improved. "By degrees," says a most accomplished writer,\* "barbarian mercenaries came to form the largest, or at least the most effective, part of the Roman armies. The body-guard of Augustus had been so composed; the pretorians were generally selected from the bravest frontier troops, most of them Germans." "Thus," he continues, "in many ways was the old antagonism broken

\* Mr. Bryce.

down, Romans admitting barbarians to rank and office; barbarians catching something of the manners and culture of their neighbors. 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 "civilized nations." The *literati* of the last century were forever 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 civilization seem to decline just as its military strength augments. Somehow or other civilization 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 vigor. 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 civilization; 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 eighteenth century; and if they stood the contact of ancient civilized 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 vigor 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 strength; 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 civilization, and to some of the progress of all civilization. The answer is that there are very 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 civilization grows by the coalescence of strengths and by the competition of strengths.

#### Part 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 civilized and uncivilized 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 rigor 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."\*

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 vigor, 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. Civilization begins, because the beginning of civilization is a military advantage.

\* Ethnological Society's Transactions, vol. iii. p. 137.

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—we should know that this first step in civilization 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 "Cyclops"—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 civilization begins near the Mediterranean Sea; the best, doubtless, of the ante-historic civilizations 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 civilizations. 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 civilization, 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 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 civilization 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 what 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.

A still more powerful cause co-operated, if a cause more powerful can be imagined. Dryden had a dream of an early age, "when wild in woods the noble savage ran;" but "when lone in woods the cringing savage crept" would have been more like all we know of that early, bare, painful period. Not only had they no comfort, no convenience, not the very beginnings of an epicurean life, but their mind within was as painful to them as the world without. It was full of fear. So far as the vestiges inform us, they were afraid of everything;

they were afraid of animals, of certain attacks by near tribes, and of possible inroads from far tribes. But, above all things, they were frightened of "the world;" the spectacle of nature filled them with awe and dread. They fancied there were powers behind it which must be pleased, soothed, flattered, and this very often in a number of hideous ways. We have too many such religions, even among races of great cultivation. Men change their religions more slowly than they change anything else; and accordingly we have religions "of the ages"—(it is Mr. Jowett who so calls them)—of the "ages before morality;" of ages of which the civil life, the common maxims, and all the secular thoughts have long been dead. "Every reader of the classics," said Dr. Johnson, "finds their mythology tedious." In that old world, which is so like our modern world in so many things, so much more like than many far more recent, or some that live beside us, there is a part in which we seem to have no kindred, which we stare at, of which we cannot think how it could be credible, or how it came to be thought of. This is the archaic part of that very world which we look at as so ancient; an "antiquity" which descended to them, hardly altered, perhaps, from times long antecedent, which were as unintelligible to them as to us, or more so. How this terrible religion—for such it was in all living detail, though we make, and the ancients then made, an artistic use of the more attractive bits of it—weighed on man, the great poem of Lucretius, the most of a nineteenth century poem of any in antiquity, brings before us with a feeling so vivid as to be almost a feeling of our own. Yet the classical religion is a mild and tender specimen of the preserved religions. To get at the worst, you should look where the destroying competition has been least—at America, where sectional civilization was rare, and a pervading coercive civilization did not exist; at such religions as those of the Aztecs.

At first sight it seems impossible to imagine what conceivable function such awful religions can perform in the economy of the world. And no one can fully explain them. But one use they assuredly had: they fixed the yoke of custom thoroughly on mankind. They were the prime agents of the era. They put upon a fixed law a sanction so fearful that no one could dream of not conforming to it.

No one will ever comprehend the arrested civilizations unless he sees the strict dilemma of early society. Either men had no law at all, and lived in confused tribes, hardly hanging together, or they had to obtain a fixed law by processes of incredible difficulty. Those who surmounted that difficulty soon destroyed all those that lay in their way who did not. And then they themselves were caught in their own yoke. The customary discipline, which could only be imposed on any early men by terrible sanctions, continued with those sanctions, and killed out of the whole society the propensities to variation which are the principle of progress.

Experience shows how incredibly difficult it is to get men really to encourage the principle of originality. They will admit it in theory, but in practice the old error—the error which arrested a hundred civilizations—returns again. Men are too fond of their own life, too credulous of the completeness of their own ideas, too angry at the pain of new thoughts, to be able to bear easily with a changing existence; or else, having new ideas, they want to enforce them on mankind—to make them heard, and admitted, and obeyed before, in simple competition with other ideas, they would ever be so naturally. At this very moment there are the most rigid Comtists teaching that we ought to be governed by a hierarchy—a combination of *savans* orthodox in science. Yet who can doubt that Comte would have been hanged by his own hierarchy; that his *essor matériel*, which was in fact troubled by the “theologians and metaphysicians” of the Polytechnic School, would have been more impeded by the government he wanted to make? And then the secular Comtists, Mr. Harrison and Mr. Beesly, who want to “Frenchify the English institutions”—that is, to introduce here an imitation of the Napoleonic system, a dictatorship founded on the proletariat—who can doubt that if both these clever writers had been real Frenchmen they would have been irascible anti-Bonapartists, and have been sent to Cayenne long ere now? The wish of these writers is very natural. They want to “organize society,” to erect a despot who will do what they like, and work out their ideas; but any despot will do what he himself likes, and will root out new ideas ninety-nine times for once that he introduces them.

Again, side by side with these Comtists, and warring with

them—at least with one of them—is Mr. Arnold, whose poems we know by heart, and who has, as much as any living Englishman, the genuine literary impulse; and yet even he wants to put a yoke upon us—and, worse than a political yoke, an academic yoke, a yoke upon our minds and our styles. He, too, asks us to imitate France; and what else can we say than what the two most thorough Frenchmen of the last age did say?—“*Dans les corps à talent, nulle distinction ne fait ombre, si ce n'est pas celle du talent. Un duc et pair honore l'Académie Française, qui ne veut point de Boileau, refuse la Bruyère, fait attendre Voltaire, mais reçoit tout d'abord Chapelain et Conrart. De même nous voyons à l'Académie Grecque le vicomte invité, Corûi repoussé, lorsque Jormard y entre comme dans un moulin.*” Thus speaks Paul-Louis Courier in his own brief inimitable prose. And a still greater writer—a real Frenchman, if ever there was one, and (what many critics would have denied to be possible) a great poet by reason of his most French characteristics—Béranger, tells us in verse:—

“ Je croyais voir le président  
Faire bâiller—en répondant  
Que l'on vient de perdre un grand homme;  
Que moi je le vau, Dieu sait comme.  
Mais ce président sans façon \*  
Ne pérorer ici qu'en chanson :  
Toujours trop tôt sa harangue est finie.  
Non, non, ce n'est point comme à l'Académie,  
Ce n'est point comme à l'Académie,

“ Admis enfin, aurai-je alors,  
Pour tout esprit, l'esprit de corps?  
Il rend le bon sens, quoi qu'on dise,  
Solidaire de la sottise;  
Mais, dans votre société,  
L'esprit de corps, c'est la gaité.  
Cet esprit là règne sans tyrannie.  
Non, non, ce n'est point comme à l'Académie;  
Ce n'est point comme à l'Académie.”

Asylums of common-place, he hints, academies must ever be. But that sentence is too harsh; the true one is—the academies are asylums of the ideas and the tastes of the last age. “By the time,” I have heard a most eminent man of sci-

\* Désaugiers.

ence observe, "by the time a man of science attains eminence on any subject, he becomes a nuisance upon it, because he is sure to retain errors which were in vogue when he was young, but which the new race have refuted." These are the sort of ideas which find their home in academies, and out of their dignified windows pooh-pooh new things.

I may seem to have wandered far from early society, but I have not wandered. The true scientific method is to explain the past by the present—what we see by what we do not see. We can only comprehend why so many nations have not varied, when we see how hateful variation is; how everybody turns against it; how not only the conservatives of speculation try to root it out, but the very innovators invent most rigid machines for crushing the "monstrosities and anomalies"—the new forms, out of which, by competition and trial, the best is to be selected for the future. The point I am bringing out is simple:—one most important prerequisite of a prevailing nation is that it should have passed out of the first stage of civilization into the second stage—out of the stage where permanence is most wanted into that where variability is most wanted; and you cannot comprehend why progress is so slow till you see how hard the most obstinate tendencies of human nature make that step to mankind.

Of course the nation we are supposing must keep the virtues of its first stage as it passes into the after stage, else it will be trodden out; it will have lost the savage virtues in getting the beginning of the civilized virtues; and the savage virtues which tend to war are the daily bread of human nature. Carlyle said, in his graphic way, "The ultimate question between every two human beings is, 'Can I kill thee, or canst thou kill me?'" History is strewn with the wrecks of nations which have gained a little progressiveness at the cost of a great deal of hard manliness, and have thus prepared themselves for destruction as soon as the movements of the world gave a chance for it. But these nations have come out of the "pre-economic stage" too soon; they have been put to learn while yet only too apt to unlearn. Such cases do not vitiate, they confirm, the principle—that a nation which has just gained variability without losing legality has a singular likelihood to be a prevalent nation.

No nation admits of an abstract definition; all nations are beings of many qualities and many sides; no historical event exactly illustrates any one principle; every cause is intertwined and surrounded with a hundred others. The best history is but like the art of Rembrandt; it casts a vivid light on certain selected causes, on those which were best and greatest; it leaves all the rest in shadow and unseen. To make a single nation illustrate a principle, you must exaggerate much and you must omit much. But, not forgetting this caution, did not Rome—the prevalent nation in the ancient world—gain her predominance by the principle on which I have dwelt? In the thick crust of her legality there was hidden a little seed of adaptiveness. Even in her law itself no one can fail to see that, binding as was the habit of obedience, coercive as use and wont at first seem, a hidden impulse of extrication did manage, in some queer way, to change the substance while conforming to the accidents—to do what was wanted for the new time while seeming to do only what was directed by the old time. And the moral of their whole history is the same: each Roman generation, so far as we know, differs a little—and in the best times often but a very little—from its predecessors. And, therefore, the history is so continuous as it goes, though its two ends are so unlike. The history of many nations is like the stage of the English drama: one scene is succeeded on a sudden by a scene quite different,—a cottage by a palace, and a windmill by a fortress. But the history of Rome changes as a good diorama changes; while you look, you hardly see it alter; each moment is hardly different from the last moment; yet at the close the metamorphosis is complete, and scarcely anything is as it began. Just so in the history of the great prevailing city: you begin with a town and you end with an empire, and this by unmarked stages. So shrouded, so shielded, in the coarse fibre of other qualities was the delicate principle of progress, that it never failed, and it was never broken.

One standing instance, no doubt, shows that the union of progressiveness and legality does not secure supremacy in war. The Jewish nation has its type of progress in the prophets, side by side with its type of permanence in the law and Levites, more distinct than any other ancient people. Nowhere in common history do we see the two forces—both so necessary and