

NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL SELECTION.

THE writer of a remarkable paper in the September number of *Fraser's Magazine* attempts to make out that the Darwinian principle of natural selection fails, and fails necessarily, in the case of man;—not, indeed, in the case of *races* of men, as to which he argues that it completely holds good, since the less efficient race-organizations yield in the conflict of race to the more efficient, and as inevitably in the case of man as of the lower animals; nor, he asserts, even in the case of *nations* of men, since there, too, he thinks that there is evidence that the more united and better governed society wins power and influence and a position of physical and moral advantage at the expense of the less united and worse governed; but in the case of classes and individuals, as to whom he argues that art, law, and usage tend to neutralize the wise severity of nature in extinguishing diseased or weak constitutions, and crushing feeble and imprudent and useless characters. "The two great instruments and achievements of civilization are respect for life and respect for property." Now, the former, and the science which it has developed, tend to prolong sickly lives, and to transmit debilitated constitutions to a posterity which in a "natural" state ("natural," of course, in the Darwinian sense) would never have existed at all. On the other hand, the respect for property and the institutions which it has developed, provide for the transmission of millions sterling to people who would never have had the energy to earn or acquire it for themselves, and so encourage the foundation of families and the growth of races which could only have flourished under a protected system of things,—a system of things in which the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. The able poor man, instead of coming as quickly to the top as he would in a society where proprietary institutions were of the rudest, has to compete not only with his fellow-men, but with fellow-men whose influence is artificially multiplied by an enormous factor representing that accumulated industry of their friends or ancestors through whom they have been placed on this vantage-ground. Such is the argument of the essayist in *Fraser*, and he leaves the difficulty where he finds it, without, of course, proposing seriously to remedy this failure of "natural selection," either by abolishing hospitals and putting to death feeble children in their infancy, or, on the other hand, by proclaiming a confiscation and universal scramble for property every fifty years or so.

Now, in criticizing this argument, we must notice, first, that there is a great danger of confusion in the use of the words "the law of natural selection" as applied to races in which any characteristics higher than the physical exist at all. What is to be the criterion of a natural advantage? How are we to know which is the race "favoured" by nature, except by the result of success? That is what Mr. Darwin judges by, though he often points out, on a retrospect, what *were* the natural advantages by which one race of lower animals beat another in the competition. But Mr. Darwin would never question the testimony of facts. He often shows us that some defeated and dying if not extinct race had some one or more special advantages over the races which vanquished it; only, if it was defeated *in spite* of those advantages, he would not for a moment dispute that the conquering race must have had, on the whole, *overbalancing* advantages, whether visible or not, on its side. Now, applying this train of reasoning to the supposed "failure" of the law which the able essayist in *Fraser* has pointed out, is it not obvious that if, by the growth of the respect for life and of medical science, enfeebled or delicate constitutions are patched up, and enabled to transmit their deficiencies of frame and brain to posterity, we have yet no scientific right whatever to deny that this may be the very arrangement which on the final balance of advantages is the best calculated to bring the best and wisest and sanest minds to the top? True, it may, so far as it goes, tell against the purity of the race, that medical science not only restores and preserves to us the radically sound and vigorous constitutions, but also prolongs and patches up many radically unsound and tainted constitutions, which are thus handed down to a later generation. But the question is whether the race does not gain far more even for its vigour, health, and sanity by the true healing art, than it loses from this cause. Of course it is not true, as the essayist seems to suppose, that any such art can put the radically unsound on a level with the radically sound in the struggle for existence, or give them the same chance of healthy and vigorous children. The most it can do for

the latter is probably less than it does to save the former from the results of injuries and mischances which do not affect the foundation of the constitution. At all events, even if it be supposed to diminish the *relative* disadvantages of undermined constitutions as compared with sound ones, and to patch up lives that are organically diseased even more successfully than it wards off the accidental dangers affecting the strong and healthy, even then it does not neutralize the law of natural selection, it only slightly impairs the force and speed with which it acts; and against this must be set, on the *per contra* side, the vast gain in force which, as we shall presently see, accrues *most* to the wisest and best, from the substitution of a higher principle than that of mere "natural" struggle and competition, for the lower one which suffices in the purely animal world. And with regard to the laws of property, the essayist's case is weaker still. No doubt they do secure to a vast number the means of living and of giving life to others who would not seem well qualified for "the struggle of existence," and who might have succumbed if they had had to win the means of living for themselves by shouldering their own way in life. Still, not only does this tell as strongly for the energetic who inherit, as for the *diletantti* who inherit, not only does it leave it quite as certain as ever that those who have no moral capacity to rise will scarcely fail to fall, will be quick to lose their inheritance to those who would have had power to gain it,—not only is this so, but in fact this transmission of a great bulk of property to persons not well fitted to make or save it, is a necessary condition of detecting and developing capacities, of the first value to our race, which would be utterly drowned and lost in the mere conflict for material sustenance. No test could be coarser or more ineffectual of the sort of intellectual and moral energy which gives value to life, than the test of ability to win money without the help of accumulated capital. Such a test would put out of court at one blow, as unfit for "the struggle for existence," three-fourths of the religious teachers, the thinkers, the discoverers, the poets, the artists, the philanthropists, the reformers. If we are to assume that all who inherit are drones unless they show the power to win what they inherit, we should have to assume that there is no true sort of energy at all, except it admits of diversion into a channel wherein pounds, shillings, and pence could be rapidly accumulated. And it is obvious enough that such a test would be quite false.

Still, what we have said as yet, is but preliminary to the true answer to the essayist we refer to. The real answer to him is this,—that directly you reach man in the ascending stages of animal life, you reach a point where the competitive principle of "natural selection" is more or less superseded by a higher principle, of which the key-note is not "Let the strong trample out the weak," but "Let the strong sacrifice themselves for the weak." This is really the law of supernatural selection, as distinguished from the law which governs the selection of races in the lower animal world. It is from reverence for this law that men value so highly the healing art which helps us to restore the weak instead of to trample them out,—the arts of political organization which teach us to feed and clothe those who are, without their own fault, hungry and naked, instead of to leave them to destruction,—the charity which bestows a new language on the dumb, teaches the blind to see with their fingers, brightens the hopeless fate even of the idiotic and the insane, nay, reforms even criminals if it be possible, instead of exterminating them. The history of all Christian and many other Churches is at bottom little but the history of the growth of human reverence for that law of supernatural selection which supersedes the law ruling in the merely animal world. If we are to complain that the Darwinian theorem does not apply to man, we are complaining that we are in the truest sense men at all. The law of self-sacrifice, the law of the Cross, the law the religious root of which lies in the teaching that One, "being in the form of God," made himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, to raise creatures infinitely below Himself up to His own level, to give them of His life, and breathe into them His spirit, is in its very essence and conception a reversal of the law of "natural selection," at least so far as man dreams of making himself in purpose and in spirit the executioner of that law. Christ tells us *not*, to help to extinguish poor and maimed and blighted forms of life lest they spoil the breed, but to have faith that every act of wise self-sacrifice, *i. e.*, every transfer of blessings from the strong, happy, or wealthy, who can spare them, to the weak, miserable, or poor who might otherwise dwindle and perish, is a vindication of that higher law of supernatural selection by virtue of which the "weak things of the world confound the mighty, and the things which are not bring to naught the things which are."

But then how far is this reversal of the Darwinian law of "conflict for existence," in the life of man, a true abrogation of the

"Providential" principle, as our essayist calls it, which secures a gradual amelioration of the organisms of the animal world? Can we properly say that the principle of competition, so far as it secures the recognition of every new faculty, and the appropriate reward of strength and industry and ingenuity and invention is not wanted, and not in the highest degree beneficent, in the human world as well as the world below it? If not, where are we to draw the line? Where does the Darwinian principle end, and the Christian begin? Where does it cease to be mischievous, to give aid to lower forms of life which we should be glad in the abstract to see disappear? Where does it become beneficent to lend artificial succour to those who may transmit the seeds of misery and even crime to distant generations? Of course these are questions by no means easy to answer. Each one must try and answer them for himself. But it is easy to perceive that, judging even by the coldest light of reason, the race would lose infinitely more of greatness, of energy, of variety of activity, of mental and moral stimulus of every kind, by the extinction of the principle of self-sacrifice, by the rigid application of the animal law of natural selection to human affairs and purposes, than it could possibly gain in purity of breed. In fact, there would be no room at all left for the highest dispositions which we hope to see transmitted to our children, if the "catch-who-can" principle of natural selection is to govern the conscience and inform the motives of men. In endeavouring to purify the breed, we should at once extinguish every character of the highest calibre, and make the breed no longer worth a future destiny at all. In pushing on the competitive principle, pure and simple, beyond its legitimate point, and making it supreme over the life of a being capable of self-sacrifice, we should only degrade man to the level next beneath him, and cut off at a blow the last upward step of his progress. Indeed, whatever risk there is of artificially preserving and perpetuating low types of humanity by our charitable institutions and the higher principles of our civilization, there is infinitely more risk of failing to preserve and perpetuate that very highest of all types of life which cares more to draw up those beneath it than even to climb itself,—or rather which climbs itself by virtue, chiefly, of the endeavour to draw up those beneath it. Grant, if you will, that the true physician may sometimes save from extinction a life which propagates the seeds of crime and suffering. Grant, if you will, that the giver who saves the wretched from destruction may sometimes have lent a helping hand to physical and moral mediocrities whose posterity will start from a very low level of natural advantage. Still you cannot arrest the hand of either, without arresting an infinitely grander stimulus to all the higher human energies,—intellectual no less than moral,—than can for a moment be compared with the loss which may result from the perpetuation of some low types of organization. The higher virtues, or rather the characteristic impulses and dispositions in which they are rooted, are amongst the most transmissible of hereditary moral qualities. The children of the purely selfish start from a selfish basis of character. The children of the self-denying start from a freer and nobler capacity for impulse. Enthroned the principle of natural selection, and even if you succeed in diminishing the number of transmitted mischiefs, you diminish infinitely more the number of transmitted goods. The plan of God seems to be to ennoble the higher part of His universe at least, *not* so much by eliminating imperfection, as by multiplying graces and virtues. He balances the new evils peculiar to human life by infinitely greater weights in the scale of the good which is also peculiar to human life. "Natural selection" has its place and its function, doubtless, even amongst us. But over it, and high above it, is growing up a principle of supernatural selection, by our free participation in which we can alone become brethren of Christ and children of God.