

of legislative institutions self-convinced of failure.

All this is bad, it may be said, but there have been moments in the history of England when the outlook has been as gloomy; yet she has put forth her wonderful power of adaptation, of recovery, and her affairs have got better again. As instances of this, the days of John, Mary and Charles I, may be cited. Those, however, who rely upon these as historical parallels, are perhaps short-sighted. At best these are but half-parallels, as in each case the manifest evil of the times was easily traced to its cause. What makes the present symptoms of England's case so deplorable is, that there seems no way of accounting for them, except by the theory of national decline. England has pursued mainly a pacific policy since the Crimean War; she has had few wars, none at all in Europe; she has had the benefit (if benefit it were) of the counsels of the Liberal or Progressive party. No pains have been spared. 'What could have been done more to my vineyard,' England might say, 'that I have not done it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'

As the subject I have before me is one greatly susceptible of vagueness, I propose to submit four propositions, containing principles of the truth of which I am myself persuaded; to discuss them in special relation to England, and to conclude by briefly intimating the problem that England has before her. My propositions are: That a nation like an individual has a life of its own; that it has a distinct character and functions, which depend to a great extent upon its constitution, culture, and power; that a nation takes its rank in history from the due discharge of its functions, and its spiritual life ceases when its character degenerates, and it abandons their proper performance; that its corporate existence, which depends greatly upon

external circumstances (as well as upon its constitution and power) may outlast its spiritual life. I will take these in their order.

1. *A nation, like an individual, has a life of its own.* That a nation cannot last for ever would seem to be self-evident to any one who takes the trouble to think about it. The first writer, however, who clearly pointed out the fact that, after lasting for a certain time, a nation begins to decline, was Plato. The discussion occurs in the eighth book of the 'Republic.' Every one knows that Plato's 'Republic' starts with the idea of the analogy between the soul of man and the state. The whole is most suggestive, though the generalizations drawn about the successive phases of governments are only partially true of Greek states, and have little application to modern times. The idea of progress and development into something higher, which is fundamental with the modern mind, was unknown to the Greeks before the era of Stoicism. Athena, the goddess of wisdom, sprung fully developed from the forehead of Zeus. Plato accordingly starts with his ideal state, which he calls an 'Aristocracy, and as long as this lasts the state remains unchanged. But decline comes after a time. 'It is difficult,' he writes (p. 546), 'for a state, thus constituted, to be shaken. But since everything that has come into being must one day perish, even a system like ours will not endure for all time, but must suffer dissolution.' How this dissolution is to come is a puzzle to him, and he explains it by a celebrated mathematical problem (the key to which has not yet been discovered). By the way he suggests other more tangible theories. 'Not only the vegetable, but also the animal kingdom, is liable to alternations of fertility and barrenness, mental and bodily; and these alternations are coincident with certain cyclical revolutions, which vary in each case in length according to the length of life of the particular