

THE
ART *of*
WAR
Sun Tzu

■ Book: The Art of War

Sun Tzu

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Introduction

ART OR SCIENCE OF WAR

Usage Still Unsettled (Power and Knowledge. Science When Mere Knowing; Art, When Doing, Is the Object)

THE choice between these terms seems to be still unsettled, and no one seems to know rightly on what grounds it should be decided, and yet the thing is simple. We have already said elsewhere that “knowing” is something different from “doing.” The two are so different that they should not easily be mistaken the one for the other. The “doing” cannot properly stand in any book, and therefore also Art should never be the title of a book. But because we have once accustomed ourselves to combine in conception, under the name of theory of Art, or simply Art, the branches of knowledge (which may be separately pure sciences) necessary for the practice of an Art, therefore it is consistent to continue this ground of distinction, and to call everything

Art when the object is to carry out the “doing” (being able), as for example, Art of building; Science, when merely knowledge is the object; as Science of mathematics, of astronomy. That in every Art certain complete sciences may be included is intelligible of itself, and should not perplex us. But still it is worth observing that there is also no science without a mixture of Art. In mathematics, for instance, the use of figures and of algebra is an Art, but that is only one amongst many instances. The reason is, that however plain and palpable the difference is between knowledge and power in the composite results of human knowledge, yet it is difficult to trace out their line of separation in man himself.

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All thinking is indeed Art. Where the logician draws the line, where the premises stop which are the result of cognition—where judgment begins, there Art begins. But more than this even the perception of the mind is judgment again, and consequently Art; and at last, even the perception by the senses as well. In a word, if it is impossible to imagine a human being possessing merely the faculty of cognition, devoid of judgment or the reverse, so also Art and Science can never be completely separated from each other. The more these subtle elements of light embody themselves in the outward forms of the world, so much the more separate appear their domains; and now once more, where the object is creation and production, there is the province of Art; where the object is investigation and knowledge Science

holds sway.—After all this it results of itself that it is more fitting to say Art of War than Science of War.

So much for this, because we cannot do without these conceptions. But now we come forward with the assertion that War is neither an Art nor a Science in the real signification, and that it is just the setting out from that starting-point of ideas which has led to a wrong direction being taken, which has caused War to be put on a par with other arts and sciences, and has led to a number of erroneous analogies.

This has indeed been felt before now, and on that it was maintained that War is a handicraft; but there was more lost than gained by that, for a handicraft is only an inferior art, and as such is also subject to definite and rigid laws. In reality the Art of War did go on for some time in the spirit of a handicraft—we allude to the times of the Condottieri—but then it received that direction, not from intrinsic but from external causes; and military history shows how little it was at that time in accordance with the nature of the thing.

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War Is Part of the Intercourse of the Human Race We say therefore War belongs not to the province of Arts and Sciences, but to the province of social life. It is a conflict of great interests which is settled by bloodshed, and only in that is it different from others. It would be better, instead of comparing it with any Art, to liken it to business competition, which is also a conflict of human interests and activities; and

it is still more like State policy, which again, on its part, may be looked upon as a kind of business competition on a great scale. Besides, State policy is the womb in which War is developed, in which its outlines lie hidden in a rudimentary state, like the qualities of living creatures in their germs. analogy has become much closer since Clausewitz's time.

Now that the first business of the State is regarded as the development of facilities for trade, War between great nations is only a question of time. No Hague Conferences can avert

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The essential difference consists in this, that War is no activity of the will, which exerts itself upon inanimate matter like the mechanical Arts; or upon a living but still passive and yielding subject, like the human mind and the human feelings in the ideal Arts, but against a living and reacting force. How little the categories of Arts and Sciences are applicable.



The Art of War is an ancient Chinese military treatise dating from the Late Spring and Autumn Period (roughly 5th century BC). The work, which is attributed to the ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu ("Master Sun", also spelled Sunzi), is composed of 13 chapters. Each one is devoted to an aspect of warfare and how it applies to military strategy and tactics. For almost 1,500 years it was the lead text in an anthology that would be formalised as the Seven Military Classics by Emperor Shenzong of Song in 1080. The Art of War remains the most influential strategy text in East Asian warfare and has influenced both Eastern and Western military thinking, business tactics, legal strategy, lifestyles and beyond.

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The Art of War is traditionally attributed to a military general from the late 6th century BC known as "Master Sun" (Mandarin: "Sunzi", earlier "Sun Tzu"), though its earliest parts probably date to at least 100 years later. Sima Qian's 1st century BC work *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shiji), the first of China's 24 dynastic histories, records an early Chinese tradition stating that a text on military matters was written by one "Sun Wu" from the State of Qi, and that this text had been read and studied by King Helü of Wu (r. 514–495 BC). This text was traditionally identified with the received Master Sun's Art of War. The conventional view—which is still widely held in China—was that Sun Wu was a military theorist from the end of the Spring and Autumn period (776–471 BC) who fled his home state of Qi to the southeastern kingdom of Wu, where he is said to have impressed the king with his ability to train even dainty palace ladies in warfare and to have made Wu's armies powerful enough to challenge their western rivals in the state of Chu.

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The strategist, poet, and warlord Cao Cao in the early 3rd century AD authored the earliest known commentary to the Art of War. Cao's preface makes clear that he edited the text and removed certain passages, but the extent of his changes were unclear historically.

The Art of War appears throughout the bibliographical catalogs of the Chinese dynastic histories, but listings of its divisions and size varied widely. In the early 20th century,

the Chinese writer and reformer Liang Qichao theorized that the text was actually written in the 4th century BC by Sunzi's purported descendant Sun Bin, as a number of historical sources mention a military treatise he wrote.

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Laying Plans



Sun Tzu said: The art of war is of vital importance to the State.

It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected.

The art of war, then, is governed by five constant factors, to be taken into account in one's deliberations, when seeking to determine the conditions obtaining in the field.

These are: (1) The Moral Law; (2) Heaven; (3) Earth; (4) The Commander; (5) Method and discipline. [It appears from what follows that Sun Tzu means by "Moral Law" a principle of harmony, not unlike the Tao of Lao Tzu in its moral aspect. One might be tempted to render it by "morale," were it not considered as an attribute of the ruler.]

The moral law causes the people to be in complete accord with their ruler, so that they will follow him regardless of



their lives, undismayed by any danger. [Tu Yu quotes Wang Tzu as saying: “Without constant practice, the officers will be nervous and undecided when mustering for battle; without constant practice, the general will be wavering and irresolute when the crisis is at hand.”]

Heaven signifies night and day, cold and heat, times and seasons. [The commentators, I think, make an unnecessary mystery of two words here. Meng Shih refers to “the hard and the soft, waxing and waning” of Heaven. Wang Hsi, however, may be right in saying that what is meant is “the general economy of Heaven,” including the five elements, the four seasons, wind and clouds, and other phenomena.]

Earth comprises distances, great and small; danger and security; open ground and narrow passes; the chances of life and death.

The Commander stands for the virtues of wisdom, sincerely, benevolence, courage and strictness. [The five cardinal virtues of the Chinese are (1) humanity or benevolence; (2) uprightness of mind; (3) self-respect, self-control, or “proper feeling;” (4) wisdom; (5) sincerity or good faith. Here “wisdom” and “sincerity” are put before “humanity or benevolence,” and the two military virtues of “courage” and “strictness” substituted for “uprightness of mind” and “self-respect, self-control, or ‘proper feeling.’”]

By Method and Discipline are to be understood the marshaling of the army in its proper subdivisions, the graduations of rank among the officers, the maintenance of



roads by which supplies may reach the army, and the control of military expenditure.

These five heads should be familiar to every general: he who knows them will be victorious; he who knows them not will fail.

Therefore, in your deliberations, when seeking to determine the military conditions, let them be made the basis of a comparison, in this wise:

(a) Which of the two sovereigns is imbued with the Moral law? [I.e., “is in harmony with his subjects..]

(b) Which of the two generals has most ability?

(c) With whom lie the advantages derived from Heaven and Earth?

(d) On which side is discipline most rigorously enforced? [Tu Mu alludes to the remarkable story of Ts`ao Ts`ao (a.d. 155-220), who was such a strict disciplinarian that once, in accordance with his own severe regulations against injury to standing crops, he condemned himself to death for having allowed his horse to shy into a field of corn! However, in lieu of losing his head, he was persuaded to satisfy his sense of justice by cutting off his hair. Ts`ao Ts`ao’s own comment on the present passage is characteristically curt: “when you lay down a law, see that it is not disobeyed; if it is disobeyed the offender must be put to death.”]

(e) Which army is stronger? [Morally as well as physically. As Mei Yao-ch`en puts it, freely rendered, “Espirit De Corps and ‘big battalions.’”]



(f) On which side are officers and men more highly trained? [Tu Yu quotes Wang Tzu as saying: “Without constant practice, the officers will be nervous and undecided when mustering for battle; without constant practice, the general will be wavering and irresolute when the crisis is at hand.”]

(g) In which army is there the greater constancy both in reward and punishment? [On which side is there the most absolute certainty that merit will be properly rewarded and misdeeds summarily punished?]

By means of these seven considerations I can forecast victory or defeat.

The general that hearkens to my counsel and acts upon it, will conquer: —let such a one be retained in command! The general that hearkens not to my counsel nor acts upon it, will suffer defeat: —let such a one be dismissed! [The form of this paragraph reminds us that Sun Tzu’s treatise was composed expressly for the benefit of his patron Ho Lu, king of the Wu State.]

While heading the profit of my counsel, avail yourself also of any helpful circumstances over and beyond the ordinary rules.

According as circumstances are favorable, one should modify one’s plans. [Sun Tzu, as a practical soldier, will have none of the “bookish theoretic.” He cautions us here not to pin our faith to abstract principles; “for,” as Chang Yu puts it, “while the main laws of strategy can be stated clearly enough



for the benefit of all and sundry, you must be guided by the actions of the enemy in attempting to secure a favorable position in actual warfare.” On the eve of the battle of Waterloo, Lord Uxbridge, commanding the cavalry, went to the Duke of Wellington in order to learn what his plans and calculations were for the morrow, because, as he explained, he might suddenly find himself Commander-in-chief and would be unable to frame new plans in a critical moment. The Duke listened quietly and then said: “Who will attack the first tomorrow — I or Bonaparte?” “Bonaparte,” replied Lord Uxbridge. “Well,” continued the Duke, “Bonaparte has not given me any idea of his projects; and as my plans will depend upon his, how can you expect me to tell you what mine are?”]

All warfare is based on deception. [The truth of this pithy and profound saying will be admitted by every soldier. Col. Henderson tells us that Wellington, great in so many military qualities, was especially distinguished by “the extraordinary skill with which he concealed his movements and deceived both friend and foe.”]

Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.

Hold out baits to entice the enemy. Feign disorder, and crush him. [All commentators, except Chang Yu, say, “When he is in disorder, crush him.” It is more natural to suppose that Sun



Tzu is still illustrating the uses of deception in war.]

If he is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him.

If your opponent is of choleric temper, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. [Wang Tzu, quoted by Tu Yu, says that the good tactician plays with his adversary as a cat plays with a mouse, first feigning weakness and immobility, and then suddenly pouncing upon him.]

If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. [This is probably the meaning though Mei Yao-ch`en has the note: "while we are taking our ease, wait for the enemy to tire himself out." The Yu Lan has "Lure him on and tire him out."]

If his forces are united, separate them. [Less plausible is the interpretation favored by most of the commentators: "If sovereign and subject are in accord, put division between them."]

Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

These military devices, leading to victory, must not be divulged beforehand.

Now the general who wins a battle makes many calculations in his temple ere the battle is fought. [Chang Yu tells us that in ancient times it was customary for a temple to be set apart for the use of a general who was about to take the field, in order that he might there elaborate his plan of campaign.]



The general who loses a battle makes but few calculations beforehand. Thus do many calculations lead to victory, and few calculations to defeat: how much more no calculation at all! It is by attention to this point that I can foresee who is likely to win or lose.

* * *



Waging War



Sun Tzu said: In the operations of war, where there are in the field a thousand swift chariots, as many heavy chariots, and a hundred thousand mail-clad soldiers, with provisions enough to carry them a thousand li, the expenditure at home and at the front, including entertainment of guests, small items such as glue and paint, and sums spent on chariots and armor, will reach the total of a thousand ounces of silver per day. Such is the cost of raising an army of 100 ,000 men. [The “swift chariots” were lightly built and, according to Chang Yu, used for the attack; the “heavy chariots” were heavier, and designed for purposes of defense. Li Ch`uan, it is true, says that the latter were light, but this seems hardly probable. I t is interesting to note the analogies between early Chinese warfare and that of the Homeric Greeks. In each case, the war-chariot was the important factor, forming



as it did the nucleus round which was grouped a certain number of foot-soldiers. With regard to the numbers given here, we are informed that each swift chariot was accompanied by 75 footmen, and each heavy chariot by 25 footmen, so that the whole army would be divided up into a thousand battalions, each consisting of two chariots and a hundred men.] [2.78 modern li go to a mile. The length may have varied slightly since Sun Tzu's time.]

When you engage in actual fighting, if victory is long in coming, then men's weapons will grow dull and their ardor will be damped. If you lay siege to a town, you will exhaust your strength.

Again, if the campaign is protracted, the resources of the State will not be equal to the strain.

Now, when your weapons are dulled, your ardor damped, your strength exhausted and your treasure spent, other chieftains will spring up to take advantage of your extremity. Then no man, however wise, will be able to avert the consequences that must ensue.

Thus, though we have heard of stupid haste in war, cleverness has never been seen associated with long delays. [This concise and difficult sentence is not well explained by any of the commentators. Ts`ao Kung, Li Ch`uan, Meng Shih, Tu Yu, Tu Mu and Mei Yao-ch`en have notes to the effect that a general, though naturally stupid, may nevertheless conquer through sheer force of rapidity. Ho Shih says: "Haste may be stupid, but at any rate it saves expenditure of energy



and treasure; protracted operations may be very clever, but they bring calamity in their train.” Wang Hsi evades the difficulty by remarking: “Lengthy operations mean an army growing old, wealth being expended, an empty exchequer and distress among the people; true cleverness insures against the occurrence of such calamities.” Chang Yu says: “So long as victory can be attained, stupid haste is preferable to clever dilatoriness.”] [Now Sun Tzu says nothing whatever, except possibly by implication, about ill-considered haste being better than ingenious but lengthy operations. What he does say is something much more guarded, namely that, while speed may sometimes be injudicious, tardiness can never be anything but foolish — if only because it means impoverishment to the nation. In considering the point raised here by Sun Tzu, the classic example of Fabius Cunctator will inevitably occur to the mind. That general deliberately measured the endurance of Rome against that of Hannibal’s isolated army, because it seemed to him that the latter was more likely to suffer from a long campaign in a strange country. But it is quite a moot question whether his tactics would have proved successful in the long run. Their reversal it is true, led to Cannae; but this only establishes a negative presumption in their favor.]

There is no instance of a country having benefitted from prolonged warfare.

It is only one who is thoroughly acquainted with the evils of war that can thoroughly understand the profitable way of



carrying it on. [That is, with rapidity. Only one who knows the disastrous effects of a long war can realize the supreme importance of rapidity in bringing it to a close. Only two commentators seem to favor this interpretation, but it fits well into the logic of the context, whereas the rendering, “He who does not know the evils of war cannot appreciate its benefits,” is distinctly pointless.]

The skillful soldier does not raise a second levy, neither are his supply-wagons loaded more than twice. [Once war is declared, he will not waste precious time in waiting for reinforcements, nor will he return his army back for fresh supplies, but crosses the enemy’s frontier without delay. This may seem an audacious policy to recommend, but with all great strategists, from Julius Caesar to Napoleon Bonaparte, the value of time — that is, being a little ahead of your opponent — has counted for more than either numerical superiority or the nicest calculations with regard to commissariat.]

Bring war material with you from home, but forage on the enemy. Thus the army will have food enough for its needs. [The Chinese word translated here as “war material” literally means “things to be used”, and is meant in the widest sense. It includes all the impedimenta of an army, apart from provisions.]

Poverty of the State exchequer causes an army to be maintained by contributions from a distance. Contributing to maintain an army at a distance causes the people to be



impoverished. [The beginning of this sentence does not balance properly with the next, though obviously intended to do so. The arrangement, moreover, is so awkward that I cannot help suspecting some corruption in the text. It never seems to occur to Chinese commentators that an emendation may be necessary for the sense, and we get no help from them there. The Chinese words Sun Tzu used to indicate the cause of the people's impoverishment clearly have reference to some system by which the husbandmen sent their contributions of corn to the army direct. But why should it fall on them to maintain an army in this way, except because the State or Government is too poor to do so?]

On the other hand, the proximity of an army causes prices to go up; and high prices cause the people's substance to be drained away. [Wang Hsi says high prices occur before the army has left its own territory. Ts'ao Kung understands it of an army that has already crossed the frontier.]

When their substance is drained away, the peasantry will be afflicted by heavy exactions.

With this loss of substance and exhaustion of strength, the homes of the people will be stripped bare, and three-tenths of their income will be dissipated; [Tu Mu and Wang Hsi agree that the people are not mulcted not of 3/10, but of 7/10, of their income. But this is hardly to be extracted from our text. Ho Shih has a characteristic tag: "The people being regarded as the essential part of the State, and food as the people's heaven, is it not right that those in authority should



value and be careful of both?”] while government expenses for broken chariots, worn-out horses, breast-plates and helmets, bows and arrows, spears and shields, protective mantles, drought-oxen and heavy wagons, will amount to four-tenths of its total revenue.

Hence a wise general makes a point of foraging on the enemy. One cartload of the enemy’s provisions is equivalent to twenty of one’s own, and likewise a single picul of his provender is equivalent to twenty from one’s own store. [Because twenty cartloads will be consumed in the process of transporting one cartload to the front. A picul is a unit of measure equal to 133.3 pounds (65.5 kilograms).]

Now in order to kill the enemy, our men must be roused to anger; that there may be advantage from defeating the enemy, they must have their rewards. [Tu Mu says: “Rewards are necessary in order to make the soldiers see the advantage of beating the enemy; thus, when you capture spoils from the enemy, they must be used as rewards, so that all your men may have a keen desire to fight, each on his own account.”]

Therefore in chariot fighting, when ten or more chariots have been taken, those should be rewarded who took the first. Our own flags should be substituted for those of the enemy, and the chariots mingled and used in conjunction with ours. The captured soldiers should be kindly treated and kept.

This is called, using the conquered foe to augment one’s own strength.



In war, then, let your great object be victory, not lengthy campaigns. [As Ho Shih remarks: “War is not a thing to be trifled with.” Sun Tzu here reiterates the main lesson which this chapter is intended to enforce.”]

* * *



Attack by Stratagem



Sun Tzu said: In the practical art of war, the best thing of all is to take the enemy's country whole and intact; to shatter and destroy it is not so good. So, too, it is better to recapture an army entire than to destroy it, to capture a regiment, a detachment or a company entire than to destroy them. [The equivalent to an army corps, according to Ssu-ma Fa, consisted nominally of 12500 men; according to Ts'ao Kung, the equivalent of a regiment contained 500 men, the equivalent to a detachment consists from any number between 100 and 500, and the equivalent of a company contains from 5 to 100 men. For the last two, however, Chang Yu gives the exact figures of 100 and 5 respectively.]

Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting. [Here again, no



modern strategist but will approve the words of the old Chinese general. Moltke's greatest triumph, the capitulation of the huge French army at Sedan, was won practically without bloodshed.]

Thus the highest form of generalship is to balk the enemy's plans; [Perhaps the word "balk" falls short of expressing the full force of the Chinese word, which implies not an attitude of defense, whereby one might be content to foil the enemy's stratagems one after another, but an active policy of counter-attack. Ho Sh ih puts this very clearly in his note: "When the enemy has made a plan of attack against us, we must anticipate him by delivering our own attack first."] the next best is to prevent the junction of the enemy's forces; [Isolating him from his allies. We must not forget that Sun Tzu, in speaking of hostilities, always has in mind the numerous states or principalities into which the China of his day was split up.] the next in order is to attack the enemy's army in the field; [When he is already at full strength.] and the worst policy of all is to besiege walled cities.

The rule is, not to besiege walled cities if it can possibly be avoided. [Another sound piece of military theory. Had the Boers acted upon it in 1899, and refrained from dissipating their strength before Kimberley, Mafeking, or even Ladysmith, it is more than probable that they would have been masters of the situation before the British were ready seriously to oppose them.]



The preparation of mantlets, movable shelters, and various implements of war, will take up three whole months; [It is not quite clear what the Chinese word, here translated as “mantlets”, described. Ts`ao Kung simply defines them as “large shields,” but we get a better idea of them from Li Ch`uan, who says they were to protect the heads of those who were assaulting the city walls at close quarters. This seems to suggest a sort of Roman Testudo, ready made. Tu Mu says they were wheeled vehicles used in repelling attacks, but this is denied by Ch`en Hao. See supra II. 14. The name is also applied to turrets on city walls. Of the “movable shelters” we get a fairly clear description from several commentators. They were wooden missile-proof structures on four wheels, propelled from within, covered over with raw hides, and used in sieges to convey parties of men to and from the walls, for the purpose of filling up the encircling moat with earth. Tu Mu adds that they are now called “wooden donkeys.”] and the piling up of mounds over against the walls will take three months more. [These were great mounds or ramparts of earth heaped up to the level of the enemy’s walls in order to discover the weak points in the defense, and also to destroy the fortified turrets mentioned in the preceding note.]

The general, unable to control his irritation, will launch his men to the assault like swarming ants, [This vivid simile of Ts`ao Kung is taken from the spectacle of an army of ants climbing a wall. The meaning is that the general, losing



patience at the long delay, may make a premature attempt to storm the place before his engines of war are ready.] with the result that one-third of his men are slain, while the town still remains untaken. Such are the disastrous effects of a siege. [We are reminded of the terrible losses of the Japanese before Port Arthur, in the most recent siege which history has to record.]

Therefore the skillful leader subdues the enemy's troops without any fighting; he captures their cities without laying siege to them; he overthrows their kingdom without lengthy operations in the field. [Chia Lin notes that he only overthrows the Government, but does no harm to individuals. The classical instance is Wu Wang, who after having put an end to the Yin dynasty was acclaimed "Father and mother of the people."]

With his forces intact he will dispute the mastery of the Empire, and thus, without losing a man, his triumph will be complete. [Owing to the double meanings in the Chinese text, the latter part of the sentence is susceptible of quite a different meaning: "And thus, the weapon not being blunted by use, its keenness remains perfect."]

This is the method of attacking by stratagem.

It is the rule in war:

- a) If our forces are ten to the enemy's one, to surround him;
- b) If five to one, to attack him; [Straightway, without waiting for any further advantage.]



c) If twice as numerous, to divide our army into two. [Tu Mu takes exception to the saying; and at first sight, indeed, it appears to violate a fundamental principle of war. Ts'ao Kung, however, gives a clue to Sun Tzu's meaning: "Being two to the enemy's one, we may use one part of our army in the regular way, and the other for some special diversion." Chang Yu thus further elucidates the point: "If our force is twice as numerous as that of the enemy, it should be split up into two divisions, one to meet the enemy in front, and one to fall upon his rear; if he replies to the frontal attack, he may be crushed from behind; if to the rearward attack, he may be crushed in front." This is what is meant by saying that 'one part may be used in the regular way, and the other for some special diversion.' Tu Mu does not understand that dividing one's army is simply an irregular, just as concentrating it is the regular, strategical method, and he is too hasty in calling this a mistake."]

d) If equally matched, we can offer battle; [Li Ch'uan, followed by Ho Shih, gives the following paraphrase: "If attackers and attacked are equally matched in strength, only the able general will fight."]

e) If slightly inferior in numbers, we can avoid the enemy; [The meaning, "we can watch the enemy," is certainly a great improvement on the above; but unfortunately there appears to be no very good authority for the variant. Chang Yu reminds us that the saying only applies if the other factors are equal; a small difference in numbers is often more than



counterbalanced by superior energy and discipline.]

f) If quite unequal in every way, we can flee from him.

Hence, though an obstinate fight may be made by a small force, in the end it must be captured by the larger force.

Now the general is the bulwark of the State; if the bulwark is complete at all points; the State will be strong; if the bulwark is defective, the State will be weak. [As Li Ch`uan tersely puts it: “Gap indicates deficiency; if the general’s ability is not perfect (i.e. if he is not thoroughly versed in his profession), his army will lack strength.”]

There are three ways in which a ruler can bring misfortune upon his army:—

a) By commanding the army to advance or to retreat, being ignorant of the fact that it cannot obey. This is called hobbling the army. [Li Ch`uan adds the comment: “It is like tying together the legs of a thoroughbred, so that it is unable to gallop.” One would naturally think of “the ruler” in this passage as being at home, and trying to direct the movements of his army from a distance. But the commentators understand just the reverse, and quote the saying of T`ai Kung: “A kingdom should not be governed from without, and army should not be directed from within.” Of course it is true that, during an engagement, or when in close touch with the enemy, the general should not be in the thick of his own troops, but a little distance apart. Otherwise, he will be liable to misjudge the position as a whole, and give wrong orders.]



(b) By attempting to govern an army in the same way as he administers a kingdom, being ignorant of the conditions which obtain in an army. This causes restlessness in the soldier's minds. [Ts'ao Kung's note is, freely translated: "The military sphere and the civil sphere are wholly distinct; you can't handle an army in kid gloves." And Chang Yu says: "Humanity and justice are the principles on which to govern a state, but not an army; opportunism and flexibility, on the other hand, are military rather than civil virtues to assimilate the governing of an army"—to that of a State, understood.]

c) By employing the officers of his army without discrimination, [That is, he is not careful to use the right man in the right place.] through ignorance of the military principle of adaptation to circumstances. This shakes the confidence of the soldiers. [I follow Mei Yao-ch'ên here. The other commentators refer not to the ruler, but to the officers he employs. Thus Tu Yu says: "If a general is ignorant of the principle of adaptability, he must not be entrusted with a position of authority." Tu Mu quotes: "The skillful employer of men will employ the wise man, the brave man, the covetous man, and the stupid man. For the wise man delights in establishing his merit, the brave man likes to show his courage in action, the covetous man is quick at seizing advantages, and the stupid man has no fear of death."]

But when the army is restless and distrustful, trouble is sure to come from the other feudal princes. This is simply bringing anarchy into the army, and flinging victory away.



Thus we may know that there are five essentials for victory:

a) He will win who knows when to fight and when not to fight. [Chang Yu says: If he can fight, he advances and takes the offensive; if he cannot fight, he retreats and remains on the defensive. He will invariably conquer who knows whether it is right to take the offensive or the defensive.]

b) He will win who knows how to handle both superior and inferior forces. [This is not merely the general's ability to estimate numbers correctly, as Li Ch`uan and others make out. Chang Yu expounds the saying more satisfactorily: "By applying the art of war, it is possible with a lesser force to defeat a greater, and vice versa. The secret lies in an eye for locality, and in not letting the right moment slip. Thus Wu Tzu says: 'With a superior force, make for easy ground; with an inferior one, make for difficult ground.'"]

c) He will win whose army is animated by the same spirit throughout all its ranks.

d) He will win who, prepared himself, waits to take the enemy unprepared.

e) He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sovereign. [Tu Yu quotes Wang Tzu as saying: "It is the sovereign's function to give broad instructions, but to decide on battle it is the function of the general." It is needless to dilate on the military disasters which have been caused by undue interference with operations in the field on the



part of the home government. Napoleon undoubtedly owed much of his extraordinary success to the fact that he was not hampered by central authority.]

Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. [Li Ch`uan cites the case of Fu Chien, prince of Ch`in, who in 383 a.d. marched with a vast army against the Chin Emperor. When warned not to despise an enemy who could command the services of such men as Hsieh An and Huan Ch`ung, he boastfully replied: "I have the population of eight provinces at my back, infantry and horsemen to the number of one million; why, they could dam up the Yangtze River itself by merely throwing their whips into the stream. What danger have I to fear?" Nevertheless, his forces were soon after disastrously routed at the Fei River, and he was obliged to beat a hasty retreat.]

If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle. [Chang Yu said: "Knowing the enemy enables you to take the offensive, knowing yourself enables you to stand on the defensive." He adds: "Attack is the secret of defense; defense is the planning of an attack." It would be hard to find a better epitome of the root-principle of war.]

Thus it may be known that the leader of armies is the arbiter of the people's fate, the man on whom it depends whether the nation shall be in peace or in peril.

* * *



Tactical Dispositions



Sun Tzu said: The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself. [That is, of course, by a mistake on the enemy's part.]

Thus the good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat, [Chang Yu says this is done, "By concealing the disposition of his troops, covering up his tracks, and taking unremitting precautions."] but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy.

Hence the saying: One may Know how to conquer without being able to do it.

Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive. [I retain the



sense found in a similar passage in in spite of the fact that the commentators are all against me. The meaning they give, “He who cannot conquer takes the defensive,” is plausible enough.]

Standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a superabundance of strength.

The general who is skilled in defense hides in the most secret recesses of the earth; [Literally, “hides under the ninth earth,” which is a metaphor indicating the utmost secrecy and concealment, so that the enemy may not know his whereabouts.”] he who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven. [Another metaphor, implying that he falls on his adversary like a thunderbolt, against which there is no time to prepare. This is the opinion of most of the commentators.]

Thus on the one hand we have ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.

To see victory only when it is within the ken of the common herd is not the acme of excellence. [As Ts`ao Kung remarks, “the thing is to see the plant before it has germinated,” to foresee the event before the action has begun. Li Ch`uan alludes to the story of Han Hsin who, when about to attack the vastly superior army of Chao, which was strongly entrenched in the city of Ch`eng-an, said to his officers: “Gentlemen, we are going to annihilate the enemy, and shall meet again at dinner.” The officers hardly took his words seriously, and gave a very dubious



assent. But Han Hsin had already worked out in his mind the details of a clever stratagem, whereby, as he foresaw, he was able to capture the city and inflict a crushing defeat on his adversary.”]

Neither is it the acme of excellence if you fight and conquer and the whole Empire says, “Well done!” [True excellence being, as Tu Mu says: “To plan secretly, to move surreptitiously, to foil the enemy’s intentions and balk his schemes, so that at last the day may be won without shedding a drop of blood.” Sun Tzu reserves his approbation for things that “the world’s coarse thumb And finger fail to plumb.”]

To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength; [“Autumn” hair” is explained as the fur of a hare, which is finest in autumn, when it begins to grow afresh. The phrase is a very common one in Chinese writers.] to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear. [Ho Shih gives as real instances of strength, sharp sight and quick hearing: Wu Huo, who could lift a tripod weighing 250 stone; Li Chu, who at a distance of a hundred paces could see objects no bigger than a mustard seed; and Shih K`uang, a blind musician who could hear the footsteps of a mosquito.]

What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease. [The last half is literally “one who, conquering, excels in easy conquering.” Mei Yao-ch`en says: “He who only sees the obvious, wins



his battles with difficulty; he who looks below the surface of things, wins with ease.”]

Hence his victories bring him neither reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage. [Tu Mu explains this very well: “Inasmuch as his victories are gained over circumstances that have not come to light, the world as large knows nothing of them, and he wins no reputation for wisdom; inasmuch as the hostile state submits before there has been any bloodshed, he receives no credit for courage.”]

He wins his battles by making no mistakes. [Ch`en Hao says: “He plans no superfluous marches, he devises no futile attacks.” The connection of ideas is thus explained by Chang Yu: “One who seeks to conquer by sheer strength, clever though he may be at winning pitched battles, is also liable on occasion to be vanquished; whereas he who can look into the future and discern conditions that are not yet manifest, will never make a blunder and therefore invariably win.”]

Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory, for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated.

Hence the skillful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible, and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy. [A “counsel of perfection” as Tu Mu truly observes. “Position” need not be confined to the actual ground occupied by the troops. It includes all the arrangements and preparations which a wise general will make to increase the safety of his army.]



Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory. [Ho Shih thus expounds the paradox: “In warfare, first lay plans which will ensure victory, and then lead your army to battle; if you will not begin with stratagem but rely on brute strength alone, victory will no longer be assured.”]

The consummate leader cultivates the moral law, and strictly adheres to method and discipline; thus it is in his power to control success.

In respect of military method, we have, firstly, Measurement; secondly, Estimation of quantity; thirdly, Calculation; fourthly, Balancing of chances; fifthly, Victory.

Measurement owes its existence to Earth; Estimation of quantity to Measurement; Calculation to Estimation of quantity; Balancing of chances to Calculation; and Victory to Balancing of chances. [It is not easy to distinguish the four terms very clearly in the Chinese. The first seems to be surveying and measurement of the ground, which enable us to form an estimate of the enemy’s strength, and to make calculations based on the data thus obtained; we are thus led to a general weighing-up, or comparison of the enemy’s chances with our own; if the latter turn the scale, then victory ensues. The chief difficulty lies in third term, which in the Chinese some commentators take as a calculation of numbers, thereby making it nearly synonymous with the second term. Perhaps the second term should be thought of



as a consideration of the enemy's general position or condition, while the third term is the estimate of his numerical strength. On the other hand, Tu Mu says: "The question of relative strength having been settled, we can bring the varied resources of cunning into play." Ho Shih seconds this interpretation, but weakens it. However, it points to the third term as being a calculation of numbers.]

A victorious army opposed to a routed one, is as a pound's weight placed in the scale against a single grain. [Literally, "a victorious army is like an i (20 oz.) weighed against a shu (1/ 24 oz.); a routed army is a shu weighed against an I." The point is simply the enormous advantage which a disciplined force, flushed with victory, has over one demoralized by defeat." Legge, in his note on Mencius, I. 2. ix. 2, makes the I to be 24 Chinese ounces, and corrects Chu Hsi's statement that it equaled 20 oz. only. But Li Ch`uan of the T`ang dynasty here gives the same figure as Chu Hsi.]

The onrush of a conquering force is like the bursting of pent-up waters into a chasm a thousand fathoms deep.

* * *



Energy



Sun Tzu said: The control of a large force is the same principle as the control of a few men: it is merely a question of dividing up their numbers. [That is, cutting up the army into regiments, companies, etc., with subordinate officers in command of each. Tu Mu reminds us of Han Hsin's famous reply to the first Han Emperor, who once said to him: "How large an army do you think I could lead?" "Not more than 100,000 men, your Majesty." "And you?" asked the Emperor.

"Oh!" he answered, "the more the better."]

Fighting with a large army under your command is nowise different from fighting with a small one: it is merely a question of instituting signs and signals.

To ensure that your whole host may withstand the brunt of the enemy's attack and remain unshaken — this is



effected by maneuvers direct and indirect. [We now come to one of the most interesting parts of Sun Tzu's treatise, the discussion of the Cheng and the Ch`i." As it is by no means easy to grasp the full significance of these two terms, or to render them consistently by good English equivalents; it may be as well to tabulate some of the commentators' remarks on the subject before proceeding further. Li Ch`uan: "Facing the enemy is Cheng, making lateral diversion is Ch`i. Chia Lin: "In presence of the enemy, your troops should be arrayed in normal fashion, but in order to secure victory abnormal maneuvers must be employed." Mei Yao-ch`en: "Ch`i is active, Cheng is passive; passivity means waiting for an opportunity, activity brings the victory itself." Ho Shih: "We must cause the enemy to regard our straightforward attack as one that is secretly designed, and vice versa; thus Cheng may also be Ch`i, and Ch`i may also be Cheng."]

[He instances the famous exploit of Han Hsin, who when marching ostensibly against Lin-chin (now Chao-I in Shensi), suddenly threw a large force across the Yellow River in wooden tubs, utterly disconcerting his opponent. [Ch`ien Han Shu, ch. 3.] Here, we are told, the march on Lin-chin was Cheng, and the surprise maneuver was Ch`i." Chang Yu gives the following summary of opinions on the words: "Military writers do not agree with regard to the meaning of Ch`i and Cheng. Wei Liao Tzu [4th cent. B.C.] says: 'Direct warfare favors frontal attacks, indirect warfare



attacks from the rear.’ Ts’ao Kung says: ‘Going straight out to join battle is a direct operation; appearing on the enemy’s rear is an indirect maneuver.’ Li Wei-kung [6th and 7th cent . a.d.] says: ‘In war, to march straight ahead is Cheng; turning movements, on the other hand, are Ch`i.’ These writers simply regard Cheng as Cheng, and Ch`i as Ch`i; they do not note that the two are mutually interchangeable and run into each other like the two sides of a circle]

[A comment on the T`ang Emperor T`ai Tsung goes to the root of the matter: ‘A Ch`i maneuver may be Cheng, if we make the enemy look upon it as Cheng; then our real attack will be Ch`i, and vice versa. The whole secret lies in confusing the enemy, so that he cannot fathom our real intent.’” To put it perhaps a little more clearly: any attack or other operation is Cheng, on which the enemy has had his attention fixed; whereas that is Ch`i,” which takes him by surprise or comes from an unexpected quarter. If the enemy perceives a movement which is meant to be Ch`i,” it immediately becomes Cheng.”]

That the impact of your army may be like a grindstone dashed against an egg — this is effected by the science of weak points and strong.

In all fighting, the direct method may be used for joining battle, but indirect methods will be needed in order to secure victory. [Chang Yu says: “Steadily develop indirect tactics, either by pounding the enemy’s flanks or falling on his rear.” A brilliant example of “indirect tactics” which decided the



fortunes of a campaign was Lord Roberts' night march round the Peiwar Ko tal in the second Afghan war Indirect tactics, efficiently applied, are inexhaustible as Heaven and Earth, unending as the flow of rivers and streams; like the sun and moon, they end but to begin anew; like the four seasons, they pass away to return once more. [Tu Yu and Chang Yu understand this of the permutations of Ch`i and Cheng." But at present Sun Tzu is not speaking of Cheng at all, unless, indeed, we suppose with Cheng Yu-hsien that a clause relating to it has fallen out of the text. Of course, as has already been pointed out, the two are so inextricably interwoven in all military operations, that they cannot really be considered apart. Here we simply have an expression, in figurative language, of the almost infinite resource of a great leader.]

There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combinations of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard.

There are not more than five primary colors (blue, yellow, red, white, and black), yet in combination they produce more hues than can ever been seen.

There are not more than five cardinal tastes (sour, acrid, salt, sweet, bitter), yet combinations of them yield more flavors than can ever be tasted.

In battle, there are not more than two methods of attack — the direct and the indirect; yet these two in combination give rise to an endless series of maneuvers.



The direct and the indirect lead on to each other in turn. It is like moving in a circle — you never come to an end. Who can exhaust the possibilities of their combination?

The onset of troops is like the rush of a torrent which will even roll stones along in its course.

The quality of decision is like the well-timed swoop of a falcon which enables it to strike and destroy its victim. [The Chinese here is tricky and a certain key word in the context it is used defies the best efforts of the translator. Tu Mu defines this word as “the measurement or estimation of distance.” But this meaning does not quite fit the illustrative simile. Applying this definition to the falcon, it seems to me to denote that instinct of self restraint which keeps the bird from swooping on its quarry until the right moment, together with the power of judging when the right moment has arrived. The analogous quality in soldiers is the highly important one of being able to reserve their fire until the very instant at which it will be most effective. When the “Victory” went into action at Trafalgar at hardly more than drifting pace, she was for several minutes exposed to a storm of shot and shell before replying with a single gun. Nelson coolly waited until he was within close range, when the broadside he brought to bear worked fearful havoc on the enemy’s nearest ships.]

Therefore the good fighter will be terrible in his onset, and prompt in his decision. [The word “decision” would have reference to the measurement of distance mentioned



above, letting the enemy get near before striking. But I cannot help thinking that Sun Tzu meant to use the word in a figurative sense comparable to our own idiom “short and sharp.” Cf. Wang Hsi’s note, which after describing the falcon’s mode of attack, proceeds: “This is just how the ‘psychological moment’ should be seized in war.”]

Energy may be likened to the bending of a crossbow; decision, to the releasing of a trigger. [None of the commentators seem to grasp the real point of the simile of energy and the force stored up in the bent cross-bow until released by the finger on the trigger.]

Amid the turmoil and tumult of battle, there may be seeming disorder and yet no real disorder at all; amid confusion and chaos, your array may be without head or tail, yet it will be proof against defeat. [Mei Yao-ch`en says: “The subdivisions of the army having been previously fixed, and the various signals agreed upon, the separating and joining, the dispersing and collecting which will take place in the course of a battle, may give the appearance of disorder when no real disorder is possible. Your formation may be without head or tail, your dispositions all topsy-turvy, and yet a rout of your forces quite out of the question.”]

Simulated disorder postulates perfect discipline, simulated fear postulates courage; simulated weakness postulates strength. [In order to make the translation intelligible, it is necessary to tone down the sharply paradoxical form of the original. Ts`ao Kung throws out a



hint of the meaning in his brief note: “These things all serve to destroy formation and conceal one’s condition.” But Tu Mu is the first to put it quite plainly: “If you wish to feign confusion in order to lure the enemy on, you must first have perfect discipline; if you wish to display timidity in order to entrap the enemy, you must have extreme courage; if you wish to parade your weakness in order to make the enemy over-confident, you must have

exceeding strength.”]

Hiding order beneath the cloak of disorder is simply a question of subdivision; concealing courage under a show of timidity presupposes a fund of latent energy; [The commentators strongly understand a certain Chinese word here differently than anywhere else in this chapter. Thus Tu Mu says: “seeing that we are favorably circumstanced and yet make no move, the enemy will believe that we are really afraid.”] masking strength with weakness is to be effected by tactical dispositions. [Chang Yu relates the following anecdote of Kao Tsu, the first Han Emperor: “Wishing to crush the Hsiung-nu, he sent out spies to report on their condition. But the Hsiung-nu, forewarned, carefully concealed all their able-bodied men and well-fed horses, and only allowed infirm soldiers and emaciated cattle to be seen. The result was that spies one and all recommended the Emperor to deliver his attack. Lou Ching alone opposed them, saying: “When two countries go to war, they are naturally inclined to make an ostentatious display of their



strength. Yet our spies have seen nothing but old age and infirmity. This is surely some ruse on the part of the enemy, and it would be unwise for us to attack.” The Emperor, however, disregarding this advice, fell into the trap and found himself surrounded at Po-teng.”]

Thus one who is skillful at keeping the enemy on the move maintains deceitful appearances, according to which the enemy will act. [Ts`ao Kung’s note is “Make a display of weakness and want.” Tu Mu says: “If our force happens to be superior to the enemy’s, weakness may be simulated in order to lure him on; but if inferior, he must be led to believe that we are strong, in order that he may keep off. In fact, all the enemy’s movements should be determined by the signs that we choose to give him.” Note the following anecdote of Sun Pin, a descendent of Sun Wu: In 341 B.C., the Ch`I State being at war with Wei, sent T`ien Chi and Sun Pin against the general P`ang Chuan, who happened to be a deadly personal enemy of the later. Sun Pin said: “The Ch`I State has a reputation for cowardice, and therefore our adversary despises us. Let us turn this circumstance to account.”]

[Accordingly, when the army had crossed the border into Wei territory, he gave orders to show 100,000 fires on the first night, 50,000 on the next, and the night after only 20,000. P`ang Chuan pursued them hotly, saying to himself: “I knew these men of Ch`I were cowards: their numbers have already fallen away by more than half.” In his retreat,



Sun Pin came to a narrow defile, with he calculated that his pursuers would reach after dark.]

[Here he had a tree stripped of its bark, and inscribed upon it the words: “Under this tree shall P`ang Chuan die.” Then, as night began to fall, he placed a strong body of archers in ambush near by, with orders to shoot directly they saw a light. Later on, P`ang Chuan arrived at the spot, and noticing the tree, struck a light in order to read what was written on it. His body was immediately riddled by a volley of arrows, and his whole army thrown into confusion. [The above is Tu Mu’s version of the story; the Shih Chi, less dramatically but probably with more historical truth, makes P`ang Chuan cut his own throat with an exclamation of despair, after the rout of his army.]

He sacrifices something, that the enemy may snatch at it.

By holding out baits, he keeps him on the march; then with a body of picked men he lies in wait for him. [With an emendation suggested by Li Ching, this then reads, “He lies in wait with the main body of his troops.”]

The clever combatant looks to the effect of combined energy, and does not require too much from individuals. [Tu Mu says: “He first of all considers the power of his army in the bulk; afterwards he takes individual talent into account, and uses each men according to his capabilities. He does not demand perfection from the untalented.”]

Hence his ability to pick out the right men and utilize combined energy.



When he utilizes combined energy, his fighting men become as it were like unto rolling logs or stones. For it is the nature of a log or stone to remain motionless on level ground, and to move when on a slope; if four-cornered, to come to a standstill, but if round-shaped, to go rolling down. [Ts`au Kung calls this “the use of natural or inherent power.”]

Thus the energy developed by good fighting men is as the momentum of a round stone rolled down a mountain thousands of feet in height. So much on the subject of energy. [The chief lesson of this chapter, in Tu Mu’s opinion, is the paramount importance in war of rapid evolutions and sudden rushes. “Great results,” he adds, “can thus be achieved with small forces.”]

* * *



Weak Points and Strong



Sun Tzu said: Whoever is first in the field and awaits the coming of the enemy, will be fresh for the fight; whoever is second in the field and has to hasten to battle will arrive exhausted. Therefore the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy, but does not allow the enemy's will to be imposed on him. [One mark of a great soldier is that he fight on his own terms or fights not at all.]

By holding out advantages to him, he can cause the enemy to approach of his own accord; or, by inflicting damage, he can make it impossible for the enemy to draw near. [In the first case, he will entice him with a bait; in the second, he will strike at some important point which the enemy will have to defend.]

If the enemy is taking his ease, he can harass him; [This passage may be cited as evidence against Mei Yao-Ch`en's



interpretation of I.] if well supplied with food, he can starve him out; if quietly encamped, he can force him to move.

Appear at points which the enemy must hasten to defend; march swiftly to places where you are not expected.

An army may march great distances without distress, if it marches through country where the enemy is not. [Ts`ao Kung sums up very well: “Emerge from the void [q.d. like “a bolt from the blue”], strike at vulnerable points, shun places that are defended, attack in unexpected quarters.”]

You can be sure of succeeding in your attacks if you only attack places which are undefended. [Wang Hsi explains “undefended places” as “weak points; that is to say, where the general is lacking in capacity, or the soldiers in spirit; where the walls are not strong enough, or the precautions not strict enough; where relief comes too late, or provisions are too scanty, or the defenders are variance amongst themselves.”]

You can ensure the safety of your defense if you only hold positions that cannot be attacked. [i.e., where there are none of the weak points mentioned above. There is rather a nice point involved in the interpretation of this later clause. Tu Mu, Ch`en Hao, and Mei Yao-ch`en assume the meaning to be: “In order to make your defense quite safe, you must defend even those places that are not likely to be attacked;” and Tu Mu adds: “How much more, then, those that will be attacked.” Taken thus, however, the clause balances less well with the preceding—always a consideration I n the



highly antithetical style which is natural to the Chinese. Chang Yu, therefore, seems to come nearer the mark in saying: “He who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven, making it impossible for the enemy to guard against him. This being so, the places that I shall attack are precisely those that the enemy cannot defend . . . He who is skilled in defense hides in the most secret recesses of the earth, making it impossible for the enemy to estimate his whereabouts. This being so, the places that I shall hold are precisely those that the enemy cannot attack.”]

Hence that general is skillful in attack whose opponent does not know what to defend; and he is skillful in defense whose opponent does not know what to attack. [An aphorism which puts the whole art of war in a nutshell.]

O divine art of subtlety and secrecy! Through you we learn to be invisible, through you inaudible; [Literally, “without form or sound,” but it is said of course with reference to the enemy.] and hence we can hold the enemy’s fate in our hands.

You may advance and be absolutely irresistible, if you make for the enemy’s weak points; you may retire and be safe from pursuit if your movements are more rapid than those of the enemy.

If we wish to fight, the enemy can be forced to an engagement even though he be sheltered behind a high rampart and a deep ditch. All we need do is attack some other place that he will be obliged to relieve. [Tu Mu says:



“If the enemy is the invading party, we can cut his line of communications and occupy the roads by which he will have to return; if we are the invaders, we may direct our attack against the sovereign himself.” It is clear that Sun Tzu, unlike certain generals in the late Boer war, was no believer in frontal attacks.]

If we do not wish to fight, we can prevent the enemy from engaging us even though the lines of our encampment be merely traced out on the ground. All we need do is to throw something odd and unaccountable in his way. [This extremely concise expression is intelligibly paraphrased by Chia Lin: “even though we have constructed neither wall nor ditch.” Li Ch`uan says: “we puzzle him by strange and unusual dispositions;” and Tu Mu finally clinches the meaning by three illustrative anecdotes—one of Chu-ko Liang, who when occupying Yang-p`ing and about to be attacked by Ssu-ma I, suddenly struck his colors, stopped the beating of the drums, and flung open the city gates, showing only a few men engaged in sweeping and sprinkling the ground. This unexpected proceeding had the intended effect; for Ssu-ma I, suspecting an ambush, actually drew off his army and retreated. What Sun Tzu is advocating here, therefore, is nothing more nor less than the timely use of “bluff.”]

By discovering the enemy’s dispositions and remaining invisible ourselves, we can keep our forces concentrated, while the enemy’s must be divided. [The conclusion is



perhaps not very obvious, but Chang Yu (after Mei Yao-ch`en) rightly explains it thus: “If the enemy’s dispositions are visible, we can make for him in one body; whereas, our own dispositions being kept secret, the enemy will be obliged to divide his forces in order to guard against attack from every quarter.”]

We can form a single united body, while the enemy must split up into fractions. Hence there will be a whole pitted against separate parts of a whole, which means that we shall be many to the enemy’s few.

And if we are able thus to attack an inferior force with a superior one, our opponents will be in dire straits.

The spot where we intend to fight must not be made known; for then the enemy will have to prepare against a possible attack at several different points; [Sheridan once explained the reason of General Grant’s victories by saying that “while his opponents were kept fully employed wondering what he was going to do, he was thinking most of what he was going to do himself.”] and his forces being thus distributed in many directions, the numbers we shall have to face at any given point will be proportionately few.

For should the enemy strengthen his van, he will weaken his rear; should he strengthen his rear, he will weaken his van; should he strengthen his left, he will weaken his right; should he strengthen his right, he will weaken his left. If he sends reinforcements everywhere, he will everywhere be weak. [In Frederick the Great’s instructions to his generals



we read: “A defensive war is apt to betray us into too frequent detachment. Those generals who have had but little experience attempt to protect every point, while those who are better acquainted with their profession, having only the capital object in view, guard against a decisive blow, and acquiesce in small misfortunes to avoid greater.”]

Numerical weakness comes from having to prepare against possible attacks; numerical strength, from compelling our adversary to make these preparations against us. [The highest generalship, in Col. Henderson’s words, is “to compel the enemy to disperse his army, and then to concentrate superior force against each fraction in turn.”]

Knowing the place and the time of the coming battle, we may concentrate from the greatest distances in order to fight. [What Sun Tzu evidently has in mind is that nice calculation of distances and that masterly employment of strategy which enable a general to divide his army for the purpose of a long and rapid march, and afterwards to effect a junction at precisely the right spot and the right hour in order to confront the enemy in overwhelming strength. Among many such successful junctions which military history records, one of the most dramatic and decisive was the appearance of Blucher just at the critical moment on the field of Waterloo.]

But if neither time nor place be known, then the left wing will be impotent to succor the right, the right equally impotent to succor the left, the van unable to relieve the rear,



or the rear to support the van. How much more so if the furthest portions of the army are anything under a hundred li apart, and even the nearest are separated by several li! [The Chinese of this last sentence is a little lacking in precision, but the mental picture we are required to draw is probably that of an army advancing towards a given rendezvous in separate columns, each of which has orders to be there on a fixed date. If the general allows the various detachments to proceed at haphazard, without precise instructions as to the time and place of meeting, the enemy will be able to annihilate the army in detail. Chang Yu's note may be worth quoting here: "If we do not know the place where our opponents mean to concentrate or the day on which they will join battle, our unity will be forfeited through our preparations for defense, and the positions we hold will be insecure. Suddenly happening upon a powerful foe, we shall be brought to battle in a flurried condition, and no mutual support will be possible between wings, vanguard or rear, especially if there is any great distance between the foremost and hindmost divisions of the army."]

Though according to my estimate the soldiers of Yueh exceed our own in number, that shall advantage them nothing in the matter of victory. I say then that victory can be achieved. [Alas for these brave words! The long feud between the two states ended in 473 B.C. with the total defeat of Wu by Kou Chien and its incorporation in Yueh. This was doubtless long after Sun Tzu's death. With his



present assertion Chang Yu is the only one to point out the seeming discrepancy, which he thus goes on to explain: "In the chapter on Tactical Dispositions it is said, 'One may know how to conquer without being able to do it,' whereas here we have the statement that 'victory' can be achieved."

The explanation is, that in the former chapter, where the offensive and defensive are under discussion, it is said that if the enemy is fully prepared, one cannot make certain of beating him. But the present passage refers particularly to the soldiers of Yueh who, according to Sun Tzu's calculations, will be kept in ignorance of the time and place of the impending struggle.

That is why he says here that victory can be achieved."]
Though the enemy be stronger in numbers, we may prevent him from fighting. Scheme so as to discover his plans and the likelihood of their success. [An alternative reading offered by Chia Lin is: "Know beforehand all plans conducive to our success and to the enemy's failure."]

Rouse him, and learn the principle of his activity or inactivity. [Chang Yu tells us that by noting the joy or anger shown by the enemy on being thus disturbed, we shall be able to conclude whether his policy is to lie low or the reverse. He instances the action of Cho-ku Liang, who sent the scornful present of a woman's head-dress to Ssu-ma I, in order to goad him out of his Fabian tactics.]

Force him to reveal himself, so as to find out his vulnerable spots.



Carefully compare the opposing army with your own, so that you may know where strength is superabundant and where it is deficient.

In making tactical dispositions, the highest pitch you can attain is to conceal them; conceal your dispositions, and you will be safe from the prying of the subtlest spies, from the machinations of the wisest brains. [The piquancy of the paradox evaporates in translation. Concealment is perhaps not so much actual invisibility as “showing no sign” of what you mean to do, of the plans that are formed in your brain. Tu Mu explains: “Though the enemy may have clever and capable officers, they will not be able to lay any plans against us.”]

How victory may be produced for them out of the enemy’s own tactics—that is what the multitude cannot comprehend.

All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved. [i.e., everybody can see superficially how a battle is won; what they cannot see is the long series of plans and combinations which has preceded the battle. Do not repeat the tactics which have gained you one victory, but let your methods be regulated by the infinite variety of circumstances]

[As Wang Hsi sagely remarks: “There is but one root-principle underlying victory, but the tactics which lead up to it are infinite in number.” With this compare Col.



Henderson: “The rules of strategy are few and simple. They may be learned in a week. They may be taught by familiar illustrations or a dozen diagrams. But such knowledge will no more teach a man to lead an army like Napoleon than a knowledge of grammar will teach him to write like Gibbon.”]

Military tactics are like unto water; for water in its natural course runs away from high places and hastens downwards.

So in war, the way is to avoid what is strong and to strike at what is weak. [Like water, taking the line of least resistance.]

Water shapes its course according to the nature of the ground over which it flows; the soldier works out his victory in relation to the foe whom he is facing.

Therefore, just as water retains no constant shape, so in warfare there are no constant conditions.

He who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby succeed in winning, may be called a heaven-born captain.

The five elements (water, fire, wood, metal, earth) are not always equally predominant; [That is, as Wang Hsi says: “they predominate alternately.”] the four seasons make way for each other in turn. [Literally, “have no invariable seat.”]

There are short days and long; the moon has its periods of waning and waxing. [The purport of the passage is simply to illustrate the want of fixity in war by the



changes constantly taking place in Nature. The comparison is not very happy, however, because the regularity of the phenomena which Sun Tzu mentions is by no means paralleled in war.]

* * *



Maneuvering



Sun Tzu said: In war, the general receives his commands from the sovereign.

Having collected an army and concentrated his forces, he must blend and harmonize the different elements thereof before pitching his camp. [“Chang Yu says: “the establishment of harmony and confidence between the higher and lower ranks before venturing into the field;” and he quotes a saying of Wu Tzu (chap. 1 adinit.): “Without harmony in the State, no military expedition can be undertaken; without harmony in the army, no battle array can be formed.” In an historical romance Sun Tzu is represented as saying to Wu Yuan: “As a general rule, those who are waging war should get rid of all the domestic troubles before proceeding to attack the external foe.”]



After that, comes tactical maneuvering, than which there is nothing more difficult. [I have departed slightly from the traditional interpretation of Ts`ao Kung, who says: "From the time of receiving the sovereign's instructions until our encampment over against the enemy, the tactics to be pursued are most difficult." It seems to me that the tactics or maneuvers can hardly be said to begin until the army has sallied forth and encamped, and Ch`ien Hao's note gives color to this view: "For levying, concentrating, harmonizing and entrenching an army, there are plenty of old rules which will serve. The real difficulty comes when we engage in tactical operations." Tu Yu also observes that "the great difficulty is to be beforehand with the enemy in seizing favorable position."]

The difficulty of tactical maneuvering consists in turning the devious into the direct, and misfortune into gain. [This sentence contains one of those highly condensed and somewhat enigmatical expressions of which Sun Tzu is so fond. This is how it is explained by Ts`ao Kung: "Make it appear that you are a long way off, then cover the distance rapidly and arrive on the scene before your opponent." Tu Mu says: "Hoodwink the enemy, so that he may be remiss and leisurely while you are dashing along with utmost speed." Ho Shih gives a slightly different turn: "Although you may have difficult ground to traverse and natural obstacles to encounter this is a drawback which can be turned into actual advantage by celerity of movement."



Signal examples of this saying are afforded by the two famous passages across the Alps—that of Hannibal, which laid Italy at his mercy, and that of Napoleon two thousand years later, which resulted in the great victory of Marengo.]

Thus, to take a long and circuitous route, after enticing the enemy out of the way, and though starting after him, to contrive to reach the goal before him, shows knowledge of the artifice of deviation. [Tu Mu cites the famous march of Chao She in 270 B.C. to relieve the town of O-yu, which was closely invested by a Ch`in army. The King of Chao first consulted Lien P`o on the advisability of attempting a relief, but the latter thought the distance too great, and the intervening country too rugged and difficult. His Majesty then turned to Chao She, who fully admitted the hazardous nature of the march, but finally said: "We shall be like two rats fighting in a whole—and the pluckier one will win!" So he left the capital with his army, but had only gone a distance of 30 li when he stopped and began throwing up entrenchments. For 28 days he continued strengthening his fortifications, and took care that spies should carry the intelligence to the enemy. The Ch`in general was overjoyed, and attributed his adversary's tardiness to the fact that the beleaguered city was in the Han State, and thus not actually part of Chao territory. But the spies had no sooner departed than Chao She began a forced march lasting for two days and one night, and arrive on the scene of action with such astonishing rapidity that he was able to occupy a



commanding position on the “North hill” before the enemy had got wind of his movements. A crushing defeat followed for the Ch`in forces, who were obliged to raise the siege of O-yu in all haste and retreat across the border.]

Maneuvering with an army is advantageous; with an undisciplined multitude, most dangerous. [I adopt the reading of the T`uang Tien, Cheng Yu-hsien and the T`u Shu, since they appear to apply the exact nuance required in order to make sense. The commentators using the standard text take this line to mean that maneuvers may be profitable, or they may be dangerous: it all depends on the ability of the general.]

If you set a fully equipped army in march in order to snatch an advantage, the chances are that you will be too late. On the other hand, to detach a flying column for the purpose involves the sacrifice of its baggage and stores. [Some of the Chinese text is unintelligible to the Chinese commentators, who paraphrase the sentence. I submit my own rendering without much enthusiasm, being convinced that there is some deep-seated corruption in the text. On the whole, it is clear that Sun Tzu does not approve of a lengthy march being undertaken without supplies.]

Thus, if you order your men to roll up their buff-coats, and make forced marches without halting day or night, covering double the usual distance at a stretch, [The ordinary day’s march, according to Tu Mu, was 30 li; but on one occasion, when pursuing Liu Pei, Ts`ao Ts`ao is said to have



covered the incredible distance of 300 li within twenty-four hours.] doing a hundred li in order to wrest an advantage, the leaders of all your three divisions will fall into the hands of the enemy.

The stronger men will be in front, the jaded ones will fall behind, and on this plan only one-tenth of your army will reach its destination. [The moral is, as Ts`ao Kung and others point out: Don't march a hundred li to gain a tactical advantage, either with or without impedimenta. Maneuvers of this description should be confined to short distances. Stonewall Jackson said: "The hardships of forced marches are often more painful than the dangers of battle." He did not often call upon his troops for extraordinary exertions. It was only when he intended a surprise, or when a rapid retreat was

imperative, that he sacrificed everything for speed.]

If you march fifty li in order to outmaneuver the enemy, you will lose the leader of your first division, and only half your force will reach the goal. [Literally, "the leader of the first division will be torn away."]

If you march thirty li with the same object, two-thirds of your army will arrive. [In the T`uang Tien is added: "From this we may know the difficulty of maneuvering."]

We may take it then that an army without its baggage-train is lost; without provisions it is lost; without bases of supply it is lost. [I think Sun Tzu meant "stores accumulated in depots." But Tu Yu says "fodder and the



like,” Chang Yu says “Goods in general,” and Wang Hsi says “fuel, salt, foodstuffs, etc.”]

We cannot enter into alliances until we are acquainted with the designs of our neighbors.

We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country—its mountains and forests, its pitfalls and precipices, its marshes and swamps.

We shall be unable to turn natural advantage to account unless we make use of local guides.

In war, practice dissimulation, and you will succeed. [In the tactics of Turenne, deception of the enemy, especially as to the numerical strength of his troops, took a very prominent position.]

Whether to concentrate or to divide your troops, must be decided by circumstances.

Let your rapidity be that of the wind, [The simile is doubly appropriate, because the wind is not only swift but, as Mei Yao-ch`en points out, “invisible and leaves no tracks.”] your compactness that of the forest. [Meng Shih comes nearer to the mark in his note: “When slowly marching, order and ranks must be preserved”—so as to guard against surprise attacks. But natural forest do not grow in rows, whereas they do generally possess the quality of density or compactness.]

In raiding and plundering be like fire, in immovability like a mountain. [That is, when holding a position from which the enemy is trying to dislodge you, or perhaps, as Tu Yu says,



when he is trying to entice you into a trap.]

Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt. [Tu Yu quotes a saying of T`ai Kung which has passed into a proverb: “You cannot shut your ears to the thunder or your eyes to the lighting—so rapid are they.” Likewise, an attack should be made so quickly that it cannot be parried.]

When you plunder a countryside, let the spoil be divided amongst your men; [Sun Tzu wishes to lessen the abuses of indiscriminate plundering by insisting that all booty shall be thrown into a common stock, which may afterwards be fairly divided amongst all.] when you capture new territory, cut it up into allotments for the benefit of the soldiery. [Ch`en Hao says “quarter your soldiers on the land, and let them sow and plant it.” It is by acting on this principle, and harvesting the lands they invaded, that the Chinese have succeeded in carrying out some of their most memorable and triumphant expeditions, such as that of Pan Ch`ao who penetrated to the Caspian, and in more recent years, those of Fu-k`ang-an and Tso Tsung-t`ang.]

Ponder and deliberate before you make a move. [Chang Yu quotes Wei Liao Tzu as saying that we must not break camp until we have gained the resisting power of the enemy and the cleverness of the opposing general.]

He will conquer who has learnt the artifice of deviation.

Such is the art of maneuvering. [With these words, the chapter would naturally come to an end. But there now



follows a long appendix in the shape of an extract from an earlier book on War, now lost, but apparently extant at the time when Sun Tzu wrote. The style of this fragment is not noticeable different from that of Sun Tzu himself, but no commentator raises a doubt as to its genuineness.]

The Book of Army Management says: [It is perhaps significant that none of the earlier commentators give us any information about this work. Mei Yao-Ch`en calls it “an ancient military classic,” and Wang Hsi, “an old book on war.” Considering the enormous amount of fighting that had gone on for centuries before Sun Tzu’s time between the various kingdoms and principalities of China, it is not in itself improbable that a collection of military maxims should have been made and written down at some earlier period.]

On the field of battle, [Implied, though not actually in the Chinese.] the spoken word does not carry far enough: hence the institution of gongs and drums. Nor can ordinary objects be seen clearly enough: hence the institution of banners and flags.

Gongs and drums, banners and flags, are means whereby the ears and eyes of the host may be focused on one particular point. [Chang Yu says: “If sight and hearing converge simultaneously on the same object, the evolutions of as many as a million soldiers will be like those of a single man.”!]

The host thus forming a single united body, is it impossible either for the brave to advance alone, or for the



cowardly to retreat alone. [Chuang Yu quotes a saying: “Equally guilty are those who advance against orders and those who retreat against orders.” Tu Mu tells a story in this connection of Wu Ch`I, when he was fighting against the Ch`in State. Before the battle had begun, one of his soldiers, a man of matchless daring, sallied forth by himself, captured two heads from the enemy, and returned to camp. Wu Ch`I had the man instantly executed, whereupon an officer ventured to remonstrate, saying: “This man was a good soldier, and ought not to have been beheaded.” Wu Ch`I replied: “I fully believe he was a good soldier, but I had him beheaded because he acted without orders.”]

This is the art of handling large masses of men.

In night-fighting, then, make much use of signal-fires and drums, and in fighting by day, of flags and banners, as a means of influencing the ears and eyes of your army. [Ch`en Hao alludes to Li Kuang-pi’s night ride to Ho-yang at the head of 500 mounted men; they made such an imposing display with torches, that though the rebel leader Shih Ssu-ming had a large army, he did not dare to dispute their passage.]

A whole army may be robbed of its spirit; [“In war,” says Chang Yu, “if a spirit of anger can be made to pervade all ranks of an army at one and the same time, its onset will be irresistible. Now the spirit of the enemy’s soldiers will be keenest when they have newly arrived on the scene, and it is therefore our cue not to fight at once, but to wait until their ardor and enthusiasm have worn off, and then strike. It is in



this way that they may be robbed of their keen spirit.” Li Ch`uan and others tell an anecdote (to be found in the Tso C Huan, year 10.) of Ts`ao Kuei, a protégé of Duke Chuang of Lu. The latter State was attacked by Ch`I, and the duke was about to join battle at Ch`ang-cho, after the first roll of the enemy’s drums, when Ts`ao said: “Not just yet.” [Only after their drums had beaten for the third time, did he give the word for attack. Then they fought, and the men of Ch`I were utterly defeated. Questioned afterwards by the Duke as to the meaning of his delay, Ts`ao Kuei replied: “In battle, a courageous spirit is everything. Now the first roll of the drum tends to create this spirit, but with the second it is already on the wane, and after the third it is gone altogether. I attacked when their spirit was gone and ours was at its height. Hence our victory.” Wu Tzu (chap. 4) puts “spirit” first among the “four important influences” in war, and continues: “The value of a whole army—a mighty host of a million men—is dependent on one man alone: such is the influence of spirit!”] a commander-in-chief may be robbed of his presence of mind. [Chang Yu says: “Presence of mind is the general’s most important asset. It is the quality which enables him to discipline disorder and to inspire courage into the panic-stricken.” The great general Li Ching (a.d. 571-649) has a saying: “Attacking does not merely consist in assaulting walled cities or striking at an army in battle array; it must include the art of assailing the enemy’s mental equilibrium.”]



Now a soldier's spirit is keenest in the morning; [Always provided, I suppose, that he has had breakfast. At the battle of the Trebia, the Romans were foolishly allowed to fight fasting, whereas Hannibal's men had breakfasted at their leisure.] by noonday it has begun to flag; and in the evening, his mind is bent only on returning to camp.

A clever general, therefore, avoids an army when its spirit is keen, but attacks it when it is sluggish and inclined to return. This is the art of studying moods.

Disciplined and calm, to await the appearance of disorder and hubbub amongst the enemy:—this is the art of retaining self-possession.

To be near the goal while the enemy is still far from it, to wait at ease while the enemy is toiling and struggling, to be well-fed while the enemy is famished:—this is the art of husbanding one's strength.

To refrain from intercepting an enemy whose banners are in perfect order, to refrain from attacking an army drawn up in calm and confident array:—this is the art of studying circumstances.

It is a military axiom not to advance uphill against the enemy, nor to oppose him when he comes downhill.

Do not pursue an enemy who simulates flight; do not attack soldiers whose temper is keen.

Do not swallow bait offered by the enemy. [Li Ch`uan and Tu Mu, with extraordinary inability to see a metaphor, take these words quite literally of food and drink that have



been poisoned by the enemy. Ch`en Hao and Chang Yu carefully point out that the saying has a wider application.]

Do not interfere with an army that is returning home. [The commentators explain this rather singular piece of advice by saying that a man whose heart is set on returning home will fight to the death against any attempt to bar his way, and is therefore too dangerous an opponent to be tackled. Chang Yu quote s the words of Han Hsin: "Invincible is the soldier who hath his desire and returneth homewards." A marvelous tale is told of Ts`ao Ts`ao's courage and resource in ch. 1 of the San Kuo Chi: In 198 a.d., he was besieging Chang Hsiu in Jang, when Liu Pi ao sent reinforcements with a view to cutting off Ts`ao's retreat. The latter was obliged to draw off his troops, only to find himself hemmed in between two enemies, who were guarding each outlet of a narrow pass in which he had engaged himself. In this desperate plight Ts`ao waited until nightfall, when he bored a tunnel into the mountain side and laid an ambush in it. As soon as the whole army had passed by, the hidden troops fell on his rear, while Ts`ao himself turned and met his pursuers in front, so that they were thrown into confusion and annihilated. Ts`ao Ts`ao said afterwards: "The brigands tried to check my army in its retreat and brought me to battle in a desperate position: hence I knew how to overcome them."]

When you surround an army, leave an outlet free. [This does not mean that the enemy is to be allowed to escape. The



object, as Tu Mu puts it, is “to make him believe that there is a road to safety, and thus prevent his fighting with the courage of despair.” Tu Mu adds pleasantly: “After that, you may crush him.”]

Do not press a desperate foe too hard. [Ch`en Hao quotes the saying: “Birds and beasts when brought to bay will use their claws and teeth.” Chang Yu says: “If your adversary has burned his boats and destroyed his cooking-pots, and is ready to stake all on the issue of a battle, he must not be pushed to extremities.” Ho Shih illustrates the meaning by a story taken from the life of Yen-ch`ing. That general, together with his colleague Tu Chung-wei was surrounded by a vastly superior army of Khitans in the year 945 a.d. The country was bare and desert-like, and the little Chinese force was soon in dire straits for want of water. The wells they bored ran dry, and the men were reduced to squeezing lumps of mud and sucking out the moisture. Their ranks thinned rapidly, until at last Fu Yen -ch`ing exclaimed: “We are desperate men. Far better to die for our country than to go with fettered hands into captivity!” A strong gale happened to be blowing from the northeast and darkening the air with dense clouds of sandy dust. Tu Chung-wei was for waiting until this had abated before deciding on a final attack; but luckily another officer, Li Shou-cheng by name, was quicker to see an opportunity, and said: “They are many and we are few, but in the midst of this sandstorm our numbers will not be discernible; victory will go to the strenuous fighter, and



the wind will be our best ally.” Accordingly, Fu Yen-ch`ing made a sudden and wholly unexpected onslaught with his cavalry, routed the barbarians and succeeded in breaking through to safety.]

Such is the art of warfare.

* * *



Variation in Tactics



Sun Tzu said: In war, the general receives his commands from the sovereign, collects his army and concentrates his forces. [It may have been interpolated here merely in order to supply a beginning to the chapter.]

When in difficult country, do not encamp. In country where high roads intersect, join hands with your allies. Do not linger in dangerously isolated positions. [The last situation is not one of the Nine Situations as given in the beginning of chap. XI, but occurs later on. Chang Yu defines this situation as being situated across the frontier, in hostile territory. Li Ch`uan says it is "country in which there are no springs or wells, flocks or herds, vegetables or firewood;" Chia Lin, "one of gorges, chasms and precipices, without a road by which to advance."]

In hemmed-in situations, you must resort to stratagem. In desperate position, you must fight.



There are roads which must not be followed, [“Especially those leading through narrow defiles,” says Li Ch`uan, “where an ambush is to be feared.”] armies which must be not attacked, [More correctly, perhaps, “there are times when an army must not be attacked.” Ch`en Hao says: “When you see your way to obtain a rival advantage, but are powerless to inflict a real defeat, refrain from attacking, for fear of overtaxing your men’s strength.”] towns which must not be besieged, [Ts`ao Kung gives an interesting illustration from his own experience. When invading the territory of Hsu-chou, he ignored the city of Hua-pi, which lay directly in his path, and pressed on into the heart of the country. This excellent strategy was rewarded by the subsequent capture of no fewer than fourteen important district cities. Chang Yu says: “No town should be attacked which, if taken, cannot be held, or if left alone, will not cause any trouble.” Hsun Ying, when urged to attack Pi-yang, replied: “The city is small and well-fortified; even if I succeed in taking it, it will be no great feat of arms; whereas if I fail, I shall make myself a laughing-stock.” In the seventeenth century, sieges still formed a large proportion of war. It was Turenne who directed attention to the importance of marches, countermarches and maneuvers. He said: “It is a great mistake to waste men in taking a town when the same expenditure of soldiers will gain a province.”] positions which must not be contested, commands of the sovereign which must not be obeyed. [This is a hard saying for the



Chinese, with their reverence for authority, and Wei Liao Tzu (quoted by Tu Mu) is moved to exclaim: “Weapons are baleful instruments, strife is antagonistic to virtue, a military commander is the negation of civil order!” The unpalatable fact remains, however, that even Imperial wishes must be subordinated to military necessity.]

The general who thoroughly understands the advantages that accompany variation of tactics knows how to handle his troops.

The general who does not understand these, may be well acquainted with the configuration of the country, yet he will not be able to turn his knowledge to practical account. [Literally, “get the advantage of the ground,” which means not only securing good positions, but availing oneself of natural advantages in every possible way. Chang Yu says: “Every kind of ground is characterized by certain natural features, and also gives scope for a certain variability of plan. How it is possible to turn these natural features to account unless topographical knowledge is supplemented by versatility of mind?”]

So, the student of war who is unversed in the art of war of varying his plans, even though he be acquainted with the Five Advantages, will fail to make the best use of his men. [Chia Lin tells us that these imply five obvious and generally advantageous lines of action, namely: “if a certain road is short, it must be followed; if an army is isolated, it must be attacked; if a town is in a parlous condition, it must be



besieged; if a position can be stormed, it must be attempted; and if consistent with military operations, the ruler's commands must be obeyed." But there are circumstances which sometimes forbid a general to use these advantages. For instance, "a certain road may be the shortest way for him, but if he knows that it abounds in natural obstacles, or that the enemy has laid an ambush on it, he will not follow that road. A hostile force may be open to attack, but if he knows that it is hard-pressed and likely to fight with desperation, he will refrain from striking," and so on.]

Hence in the wise leader's plans, considerations of advantage and of disadvantage will be blended together. ["Whether in an advantageous position or a disadvantageous one," says Ts'ao Kung, "the opposite state should be always present to your mind. "]

If our expectation of advantage be tempered in this way, we may succeed in accomplishing the essential part of our schemes. [Tu Mu says: "If we wish to wrest an advantage from the enemy, we must not fix our minds on that alone, but allow for the possibility of the enemy also doing some harm to us, and let this enter as a factor into our calculations."]

If, on the other hand, in the midst of difficulties we are always ready to seize an advantage, we may extricate ourselves from misfortune. [Tu Mu says: "If I wish to extricate myself from a dangerous position, I must consider not only the enemy's ability to injure me, but also my own



ability to gain an advantage over the enemy. If in my counsels these two considerations are properly blended, I shall succeed in liberating myself.... For instance; if I am surrounded by the enemy and only think of effecting an escape, the nervelessness of my policy will incite my adversary to pursue and crush me; it would be far better to encourage my men to deliver a bold counter-attack, and use the advantage thus gained to free myself from the enemy's toils.”]

Reduce the hostile chiefs by inflicting damage on them; [Chia Lin enumerates several ways of inflicting this injury, some of which would only occur to the Oriental mind:—“Entice away the enemy's best and wisest men, so that he may be left without counselors. Introduce traitors into his country, that the government policy may be rendered futile. Foment intrigue and deceit, and thus sow dissension between the ruler and his ministers. By means of every artful contrivance, cause deterioration amongst his men and waste of his treasure. Corrupt his morals by insidious gifts leading him into excess. Disturb and unsettle his mind by presenting him with lovely women.” Chang Yu (after Wang Hsi) makes a different interpretation of Sun Tzu here: “Get the enemy into a position where he must suffer injury, and he will submit of his own accord.”] and make trouble for them, [Tu Mu, in this phrase, in his interpretation indicates that trouble should be made for the enemy affecting their “possessions,” or, as we might say, “assets,” which he considers to be “a



large army, a rich exchequer, harmony amongst the soldiers, punctual fulfillment of commands.” These give us a whip-hand over the enemy.] and keep them constantly engaged; [Literally, “make servants of them.” Tu Yu says “prevent them from having any rest.”] hold out specious allurements, and make them rush to any given point. [Meng Shih’s note contains an excellent example of the idiomatic use of: “cause them to forget pien (the reasons for acting otherwise than on their first impulse), and hasten in our direction.”]

The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy’s not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

There are five dangerous faults which may affect a general:

(a) Recklessness, which leads to destruction; [“Bravery without forethought,” as Ts`ao Kung analyzes it, which causes a man to fight blindly and desperately like a mad bull. Such an opponent, says Chang Yu, “must not be encountered with brute force, but may be lured into an ambush and slain. In estimating the character of a general, men are wont to pay exclusive attention to his courage, forgetting that courage is only one out of many qualities which a general should possess. The merely brave man is prone to fight recklessly; and he who fights recklessly, without any perception of what is expedient, must be condemned.” Ssu-ma Fa, too, make the



incisive remark: “Simply going to one’s death does not bring about victory.”]

(b) Cowardice, which leads to capture; [Ts`ao Kung defines the Chinese word translated here as “cowardice” as being of the man “whom timidity prevents from advancing to seize an advantage,” and Wang Hsi adds “who is quick to flee at the sight of danger.” Meng Shih gives the closer paraphrase “he who is bent on returning alive,” this is, the man who will never take a risk. But, as Sun Tzu knew, nothing is to be achieved in war unless you are willing to take risks. T`ai Kung said: “He who lets an advantage slip will subsequently bring upon himself real disaster.” In 404 a.d., Liu Yu pursued the rebel Huan Hsuan up the Yangtze and fought a naval battle with him at the island of Ch`eng-hung. The loyal troops numbered only a few thousands, while their opponents were in great force. But Huan Hsuan, fearing the fate which was in store for him should he be overcome, had a light boat made fast to the side of his war-junk, so that he might escape, if necessary, at a moment’s notice. The natural result was that the fighting spirit of his soldiers was utterly quenched, and when the loyalists made an attack from windward with fireships, all striving with the utmost ardor to be first in the fray, Huan Hsuan’s forces were routed, had to burn all their baggage and fled for two days and nights without stopping. Chang Yu tells a somewhat similar story of Chao Ying-ch`I, a general of the Chin State who during a battle with the army of Ch`u



in 597 B.C. had a boat kept in readiness for him on the river, wishing in case of defeat to be the first to get across.]

(c) A hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults; [Tu Mu tells us that Yao Hsing, when opposed in 357 a.d. by Huang Mei, Teng Ch`iang and others shut himself up behind his walls and refused to fight. Teng Ch`iang said: "Our adversary is of a choleric temper and easily provoked; let us make constant allies and break down his walls, then he will grow angry and come out. Once we can bring his force to battle, it is doomed to be our prey." This plan was acted upon, Yao Hsiang came out to fight, was lured as far as San-yuan by the enemy's pretended flight, and finally attacked and slain.]

d) A delicacy of honor which is sensitive to shame; [This need not be taken to mean that a sense of honor is really a defect in a general. What Sun Tzu condemns is rather an exaggerated sensitiveness to slanderous reports, the thin-skinned man who is stung by opprobrium, however undeserved. Mei Yao-ch`en truly observes, though somewhat paradoxically: "The seek after glory should be careless of public opinion."]

(e) Over-solicitude for his men, which exposes him to worry and trouble. [Here again, Sun Tzu does not mean that the general is to be careless of the welfare of his troops. All he wishes to emphasize is the danger of sacrificing any important military advantage to the immediate comfort of his men. This is a shortsighted policy, because in the long run



the troops will suffer more from the defeat, or, at best, the prolongation of the war, which will be the consequence. A mistaken feeling of pity will often induce a general to relieve a beleaguered city, or to reinforce a hard-pressed detachment, contrary to his military instincts. It is now generally admitted that our repeated efforts to relieve Ladysmith in the South African War were so many strategical blunders which defeated their own purpose. And in the end, relief came through the very man who started out with the distinct resolve no longer to subordinate the interests of the whole to sentiment in favor of a part. An old soldier of one of our generals who failed most conspicuously in this war, tried once, I remember, to defend him to me on the ground that he was always "so good to his men." By this plea, had he but known it, he was only condemning him out of Sun Tzu's mouth.]

These are the five besetting sins of a general, ruinous to the conduct of war.

When an army is overthrown and its leader slain, the cause will surely be found among these five dangerous faults. Let them be a subject of meditation.

* * *



The Army on the March



Sun Tzu said: We come now to the question of encamping the army, and observing signs of the enemy. Pass quickly over mountains, and keep in the neighborhood of valleys. [The idea is, not to linger among barren uplands, but to keep close to supplies of water and grass. “Abide not in natural ovens,” i.e. “the openings of valleys.” Chang Yu tells the following anecdote: Wu-tu Ch`iang was a robber captain in the time of the Later Han, and Ma Yuan was sent to exterminate his gang. Ch`iang having found a refuge in the hills, Ma Yuan made no attempt to force a battle, but seized all the favorable positions commanding supplies of water and forage. Ch`iang was soon in such a desperate plight for want of provisions that he was forced to make a total surrender. He did not know the advantage of keeping in the neighborhood of valleys.”]



Camp in high places, [Not on high hills, but on knolls or hillocks elevated above the surrounding country.] facing the sun. [Tu Mu takes this to mean “facing south,” and Ch`en Hao “facing east.”]

Do not climb heights in order to fight. So much for mountain warfare.

After crossing a river, you should get far away from it. [“In order to tempt the enemy to cross after you,” according to Ts`ao Kung, and also, says Chang Yu, “in order not to be impeded in your evolutions.” The T`uang Tien reads, “If the Enemy crosses a river,” etc. But in view of the next sentence, this is almost certainly an interpolation.]

When an invading force crosses a river in its onward march, do not advance to meet it in mid-stream. It will be best to let half the army get across, and then deliver your attack. [Li Ch`uan alludes to the great victory won by Han Hsin over Lung Chu at the Wei River. Turning to the ch`ien han shu, ch. 34, fol. 6 verso, we find the battle described as follows: “The two armies were drawn up on opposite sides of the river. In the night, Han Hsin ordered his men to take some ten thousand sacks filled with sand and construct a dam higher up. Then, leading half his army across, he attacked Lung Chu; but after a time, pretending to have failed in his attempt, he hastily withdrew to the other bank. Lung Chu was much elated by this unlooked-for success, and exclaiming: “I felt sure that Han Hsin was really a coward!” he pursued him and began crossing the river in his



turn. Han Hsin now sent a party to cut open the sandbags, thus releasing a great volume of water, which swept down and prevented the greater portion of Lung Chu's army from getting across. He then turned upon the force which had been cut off, and annihilated it, Lung Chu himself being amongst the slain. The rest of the army, on the further bank, also scattered and fled in all directions.]

If you are anxious to fight, you should not go to meet the invader near a river which he has to cross. [For fear of preventing his crossing.] Moor your craft higher up than the enemy, and facing the sun. [The repetition of these words in connection with water is very awkward. Chang Yu has the note: "Said either of troops marshaled on the river-bank, or of boats anchored in the stream itself; in either case it is essential to be higher than the enemy and facing the sun." The other commentators are not at all explicit.]

Do not move up-stream to meet the enemy. [Tu Mu says: "As water flows downwards, we must not pitch our camp on the lower reaches of a river, for fear the enemy should open the sluices and sweep us away in a flood. Chu-ko Wu-hou has remarked that 'in river warfare we must not advance against the stream,' which is as much as to say that our fleet must not be anchored below that of the enemy, for then they would be able to take advantage of the current and make short work of us." There is also the danger, noted by other commentators, that the enemy may throw poison on the water to be carried down to us.]



So much for river warfare.

In crossing salt-marshes, your sole concern should be to get over them quickly, without any delay. [Because of the lack of fresh water, the poor quality of the herbage, and last but not least, because they are low, flat, and exposed to attack.]

If forced to fight in a salt-marsh, you should have water and grass near you, and get your back to a clump of trees. [Li Ch`uan remarks that the ground is less likely to be treacherous where there are trees, while Tu Mu says that they will serve to protect the rear.] So much for operations in salt-marches.

In dry, level country, take up an easily accessible position with rising ground to your right and on your rear, [Tu Mu quotes T`ai Kung as saying: "An army should have a stream or a marsh on its left, and a hill or tumulus on its right."] so that the danger may be in front, and safety lie behind. So much for campaigning in flat country.

These are the four useful branches of military knowledge [Those, namely, concerned with (1) mountains, (2) rivers, (3) marshes, and (4) plains. Compare Napoleon's "Military Maxims," no. 1.] which enabled the Yellow Emperor to vanquish four several sovereigns. [Regarding the "Yellow Emperor": Mei Yao-ch`en asks, with some plausibility, whether there is an error in the text as nothing is known of Huang Ti having conquered four other Emperors. The Shih Chi (ch. 1 ad init.) speaks only of his victories over Y en Ti



and Ch`ih Yu. In the liU T`AO it is mentioned that he “fought seventy battles and pacified the Empire.” Ts`ao Kung’s explanation is, that the Yellow Emperor was the first to institute the feudal system of vassals princes, each of whom (to the number of four) originally bore the title of Emperor. Li Ch`uan tells us that the art of war originated under Huang Ti, who received it from his Minister Feng Hou.]

All armies prefer high ground to low. [“High Ground,” says Mei Yao-ch`en, “is not only more agreement and salubrious, but more convenient from a military point of view; low ground is not only damp and unhealthy, but also disadvantageous for fighting.”] and sunny places to dark.

If you are careful of your men, [Ts`ao Kung says: “Make for fresh water and pasture, where you can turn out your animals to graze.”] and camp on hard ground, the army will be free from disease of every kind, [Chang Yu says: “The dryness of the climate will prevent the outbreak of illness.”] and this will spell victory.

When you come to a hill or a bank, occupy the sunny side, with the slope on your right rear. Thus you will at once act for the benefit of your soldiers and utilize the natural advantages of the ground.

When, in consequence of heavy rains up-country, a river which you wish to ford is swollen and flecked with foam, you must wait until it subsides.

Country in which there are precipitous cliffs with torrents running between, deep natural hollows, [The latter defined



as “places enclosed on every side by steep banks, with pools of water at the bottom.] confined places, [Defined as “natural pens or prisons” or “places surrounded by precipices on three sides—easy to get into, but hard to get out of.”] tangled thickets, [Defined as “places covered with such dense undergrowth that spears cannot be used.”] quagmires [Defined as “low-lying places, so heavy with mud as to be impassable for chariots and horsemen.”] and crevasses, [Defined by Mei Yao-ch`en as “a narrow difficult way between beetling cliffs.” Tu Mu’s note is “ground covered with trees and rocks, and intersected by numerous ravines and pitfalls.” This is very vague, but Chia Lin explains it clearly enough as a defile or narrow pass, and Chang Yu takes much the same view. On the whole, the weight of the commentators certainly inclines to the rendering “defile.” But the ordinary meaning of the Chinese in one place is “a crack or fissure” and the fact that the meaning of the Chinese elsewhere in the sentence indicates something in the nature of a defile, make me think that Sun Tzu is here speaking of crevasses.] should be left with all possible speed and not approached.

While we keep away from such places, we should get the enemy to approach them; while we face them, we should let the enemy have them on his rear.

If in the neighborhood of your camp there should be any hilly country, ponds surrounded by aquatic grass, hollow basins filled with reeds, or woods with thick undergrowth, they must



be carefully routed out and searched; for these are places where men in ambush or insidious spies are likely to be lurking. [Chang Yu has the note: “We must also be on our guard against traitors who may lie in close covert, secretly spying out our weaknesses and overhearing our instructions.”]

When the enemy is close at hand and remains quiet, he is relying on the natural strength of his position. [Here begin Sun Tzu’s remarks on the reading of signs, much of which is so good that it could almost be included in a modern manual like Gen. Baden-Powell’s “Aids to Scouting.”]

When he keeps aloof and tries to provoke a battle, he is anxious for the other side to advance. [Probably because we are in a strong position from which he wishes to dislodge us. “If he came close up to us, says Tu Mu, “and tried to force a battle, he would seem to despise us, and there would be less probability of our responding to the challenge. “]

If his place of encampment is easy of access, he is tendering a bait.

Movement amongst the trees of a forest shows that the enemy is advancing. [Ts`ao Kung explains this as “felling trees to clear a passage,” and Chang Yu says: “Every man sends out scouts to climb high places and observe the enemy. If a scout sees that the trees of a forest are moving and shaking, he may know that they are being cut down to clear a passage for the enemy’s march.”]

The appearance of a number of screens in the midst of thick grass means that the enemy wants to make us



suspicious. [Tu Yu's explanation, borrowed from Ts'ao Kung's, is as follows: "The presence of a number of screens or sheds in the midst of thick vegetation is a sure sign that the enemy has fled and, fearing pursuit, has constructed these hiding-places in order to make us suspect an ambush." It appears that these "screens" were hastily knotted together out of any long grass which the retreating enemy happened to come across.]

The rising of birds in their flight is the sign of an ambushade. [Chang Yu's explanation is doubtless right: "When birds that are flying along in a straight line suddenly shoot upwards, it means that soldiers are in ambush at the spot beneath."]

Startled beasts indicate that a sudden attack is coming.

When there is dust rising in a high column, it is the sign of chariots advancing; when the dust is low, but spread over a wide area, it betokens the approach of infantry. ["High and sharp," or rising to a peak, is of course somewhat exaggerated as applied to dust. The commentators explain the phenomenon by saying that horses and chariots, being heavier than men, raise more dust, and also follow one another in the same wheel-track, whereas foot-soldiers would be marching in ranks, many abreast. According to Chang Yu, "every army on the march must have scouts some way in advance, who on sighting dust raised by the enemy, will gallop back and report it to the commander-in-chief." Cf. Gen. Baden-Powell: "As you move along, say, in a



hostile country, your eyes should be looking afar for the enemy or any signs of him: figures, dust rising, birds getting up, glitter of arms, etc.”]

When it branches out in different directions, it shows that parties have been sent to collect firewood. A few clouds of dust moving to and fro signify that the army is encamping. [Chang Yu says: “In apportioning the defenses for a cantonment, light horse will be sent out to survey the position and ascertain the weak and strong points all along its circumference. Hence the small quantity of dust and its motion.”]

Humble words and increased preparations are signs that the enemy is about to advance. [“As though they stood in great fear of us,” says Tu Mu. “Their object is to make us contemptuous and careless, after which they will attack us.” Chang Yu alludes to the story of T`ien Tan of the Ch`i-mo against the Yen forces, led by Ch`i Chieh. In ch. 82 of the Shih Chi we read: “T`ien Tan openly said: ‘My only fear is that the Yen army may cut off the noses of their Ch`i prisoners and place them in the front rank to fight against us; that would be the undoing of our city.’ The other side being informed of this speech, at once acted on the suggestion; but those within the city were enraged at seeing their fellow-countrymen thus mutilated, and fearing only lest they should fall into the enemy’s hands, were nerved to defend themselves more obstinately than ever. Once again T`ien Tan sent back converted spies who reported these words to



the enemy: "What I dread most is that the men of Yen may dig up the ancestral tombs outside the town, and by inflicting this indignity on our forefathers cause us to become faint-hearted.')

[Forthwith the besiegers dug up all the graves and burned the corpses lying in them. And the inhabitants of Chi-mo, witnessing the outrage from the city-walls, wept passionately and were all impatient to go out and fight, their fury being increased tenfold. T`ien Tan knew then that his soldiers were ready for any enterprise. But instead of a sword, he himself too a mattock in his hands, and ordered others to be distributed amongst his best warriors, while the ranks were filled up with their wives and concubines. He then served out all the remaining rations and bade his men eat their fill. The regular soldiers were told to keep out of sight, and the walls were manned with the old and weaker men and with women. This done, envoys were dispatched to the enemy's camp to arrange terms of surrender, whereupon the Yen army began shouting for joy.]

[T`ien Tan also collected 20,000 ounces of silver from the people, and got the wealthy citizens of Chi-mo to send it to the Yen general with the prayer that, when the town capitulated, he would allow their homes to be plundered or their women to be maltreated. Ch`i Chieh, in high good humor, granted their prayer; but his army now became increasingly slack and careless. Meanwhile, T`ien Tan got together a thousand oxen, decked them with pieces of red



silk, painted their bodies, dragon-like, with colored stripes, and fastened sharp blades on their horns and well-greased rushes on their tails. When night came on, he lighted the ends of the rushes, and drove the oxen through a number of holes which he had pierced in the walls, backing them up with a force of 5000 picked warriors. The animals, maddened with pain, dashed furiously into the enemy's camp where they caused the utmost confusion and dismay; for their tails acted as torches, showing up the hideous pattern on their bodies, and the weapons on their horns killed or wounded any with whom they came into contact.]

[In the meantime, the band of 5000 had crept up with gags in their mouths, and now threw themselves on the enemy. At the same moment a frightful din arose in the city itself, all those that remained behind making as much noise as possible by banging drums and hammering on bronze vessels, until heaven and earth were convulsed by the uproar.

Terror-stricken, the Yen army fled in disorder, hotly pursued by the men of Ch`i, who succeeded in slaying their general Ch`i Chien . . . The result of the battle was the ultimate recovery of some seventy cities which had belonged to the Ch`i State.”]

Violent language and driving forward as if to the attack are signs that he will retreat.

When the light chariots come out first and take up a position on the wings, it is a sign that the enemy is forming for battle.



Peace proposals unaccompanied by a sworn covenant indicate a plot. [The reading here is uncertain. Li Ch`uan indicates “a treaty confirmed by oaths and hostages.” Wang Hsi and Chang Yu, on the other hand, simply say “without reason,” “on a frivolous pretext.”]

When there is much running about [Every man hastening to his proper place under his own regimental banner.] and the soldiers fall into rank, it means that the critical moment has come.

When some are seen advancing and some retreating, it is a lure.

When the soldiers stand leaning on their spears, they are faint from want of food.

If those who are sent to draw water begin by drinking themselves, the army is suffering from thirst. [As Tu Mu remarks: “One may know the condition of a whole army from the behavior of a single man.”]

If the enemy sees an advantage to be gained and makes no effort to secure it, the soldiers are exhausted.

If birds gather on any spot, it is unoccupied. [A useful fact to bear in mind when, for instance, as Ch`en Hao says, the enemy has secretly abandoned his camp.] Clamor by night betokens nervousness.

If there is disturbance in the camp, the general’s authority is weak. If the banners and flags are shifted about, sedition is afoot. If the officers are angry, it means that the men are weary. [Tu Mu understands the sentence differently: “If all



the officers of an army are angry with their general, it means that they are broken with fatigue” owing to the exertions which he has demanded from them.]

When an army feeds its horses with grain and kills its cattle for food, [In the ordinary course of things, the men would be fed on grain and the horses chiefly on grass.] and when the men do not hang their cooking-pots over the camp-fires, showing that they will not return to their tents, you may know that they are determined to fight to the death. [I may quote here the illustrative passage from the Hou Han Shu, ch. 71, given in abbreviated form by the P'ei Wen Yun fu: “The rebel Wang Kuo of Liang was besieging the town of Ch'en-ts'ang, and Huang-fu Sung, who was in supreme command, and Tung Cho were sent out against him. The latter pressed for hasty measures, but Sung turned a deaf ear to his counsel. At last the rebels were utterly worn out, and began to throw down their weapons of their own accord. Sung was not advancing to the attack, but Cho said: ‘It is a principle of war not to pursue desperate men and not to press a retreating host.’ Sung answered: ‘That does not apply here. What I am about to attack is a jaded army, not a retreating host; with disciplined troops I am falling on a disorganized multitude, not a band of desperate men.’ Thereupon he advances to the attack unsupported by his colleague, and routed the enemy, Wang Kuo being slain.”]

The sight of men whispering together in small knots or speaking in subdued tones points to disaffection amongst the rank and file.



Too frequent rewards signify that the enemy is at the end of his resources; [Because, when an army is hard pressed, as Tu Mu says, there is always a fear of mutiny, and lavish rewards are given to keep the men in good temper.] too many punishments betray a condition of dire distress. [Because in such case discipline becomes relaxed, and unwonted severity is necessary to keep the men to their duty.]

To begin by bluster, but afterwards to take fright at the enemy's numbers, shows a supreme lack of intelligence. [I follow the interpretation of Ts`ao Kung, also adopted by Li Ch`uan, Tu Mu, and Chang Yu. Another possible meaning set forth by Tu Yu, Chia Lin, Mei Tao-ch`en and Wang Hsi, is: "The general who is first tyrannical towards his men, and then in terror lest they should mutiny, etc." This would connect the sentence with what went before about rewards and punishments.]

When envoys are sent with compliments in their mouths, it is a sign that the enemy wishes for a truce. [Tu Mu says: "If the enemy open friendly relations by sending hostages, it is a sign that they are anxious for an armistice, either because their strength is exhausted or for some other reason." But it hardly needs a Sun Tzu to draw such an obvious inference.]

If the enemy's troops march up angrily and remain facing ours for a long time without either joining battle or taking themselves off again, the situation is one that demands great vigilance and circumspection. [Ts`ao Kung says a maneuver



of this sort may be only a ruse to gain time for an unexpected flank attack or the laying of an ambush.]

If our troops are no more in number than the enemy, that is amply sufficient; it only means that no direct attack can be made. [Literally, “no martial advance.” That is to say, Cheng tactics and frontal attacks must be eschewed, and stratagem resorted to instead.]

What we can do is simply to concentrate all our available strength, keep a close watch on the enemy, and obtain reinforcements. [This is an obscure sentence, and none of the commentators succeed in squeezing very good sense out of it. I follow Li Ch`uan, who appears to offer the simplest explanation: “Only the side that gets more men will win.” Fortunately we have Chang Yu to expound its meaning to us in language which is lucidity itself: “When the numbers are even, and no favorable opening presents itself, although we may not be strong enough to deliver a sustained attack, we can find additional recruits amongst our sutlers and camp-followers, and then, concentrating our forces and keeping a close watch on the enemy, contrive to snatch the victory. But we must avoid borrowing foreign soldiers to help us.” He then quotes from Wei Liao Tzu, ch. 3: “The nominal strength of mercenary troops may be 100,000, but their real value will be not more than half that figure.”]

He who exercises no forethought but makes light of his opponents is sure to be captured by them. [Ch`en Hao, quoting from the Tso Chuan, says: “If bees and scorpions



carry poison, how much more will a hostile state! Even a puny opponent, then, should not be treated with contempt.”]

If soldiers are punished before they have grown attached to you, they will not prove submissive; and, unless submissive, then will be practically useless. If, when the soldiers have become attached to you, punishments are not enforced, they will still be useless.

Therefore soldiers must be treated in the first instance with humanity, but kept under control by means of iron discipline. [Yen Tzu [B.C. 493] said of Ssu-ma Jang-chu: “His civil virtues endeared him to the people; his martial prowess kept his enemies in awe.” Cf. Wu Tzu, ch. 4 init.: “The ideal commander unites culture with a warlike temper; the profession of arms requires a combination of hardness and tenderness.”]

This is a certain road to victory.

If in training soldiers commands are habitually enforced, the army will be well-disciplined; if not, its discipline will be bad.

If a general shows confidence in his men but always insists on his orders being obeyed, [Tu Mu says: “A general ought in time of peace to show kindly confidence in his men and also make his authority respected, so that when they come to face the enemy, orders may be executed and discipline maintained, because they all trust and look up to him.” What Sun Tzu has said, however, would lead one rather to expect something like this: “If a general is always confident that his orders will be carried out,” etc.”] the gain



will be mutual. [Chang Yu says: “The general has confidence in the men under his command, and the men are docile, having confidence in him. Thus the gain is mutual” He quotes a pregnant sentence from Wei Liao Tzu, ch. 4: “The art of giving orders is not to try to rectify minor blunders and not to be swayed by petty doubts.” Vacillation and fussiness are the surest means of sapping the confidence of an army.]

* * *



Terrain



Sun Tzu said: We may distinguish six kinds of terrain, to wit:

- (a) Accessible ground; [Mei Yao-ch`en says: “plentifully provided with roads and means of communications.”]
- (b) Entangling ground; [The same commentator says: “Net-like country, venturing into which you become entangled.”]
- (c) Temporizing ground; [Ground which allows you to “stave off” or “delay.”]
- (d) Narrow passes;
- (e) Precipitous heights;
- (f) Positions at a great distance from the enemy. [It is hardly necessary to point out the faultiness of this classification. A strange lack of logical perception is shown in the Chinese unquestioning acceptance of glaring cross-divisions such as the above.]



Ground which can be freely traversed by both sides is called accessible.

With regard to ground of this nature, be before the enemy in occupying the raised and sunny spots, and carefully guard your line of supplies. [The general meaning of the last phrase is doubtlessly, as Tu Yu says, “not to allow the enemy to cut your communications.” In view of Napoleon’s dictum, “the secret of war lies in the communications,” we could wish that Sun Tzu had done more than skirt the edge of this important subject here and in I. Col. Henderson says: “The line of supply may be said to be as vital to the existence of an army as the heart to the life of a human being. Just as the duelist who finds his adversary’s point menacing him with certain death, and his own guard astray, is compelled to conform to his adversary’s movements, and to content himself with warding off his thrusts, so the commander whose communications are suddenly threatened finds himself in a false position, and he will be fortunate if he has not to change all his plans, to split up his force into more or less isolated detachments, and to fight with inferior numbers on ground which he has not had time to prepare, and where defeat will not be an ordinary failure, but will entail the ruin or surrender of his whole army.”]

Then you will be able to fight with advantage.

Ground which can be abandoned but is hard to re-occupy is called entangling.



From a position of this sort, if the enemy is unprepared, you may sally forth and defeat him. But if the enemy is prepared for your coming, and you fail to defeat him, then, return being impossible, disaster will ensue.

When the position is such that neither side will gain by making the first move, it is called temporizing ground. [Tu Mu says: “Each side finds it inconvenient to move, and the situation remains at a deadlock.”]

In a position of this sort, even though the enemy should offer us an attractive bait, [Tu Yu says, “turning their backs on us and pretending to flee.” But this is only one of the lures which might induce us to quit our position.] it will be advisable not to stir forth, but rather to retreat, thus enticing the enemy in his turn; then, when part of his army has come out, we may deliver our attack with advantage.

With regard to narrow passes, if you can occupy them first, let them be strongly garrisoned and await the advent of the enemy. [Because then, as Tu Yu observes, “the initiative will lie with us, and by making sudden and unexpected attacks we shall have the enemy at our mercy.”]

Should the army forestall you in occupying a pass, do not go after him if the pass is fully garrisoned, but only if it is weakly garrisoned.

With regard to precipitous heights, if you are beforehand with your adversary, you should occupy the raised and sunny spots, and there wait for him to come up. [Ts`ao Kung says: “The particular advantage of securing heights and defiles is



that your actions cannot then be dictated by the enemy.” Chang Yu tells the following anecdote of P`ei Hsing-chien (a.d. 619-682), who was sent on a punitive expedition against the Turkic tribes. “At night he pitched his camp as usual, and it had already been completely fortified by wall and ditch, when suddenly he gave orders that the army should shift its quarters to a hill near by. This was highly displeasing to his officers, who protested loudly against the extra fatigue which it would entail on the men. P`ei Hsing-chien, however, paid no heed to their remonstrances and had the camp moved as quickly as possible. The same night, a terrific storm came on, which flooded their former place of encampment to the depth of over twelve feet. The recalcitrant officers were amazed at the sight, and owned that they had been in the wrong. ‘How did you know what was going to happen?’ they asked. P`ei Hsing-chien replied: ‘From this time forward be content to obey orders without asking unnecessary questions.’ From this it may be seen,” Chang Yu continues, “that high and sunny places are advantageous not only for fighting, but also because they are immune from disastrous floods.”]

If the enemy has occupied them before you, do not follow him, but retreat and try to entice him away. [The turning point of Li Shih-min’s campaign in 621 a.d. against the two rebels, Tou Chien-te, King of Hsia, and Wang Shih-ch`uang, Prince of Cheng, was his seizure of the heights of Wu-lao, in spite of which Tou Chien-te persisted in his attempt to



relieve his ally in Lo-yang, was defeated and taken prisoner.]

If you are situated at a great distance from the enemy, and the strength of the two armies is equal, it is not easy to provoke a battle, [The point is that we must not think of undertaking a long and wearisome march, at the end of which, as Tu Yu says, “we should be exhausted and our adversary fresh and keen.”] and fighting will be to your disadvantage.

These six are the principles connected with Earth. The general who has attained a responsible post must be careful to study them.

Now an army is exposed to six several calamities, not arising from natural causes, but from faults for which the general is responsible. These are: a) Flight; b) Insubordination; c)

Collapse; d) Ruin; e) Disorganization; e) Rout.

Other conditions being equal, if one force is hurled against another ten times its size, the result will be the flight of the former.

When the common soldiers are too strong and their officers too weak, the result is insubordination. [Tu Mu cites the unhappy case of T`ien Pu, who was sent to Wei in 821 a.d. with orders to lead an army against Wang T`ing-ts`ou. But the whole time he was in command, his soldiers treated him with the utmost contempt, and openly flouted his authority by riding about the camp on donkeys, several thousands at a time. T`ien Pu was powerless to put a stop to



this conduct, and when, after some months had passed, he made an attempt to engage the enemy, his troops turned tail and dispersed in every direction. After that, the unfortunate man committed suicide by cutting his throat.]

When the officers are too strong and the common soldiers too weak, the result is collapse. [Ts`ao Kung says: “The officers are energetic and want to press on, the common soldiers are feeble and suddenly collapse.”]

When the higher officers are angry and insubordinate, and on meeting the enemy give battle on their own account from a feeling of resentment, before the commander-in-chief can tell whether or no he is in a position to fight, the result is ruin. [Wang Hsi`s note is: “This means, the general is angry without cause, and at the same time does not appreciate the ability of his subordinate officers; thus he arouses fierce resentment and brings an avalanche of ruin upon his head.”]

When the general is weak and without authority; when his orders are not clear and distinct; [Wei Liao Tzu says: “If the commander gives his orders with decision, the soldiers will not wait to hear them twice; if his moves are made without vacillation, the soldiers will not be in two minds about doing their duty.” General Baden-Powell says, italicizing the words: “The secret of getting successful work out of your trained men lies in one nutshell—in the clearness of the instructions they receive.” “the most fatal defect in a military leader is difference; the worst calamities that befall an army arise from hesitation.”] when there are no fixed duties assigned to



officers and men, [Tu Mu says: “Neither officers nor men have any regular routine.”] and the ranks are formed in a slovenly haphazard manner, the result is utter disorder and demoralization.

When a general, unable to estimate the enemy’s strength, allows an inferior force to engage a larger one, or hurls a weak detachment against a powerful one, and neglects to place picked soldiers in the front rank, the result must be rout. [Chang Yu paraphrases the latter part of the sentence and continues: “Whenever there is fighting to be done, the keenest spirits should be appointed to serve in the front ranks, both in order to strengthen the resolution of our own men and to demoralize the enemy.”]

These are six ways of courting defeat, which must be carefully noted by the general who has attained a responsible post.

The natural formation of the country is the soldier’s best ally; [Ch`en Hao says: “The advantages of weather and season are not equal to those connected with ground.”] but a power of estimating the adversary, of controlling the forces of victory, and of shrewdly calculating difficulties, dangers and distances, constitutes the test of a great general.

He who knows these things, and in fighting puts his knowledge into practice, will win his battles. He who knows them not, nor practices them, will surely be defeated.

If fighting is sure to result in victory, then you must fight, even though the ruler forbid it; if fighting will not result in



victory, then you must not fight even at the ruler's bidding. [Huang Shih-kung of the Ch`in dynasty, who is said to have been the patron of Chang Liang and to have written the San Lueh, has these words attributed to him: "The responsibility of setting an army in motion must devolve on the general alone; if advance and retreat are controlled from the Palace, brilliant results will hardly be achieved. Hence the god-like ruler and the enlightened monarch are content to play a humble part in furthering their country's cause [lit., kneel down to push the chariot wheel]." This means that "in matters lying outside the zenana, the decision of the military commander must be absolute." Chang Yu also quote the saying: "Decrees from the Son of Heaven do not penetrate the walls of a camp."]

The general who advances without coveting fame and retreats without fearing disgrace, [It was Wellington, I think, who said that the hardest thing of all for a soldier is to retreat.] whose only thought is to protect his country and do good service for his sovereign, is the jewel of the kingdom. [A noble presentiment, in few words, of the Chinese "happy warrior." Such a man, says Ho Shih, "even if he had to suffer punishment, would not regret his conduct."]

Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look upon them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death. [In this connection, Tu Mu draws for us an engaging picture of the famous general Wu Ch`i, from whose treatise



on war I have frequently had occasion to quote: “He wore the same clothes and ate the same food as the meanest of his soldiers, refused to have either a horse to ride or a mat to sleep on, carried his own surplus rations wrapped in a parcel, and shared every hardship with his men. One of his soldiers was suffering from an abscess, and Wu Ch`i himself sucked out the virus. The soldier’s mother, hearing this, began wailing and lamenting. Somebody asked her, saying: ‘Why do you cry? Your son is only a common soldier, and yet the commander-in-chief himself has sucked the poison from his sore.’ The woman replied, ‘Many years ago, Lord Wu performed a similar service for my husband, who never left him afterwards, and finally met his death at the hands of the enemy. And now that he has done the same for my son, he too will fall fighting I know not where.’” Li Ch`uan mentions the Viscount of Ch`u, who invaded the small state of Hsiao during the winter. The Duke of Shen said to him: “Many of the soldiers are suffering severely from the cold.” So he made a round of the whole army, comforting and encouraging the men; and straightway they felt as if they were clothed in garments lined with floss silk.]

If, however, you are indulgent, but unable to make your authority felt; kind-hearted, but unable to enforce your commands; and incapable, moreover, of quelling disorder: then your soldiers must be likened to spoilt children; they are useless for any practical purpose. [Li Ching once said that if you could make your soldiers afraid of you, they would not



be afraid of the enemy. Tu Mu recalls an instance of stern military discipline which occurred in 219 a.d., when Lu Meng was occupying the town of Chiang-ling. He had given stringent orders to his army not to molest the inhabitants nor take anything from them by force. Nevertheless, a certain officer serving under his banner, who happened to be a fellow-townsmen, ventured to appropriate a bamboo hat belonging to one of the people, in order to wear it over his regulation helmet as a protection against the rain. Lu Meng considered that the fact of his being also a native of Ju-nan should not be allowed to palliate a clear breach of discipline, and accordingly he ordered his summary execution, the tears rolling down his face, however, as he did so. This act of severity filled the army with wholesome awe, and from that time forth even articles dropped in the highway were not picked up.]

If we know that our own men are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the enemy is not open to attack, we have gone only halfway towards victory. [That is, Ts'ao Kung says, "the issue in this case is uncertain."]

If we know that the enemy is open to attack, and also know that our men are in a condition to attack, but are unaware that the nature of the ground makes fighting impracticable, we have still gone only halfway towards victory.

Hence the experienced soldier, once in motion, is never bewildered; once he has broken camp, he is never at a loss.



[The reason being, according to Tu Mu, that he has taken his measures so thoroughly as to ensure victory beforehand. “He does not move recklessly,” says Chang Yu, “so that when he does move, he makes no mistakes.”]

Hence the saying: If you know the enemy and know yourself, your victory will not stand in doubt; if you know Heaven and know Earth, you may make your victory complete. [Li Ch`uan sums up as follows: “Given a knowledge of three things—the affairs of men, the seasons of heaven and the natural advantages of earth—, victory will invariably crown your battles.”]

* * *



The Nine Situations



Sun Tzu said: The art of war recognizes nine varieties of ground:

(1) Dispersive ground — When a chieftain is fighting in his own territory, it is dispersive ground; (2) Facile ground — When he has penetrated into hostile territory, but to no great distance, it is facile ground; (3) Contentious ground — Ground the possession of which imports great advantage to either side, is contentious ground; (4) Open ground — Ground on which each side has liberty of movement is open ground; (5) Ground of intersecting highways — Ground which forms the key to three contiguous states, so that he who occupies it first has most of the Empire at his command, is a ground of intersecting highways; (6) Serious ground — When an army has penetrated into the heart of a hostile country, leaving a number of fortified cities in its rear, it is



serious ground; (7) Difficult ground — Mountain forests, rugged steeps, marshes and fens—all country that is hard to traverse: this is difficult ground; (8) Hemmed-in ground — Ground which is reached through narrow gorges, and from which we can only retire by tortuous paths, so that a small number of the enemy would suffice to crush a large body of our men: this is hemmed in ground; (9) Desperate ground — Ground on which we can only be saved from destruction by fighting without delay, is desperate ground.

On dispersive ground, therefore, fight not. On facile ground, halt not. On contentious ground, attack not. On open ground, do not try to block the enemy's way. On the ground of intersecting highways, join hands with your allies. On serious ground, gather in plunder. In difficult ground, keep steadily on the march. On hemmed-in ground, resort to stratagem. On desperate ground, fight.

Those who were called skillful leaders of old knew how to drive a wedge between the enemy's front and rear; to prevent co-operation between his large and small divisions; to hinder the good troops from rescuing the bad, the officers from rallying their men. When the enemy's men were united, they managed to keep them in disorder. When it was to their advantage, they made a forward move; when otherwise, they stopped still.

If asked how to cope with a great host of the enemy in orderly array and on the point of marching to the attack, I should say: "Begin by seizing something which your



opponent holds dear; then he will be amenable to your will.” Rapidity is the essence of war: take advantage of the enemy’s unreadiness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack unguarded spots.

The following are the principles to be observed by an invading force: The further you penetrate into a country, the greater will be the solidarity of your troops, and thus the defenders will not prevail against you.

(1) Make forays in fertile country in order to supply your army with food; (2) Carefully study the well-being of your men, and do not overtax them. Concentrate your energy and hoard your strength. Keep your army continually on the move, and devise unfathomable plans; (3) Throw your soldiers into positions whence there is no escape, and they will prefer death to flight. If they will face death, there is nothing they may not achieve. Officers and men alike will put forth their uttermost strength; (4) Soldiers when in desperate straits lose the sense of fear. If there is no place of refuge, they will stand firm. If they are in hostile country, they will show a stubborn front. If there is no help for it, they will fight hard.

Thus, without waiting to be marshaled, the soldiers will be constantly on the qui vive; without waiting to be asked, they will do your will; without restrictions, they will be faithful; without giving orders, they can be trusted. Prohibit the taking of omens, and do away with superstitious doubts. Then, until death itself comes, no calamity need be feared.



If our soldiers are not overburdened with money, it is not because they have a distaste for riches; if their lives are not unduly long, it is not because they are disinclined to longevity.

On the day they are ordered out to battle, your soldiers may weep, those sitting up bedewing their garments, and those lying down letting the tears run down their cheeks. But let them once be brought to bay, and they will display the courage of a Chu or a Kuei.

The skillful tactician may be likened to the shuai-jan. Now the shuai-jan is a snake that is found in the Ch'ung mountains. Strike at its head, and you will be attacked by its tail; strike at its tail, and you will be attacked by its head; strike at its middle, and you will be attacked by head and tail both. Asked if an army can be made to imitate the shuai-jan, I should answer, Yes. For the men of Wu and the men of Yueh are enemies; yet if they are crossing a river in the same boat and are caught by a storm, they will come to each other's assistance just as the left hand helps the right.

Hence it is not enough to put one's trust in the tethering of horses, and the burying of chariot wheels in the ground.

The principle on which to manage an army is to set up one standard of courage which all must reach. How to make the best of both strong and weak—that is a question involving the proper use of ground. Thus the skillful general conducts his army just as though he were leading a single man, willy-nilly, by the hand.



It is the business of a general to be quiet and thus ensure secrecy; upright and just, and thus maintain order. He must be able to mystify his officers and men by false reports and appearances, and thus keep them in total ignorance.

By altering his arrangements and changing his plans, he keeps the enemy without definite knowledge. By shifting his camp and taking circuitous routes, he prevents the enemy from anticipating his purpose.

At the critical moment, the leader of an army acts like one who has climbed up a height and then kicks away the ladder behind him. He carries his men deep into hostile territory before he shows his hand. He burns his boats and breaks his cooking-pots; like a shepherd driving a flock of sheep, he drives his men this way and that, and nothing knows whither he is going. To muster his host and bring it into dange:—this may be termed the business of the general.

The different measures suited to the nine varieties of ground; the expediency of aggressive or defensive tactics; and the fundamental laws of human nature: these are things that must most certainly be studied.

When invading hostile territory, the general principle is, that penetrating deeply brings cohesion; penetrating but a short way means dispersion.

When you leave your own country behind, and take your army across neighborhood territory, you find yourself on critical ground. When there are means of communication on all four sides, the ground is one of intersecting highways.



When you penetrate deeply into a country, it is serious ground. When you penetrate but a little way, it is facile ground.

When you have the enemy's strongholds on your rear, and narrow passes in front, it is hemmed-in ground. When there is no place of refuge at all, it is desperate ground.

Therefore, on dispersive ground, I would inspire my men with unity of purpose. On facile ground, I would see that there is close connection between all parts of my army.

On contentious ground, I would hurry up my rear.

On open ground, I would keep a vigilant eye on my defenses. On ground of intersecting highways, I would consolidate my alliances.

On serious ground, I would try to ensure a continuous stream of supplies. On difficult ground, I would keep pushing on along the road.

On hemmed-in ground, I would block any way of retreat. On desperate ground, I would proclaim to my soldiers the hopelessness of saving their lives.

For it is the soldier's disposition to offer an obstinate resistance when surrounded, to fight hard when he cannot help himself, and to obey promptly when he has fallen into danger.

We cannot enter into alliance with neighboring princes until we are acquainted with their designs. We are not fit to lead an army on the march unless we are familiar with the face of the country—its mountains and forests, its pitfalls



and precipices, its marshes and swamps. We shall be unable to turn natural advantages to account unless we make use of local guides.

To be ignored of any one of the following four or five principles does not befit a warlike prince.

When a warlike prince attacks a powerful state, his generalship shows itself in preventing the concentration of the enemy's forces. He overawes his opponents, and their allies are prevented from joining against him.

Hence he does not strive to ally himself with all and sundry, nor does he foster the power of other states. He carries out his own secret designs, keeping his antagonists in awe. Thus he is able to capture their cities and overthrow their kingdoms.

Bestow rewards without regard to rule, issue orders without regard to previous arrangements; and you will be able to handle a whole army as though you had to do with but a single man. Confront your soldiers with the deed itself; never let them know your design. When the outlook is bright, bring it before their eyes; but tell them nothing when the situation is gloomy.

Place your army in deadly peril, and it will survive; plunge it into desperate straits, and it will come off in safety.

For it is precisely when a force has fallen into harm's way that is capable of striking a blow for victory.

Success in warfare is gained by carefully accommodating ourselves to the enemy's purpose.



By persistently hanging on the enemy's flank, we shall succeed in the long run in killing the commander-in-chief.

This is called ability to accomplish a thing by sheer cunning.

On the day that you take up your command, block the frontier passes, destroy the official tallies, and stop the passage of all emissaries.

Be stern in the council-chamber, so that you may control the situation.

If the enemy leaves a door open, you must rush in.

Forestall your opponent by seizing what he holds dear, and subtly contrive to time his arrival on the ground.

Walk in the path defined by rule, and accommodate yourself to the enemy until you can fight a decisive battle.

At first, then, exhibit the coyness of a maiden, until the enemy gives you an opening; afterwards emulate the rapidity of a running hare, and it will be too late for the enemy to oppose you.

* * *



The Attack by Fire



Sun Tzu said: There are five ways of attacking with fire. The first is to burn soldiers in their camp; the second is to burn stores; the third is to burn baggage trains; the fourth is to burn arsenals and magazines; the fifth is to hurl dropping fire amongst the opponent.

In order to carry out an attack, we must have means available. The material for raising fire should always be kept in readiness. There is a proper season for making attacks with fire, and special days for starting a conflagration. The proper season is when the weather is very dry; the special days are those when the moon is in the constellations of the Sieve, the Wall, the Wing or the Cross-bar; for these four are all days of rising wind.

In attacking with fire, one should be prepared to meet five possible developments: (1) When fire breaks out inside to



opponent's camp, respond at once with an attack from without; (2) If there is an outbreak of fire, but the opponent's soldiers remain quiet, bide your time and do not attack; (3) When the force of the flames has reached its height, follow it up with an attack, if that is practicable; if not, stay where you are; (4) If it is possible to make an assault with fire from without, do not wait for it to break out within, but deliver your attack at a favorable moment; (5) When you start a fire, be to windward of it. Do not attack from the leeward.

A wind that rises in the daytime lasts long, but a night breeze soon falls. In every army, the five developments connected with fire must be known, the movements of the stars calculated, and a watch kept for the proper days. Hence those who use fire as an aid to the attack show intelligence; those who use water as an aid to the attack gain an accession of strength. By means of water, an opponent may be intercepted, but not robbed of all his belongings.

Unhappy is the fate of one who tries to win his battles and succeed in his attacks without cultivating the spirit of enterprise; for the result is waste of time and general stagnation. Hence the saying: The enlightened ruler lays his plans well ahead; the good general cultivates his resources.

Move not unless you see an advantage; use not your troops unless there is something to be gained; fight not unless the position is critical. If it is to your advantage, make a forward move; if not, stay where you are. Anger may in time change to gladness; vexation may be succeeded by content.



No leader should put troops into the field merely to gratify his own spleen; no leader should fight a battle simply out of pique. But a kingdom that has once been destroyed can never come again into being; nor can the dead ever be brought back to life. Hence the enlightened leader is heedful, and the good leader full of caution.

* * *



The Use of Spies



Sun Tzu said: Raising a host of a hundred thousand men and engaging them in war entails heavy loss on the people and a drain on the resources. The daily expenditure will amount to a thousand ounces of silver. There will be commotion at home and abroad, and men will drop out exhausted.

Opposing forces may face each other for years, striving for the victory which may be decided in a single day. This being so, to remain in ignorance of the enemy's condition simply because one grudges the outlay of a hundred ounces of silver is the height of stupidity.

One who acts thus is no leader of men, no present help to his cause, no master of victory. Thus, what enables the wise commander to strike and conquer, and achieve things beyond the reach of ordinary men, is foreknowledge. Now



this foreknowledge cannot be elicited from spirits; it cannot be obtained inductively from experience, nor by any deductive calculation. Knowledge of the enemy's dispositions can only be obtained from other men.

Hence the use of spies, of whom there are five classes: (1) Local spies — Having local spies means employing the services of the inhabitants of an enemy territory; (2) Moles — Having moles means making use of officials of the enemy; (3) Double agents — Having double agents means getting hold of the enemy's spies and using them for our own purposes; (4) Doomed spies — Having doomed spies means doing certain things openly for purposes of deception, and allowing our spies to know of them and report them to the enemy; (5) Surviving spies — Surviving spies means those who bring back news from the enemy's camp.

When these five kinds of spy are all at work, none can discover the secret system. This is called "divine manipulation of the threads." It is the commander's most precious faculty. Hence it is that which none in the whole army are more intimate relations to be maintained than with spies. None should be more liberally rewarded. In no other fields should greater secrecy be preserved.

(1) Spies cannot be usefully employed without a certain intuitive sagacity; (2) They cannot be properly managed without benevolence and straight forwardness; (3) Without subtle ingenuity of mind, one cannot make certain of the truth of their reports; (4) Be subtle! be subtle! and use your



spies for every kind of warfare; (5) If a secret piece of news is divulged by a spy before the time is ripe, he must be put to death together with the man to whom the secret was told.

Whether the object be to crush an enemy, to storm a territory, or to kill an enemy general, it is always necessary to begin by finding out the names of the attendants, the aides-de-camp, and door-keepers and sentries of the general in command. Our spies must be commissioned to ascertain these.

The enemy's spies who have come to spy on us must be sought out, tempted with bribes, led away and comfortably housed. Thus they will become double agents and available for our service. It is through the information brought by the double agent that we are able to acquire and employ local and inward spies. It is owing to his information, again, that we can cause the doomed spy to carry false tidings to the enemy.

Lastly, it is by his information that the surviving spy can be used on appointed occasions. The end and aim of spying in all its five varieties is knowledge of the enemy; and this knowledge can only be derived, in the first instance, from the double agent . Hence it is essential that the double agent be treated with the utmost liberality.

Hence it is only the enlightened and wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for purposes of spying and thereby they achieve great results. Spies are the most important asset, because on them depends an army's ability to march.

* * *





On War





The Germans interpret their new national colors— black, red, and white— by the saying, “Durch Nacht und Blut zur licht.” (“Through night and blood to light”), and no work yet written conveys to the thinker a clearer conception of all that the red streak in their flag stands for than this deep and philosophical analysis of “War” by Clausewitz.

It reveals “War,” stripped of all accessories, as the exercise of force for the attainment of a political object, unrestrained by any law save that of expediency, and thus gives the key to the interpretation of German political aims, past, present, and future, which is unconditionally necessary for every student of the modern conditions of Europe. Step by step, every event since Waterloo follows with logical consistency from the teachings of Napoleon, formulated for the first time, some twenty years afterwards, by this remarkable thinker.



What Darwin accomplished for Biology generally Clausewitz did for the Life-History of Nations nearly half a century before him, for both have proved the existence of the same law in each case, viz., “The survival of the fittest”—the “fittest,” as Huxley long since pointed out, not being necessarily synonymous with the ethically “best.” Neither of these thinkers was concerned with the ethics of the struggle which each studied so exhaustively, but to both men the phase or condition presented itself neither as moral nor immoral, any more than are famine, disease, or other natural phenomena, but as emanating from a force inherent in all living organisms which can only be mastered by understanding its nature. It is in that spirit that, one after the other, all the Nations of the Continent, taught by such drastic lessons as Koniggrätz and Sedan, have accepted the lesson, with the result that to-day Europe is an armed camp, and peace is maintained by the equilibrium of forces, and will continue just as long as this equilibrium exists, and no longer.

Whether this state of equilibrium is in itself a good or desirable thing may be open to argument. I have discussed it at length in my “War and the World’s Life”; but I venture to suggest that to no one would a renewal of the era of warfare be a change for the better, as far as existing humanity is concerned. Meanwhile, however, with every year that elapses the forces at present in equilibrium are changing in magnitude—the pressure of populations which have to be



fed is rising, and an explosion along the line of least resistance is, sooner or later, inevitable.

As I read the teaching of the recent Hague Conference, no responsible Government on the Continent is anxious to form in themselves that line of least resistance; they know only too well what War would mean; and we alone, absolutely unconscious of the trend of the dominant thought of Europe, are pulling down the dam which may at any moment let in on us the flood of invasion.

Now no responsible man in Europe, perhaps least of all in Germany, thanks us for this voluntary destruction of our defences, for all who are of any importance would very much rather end their days in peace than incur the burden of responsibility which War would entail. But they realise that the gradual dissemination of the principles taught by Clausewitz has created a condition of molecular tension in the minds of the Nations they govern analogous to the “critical temperature of water heated above boiling-point under pressure,” which may at any moment bring about an explosion which they will be powerless to control.

The case is identical with that of an ordinary steam boiler, delivering so and so many pounds of steam to its engines as long as the envelope can contain the pressure; but let a breach in its continuity arise—relieving the boiling water of all restraint—and in a moment the whole mass flashes into vapour, developing a power no work of man can oppose.



The ultimate consequences of defeat no man can foretell. The only way to avert them is to ensure victory; and, again following out the principles of Clausewitz, victory can only be ensured by the creation in peace of an organisation which will bring every available man, horse, and gun (or ship and gun, if the war be on the sea) in the shortest possible time, and with the utmost possible momentum, upon the decisive field of action—which in turn leads to the final doctrine formulated by Von der Goltz in excuse for the action of the late President Kruger in 1899:

“The Statesman who, knowing his instrument to be ready, and seeing War inevitable, hesitates to strike first is guilty of a crime against his country.”

It is because this sequence of cause and effect is absolutely unknown to our Members of Parliament, elected by popular representation, that all our efforts to ensure a lasting peace by securing efficiency with economy in our National Defences have been rendered nugatory.

This estimate of the influence of Clausewitz’s sentiments on contemporary thought in Continental Europe may appear exaggerated to those who have not familiarised themselves with M. Gustav de Bon’s exposition of the laws governing the formation and conduct of crowds I do not wish for one minute to be understood as asserting that Clausewitz has been conscientiously studied and understood in any Army, not even in the Prussian, but his work has been the ultimate foundation on which every drill regulation in Europe, except



our own, has been reared. It is this ceaseless repetition of his fundamental ideas to which one-half of the male population of every Continental Nation has been subjected for two to three years of their lives, which has tuned their minds to vibrate in harmony with his precepts, and those who know and appreciate this fact at its true value have only to strike the necessary chords in order to evoke a response sufficient to overpower any other ethical conception which those who have not organised their forces beforehand can appeal to.

The recent set-back experienced by the Socialists in Germany is an illustration of my position. The Socialist leaders of that country are far behind the responsible Governors in their knowledge of the management of crowds. The latter had long before (in 1893, in fact) made their arrangements to prevent the spread of Socialistic propaganda beyond certain useful limits. As long as the Socialists only threatened capital they were not seriously interfered with, for the Government knew quite well that the undisputed sway of the employer was not for the ultimate good of the State. The standard of comfort must not be pitched too low if men are to be ready to die for their country. But the moment the Socialists began to interfere seriously with the discipline of the Army the word went round, and the Socialists lost heavily at the polls.

If this power of predetermined reaction to acquired ideas can be evoked successfully in a matter of internal interest only, in which the “obvious interest” of the vast majority of



the population is so clearly on the side of the Socialist, it must be evident how enormously greater it will prove when set in motion against an external enemy, where the “obvious interest” of the people is, from the very nature of things, as manifestly on the side of the Government; and the Statesman who failed to take into account the force of the “resultant thought wave” of a crowd of some seven million men, all trained to respond to their ruler’s call, would be guilty of treachery as grave as one who failed to strike when he knew the Army to be ready for immediate action.

As already pointed out, it is to the spread of Clausewitz’s ideas that the present state of more or less immediate readiness for war of all European Armies is due, and since the organisation of these forces is uniform this “more or less” of readiness exists in precise proportion to the sense of duty which animates the several Armies. Where the spirit of duty and self-sacrifice is low the troops are unready and inefficient; where, as in Prussia, these qualities, by the training of a whole century, have become instinctive, troops really are ready to the last button, and might be poured down upon any one of her neighbours with such rapidity that the very first collision must suffice to ensure ultimate success—a success by no means certain if the enemy, whoever he may be, is allowed breathing-time in which to set his house in order.

An example will make this clearer. In 1887 Germany was on the very verge of War with France and Russia. At that



moment her superior efficiency, the consequence of this inborn sense of duty—surely one of the highest qualities of humanity—was so great that it is more than probable that less than six weeks would have sufficed to bring the French to their knees. Indeed, after the first fortnight it would have been possible to begin transferring troops from the Rhine to the Niemen; and the same case may arise again. But if France and Russia had been allowed even ten days' warning the German plan would have been completely defeated. France alone might then have claimed all the efforts that Germany could have put forth to defeat her.

Yet there are politicians in England so grossly ignorant of the German reading of the Napoleonic lessons that they expect that Nation to sacrifice the enormous advantage they have prepared by a whole century of self-sacrifice and practical patriotism by an appeal to a Court of Arbitration, and the further delays which must arise by going through the mediaeval formalities of recalling Ambassadors and exchanging ultimatums.

Most of our present-day politicians have made their money in business—a “form of human competition greatly resembling War,” to paraphrase Clausewitz. Did they, when in the throes of such competition, send formal notice to their rivals of their plans to get the better of them in commerce? Did Mr. Carnegie, the arch-priest of Peace at any price, when he built up the Steel Trust, notify his competitors when and how he proposed to strike the blows which successively



made him master of millions? Surely the Directors of a Great Nation may consider the interests of their shareholders—i.e., the people they govern—as sufficiently serious not to be endangered by the deliberate sacrifice of the preponderant position of readiness which generations of self-devotion, patriotism and wise forethought have won for them?

As regards the strictly military side of this work, though the recent researches of the French General Staff into the records and documents of the Napoleonic period have shown conclusively that Clausewitz had never grasped the essential point of the Great Emperor's strategic method, yet it is admitted that he has completely fathomed the spirit which gave life to the form; and notwithstanding the variations in application which have resulted from the progress of invention in every field of national activity (not in the technical improvements in armament alone), this spirit still remains the essential factor in the whole matter. Indeed, if anything, modern appliances have intensified its importance, for though, with equal armaments on both sides, the form of battles must always remain the same, the facility and certainty of combination which better methods of communicating orders and intelligence have conferred upon the Commanders has rendered the control of great masses immeasurably more certain than it was in the past.

Men kill each other at greater distances, it is true—but killing is a constant factor in all battles. The difference between “now and then” lies in this, that, thanks to the



enormous increase in range (the essential feature in modern armaments), it is possible to concentrate by surprise, on any chosen spot, a man-killing power fully twentyfold greater than was conceivable in the days of Waterloo; and whereas in Napoleon's time this concentration of man-killing power (which in his hands took the form of the great case-shot attack) depended almost entirely on the shape and condition of the ground, which might or might not be favourable, nowadays such concentration of fire-power is almost independent of the country altogether.

Thus, at Waterloo, Napoleon was compelled to wait till the ground became firm enough for his guns to gallop over; nowadays every gun at his disposal, and five times that number had he possessed them, might have opened on any point in the British position he had selected, as soon as it became light enough to see.

Or, to take a more modern instance, viz., the battle of St. Privat-Gravelotte, August 18, 1870, where the Germans were able to concentrate on both wings batteries of two hundred guns and upwards, it would have been practically impossible, owing to the section of the slopes of the French position, to carry out the old-fashioned case-shot attack at all. Nowadays there would be no difficulty in turning on the fire of two thousand guns on any point of the position, and switching this fire up and down the line like water from a fire-engine hose, if the occasion demanded such concentration.



But these alterations in method make no difference in the truth of the picture of War which Clausewitz presents, with which every soldier, and above all every Leader, should be saturated.

Death, wounds, suffering, and privation remain the same, whatever the weapons employed, and their reaction on the ultimate nature of man is the same now as in the struggle a century ago. It is this reaction that the Great Commander has to understand and prepare himself to control; and the task becomes ever greater as, fortunately for humanity, the opportunities for gathering experience become more rare.

In the end, and with every improvement in science, the result depends more and more on the character of the Leader and his power of resisting “the sensuous impressions of the battlefield.” Finally, for those who would fit themselves in advance for such responsibility, I know of no more inspiring advice than that given by Krishna to Arjuna ages ago, when the latter trembled before the awful responsibility of launching his Army against the hosts of the Pandav’s:

This Life within all living things, my Prince, Hides beyond harm. Scorn thou to suffer, then, For that which cannot suffer. Do thy part! Be mindful of thy name, and tremble not. Nought better can betide a martial soul Than lawful war. Happy the warrior To whom comes joy of battle.... . . . But if thou shunn’st This honourable field—a Kshittriya— If, knowing thy duty and thy task, thou bidd’st Duty and task go by—that shall be sin! And those to come



shall speak thee infamy From age to age. But infamy is
worse For men of noble blood to bear than death!
Therefore arise, thou Son of Kunti! Brace Thine arm for
conflict; nerve thy heart to meet, As things alike to thee,
pleasure or pain, Profit or ruin, victory or defeat. So minded,
gird thee to the fight, for so Thou shalt not sin!

* * *



Brief Memoir of General Clausewitz



The Author of the work here translated, General Carl Von Clausewitz, was born at Burg, near Magdeburg, in 1780, and entered the Prussian Army as Fahnenjunker (i.e., ensign) in 1792. He served in the campaigns of 1793-94 on the Rhine, after which he seems to have devoted some time to the study of the scientific branches of his profession. In 1801 he entered the Military School at Berlin, and remained there till 1803. During his residence there he attracted the notice of General Scharnhorst, then at the head of the establishment; and the patronage of this distinguished officer had immense influence on his future career, and we may gather from his writings that he ever afterwards continued to entertain a high esteem for Scharnhorst. In the campaign of 1806 he served as Aide-de-camp to Prince Augustus of Prussia; and being wounded and taken prisoner, he was sent into France until



the close of that war. On his return, he was placed on General Scharnhorst's Staff, and employed in the work then going on for the reorganisation of the Army. He was also at this time selected as military instructor to the late King of Prussia, then Crown Prince. In 1812 Clausewitz, with several other Prussian officers, having entered the Russian service, his first appointment was as Aide-de-camp to General Phul. Afterwards, while serving with Wittgenstein's army, he assisted in negotiating the famous convention of Tauroggen with York. Of the part he took in that affair he has left an interesting account in his work on the "Russian Campaign." It is there stated that, in order to bring the correspondence which had been carried on with York to a termination in one way or another, the Author was despatched to York's headquarters with two letters, one was from General d'Auvray, the Chief of the Staff of Wittgenstein's army, to General Diebitsch, showing the arrangements made to cut off York's corps from Macdonald (this was necessary in order to give York a plausible excuse for seceding from the French); the other was an intercepted letter from Macdonald to the Duke of Bassano. With regard to the former of these, the Author says, "it would not have had weight with a man like York, but for a military justification, if the Prussian Court should require one as against the French, it was important."

The second letter was calculated at the least to call up in General York's mind all the feelings of bitterness which



perhaps for some days past had been diminished by the consciousness of his own behaviour towards the writer.

As the Author entered General York's chamber, the latter called out to him, "Keep off from me; I will have nothing more to do with you; your d——d Cossacks have let a letter of Macdonald's pass through them, which brings me an order to march on Piktrepohnen, in order there to effect our junction. All doubt is now at an end; your troops do not come up; you are too weak; march I must, and I must excuse myself from further negotiation, which may cost me my head." The Author said that he would make no opposition to all this, but begged for a candle, as he had letters to show the General, and, as the latter seemed still to hesitate, the Author added, "Your Excellency will not surely place me in the embarrassment of departing without having executed my commission." The General ordered candles, and called in Colonel von Roeder, the chief of his staff, from the ante-chamber. The letters were read. After a pause of an instant, the General said, "Clausewitz, you are a Prussian, do you believe that the letter of General d'Auvray is sincere, and that Wittgenstein's troops will really be at the points he mentioned on the 31st?" The Author replied, "I pledge myself for the sincerity of this letter upon the knowledge I have of General d'Auvray and the other men of Wittgenstein's headquarters; whether the dispositions he announces can be accomplished as he lays down I certainly cannot pledge myself; for your Excellency knows that in war



we must often fall short of the line we have drawn for ourselves.” The General was silent for a few minutes of earnest reflection; then he held out his hand to the Author, and said, “You have me. Tell General Diebitsch that we must confer early to-morrow at the mill of Poschenen, and that I am now firmly determined to separate myself from the French and their cause.” The hour was fixed for 8 A.M. After this was settled, the General added, “But I will not do the thing by halves, I will get you Massenbach also.” He called in an officer who was of Massenbach’s cavalry, and who had just left them. Much like Schiller’s Wallenstein, he asked, walking up and down the room the while, “What say your regiments?” The officer broke out with enthusiasm at the idea of a riddance from the French alliance, and said that every man of the troops in question felt the same.

“You young ones may talk; but my older head is shaking on my shoulders,” replied the General. [“Campaign in Russia in 1812”; translated from the German of General Von Clausewitz (by Lord Ellesmere).] After the close of the Russian campaign Clausewitz remained in the service of that country, but was attached as a Russian staff officer to Blucher’s headquarters till the Armistice in 1813.

In 1814, he became Chief of the Staff of General Walmoden’s Russo-German Corps, which formed part of the Army of the North under Bernadotte. His name is frequently mentioned with distinction in that campaign, particularly in connection with the affair of Goehrde.



Clausewitz re-entered the Prussian service in 1815, and served as Chief of the Staff to Thielman's corps, which was engaged with Grouchy at Wavre, on the 18th of June.

After the Peace, he was employed in a command on the Rhine. In 1818, he became Major-General, and Director of the Military School at which he had been previously educated.

In 1830, he was appointed Inspector of Artillery at Breslau, but soon after nominated Chief of the Staff to the Army of Observation, under Marshal Gneisenau on the Polish frontier.

The latest notices of his life and services are probably to be found in the memoirs of General Brandt, who, from being on the staff of Gneisenau's army, was brought into daily intercourse with Clausewitz in matters of duty, and also frequently met him at the table of Marshal Gneisenau, at Posen.

Amongst other anecdotes, General Brandt relates that, upon one occasion, the conversation at the Marshal's table turned upon a sermon preached by a priest, in which some great absurdities were introduced, and a discussion arose as to whether the Bishop should not be made responsible for what the priest had said. This led to the topic of theology in general, when General Brandt, speaking of himself, says, "I expressed an opinion that theology is only to be regarded as an historical process, as a moment in the gradual development of the human race. This brought upon me an



attack from all quarters, but more especially from Clausewitz, who ought to have been on my side, he having been an adherent and pupil of Kiesewetter's, who had indoctrinated him in the philosophy of Kant, certainly diluted—I might even say in homoeopathic doses." This anecdote is only interesting as the mention of Kiesewetter points to a circumstance in the life of Clausewitz that may have had an influence in forming those habits of thought which distinguish his writings.

"The way," says General Brandt, "in which General Clausewitz judged of things, drew conclusions from movements and marches, calculated the times of the marches, and the points where decisions would take place, was extremely interesting. Fate has unfortunately denied him an opportunity of showing his talents in high command, but I have a firm persuasion that as a strategist he would have greatly distinguished himself. As a leader on the field of battle, on the other hand, he would not have been so much in his right place, from a *manque d'habitude du commandement*, he wanted the *art d'enlever les troupes*."

After the Prussian Army of Observation was dissolved, Clausewitz returned to Breslau, and a few days after his arrival was seized with cholera, the seeds of which he must have brought with him from the army on the Polish frontier.

His death took place in November 1831.

His writings are contained in nine volumes, published after his death, but his fame rests most upon the three



volumes forming his treatise on “War.” In the present attempt to render into English this portion of the works of Clausewitz, the translator is sensible of many deficiencies, but he hopes at all events to succeed in making this celebrated treatise better known in England, believing, as he does, that so far as the work concerns the interests of this country, it has lost none of the importance it possessed at the time of its first publication.

* * *



On The Nature of War What Is War?



1. Introduction

We propose to consider first the single elements of our subject, then each branch or part, and, last of all, the whole, in all its relations—therefore to advance from the simple to the complex. But it is necessary for us to commence with a glance at the nature of the whole, because it is particularly necessary that in the consideration of any of the parts their relation to the whole should be kept constantly in view.

2. Definition

We shall not enter into any of the abstruse definitions of War used by publicists. We shall keep to the element of the thing itself, to a duel. War is nothing but a duel on an extensive scale. If we would conceive as a unit the countless number of duels which make up a War, we shall do so best by supposing to ourselves two wrestlers. Each strives by



physical force to compel the other to submit to his will: each endeavours to throw his adversary, and thus render him incapable of further resistance.

War therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will.

Violence arms itself with the inventions of Art and Science in order to contend against violence. Self-imposed restrictions, almost imperceptible and hardly worth mentioning, termed usages of International Law, accompany it without essentially impairing its power. Violence, that is to say, physical force (for there is no moral force without the conception of States and Law), is therefore the MEANS; the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object. In order to attain this object fully, the enemy must be disarmed, and disarmament becomes therefore the immediate OBJECT of hostilities in theory. It takes the place of the final object, and puts it aside as something we can eliminate from our calculations.

3. Utmost Use of Force

Now, philanthropists may easily imagine there is a skilful method of disarming and overcoming an enemy without great bloodshed, and that this is the proper tendency of the Art of War. However plausible this may appear, still it is an error which must be extirpated; for in such dangerous things as War, the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst. As the use of physical power to the utmost extent by no means excludes the co-operation of



the intelligence, it follows that he who uses force unsparingly, without reference to the bloodshed involved, must obtain a superiority if his adversary uses less vigour in its application. The former then dictates the law to the latter, and both proceed to extremities to which the only limitations are those imposed by the amount of counter-acting force on each side.

This is the way in which the matter must be viewed and it is to no purpose, it is even against one's own interest, to turn away from the consideration of the real nature of the affair because the horror of its elements excites repugnance.

If the Wars of civilised people are less cruel and destructive than those of savages, the difference arises from the social condition both of States in themselves and in their relations to each other. Out of this social condition and its relations War arises, and by it War is subjected to conditions, is controlled and modified. But these things do not belong to War itself; they are only given conditions; and to introduce into the philosophy of War itself a principle of moderation would be an absurdity.

Two motives lead men to War: instinctive hostility and hostile intention. In our definition of War, we have chosen as its characteristic the latter of these elements, because it is the most general. It is impossible to conceive the passion of hatred of the wildest description, bordering on mere instinct, without combining with it the idea of a hostile intention. On the other hand, hostile intentions may often exist without



being accompanied by any, or at all events by any extreme, hostility of feeling. Amongst savages views emanating from the feelings, amongst civilised nations those emanating from the understanding, have the predominance; but this difference arises from attendant circumstances, existing institutions, etc., and, therefore, is not to be found necessarily in all cases, although it prevails in the majority. In short, even the most civilised nations may burn with passionate hatred of each other.

We may see from this what a fallacy it would be to refer the War of a civilised nation entirely to an intelligent act on the part of the Government, and to imagine it as continually freeing itself more and more from all feeling of passion in such a way that at last the physical masses of combatants would no longer be required; in reality, their mere relations would suffice—a kind of algebraic action.

Theory was beginning to drift in this direction until the facts of the last War [Clausewitz alludes here to the “Wars of Liberation,” 1813,14,15.] taught it better. If War is an act of force, it belongs necessarily also to the feelings. If it does not originate in the feelings, it reacts, more or less, upon them, and the extent of this reaction depends not on the degree of civilisation, but upon the importance and duration of the interests involved.

Therefore, if we find civilised nations do not put their prisoners to death, do not devastate towns and countries, this is because their intelligence exercises greater influence on



their mode of carrying on War, and has taught them more effectual means of applying force than these rude acts of mere instinct. The invention of gunpowder, the constant progress of improvements in the construction of firearms, are sufficient proofs that the tendency to destroy the adversary which lies at the bottom of the conception of War is in no way changed or modified through the progress of civilisation.

We therefore repeat our proposition, that War is an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds; as one side dictates the law to the other, there arises a sort of reciprocal action, which logically must lead to an extreme. This is the first reciprocal action, and the first extreme with which we meet (first reciprocal action).

4. The Aim Is to Disarm the Enemy

We have already said that the aim of all action in War is to disarm the enemy, and we shall now show that this, theoretically at least, is indispensable.

If our opponent is to be made to comply with our will, we must place him in a situation which is more oppressive to him than the sacrifice which we demand; but the disadvantages of this position must naturally not be of a transitory nature, at least in appearance, otherwise the enemy, instead of yielding, will hold out, in the prospect of a change for the better. Every change in this position which is produced by a continuation of the War should therefore be a change for the worse. The worst condition in which a



belligerent can be placed is that of being completely disarmed. If, therefore, the enemy is to be reduced to submission by an act of War, he must either be positively disarmed or placed in such a position that he is threatened with it. From this it follows that the disarming or overthrow of the enemy, whichever we call it, must always be the aim of Warfare. Now War is always the shock of two hostile bodies in collision, not the action of a living power upon an inanimate mass, because an absolute state of endurance would not be making War; therefore, what we have just said as to the aim of action in War applies to both parties. Here, then, is another case of reciprocal action. As long as the enemy is not defeated, he may defeat me; then I shall be no longer my own master; he will dictate the law to me as I did to him. This is the second reciprocal action, and leads to a second extreme (second reciprocal action).

5. Utmost Exertion of Powers

If we desire to defeat the enemy, we must proportion our efforts to his powers of resistance. This is expressed by the product of two factors which cannot be separated, namely, the sum of available means and the strength of the Will. The sum of the available means may be estimated in a measure, as it depends (although not entirely) upon numbers; but the strength of volition is more difficult to determine, and can only be estimated to a certain extent by the strength of the motives. Granted we have obtained in this way an approximation to the strength of the power to be contended



with, we can then take of our own means, and either increase them so as to obtain a preponderance, or, in case we have not the resources to effect this, then do our best by increasing our means as far as possible. But the adversary does the same; therefore, there is a new mutual enhancement, which, in pure conception, must create a fresh effort towards an extreme. This is the third case of reciprocal action, and a third extreme with which we meet (third reciprocal action).

6. Modification in the Reality

Thus reasoning in the abstract, the mind cannot stop short of an extreme, because it has to deal with an extreme, with a conflict of forces left to themselves, and obeying no other but their own inner laws. If we should seek to deduce from the pure conception of War an absolute point for the aim which we shall propose and for the means which we shall apply, this constant reciprocal action would involve us in extremes, which would be nothing but a play of ideas produced by an almost invisible train of logical subtleties. If, adhering closely to the absolute, we try to avoid all difficulties by a stroke of the pen, and insist with logical strictness that in every case the extreme must be the object, and the utmost effort must be exerted in that direction, such a stroke of the pen would be a mere paper law, not by any means adapted to the real world.

Even supposing this extreme tension of forces was an absolute which could easily be ascertained, still we must admit that the human mind would hardly submit itself to this



kind of logical chimera. There would be in many cases an unnecessary waste of power, which would be in opposition to other principles of statecraft; an effort of Will would be required disproportioned to the proposed object, which therefore it would be impossible to realise, for the human will does not derive its impulse from logical subtleties.

But everything takes a different shape when we pass from abstractions to reality. In the former, everything must be subject to optimism, and we must imagine the one side as well as the other striving after perfection and even attaining it. Will this ever take place in reality? It will if,

- (1) War becomes a completely isolated act, which arises suddenly, and is in no way connected with the previous history of the combatant States.
- (2) If it is limited to a single solution, or to several simultaneous solutions.
- (3) If it contains within itself the solution perfect and complete, free from any reaction upon it, through a calculation beforehand of the political situation which will follow from it.

7. War Is Never an Isolated Act

With regard to the first point, neither of the two opponents is an abstract person to the other, not even as regards that factor in the sum of resistance which does not depend on objective things, viz., the Will. This Will is not an entirely unknown quantity; it indicates what it will be to-morrow by what it is to-day. War does not spring up quite



suddenly, it does not spread to the full in a moment; each of the two opponents can, therefore, form an opinion of the other, in a great measure, from what he is and what he does, instead of judging of him according to what he, strictly speaking, should be or should do. But, now, man with his incomplete organisation is always below the line of absolute perfection, and thus these deficiencies, having an influence on both sides, become a modifying principle.

8. War Does Not Consist of a Single Instantaneous Blow.

The second point gives rise to the following considerations:

If War ended in a single solution, or a number of simultaneous ones, then naturally all the preparations for the same would have a tendency to the extreme, for an omission could not in any way be repaired; the utmost, then, that the world of reality could furnish as a guide for us would be the preparations of the enemy, as far as they are known to us; all the rest would fall into the domain of the abstract. But if the result is made up from several successive acts, then naturally that which precedes with all its phases may be taken as a measure for that which will follow, and in this manner the world of reality again takes the place of the abstract, and thus modifies the effort towards the extreme.

Yet every War would necessarily resolve itself into a single solution, or a sum of simultaneous results, if all the means required for the struggle were raised at once, or could be at once raised; for as one adverse result necessarily diminishes the means, then if all the means have been



applied in the first, a second cannot properly be supposed. All hostile acts which might follow would belong essentially to the first, and form, in reality only its duration.

But we have already seen that even in the preparation for War the real world steps into the place of mere abstract conception—a material standard into the place of the hypotheses of an extreme: that therefore in that way both parties, by the influence of the mutual reaction, remain below the line of extreme effort, and therefore all forces are not at once brought forward.

It lies also in the nature of these forces and their application that they cannot all be brought into activity at the same time. These forces are the armies actually on foot, the country, with its superficial extent and its population, and the allies.

In point of fact, the country, with its superficial area and the population, besides being the source of all military force, constitutes in itself an integral part of the efficient quantities in War, providing either the theatre of war or exercising a considerable influence on the same.

Now, it is possible to bring all the movable military forces of a country into operation at once, but not all fortresses, rivers, mountains, people, etc.—in short, not the whole country, unless it is so small that it may be completely embraced by the first act of the War. Further, the co-operation of allies does not depend on the Will of the belligerents; and from the nature of the political relations of



states to each other, this co-operation is frequently not afforded until after the War has commenced, or it may be increased to restore the balance of power.

That this part of the means of resistance, which cannot at once be brought into activity, in many cases, is a much greater part of the whole than might at first be supposed, and that it often restores the balance of power, seriously affected by the great force of the first decision, will be more fully shown hereafter. Here it is sufficient to show that a complete concentration of all available means in a moment of time is contradictory to the nature of War.

Now this, in itself, furnishes no ground for relaxing our efforts to accumulate strength to gain the first result, because an unfavourable issue is always a disadvantage to which no one would purposely expose himself, and also because the first decision, although not the only one, still will have the more influence on subsequent events, the greater it is in itself.

But the possibility of gaining a later result causes men to take refuge in that expectation, owing to the repugnance in the human mind to making excessive efforts; and therefore forces are not concentrated and measures are not taken for the first decision with that energy which would otherwise be used. Whatever one belligerent omits from weakness, becomes to the other a real objective ground for limiting his own efforts, and thus again, through this reciprocal action, extreme tendencies are brought down to efforts on a limited scale.



9. The Result in War Is Never Absolute

Lastly, even the final decision of a whole War is not always to be regarded as absolute. The conquered State often sees in it only a passing evil, which may be repaired in after times by means of political combinations. How much this must modify the degree of tension, and the vigour of the efforts made, is evident in itself.

10. The Probabilities of Real Life Take the Place of the Conceptions of the Extreme and the Absolute In this manner, the whole act of War is removed from the rigorous law of forces exerted to the utmost. If the extreme is no longer to be apprehended, and no longer to be sought for, it is left to the judgment to determine the limits for the efforts to be made in place of it, and this can only be done on the data furnished by the facts of the real world by the Laws of Probability. Once the belligerents are no longer mere conceptions, but individual States and Governments, once the War is no longer an ideal, but a definite substantial procedure, then the reality will furnish the data to compute the unknown quantities which are required to be found.

From the character, the measures, the situation of the adversary, and the relations with which he is surrounded, each side will draw conclusions by the law of probability as to the designs of the other, and act accordingly.

11. The Political Object Now Reappears

Here the question which we had laid aside forces itself again into consideration, viz., the political object of the War.



The law of the extreme, the view to disarm the adversary, to overthrow him, has hitherto to a certain extent usurped the place of this end or object. Just as this law loses its force, the political must again come forward. If the whole consideration is a calculation of probability based on definite persons and relations, then the political object, being the original motive, must be an essential factor in the product. The smaller the sacrifice we demand from ours, the smaller, it may be expected, will be the means of resistance which he will employ; but the smaller his preparation, the smaller will ours require to be. Further, the smaller our political object, the less value shall we set upon it, and the more easily shall we be induced to give it up altogether.

Thus, therefore, the political object, as the original motive of the War, will be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made. This it cannot be in itself, but it is so in relation to both the belligerent States, because we are concerned with realities, not with mere abstractions. One and the same political object may produce totally different effects upon different people, or even upon the same people at different times; we can, therefore, only admit the political object as the measure, by considering it in its effects upon those masses which it is to move, and consequently the nature of those masses also comes into consideration. It is easy to see that thus the result may be very different according as these masses are animated with a spirit which will infuse vigour



into the action or otherwise. It is quite possible for such a state of feeling to exist between two States that a very trifling political motive for War may produce an effect quite disproportionate—in fact, a perfect explosion.

This applies to the efforts which the political object will call forth in the two States, and to the aim which the military action shall prescribe for itself. At times it may itself be that aim, as, for example, the conquest of a province. At other times the political object itself is not suitable for the aim of military action; then such a one must be chosen as will be an equivalent for it, and stand in its place as regards the conclusion of peace. But also, in this, due attention to the peculiar character of the States concerned is always supposed. There are circumstances in which the equivalent must be much greater than the political object, in order to secure the latter. The political object will be so much the more the standard of aim and effort, and have more influence in itself, the more the masses are indifferent, the less that any mutual feeling of hostility prevails in the two States from other causes, and therefore there are cases where the political object almost alone will be decisive.

If the aim of the military action is an equivalent for the political object, that action will in general diminish as the political object diminishes, and in a greater degree the more the political object dominates. Thus it is explained how, without any contradiction in itself, there may be Wars of all degrees of importance and energy, from a War of



extermination down to the mere use of an army of observation. This, however, leads to a question of another kind which we have hereafter to develop and answer.

12. A Suspension in the Action of War Unexplained by Anything Said as Yet

However insignificant the political claims mutually advanced, however weak the means put forth, however small the aim to which military action is directed, can this action be suspended even for a moment? This is a question which penetrates deeply into the nature of the subject.

Every transaction requires for its accomplishment a certain time which we call its duration. This may be longer or shorter, according as the person acting throws more or less despatch into his movements.

About this more or less we shall not trouble ourselves here. Each person acts in his own fashion; but the slow person does not protract the thing because he wishes to spend more time about it, but because by his nature he requires more time, and if he made more haste would not do the thing so well. This time, therefore, depends on subjective causes, and belongs to the length, so called, of the action.

If we allow now to every action in War this, its length, then we must assume, at first sight at least, that any expenditure of time beyond this length, that is, every suspension of hostile action, appears an absurdity; with respect to this it must not be forgotten that we now speak not of the progress of one or other of the two opponents, but of the general progress of the whole action of the War.



13. There Is Only One Cause Which Can Suspend the Action, and this Seems to Be Only Possible on One Side in Any Case If two parties have armed themselves for strife, then a feeling of animosity must have moved them to it; as long now as they continue armed, that is, do not come to terms of peace, this feeling must exist; and it can only be brought to a standstill by either side by one single motive alone, which is, That he waits for a more favourable moment for action. Now, at first sight, it appears that this motive can never exist except on one side, because it, eo ipso, must be prejudicial to the other. If the one has an interest in acting, then the other must have an interest in waiting.

A complete equilibrium of forces can never produce a suspension of action, for during this suspension he who has the positive object (that is, the assailant) must continue progressing; for if we should imagine an equilibrium in this way, that he who has the positive object, therefore the strongest motive, can at the same time only command the lesser means, so that the equation is made up by the product of the motive and the power, then we must say, if no alteration in this condition of equilibrium is to be expected, the two parties must make peace; but if an alteration is to be expected, then it can only be favourable to one side, and therefore the other has a manifest interest to act without delay. We see that the conception of an equilibrium cannot explain a suspension of arms, but that it ends in the question of the expectation of a more favourable moment.



Let us suppose, therefore, that one of two States has a positive object, as, for instance, the conquest of one of the enemy's provinces—which is to be utilised in the settlement of peace. After this conquest, his political object is accomplished, the necessity for action ceases, and for him a pause ensues. If the adversary is also contented with this solution, he will make peace; if not, he must act. Now, if we suppose that in four weeks he will be in a better condition to act, then he has sufficient grounds for putting off the time of action.

But from that moment the logical course for the enemy appears to be to act that he may not give the conquered party the desired time. Of course, in this mode of reasoning a complete insight into the state of circumstances on both sides is supposed.

14. Thus a Continuance of Action Will Ensure Which Will Advance Towards a Climax If this unbroken continuity of hostile operations really existed, the effect would be that everything would again be driven towards the extreme; for, irrespective of the effect of such incessant activity in inflaming the feelings, and infusing into the whole a greater degree of passion, a greater elementary force, there would also follow from this continuance of action a stricter continuity, a closer connection between cause and effect, and thus every single action would become of more importance, and consequently more replete with danger.

But we know that the course of action in War has seldom or never this unbroken continuity, and that there have been many



Wars in which action occupied by far the smallest portion of time employed, the whole of the rest being consumed in inaction. It is impossible that this should be always an anomaly; suspension of action in War must therefore be possible, that is no contradiction in itself. We now proceed to show how this is.

15. Here, Therefore, the Principle of Polarity Is Brought into Requisition As we have supposed the interests of one Commander to be always antagonistic to those of the other, we have assumed a true polarity. We reserve a fuller explanation of this for another chapter, merely making the following observation on it at present.

The principle of polarity is only valid when it can be conceived in one and the same thing, where the positive and its opposite the negative completely destroy each other. In a battle both sides strive to conquer; that is true polarity, for the victory of the one side destroys that of the other. But when we speak of two different things which have a common relation external to themselves, then it is not the things but their relations which have the polarity.

16. Attack and Defence Are Things Differing in Kind and of Unequal Force. Polarity Is, Therefore, Not Applicable to Them If there was only one form of War, to wit, the attack of the enemy, therefore no defence; or, in other words, if the attack was distinguished from the defence merely by the positive motive, which the one has and the other has not, but the methods of each were precisely one and the same: then in this sort of fight every advantage gained on the one side



would be a corresponding disadvantage on the other, and true polarity would exist.

But action in War is divided into two forms, attack and defence, which, as we shall hereafter explain more particularly, are very different and of unequal strength. Polarity therefore lies in that to which both bear a relation, in the decision, but not in the attack or defence itself.

If the one Commander wishes the solution put off, the other must wish to hasten it, but only by the same form of action. If it is A's interest not to attack his enemy at present, but four weeks hence, then it is B's interest to be attacked, not four weeks hence, but at the present moment. This is the direct antagonism of interests, but it by no means follows that it would be for B's interest to attack A at once. That is plainly something totally different.

17. The Effect of Polarity Is Often Destroyed by the Superiority of the Defence over the Attack, and Thus the Suspension of Action in War Is Explained If the form of defence is stronger than that of offence, as we shall hereafter show, the question arises, Is the advantage of a deferred decision as great on the one side as the advantage of the defensive form on the other? If it is not, then it cannot by its counter-weight over-balance the latter, and thus influence the progress of the action of the War. We see, therefore, that the impulsive force existing in the polarity of interests may be lost in the difference between the strength of the offensive and the defensive, and thereby become ineffectual.



If, therefore, that side for which the present is favourable, is too weak to be able to dispense with the advantage of the defensive, he must put up with the unfavourable prospects which the future holds out; for it may still be better to fight a defensive battle in the unpromising future than to assume the offensive or make peace at present. Now, being convinced that the superiority of the defensive [It must be remembered that all this antedates by some years the introduction of long-range weapons.] (rightly understood) is very great, and much greater than may appear at first sight, we conceive that the greater number of those periods of inaction which occur in war are thus explained without involving any contradiction. The weaker the motives to action are, the more will those motives be absorbed and neutralised by this difference between attack and defence, the more frequently, therefore, will action in warfare be stopped, as indeed experience teaches.

18 A Second Ground Consists in the Imperfect Knowledge of Circumstances But there is still another cause which may stop action in War, viz., an incomplete view of the situation. Each Commander can only fully know his own position; that of his opponent can only be known to him by reports, which are uncertain; he may, therefore, form a wrong judgment with respect to it upon data of this description, and, in consequence of that error, he may suppose that the power of taking the initiative rests with his adversary when it lies really with himself. This want of perfect insight might



certainly just as often occasion an untimely action as untimely inaction, and hence it would in itself no more contribute to delay than to accelerate action in War. Still, it must always be regarded as one of the natural causes which may bring action in War to a standstill without involving a contradiction. But if we reflect how much more we are inclined and induced to estimate the power of our opponents too high than too low, because it lies in human nature to do so, we shall admit that our imperfect insight into facts in general must contribute very much to delay action in War, and to modify the application of the principles pending our conduct.

The possibility of a standstill brings into the action of War a new modification, inasmuch as it dilutes that action with the element of time, checks the influence or sense of danger in its course, and increases the means of reinstating a lost balance of force. The greater the tension of feelings from which the War springs, the greater therefore the energy with which it is carried on, so much the shorter will be the periods of inaction; on the other hand, the weaker the principle of warlike activity, the longer will be these periods: for powerful motives increase the force of the will, and this, as we know, is always a factor in the product of force.

19. Frequent Periods of Inaction in War Remove it Further from the Absolute, and Make it Still More a Calculation of Probabilities But the slower the action proceeds in War, the more frequent and longer the periods of inaction, so much



the more easily can an error be repaired; therefore, so much the bolder a General will be in his calculations, so much the more readily will he keep them below the line of the absolute, and build everything upon probabilities and conjecture. Thus, according as the course of the War is more or less slow, more or less time will be allowed for that which the nature of a concrete case particularly requires, calculation of probability based on given circumstances.

20. Therefore, the Element of Chance Only Is Wanting to Make of War a Game, and in That Element it Is Least of All Deficient We see from the foregoing how much the objective nature of War makes it a calculation of probabilities; now there is only one single element still wanting to make it a game, and that element it certainly is not without: it is chance. There is no human affair which stands so constantly and so generally in close connection with chance as War. But together with chance, the accidental, and along with it good luck, occupy a great place in War.

21. War Is a Game Both Objectively and Subjectively If we now take a look at the subjective nature of War, that is to say, at those conditions under which it is carried on, it will appear to us still more like a game. Primarily the element in which the operations of War are carried on is danger; but which of all the moral qualities is the first in danger? Courage. Now certainly courage is quite compatible with prudent calculation, but still they are things of quite a different kind, essentially different qualities of the mind; on



the other hand, daring reliance on good fortune, boldness, rashness, are only expressions of courage, and all these propensities of the mind look for the fortuitous (or accidental), because it is their element.

We see, therefore, how, from the commencement, the absolute, the mathematical as it is called, nowhere finds any sure basis in the calculations in the Art of War; and that from the outset there is a play of possibilities, probabilities, good and bad luck, which spreads about with all the coarse and fine threads of its web, and makes War of all branches of human activity the most like a gambling game.

22. How this Accords Best with the Human Mind in General Although our intellect always feels itself urged towards clearness and certainty, still our mind often feels itself attracted by uncertainty. Instead of threading its way with the understanding along the narrow path of philosophical investigations and logical conclusions, in order, almost unconscious of itself, to arrive in spaces where it feels itself a stranger, and where it seems to part from all well-known objects, it prefers to remain with the imagination in the realms of chance and luck. Instead of living yonder on poor necessity, it revels here in the wealth of possibilities; animated thereby, courage then takes wings to itself, and daring and danger make the element into which it launches itself as a fearless swimmer plunges into the stream.

Shall theory leave it here, and move on, self-satisfied with absolute conclusions and rules? Then it is of no practical use.



Theory must also take into account the human element; it must accord a place to courage, to boldness, even to rashness. The Art of War has to deal with living and with moral forces, the consequence of which is that it can never attain the absolute and positive. There is therefore everywhere a margin for the accidental, and just as much in the greatest things as in the smallest. As there is room for this accidental on the one hand, so on the other there must be courage and self-reliance in proportion to the room available. If these qualities are forthcoming in a high degree, the margin left may likewise be great. Courage and self-reliance are, therefore, principles quite essential to War; consequently, theory must only set up such rules as allow ample scope for all degrees and varieties of these necessary and noblest of military virtues. In daring there may still be wisdom, and prudence as well, only they are estimated by a different standard of value.

23. War Is Always a Serious Means for a Serious Object. Its More Particular Definition Such is War; such the Commander who conducts it; such the theory which rules it. But War is no pastime; no mere passion for venturing and winning; no work of a free enthusiasm: it is a serious means for a serious object. All that appearance which it wears from the varying hues of fortune, all that it assimilates into itself of the oscillations of passion, of courage, of imagination, of enthusiasm, are only particular properties of this means.

The War of a community of whole Nations, and particularly of civilised Nations always starts from a political condition, and



is called forth by a political motive. It is, therefore, a political act. Now if it was a perfect, unrestrained, and absolute expression of force, as we had to deduct it from its mere conception, then the moment it is called forth by policy it would step into the place of policy, and as something quite independent of it would set it aside, and only follow its own laws, just as a mine at the moment of explosion cannot be guided into any other direction than that which has been given to it by preparatory arrangements. This is how the thing has really been viewed hitherto, whenever a want of harmony between policy and the conduct of a War has led to theoretical distinctions of the kind. But it is not so, and the idea is radically false. War in the real world, as we have already seen, is not an extreme thing which expends itself at one single discharge; it is the operation of powers which do not develop themselves completely in the same manner and in the same measure, but which at one time expand sufficiently to overcome the resistance opposed by inertia or friction, while at another they are too weak to produce an effect; it is therefore, in a certain measure, a pulsation of violent force more or less vehement, consequently making its discharges and exhausting its powers more or less quickly—in other words, conducting more or less quickly to the aim, but always lasting long enough to admit of influence being exerted on it in its course, so as to give it this or that direction, in short, to be subject to the will of a guiding intelligence., if we reflect that War has its root in a political object, then naturally this original motive which called it into



existence should also continue the first and highest consideration in its conduct. Still, the political object is no despotic lawgiver on that account; it must accommodate itself to the nature of the means, and though changes in these means may involve modification in the political objective, the latter always retains a prior right to consideration. Policy, therefore, is interwoven with the whole action of War, and must exercise a continuous influence upon it, as far as the nature of the forces liberated by it will permit.

24. War Is a Mere Continuation of Policy by Other Means

We see, therefore, that War is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means. All beyond this which is strictly peculiar to War relates merely to the peculiar nature of the means which it uses. That the tendencies and views of policy shall not be incompatible with these means, the Art of War in general and the Commander in each particular case may demand, and this claim is truly not a trifling one. But however powerfully this may react on political views in particular cases, still it must always be regarded as only a modification of them; for the political view is the object, War is the means, and the means must always include the object in our conception.

25. Diversity in the Nature of Wars

The greater and the more powerful the motives of a War, the more it affects the whole existence of a people. The more violent the excitement which precedes the War, by so much



the nearer will the War approach to its abstract form, so much the more will it be directed to the destruction of the enemy, so much the nearer will the military and political ends coincide, so much the more purely military and less political the War appears to be; but the weaker the motives and the tensions, so much the less will the natural direction of the military element—that is, force—be coincident with the direction which the political element indicates; so much the more must, therefore, the War become diverted from its natural direction, the political object diverge from the aim of an ideal War, and the War appear to become political.

But, that the reader may not form any false conceptions, we must here observe that by this natural tendency of War we only mean the philosophical, the strictly logical, and by no means the tendency of forces actually engaged in conflict, by which would be supposed to be included all the emotions and passions of the combatants. No doubt in some cases these also might be excited to such a degree as to be with difficulty restrained and confined to the political road; but in most cases such a contradiction will not arise, because by the existence of such strenuous exertions a great plan in harmony therewith would be implied. If the plan is directed only upon a small object, then the impulses of feeling amongst the masses will be also so weak that these masses will require to be stimulated rather than repressed.

26. They May All Be Regarded as Political Acts

Returning now to the main subject, although it is true that in one kind of War the political element seems almost to



disappear, whilst in another kind it occupies a very prominent place, we may still affirm that the one is as political as the other; for if we regard the State policy as the intelligence of the personified State, then amongst all the constellations in the political sky whose movements it has to compute, those must be included which arise when the nature of its relations imposes the necessity of a great War. It is only if we understand by policy not a true appreciation of affairs in general, but the conventional conception of a cautious, subtle, also dishonest craftiness, averse from violence, that the latter kind of War may belong more to policy than the first.

27. Influence of this View on the Right Understanding of Military History, and on the Foundations of Theory

We see, therefore, in the first place, that under all circumstances War is to be regarded not as an independent thing, but as a political instrument; and it is only by taking this point of view that we can avoid finding ourselves in opposition to all military history. This is the only means of unlocking the great book and making it intelligible. Secondly, this view shows us how Wars must differ in character according to the nature of the motives and circumstances from which they proceed.

Now, the first, the grandest, and most decisive act of judgment which the Statesman and General exercises is rightly to understand in this respect the War in which he engages, not to take it for something, or to wish to make of it something, which by the nature of its relations it is impossible for it to be.



This is, therefore, the first, the most comprehensive, of all strategical questions. We shall enter into this more fully in treating of the plan of a War.

For the present we content ourselves with having brought the subject up to this point, and having thereby fixed the chief point of view from which War and its theory are to be studied.

28. Result for Theory

War is, therefore, not only chameleon-like in character, because it changes its colour in some degree in each particular case, but it is also, as a whole, in relation to the predominant tendencies which are in it, a wonderful trinity, composed of the original violence of its elements, hatred and animosity, which may be looked upon as blind instinct; of the play of probabilities and chance, which make it a free activity of the soul; and of the subordinate nature of a political instrument, by which it belongs purely to the reason.

The first of these three phases concerns more the people the second, more the General and his Army; the third, more the Government. The passions which break forth in War must already have a latent existence in the peoples. The range which the display of courage and talents shall get in the realm of probabilities and of chance depends on the particular characteristics of the General and his Army, but the political objects belong to the Government alone.

These three tendencies, which appear like so many different law-givers, are deeply rooted in the nature of the



subject, and at the same time variable in degree. A theory which would leave any one of them out of account, or set up any arbitrary relation between them, would immediately become involved in such a contradiction with the reality, that it might be regarded as destroyed at once by that alone.

The problem is, therefore, that theory shall keep itself poised in a manner between these three tendencies, as between three points of attraction.

The way in which alone this difficult problem can be solved we shall examine in the book on the "Theory of War." In every case the conception of War, as here defined, will be the first ray of light which shows us the true foundation of theory, and which first separates the great masses and allows us to distinguish them from one another.



End and Means in War



Having in the foregoing chapter ascertained the complicated and variable nature of War, we shall now occupy ourselves in examining into the influence which this nature has upon the end and means in War.

If we ask, first of all, for the object upon which the whole effort of War is to be directed, in order that it may suffice for the attainment of the political object, we shall find that it is just as variable as are the political object and the particular circumstances of the War.

If, in the next place, we keep once more to the pure conception of War, then we must say that the political object properly lies out of its province, for if War is an act of violence to compel the enemy to fulfil our will, then in every case all depends on our overthrowing the enemy, that is, disarming him, and on that alone. This object, developed



from abstract conceptions, but which is also the one aimed at in a great many cases in reality, we shall, in the first place, examine in this reality.

In connection with the plan of a campaign we shall hereafter examine more closely into the meaning of disarming a nation, but here we must at once draw a distinction between three things, which, as three general objects, comprise everything else within them. They are the Military power, the country, and the will of the enemy.

The military power must be destroyed, that is, reduced to such a state as not to be able to prosecute the War. This is the sense in which we wish to be understood hereafter, whenever we use the expression “destruction of the enemy’s military power.”

The country must be conquered, for out of the country a new military force may be formed.

But even when both these things are done, still the War, that is, the hostile feeling and action of hostile agencies, cannot be considered as at an end as long as the will of the enemy is not subdued also; that is, its Government and its Allies must be forced into signing a peace, or the people into submission; for whilst we are in full occupation of the country, the War may break out afresh, either in the interior or through assistance given by Allies. No doubt, this may also take place after a peace, but that shows nothing more than that every War does not carry in itself the elements for a complete decision and final settlement.



But even if this is the case, still with the conclusion of peace a number of sparks are always extinguished which would have smouldered on quietly, and the excitement of the passions abates, because all those whose minds are disposed to peace, of which in all nations and under all circumstances there is always a great number, turn themselves away completely from the road to resistance. Whatever may take place subsequently, we must always look upon the object as attained, and the business of War as ended, by a peace.

As protection of the country is the primary object for which the military force exists, therefore the natural order is, that first of all this force should be destroyed, then the country subdued; and through the effect of these two results, as well as the position we then hold, the enemy should be forced to make peace. Generally the destruction of the enemy's force is done by degrees, and in just the same measure the conquest of the country follows immediately. The two likewise usually react upon each other, because the loss of provinces occasions a diminution of military force. But this order is by no means necessary, and on that account it also does not always take place. The enemy's Army, before it is sensibly weakened, may retreat to the opposite side of the country, or even quite outside of it. In this case, therefore, the greater part or the whole of the country is conquered.

But this object of War in the abstract, this final means of attaining the political object in which all others are



combined, the disarming the enemy, is rarely attained in practice and is not a condition necessary to peace. Therefore it can in no wise be set up in theory as a law. There are innumerable instances of treaties in which peace has been settled before either party could be looked upon as disarmed; indeed, even before the balance of power had undergone any sensible alteration. Nay, further, if we look at the case in the concrete, then we must say that in a whole class of cases, the idea of a complete defeat of the enemy would be a mere imaginative flight, especially when the enemy is considerably superior.

The reason why the object deduced from the conception of War is not adapted in general to real War lies in the difference between the two, which is discussed in the preceding chapter. If it was as pure theory gives it, then a War between two States of very unequal military strength would appear an absurdity; therefore impossible. At most, the inequality between the physical forces might be such that it could be balanced by the moral forces, and that would not go far with our present social condition in Europe. Therefore, if we have seen Wars take place between States of very unequal power, that has been the case because there is a wide difference between War in reality and its original conception.

There are two considerations which as motives may practically take the place of inability to continue the contest. The first is the improbability, the second is the excessive price, of success.



According to what we have seen in the foregoing chapter, War must always set itself free from the strict law of logical necessity, and seek aid from the calculation of probabilities; and as this is so much the more the case, the more the War has a bias that way, from the circumstances out of which it has arisen—the smaller its motives are, and the excitement it has raised—so it is also conceivable how out of this calculation of probabilities even motives to peace may arise. War does not, therefore, always require to be fought out until one party is overthrown; and we may suppose that, when the motives and passions are slight, a weak probability will suffice to move that side to which it is unfavourable to give way. Now, were the other side convinced of this beforehand, it is natural that he would strive for this probability only, instead of first wasting time and effort in the attempt to achieve the total destruction of the enemy's Army.

Still more general in its influence on the resolution to peace is the consideration of the expenditure of force already made, and further required. As War is no act of blind passion, but is dominated by the political object, therefore the value of that object determines the measure of the sacrifices by which it is to be purchased. This will be the case, not only as regards extent, but also as regards duration. As soon, therefore, as the required outlay becomes so great that the political object is no longer equal in value, the object must be given up, and peace will be the result.



We see, therefore, that in Wars where one side cannot completely disarm the other, the motives to peace on both sides will rise or fall on each side according to the probability of future success and the required outlay. If these motives were equally strong on both sides, they would meet in the centre of their political difference. Where they are strong on one side, they might be weak on the other. If their amount is only sufficient, peace will follow, but naturally to the advantage of that side which has the weakest motive for its conclusion. We purposely pass over here the difference which the positive and negative character of the political end must necessarily produce practically; for although that is, as we shall hereafter show, of the highest importance, still we are obliged to keep here to a more general point of view, because the original political views in the course of the War change very much, and at last may become totally different, Just because they are determined by results and probable events.

Now comes the question how to influence the probability of success. In the first place, naturally by the same means which we use when the object is the subjugation of the enemy, by the destruction of his military force and the conquest of his provinces; but these two means are not exactly of the same import here as they would be in reference to that object. If we attack the enemy's Army, it is a very different thing whether we intend to follow up the first blow with a succession of others, until the whole force



is destroyed, or whether we mean to content ourselves with a victory to shake the enemy's feeling of security, to convince him of our superiority, and to instil into him a feeling of apprehension about the future. If this is our object, we only go so far in the destruction of his forces as is sufficient. In like manner, the conquest, of the enemy's provinces is quite a different measure if the object is not the destruction of the enemy's Army. In the latter case the destruction of the Army is the real effectual action, and the taking of the provinces only a consequence of it; to take them before the Army had been defeated would always be looked upon only as a necessary evil. On the other hand, if our views are not directed upon the complete destruction of the enemy's force, and if we are sure that the enemy does not seek but fears to bring matters to a bloody decision, the taking possession of a weak or defenceless province is an advantage in itself, and if this advantage is of sufficient importance to make the enemy apprehensive about the general result, then it may also be regarded as a shorter road to peace.

But now we come upon a peculiar means of influencing the probability of the result without destroying the enemy's Army, namely, upon the expeditions which have a direct connection with political views. If there are any enterprises which are particularly likely to break up the enemy's alliances or make them inoperative, to gain new alliances for ourselves, to raise political powers in our own favour, etc. etc., then it is easy to conceive how much these may increase



the probability of success, and become a shorter way towards our object than the routing of the enemy's forces.

The second question is how to act upon the enemy's expenditure in strength, that is, to raise the price of success.

The enemy's outlay in strength lies in the wear and tear of his forces, consequently in the destruction of them on our part, and in the loss of provinces, consequently the Conquest of them by us.

Here, again, on account of the various significations of these means, so likewise it will be found that neither of them will be identical in its signification in all cases if the objects are different. The smallness in general of this difference must not cause us perplexity, for in reality the weakest motives, the finest shades of difference, often decide in favour of this or that method of applying force. Our only business here is to show that, certain conditions being supposed, the possibility of attaining our purpose in different ways is no contradiction, absurdity, nor even error.

Besides these two means, there are three other peculiar ways of directly increasing the waste of the enemy's force. The first is invasion, that is The occupation of the enemy's territory, not with a view to keeping it, but in order to levy contributions upon it, or to devastate it.

The immediate object here is neither the conquest of the enemy's territory nor the defeat of his armed force, but merely to do him damage in a general way. The second way is to select for the object of our enterprises those points at



which we can do the enemy most harm. Nothing is easier to conceive than two different directions in which our force may be employed, the first of which is to be preferred if our object is to defeat the enemy's Army, while the other is more advantageous if the defeat of the enemy is out of the question. According to the usual mode of speaking, we should say that the first is primarily military, the other more political. But if we take our view from the highest point, both are equally military, and neither the one nor the other can be eligible unless it suits the circumstances of the case. The third, by far the most important, from the great number of cases which it embraces, is the wearing out of the enemy. We choose this expression not only to explain our meaning in few words, but because it represents the thing exactly, and is not so figurative as may at first appear. The idea of wearing out in a struggle amounts in practice to a gradual exhaustion of the physical powers and of the will by the long continuance of exertion.

Now, if we want to overcome the enemy by the duration of the contest, we must content ourselves with as small objects as possible, for it is in the nature of the thing that a great end requires a greater expenditure of force than a small one; but the smallest object that we can propose to ourselves is simple passive resistance, that is a combat without any positive view. In this way, therefore, our means attain their greatest relative value, and therefore the result is best secured. How far now can this negative mode of proceeding



be carried? Plainly not to absolute passivity, for mere endurance would not be fighting; and the defensive is an activity by which so much of the enemy's power must be destroyed that he must give up his object. That alone is what we aim at in each single act, and therein consists the negative nature of our object.

No doubt this negative object in its single act is not so effective as the positive object in the same direction would be, supposing it successful; but there is this difference in its favour, that it succeeds more easily than the positive, and therefore it holds out greater certainty of success; what is wanting in the efficacy of its single act must be gained through time, that is, through the duration of the contest, and therefore this negative intention, which constitutes the principle of the pure defensive, is also the natural means of overcoming the enemy by the duration of the combat, that is of wearing him out.

Here lies the origin of that difference of offensive and Defensive, the influence of which prevails throughout the whole province of War. We cannot at present pursue this subject further than to observe that from this negative intention are to be deduced all the advantages and all the stronger forms of combat which are on the side of the Defensive, and in which that philosophical-dynamic law which exists between the greatness and the certainty of success is realised. We shall resume the consideration of all this hereafter.



If then the negative purpose, that is the concentration of all the means into a state of pure resistance, affords a superiority in the contest, and if this advantage is sufficient to balance whatever superiority in numbers the adversary may have, then the mere Duration of the contest will suffice gradually to bring the loss of force on the part of the adversary to a point at which the political object can no longer be an equivalent, a point at which, therefore, he must give up the contest. We see then that this class of means, the wearing out of the enemy, includes the great number of cases in which the weaker resists the stronger.

Frederick the Great, during the Seven Years' War, was never strong enough to overthrow the Austrian monarchy; and if he had tried to do so after the fashion of Charles the Twelfth, he would inevitably have had to succumb himself. But after his skilful application of the system of husbanding his resources had shown the powers allied against him, through a seven years' struggle, that the actual expenditure of strength far exceeded what they had at first anticipated, they made peace.

We see then that there are many ways to one's object in War; that the complete subjugation of the enemy is not essential in every case; that the destruction of the enemy's military force, the conquest of the enemy's provinces, the mere occupation of them, the mere invasion of them—enterprises which are aimed directly at political objects—lastly, a passive expectation of the enemy's blow,



are all means which, each in itself, may be used to force the enemy's will according as the peculiar circumstances of the case lead us to expect more from the one or the other. We could still add to these a whole category of shorter methods of gaining the end, which might be called arguments *ad hominem*. What branch of human affairs is there in which these sparks of individual spirit have not made their appearance, surmounting all formal considerations? And least of all can they fail to appear in War, where the personal character of the combatants plays such an important part, both in the cabinet and in the field. We limit ourselves to pointing this out, as it would be pedantry to attempt to reduce such influences into classes. Including these, we may say that the number of possible ways of reaching the object rises to infinity.

To avoid under-estimating these different short roads to one's purpose, either estimating them only as rare exceptions, or holding the difference which they cause in the conduct of War as insignificant, we must bear in mind the diversity of political objects which may cause a War—measure at a glance the distance which there is between a death struggle for political existence and a War which a forced or tottering alliance makes a matter of disagreeable duty. Between the two innumerable gradations occur in practice. If we reject one of these gradations in theory, we might with equal right reject the whole, which would be tantamount to shutting the real world completely out of sight.



These are the circumstances in general connected with the aim which we have to pursue in War; let us now turn to the means.

There is only one single means, it is the fight. However diversified this may be in form, however widely it may differ from a rough vent of hatred and animosity in a hand-to-hand encounter, whatever number of things may introduce themselves which are not actual fighting, still it is always implied in the conception of War that all the effects manifested have their roots in the combat.

That this must always be so in the greatest diversity and complication of the reality is proved in a very simple manner. All that takes place in War takes place through armed forces, but where the forces of War, i.e., armed men, are applied, there the idea of fighting must of necessity be at the foundation.

All, therefore, that relates to forces of War—all that is connected with their creation, maintenance, and application—belongs to military activity.

Creation and maintenance are obviously only the means, whilst application is the object.

The contest in War is not a contest of individual against individual, but an organised whole, consisting of manifold parts; in this great whole we may distinguish units of two kinds, the one determined by the subject, the other by the object. In an Army the mass of combatants ranges itself always into an order of new units, which again form



members of a higher order. The combat of each of these members forms, therefore, also a more or less distinct unit. Further, the motive of the fight; therefore its object forms its unit.

Now, to each of these units which we distinguish in the contest we attach the name of combat.

If the idea of combat lies at the foundation of every application of armed power, then also the application of armed force in general is nothing more than the determining and arranging a certain number of combats.

Every activity in War, therefore, necessarily relates to the combat either directly or indirectly. The soldier is levied, clothed, armed, exercised, he sleeps, eats, drinks, and marches, all merely to fight at the right time and place.

If, therefore, all the threads of military activity terminate in the combat, we shall grasp them all when we settle the order of the combats. Only from this order and its execution proceed the effects, never directly from the conditions preceding them. Now, in the combat all the action is directed to the destruction of the enemy, or rather of his fighting powers, for this lies in the conception of combat. The destruction of the enemy's fighting power is, therefore, always the means to attain the object of the combat.

This object may likewise be the mere destruction of the enemy's armed force; but that is not by any means necessary, and it may be something quite different. Whenever, for instance, as we have shown, the defeat of the



enemy is not the only means to attain the political object, whenever there are other objects which may be pursued as the aim in a War, then it follows of itself that such other objects may become the object of particular acts of Warfare, and therefore also the object of combats.

But even those combats which, as subordinate acts, are in the strict sense devoted to the destruction of the enemy's fighting force need not have that destruction itself as their first object.

If we think of the manifold parts of a great armed force, of the number of circumstances which come into activity when it is employed, then it is clear that the combat of such a force must also require a manifold organisation, a subordinating of parts and formation. There may and must naturally arise for particular parts a number of objects which are not themselves the destruction of the enemy's armed force, and which, while they certainly contribute to increase that destruction, do so only in an indirect manner. If a battalion is ordered to drive the enemy from a rising ground, or a bridge, etc., then properly the occupation of any such locality is the real object, the destruction of the enemy's armed force which takes place only the means or secondary matter. If the enemy can be driven away merely by a demonstration, the object is attained all the same; but this hill or bridge is, in point of fact, only required as a means of increasing the gross amount of loss inflicted on the enemy's armed force. It is the case on the field of battle, much more



must it be so on the whole theatre of war, where not only one Army is opposed to another, but one State, one Nation, one whole country to another. Here the number of possible relations, and consequently possible combinations, is much greater, the diversity of measures increased, and by the gradation of objects, each subordinate to another the first means employed is further apart from the ultimate object.

It is therefore for many reasons possible that the object of a combat is not the destruction of the enemy's force, that is, of the force immediately opposed to us, but that this only appears as a means. But in all such cases it is no longer a question of complete destruction, for the combat is here nothing else but a measure of strength—has in itself no value except only that of the present result, that is, of its decision.

But a measuring of strength may be effected in cases where the opposing sides are very unequal by a mere comparative estimate. In such cases no fighting will take place, and the weaker will immediately give way.

If the object of a combat is not always the destruction of the enemy's forces therein engaged—and if its object can often be attained as well without the combat taking place at all, by merely making a resolve to fight, and by the circumstances to which this resolution gives rise—then that explains how a whole campaign may be carried on with great activity without the actual combat playing any notable part in it.

That this may be so military history proves by a hundred examples. How many of those cases can be justified, that is,



without involving a contradiction and whether some of the celebrities who rose out of them would stand criticism, we shall leave undecided, for all we have to do with the matter is to show the possibility of such a course of events in War.

We have only one means in War—the battle; but this means, by the infinite variety of paths in which it may be applied, leads us into all the different ways which the multiplicity of objects allows of, so that we seem to have gained nothing; but that is not the case, for from this unity of means proceeds a thread which assists the study of the subject, as it runs through the whole web of military activity and holds it together.

But we have considered the destruction of the enemy's force as one of the objects which maybe pursued in War, and left undecided what relative importance should be given to it amongst other objects. In certain cases it will depend on circumstances, and as a general question we have left its value undetermined. We are once more brought back upon it, and we shall be able to get an insight into the value which must necessarily be accorded to it.

The combat is the single activity in War; in the combat the destruction of the enemy opposed to us is the means to the end; it is so even when the combat does not actually take place, because in that case there lies at the root of the decision the supposition at all events that this destruction is to be regarded as beyond doubt. It follows, therefore, that the destruction of the enemy's military force is the



foundation-stone of all action in War, the great support of all combinations, which rest upon it like the arch on its abutments. All action, therefore, takes place on the supposition that if the solution by force of arms which lies at its foundation should be realised, it will be a favourable one. The decision by arms is, for all operations in War, great and small, what cash payment is in bill transactions. However remote from each other these relations, however seldom the realisation may take place, still it can never entirely fail to occur.

If the decision by arms lies at the foundation of all combinations, then it follows that the enemy can defeat each of them by gaining a victory on the field, not merely in the one on which our combination directly depends, but also in any other encounter, if it is only important enough; for every important decision by arms—that is, destruction of the enemy's forces—reacts upon all preceding it, because, like a liquid element, they tend to bring themselves to a level.

Thus, the destruction of the enemy's armed force appears, therefore, always as the superior and more effectual means, to which all others must give way.

It is, however, only when there is a supposed equality in all other conditions that we can ascribe to the destruction of the enemy's armed force the greater efficacy. It would, therefore, be a great mistake to draw the conclusion that a blind dash must always gain the victory over skill and caution. An unskilful attack would lead to the destruction of



our own and not of the enemy's force, and therefore is not what is here meant. The superior efficacy belongs not to the means but to the end, and we are only comparing the effect of one realised purpose with the other.

If we speak of the destruction of the enemy's armed force, we must expressly point out that nothing obliges us to confine this idea to the mere physical force; on the contrary, the moral is necessarily implied as well, because both in fact are interwoven with each other, even in the most minute details, and therefore cannot be separated. But it is just in connection with the inevitable effect which has been referred to, of a great act of destruction (a great victory) upon all other decisions by arms, that this moral element is most fluid, if we may use that expression, and therefore distributes itself the most easily through all the parts.

Against the far superior worth which the destruction of the enemy's armed force has over all other means stands the expense and risk of this means, and it is only to avoid these that any other means are taken. That these must be costly stands to reason, for the waste of our own military forces must, *ceteris paribus*, always be greater the more our aim is directed upon the destruction of the enemy's power.

The danger lies in this, that the greater efficacy which we seek recoils on ourselves, and therefore has worse consequences in case we fail of success.

Other methods are, therefore, less costly when they succeed, less dangerous when they fail; but in this is



necessarily lodged the condition that they are only opposed to similar ones, that is, that the enemy acts on the same principle; for if the enemy should choose the way of a great decision by arms, Our Means must on That Account Be Changed Against Our Will, in Order to Correspond with His. Then all depends on the issue of the act of destruction; but of course it is evident that, *ceteris paribus*, in this act we must be at a disadvantage in all respects because our views and our means had been directed in part upon other objects, which is not the case with the enemy. Two different objects of which one is not part, the other exclude each other, and therefore a force which may be applicable for the one may not serve for the other. If, therefore, one of two belligerents is determined to seek the great decision by arms, then he has a high probability of success, as soon as he is certain his opponent will not take that way, but follows a different object; and every one who sets before himself any such other aim only does so in a reasonable manner, provided he acts on the supposition that his adversary has as little intention as he has of resorting to the great decision by arms.

But what we have here said of another direction of views and forces relates only to Other Positive Objects, which we may propose to ourselves in War, besides the destruction of the enemy's force, not by any means to the pure defensive, which may be adopted with a view thereby to exhaust the enemy's forces. In the pure defensive the positive object is wanting, and therefore, while on the defensive, our forces



cannot at the same time be directed on other objects; they can only be employed to defeat the intentions of the enemy.

We have now to consider the opposite of the destruction of the enemy's armed force, that is to say, the preservation of our own. These two efforts always go together, as they mutually act and react on each other; they are integral parts of one and the same view, and we have only to ascertain what effect is produced when one or the other has the predominance. The endeavour to destroy the enemy's force has a positive object, and leads to positive results, of which the final aim is the conquest of the enemy. The preservation of our own forces has a negative object, leads therefore to the defeat of the enemy's intentions, that is to pure resistance, of which the final aim can be nothing more than to prolong the duration of the contest, so that the enemy shall exhaust himself in it.

The effort with a positive object calls into existence the act of destruction; the effort with the negative object awaits it.

How far this state of expectation should and may be carried we shall enter into more particularly in the theory of attack and defence, at the origin of which we again find ourselves. Here we shall content ourselves with saying that the awaiting must be no absolute endurance, and that in the action bound up with it the destruction of the enemy's armed force engaged in this conflict may be the aim just as well as anything else. It would therefore be a great error in the fundamental idea to suppose that the consequence of the



negative course is that we are precluded from choosing the destruction of the enemy's military force as our object, and must prefer a bloodless solution. The advantage which the negative effort gives may certainly lead to that, but only at the risk of its not being the most advisable method, as that question is dependent on totally different conditions, resting not with ourselves but with our opponents. This other bloodless way cannot, therefore, be looked upon at all as the natural means of satisfying our great anxiety to spare our forces; on the contrary, when circumstances are not favourable, it would be the means of completely ruining them. Very many Generals have fallen into this error, and been ruined by it. The only necessary effect resulting from the superiority of the negative effort is the delay of the decision, so that the party acting takes refuge in that way, as it were, in the expectation of the decisive moment. The consequence of that is generally The postponement of the action as much as possible in time, and also in space, in so far as space is in connection with it. If the moment has arrived in which this can no longer be done without ruinous disadvantage, then the advantage of the negative must be considered as exhausted, and then comes forward unchanged the effort for the destruction of the enemy's force, which was kept back by a counterpoise, but never discarded.

We have seen, therefore, in the foregoing reflections, that there are many ways to the aim, that is, to the attainment of the political object; but that the only means is the combat,



and that consequently everything is subject to a supreme law: which is the decision by arms; that where this is really demanded by one, it is a redress which cannot be refused by the other; that, therefore, a belligerent who takes any other way must make sure that his opponent will not take this means of redress, or his cause may be lost in that supreme court; hence therefore the destruction of the enemy's armed force, amongst all the objects which can be pursued in War, appears always as the one which overrules all others.

What may be achieved by combinations of another kind in War we shall only learn in the sequel, and naturally only by degrees. We content ourselves here with acknowledging in general their possibility, as something pointing to the difference between the reality and the conception, and to the influence of particular circumstances. But we could not avoid showing at once that the bloody solution of the crisis, the effort for the destruction of the enemy's force, is the firstborn son of War. If when political objects are unimportant, motives weak, the excitement of forces small, a cautious commander tries in all kinds of ways, without great crises and bloody solutions, to twist himself skilfully into a peace through the characteristic weaknesses of his enemy in the field and in the Cabinet, we have no right to find fault with him, if the premises on which he acts are well founded and justified by success; still we must require him to remember that he only travels on forbidden tracks, where the God of War may surprise him; that he ought always to keep



his eye on the enemy, in order that he may not have to defend himself with a dress rapier if the enemy takes up a sharp sword.

The consequences of the nature of War, how ends and means act in it, how in the modifications of reality it deviates sometimes more, sometimes less, from its strict original conception, fluctuating backwards and forwards, yet always remaining under that strict conception as under a supreme law: all this we must retain before us, and bear constantly in mind in the consideration of each of the succeeding subjects, if we would rightly comprehend their true relations and proper importance, and not become involved incessantly in the most glaring contradictions with the reality, and at last with our own selves.

* * *



The Genius for War



Every special calling in life, if it is to be followed with success, requires peculiar qualifications of understanding and soul. Where these are of a high order, and manifest themselves by extraordinary achievements, the mind to which they belong is termed Genius.

We know very well that this word is used in many significations which are very different both in extent and nature, and that with many of these significations it is a very difficult task to define the essence of Genius; but as we neither profess to be philosopher nor grammarian, we must be allowed to keep to the meaning usual in ordinary language, and to understand by “genius” a very high mental capacity for certain employments.

We wish to stop for a moment over this faculty and dignity of the mind, in order to vindicate its title, and to



explain more fully the meaning of the conception. But we shall not dwell on that (genius) which has obtained its title through a very great talent, on genius properly so called, that is a conception which has no defined limits. What we have to do is to bring under consideration every common tendency of the powers of the mind and soul towards the business of War, the whole of which common tendencies we may look upon as the essence of military genius. We say "common," for just therein consists military genius, that it is not one single quality bearing upon War, as, for instance, courage, while other qualities of mind and soul are wanting or have a direction which is unserviceable for War, but that it is an harmonious association of powers, in which one or other may predominate, but none must be in opposition.

If every combatant required to be more or less endowed with military genius, then our armies would be very weak; for as it implies a peculiar bent of the intelligent powers, therefore it can only rarely be found where the mental powers of a people are called into requisition and trained in many different ways. The fewer the employments followed by a Nation, the more that of arms predominates, so much the more prevalent will military genius also be found. But this merely applies to its prevalence, by no means to its degree, for that depends on the general state of intellectual culture in the country. If we look at a wild, warlike race, then we find a warlike spirit in individuals much more common than in a civilised people; for in the former almost



every warrior possesses it, whilst in the civilised whole, masses are only carried away by it from necessity, never by inclination. But amongst uncivilised people we never find a really great General, and very seldom what we can properly call a military genius, because that requires a development of the intelligent powers which cannot be found in an uncivilised state. That a civilised people may also have a warlike tendency and development is a matter of course; and the more this is general, the more frequently also will military spirit be found in individuals in their armies. Now as this coincides in such case with the higher degree of civilisation, therefore from such nations have issued forth the most brilliant military exploits, as the Romans and the French have exemplified. The greatest names in these and in all other nations that have been renowned in War belong strictly to epochs of higher culture.

From this we may infer how great a share the intelligent powers have in superior military genius. We shall now look more closely into this point.

War is the province of danger, and therefore courage above all things is the first quality of a warrior.

Courage is of two kinds: first, physical courage, or courage in presence of danger to the person; and next, moral courage, or courage before responsibility, whether it be before the judgment-seat of external authority, or of the inner power, the conscience. We only speak here of the first.



Courage before danger to the person, again, is of two kinds. First, it may be indifference to danger, whether proceeding from the organism of the individual, contempt of death, or habit: in any of these cases it is to be regarded as a permanent condition.

Secondly, courage may proceed from positive motives, such as personal pride, patriotism, enthusiasm of any kind. In this case courage is not so much a normal condition as an impulse.

We may conceive that the two kinds act differently. The first kind is more certain, because it has become a second nature, never forsakes the man; the second often leads him farther. In the first there is more of firmness, in the second, of boldness. The first leaves the judgment cooler, the second raises its power at times, but often bewilders it. The two combined make up the most perfect kind of courage.

War is the province of physical exertion and suffering. In order not to be completely overcome by them, a certain strength of body and mind is required, which, either natural or acquired, produces indifference to them. With these qualifications, under the guidance of simply a sound understanding, a man is at once a proper instrument for War; and these are the qualifications so generally to be met with amongst wild and half-civilised tribes. If we go further in the demands which War makes on it, then we find the powers of the understanding predominating. War is the province of uncertainty: three-fourths of those things upon which action



in War must be calculated, are hidden more or less in the clouds of great uncertainty. Here, then, above all a fine and penetrating mind is called for, to search out the truth by the tact of its judgment.

An average intellect may, at one time, perhaps hit upon this truth by accident; an extraordinary courage, at another, may compensate for the want of this tact; but in the majority of cases the average result will always bring to light the deficient understanding.

War is the province of chance. In no sphere of human activity is such a margin to be left for this intruder, because none is so much in constant contact with him on all sides. He increases the uncertainty of every circumstance, and deranges the course of events.

From this uncertainty of all intelligence and suppositions, this continual interposition of chance, the actor in War constantly finds things different from his expectations; and this cannot fail to have an influence on his plans, or at least on the presumptions connected with these plans. If this influence is so great as to render the pre-determined plan completely nugatory, then, as a rule, a new one must be substituted in its place; but at the moment the necessary data are often wanting for this, because in the course of action circumstances press for immediate decision, and allow no time to look about for fresh data, often not enough for mature consideration.

But it more often happens that the correction of one premise, and the knowledge of chance events which have



arisen, are not sufficient to overthrow our plans completely, but only suffice to produce hesitation. Our knowledge of circumstances has increased, but our uncertainty, instead of having diminished, has only increased. The reason of this is, that we do not gain all our experience at once, but by degrees; thus our determinations continue to be assailed incessantly by fresh experience; and the mind, if we may use the expression, must always be “under arms.”

Now, if it is to get safely through this perpetual conflict with the unexpected, two qualities are indispensable: in the first place an intellect which, even in the midst of this intense obscurity, is not without some traces of inner light, which lead to the truth, and then the courage to follow this faint light. The first is figuratively expressed by the French phrase *coup d’oeil*. The other is resolution. As the battle is the feature in War to which attention was originally chiefly directed, and as time and space are important elements in it, more particularly when cavalry with their rapid decisions were the chief arm, the idea of rapid and correct decision related in the first instance to the estimation of these two elements, and to denote the idea an expression was adopted which actually only points to a correct judgment by eye. Many teachers of the Art of War then gave this limited signification as the definition of *coup d’oeil*. But it is undeniable that all able decisions formed in the moment of action soon came to be understood by the expression, as, for instance, the hitting upon the right point of attack, etc. It is,



therefore, not only the physical, but more frequently the mental eye which is meant in coup d'oeil. Naturally, the expression, like the thing, is always more in its place in the field of tactics: still, it must not be wanting in strategy, inasmuch as in it rapid decisions are often necessary. If we strip this conception of that which the expression has given it of the over-figurative and restricted, then it amounts simply to the rapid discovery of a truth which to the ordinary mind is either not visible at all or only becomes so after long examination and reflection.

Resolution is an act of courage in single instances, and if it becomes a characteristic trait, it is a habit of the mind. But here we do not mean courage in face of bodily danger, but in face of responsibility, therefore, to a certain extent against moral danger. This has been often called courage d'esprit, on the ground that it springs from the understanding; nevertheless, it is no act of the understanding on that account; it is an act of feeling. Mere intelligence is still not courage, for we often see the cleverest people devoid of resolution. The mind must, therefore, first awaken the feeling of courage, and then be guided and supported by it, because in momentary emergencies the man is swayed more by his feelings than his thoughts.

We have assigned to resolution the office of removing the torments of doubt, and the dangers of delay, when there are no sufficient motives for guidance. Through the unscrupulous use of language which is prevalent, this term is



often applied to the mere propensity to daring, to bravery, boldness, or temerity. But, when there are sufficient motives in the man, let them be objective or subjective, true or false, we have no right to speak of his resolution; for, when we do so, we put ourselves in his place, and we throw into the scale doubts which did not exist with him.

Here there is no question of anything but of strength and weakness. We are not pedantic enough to dispute with the use of language about this little misapplication, our observation is only intended to remove wrong objections.

This resolution now, which overcomes the state of doubting, can only be called forth by the intellect, and, in fact, by a peculiar tendency of the same. We maintain that the mere union of a superior understanding and the necessary feelings are not sufficient to make up resolution. There are persons who possess the keenest perception for the most difficult problems, who are also not fearful of responsibility, and yet in cases of difficulty cannot come to a resolution. Their courage and their sagacity operate independently of each other, do not give each other a hand, and on that account do not produce resolution as a result. The forerunner of resolution is an act of the mind making evident the necessity of venturing, and thus influencing the will. This quite peculiar direction of the mind, which conquers every other fear in man by the fear of wavering or doubting, is what makes up resolution in strong minds; therefore, in our opinion, men who have little intelligence



can never be resolute. They may act without hesitation under perplexing circumstances, but then they act without reflection. Now, of course, when a man acts without reflection he cannot be at variance with himself by doubts, and such a mode of action may now and then lead to the right point; but we say now as before, it is the average result which indicates the existence of military genius. Should our assertion appear extraordinary to any one, because he knows many a resolute hussar officer who is no deep thinker, we must remind him that the question here is about a peculiar direction of the mind, and not about great thinking powers.

We believe, therefore, that resolution is indebted to a special direction of the mind for its existence, a direction which belongs to a strong head rather than to a brilliant one. In corroboration of this genealogy of resolution we may add that there have been many instances of men who have shown the greatest resolution in an inferior rank, and have lost it in a higher position. While, on the one hand, they are obliged to resolve, on the other they see the dangers of a wrong decision, and as they are surrounded with things new to them, their understanding loses its original force, and they become only the more timid the more they become aware of the danger of the irresolution into which they have fallen, and the more they have formerly been in the habit of acting on the spur of the moment.

From the coup d'oeil and resolution we are naturally to speak of its kindred quality, presence of mind, which in a



region of the unexpected like War must act a great part, for it is indeed nothing but a great conquest over the unexpected. As we admire presence of mind in a pithy answer to anything said unexpectedly, so we admire it in a ready expedient on sudden danger. Neither the answer nor the expedient need be in themselves extraordinary, if they only hit the point; for that which as the result of mature reflection would be nothing unusual, therefore insignificant in its impression on us, may as an instantaneous act of the mind produce a pleasing impression. The expression “presence of mind” certainly denotes very fitly the readiness and rapidity of the help rendered by the mind.

Whether this noble quality of a man is to be ascribed more to the peculiarity of his mind or to the equanimity of his feelings, depends on the nature of the case, although neither of the two can be entirely wanting. A telling repartee bespeaks rather a ready wit, a ready expedient on sudden danger implies more particularly a well-balanced mind.

If we take a general view of the four elements composing the atmosphere in which War moves, of danger, physical effort, uncertainty, and chance, it is easy to conceive that a great force of mind and understanding is requisite to be able to make way with safety and success amongst such opposing elements, a force which, according to the different modifications arising out of circumstances, we find termed by military writers and annalists as energy, firmness, staunchness, strength of mind and character. All these



manifestations of the heroic nature might be regarded as one and the same power of volition, modified according to circumstances; but nearly related as these things are to each other, still they are not one and the same, and it is desirable for us to distinguish here a little more closely at least the action of the powers of the soul in relation to them.

In the first place, to make the conception clear, it is essential to observe that the weight, burden, resistance, or whatever it may be called, by which that force of the soul in the General is brought to light, is only in a very small measure the enemy's activity, the enemy's resistance, the enemy's action directly. The enemy's activity only affects the General directly in the first place in relation to his person, without disturbing his action as Commander. If the enemy, instead of two hours, resists for four, the Commander instead of two hours is four hours in danger; this is a quantity which plainly diminishes the higher the rank of the Commander. What is it for one in the post of Commander-in-Chief? It is nothing.

Secondly, although the opposition offered by the enemy has a direct effect on the Commander through the loss of means arising from prolonged resistance, and the responsibility connected with that loss, and his force of will is first tested and called forth by these anxious considerations, still we maintain that this is not the heaviest burden by far which he has to bear, because he has only himself to settle with. All the other effects of the enemy's



resistance act directly upon the combatants under his command, and through them react upon him.

As long as his men full of good courage fight with zeal and spirit, it is seldom necessary for the Chief to show great energy of purpose in the pursuit of his object. But as soon as difficulties arise—and that must always happen when great results are at stake—then things no longer move on of themselves like a well-oiled machine, the machine itself then begins to offer resistance, and to overcome this the Commander must have a great force of will. By this resistance we must not exactly suppose disobedience and murmurs, although these are frequent enough with particular individuals; it is the whole feeling of the dissolution of all physical and moral power, it is the heartrending sight of the bloody sacrifice which the Commander has to contend with in himself, and then in all others who directly or indirectly transfer to him their impressions, feelings, anxieties, and desires. As the forces in one individual after another become prostrated, and can no longer be excited and supported by an effort of his own will, the whole inertia of the mass gradually rests its weight on the Will of the Commander: by the spark in his breast, by the light of his spirit, the spark of purpose, the light of hope, must be kindled afresh in others: in so far only as he is equal to this, he stands above the masses and continues to be their master; whenever that influence ceases, and his own spirit is no longer strong enough to revive the spirit of all others, the masses drawing



him down with them sink into the lower region of animal nature, which shrinks from danger and knows not shame. These are the weights which the courage and intelligent faculties of the military Commander have to overcome if he is to make his name illustrious. They increase with the masses, and therefore, if the forces in question are to continue equal to the burden, they must rise in proportion to the height of the station.

Energy in action expresses the strength of the motive through which the action is excited, let the motive have its origin in a conviction of the understanding, or in an impulse. But the latter can hardly ever be wanting where great force is to show itself.

Of all the noble feelings which fill the human heart in the exciting tumult of battle, none, we must admit, are so powerful and constant as the soul's thirst for honour and renown, which the German language treats so unfairly and tends to depreciate by the unworthy associations in the words *Ehrgeiz* (greed of honour) and *Ruhmsucht* (hankering after glory). No doubt it is just in War that the abuse of these proud aspirations of the soul must bring upon the human race the most shocking outrages, but by their origin they are certainly to be counted amongst the noblest feelings which belong to human nature, and in War they are the vivifying principle which gives the enormous body a spirit. Although other feelings may be more general in their influence, and many of them—such as love of country, fanaticism, revenge,



enthusiasm of every kind—may seem to stand higher, the thirst for honour and renown still remains indispensable. Those other feelings may rouse the great masses in general, and excite them more powerfully, but they do not give the Leader a desire to will more than others, which is an essential requisite in his position if he is to make himself distinguished in it. They do not, like a thirst for honour, make the military act specially the property of the Leader, which he strives to turn to the best account; where he ploughs with toil, sows with care, that he may reap plentifully. It is through these aspirations we have been speaking of in Commanders, from the highest to the lowest, this sort of energy, this spirit of emulation, these incentives, that the action of armies is chiefly animated and made successful. And now as to that which specially concerns the head of all, we ask, Has there ever been a great Commander destitute of the love of honour, or is such a character even conceivable?

Firmness denotes the resistance of the will in relation to the force of a single blow, STAUNCHNESS in relation to a continuance of blows. Close as is the analogy between the two, and often as the one is used in place of the other, still there is a notable difference between them which cannot be mistaken, inasmuch as firmness against a single powerful impression may have its root in the mere strength of a feeling, but staunchness must be supported rather by the understanding, for the greater the duration of an action the



more systematic deliberation is connected with it, and from this staunchness partly derives its power.

If we now turn to Strength of mind or soul, then the first question is, What are we to understand thereby?

Plainly it is not vehement expressions of feeling, nor easily excited passions, for that would be contrary to all the usage of language, but the power of listening to reason in the midst of the most intense excitement, in the storm of the most violent passions. Should this power depend on strength of understanding alone? We doubt it. The fact that there are men of the greatest intellect who cannot command themselves certainly proves nothing to the contrary, for we might say that it perhaps requires an understanding of a powerful rather than of a comprehensive nature; but we believe we shall be nearer the truth if we assume that the power of submitting oneself to the control of the understanding, even in moments of the most violent excitement of the feelings, that power which we call self-command, has its root in the heart itself. It is, in point of fact, another feeling, which in strong minds balances the excited passions without destroying them; and it is only through this equilibrium that the mastery of the understanding is secured. This counterpoise is nothing but a sense of the dignity of man, that noblest pride, that deeply-seated desire of the soul always to act as a being endued with understanding and reason. We may therefore say that a strong mind is one which does not lose its balance even under the most violent excitement.



If we cast a glance at the variety to be observed in the human character in respect to feeling, we find, first, some people who have very little excitability, who are called phlegmatic or indolent.

Secondly, some very excitable, but whose feelings still never overstep certain limits, and who are therefore known as men full of feeling, but sober-minded.

Thirdly, those who are very easily roused, whose feelings blaze up quickly and violently like gunpowder, but do not last.

Fourthly, and lastly, those who cannot be moved by slight causes, and who generally are not to be roused suddenly, but only gradually; but whose feelings become very powerful and are much more lasting. These are men with strong passions, lying deep and latent.

This difference of character lies probably close on the confines of the physical powers which move the human organism, and belongs to that amphibious organisation which we call the nervous system, which appears to be partly material, partly spiritual. With our weak philosophy, we shall not proceed further in this mysterious field. But it is important for us to spend a moment over the effects which these different natures have on, action in War, and to see how far a great strength of mind is to be expected from them.

Indolent men cannot easily be thrown out of their equanimity, but we cannot certainly say there is strength of mind where there is a want of all manifestation of power.



At the same time, it is not to be denied that such men have a certain peculiar aptitude for War, on account of their constant equanimity. They often want the positive motive to action, impulse, and consequently activity, but they are not apt to throw things into disorder.

The peculiarity of the second class is that they are easily excited to act on trifling grounds, but in great matters they are easily overwhelmed. Men of this kind show great activity in helping an unfortunate individual, but by the distress of a whole Nation they are only inclined to despond, not roused to action.

Such people are not deficient in either activity or equanimity in War; but they will never accomplish anything great unless a great intellectual force furnishes the motive, and it is very seldom that a strong, independent mind is combined with such a character.

Excitable, inflammable feelings are in themselves little suited for practical life, and therefore they are not very fit for War. They have certainly the advantage of strong impulses, but that cannot long sustain them. At the same time, if the excitability in such men takes the direction of courage, or a sense of honour, they may often be very useful in inferior positions in War, because the action in War over which commanders in inferior positions have control is generally of shorter duration. Here one courageous resolution, one effervescence of the forces of the soul, will often suffice. A brave attack, a soul-stirring hurrah, is the work of a few



moments, whilst a brave contest on the battle-field is the work of a day, and a campaign the work of a year.

Owing to the rapid movement of their feelings, it is doubly difficult for men of this description to preserve equilibrium of the mind; therefore they frequently lose head, and that is the worst phase in their nature as respects the conduct of War. But it would be contrary to experience to maintain that very excitable spirits can never preserve a steady equilibrium—that is to say, that they cannot do so even under the strongest excitement. Why should they not have the sentiment of self-respect, for, as a rule, they are men of a noble nature? This feeling is seldom wanting in them, but it has not time to produce an effect. After an outburst they suffer most from a feeling of inward humiliation. If through education, self-observance, and experience of life, they have learned, sooner or later, the means of being on their guard, so that at the moment of powerful excitement they are conscious betimes of the counteracting force within their own breasts, then even such men may have great strength of mind.

Lastly, those who are difficult to move, but on that account susceptible of very deep feelings, men who stand in the same relation to the preceding as red heat to a flame, are the best adapted by means of their Titanic strength to roll away the enormous masses by which we may figuratively represent the difficulties which beset command in War. The effect of their feelings is like the movement of a great body, slower, but more irresistible.



Although such men are not so likely to be suddenly surprised by their feelings and carried away so as to be afterwards ashamed of themselves, like the preceding, still it would be contrary to experience to believe that they can never lose their equanimity, or be overcome by blind passion; on the contrary, this must always happen whenever the noble pride of self-control is wanting, or as often as it has not sufficient weight. We see examples of this most frequently in men of noble minds belonging to savage nations, where the low degree of mental cultivation favours always the dominance of the passions. But even amongst the most civilised classes in civilised States, life is full of examples of this kind—of men carried away by the violence of their passions, like the poacher of old chained to the stag in the forest.

We therefore say once more a strong mind is not one that is merely susceptible of strong excitement, but one which can maintain its serenity under the most powerful excitement, so that, in spite of the storm in the breast, the perception and judgment can act with perfect freedom, like the needle of the compass in the storm-tossed ship.

By the term strength of character, or simply character, is denoted tenacity of conviction, let it be the result of our own or of others' views, and whether they are principles, opinions, momentary inspirations, or any kind of emanations of the understanding; but this kind of firmness certainly cannot manifest itself if the views themselves are subject to



frequent change. This frequent change need not be the consequence of external influences; it may proceed from the continuous activity of our own mind, in which case it indicates a characteristic unsteadiness of mind. Evidently we should not say of a man who changes his views every moment, however much the motives of change may originate with himself, that he has character. Only those men, therefore, can be said to have this quality whose conviction is very constant, either because it is deeply rooted and clear in itself, little liable to alteration, or because, as in the case of indolent men, there is a want of mental activity, and therefore a want of motives to change; or lastly, because an explicit act of the will, derived from an imperative maxim of the understanding, refuses any change of opinion up to a certain point.

Now in War, owing to the many and powerful impressions to which the mind is exposed, and in the uncertainty of all knowledge and of all science, more things occur to distract a man from the road he has entered upon, to make him doubt himself and others, than in any other human activity.

The harrowing sight of danger and suffering easily leads to the feelings gaining ascendancy over the conviction of the understanding; and in the twilight which surrounds everything a deep clear view is so difficult that a change of opinion is more conceivable and more pardonable. It is, at all times, only conjecture or guesses at truth which we have to



act upon. This is why differences of opinion are nowhere so great as in War, and the stream of impressions acting counter to one's own convictions never ceases to flow. Even the greatest impassibility of mind is hardly proof against them, because the impressions are powerful in their nature, and always act at the same time upon the feelings.

When the discernment is clear and deep, none but general principles and views of action from a high standpoint can be the result; and on these principles the opinion in each particular case immediately under consideration lies, as it were, at anchor. But to keep to these results of bygone reflection, in opposition to the stream of opinions and phenomena which the present brings with it, is just the difficulty. Between the particular case and the principle there is often a wide space which cannot always be traversed on a visible chain of conclusions, and where a certain faith in self is necessary and a certain amount of scepticism is serviceable.

Here often nothing else will help us but an imperative maxim which, independent of reflection, at once controls it: that maxim is, in all doubtful cases to adhere to the first opinion, and not to give it up until a clear conviction forces us to do so. We must firmly believe in the superior authority of well-tried maxims, and under the dazzling influence of momentary events not forget that their value is of an inferior stamp. By this preference which in doubtful cases we give to first convictions, by adherence to the same our actions



acquire that stability and consistency which make up what is called character.

It is easy to see how essential a well-balanced mind is to strength of character; therefore men of strong minds generally have a great deal of character.

Force of character leads us to a spurious variety of it—obstinacy.

It is often very difficult in concrete cases to say where the one ends and the other begins; on the other hand, it does not seem difficult to determine the difference in idea.

Obstinacy is no fault of the understanding; we use the term as denoting a resistance against our better judgment, and it would be inconsistent to charge that to the understanding, as the understanding is the power of judgment. Obstinacy is a fault of the feelings or heart. This inflexibility of will, this impatience of contradiction, have their origin only in a particular kind of egotism, which sets above every other pleasure that of governing both self and others by its own mind alone. We should call it a kind of vanity, were it not decidedly something better. Vanity is satisfied with mere show, but obstinacy rests upon the enjoyment of the thing.

We say, therefore, force of character degenerates into obstinacy whenever the resistance to opposing judgments proceeds not from better convictions or a reliance upon a trustworthy maxim, but from a feeling of opposition. If this definition, as we have already admitted, is of little assistance



practically, still it will prevent obstinacy from being considered merely force of character intensified, whilst it is something essentially different—something which certainly lies close to it and is cognate to it, but is at the same time so little an intensification of it that there are very obstinate men who from want of understanding have very little force of character.

Having in these high attributes of a great military Commander made ourselves acquainted with those qualities in which heart and head co-operate, we now come to a speciality of military activity which perhaps may be looked upon as the most marked if it is not the most important, and which only makes a demand on the power of the mind without regard to the forces of feelings. It is the connection which exists between War and country or ground.

This connection is, in the first place, a permanent condition of War, for it is impossible to imagine our organised Armies effecting any operation otherwise than in some given space; it is, secondly, of the most decisive importance, because it modifies, at times completely alters, the action of all forces; thirdly, while on the one hand it often concerns the most minute features of locality, on the other it may apply to immense tracts of country.

In this manner a great peculiarity is given to the effect of this connection of War with country and ground. If we think of other occupations of man which have a relation to these objects, on horticulture, agriculture, on building houses and



hydraulic works, on mining, on the chase, and forestry, they are all confined within very limited spaces which may be soon explored with sufficient exactness. But the Commander in War must commit the business he has in hand to a corresponding space which his eye cannot survey, which the keenest zeal cannot always explore, and with which, owing to the constant changes taking place, he can also seldom become properly acquainted. Certainly the enemy generally is in the same situation; still, in the first place, the difficulty, although common to both, is not the less a difficulty, and he who by talent and practice overcomes it will have a great advantage on his side; secondly, this equality of the difficulty on both sides is merely an abstract supposition which is rarely realised in the particular case, as one of the two opponents (the defensive) usually knows much more of the locality than his adversary.

This very peculiar difficulty must be overcome by a natural mental gift of a special kind which is known by the—too restricted—term of Orisinn sense of locality. It is the power of quickly forming a correct geometrical idea of any portion of country, and consequently of being able to find one's place in it exactly at any time. This is plainly an act of the imagination. The perception no doubt is formed partly by means of the physical eye, partly by the mind, which fills up what is wanting with ideas derived from knowledge and experience, and out of the fragments visible to the physical eye forms a whole; but that this whole should present itself vividly to the



reason, should become a picture, a mentally drawn map, that this picture should be fixed, that the details should never again separate themselves—all that can only be effected by the mental faculty which we call imagination. If some great poet or painter should feel hurt that we require from his goddess such an office; if he shrugs his shoulders at the notion that a sharp gamekeeper must necessarily excel in imagination, we readily grant that we only speak here of imagination in a limited sense, of its service in a really menial capacity. But, however slight this service, still it must be the work of that natural gift, for if that gift is wanting, it would be difficult to imagine things plainly in all the completeness of the visible. That a good memory is a great assistance we freely allow, but whether memory is to be considered as an independent faculty of the mind in this case, or whether it is just that power of imagination which here fixes these things better on the memory, we leave undecided, as in many respects it seems difficult upon the whole to conceive these two mental powers apart from each other.

That practice and mental acuteness have much to do with it is not to be denied. Puysegur, the celebrated Quartermaster-General of the famous Luxemburg, used to say that he had very little confidence in himself in this respect at first, because if he had to fetch the parole from a distance he always lost his way.

It is natural that scope for the exercise of this talent should increase along with rank. If the hussar and rifleman



in command of a patrol must know well all the highways and byways, and if for that a few marks, a few limited powers of observation, are sufficient, the Chief of an Army must make himself familiar with the general geographical features of a province and of a country; must always have vividly before his eyes the direction of the roads, rivers, and hills, without at the same time being able to dispense with the narrower “sense of locality” Orisinn. No doubt, information of various kinds as to objects in general, maps, books, memoirs, and for details the assistance of his Staff, are a great help to him; but it is nevertheless certain that if he has himself a talent for forming an ideal picture of a country quickly and distinctly, it lends to his action an easier and firmer step, saves him from a certain mental helplessness, and makes him less dependent on others.

If this talent then is to be ascribed to imagination, it is also almost the only service which military activity requires from that erratic goddess, whose influence is more hurtful than useful in other respects.

We think we have now passed in review those manifestations of the powers of mind and soul which military activity requires from human nature. Everywhere intellect appears as an essential co-operative force; and thus we can understand how the work of War, although so plain and simple in its effects, can never be conducted with distinguished success by people without distinguished powers of the understanding.



When we have reached this view, then we need no longer look upon such a natural idea as the turning an enemy's position, which has been done a thousand times, and a hundred other similar conceptions, as the result of a great effort of genius.

Certainly one is accustomed to regard the plain honest soldier as the very opposite of the man of reflection, full of inventions and ideas, or of the brilliant spirit shining in the ornaments of refined education of every kind. This antithesis is also by no means devoid of truth; but it does not show that the efficiency of the soldier consists only in his courage, and that there is no particular energy and capacity of the brain required in addition to make a man merely what is called a true soldier. We must again repeat that there is nothing more common than to hear of men losing their energy on being raised to a higher position, to which they do not feel themselves equal; but we must also remind our readers that we are speaking of pre-eminent services, of such as give renown in the branch of activity to which they belong. Each grade of command in War therefore forms its own stratum of requisite capacity of fame and honour.

An immense space lies between a General—that is, one at the head of a whole War, or of a theatre of War—and his Second in Command, for the simple reason that the latter is in more immediate subordination to a superior authority and supervision, consequently is restricted to a more limited sphere of independent thought. This is why



common opinion sees no room for the exercise of high talent except in high places, and looks upon an ordinary capacity as sufficient for all beneath: this is why people are rather inclined to look upon a subordinate General grown grey in the service, and in whom constant discharge of routine duties has produced a decided poverty of mind, as a man of failing intellect, and, with all respect for his bravery, to laugh at his simplicity. It is not our object to gain for these brave men a better lot—that would contribute nothing to their efficiency, and little to their happiness; we only wish to represent things as they are, and to expose the error of believing that a mere bravo without intellect can make himself distinguished in War.

As we consider distinguished talents requisite for those who are to attain distinction, even in inferior positions, it naturally follows that we think highly of those who fill with renown the place of Second in Command of an Army; and their seeming simplicity of character as compared with a polyhistor, with ready men of business, or with councillors of state, must not lead us astray as to the superior nature of their intellectual activity. It happens sometimes that men import the fame gained in an inferior position into a higher one, without in reality deserving it in the new position; and then if they are not much employed, and therefore not much exposed to the risk of showing their weak points, the judgment does not distinguish very exactly what degree of fame is really due to them; and thus such men are often the



occasion of too low an estimate being formed of the characteristics required to shine in certain situations.

For each station, from the lowest upwards, to render distinguished services in War, there must be a particular genius. But the title of genius, history and the judgment of posterity only confer, in general, on those minds which have shone in the highest rank, that of Commanders-in-Chief. The reason is that here, in point of fact, the demand on the reasoning and intellectual powers generally is much greater.

To conduct a whole War, or its great acts, which we call campaigns, to a successful termination, there must be an intimate knowledge of State policy in its higher relations. The conduct of the War and the policy of the State here coincide, and the General becomes at the same time the Statesman.

We do not give Charles XII. the name of a great genius, because he could not make the power of his sword subservient to a higher judgment and philosophy—could not attain by it to a glorious object. We do not give that title to Henry IV. (of France), because he did not live long enough to set at rest the relations of different States by his military activity, and to occupy himself in that higher field where noble feelings and a chivalrous disposition have less to do in mastering the enemy than in overcoming internal dissension.

In order that the reader may appreciate all that must be comprehended and judged of correctly at a glance by a General, we refer to the first chapter. We say the General



becomes a Statesman, but he must not cease to be the General. He takes into view all the relations of the State on the one hand; on the other, he must know exactly what he can do with the means at his disposal.

As the diversity, and undefined limits, of all the circumstances bring a great number of factors into consideration in War, as the most of these factors can only be estimated according to probability, therefore, if the Chief of an Army does not bring to bear upon them a mind with an intuitive perception of the truth, a confusion of ideas and views must take place, in the midst of which the judgment will become bewildered. In this sense, Buonaparte was right when he said that many of the questions which come before a General for decision would make problems for a mathematical calculation not unworthy of the powers of Newton or Euler.

What is here required from the higher powers of the mind is a sense of unity, and a judgment raised to such a compass as to give the mind an extraordinary faculty of vision which in its range allays and sets aside a thousand dim notions which an ordinary understanding could only bring to light with great effort, and over which it would exhaust itself. But this higher activity of the mind, this glance of genius, would still not become matter of history if the qualities of temperament and character of which we have treated did not give it their support.

Truth alone is but a weak motive of action with men, and hence there is always a great difference between knowing



and action, between science and art. The man receives the strongest impulse to action through the feelings, and the most powerful succour, if we may use the expression, through those faculties of heart and mind which we have considered under the terms of resolution, firmness, perseverance, and force of character.

If, however, this elevated condition of heart and mind in the General did not manifest itself in the general effects resulting from it, and could only be accepted on trust and faith, then it would rarely become matter of history.

All that becomes known of the course of events in War is usually very simple, and has a great sameness in appearance; no one on the mere relation of such events perceives the difficulties connected with them which had to be overcome. It is only now and again, in the memoirs of Generals or of those in their confidence, or by reason of some special historical inquiry directed to a particular circumstance, that a portion of the many threads composing the whole web is brought to light. The reflections, mental doubts, and conflicts which precede the execution of great acts are purposely concealed because they affect political interests, or the recollection of them is accidentally lost because they have been looked upon as mere scaffolding which had to be removed on the completion of the building.

If, now, in conclusion, without venturing upon a closer definition of the higher powers of the soul, we should admit a distinction in the intelligent faculties themselves according



to the common ideas established by language, and ask ourselves what kind of mind comes closest to military genius, then a look at the subject as well as at experience will tell us that searching rather than inventive minds, comprehensive minds rather than such as have a special bent, cool rather than fiery heads, are those to which in time of War we should prefer to trust the welfare of our women and children, the honour and the safety of our fatherland.

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Of Danger in War



Usually before we have learnt what danger really is, we form an idea of it which is rather attractive than repulsive. In the intoxication of enthusiasm, to fall upon the enemy at the charge—who cares then about bullets and men falling? To throw oneself, blinded by excitement for a moment, against cold death, uncertain whether we or another shall escape him, and all this close to the golden gate of victory, close to the rich fruit which ambition thirsts for—can this be difficult? It will not be difficult, and still less will it appear so. But such moments, which, however, are not the work of a single pulse-beat, as is supposed, but rather like doctors' draughts, must be taken diluted and spoilt by mixture with time—such moments, we say, are but few.

Let us accompany the novice to the battle-field. As we approach, the thunder of the cannon becoming plainer and



plainer is soon followed by the howling of shot, which attracts the attention of the inexperienced. Balls begin to strike the ground close to us, before and behind. We hasten to the hill where stands the General and his numerous Staff. Here the close striking of the cannon balls and the bursting of shells is so frequent that the seriousness of life makes itself visible through the youthful picture of imagination. Suddenly some one known to us falls—a shell strikes amongst the crowd and causes some involuntary movements—we begin to feel that we are no longer perfectly at ease and collected; even the bravest is at least to some degree confused. Now, a step farther into the battle which is raging before us like a scene in a theatre, we get to the nearest General of Division; here ball follows ball, and the noise of our own guns increases the confusion. From the General of Division to the Brigadier. He, a man of acknowledged bravery, keeps carefully behind a rising ground, a house, or a tree—a sure sign of increasing danger. Grape rattles on the roofs of the houses and in the fields; cannon balls howl over us, and plough the air in all directions, and soon there is a frequent whistling of musket balls. A step farther towards the troops, to that sturdy infantry which for hours has maintained its firmness under this heavy fire; here the air is filled with the hissing of balls which announce their proximity by a short sharp noise as they pass within an inch of the ear, the head, or the breast.

To add to all this, compassion strikes the beating heart with pity at the sight of the maimed and fallen. The young



soldier cannot reach any of these different strata of danger without feeling that the light of reason does not move here in the same medium, that it is not refracted in the same manner as in speculative contemplation. Indeed, he must be a very extraordinary man who, under these impressions for the first time, does not lose the power of making any instantaneous decisions. It is true that habit soon blunts such impressions; in half an hour we begin to be more or less indifferent to all that is going on around us: but an ordinary character never attains to complete coolness and the natural elasticity of mind; and so we perceive that here again ordinary qualities will not suffice—a thing which gains truth, the wider the sphere of activity which is to be filled. Enthusiastic, stoical, natural bravery, great ambition, or also long familiarity with danger—much of all this there must be if all the effects produced in this resistant medium are not to fall far short of that which in the student's chamber may appear only the ordinary standard.

Danger in War belongs to its friction; a correct idea of its influence is necessary for truth of perception, and therefore it is brought under notice here.

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Of Bodily Exertion in War



If no one were allowed to pass an opinion on the events of War, except at a moment when he is benumbed by frost, sinking from heat and thirst, or dying with hunger and fatigue, we should certainly have fewer judgments correct objectively; but they would be so, subjectively, at least; that is, they would contain in themselves the exact relation between the person giving the judgment and the object. We can perceive this by observing how modestly subdued, even spiritless and desponding, is the opinion passed upon the results of untoward events by those who have been eye-witnesses, but especially if they have been parties concerned. This is, according to our view, a criterion of the influence which bodily fatigue exercises, and of the allowance to be made for it in matters of opinion.



Amongst the many things in War for which no tariff can be fixed, bodily effort may be specially reckoned. Provided there is no waste, it is a coefficient of all the forces, and no one can tell exactly to what extent it may be carried. But what is remarkable is, that just as only a strong arm enables the archer to stretch the bowstring to the utmost extent, so also in War it is only by means of a great directing spirit that we can expect the full power latent in the troops to be developed. For it is one thing if an Army, in consequence of great misfortunes, surrounded with danger, falls all to pieces like a wall that has been thrown down, and can only find safety in the utmost exertion of its bodily strength; it is another thing entirely when a victorious Army, drawn on by proud feelings only, is conducted at the will of its Chief. The same effort which in the one case might at most excite our pity must in the other call forth our admiration, because it is much more difficult to sustain.

By this comes to light for the inexperienced eye one of those things which put fetters in the dark, as it were, on the action of the mind, and wear out in secret the powers of the soul.

Although here the question is strictly only respecting the extreme effort required by a Commander from his Army, by a leader from his followers, therefore of the spirit to demand it and of the art of getting it, still the personal physical exertion of Generals and of the Chief Commander must not be overlooked. Having brought the analysis of War



conscientiously up to this point, we could not but take account also of the weight of this small remaining residue.

We have spoken here of bodily effort, chiefly because, like danger, it belongs to the fundamental causes of friction, and because its indefinite quantity makes it like an elastic body, the friction of which is well known to be difficult to calculate.

To check the abuse of these considerations, of such a survey of things which aggravate the difficulties of War, nature has given our judgment a guide in our sensibilities, just as an individual cannot with advantage refer to his personal deficiencies if he is insulted and ill-treated, but may well do so if he has successfully repelled the affront, or has fully revenged it, so no Commander or Army will lessen the impression of a disgraceful defeat by depicting the danger, the distress, the exertions, things which would immensely enhance the glory of a victory. Thus our feeling, which after all is only a higher kind of judgment, forbids us to do what seems an act of justice to which our judgment would be inclined.

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Information in War



By the word “information” we denote all the knowledge which we have of the enemy and his country; therefore, in fact, the foundation of all our ideas and actions. Let us just consider the nature of this foundation, its want of trustworthiness, its changefulness, and we shall soon feel what a dangerous edifice War is, how easily it may fall to pieces and bury us in its ruins. For although it is a maxim in all books that we should trust only certain information, that we must be always suspicious, that is only a miserable book comfort, belonging to that description of knowledge in which writers of systems and compendiums take refuge for want of anything better to say.

Great part of the information obtained in War is contradictory, a still greater part is false, and by far the greatest part is of a doubtful character. What is required of



an officer is a certain power of discrimination, which only knowledge of men and things and good judgment can give. The law of probability must be his guide. This is not a trifling difficulty even in respect of the first plans, which can be formed in the chamber outside the real sphere of War, but it is enormously increased when in the thick of War itself one report follows hard upon the heels of another; it is then fortunate if these reports in contradicting each other show a certain balance of probability, and thus themselves call forth a scrutiny. It is much worse for the inexperienced when accident does not render him this service, but one report supports another, confirms it, magnifies it, finishes off the picture with fresh touches of colour, until necessity in urgent haste forces from us a resolution which will soon be discovered to be folly, all those reports having been lies, exaggerations, errors, etc. etc. In a few words, most reports are false, and the timidity of men acts as a multiplier of lies and untruths. As a general rule, every one is more inclined to lend credence to the bad than the good. Every one is inclined to magnify the bad in some measure, and although the alarms which are thus propagated like the waves of the sea subside into themselves, still, like them, without any apparent cause they rise again. Firm in reliance on his own better convictions, the Chief must stand like a rock against which the sea breaks its fury in vain. The role is not easy; he who is not by nature of a buoyant disposition, or trained by experience in War, and matured in judgment, may let it be



his rule to do violence to his own natural conviction by inclining from the side of fear to that of hope; only by that means will he be able to preserve his balance. This difficulty of seeing things correctly, which is one of the greatest sources of friction in War, makes things appear quite different from what was expected. The impression of the senses is stronger than the force of the ideas resulting from methodical reflection, and this goes so far that no important undertaking was ever yet carried out without the Commander having to subdue new doubts in himself at the time of commencing the execution of his work. Ordinary men who follow the suggestions of others become, therefore, generally undecided on the spot; they think that they have found circumstances different from what they had expected, and this view gains strength by their again yielding to the suggestions of others. But even the man who has made his own plans, when he comes to see things with his own eyes will often think he has done wrong. Firm reliance on self must make him proof against the seeming pressure of the moment; his first conviction will in the end prove true, when the foreground scenery which fate has pushed on to the stage of War, with its accompaniments of terrific objects, is drawn aside and the horizon extended. This is one of the great chasms which separate conception from execution.

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Friction in War



As long as we have no personal knowledge of War, we cannot conceive where those difficulties lie of which so much is said, and what that genius and those extraordinary mental powers required in a General have really to do. All appears so simple, all the requisite branches of knowledge appear so plain, all the combinations so unimportant, that in comparison with them the easiest problem in higher mathematics impresses us with a certain scientific dignity. But if we have seen War, all becomes intelligible; and still, after all, it is extremely difficult to describe what it is which brings about this change, to specify this invisible and completely efficient factor.

Everything is very simple in War, but the simplest thing is difficult. These difficulties accumulate and produce a friction which no man can imagine exactly who has not seen



War, Suppose now a traveller, who towards evening expects to accomplish the two stages at the end of his day's journey, four or five leagues, with post-horses, on the high road—it is nothing. He arrives now at the last station but one, finds no horses, or very bad ones; then a hilly country, bad roads; it is a dark night, and he is glad when, after a great deal of trouble, he reaches the next station, and finds there some miserable accommodation. So in War, through the influence of an infinity of petty circumstances, which cannot properly be described on paper, things disappoint us, and we fall short of the mark. A powerful iron will overcomes this friction; it crushes the obstacles, but certainly the machine along with them. We shall often meet with this result. Like an obelisk towards which the principal streets of a town converge, the strong will of a proud spirit stands prominent and commanding in the middle of the Art of War.

Friction is the only conception which in a general way corresponds to that which distinguishes real War from War on paper. The military machine, the Army and all belonging to it, is in fact simple, and appears on this account easy to manage. But let us reflect that no part of it is in one piece, that it is composed entirely of individuals, each of which keeps up its own friction in all directions. Theoretically all sounds very well: the commander of a battalion is responsible for the execution of the order given; and as the battalion by its discipline is glued together into one piece, and the chief must be a man of acknowledged zeal, the beam turns on an iron pin



with little friction. But it is not so in reality, and all that is exaggerated and false in such a conception manifests itself at once in War. The battalion always remains composed of a number of men, of whom, if chance so wills, the most insignificant is able to occasion delay and even irregularity. The danger which War brings with it, the bodily exertions which it requires, augment this evil so much that they may be regarded as the greatest causes of it.

This enormous friction, which is not concentrated, as in mechanics, at a few points, is therefore everywhere brought into contact with chance, and thus incidents take place upon which it was impossible to calculate, their chief origin being chance. As an instance of one such chance: the weather. Here the fog prevents the enemy from being discovered in time, a battery from firing at the right moment, a report from reaching the General; there the rain prevents a battalion from arriving at the right time, because instead of for three it had to march perhaps eight hours; the cavalry from charging effectively because it is stuck fast in heavy ground.

These are only a few incidents of detail by way of elucidation, that the reader may be able to follow the author, for whole volumes might be written on these difficulties. To avoid this, and still to give a clear conception of the host of small difficulties to be contended with in War, we might go on heaping up illustrations, if we were not afraid of being tiresome. But those who have already comprehended us will permit us to add a few more.



Activity in War is movement in a resistant medium. Just as a man immersed in water is unable to perform with ease and regularity the most natural and simplest movement, that of walking, so in War, with ordinary powers, one cannot keep even the line of mediocrity. This is the reason that the correct theorist is like a swimming master, who teaches on dry land movements which are required in the water, which must appear grotesque and ludicrous to those who forget about the water. This is also why theorists, who have never plunged in themselves, or who cannot deduce any generalities from their experience, are unpractical and even absurd, because they only teach what every one knows—how to walk.

Further, every War is rich in particular facts, while at the same time each is an unexplored sea, full of rocks which the General may have a suspicion of, but which he has never seen with his eye, and round which, moreover, he must steer in the night. If a contrary wind also springs up, that is, if any great accidental event declares itself adverse to him, then the most consummate skill, presence of mind, and energy are required, whilst to those who only look on from a distance all seems to proceed with the utmost ease. The knowledge of this friction is a chief part of that so often talked of, experience in War, which is required in a good General. Certainly he is not the best General in whose mind it assumes the greatest dimensions, who is the most over-awed by it (this includes that class of over-anxious Generals, of whom there are so



many amongst the experienced); but a General must be aware of it that he may overcome it, where that is possible, and that he may not expect a degree of precision in results which is impossible on account of this very friction. Besides, it can never be learnt theoretically; and if it could, there would still be wanting that experience of judgment which is called tact, and which is always more necessary in a field full of innumerable small and diversified objects than in great and decisive cases, when one's own judgment may be aided by consultation with others. Just as the man of the world, through tact of judgment which has become habit, speaks, acts, and moves only as suits the occasion, so the officer experienced in War will always, in great and small matters, at every pulsation of War as we may say, decide and determine suitably to the occasion. Through this experience and practice the idea comes to his mind of itself that so and so will not suit. And thus he will not easily place himself in a position by which he is compromised, which, if it often occurs in War, shakes all the foundations of confidence and becomes extremely dangerous.

It is therefore this friction, or what is so termed here, which makes that which appears easy in War difficult in reality. As we proceed, we shall often meet with this subject again, and it will hereafter become plain that besides experience and a strong will, there are still many other rare qualities of the mind required to make a man a consummate General.

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Concluding Remarks,



Those things which as elements meet together in the atmosphere of War and make it a resistant medium for every activity we have designated under the terms danger, bodily effort (exertion), information, and friction. In their impeding effects they may therefore be comprehended again in the collective notion of a general friction. Now is there, then, no kind of oil which is capable of diminishing this friction? Only one, and that one is not always available at the will of the Commander or his Army. It is the habituation of an Army to War.

Habit gives strength to the body in great exertion, to the mind in great danger, to the judgment against first impressions. By it a valuable circumspection is generally gained throughout every rank, from the hussar and rifleman up to the General of Division, which facilitates the work of the Chief Commander.



As the human eye in a dark room dilates its pupil, draws in the little light that there is, partially distinguishes objects by degrees, and at last knows them quite well, so it is in War with the experienced soldier, whilst the novice is only met by pitch dark night.

Habituation to War no General can give his Army at once, and the camps of manoeuvre (peace exercises) furnish but a weak substitute for it, weak in comparison with real experience in War, but not weak in relation to other Armies in which the training is limited to mere mechanical exercises of routine. So to regulate the exercises in peace time as to include some of these causes of friction, that the judgment, circumspection, even resolution of the separate leaders may be brought into exercise, is of much greater consequence than those believe who do not know the thing by experience. It is of immense importance that the soldier, high or low, whatever rank he has, should not have to encounter in War those things which, when seen for the first time, set him in astonishment and perplexity; if he has only met with them one single time before, even by that he is half acquainted with them. This relates even to bodily fatigues. They should be practised less to accustom the body to them than the mind. In War the young soldier is very apt to regard unusual fatigues as the consequence of faults, mistakes, and embarrassment in the conduct of the whole, and to become distressed and despondent as a consequence. This would not happen if he had been prepared for this beforehand by exercises in peace.



Another less comprehensive but still very important means of gaining habituation to War in time of peace is to invite into the service officers of foreign armies who have had experience in War. Peace seldom reigns over all Europe, and never in all quarters of the world. A State which has been long at peace should, therefore, always seek to procure some officers who have done good service at the different scenes of Warfare, or to send there some of its own, that they may get a lesson in War.

However small the number of officers of this description may appear in proportion to the mass, still their influence is very sensibly felt. [The War of 1870 furnishes a marked illustration. Von Moltke and von Goeben, not to mention many others, had both seen service in this manner, the former in Turkey and Syria, the latter in Spain—Editor] Their experience, the bent of their genius, the stamp of their character, influence their subordinates and comrades; and besides that, if they cannot be placed in positions of superior command, they may always be regarded as men acquainted with the country, who may be questioned on many special occasions.

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