

NIETZSCHE

On August 25, at Weimar, one whom Mr. Havlock Ellis well describes as a "tragic figure" passed from the world. A tragic figure, indeed, was Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche! Profound speculator and brilliant litterateur—"one of the greatest spiritual forces which have appeared since Goethe," if the eulogy of his chief English biographer can be accepted, the bearer of a name familiar in all philosophic circles, Nietzsche devoted gifts of the rarest kind to the exposition of perhaps the most dismal gospel the human brain could conceive. It was not merely the negation, it was the antithesis, of Christianity, which the author of the "Zarathustra" sought to popularise. The undertaking on which he embarked was nothing less than a crusade against the moral system of his age! Self-culture, self-perfection is the supreme law of our being. The ancients had solved the riddle of human destiny, and under the guidance of the Epicureans mankind was in a fair way of attaining a stage of development as superior to the existing one as the stage it had reached was to that of its anthropoid ancestors. But Christianity made its appearance, and transformed the ideals of the race. It substituted a moral standard for the physiological and intellectual one decreed, as Nietzsche held, by Nature itself, and embraced by the Greek philosophers and their Roman disciples. It was the object of the "Zarathustra"—the "profoundest book," said its author, "mankind possesses"—to bring back to the world's memory a forgotten truth. Nature knows no morals, and to attempt to impose upon mankind a scheme of morality, good or bad, is to hamper human development.

In the dearth of great speculative writers which the last half-century has witnessed, it is not difficult to understand the influence exercised by Nietzsche over Continental thought. A new creed is always in demand; and there was a certain piquancy in one which not only obliterated God, but morality itself, from the scheme of things. Nietzsche spoke with a certain tone of academic authority. Born at Lutzen, in Saxony, in 1844, he had a brilliant career in the Bonn University. In his twenty-fifth year he became professor of philology at the University of Basle, a post he retained till 1880. His fate, the most awful known to our kind, may have contributed to the interest awakened by his personality and writings. In 1889 he lost his reason. Enforced service in

personality and writings. In 1889 he lost his reason. Enforced service in the battlefield two decades before had told upon his health, but his admirers are more disposed to attribute to mortification over the inadequacy of the response to his mission, his passage across the dividing line that separates genius from insanity. Popularity, such a creed as is unfolded in the "Zarathustra" is hardly calculated to win. But the Nietzschean philosophy, we have the assurance of the London "Daily News," is making "great progress on the Continent." And it is certainly not difficult to find traces of its influence in the literature of the day. The doctrine that "man alone is and must be our God"—is not this in some form or another the foundation of a hundred current philosophies? The doctrine of freedom for the human will has a thousand apostles, from Tolstoi down or up to Ibsen. But it has none so thoroughgoing as Nietzsche. George Eliot, as Mr. Myers tells us in a memorable essay, was so far convinced of Man's self-sufficiency as to have got rid of God and immortality. But one external influence she still recognised — that of Duty. Mill believed—and the belief is the *raison d'être* of that modern school of utilitarians known as Positivists—that morality would gain by divorce from theology. But Nietzsche threw overboard theology and morality alike. Pain and wickedness, so far from being the blots upon the universe represented by Christianity, were, in his view, essential to human development. "It is with man as with the tree, the higher he would climb into the brightness above, the more vigorously his roots must strike earthwards, downwards, into the darkness and the depths—into wickedness. It is the ploughshare of wickedness which turns up and fertilises the exhausted fields of goodness." A man should have freedom of choice between good and evil, and his inclination towards either should not be warped by early training or by public sentiment embodied in any code of morality. Strength, beauty, and intellect were the only factors in human development recognised before the irruption into the Roman Empire of the degraded hordes of the East led to the proclamation of a new gospel. The only gospel that suited a servile population was one that taught the duty of care and love for the meek and lowly. As gradually the civilised world fell under the sway of Christianity, the seeds of a "fundamental enfeeblement" were

"fundamental enfeeblement" were sown among the race. The obligation of preserving the physiologically and mentally unfit was inculcated in defiance of natural law, and the first lesson mankind has now to learn is the need of pitilessness!

"Blessed are the strong, for they shall inherit the earth," is the outcome of the teaching of "Zarathustra." The clever and the strong are to regard the restraints of morality as barbarous fetters imposed upon them in the interests of the unfit. Let the unfit perish, and the human race in course of ages will become in mind and body "even as the gods." The strong and the clever will not be shouldered out of the universe for the benefit of the down-trodden, the wretched, the ill-conditioned, the unfortunate. The theory that underlies this grotesque philosophy has perhaps at first sight a certain plausibility. And in some of its aspects it is countenanced by high authority. A distinguished prelate has affirmed, for example, that the morality of the Sermon on the Mount, though obligatory upon the individual, is not applicable to that collection of individuals we call the State. And similarly Nietzsche's glorification of the purifying influence of war is not without ecclesiastical sanction. A leading divine not long ago contributed to the "Times" a glowing panegyric upon the anthems chanted by the guns resonating through the valleys of South Africa. But it is not in this way that the common sense of the world regards war. War, though to be faced, and even to be accepted with enthusiasm for other ends, is not to be incurred as a remedy for the "canker" of peace. The violent passions of humanity as exercised on the battlefield do not suspend, much less cure, the mean ones of the home or the street. Swindlers, burglars, fraudulent shopkeepers, and wife-beaters do not change their ways when "the troopship's on the tide," but on the other hand, to the common list of rogueries invariably are added those of commissaries and contractors. But this is a small matter beside the fundamental error which vitiates the teaching of Nietzsche and others who share his principles. The law of evolution, as Huxley has shown, is not fatal to the practice of the virtues. The "fittest" whose survival it decrees are only the types which are adapted to the environment. But mankind differs from the brute creation in the fact that it can largely control its environment: and slowly but surely it has

learned that a better way to ensure the survival of the fittest than that of exterminating the unfit is to adjust the environment so that all may be fitted to survive. A higher wisdom than that of Nietzsche teaches that man will not progress by stifling all the instincts that distinguish him from the brute.