

WHO WAS NIETZSCHE? What Was He?

Some of us (let it be admitted with more enthusiasm than knowledge) used, in the early days of the war, to denounce Nietzsche as the madman philosopher whose teaching had served to change the German character from an unimpeachable idealism to ruthless jackbootery. It was Nietzsche, so we suggested, who had thrown the fair-haired Teutonic dreamer into the Rhine and had set up the image of a rampaging Blonde Beast for Germany to worship and imitate. Perhaps we exaggerated. Men do exaggerate in war time.

It is true that Nietzsche himself was anti-Prussian, but even Mr. Janko Lavrin, in his recently published and most interesting "Nietzsche and Modern Consciousness" (Collins), admits that "some official German imperialists proclaimed the bitter anti-German Nietzsche almost as their patron saint, making him nominally a participant in the ideology of that grabbing nationalism that was one of the causes of the European war." And who can blame them? (asks Sidney Dark, in "John o' London's Weekly"). Here are some passages from the philosopher's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra":—

"Ye shall love peace as a means to new wars—and the short peace more than the long."

"Chastity is a virtue with some, but with many almost a vice."

"Man shall be trained for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior. All else is folly."

Masters and Slaves.

The Prussian militarists may not have understood Nietzsche's philosophy, but they must have found maxims like these much to their taste. What is the philosophy? Nietzsche divided men into masters and slaves, the men destined by race and character to command and the rest whose business it is to obey. There is considerable similarity in the points of view of Nietzsche and Carlyle, whose hero-worship caused him to admire that scoundrel, Frederick the Great. Nietzsche despaired of the world because the great men were losing their hold, owing to the advance of the democracy that he loathed. Equality to him was ridiculous. The weak are not to be pitied but commanded. There are two moralities, one for the masters and another for the slaves, and religion is merely one of the means used by the strong to enforce their will.

Unless the strong man asserts himself, possesses to the full the Will to Power, is consumed by an egotism that enforces the trampling down of the weaklings in the path, discards the idea that there is any such thing as absolute good and evil, and takes as his motto, "He not con-

is any such thing as absolute good and evil, and takes as his motto, "He not considerate of thy neighbor," then power will pass to the weak, and this means chaos. But if the strong man is true to his own strength, subjecting himself to a rigid discipline, the superman will in time evolve. "Man," wrote Nietzsche, "is a rope swung between animal and superman. And again—"Dead are all gods, now we will that supermen live."

Man a Disease.

The mass of men are just rabble. The Christian is taught that man is only a little lower than the angels. Nietzsche said:—"The earth has a skin; and this skin hath diseases. One of these diseases is called man." Whatever Nietzsche was he was definitely anti-Christian. He hated pity. He hated brotherliness. To him forgiveness was offensive. To be the recipient of a gracious act of kindness was to lose one's manliness. "A right which thou cannot seize upon shalt thou not allow to be given thee."

Nietzsche was anti-Christian, but he was not original. His philosophy was the philosophy of Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia, and, in the middle of the nineteenth century, of that queer Frenchman, Gobineau, who, according to Dr. Oscar Levy, believed that "our moral values, the values of Democracy, Socialism, Liberalism, Christianity, lead to the survival of a type of man who has no right to survive." Gobineau actually excused Cesare Borgia's audacious wickedness. He wrote:—"The great law of this world is, not to do this or that, to avoid one thing and run after another; it is to live, to enlarge and develop one's most active and lofty qualities, in such a way that from any sphere we can always hew ourselves out a way to one that is wider, nobler, more elevated. Never forget that. Walk straight on. Do only what pleases you, but only do it if it likewise serves you."

This is the doctrine of Nietzsche, a fierce masculinity, scorning, like the Italian Futurist poet, Marinetti, all the gentle virtues as puerile and feminine. Nietzsche was a sickly man who spent his life parting with illusions and breaking with his friends, and after, and perhaps because, he had lived for years, as Mr. Lavrin says, "now in the highest pitch of Dionysian ecstasies, a little later in the depths of dejection and despondency," finally lost his reason in 1889. The cult of the great man has been unfortunate in its apostles. Carlyle was a disagreeable dyspeptic. Dr. Levy tells us that Gobineau was a very gloomy person, and Nietzsche went mad.

The real truth, of course, is that it is certainly not by becoming "puffed up" that man approaches the superman. It is the meek who inherit the earth. The teaching of Nietzsche is not only opposed to traditional faiths, it is contradicted by generations of human experience. He writes:—

O Zarathustra,
Cruelest Nimrod!
Of late still a hunter of God,
A spider's web to capture virtue,
An arrow of evil!
Now
Hunted by thyself,
Thine own prey
Caught in the grip of thine own soul.

The Antithesis.

Here the idea is the exact antithesis of the idea of Nietzsche. The antithesis of

Here the idea is the exact antithesis of the idea of Francis Thompson's "The Hound of Heaven." Zarathustra hunts God and this presumption makes him the hunter of himself. To Thompson, God is the hunter:

I fled Him down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him down the arches of the years;

I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the mist of
tears,

I hid from Him and under running
laughter,

Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms of chasm'd
fears,

From those strong Feet that followed,
followed after.

And when the chase is ended the quarry finds that his gloom is "shade of his hand, outstretched caressingly."

I do not suggest that the more beautiful of two theories is necessarily the true one. If that were so, Thompson would assuredly "have it." I do suggest that Thompson is expressing normal and one gratefully adds beautiful normal human experience, while Nietzsche records the pitiful blunderings of an abnormal and morbid individual. I am not prepared with any glib explanation of the "mystery of pain." But I do not believe that the sick man, just because he is sick, is qualified to guide the steps of those who are whole. Certainly, pain sometimes embitters, sometimes aggravates egotism, as in Henry when he asserted:--

It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the
scroll,

I am the master of my fate.

I am the captain of my soul.

An assertion, by the way, obviously untrue of Henry and every other man. But pain often ennobles. It often induces just those goes that Nietzsche most hated. As when Stevenson asked pardon:

If I have faltered more or less

In my great task of happiness;

If I have moved among my race

And shown no glorious morning face,

Disseas'd Nietzsche taught that salvation comes from bashing away at the weak. But the true philosophy is still the old philosophy.