

NIETZSCHE AND HIS DOCTRINE.

A CRUCIAL QUESTION OF NATURAL HISTORY.

We have before us four volumes of "the complete and authorised English translation" of the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, which is now being prepared under the editorship of Dr. Oscar Levy (says the "Westminster Gazette"). These include "Beyond Good and Evil," the two volumes of "Thoughts out of Season" and the early Essay entitled "The Birth of Tragedy." The translators include Dr. Hausmann, Mr. Anthony Ludovici, Miss Helen Zimmern, and Mr. Adrian Collins. We cannot profess, in the short time at our disposal, to have examined their work minutely, but it is readable and fluent, and it preserves not a little of the vivid flexible, and spasmodic manner of the original. Nietzsche lends himself easily to the process of Englishing. Much as he would have disliked the idea, one may almost say that as Heine wrote German in a French way, so he wrote German in an English way. For the moment, however, we must leave these questions of style aside, while we seize the occasion to set down a few general ideas about the Nietzsche doctrine and system. This we can only do in the most cursory way, and without attempting a regular review of any of the volumes before us.

The Question at Issue

between Nietzsche and his critics is fundamentally not a question of morals or theology, but a question of natural history. Is man a gregarious animal, a political animal, as Aristotle calls him, or a solitary hunter? The whole world has hitherto assumed the former to be the case. All civilisation is founded on that assumption, all religions, all philosophies have accepted it as unquestionable. The laws which protect property, which stand between the weaker individuals and the stronger individuals, and which regulate the family and adjust it to the nation, are the laws of men in community. Religion or philosophy may transform them and mysticise them or refer them to definite ideals and standards which it thinks of as absolute; but if religion and philosophy were blotted out, some code which must be called altruistic would still be inevitable if men are to live together in community. To Nietzsche, however, man is an isolated self-dependent individual whose law is self-assertion over other individuals, and the whole code which society has evolved for the protection of the physically

for the protection of the physically weaker against the physically stronger, or for the protection of the weaker man's property against the stronger man's arm, is a vicious interference with the natural struggle which evolves the super-man through his "will to power." He calls it

The Slave Morality,

and assumes it to have been imposed on the world by priests and sentimentalists who have insidiously lent themselves to stifling the strong in the interests of the mob of weaklings. And he quarrels especially with the Christian religion, which he denounces as the chief instrument whereby the weak have overcome the strong, to the destruction of the super-morality. We do not think we overstate the case, and to do him justice Nietzsche never shrinks from the logic of his doctrine. Hear Zarathustra:

"Thou shalt not rob!" "Thou shalt not commit manslaughter!" Such words were once called holy: before them the folk bent their knees and heads and took off their shoes."

But I ask you: Where in the world have there been better robbers and murderers than such holy words?

Is there not in all life—robbing and manslaughter? And by calling such words holy, did they not murder truth itself?

Or was it a sermon of death, to call that holy which contradicted all life and counselled against it? O, my brethren, break, break the old tables!

The Roots of His Doctrine.

We must not, of course, credit Nietzsche with everything that he puts into the mouth of Zarathustra, but, after making all allowance for dramatic expression, we have in this passage the roots of his doctrine. The "holy words contradict all life." They "murder truth" by forbidding manslaughter and robbing, because there is in all life murder and theft. It is Rousseau-ism with a difference. We are to return to nature, but nature red in tooth and claw, and not the idyllic, impossible, sentimentalised nature of Rousseau. And any discipline or code or sentiment or religion which interferes with the free play of tooth and claw is a "murdering of truth." Thus, in effect, Nietzsche takes man at a certain primitive stage of existence, finds him addicted to murder and theft and other violent assertions of his strength, declares him to be the natural man, and denounces all legal and so-called moral obstacles which prevent him from working out his destiny through conflict with other men. As a philosophy this entails all the vices and fallacies which attach to Rousseau's glo-

fallacies which attach to Rousseau's glorification of an idealised nature and adds to them the practical inconvenience that it renders impossible not merely what we call the civilised life, but any kind of life of man in community. Even the wolf has to keep the tendency of robbing and wolf-slaughter within bounds on pain of the pack being extinguished. Now, the Nietzschean doctrine stands, of course, for a certain element in human nature. All of us at times wish to break loose from

The Restraints of Our Conventional Life.

All of us at times have our reaction against sentiment and philanthropy. For years together the cult of the strong man affects literature, and writers vie with each other in glorifying the primitive violent instincts and decrying the humanitarian, softly civilised temperament. We saw it in Carlyle; we have seen it in Henley, Kipling, and a score of lesser novelists and poets in recent years. But a diversion of this kind, or an occasional break-out on the part of an individual, is a very different thing from an attempt to construct a philosophy for mankind by

"breaking the tables." There are untamable free spirits to whom the Ten Commandments are a stumbling-block, and there is an excess of philanthropic sentiment against which the fighting man revolts. To cultivate the Christian virtues while maintaining the energy of the fighting race is undeniably one of the problems of civilisation, and it is solved by striking a rough equilibrium between excesses on either hand. So there is always an element of truth in Nietzsche's writings. Romance or a kind of wild poetry of revolt may give it fit and harmless expression, but the effort to make it a doctrine results in folly and nonsense.

All the Wild Men of Romance

return eventually to the civilised fold, and their creators generally take special pleasure in representing them as tender and loyal and pitiful in proportion to their strength. Whatever their practice may be, they still in their hearts acknowledge the "slave-morality" which Nietzsche denounces. That is a necessity of fiction, because otherwise it is impossible to make sense of them or to get them into any human relations which will look sane. And so with the doctrine of Nietzsche. You may admire this or that aphorism; you may find truth in it as a criticism of democracy or philanthropy or any excess of current modes of thought, but you cannot think it and he cannot write it as a consecu-

modes of thought, but you cannot think it and he cannot write it as a consecutive system for men living together. This seems to dawn on Nietzsche as he proceeds, for his super-man, the man who is beyond good and evil, seems more and more to be conceived as a solitary being removed from human kind, and less as a possible ideal for the human race. And his method is not that of a philosopher giving us coherent doctrine, but of a literary man dealing in explosive epigrams, and scattered half-truths, some of them imaginative and poetical, and even morally bracing if they are treated as epigram, but extremely pernicious if they are seriously presented to us as an ideal or a system.

Not Philosophical.

So when Mr. Thomas Common says in his introduction to "Beyond Good and Evil" that here we have one of the most serious, profound, and original philosophical works, we reply that philosophical is just the epithet which should not be applied to it. It mocks, and denounces, and criticises, and pours a great deal of hot shot into accepted opinions about religion and morality. But it is wholly vague about the new order which is to supplant and surpass the existing order. "Slave-morality," "herding animal morality," "free spirits," "will-to-power"—these and a dozen other characteristic Nietzschean phrases are repeated as if they had a precise meaning, whereas we have the greatest difficulty in ascertaining what the writer really has in his mind beyond some grandiose conception of powerful persons, exerting themselves at the expense of less powerful persons. Take the famous phrase "will-to-power." There is no objection to it as expressing an instinct which undeniably exists in all living creatures. But will-to-power for what? It is with this question that philosophy begins, and to Nietzsche apparently it seems an absurd question. He

Arraigns the Philosophers

because they philosophise—because they seek some purpose or aim for the world or human kind outside the mere exercise of will and power, as such. But in the absence of such a purpose our ideal may be a steam-hammer or a rhinoceros or a bete-humaine who exercises his will-to-power by running amok. Nietzsche, looking out on human-kind, finds will-to-power incarnate in Napoleon, whom he admires not for his romantic notions of reconstructing the world (on the old basis of slave-morality), but for the forcible assertions of his violent will. For all practical purposes the Nietzschean idea leads straight to anarchy, and it is only avoided by withdrawing the "select

idea leads straight to anarchy, and is only avoided by withdrawing the "select men" into a privacy where they "may forget men who are the rule," and evade the practice of their doctrine. In that privacy, apparently, they brood and satisfy their will-to-power in some purely imaginative way. But the doctrine when preached to men "who are the rule" has active misanthropic results, and may, if it falls into careless hands, lead sometimes to practical anarchism. "Nietzsche's mind," says one of his biographers, "is as unpolitical as possible. The modern State is for him nothing but a new idol. He does not believe in nations and countries, and is indifferent about any special form of government, except that he hates from the bottom of his soul democracy as the depth of decadence. In his eyes the teachers of equality are tarantulae." Of course they are. On "immoralist" principles.

Democracy Must, Like Christianity, be Folly.

But so, as we have seen, are the Ten Commandments. The Nietzschean aristocracy evolves itself by the law of the jungle. We begin now to see what Nietzsche meant when, at a certain stage of his career, he spoke of the "far-spread and dangerous land through which my mind had wandered." Fraulein Nietzsche endeavours to prove that he was of a vigorous and healthy constitution, and that the stock from which he came was without blemish. Yet the fact remains that he went mad in early middle-age and never recovered his reason till he died. The testimony of his friends is, indeed, unanimous that he was a quiet and blameless man, with many admirable qualities, but he was also of that not uncommon type which, through an excessive consciousness of its own quietism, is driven to an extravagant eulogy of the robust and forcible. These men compound for the qualities they are inclined to by praising others that they have no mind to. So we see Nietzsche, the scholar, and philologist, and recluse, with an ardent poetical temperament stifled under books, entering the lists as

Champion of the Physical Unintellectual, Animal Man.

We can trace the beginning in the early essays on "The Birth of Tragedy" and in "The Use and Abuse of History,"

Greek tragedy, and he answers, the free Greek "Dionysian Spirit," expressing an unconscious impulse both for creation and destruction. Then he denounces Socrates in unmeasured language, and brands him as a "decadent," because he presumed to put his free spirit to the question and to endeavour to subdue it to rule and reason. "Weh! Weh!" he cries out, in Goethe's words:

Du hast sie zerstört, die schöne Welt.
Mit mächtiger Faust: sie stürzt, sie zerfällt.

And in precisely the same spirit in "The Use and Abuse of History" he arraigns those who would attempt to reduce life to a science through the study of history. "History," he says, must be "seriously hated as a costly and superfluous luxury of the understanding."

The Historical Sense

is a "malady from which men suffer," which prevents the free spirit from bravely facing the adventure of the future. It is a useful and stimulating paradox, provided it remains a paradox. But from these germs we see developing a system which, from idealising instinct, goes on to dethrone reason and ends finally in chaos and black night. Needless to say, Nietzsche on these lines finds himself most of all in conflict with the English spirit. English rationalism, English utilitarianism, English humanitarianism, English constitutionalism, English democracy, are to him anathema. He cannot abide the legal and Liberal movement which, starting from these islands, has spread, in his view, like a blight over the Continent. To him we are the gaolers of the super-man, and no more than Heine can he forgive us our Saint Helena. We are the more guilty because under our mask of legality and Liberalism we conceal so many of the qualities which are "beyond good and evil." All this we can take good-humouredly. Nietzsche is quite right. We have a great deal of the old Adam in us, and yet—perhaps for that very reason—we erect hard-and-fast barriers against the "immoralist." These trains of thought, however, take us too far afield. Let us say, in conclusion, that we have no grudge against the publication of Nietzsche's works in full in this country. To read enough of him is to provide yourself with the appropriate remedies for his doctrine. He leads so obviously to incoherence and chaos. But he stirs and startles, by the way, and is a good tonic for those who are tempted to accept conventions without questioning them. Whatever else he may be he is at war with frivolity and the mere craving for pleasure and ease which infects the modern world. Moreover, he is a poet and a man of genius who has

which were side-issues of his work as Professor of Classical Philology at Bale University. He asks what is the root of Greek tragedy, and he answers, the free

is a poet and a man of genius who has flashes of insight, and gives them imaginative expression. The danger of Nietzsche is not for those who read him, but for those who take his "immoralist" doctrine at second-hand. In this respect his influence has, in our opinion, been an unmitigated misfortune, but we have no fears for those who really study his works.
