

NIETZSCHE AS A PHILOSOPHER.

LECTURE BY MR. LE COUTEUR.

"Nietzsche as a Philosopher" was the subject of an interesting lecture delivered by Mr. P. B. Le Couteur, M.A., on Friday evening before the University Literary and Debating Society.

Mr. Le Couteur said that Nietzsche (1844-1900) set himself the task of the transvaluation of all values, assuming that till his time all estimates had been wrong, and that he was able to set them right. He began with a stage of doubt or Nihilism, reading himself of prevailing customs and beliefs; he dogmatically threw overboard everything of conventional religion and morality. Virtues like veracity and philanthropy and goodness were foolish standards—the only standards of value were life, power, vitality. Christianity had said nay to our richest impulses, so that life was become anaemic; Nietzsche urged the "restoration of the egoism of humanity." Two codes of morals were seen everywhere, master morality and slave morality. The high-born aristocrat valued strength, cunning, and cruelty; faithfulness was due to his own class only; he despised weakness and sympathy. This type Nietzsche praised as sane and sound, springing from a strong soul. To the slave this class seemed the very type of evil; goodness was the virtue despised by the masters—patience, benevolence, industry. In Christianity these had triumphed, the worm had turned, and the result was decadence, out of which we had to produce the superman, in whom lay the only hope for humanity. For him the lower race existed. Leisure, adventure, unbelief, excess were for the higher man, while industry, temperance, and fixed convictions were necessary to the existence of the lower.

In his criticism which followed Mr. Le Couteur pointed out the obscurity and self-contradiction pervading all Nietzsche's writing. They were full of half-truths. His starting point of doubt was common to most modern philosophers, who were, however, destructive only to rebuild the stronger. Nietzsche's position was utter annihilation of customary beliefs. This was inconsistent with his central thought of evolution, for since these had survived they must be useful. Nietzsche's teaching that there was sharply defined in every community, on the one hand a group of aristocratic minds, revelling in their strength, glorying in the crushing of others, contemptuous of Christian virtues, and thinking that such action was right, and, on the other hand, a group of weaker men resigning themselves to these depredations, and making the best of their miserable lives through practice of the Christian virtues, was not true to life. We found in all grades of society an equal practice or omission of these virtues. Nor was Christianity, his slave morality, the morality of the weak; if it were, it should have gone to the wall according to his evolutionary argument. A "scrap of paper" was stronger than brutish force. Nietzsche's superman was a superior machine, for which man was to be scrapped. But a machine did not usually scrap itself, and we did not care to

usually scrap itself, and we did not care to sacrifice ourselves for a being whose sole attribute was vitality and power and whose sole function was to use it—a kind of glorified Prussian officer. Power was not the supreme end of life.

The lecturer succeeded in his aim of provoking discussion. On Nietzsche's relation to the war, it was thought, not by any means that Nietzsche brought about the war, but that he gave expression to a spirit already existent—Bismarckism.

A hearty vote of thanks was conveyed to Mr. Le Couteur.