

NIETZSCHE AND HIS PHILOSOPHY.

(By R. E. White).

I. AN ANALYSIS.

Recently in Perth a small gathering of thoughtful men and women met to hear an exposition of Nietzsche's philosophy, by a gentleman who had spent the last three years in studying it, and who was an ardent exponent of it.

I had the honour to be present, and found the occasion a most impressive one, for it was evident that Nietzsche's doctrine has a very strong appeal to the intellectuals, and promises to be a potent factor in moulding the thought and influencing the actions of the future. Even to-day, though his teachings are intensely revolutionary, and though they have gained wide publicity only during the last few years, it is difficult to exaggerate his influence. Already he has been eagerly discussed in a thousand books and pamphlets, and many of our popular authors are more or less swayed by him. We have long since read several of his very difficult books, but since the meeting referred to, I have diligently sought to grasp the basic principles of this new philosophy and to form my own conclusions as to its truth or falseness. There are others, I feel sure, even in this small community, who are also earnestly studying the subject and finding difficulty in forming their judgments, and such may be interested in hearing my testimony.

Besides the special interest it may have for philosophical and sociological students, a much wider audience should be interested owing to the fact that it has been widely and warmly debated whether or not Nietzsche was a factor in causing this frightful war. With your permission I will therefore attempt a brief analysis of Nietzsche's doctrine. I find this a very difficult task owing to the erratic, unsympathetic, and often contradictory nature of his writings.

He was also very discursive, and utterly lacked method. Nevertheless, behind the tropical profusion of his language there are certain root ideas which distinguish him from all other writers, and mark him as a radical and revolutionary thinker, and it is these root ideas I will endeavour to expose.

His works throughout are violently antagonistic to our religious, moral, social, and political systems, but his most violent antipathy was concentrated on Christianity, which he considered the root evil of this civilisation.

Back of all his contradictions and eccentricities was a dominant idea, and a consistent viewpoint, and the essence of it will be found in his theory of evolution.

Of course I am not suggesting there was any novelty in the mere fact that he was an evolutionist, for so are we all nowadays;

an evolutionist, for so are we all nowadays; nor even in that he extended the theory of evolution to embrace the moral sphere, for most philosophers and psychologists do that also. It was in his definition of the dynamic of progress that he broke new ground and propounded his startling doctrine.

He repudiated Darwin's doctrine of struggle for existence and natural selection and proclaimed that of the will to power in lieu of the will to live.

In all organisms, from the micrococcus to the nation he saw the struggle, not for life, but for power, and parallel with it, and constantly thwarting it, the will to weakness. All religions and moral systems originated in these two forces, and at basis all are either master or slave moralities. By that light he read history, and asserted that whenever the master morality dominated, as in pagan Rome, there was progress and expansion. Wherever the slave morality—the glorification of weakness, humility, prevailed, as in Christian Rome there was retrogression and degeneracy.

He detested altruism and all that the term involves, and exalted egoism. "This new command, oh my brethren, I give unto you: Become hard!" And the ideal he preached was the superman; never very definitely or clearly but with intense poetic fervour.

This somewhat vague conception was to be the very incarnation of the will to power. Strong and beautiful in mind and body, fearless and merciless; loving war and danger; ruling lesser men, who are pawns for him to play with. Nietzsche was nebulous and ambiguous as to the method of producing the superman, but apparently his is an esoteric doctrine intended only for the natural aristocrats who shall shall by some undefined means succeed in thoroughly enslaving the "herd animal."

I fancy that one weapon to be employed is Christianity, which is to be retained for the use of the lower orders, to keep them properly submissive, and to teach them that it is more blessed to give than receive. Certainly he forecasted as the ideal a human society of two evenly balanced classes: A vast inert religious, moral slave-class, beneath a small, alert, iconoclastic, immoral, progressive master class.

These, then, appear to be the essential features in Nietzsche's philosophy, "The will to power, master, and slave morality, egoism, and the superman. Extravagant though it may seem at first glance it does not appear incompatible with the theory of survival of the fittest, as proclaimed by Huxley and other followers of Darwin. I may, add, too, that shockingly odious though we may consider him in his bitter tirades against sympathy many biologists will agree with him in the assertion that "Sympathy thwarts the law of development, of evolution, of the survival of the fittest. It is hostile to life!" I firmly believe that this doctrine, confessedly immoral, and degrading morality, will continue to grow and spread.

I base that opinion on the fact that our

spread.

I base that opinion on the fact that our moral concepts of to-day are those which for two millenniums past have been proclaimed as peculiarly Christian, having no sanction and needing none save the teachings of Christ. And all the signs indicate a breakup of Christianity: it is already practically extinct amongst the cultured classes, though they may make a formal profession of it. So there seems a strong probability that as Christianity decays, so will the ethics taught with it.

Thus far I have tried to state Nietzscheism impartially and dispassionately, but I now testify that I believe it to be in its very essence a pernicious doctrine, subser-

sive of progress, and opposed to the latest conclusions of evolutionary science.

Your space will not permit an adequate criticism in this article, so I will crave your permission to continue in another article.