

NIETZSCHE AND HIS PHILOSOPHY.

A CRITICISM.

By R. E. White.

II.

The bitterest opponents of Nietzsche must concede him a vast accumulation of knowledge; a splendid capacity for daring, original thought, and an almost unique power of vivid expression.

In his many books he roamed over the whole world of thought, and, let us admit, made many interesting and valuable philosophical discoveries. In these latter days, too, when the State is steadily expanding its functions and exerting an increasing despotism over the individual; when majority rule is exalted into a fetish; when "banded unions persecute opinions and induce a line when single thought is a civil crime, and individual freedom mute," the fierce individualism of Nietzsche has a wonderful attraction to many independent minds. He hated mob rule, State tyranny, and the levelling tendency so appariant to-day, and many of us are in complete sympathy with those sentiments. Certainly, too, his crusade against Christianity has gained him many followers, who think, with him, it is an anachronism and the virtue has gone out of it.

Nevertheless, I feel that the very fact that so many of us will find so many points of agreement with him renders him the more dangerous. The process of time has already proved him great enough to gain a devoted following amongst superior minds, therefore his philosophy demands and deserves the most critical analysis. There never was such a marked period of transition as now, when all old things are passing away, and beliefs hoary with age are being flung into the crucible. At this momentous epoch, then, when dogmas are dying, and institutions crumbling, we should be specially careful lest we destroy the wheat with the tares. It maybe that when we follow daring leaders in attacking the extraneous and the false, we may be misled into destroying the essential and the true.

"Hold fast to Truth, preserve it well
For fear divine Philosophy
May push beyond her mark and be
Procureess to the lords of hell."

The cardinal principles I have outlined as constituting the distinctive features of Nietzsche's message all have their root in a quite new and revolutionary ethical conception, and it is on the ethics of Nietzsche I would concentrate, for on them he stands or falls. Ethics I will define as the science which treats of the distinction between right and wrong, and of the moral sense by which they are discriminated. Nietzsche continually demands a transvaluation of moral values and a transformation of social relations. In fact, he repudiates any permanent basis of moral values at all, any conduct is moral which tends to promote his ideal superman.

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And since the goal he strives for is a society bisected by caste—a few lordly rulers and a humble horde of the ruled, he derides the conception of a human brotherhood with equal rights for all. "A people is the roundabout way by which Nature arrives at six or seven great men." And this ascendant type is to be evolved by the practice of hardness, egoism, ruthlessness and an utter disregard for the "herd animal." (He ardently admired Napoleon, by the way.) The mass of the people, in a word, are merely the stepping stones over which their natural rulers shall climb to their proper high places.

He claims for this doctrine the sanction of biology and history, and if that claim be substantiated then Nietzsche's philosophy is indubitably sound. Fortunately this brings the question squarely to the decision of physical facts and clear of the mists of metaphysics.

Let it be understood here that Nietzsche had no biological training, and he denied the necessity of such training to dogmatise on biology—he always insisted that intuition was the final authority. Nor can he be considered a thoroughly equipped historian, for though he had studied history deeply, it was mainly from the narrow philological standpoint. (He was a professor of philology). Regarding the intuitive basis for his biological argument, I think modern psychology has amply demonstrated the utter unreliability of the intuition as a philosophical factor. Nevertheless it is a singular fact that Nietzsche, the bookish recluse, made an astounding discovery in biology which had been overlooked by great specialists like Darwin and Huxley, and on this discovery he built. The following quotation from his own works is a concentrated statement of that pregnant truth: "As to the famous struggle for existence, it seems to me, for the present, to be more of an assumption than a fact. It does occur, but as an exception. The general condition of life is not one of want or famine, but rather of riches, of lavish luxuriance—where there is a struggle, it is a struggle for power. We should not confound malthus with Nature."

Since he penned those lines later research has, I believe, conclusively disproved the Darwinian theory that the struggle for existence is the prime factor in evolution, though, as I will endeavour to show later, the struggle for power is by no means the true or only alternative. To concede this

would be to concede the whole position, for if what Nietzsche calls the will to power were the force which differentiated and improved the species it would naturally follow that, since it achieved the making of man, it should hereafter lead us to the Superman. With reference to his deductions from history, though he was not a really great historian, yet it may well be that history as related up to his time fully sanctioned the conclusions he drew from it. The history of the school books might justify a pessimist philosopher in

might justify a pessimist philosopher in deciding warfare and oppression were the very springs of conduct, and that social chaos can only be averted through the usurpation of power by stern rulers.

But of late a bright and pleasant light has been shed on history by patient research into the daily life, the customs and institutions of bygone peoples. History, as now becoming understood, is something grander than the tramp of armed hosts, the intrigues and squabbles of tyrants, and I will try to show presently that it does not sanction the conclusions at which Nietzsche arrived.

But besides the inadequacy of his scientific equipment to fit him as a leader of mankind to heights that are higher by strange and devious paths, he had certain fatal temperamental limitations. A perusal of the biography of Nietzsche, while

peculiarly Christian and dependent on supernatural decree, are infinitely older than any known religion, older even than man himself, and are scientifically unassailable. My text in that article will be mainly Prince Kropotkin's monumental work on "mutual aid as a law of nature and a factor of evolution."

entrancing our sympathy with the man diminishes our respect for the philosopher.

From childhood until the time, some years before his death, when the darkness of insanity closed down upon him, he led a lonely, loveless life. I know of no other man so completely cut off from social relations with his fellows.

Throughout his whole journey through life he made singularly few friends, and even these few friendships generally terminated in bitter quarrels.

While yet a young man he resigned his professorship of philology, and spent the rest of his life in lonely nomadic wanderings through Europe, mostly in Switzerland and Italy, feverishly working at his books.

He never knew the love of a woman—no child was born to him. The first edition of one of his later books he intended for private circulation amongst his friends, and had only forty copies printed in that issue.

It is pathetic to note that he only distributed seven. In short it may be said that man, the social animal, the gregarious biped, he knew not at all.

In a large measure this may explain his intuitive belief in a projected state of aristocratic anarchy. It may be of interest to add that he hypnotised himself

into a quite unfounded but very firm belief that he himself was of noble descent. This provides a somewhat humorous idea of the reliability of his intuitions and his veneration for caste distinctions. I shall now conclude this article, and in my next, and last, I shall endeavour not only to show from the evidence of biological and historical facts that Nietzsche's ethics and the philosophy he based upon them were quite unsound. I shall further attempt to demonstrate that the morality which Nietzsche (and all churchmen) claim to be peculiarly Christian and dependent on su-