

A LIFE OF NIETZSCHE.

Daniel Halevy's "Life of Friedrich Nietzsche" is on the whole perhaps the best biographical account of that philosopher for the general reader. The narrative follows Madame Forster-Nietzsche pretty closely, but with commendable compression. Mr. T. M. Kettle, M.P., writes a critical introduction, rather brilliant than profound. He says civilisation has dismissed Nietzsche's ideas to praise his images. We have to deal not with a thinker who expounds a system, but with a prophet who dispenses a revelation. Nietzsche is not the apologist, but the mystic of neo-paganism. He brings a sort of ethical strychnine, which taken in large doses is fatal, but in small doses is an incomparable tonic. His biography exhibits him as better than his gospel. All this sounds like a sort of apology to the British public. No such apology was needed. There is now an admirable, and cheap, edition of Nietzsche in English, and at any rate some of the volumes have been widely read. Lichtenberger's appreciation is issued in the same form, while Nietzschean philosophy has been popularised by Oscar Levy, Mugge, Ludovici, Kennedy, Orage, and others. It is now 10 years or so since the death of Nietzsche, and his place in the history of European thought is assured. The excellent Mr. Kettle enunciates some half truths, and it is indeed not easy to regard Nietzsche as a serious philosopher. He came at once too late and too soon to expound a system, and his upbringing and environment did nothing to help him. It is a sufficiently strange phenomenon to find dynamic ideas springing up out of a seed plot of classical philology. And yet Nietzsche was neither so individual nor so reactionary as he thought himself. His gospel of the superman is largely the gospel of Imperialism that has made modern Germany. Nietzsche, however, strips strength of its hypocrisy. His revival of aristocracy is but the reverse of that bankruptcy of liberal democracy, which was evident enough to the clear-sighted thirty years ago, and which has become evident to all except the blind to-day. It is the characteristic of genius to ante-date history; but the genius does not, as is commonly supposed, become the founder of a school; he only anticipates the scholars. Conversely there was never a cult without mirror worship. The younger generation which Ibsen left knocking at the door is largely Nietzschean at root, simply because in their case the forces that went to the making of Nietzsche have had time to work themselves out. Leslie Stephen has somewhere rightly said that philosophy has to be rewritten in every age with change of dialect. That is precisely true, but we are apt to mistake a new dialect for a new language. The working-day of Nietzsche stretched from 1869 to 1888. But he scarcely becomes characteristic before 1875, and he scarcely becomes definite until nearly a decade later. His temperament removed him from society—he lost friends as ardently as he made them. He had little contact with formal science or formal philosophy, and he threw out his thoughts at haphazard as he

threw out his thoughts at haphazard as he saw some Shagpat waiting to be shaved. It would be interesting indeed to institute a critical comparison between him and Meredith; for in spite of externals the two had much in common. A mere glance at the dates just mentioned shows how completely Nietzsche is a transition product. He is a Romantic in scorn of Romanticism, a democrat in scorn of democracy, a saint in scorn of religion. The critical habit of thought gathered strength all through the last quarter of the century, and buried Hegel and Herbert Spencer with equally polite irony. The age had been robbed of its doctrines, and it quickly ceased to believe in its ideals. No truth is ever secure unless it is the object of a superstition. The outstanding feature of the period was its violently anti-superstitious attitude. Neither science nor industrialism had any room for sentiment, and between the two of them they destroyed those fallacies that are the only sound basis for any philosophy, while at the same time they completely failed to fulfil their promise of a millennium. Hence the reaction against democracy and the reaction against materialism. Out of Nietzsche nothing emerges, but he is a cauldron of molten metal from which many alloys will crystallise, some soft and delicate as spun silk, some to point projectiles, some to fuse cold steel. The vogue of Nietzsche is explained by just that fact, for we too are molten metal, intractable, inchoate. We have as yet no synthesis, and we smile as we think how very remote a synthetic philosophy must be. Yet there is a certain ironic satisfaction in disillusion, and from that springs such virility as we can attain. In his vigorous denial of claims and sanctions that openly or implicitly we all vigorously deny, Nietzsche is something of a high priest before a buried temple. As we watch him we are not quite sure whether we look towards the ruin or towards the dawn of day. We have traced the genealogy of morals, we have glimpsed beyond good and evil, we have spoken with Zarathustra on his mountain, but hardly yet can we claim the will to power, and much less the joyful wisdom. We are quite sure that man is not a goal. We are not so sure that he is a bridge. Sometimes he looks like the muddy water of the sacred stream. (Dymock.)