

THE BRITISH SUPERMAN.

Lord Rosebery has been talking about the Superman; and there is no law to prevent his doing so. To most people the phrase is uncomfortably reminiscent of Nietzsche. But, after all, Nietzsche did not coin the expression; and, even if he had done so, are we never again to use a thing that has been once abused? References to the *ubermensch*—the overman, the superman—are to be found in Teutonic literature a couple of centuries before Nietzsche was born. Goethe occasionally coquetted with the flattering idea. Carlyle, Emerson, Renan, and Flaubert each in turn fell under its spell. Then Dühring, in a well-known work published in the year in which Nietzsche came of age, boldly espoused it; and it is in all probability from him that Nietzsche borrowed the now famous phrase. "I teach you," cried Nietzsche, "the gospel of the superman. Man is something that is to be surpassed. What is the ape to man? A laughing-stock, a thing of shame. And just the same shall man

be to the Superman: a laughing-stock, a thing of shame. The Superman is the meaning of the earth. Man is a rope stretched over the abyss which divides the animal on the one side from the Superman on the other." It is admitted by Nietzsche's warmest admirers that the philosopher scarcely knew how to interpret his own prediction. Was the Superman to arise in the form of one transcendent individual, or in the shape of an elevated race? Nietzsche could not make up his mind. But in either case the Superman was to be a thing of earthquake and thunder. The world would tremble beneath his tread. To him pity would be weakness. His pride would be in bluster and brute force. Such, baldly stated, was the ideal of the philosopher of Bale, and for British minds it has few attractions. But Lord Rosebery is not inclined, merely on that account, to taboo the phrase entirely. He thinks it too good for the scrapheap. He believes that the War will help us towards the realisation of the Superman; but in a way of which the universities of Germany have never dreamed. "What," he asks, "will our millions of men bring back to us when they return from the War? They will bring with them a new spirit and a new view of the world. From being men they will become supermen, and they will inevitably control the future of this vast empire. Above all, they will bring back character; a character that will comprise respect for themselves and sympathy with others. Yes, character is the inestimable asset that they will bring to this country; and it is by character, in the last resort, that the world is governed." We have but to gaze first on this picture and then on that in order to satisfy ourselves that between the Superman of Friedrich Nietzsche and the Superman of Lord Rosebery there is no kinship whatsoever.

If we remember rightly, Lord Rosebery has harped upon this string before. On the present occasion, he was speaking as Chancellor of the University of London. But fifteen years ago his lordship was Rector of the University of Glasgow, and he then took occasion to suggest to the Glaswegians some very similar ideas. He maintained that our universities, instead of developing the real manhood of the nation, were too stereotyped and too mechanical. "Are there not," he asked, "thousands of lads to-day plodding away at the ancient classics who will never make anything of those classics, and who, at the first opportunity, will cast them into space, never to reopen them? Think of the wasted time that that implies! All those squandered years represent a dead loss to the Empire." Not along such lines will come the Superman. How then? "We need in our universities," his lordship argued, "such training as will develop force of character, quick decision, physical activity, boundless resourcefulness, and endurance of all kinds. You want men who will go anywhere at a moment's notice and do anything." The whole address was an appeal for the evolution of a loftier standard of national character. Lord Rosebery's recent utterance is therefore entitled to the respect that is never denied to deep and sincere convictions long and consistently entertained. It is easy to be wise after the event and to grow philosophical after the tragedy has been enacted. But in the case under review, the opinions expressed by Lord Rosebery as Chancellor of the London University in 1900 are but the natural sequel to those enunciated by him as Rector of the Glasgow University in 1901.

So far, but no farther, does Lord Rosebery take us in quest of the Superman. He affirms the essential principle that, in the long run, supremacy must depend upon character, and then he

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depend upon character, and then he leaves us to work out our own salvation as best we may. He descends to no details. But, happily, where Lord Rosebery leaves off, Lord Haldane begins. In the moment of our perplexity the Lord Chancellor comes to the rescue and fills up the hiatus. Like Lord Rosebery, Lord Haldane is addressing a University, but in his case it is the University of Edinburgh. If the Superman is to represent the triumph of character, it is clearly of vital importance that we should be told precisely in what that victorious character consists. Lord Haldane has been telling the men of Edinburgh that it consists in wisdom, in courage, in spirituality, and in courtesy. Wisdom is the fruit of experience; and if the experience of this tragic time does not lead to its acquisition, the fault must surely be in the inaptitude of the pupil. Only by the possession of courage can a man be relied upon to follow the right in scorn of consequence. If wisdom dictates the path to be pursued, courage will enable the traveller to plunge along it, let what will threaten. On the third pre-requisite—the element of spirituality—Lord Haldane is particularly emphatic. Character cannot, he argues, be erected on a purely material basis. "The only foundation of what is abiding is the sense of the reality of what is spiritual—the constant presence of the God who is not far away in the skies, but is here within our minds and hearts. That is what I wished to say to you about what seems to me the deepest-lying and most real fact of life." And as to courtesy, Lord Haldane believes with Emerson that defect in manners is usually defect in delicate feeling and in fine perception: it is a radical rather than a superficial evil. It shows, not want of style alone, but want of heart. Here, then, are the things that make for knightliness, for chivalry, for character. Are they likely to be promoted by the War? Lord Rosebery thinks that they are, and promises us in consequence the Superman. Certainly, our sufferings and sacrifices will not have been in vain if, out of our present anguish, the child of so many dreams shall at length be born.
