

NIETZSCHE AND THE WILL TO POWER.

(By "Gaius.")

In the earliest days of the war there was a scrambling haste among imperfectly informed persons to discover—and more particularly to explain—the reasons why this catastrophe had fallen upon the world. They tried to get at the cause of this sudden insanity seizing upon a nation which had been so much belauded for its essential soundness. Then they discovered Nietzsche, who at one bound leapt into the position of chief devil. He, we were given to understand, had taught the German people to believe in their high destiny as the rulers of the world: the supermen to whom all the Western nations must bow, and who could command obedience as of divine right. This philosopher, who had been too much neglected, was suddenly too much considered. Publishers hastened to get out cheap editions of some of his books, and advertised them as written by "Nietzsche, the Preacher of War." The most extraordinary and muddled expositions were given of his doctrines, and those who depended for their knowledge on newspaper accounts, conceived of him as belonging to the same school as Treitschke, Bernardi, Fishenius, and others who taught that war was the highest and noblest expression of the national consciousness, and that Germany's destiny was to conquer the world and impose on it her kultur. Possibly the fact that this was an entirely erroneous view of the man and his works helped to shorten the period of existence of this idea, but, at any rate, some of the newspapers which, three years ago, scarcely allowed a day to pass without a reference to Nietzsche, would probably now be hard put to it to spell his name.

It is possibly true that the idea of the superman as conceived by Nietzsche has been taken seriously by a certain number of Germans, and applied by them to the whole nation. But, had he been alive, he would have made a fierce repudiation of any such adaptation of his doctrines. His preaching of the "Will to Power" applied to individuals, not to nations. For the German race, indeed, he had the heartiest contempt. "Good-natured and spiteful—such a juxtaposition, preposterous in the case of every other people, is unfortunately only too often justified in Germany." Such was his judgment, and he followed it up even more cruelly:—"If any one wishes to see the 'German soul' demonstrated ad oculos, let him only look at German taste, at German arts and manners: what boorish indifference to 'taste.' How the noblest and the commonest stand them in juxtaposition!" Perhaps nothing could more completely illustrate the blind self-conceit of the German people than the fact that, in face of such opinions, they could believe themselves to be the prototype, as a nation, of Nietzsche's individualist

have themselves to be the prototype, as a nation, of Nietzsche's individualist superman. There is no founder and teacher of a philosophy of life whose doctrines may not, if pushed to extremes or wrongly applied, work mischief. In the case of Nietzsche the mischief is done if his teachings are accepted in the fulness of his evident intention. But he did not teach that one nation should obtain the hegemony of the world, and, as the Germans claim for themselves, impose upon the subject peoples a mode of civilisation and life which would make for the eventual betterment of their condition. The German idea is that a world ruled by Germany would be a happier world than that which exists to-day. Nietzsche's superman would rule, not for the advantage of the subject people, but for his own benefit. The "will to power" is, according to him, the mark of the superior mind, and it is the natural and proper condition that the superior should impose his will upon the many inferiors. He puts his superman and the ravening beast of prey on the same level of superiority, destined by nature to prey upon the mediocre. "The beast of prey," he says, "and the man of prey (for instance, Caesar Borgia) are fundamentally misunderstood; 'Nature' is misunderstood, so long as one seeks a 'morbidness' in the constitution of these healthiest of all tropical monsters and growths, or even an innate 'Hell' in them—as almost all moralists have done hitherto. Does it not seem that there is a hatred of the virgin forest, and of the tropics, among moralists? And that the 'tropical man' must be discredited at all costs, whether as disease and deterioration of mankind, or as his own hell and self-torture? And why? In favour of the temperate zones? In favour of the temperate men? The moral? The mediocre?" This passionate worship of strength, and the equally passionate denunciation of all religious and moral influences designed to hold the strong in check, and raise the condition of the weak, was carried to an extreme which, perhaps, was afforded by that mental disease which afterwards found him out. But the doctrines of Nietzsche, and his even violent assertion of the "will to power," were not the ravings of a madman, nor the vapourings of a mountebank. They were a protest against the mean sentimentalism which exalted the weak to the detriment of the strong; which discounted the hardier victims, and preferred to weep over weaklings than to exalt over heroes.