

ARTICLE V.

A CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF NIETZSCHE'S
PHILOSOPHY.

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THE influence of Nietzsche not only in Germany and France, but also in England and America, has been so great as to call for attention: the more so as Arthur Symons has been good enough to say that "no one can think, and escape Nietzsche." The subject of extravagant praise — an excess of enthusiasm — he has also been the subject of a none too intelligent excess of execration. His bewitching power has been felt in spite of his pronounced irreligion. His aphoristic style of expression greatly furthered this influence, though it often took the form of spasmodic commonplace. His personality is present in all his thinking and writing. He is the obvious antithesis of a thinker like Spencer, from whose work all personality has been abstracted. His development was three-fold in its stages, after the manner of Hegel's theory. There is no need to deny Nietzsche the sincerity and the heroism claimed for him by his devotees, or to minimize the Carlylean vigor and picturesque exaggeration of his writings. Still less is there any occasion to question the artistic qualities of his work, his very conception of the world-process being that of an æsthetical manifestation of the Universal Will.

He is poet rather than psychologist, as we shall see, and is the philosopher of instinct. But he does not, as the latter, realize how, in the evolution of man's thought, his instincts

blossom into something higher than primitive instinct, and sense is transmuted into thought. [Nietzsche was saturated with Greek thought: Greek ideal, with its love of beauty and its will of power, he had made his own; his conception of life conceived it as synonymous with unrestrained strength and power.] An excessive idealism marks his thought, in one sense; and that thought, suffused with his own personality, has but little of reason or systematized character. It has been truly said of him that he came not to bring peace on earth, but a sword. His hand has been heavy, but there is often something refreshing in his virility. [Only through clash and warfare can virility come, and the tonic elements are among the best of his influence.] One cannot choose but admire Nietzsche's rare, even reckless, devotion to ideas. He has often been accounted a daring and original thinker, partly because he appeals to us as a man so much at war with himself, but mainly because his doctrine is pre-Christian in its exaltation of hardness — its pagan worship of power. "This new Table, O my brethren, I write above you: Become hard" (werdet hart). [This pagan glorification of hardness, of strength, of power, in life, with the suffering and pain that are necessary to the creation of beauty: such is the essence of Nietzsche's message.] The one thing needful, to him, is to harden ourselves greatly. The one thing successful, by him, has been to give an enhanced value to the Sermon on the Mount. His ideals were drawn from pre-Socratic Hellenism; and his apotheosis of hardness is pagan, Hellenic, Roman, anti-Christian, all in one. Has philosophy any reason to be proud of these ideals?

One can surely appreciate the finer elements of the Greek and Roman worlds without failing, like Nietzsche, to appreciate what the Christian centuries have taught us in the ethi-

cal sphere. One may admit the evils of sympathy of the merely flabby and weakening order, so often present in modern sentimentality, as it imposes itself on fine but weak, unpractical natures. There is an element of truth in his insistence that a man who seriously abandoned himself to sympathy with the misery around him would simply be destroyed by it, although Nietzsche has no inkling how to adjust this aright. But what need to revert to Greek and Roman types of purely naturalistic character? One can fully appreciate the nobility of a Socrates, the strength of an Antigone, the "hard" elements of an Ajax, an Œdipus, an Electra, a Hæmon, and many another beside, without forgetting the merely vengeful and vindictive elements so often present, or without being oblivious of the bitterness of even ancient moralists like Seneca, Persius, Juvenal, Lucian. But the ancients knew on occasion [how to be human as well as "hard," for neither Æneas nor Achilles deemed it womanish to weep.] One may desire strength of soul—a deep and primal need in a world like this—without wishing "hardness" of the Pagan order:—

"On that hard Pagan world, disgust
And secret loathing fell;
Deep weariness and sated lust
Made human life a hell!"

With due respect for Nietzsche, and for the Greek and Roman worlds, we have no desire for a reversion to that "hell." But there was value in Nietzsche's insistence that neither man nor nation can live without an ideal, be it what it may. His fundamental tendency is *æsthetic* rather than ethical, for, in his sporadic observations on life and art, Art is the great stimulant of life, wherein he provides a contrast to Schopenhauer. Nietzsche's whole thought rests upon an

æsthetic-naturalistic basis, for his thought was rooted in Romantic naturalism. It is Art which, for him, alone gives value to life. Life, as a manifestation of art, is alone strong, and worthy to be lived. This, because of its exuberant vitality. ¶ The pain and suffering attendant upon art are to be viewed from the artistic standpoint, for art would not be art without them. ¶ Suffering is necessary to the development of beauty. ¶ One can very well agree that the full life, exuberant in its vitality, is the ideal, while finding in Nietzsche's teaching an utter failure as to the mode of attaining it. It is, no doubt, in this zest for life — which he calls Dionysian — that the secret of his influence on our time is to be found. ¶ He found life too large and too compelling for men in general: it was too immense and dominating for their natures, emasculated by emotion. ¶ The creative element — the will to renew — is what he would give them. ¶ When Nietzsche grows ethical, his ethic is really derived from the grotesque conditions of savagery, of which his teaching is, in places, a recrudescence. He takes anthropological grounds, and prefers two systems of morals — that of the masters or superior races, and that of the slaves or inferior races. ¶ For his ideal is the Overman, and slavery is to him "a necessary condition of every true civilization." He grounds the difference of the two moral types in physiological constitution, as might be expected.

Despotic in the last degree is Nietzsche: his masters are hard and dangerous; his slaves pithless and peaceful. Humanity exists for the sake of the strong, and the strong — the masters and conquerors — are decaying, he thinks, in all Europe to-day. He inculcates the ethics of pride and self-assertion, even to the extent of a proud and absolute sovereignty of self. He acknowledges only rights: duty — or the "ought" —

he will leave to slaves and fools. Christian ethic is slave-morality: his ethic of strength and self-assertion is lord-morality. His teaching in things moral is really too redolent of the pre-historic forest, and in its echoes little higher can be heard than the law of the jungle. His absurd claim was to be above and beyond the moral law; he sees not in such law the conservation of a full and free life; conscience was to him ancestral and derivative. Hence his strange failure to understand how little conscience can be a check to the integral development and personality. He is no axiomatic moralist in the usual sense; but it is curiously axiomatic, to him, that individuality should be developed to the fullest extent. The will of Europe is, for him, diseased; and the modern man affected with deep degeneracy: the strength to will is his need. Deep is Nietzsche's dislike of mankind—even German humankind—but especially of democracy, which is to him one flock without a shepherd: the earth is full, he says, of "the superfluous," life is marred by "the far-too-many." Hence his thought centers in the Overman, superior only in "hard" power. His Overman has for motto "Live dangerously," which is that he may live greatly; but the ideal of the Overman is only for the few, in his estimation the "masters of creation and destruction." "Truth is hard," he says, and for the aristocratic few, whose strength as a caste lies as much in spiritual as in physical capacities: they are "the most complete individuals." "Great wealth of personality" is said to be their mark. "The Overman is the significance of the earth," says Zarathustra.

The difference between the two types of thought may be allowed to have a certain ground in Nature. The Overman is the justification of the mass of humanity; for he it is, according to Nietzsche, who creates new values, and so gives

power to the race. He has a somewhat curious and ingenious use to make of Christianity as the instrument of power in the hands of the slaves or inferior races. Christianity and the moral law, useful enough in their place — which is for the inferior races — are inimical to the development of the masters — the Overman. But his Overman cannot be called a moral ideal; for he really represents only the highest natural development of power. When it is attempted to attach a religious value to his Superman, as representing, in misapplied form, man's need of something to adore, one must candidly rate that value a good deal less highly than Baron von Hügel and Professor Aloys Riehl. Nietzsche's new values are immoral values; for, if the altruistic sentiments are moral, then the hardness, cruelty, and contempt, which he opposes to them, are immoral. But Nietzsche denies their value to the altruistic sentiments, and stops not short of the acme of selfish egoism as the only real thing in life. He does not stay to consider the fact that there are different selves, and that we must provide a criterion for justifying the true self. Blindly, and without any such analysis, he claims a sovereignty for the self as it is, unheeding of its need of ethical guidance. His self is material, not ideal. All ideas and values are, to him, relative; nothing is absolute.

¶ Heraclitus is, to him, the height of the Hellenic spirit, with its eternal Becoming. The philosopher's will for truth is, for him, will to power; the philosopher must create with the Productivity of genius — must create values; creative he must be, not merely critical, for he is the organ of the will to power. The significance of truth lies, for him, in the way it furthers this will to power; he has no interest in the truth for itself. Our knowledge is purely relative, and our world-constructions are anthropomorphic in character. Thought he

despises, for the irrational, the contradictory, rules. Life and its affirmation are all that Nietzsche cares for. Life is, for him, will to power. His standpoint is that "of all goods life is the highest." Lust for life and first-hand experience — that is the strength of his position. The aristocratic-minded Nietzsche abhorred all that savored of smug convention or typified present-day German culture. His Overman faces life like "a laughing lion": he is morally "rough, stormy, relentless, hard, violently predatory."

Nietzsche's strength has not consisted in bringing forth anything in the form of tenable system, though he had a synthetical mind, but rather in the sharpness and keenness of his critical powers. His work on "The Will to Power" was an unfinished attempt at a logical system. On the positive side the Will of Power — "a surplus of power" being, to him, the desire of man and every living organism — was his fundamental postulate. This conception of the will to power was — there is authoritative evidence for saying — of a purely militarist character in its inception, a fact which does nothing to commend it. The Christian Superman is, be it said, no "profound psychological corruption": he is an advance on Nietzsche's ideal. That will, one should think, would have need enough to be great or strong, for the Overman has no god but himself. He has his faith, however, for belief is action, and action is belief, in his view. The Overman comes only by denial of the spiritual or larger half of life. x

But the wondrous glorification of will-power in this atheistic philosophy, with its owned and cherished "illusion" of free-will, is, after all, very abruptly pulled up by an acceptance of the thing commonly called Fate — a new, and, as it seems to me, not improved version of the ancient Stoicism. Nietzsche is certainly no hedonist, albeit he is fatalist, and not

free of tendencies to universalistic hedonism; his everlasting doctrine of hardness shows that clearly enough, when fully set out. But his interest for us lies in the way he represents one side of the long-drawn contest between the principles of egoism and sympathy. His practical philosophy is ruthless in character, lacks in reasonable content, knows neither proper development nor end, rests only in an everlasting cycle of change, and does not escape contradictions. He does not realize the contradictoriness of exalting, on occasion, a pure nature principle into a principle of value, nor the impossibility of making life and power the final measure of values. It is a great fault of Nietzsche's philosophy that in it reason comes not to true independence, but is only a humble ministrant to physiological development, in consequence of his naturalistic positivism. Truth, beauty, and value exist for him only in the deeds of power. He wages war against Socraticism and Intellectualism; thinks, in a pragmatist spirit, no absolute truth possible; holds faith to have more significance for the weal of man than knowledge, for with faith one can do without truth. Truth is, for Nietzsche, a social product, and both pragmatist and humanist aspects of truth find representation in him. No doubt, there is a sense in which truth is nothing, standing by itself, and without serving some purpose, but truth is not purely subjective — only trueness is ours — for truth is discovered, not made. Despite the objectivity of truth, truth, we must hold, is for life, as life is for truth. Truths are illusions in his view, and only through forgetfulness of this fact has man the feeling for truth, truth, which is nothing absolute. Intuitional modes of apprehension he loves to set over against those of reason and logic. There is no truth, only truths.

Nietzsche lacked a proper and truly reasonable measure

for determining judgments of value. He is really too good at giving forth mere half-truths with an air of finality. He is, all the time that he is caricaturing and exaggerating existing conditions, at the mercy of a few ruling ideas. His utterances are often strikingly anticipatory of William James. He thinks the confidence in reason and its categories, in logic and dialectic, is only and really due to their usefulness for life. He makes no fundamental difference between truth and error, and even illusion has its value for him. It is his humanistic contention that no abstract pressure, but only instinct and impulse—above all, the will to power—lead us to truth and knowledge.

His theoretic or epistemological notions are of a piece with his ethical, æsthetical, and psychological notions or intuitions. The great problems in all these spheres are, as Deussen remarks, "only tentatively touched upon in his writings." The typical philosopher is for him, Plato, and his own philosophy belongs to the school of Nominalism with its dislike of universals. His philosophy is so particularistic that there is, for it, no unity of existence. The concept of life demands growth, he says, and this means new and widening powers. His self-styled Ethical Naturalism judges life's worth by whether it can be perfected in accordance with the morals of the masters. For the value of life and the resolution of its problems were Nietzsche's great concern. But not the mere conservation of life is his aim in knowledge, for that would not explain the advance to new truths, but the furtherance of that deepest of biological principles, the elevation and expansion of the type.

With biological theories he was occupied to a considerable degree; for him the founders of evolution were Lamarck and Hegel: but he was no Darwinist, since he believed not in se-

lection; to him, life is eternal and had no beginning; in his view, mind, equally with the physiological organism, has undergone evolution. He writes trenchantly, in fact, on Darwinism, with its survival of the fittest: if the environment be base and mean, then the fittest to survive will, in his view, be those most suited to baseness and meanness. Hence men must get outside their environment, and transvaluate their values, so producing great, solitary men, clear-eyed and comely of form. But Nietzsche was more Darwinian than he supposed, although he was, of course, not a natural scientist. Indeed, he contemns science. He is not much of a technical philosopher, strictly speaking, for he has no great or striking results to offer in metaphysics or ethics, and still less in logic and epistemology: his claims lie chiefly, as we have indicated, in æsthetical and psychological territories. He belongs less to the realm of the pure, scientific thinker than to the order of poet-philosophers, whose artistic instincts and intuitive vision make them no unimportant inspirers of the race. Even as philologist, he has not done much.

His judgment of Christianity is absurdly one-sided, for he is incapable of understanding its valuation of human personality. Indeed, on the whole subject of personality Nietzsche is disappointing, for one might well have expected him to make human personality supreme among his valuations. For he holds that "humanity must ever be working at the production of great individuals," and that "that, and nothing else, is its task." But he was betrayed by his anti-theistic polemic, and so drops into treating personality as an illusion. But Nietzsche had too many illusions, and small is the wonder that in his later utterances he is found confessing it was an "illusion" for him to have thought he had "transcended good and evil." He does no manner of historic jus-

tice to Christianity, for the victorious races of Christian type would be inexplicable, if only decaying races clung to a moral Deity. Hence it is mere perversion or distortion of the truth to talk of Christianity as "the most pernicious event in the history of the world." Nietzsche's ablest followers are compelled to modify the estimate put forward by Nietzsche in his extreme hostility. Christian experience is for him only the nightmare of an animal to whom parasitism is a biological need. The New Testament ideal is, in his view, that of "a completely ignoble species of man." He has blindly inverted that ideal, only to set the superiority of the Christian Superman in stronger relief. He has no eye for the social value and significance of Christianity, as these have appeared to, and in, societies and governments, so carried away has he been by the ideals of unrestrained individualism — boundless individual development or expansion! This blind neglect and ruthless sacrifice of the social aspects of Christian development is a serious enough defect. It utterly conflicts with his own professions of desire to reform and elevate mankind. But then, if he would organize mankind, it is only that it may produce the greatest number of geniuses. To him the masses were but "moles and dwarfs," in his heartless and unashamed contempt of man. But the lyrical egotism of his "Zarathustra" rolls on in spite of everything:— "The present and the bygone upon earth — alas! my friends, that is to me the intolerable; and I should not know how to live were I not a seer also of that which must come." And, again, his redemptive notions include:— "To redeem what is past, and to transform every 'It was' into 'Thus would I have it!' that alone I call redemption."

The ethical aspects of the new liberty have attention in his work "Beyond Good and Evil." Here Nietzsche recog-

nizes the whole elevation of humanity to have been due to suffering, but strangely, though intelligibly, thinks spiritual care for the sick and suffering made for the deterioration of the European race. It is the form and direction of sympathy he condemns, more than the fact. Zarathustra finds no greater power on earth than good and evil. But the power for good or evil is, to Nietzsche, wasted for lack of an end, humanity being, as he thinks, still without an aim. To him, the need is to turn away from the idealistic source of evil, to look at the facts of existence, and make what he calls the Transvaluation of all Values. For him, "morality negates life"; in his hands, the moral life is shorn of independence, and subordinated to biology, a position whose statement is its own condemnation. He can take no higher view of Christian morality than as a mere artifice by which the poor in blood and slavish in spirit may acquire power. But that is a poor way to describe the Christian Superman, who is king among men by moral virtue, spiritual power, and will to suffer or to serve.

In this *Human, All-Too-Human* world there is, for him, nothing but Heraclitean and Bergsonian flux: the world of "desires and passions" is the only real world: "the reality of our impulses" is, for him, the only reality. Thus there is, for him, no eternal ideal outside the flux, and he will overpass the dominion of good and evil. Says he therefore: "Only where there is life is there also will; not, however, Will to Life, but — so teach I thee — Will to Power!" This, as we have seen, is the transvaluation of all values — from morality to the non-morality of purely natural will of power — by the rather hazy and somewhat crazy Superman. This, because the scale of values now current is, to Nietzsche, meaningless, and he counted it his "good fortune" to have dis-

covered a new valuation. [“I teach the Nay to all that makes weak, that exhausts.” “I teach the Yea to all that strengthens, that conserves force, that justifies the feeling of force.” The virtue, self-renunciations, and compassions of the past are all, for him, values of the exhausted. But the “distinguished soul,” who is his present ideal, is wholly self-centered, full of brutal egotism, and scornful of love and sympathy. Nietzsche’s ethic is one of unconditional self-assertion, the fruit of feeling, not of reason.]

In all his inveighings against morality, Nietzsche’s position is illogical, for he is assuming — what he is not entitled, from his standpoint, to assume — that moral obligation exists in fact, and carries with it the obligation to speak the truth, not to deceive. He admits that, “in disclaiming the will to deceive, we stand on moral principle.” Yet he poses as an immoralist, rejoicing in emancipation from moral restrictions. It is love, not of our neighbor, but of the Overman — the man of the remote future — he enjoins. Well he may, for it is precisely in his present and positive strength that the superiority of the Christian Overman is seen. It is the terrible disclosure of history, he thinks, that the exhausted have always been confounded with the most abundant resources. The trouble is that Nietzsche, in his attitude of impotent revolt, does not see that his Overman is himself the product of that very naturalism which vainly hopes to cure and check the maladies or spiritual diseases, which it has itself caused. —

Such naturalism is too much and too blindly at war with itself to be able to see any higher mode of help or deliverance than its own. It takes the transvaluation of all values too lightly, and therein shows lack of depth; for the anciently existing, and still unbroken, values, against which he wages war, will not be dissolved by mere prophetic outpourings.

The transvaluation of values is always going on, wherever mankind is really carrying on a true developmental process. But that is something very different from finding a new objectivism by erecting the merely personal and subjective valuation of Nietzsche into a criterion. Such new values as "life" and "the will to power" have evidenced far too little of the unconditional worth necessary to make them the goal of all human striving, and the touchstone of all evaluation. Did not the great and heroic spirit of Nietzsche himself rise finely superior, in the article of death, to his own enunciation of life as the supreme good? Not life in its quantity, but in its quality, is our good; not all sorts and conditions of life are of like worth. Yet is death, "in the full expansion of a great soul," as he phrases it, a possible affirmation of the value of life, provided there is sufficient faith in the life beyond. The question is, Does Nietzsche's system of thought provide any sufficient basis for the maintenance of such a faith?

There are points in Nietzsche's teaching with which one can largely sympathize. His lyrical quality wins for him sympathy which his philosophizing would never gain. And there are some trends with which one can agree, at least to a considerable extent. This is so in respect of what he says of the narrowing, cramping limitations and defects of specialists of every hue and color, who are, that is to say, mere specialists, and nothing more. Rightly does he say the characteristics of all such are usually as little as possible those of the great man. But specialism is necessary, and its effects need not be so dulling or chilling as is often represented: specialism is sometimes so keenly conscious of these tendencies and effects as to be well on the way to escaping them. But Nietzsche carries his criticism of scientific spe-

cialism to a degree that makes it more amusing than serious, and it is rather curious to have science treated as a not less serious hindrance to the realization of Nietzsche's ideal than religion is. He arraigned the scientists, as he did the philosophers, for erecting a world of thought or subjective conception, out of the materials of the real world. The only objective science, for him, is that which is sanctioned by the sovereign self. In this connection, his thought is philosophically crude. But, to him, modern science is the antithesis of Christianity only by a kind of false pretense, being itself the while really an outcome of Christianity. Again, Nietzsche is not far wrong in his criticism of Socialism, which he abhors as most pernicious. It is part of his detestation of the doctrine of the equality of all men: Nietzsche glorifies differences of power, just as Whitman, on the other hand, revelled in equality; but they are alike in the naturalistic rise or origin of their ways of thinking.

With all his gifts and qualities, Nietzsche has deep and obvious defects. He is too tensional, restless, stressful: he is too self-tortured, and lacks serenity, peace, calm, beauty, harmony. His Overman, with his value-creating wisdom, is a mere visionary creation, although by no means an unsuggestive one; but his firm rejection of all that savored of empty leveling process, his claim for free, moral determination, and his strong sense of the value and the rights of personality, bear within them certain real grounds for appreciation. It is clear that much of his teaching, however, must be inimical to human progress of the higher type, and that if we took life, at any and every cost, as the highest standard of value, we should certainly bring about the degradation of life, historically judged. Indeed, the virility which he exemplifies has too often in recent years been confounded

with pure brutality—the glorification of pure brute force. So little have his new values done for us, whatever his work may have done as a wholesome tonic to sickly sentimentality. At the same time, he has been a significant thinker for the history of philosophy, one whose thoughts and sentiments have had their influence reflected in thinkers like James, Schiller, Mach, Simmel, Vaihinger, and many others.

One may do with Nietzsche as one does with Schopenhauer, take the elements of inspiriting value for mental enrichment and spiritual culture—far more subtly felt than easily formulated—discriminating for one's self what is to be left aside. For the world is still too poor in sources of mental stimulus and spiritual enrichment for us to be able to let such writers and thinkers go their way unheeded. Reason, insight, balance, breadth of vision, and impartiality, will know how to disentangle truth from Nietzschean error, and to gather stimulus without being betrayed into false spirit, or unwholesome tendency, by the alluring utterances of this uncommonly powerful individuality. Behind his characteristic extravagances, such as the saying,—"If there were a God, how should I endure not to be God?", there is still an interesting, but immature personality, engaged in his own way with the deep problems of life. The esoteric Nietzsche might be left to speak for himself, without critical estimate of any kind, but even if the world should be a little mystified in the process, it would not be content, nor would it be well, that he should be let alone, without appreciation, or comment, or censure. This will not hinder every reader of sufficient sympathy from extracting whatever of personal message Nietzsche may carry for him. There cannot even be harm in making him a touchstone to test one's own personality.