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A Wild German

Nietzsche And His Enemies

Half a dozen years ago the name of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, the German philosopher and critic of Christianity, was scarcely more than an empty word in England and America, and even the few daring souls who ventured to mention it in writing commonly spelled it in some unearthly manner. I have seen the poor fellow referred to as Nistzhy, Nitzzhy, Neitzsche, Nitse, Neitzschty, Nitske, Neeshey, Nitzkee, Neitsch and Neishie. That habit, in truth, still lingers. Not six months ago I encountered a book by an American physician, frankly designed as a counterblast to Nietzsche, in which he was spoken of from cover to cover, as Nitzche. The critics of Nietzsche, lay and clerical, offer frequent proofs that they have not read his books. Some of them, going further, give evidence that they have not even examined his title pages, for not only his own name but also the names of his works are often misspelled.

Soon after Nietzsche died, in 1900, the Macmillan Company began to issue an English translation of his writings, but the first few volumes were flat failures, and so the enterprise was abandoned. For nearly five years thereafter the only treatise upon the philosopher's ideas, in English, was a little pamphlet by Grace Neal Dolson, issued as one of the Cornell Studies in Philosophy. It was so difficult for the average reader that its value, save in the philosophical seminary, was next to nothing. Then, in England there appeared two books for the general reader, the one giving translated extracts from Nietzsche's books and the other presenting a brief summary of his chief doctrines. The first was by Thomas Common and the second by A. R. Orage. They were meritorious ventures in every respect, but they were exceedingly narrow in scope.

A Literature Appears

It was not until three years ago that the first attempt was made at a comprehensive presentation of Nietzsche's ideas in English and for the general reader. The book was published in America, but an English edition soon followed, and, though its actual sales were not very large, it apparently aroused interest in Nietzsche, for within a year two other books covering the same field appeared, and since then they have had half a dozen successors, the publication of a Macmillan translation (it is to be in 18 volumes) has been resumed, and the name of Nietzsche has begun to make frequent appearance in controversy.

The latest of the Nietzsche books is "Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism" by that same A. R. Orage who attempted a brief summary of the philosopher's ideas four or five years ago. It presents copious extracts from all the works of Nietzsche, ranging from the aesthetic essays of his student days to the posthumous "Der Antichrist," and there are, in addition, chapters in which

his fundamental doctrines are reduced to simple English. The book is published simultaneously by A. C. McClurg & Co., of Chicago, and T. N. Foulis, of Edinburgh. It is an extremely interesting and useful work.

Nietzsche's philosophical and ethical creed, though pedants and ignoramuses have often obfuscated it, is really very clear and simple. It is based, at bottom, upon the idea that the aim of the human race should be constant progress upward. Man will be really the lord of the earth, he argues, only when he has attained to a complete mastery of the forces which work toward his destruction. He must rid himself, not only of external dangers and enemies, but also of those groups and individuals of his own race who handicap him in his struggle, either by reason of their inefficiency or by reason of their hunkerous opposition to change.

Efficiency Is His Good

Nietzsche is to be ranked with the hero-worshippers, for he argues that nearly all progress is the product of individual enterprise. The mob, he says, is inert and helpless; it is only the strong man who gets ahead. Therefore he holds that all laws which place difficulties in the way of this strong man's efforts oppose the higher good of the whole race. Among such laws he ranks all systems of morals and particularly those supported by revelation. It is extremely difficult to change a moral code once it has been credited to a god and given the force of his authority, but the race, all the same, may outgrow it, and in consequence it may begin to retard quite legitimate and useful efforts at change.

This is one of the grounds of Nietzsche's objection to Christianity. Its ethical code, he says, has been borrowed from the ancient Jews, and though we have reason to believe that it will meet the needs of that people there is some doubt as to whether it exactly meets our own needs today. But so long as we accept it as a divine revelation, it is obvious that we shall be unable to change it.

Another of Nietzsche's objections to Christianity is based upon the fact that it teaches humility. The humble man, argues the philosopher, is not a man to be admired, for he does little to help along the evolutionary process. The man who is most useful to the race is that strong assertive man who thinks things out clearly and courageously and forces other men to abandon their conservatism and prejudices to follow him. All of the men who have made for progress, says Nietzsche, have been of this lawless, enterprising, egotistical sort—not only the great conquerors and explorers, but also the Darwins and Galileos, the Hunters and Jenners, the Luthers and Loyolas. The humble man accomplishes nothing. At best, he leaves the world precisely as he found it.

The notion that there is something honorable about humility, says Nietzsche, is a dangerous notion, for it puts a premium upon inefficiency and non-resistance, both of which make for racial degeneration. There are, of course, times when a race, or an individual man, may find it prudent to be humble—say in the presence of an irresistible enemy—and that was true in point of fact of the ancient Jews, who were surrounded by powerful conquerors and could not hope to win independence by the sword. But the dominating white races of today; he points out, are in no such case. They have no need to cringe. It is to their interest to do open battle for their ideas and desires, and so they gain nothing by clinging to the moral code of the Jews.

Mr. Roosevelt A Follower

This is the substance of Nietzsche's objection to Christianity. He holds that it accentuates and rewards as virtues the very qualities which work against the good of the average Christian. That this notion is sound is, of course, open to serious question, but that it is insane, as some of the opponents of Nietzsche have tried to demonstrate, is certainly far from true. Many men of undoubted sanity have come to accept it, and in Germany and France Nietzsche has a large number of followers. In our country Mr. Roosevelt has borrowed a good deal from the German sage. The ideas underlying the doctrine of the strenuous life, in truth, are nearly all of Nietzschean cut, and there is good reason to believe that they were formulated only after their author had read Nietzsche's books. Mr. Roosevelt is a professing Christian and an active adherent of a Christian sect, but his strenuous philosophy is violently anti-Christian in every detail. Not long ago a writer in the *New York Sun* called attention to this fact and showed, by parallel columns, how much antagonism there was between "The Strenuous Life" and the Sermon on the Mount.

That Nietzscheism will make much progress in the United States is to be doubted, despite the influence of Mr. Roosevelt's discipleship and the general worship of efficiency which prevails among us, for the Christian ethical scheme still makes an almost irresistible appeal to our consciences; but that the writings of Nietzsche will be more closely studied in the near future seems very likely. The German whatever his defects was at least a plausible and forceful writer, and once his works are available, in full, in an adequate English translation, it is probable that they will get a good deal of attention.

(Source: Iowa State University, Parks Library Media Center, Microfilm Collection)