THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL NIETZSCHEISM.

PROBABLY no sound thinker entertains the faintest fear of the spread of Friedrich Nietzsche's amazing gospel. The aristocratic and ultra-egoistic elements which distinguish it condemn it to defeat and theoretical oblivion. The policy of "blood and iron" is, alas! too dominant and seemingly successful in international relations to warrant strong hopes of an early triumph of the principles which received lip-homage at The Hague; but murder, devastation, and burglary between nations are one thing, and the elimination of all moral restraints *within* a given body politic is, even under our ethical standards, quite a different thing. To justify unnecessary, and consequently criminal, wars appeals are made to "the survival of the fittest," to the inevitable struggle for supremacy, and even to manifest destiny. The world-concert has just demonstrated anew that contemporary diplomacy is still following the rules laid down by Machiavelli for his *Prince*. In the settlement of the far-eastern problem nothing has been clearer than the ready assumption of most of the powers that truth, good faith, and consistency are "words, words, words," rather than realities to be relied upon. The most solemn promise, the most explicit assurance, did not prevent suspicions of double dealing and *arrière pensée*. Honesty and obedience to the moral law in international intercourse—to say nothing of altruism and brotherhood—may still be considered an iridescent dream.

But the modern mind revolts against the suggestion of applying the blood-and-iron policy in internal, national relations. Nietzscheism is neither more nor less than Bismarckism universalized. It may be summed up in a few phrases: There is no morality; consequently no evil to be avoided or reprobated. There is no duty of justice, humanity, or charity toward one's fellow-men. Why should we refrain from doing that unto others which we would not have done unto us? Why, to take Kant's expression of the "universal law of right," should you

"act externally in such a manner that the free exercise of thy will may be able to coexist with the freedom of all others"? Finally, what reason is there for observing the formula of social justice as framed by Herbert Spencer—namely, "Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man"? Why should not the weak suffer and be driven to the wall, and the strong or cunning "divide the earth"? Why should mankind set up a process different from the cosmic process, and recognize a moral and legal equality where there is no physical equality? The real obstacle to the steady improvement of the race is found in the "slave ethics" of modern codes and practice, in the practice of benevolence. Charity is not a virtue, but a blunder and a handicap. Might alone is right, and instead of the greatest good of all, or even of the greatest number, the guiding principle of the enlightened "blonde beast" should be the greatest freedom, pleasure, and welfare of the most vigorous and intelligent.

This is Nietzscheism in a nutshell. It is the code of the over-man, who has gone "beyond good and evil," and to whom the civilization founded on Hebraic and Christian ideals seems one long series of perversions of nature. Nietzsche did not contemplate the dissolution of civil society; he did not desire or expect perpetual internecine strife and confusion. He simply declined to admit that what we call justice and generosity are natural, spontaneous products essential to the preservation of society. He believed that, while it was perfectly expedient and proper for men really equal and intelligent to coöperate instead of fighting one another, it was sentimental folly to surrender anything to the mentally or physically inferior who lacked the power to assert their claims. Egoism untrammelled, and not altruism, was to him the indispensable condition of gradual ascent of the race.

Now, as already remarked above, there is no danger whatever of the open acceptance of the Nietzsche philosophy by any considerable number of persons. It is too extreme, too paradoxical, too violent. It is based on a radically defective definition of human nature, and, though claiming to be strictly

Darwinian, it is essentially anti-evolutional. Nothing is more fallacious than the distinction between natural sentiments and corresponding actions, and unnatural sentiments and resultant conduct, upon which Nietzsche's quarrel with modern civilization is based. The doctrine of evolution does not justify the assumption that egoistic feelings alone are natural, while the altruistic feelings are unnatural, due to false precepts and the sanctions of religion and morality. No one has insisted more strenuously than Mr. Herbert Spencer on the antagonism between individuation and genesis; yet is there anything unnatural about the subordination of the former to the latter? Is parental affection unnatural? Is sympathy alien to the naturally developed man?

In his *Principles of Psychology* consideration of an extensive class of facts of the sub-human and human worlds leads Mr. Spencer to the conclusion that there are "three causes of sympathy, due respectively to the three relations—between members of a species, between male and female, and between parent and offspring." These causes, Mr. Spencer points out, coöperate in various ways and degrees, and "it is inferable that, where the circumstances allow coöperation of all the causes, the effects are likely to be the greatest." Mr. Spencer continues:

Among inferior animals coöperation of all the causes is not frequent; rooks supplying us with one of the few instances easily observable. And even where all the causes coöperate the effects producible depend on the accompanying degree of intelligence; since the capacity for being sympathetically affected implies the capacity for having an ideal feeling of some kind aroused by perception of the sounds and emotions implying a real feeling of the same kind in another.

It is only when we come to the highest races of creatures that this last condition is largely fulfilled. Merely noting that among the lower primates, where considerable intelligence goes along with sociality and prolonged care of offspring by the females, sympathy is shown in various ways, we may now limit our attention to the human race. Here we have all three direct causes of sympathy in action, along with the coëssential condition—elevated intelligence.

As none of these propositions can be disputed, how absurd it is to allege that sympathy is "unnatural" to the "blonde beast"! It is true that excessive sympathy—sentimentality—is injurious—a fact which those who would practice beneficence

where rigorous justice is demanded too often overlook. But humanity is far from being in any immediate danger of erring on the side of altruism and carrying the exercise of sympathy to the point where social discipline is imperiled. To quote from another chapter of Mr. Spencer's *Psychology*:

. . . . It was pointed out that during the struggle for existence among societies, originally very intense and even now by no means ended, the conditions have been such as to make imperative the readiness to inflict pain, and have correspondingly repressed fellow-feeling. It may here be added that, beyond this checking of the sympathies which the antagonisms of societies have necessitated and still necessitate, there has been a checking of them consequent on the struggle for existence within each society. Not only does this struggle for existence involve the necessity that personal ends must be pursued with little regard to the evils entailed on unsuccessful competitors; but it also involves the necessity that there shall be not too keen a sympathy with that diffused suffering inevitably accompanying this industrial battle. Clearly, if there were so quick a sympathy for this suffering as to make it felt in anything like its real greatness and intensity, life would be rendered intolerable to all. Familiarity with the marks of misery necessarily produces (or rather maintains) a proportionate indifference; and this is as inevitable a concomitant of the bloodless competition among members of a society as it is an inevitable concomitant of the bloody competition between societies.

It is hardly necessary to preach to modern societies the strenuous life. Verily, the danger of enervation, impairment of physical and mental vigor from prolonged peace, and the cultivation of charity and mercy, is rather remote. The apprehension of the few conscious and many unconscious disciples of Nietzsche on this score would be inexpressibly comical if it did not excite a feeling of bitterness and disgust. We do not love one another too much; personal, national, and social egoism needs no artificial stimulation. An altrurian looking down and seeing the militarism of Europe and even America, the wars and preparations for war, the furious rivalry, the aggressive self-assertion, the struggle for markets and colonies, would never imagine that civilization was threatened by too literal an application of the religious and ethical doctrines of the Bible.

In truth, if what is best in modern civilization is in jeopardy; if the advance of humanity is seriously called in question by earnest thinkers; if the twentieth century opens in gloom and

doubt, the cause for all this is to be sought and found in what may be termed practical Nietzscheism. The gulf between the ideal and the real, between profession and practice, is apparently growing wider, though not many will acknowledge it. The general moral tone in literature is distinctly lower today than it was in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Bishop Potter, of New York; Mr. Abram S. Hewitt (no visionary or sentimentalist), Mr. Frederic Harrison, Professor Goldwin Smith, are among those who have recently sounded a note of warning and rebuked the shallow optimism of the poet-laureates of commercialism and sham nationalism. Is it not true that, as an American correspondent of the London *Times* has expressed it, "the rising spirit of virile, uncompromising egotism is observable in all civilized nations, but nowhere has it gained vigor of late so swiftly as in the United States"? Is it not true that, as this correspondent further says, "an unconscious discipleship to Friedrich Nietzsche is common in business, social, and military circles in America, where deeds of a type once denounced as criminal are now applauded as clever, and where Christianity, the golden rule of ethics, is for slaves"?

It will not do to dismiss this language as extravagant and irrationally pessimistic. No American thinker is more just, fair-minded, and careful in his statements than Bishop Potter, pre-eminently an exemplar of "sweetness and light." Yet here is what he deliberately said in a recent lecture on "Wealth and Commonwealth" at a gathering of the Episcopal Church Club of the diocese of Connecticut:

The subject of this evening is my own choice. I choose it because of its paramount importance. Divorce, drunkenness, crime, corruption in cities, all have one root—the lust of money. Our American disease, do I say? Nay, an American madness.

For what is the one eager, dominant hunger which, in one form or another, is expressing itself through combination, conspiracy, or other ways from end to end of this broad land? It is the passion, the hunger, the greed of gain. That it is that more than any other single influence determines our policies, shapes our manners, inspires our maxims. . . .

Is it any wonder, under such circumstances, that the average man in America turns to the business of accumulation and makes wealth the final

standard of achievement, since he finds that everybody else does? If material wealth be the end of being, if the buying of legislatures be the highest distinction possible to modern manhood, then we must needs look in the face the perils that in our time and our land are increasing.

For one I have no smallest hope that any mechanism of legislation will in the remotest degree remove these perils. The church of God must go up, must stay up, on a much higher plane. The prominent danger to our social order in this day is first the growth of wealth and then the abuse of it.

Abram S. Hewitt, "captain of industry" and ex-mayor of New York, is neither a pessimist nor an agitator. Yet so oppressed is he by contemporary developments that, like Bishop Potter, he warns the nation that only the wide and systematic exercise of altruism will save it from such a catastrophe as overwhelmed France at the end of the eighteenth century. Mr. Hewitt uses different terms, but it is plain that he, too, conceives the supreme danger to lie in the advance of unconscious, practical Nietzscheism. "If the spirit of commercialism and greed continues to grow stronger," he said in an impressive address before the Educational Alliance, "then the twentieth century will witness a social cataclysm unparalleled in history." If the rich neglect to perform their duties, "barbarism, anarchy, and plunder will be the inevitable result."¹ But Mr. Hewitt has faith in humanity. He believes that the twentieth century will witness the decline of the spirit of aggressive and reckless commercialism, and the growth of the spirit of altruism; "that the rule, 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,' will more generally prevail than in all the centuries which have gone before." The last sentences indicate what Mr. Hewitt regards as the remedy or the

¹ Here are two more significant expressions. Ex-Senator Edmunds, asked what he regarded as the chief danger of the twentieth century, answered in a newspaper contribution that it was to be found in "ignorance, greed, centralization of wealth and of social and political power, and the consequent inequality of position and opportunity, without which liberty and justice cannot exist." Mr. Edmunds knows whereof he speaks—he is the chief attorney of the shipping subsidy grabbers, the gentlemen who expect the poor taxpayer to assure them 7 or 8 per cent. interest on capital in an industry which, conducted fairly, only yields about 3 or 4 per cent. The subsidy gentlemen may consider themselves "over-men." President Hadley of Yale also points with apprehension to "legislation based on the self-interest of individuals or classes, instead of on public sentiment and public spirit." Were he required to give instances, his only difficulty would be that known as "the embarrassment of riches."

preventive of revolution and social discord. But "altruism" is a vague term, and the application of the golden rule is not as simple a matter in a complex industrial society as men like Count Tolstoy imagine.

Whether the hopes and expectations placed in the twentieth century with reference to the solution of our social and economic problems are altogether reasonable we do not need to consider. A strong case can be made out against the cheerful assumption that, the nineteenth century having attended to the questions of production, exchange, rapid locomotion and communication, markets for surplus goods, and the opening of vast tracts of territory, the twentieth will be free and willing to turn its attention to the question of fair distribution of wealth, and the removal of unnecessary and unjust poverty. But that may be left on one side. Admitting the danger and the disposition to arrest or ward it off, what are the best means of combating practical Nietzscheism? Just as it is idle to cry peace when there is no peace, so it is vain to preach altruism to a society living and toiling under conditions which would bankrupt any individual or any class that tried to live up literally to the golden rule.

There is an old, but ever new, question which has divided reformers, namely: whether moral advance, moral education—*character*, in a word—must precede the improvement in social conditions, or whether it is useless to expect moral conduct in an environment unfavorable to it, and therefore the proper business of reformers should be the modification of the conditions of life, the eradication of social wrongs and abuses. But the practice of the century has certainly proceeded under the tacit acceptance of the second theory. Not only extra-legal reformatory movements, but even the attempts of legislators, or seekers of legislation, have aimed at amelioration by means of institutional changes and modified treatment of property and person. It is but needful to allude to the anti-corn law agitation in England, to the improved treatment of criminals, to the old-age pensions plans and experiments, the question of proper housing of the poor, recognized as vital and even "burning" alike by the Tories and Liberals of Great Britain, and the admitted

necessity of fairer tax laws. Of the more radical programs of the single-taxers, land nationalizationists, socialists, and philosophical anarchists it is hardly necessary to speak, for the point to be emphasized is that even the so-called conservative groups of society which have bestowed any thought upon social-economic problems adopt the theory that moral and intellectual progress depends upon betterments of conditions.

Neither exhortation nor example will have any perceptible influence in checking the spread of practical Nietzscheism, and Bishop Potter's recent suggestion that the mad scramble for wealth (and the power conferred by wealth) should be counteracted by an organization of thoughtful men for the exemplification of "plain living and high thinking" cannot be deemed a happy one. Even in the earlier days of the nation the Brook Farm experiment was foredoomed to failure. In our own day of storm and stress, intense struggle for existence, sensationalism, and hurry, Brook Farms or settlements, or even coöperative action of scattered individuals animated by a common purpose, would command neither influence nor sympathetic attention. Perhaps it is necessary to qualify the aphorism that small reforms are the enemies of great ones; for, while small reforms do not attack the roots, the sources, of social wrong, they serve to popularize the *idea* of reform and prepare the public mind for radical programs. We all know that many things which ten or fifteen years ago were deemed almost revolutionary are now regarded as quite safe, and as within the limited vision of the ordinary citizen. This has been brought about by small reforms. To be a single-taxer or a socialist is no longer to be a member of the dangerous and criminal classes. In England the Fabians have made socialism respectable and interesting. In the United States we have plenty of unconscious Fabians — of men who are in a position similar to that of Molière's hero, who did not know that he had spoken prose for forty years. Municipal operation and ownership of "public utilities" (an elastic term) even candidates for high office fearlessly embrace, and the philistine is not shocked. In fact, we are living in an era of small reforms of which little good — and but little harm — can be predicated.

Can it not be made the eve of an era of reforms really great and far-reaching? If, as was indicated above, there is a general and profound realization of the threatening evils, is it not possible to evolve an agreement with regard to the irreducible minimum of social reform?

For example, can there be anything more nearly axiomatic than the proposition that to the inevitable natural inequalities of men there shall not be added artificial inequalities — monopolies and privileges created and supported by the state? On the subject of competition there is an irrepressible conflict between the individualists and the socialists; but is it not clear that competition in a “fair field and no favors” is entirely different from competition between men who are heavily handicapped and men who are free and untrammelled? Inequality of faculty *may* imply inequality of rewards in a society governed by individualistic principles, but society never yet has tried *equality of opportunity*. There certainly was no equality of opportunity in Greece or Rome, and there was none under feudalism. Has there been any since the industrial revolution, the rise of capitalism, and the wage system? Shallow economists like Bastiat and his contemporary disciples (whose number, fortunately, is *not* legion) may assert that there has been; but who takes them seriously? No school is more thoroughly discredited than that which accepts existing iniquities and meets all demands for reform with the *laissez-faire* mockery. Nothing will be “let alone” which is not in accordance with the requirements of social justice. The law may have its time limits, but morality is not bound by any statute of limitations. Vested wrongs, however ancient, do not become rights. *Laissez-faire* did not prevent the abolition of the institution of slavery, and it cannot prevent the rectification of other firmly established institutions. True, consistent, honest individualism presupposes two conditions: equal opportunities, and equal liberty to utilize them and develop one’s faculties. Any defense of privilege, artificial monopoly, and law-created inequality is necessarily a repudiation of the essence of the individualistic philosophy.

Now, equality of opportunity and of liberty is but another

name for justice, and the sentiment of justice is purely altruistic. By establishing justice we shall check and resist practical Nietzscheism, but we shall obtain no aid from the unconscious disciples of Nietzsche in our struggle for justice. We shall even encounter the resolute hostility of the honest but misguided element which justifies wrongful privilege in the name of the general welfare, just as slavery was defended on ethical and religious grounds. It is necessary, therefore, to have the clearest and most conclusive demonstration of the equity and indispensableness of each of the demands put forward in the interest and under the high sanction of justice. We must have precise definitions of the terms of the law and formula of justice, and rigorously logical deductions of the applications of the law to the concrete relations of men.

If justice means equality of opportunity and of liberty, what do *we* mean by equality of opportunity or of liberty? What is, and what is not, consonant with the enjoined equality? For example, with reference to land and other natural resources, what is the logical implication of equal freedom? Is private property in land compatible with justice? If not, what principle should govern the tenure of land? If the answer be affirmative, does private property justify the monopolization of large areas by individuals while tens of thousands go landless? Are enormous accumulations of wealth permissible under the law of justice? Dr. Alfred A. Wallace, in one of his social essays just republished, asserts that the privilege of unlimited bequest and inheritance is a violation of equality of opportunity. In his opinion, the right of a man to enjoy the fruits of his honest labor does not include the unlimited right of directing the disposition of his property after his death, and society may claim a share, if not the whole, of his surplus wealth. This deduction is vigorously contested by other advocates of equal opportunity. Who is right? What, in a word, are the limitations to be imposed on the individual in the interest of his fellow-members of society?

Professor Giddings, in his collection of essays entitled *Democracy and Empire*, attempts a reconciliation of those two

extremes—Tolstoyism, with its gospel of non-resistance and Christian anarchism, with Nietzscheism. It is hardly necessary to say that Professor Giddings is wholly out of sympathy with what has been called in this article “practical Nietzscheism,” though one may object strenuously to his defense of empire. Nor is he inclined to subscribe to the philosophy of the late German poet-“reformer.” He discerns half a truth in Nietzscheism, however, and points out that under a certain social condition the fullest exercise of altruism and the conscious furtherance of Nietzsche’s ideal may coincide. The soul of good in Nietzscheism is alleged to be its insistence upon the preservation of the vigor of the race. “Beyond any doubt,” writes Professor Giddings, “physiological power, physiological vigor, is the only enduring basis of human excellence. Any contrary doctrine is a form of the self-destructive philosophy that existence itself is an evil.” But Professor Giddings can find absolutely no basis for the assumption underlying Nietzsche’s repudiation of altruism, “that, in point of mere physiological power, the animals and savages whose struggle for existence is carried on entirely by crude means of self-assertion and combat are superior to men whose struggle for existence is a vastly more complicated process, and includes—auxiliary or antagonistic elements, if you please—the factors of compassion and coöperation.” Charity is not a weakness, but one of the advanced manifestations of power, and non-aggression, as well as non-resistance even, can be established without entailing race-deterioration. Only, according to Professor Giddings, the condition precedent to such relations among men is the expansion of democracy, the absorption of small states in larger political aggregates, and the spread of knowledge and mutual comprehension.

The right of small and weak nations to enjoy independence and the opportunity of working out their own salvation is a great question, but it does not necessarily enter into a consideration of the soundness of Nietzscheism. It may be that war and extra-group competition of the “crude” and savage kind will not cease until the empires have absorbed all the small states. There can be no peace and justice within, perhaps, when there

is war without. Upon this truth Mr. Spencer has never ceased to insist, and Professor Giddings evidently accepts that view without qualification. He evidently believes, in addition, that war and international burglary will go on so long as there is anything to grab and benevolently assimilate, and that exhorting so-called civilized nations to keep the peace, mind their own business, and respect the rights of others is sheer waste of breath. Empire first, and then, when there are no worlds left to conquer, democracy within these empires, is his forecast of the course of evolution. But, after all, the essential thing is not the extension of the democratic republic, but the establishment of justice within that republic. Within the limits of equality of freedom and opportunity there is plenty of room for competition, for inequality of rewards, for victories and defeats—victories without injury to the moral or physical nature of the victors, and defeats without absolute ruin to the vanquished. The struggle, not indeed for existence, but for comfort, superior position, distinction, is sufficient to maintain the vigor of the society, though it does not require the suppression of sympathy and generosity.

The fundamental trouble with our most civilized societies is not that we tolerate struggle at all, as Tolstoy believes, nor that the struggle is not severe and ruthless enough, as Nietzsche held, but that we allow the practical disciples of the metaphysical exponent of "blood and iron" to disregard the rules of the contest. Non-resistance may be possible at some future time; non-aggression by society ought to be possible here and now. Our natures are not perfect enough to dispense with "sanctions" to moral conduct, and punishment of crime and evil may be a necessary means of improvement, part of the social discipline molding individuals for the social state. But the non-invasive individual ought to be safe from interference, and the sham individualism which steals the livery of freedom and equality rigidly kept within the bounds of fair play. We cannot compel the highest altruistic conduct by force and penalties, but equality of rights can, and therefore should, be enforced. If all who seek social amelioration would but recognize that preaching on

the duties of wealth is not likely to bear fruit while wealth can be dishonestly acquired; that the abuse of legitimately earned riches is insignificant beside the evils flowing from the legalization of dishonest sources of wealth, and that the great task before us is the removal of the causes of oppressive, artificial inequalities, the prospect of curbing the unconscious "overmen" riding roughshod over the rights of their fellows would be much brighter. The social problem is not to be solved by enlightened philanthropy, by regarding surplus wealth as a "trust" and using it (as Mr. Carnegie believes it should be used) in providing free libraries, schools, museums, music halls, and picture galleries. It will be solved by reverting to first principles and adopting equality of opportunities and of freedom as the foundations of the social structure.

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