IV.—THE KEYNOTE TO THE WORK OF NIETZSCHE.

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WHEN Nietzsche first became known in Germany, by an article of the Danish literary historian Georg Brandes, the general attitude of criticism towards him was that of derision, and the way in which this criticism worked was by taking words and sentences out of the logical connexion and putting them together. The result was that Nietzsche's philosophy was at first regarded as an ethical and intellectual monstrosity, in which light English people often consider it even now. But in spite of this critical condemnation Nietzsche secured hold of Modern German Literature. His aphorisms re-echoed in literary discussions, he was studied with enthusiasm wherever in Germany the waves of the Modern Literary Movement ran high. He became a public event. Nietzsche exercised, and is still exercising, the same sway as Schopenhauer did forty years ago and Edward von Hartmann thirty years ago.

A second stage of criticism followed. Instead of flippant and prejudiced derision on the one side and glorifying deification on the other side, an appreciative and serious criticism was inaugurated in which philosophers and theologians took an active part. A new literature sprang up, analysing the thoughts of Nietzsche and acknowledging in him the merit of having propounded real and important new problems.

In England the criticism of Nietzsche has, generally speaking, not yet arrived at the second stage. On the occasion of his death newspapers and periodicals gave a more or less comprehensive account of his life and writings, but in reading all these articles and notes one had not the impression that the writers had grasped the keynote of Nietzsche's work. But this is indispensable, if a philosopher who is even paradoxical for his own countrymen is to be understood in a foreign country.

In this paper I shall try to point out this keynote of the work of Nietzsche by showing that the chief problems which

Nietzsche raised, far from being confined to the province of esoteric German philosophy, are, on the contrary, of general European interest. They belong to that universal range of problems which have arisen out of the conflict between the the one-sided radical movement of the nineteenth century and ethico-religious idealism of the past, an idealism which has had its most powerful historical realisation in Christianity, to use that word in an undogmatical and broad sense. In Germany this conflict has been carried on in the keenest way. I shall therefore follow up the special evolution of German thought in the second half of the nineteenth century; and inquire how it was that the teaching of Nietzsche arose. This teaching is chiefly characterised by two features, the "transvaluation of values" (*Umwertung aller Werte*) and the ideal of the "Overman" (*Uebersensch*).

Before entering upon my subject I must remark that I do not propose to exhaust all the sides of Nietzsche's many-sidedness. My aim is to give in general terms a sort of perspective view of the characteristic work of Nietzsche without caring for the succession of his books or the various stages of his thought. The first third of the nineteenth century is the golden age of German philosophy and literature. Carlyle then called the Germans the people of poets and thinkers. At that time poetry and philosophy were the chief interests of the Germans; what is called in Germany "innere Bildung" (self-culture) was the central point around which gathered all the highest aspirations of the prominent personalities. This period found its fullest philosophical expression in the system of Hegel who combines in his speculation all the tendencies of his age. There was one great presupposition underlying the whole German idealistic movement: Whatever is spiritual in man and mankind is the unfolding of a Divine Spirit. In the history of art, religion, morality and philosophy we have the gradual evolution of the spiritual world basis. The process of the Universe is a spiritual one, and this world of space and time is the appearance of a spiritual world, the world of reality.

After the death of Hegel, his system broke down and with it German idealism. The period of Materialism began. The causes of this intellectual and spiritual revolution are not only intellectual. The realistic side of life came into the foreground. Its centre of gravity was removed to the interests arising from our social existence. Natural Science, after having emancipated itself from the arbitrary treatment of speculation, brought to light those great discoveries which have changed the face of the earth and the relations of the

nations. Social and political ideals pushed aside the ideals of "self-culture". A new philosophy arose out of the new *Zeitgeist*, which had the deepest contempt for metaphysics, but which was nevertheless as metaphysical as Idealism. Feuerbach, the first leader of the anti-Hegelian movement, has expressed in a very neat way both his own conception and the conception of his time: "God was the thought of my youth, then came Reason, last of all came Man. He, Man alone, is and must be our God. Outside of him Salvation cannot be." It was in this subjectivistic theory of religion that Materialism was first mirrored.

For Feuerbach God is only the projection of Man's wish. Or, to put the matter antithetically:—

Hegel says: Man is the product of God.

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Hegel maintains that Matter is the product of Spirit. Feuerbach, like most of the post-Hegelian Materialists, turning Hegel topsy-turvy, maintains that Spirit is the product of Matter. The *mot* of Feuerbach: "der Mensch ist was er isst" (Man is what he eats), wittily expressed his position.

Marx, the founder of German Socialism, shows a similar tendency in his materialistic philosophy of history. For Hegel ideas are the moving forces in history; for Marx ideas are only the reflexion of the economical processes which alone determine the historical evolution of Mankind.

Materialism was reinforced by influences from England. The Darwinistic theory destroyed by its mechanical explanation of organic forms the last bulwark of a teleological view of the Universe. Darwin's book was received with enthusiasm in Germany. What Darwin only very carefully and cautiously tried to prove was taken up by his ardent devotee Ernst Hæckel in Jena as a new gospel. And with the new dogmas of this gospel: evolution, struggle for life, selection, adaptation, Hæckel and his adherents made havoc with the old outworn dogmas of the Christian Church. For them the walls which divide Nature and Man had fallen; there was no longer an incomprehensible gulf between man and animal, both belonged to the same range of beings, both were likewise subject to the same laws of the Universe. Man no longer occupied an exceptional place outside the infinite concatenation of natural events.

This theory of evolution in its naturalistic form, which has filled the age with its triumphs, meant for its followers a theoretical change in the province of science and philosophy and a resignation of long-cherished hopes and beliefs; among them the belief in the immortality of the soul. But there

was a rich compensation for the loss of a transcendental world—the faith in the ascending evolution of mankind. Hegel had ventured the daring saying: “Every form of intelligence is real and everything real is a form of intelligence.” Hegel was right to say so, for he regarded the world as the realisation of Reason. Naturalism however had just destroyed the idea of a Universal Reason; Naturalism denied the existence and the work of Reason in the world. Was that not the same as to abandon the Hegelian optimism? But feeling is much more conservative than understanding. And the feelings of these men were still imbued with the happy optimism of the Hegelian period. Therefore they both held that the new creed of science was able to prop up optimism with real facts. Science has proved—so ran the argument—that man and this glorious civilisation had arisen from the lowest stages of animal life, that man by his own energy had in the long course of ages been able to work himself up to his present high stage of culture. This truth gives us reason enough to hope that man’s power over nature will go on increasing, and that so he will be able finally to root out the evils which still distress mankind. Men were dazzled by this ideal prospect; their eyes were blinded so that they could not see the dependence of their optimism upon the idealism of Hegel. They were insensible to the blow which Naturalism had dealt at the root of the spiritual existence of man.

But what if this prospect should turn out to be a phantasmagoria? What if Naturalism should prove a Janus head whose other face looked as grim and gloomy as this face looked bright? What if the very facts underlying their theory were by similar inexorable logic shown to support a dark pessimistic view of the universe and of man?

That this was the case was proved by the pessimism of Schopenhauer. Historically Schopenhauer is completely independent of Darwin, but in the mind of those who embraced the philosophy of Schopenhauer Darwinism only reinforced pessimism.

Schopenhauer wrote his chief work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, about 1817. Nobody noticed it. But in the days of political failures—it was the reactionary period after 1848—men felt more inclined to pessimistic views. For Schopenhauer the world is the realisation, the objectification of unreason, of an objectless, unconscious, unrelenting will. He tried to prove his thesis empirically by bringing forward all the seamy sides of life, by illustrating with an unrivalled power of exposition the utter misery of the world and of man.

Schopenhauer's doctrines laid hold on the mind of Nietzsche in the strongest way. Nietzsche himself writes : " One day I picked up the volume and I know not what demon said to me : ' Take that book home '. I took it home, and throwing myself with my new treasure into a corner of the sofa I began to let the energetic gloomy genius work upon me." In the course of his thinking Nietzsche dropped the metaphysics of Schopenhauer, but he kept the pessimistic view. The cheerful picture of a happier mankind which was to arise in the course of evolution had no power over his mind. Like his teacher, Schopenhauer, he did not believe in an evolution leading to an increase of happiness. His pessimism was reinforced by Darwinism and naturalistic philosophy. He was deeply influenced by the grim-looking side of Naturalism, that side which Huxley has depicted so vividly in *Evolution and Ethics*.

Nietzsche's personality was full of religious fervour and feeling ; he was brought up in a pious Protestant faith ; at the same time he had an almost demoniacal craving after truth, truth in its absolute and fullest sense. He had learnt from Schopenhauer to put the questions : " Is life worth living ? What are the true values of life ? Has it any valuable ends ? When such a personality comes face to face with what was in his time the outcome of scientific development—what will happen ? Such a man will not see the advantages which natural science has brought to mankind, he will not feel the intellectual joy excited by its discoveries : his thoughts, his feelings, his whole being will be hypnotised by the one point which naturalistic philosophy has treated as accidental, as a matter of secondary importance—the breaking down of the idea of God or, as Nietzsche has styled it, " the death of God ".

That Nietzsche made this outcome of the naturalistic movement of the nineteenth century the starting-point of all his ideas, of his whole philosophical work, secures him a place among the original thinkers of mankind. Nietzsche was the first to realise that mankind, abandoning the idea of God, had changed its nature, and with God gone not only mankind but reality itself had lost its old meaning. For Nietzsche " the death of God " was an experience of more than mere personal importance, it was the greatest historical revolution which mankind had undergone. Through all his books one can hear re-echoing the sound of the strife produced in his mind by the " death of God ".

Let us listen to Nietzsche himself on this subject. Nietzsche was not only a thinker but a great poet too ; he

did not give abstract formulas; his artistic imagination lent its gloomy colours to his ideas; instead of a bare sentence he gives a picture full of suggestions and passionate impressiveness.

The passage which I am going to quote is an outburst of despair on account of the death of God. It is to be found in the *Froehliche Wissenschaft*, a book not yet translated into English. Nietzsche introduces a madman who runs about searching for God in broad daylight with a lantern, and clamours thus:—

"Where is God?" he cried. "I will tell you. We have killed him, you and I. We are all his murderers. But how have we done it? How have we drunk up the waters of the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? What have we done when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither goes it now? Away from all suns? Are we not ever on the brink of a catastrophe, continually stumbling? Backwards, sideways, forwards in every direction? Is there still an over or under? Are we not straying through a never-ending Naught? Is it not getting colder? Does not the darkness grow deeper and deeper?—Hear we nothing yet of the noise of the grave-diggers who bury God? God is dead! God remains dead and we have killed him. How shall we console ourselves? The worst of all murderers! Our Holiest and Mightiest has bled to death under our own knives! Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us?"

Nietzsche was well aware that the greatness of the event was not felt by his contemporaries. Therefore he regards it as his task to follow out its consequences relentlessly and as he has put it—"even if it should lead to crime" ("radical bis zum Verbrechen"). His books, *Morgenroete*, *Froehliche Wissenschaft*, *Genealogie der Moral*, *Jenseits von Gut und Bose*, are devoted to this task.

In brief his reflexions on the breakdown of Christian religion run as follows: Naturalism maintains that the world with which natural science deals is the only real world. If this is generally accepted—as it was in the second half of the nineteenth century and sometimes nowadays—then all the ideas and tendencies which connect the life of man with a spiritual world are wrong and must therefore be destroyed. Religion and especially Christianity must fall; for the very possibility of Religion depends on the reality of an invisible transcendental world, a metaphysical background of life. This last, having turned out to be only imaginary, Christianity in its broadest sense has ceased to exist.

This consequence Nietzsche held in common with other prominent personalities of his age. I may remind the reader of the then famous book of David Strauss, *The Old and the New Creed*. The old Creed is Christianity, the new Creed is Naturalism. Strauss, the famous theologian, boldly takes the side of the new creed, going to the root of the matter with the question: Are we still Christians? which he answers in the negative.

But Nietzsche did not stop here. Christianity is not an isolated fact. It has passed through a history of nearly 2,000 years and it has filled this history with its moral "values". The highest and loftiest ideals have sprung from the Christian belief in a Universal Justice, a moral order of the world. How are we to preserve these moral values if Christianity with its metaphysical presuppositions is to fall? Here we are in the centre of the most stirring problem of the present. All other serious thinkers who have denied the metaphysical foundation of Christianity were eager to preserve its moral values. Mill, *e.g.*, in his most interesting essays on Religion is wrestling with this problem and finally comes to the conclusion that the Christian values are to be preserved. But this result is brought about more by his good intention and utilitarian habit of thought than by logical reasoning on his part.

Nietzsche takes boldly the side of logical reasoning and denies the standard of Christian morality, denies the ruling moral values—as being based upon imaginary presuppositions. This is the origin of his famous demand for a 'transvaluation of all values' (*Umwertung aller Werte*) which means on the one side an ethical iconoclasm directed against Christian values and on the other side a creating of new values compatible with the modern presuppositions of Naturalism. This dependence of ethics on metaphysics is a thoroughly German tendency of Philosophy. The idea of "transvaluation of values" ceases to be paradoxical if one keeps in mind the line of thought by which Nietzsche had been led to it. The reproach of immorality which has been cast upon his aphorisms is quite illogical, for the moral condemnation is based upon those Christian values the validity of which Nietzsche denies.

I desire to impress upon the reader the necessity by which Nietzsche was driven to this revolutionary idea. It was not personal idiosyncrasy, it was not caprice, but it was the logical outcome of Naturalism. Consider the Universe in the light of Christianity and in the light of Naturalism. Christianity fully acknowledges a mechanical system of

Nature, but it maintains that by the mechanical laws a reasonable and valuable end is brought about.

Naturalism regards the Universe as a mechanical system without any meaning or end. Now consider man! According to Christianity or to any philosophical idealism—man though forming part of the system of nature belongs on his spiritual side to a Divine Reality. According to Naturalism man is an animal among other animals. All that appears spiritual to him must be reduced to the level of physiology and biology. The real being of man is to be found in these two sciences.

It is not necessary to go on comparing the two views. They are radical contraries and the difficulty naturally arises as to how the man who is a mere animal—though a refined one—can continue to have the same ethical values and ideals as before. Man and his life had a meaning on the idealistic view of the world. This view cannot stand its ground before the claims of science. Man as an animal or, as Nietzsche has called him, as a “valuing animal” has no values, no meaning until now, his old “table of values” being broken.

Nietzsche takes up the position of a new priest of a mankind bereft of God. He, Nietzsche, will give to mankind new values, a new goal for the historical evolution the “Ueberschensch”.

We have arrived at *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

In *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Nietzsche tries to give an answer to the question which he has raised in the *Morgenroete*; “When all customs and morals are finally destroyed upon which rests the power of gods, priests, and saviours, when, therefore, morality in its old sense shall have died then comes—what will then come?” Zarathustra, the mouthpiece of Nietzsche, has found an answer in his solitude and he is going to bring his new gospel to men. When stepping down from his mountains he meets an old hermit.

“And what doth the Saint in the forest?” asked Zarathustra.

The saint answered: “I make songs and sing them and making songs I laugh, cry, and hum. I praised God thus . . .” When Zarathustra was alone, however, he spake thus into his heart:—

“Can it actually be possible! This old saint in his forest has not yet heard aught of God’s being dead!” And Zarathustra goes on preaching the death of God, and the new god he brings,—the “Ueberschensch,” a god whom man himself is summoned to create.

A new period in history begins for Nietzsche with this

preaching of Zarathustra. Nietzsche looks at history as passing through three stages which he characterises by the symbols of the camel, the lion and the child.

The spirit of the Christian past is like a camel laden with the load of "Thou shalt". This "Thou shalt" contains all those values which are against the natural instincts of man. Truth for truth's sake, justice for justice's sake are Christian values or, as philosophy styles them, "absolute values". These values belong to the spiritual side of man. Christianity maintains that by following them man's life is lifted up in a higher sphere of reality.

But the age of Christianity is past for Nietzsche. There is no reality beyond the world of space and time. The spiritual world of idealism is naught and absolute values have no meaning.

This knowledge leads to the second age of history, the age of destruction, the symbol of which is the lion. The spirit must become a lion to tear asunder the trammels which the Christian age has laid upon the natural instincts of man. The aim of this age of transition is to inspire man with the courage to follow his natural instincts. Therefore Nietzsche glorifies the criminal not for his being a criminal but because he acts on principles which are not Christian. Nietzsche takes the criminal as a testimony that Nature is not completely extinguished in man, "To create freedom for new creation—for that the lion's power is enough".

But after this age of necessary destruction the Spirit must become a child. "The child is innocence and oblivion, a new starting, a play, a wheel rolling by itself, a prime motor, a holy asserting." With these poetical terms Nietzsche introduces the third age, which has done away with all dependencies on the past, with all metaphysical prejudices, an age, where, as Dr. Alex. Tille has rightly put it, "Physiology is the sole arbiter, on what is great and what is small, what is good and what is bad, where physiological ascent or decline is the last judgment of moral action. This moral standard is beyond good and evil in the sense of our traditional morality.

This third age is to become the age of the "Ueberschensch" who is ruled by one great passion "the will for power". In the "Ueberschensch" Nietzsche gathers together all the positive features of the new ideal which he has in his mind.

But the attempt to cut off all dependence upon the past is a vain one. In the picture of the "Ueberschensch" many of the old values glide in unconsciously. Despite of certain expressions of Nietzsche which seem at first sight to point

in that direction, the common mistake which treats the Overman as a mere beast of prey was far removed from Nietzsche's intention; for the "Uebermensch" has earned for himself the right to exercise power. He has the greatness which exacts submission and he has learnt to govern himself even by renunciation. There is something of the spirit of Goethe as he portrays the ideal-man in his poem "Die Geheimnisse" breathing again in the ideal of this latest, most unclassical and most romantic figure of German literature.

Nietzsche has two different views as to how the "Uebermensch" comes into existence. The one view has a Darwinistic colouring. Nietzsche believes in the possibility of breeding a new species of man. As man has followed the ape in biological evolution, so the "Uebermensch" as a higher biological being has to follow man, not by a happy chance of nature, but by the creative will of man, by means of a hereditary aristocracy. But this ideal is practically impossible, for the change of one species into another presupposes thousands of years. It is further a very doubtful question whether acquired qualities are inherited from generation to generation. Genius is mostly not hereditary.

The other conception of the "Uebermensch" is to be found in the "Antichrist". Here Nietzsche maintains that man is a biological end. The "Uebermensch" has only relative significance—a being who is a superior by his qualities, coming out as a chance product in historical evolution.

In postulating the "Uebermensch" Nietzsche represents the reaction against the democratic tendencies of his age. Thus *Spake Zarathustra* and most of his other books contain a spirited criticism of contemporary thought and life. But Nietzsche has not given positive ideals which can be followed. That lies in the nature of the subject. Nietzsche is the most unhistorical thinker of the nineteenth century. A philosopher who thinks that it is possible to begin history anew, who looks at Christianity as an historical *faux pas* has not learnt the lesson of our age of history. He holds the belief of the "Aufklaerung," that by the arbitrary will and action of a single man history can take another course.

Nietzsche's importance lies more in his suggesting general tendencies which present a sound antagonism to stereotyped prejudices. It is his struggling with the problems of the present rather than his positive results which makes the significance of Nietzsche. He does not belong to those philosophers who have given new truths to mankind, but to those who have aroused mankind by putting new questions. He

has thrown back German philosophy upon the ultimate problems of our spiritual and moral life, and by doing so he has given a new impetus to the revival of philosophical idealism whose symptoms can be recognised in the German speculation of the present.

He has seized hold of men by the impetuous passion and fierce enthusiasm with which he treats the problems of his time. His time has to face the problems—especially the religious one—which he has formulated in a new and startling way. In this sense we may apply to Nietzsche the saying of Hegel: "The condemnation which a great man lays upon the world is to force it to explain him".