

Nietzsche : Iconoclast and Prophet.

"Oxen that rattle the yoke or halt in the shade! what is that you express in your eyes?"

"It seems to me more than all the print I have read in my life."

Walt. Whitman.

WHILE all thought is the product and reflex of economic conditions, past and present, it is likewise true that thought has a history of its own, and the fully developed theory of one thinker can often be traced back to the almost amorphous idea of a predecessor. If we retrace the broad stream of the purposeful, constructive, effective thought of to-day, we shall surely be led to the three great names of Hegel, Darwin and Marx. Just as surely, if we seek for the most potent influences that have moulded contemporary literature, especially drama and fiction, we shall be led irresistibly to Ibsen and Nietzsche. Ibsen, the dramatist, unerringly seized upon the dramatic conflict between the ideals of romantic love professed by the bourgeoisie and the hideous facts of bourgeois marriage and prostitution. The degradation of woman implied by bourgeois monogamy and its invariable corollary, prostitution, only became apparent after the requirements of growing capitalist industry and commerce had made it necessary to educate and give mercantile training to hosts of women. So that Ibsen was a true child of his age. Nietzsche, who was far more a literary artist than he was a thinker, for his chief theme seized upon the violent contradiction between the ruthless self-seeking of Capitalism in an age when the cash nexus had become the only tie between man and man and no mercy was shown, no quarter given upon the fields of industrial and commercial warfare, and the religion of love, sympathy and self-sacrifice professed in all capitalist countries. This contradiction only became glaringly apparent with the disappearance of the last relics of that kindly human relation between master and serf characteristic of feudalism. So that Nietzsche as truly as Ibsen was a child of the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Though most of us have long been dimly aware that Nietzsche's influence was a potent force in Europe and had tremendously affected our comrade, Bernard Shaw, it must be confessed

that few of us have known much that was definite about Nietzsche or what he wrote, and small blame to us, for hitherto little information has been available in English. The standard Macmillan translation of Nietzsche's works is not yet complete. But Charles H. Kerr & Company have recently placed within our reach one of Nietzsche's earlier and saner books, "*Human, All-Too-Human*," written in 1876-77; and Luce and Co. of Boston have issued a very useful and informing volume on "*The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche*," by Henry L. Mencken, a brilliant Baltimore newspaper man. So that laziness is now the only valid excuse for ignorance about Nietzsche; but, let me hasten to add, my comrades, for most of you that is a sufficient excuse, and one you have no reason to be ashamed of. For we Socialists believe in the right to be lazy, and the comrade who has read what Marx, Kautsky and Lafargue have said about ethics and Christianity, need not feel compelled to puzzle his brain over the unrestrained ravings of the Nietzsche of 1880-89. As Battery Park Dan Finn would say, "Lave that to Sweeny!"

But I have been dabbling in Nietzsche for a couple of years, and want to give you, as briefly as I can, the import of his teachings to working class militants. Though Nietzsche had Polish blood in his veins, he was born in Saxony in 1844. His father and grandfather were clergymen, and as a boy Friedrich was exactly the horrible little prig one would expect. Red-blooded boys did not like him. He entered Bonn University in 1864, subsequently going to Leipsic. At the university for a time he conscientiously cultivated deviltry and did his best to be or seem a gay buck, but in this line he would seem to have been a dismal failure. At any rate he soon gave up the attempt, cut out beer and tobacco for good and all, and later in life he confided to his sister his conviction that no man who drank beer or smoked a pipe could understand his writings. I do not doubt this, and I suspect that most teetotalers find them equally difficult. In 1867 he had to do his turn at compulsory military service; he joined the artillery, but after a few months he was thrown from his horse. His breast muscles were wrenched so badly that he was condemned by a medical survey and discharged. In 1869, when he was only twenty-five, he became professor of philology at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He went to the front in the Franco-Prussian war as a hospital steward, but on the battle-fields of France he fell a victim to diphtheria and cholera morbus, which left him neurasthenic. To relieve his sufferings he resorted to a variegated assortment of narcotics, and continued to be a devotee of dope to the end of his days. From 1880 to the end—the period of his greatest literary productivity—he was a hypochondriac of the most confirmed type, and wandered up and down Europe taking all the cures, baths and massage treat-

ments that doctors and quacks offered him. In 1889 he became hopelessly insane, and died on the twenty-fifth of August, 1900. "Thus Spake Zarathustra," which was from the standpoint of literary art his masterpiece, was published in instalments from 1883 to 1885. Though he raved with frenetic fury against love, sacrifice and sympathy, his own life and work were only made possible by the love, self-sacrifice and sympathy of his devoted sister, Elisabeth.

To understand Nietzsche it is absolutely essential to bear in mind that during the period of his literary activity he was a hopelessly inefficient, hypochondriac invalid. His fiery spirit rebelled against his own impotency, and thus he became the passionate prophet and panegyrist of strength, efficiency and power. He was the true apostle of the life strenuous; by comparison our amusing President is a mere piker and burlesque imitator.

Nietzsche and his disciples are constantly using the terms "apollonian" and "dionysian." What do they mean by them? With Nietzsche they had a three-fold meaning. The first is the most constant and obvious. Where you or I would say conservative or reactionary, Nietzsche said "apollonian"; where we would say revolutionary or iconoclastic, he said "dionysian." To him not only old Greek life, but all life was a conflict between the forces symbolized by Apollo on the one hand, and Dionysos on the other. While in some passages he seems to regard the ideal condition of affairs to be one in which these two antagonistic groups of forces find themselves in a state of equilibrium, he never hesitates to declare himself a fierce dionysian. In this sense we Socialists must recognize him as a brother revolutionary. But it is a very limited brotherhood; for, while Nietzsche looked upon the making of dionysians or Immoralists as his life work, he always had the utmost contempt for the 'herd' or 'rabble' (by which pet names he meant you and me, dear reader) who, he thought, were utterly incapable of becoming dionysians. "The masses have no right to exist on their own account", he tells us, "their sole excuse for living lies in their usefulness as a sort of superstructure or scaffolding, upon which a more select race of beings may be elevated." How far removed is this from the spirit of the Titan dionysian, WHITMAN, with his imperious,

"I know perfectly well my own egotism,

"I know my omnivorous words, and cannot say any less,

"And would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with myself."

After reading Nietzsche, how comforting it is to hear old WALT roar out,

"By God! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms."

Had Nietzsche ever seen this noble line, he would have at once labelled Whitman a 'Tarantula'.

But 'dionysian' means more than radical or revolutionary. For Dionysos was the God of Life itself as opposed to Apollo the God of Art, or representations of life. From this point of view, the dionysian looks upon the humblest manifestation of real life as of infinitely more importance to living men and women than the noblest work of art. The quotation from Whitman at the head of this essay is a perfect presentation of this dionysian view of the relative importance of Life and Art.

Dionysian has still another meaning, for Dionysos was the Greek Bacchus, the God of wine and joy and sensuous pleasure. From this point of view, the dionysian is the sworn enemy of asceticism and self-denying stifling and starvation of the instincts and appetites. Nietzsche never wearies of repeating that his dionysian or immoralist is one who says "Yea" to Life in all its fullness, including so called evil as well as good. In this sense, Whitman was the King of dionysians; to all life he ever said "Yea":

"I make the poem of evil also—I commemorate that part also,
"I am myself just as much evil as good—And I say there is in
fact no evil,

"Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the earth,
or to me; as anything else."

Or again:

"What blurt is this about virtue and about vice?

"Evil propels me, and reform of evil propels me—I stand indif-
ferent,

"My gait is no fault-finder's or rejecter's gait,

"I moisten the roots of all that has grown."

But what is the use of multiplying quotations? His "Children of Adam", from beginning to end, is one triumphal ode in honor of Dionysos, the God of Earthly Joy.

In all three senses the red-blooded Socialist Proletariat seems to me to be dionysian. I would find it difficult to define class-consciousness in terms that would not to a Nietzschean suggest the dionysian spirit. You and I would like to see the Proletariat aware of its own tremendous strength, glorying in it, and resolved to use it to emancipate themselves and humanity; we would like to see them living in the actual world of reality instead of dreaming in the fictitious world of apollonian or bourgeois art; and our highest and ultimate hope is to see them revelling in the joys of the Earthly Paradise, undeterred by any preacher or moralist. Only a dionysian working-class can accomplish the Social Revolution. The rank and file of the Socialist Party to-

day are undoubtedly dionysians; but, unless my eyesight has deceived me, I have surely full oft seen some of our middle-class Leaders, Intellectuals, Parlor Socialists and Christian Socialists ogling Apollo with amorous glances. To those comrades who have of late felt moved to "rebuke sternly" the proletarians who have been insisting on bossing the work of their own emancipation, I would suggest the possibility that the conflict between Intellectuals and Proletarians that has broken out here and there may be only a new form of the age-long struggle between Apollo and Dionysos, even though some of the apollonian Intellectuals share the dionysian contempt for the rabble of "chumps", "yawpers" and "literary demagogues".

It was Nietzsche's misfortune to preach the Gospel of Dionysos to a bourgeoisie close upon senile decay and moral degeneracy and to live his whole life in utter ignorance of the only class which is in our day capable of breeding dionysians—the Proletariat.

In spite of the similarity between the intense individualism of Max Stirner and the philosophy of Nietzsche, and in spite of Nietzsche's keen consciousness of the relativity of ethics and their dependence upon economic conditions, I am not inclined to agree with Mr. Mencken when he tells us that "Nietzsche probably owed much to Max Stirner and not a little to Karl Marx." I do not believe he consciously drew from either of these sources. Nor am I able to agree with the reviewer in *THE NATION* (April 2, 1908) who tells us that "even German critics are beginning to recognize that the romantic movement (of which Socialism and Nietzscheanism are the two sociological poles) sprang almost full-grown from Rousseau's teeming head." Our conservative friends appear to me to have fallen into the habit of punishing Rousseau for his resolute refusal to father his own infants of flesh and blood by foisting upon him all the *enfants terribles* of modern thought.

But Nietzsche did consciously borrow the rudiments of his system ready-made from Arthur Schopenhauer, the philosopher of pessimism. From him he took the Will to Live and re-baptized it the Will to Power, which he looked upon as the one great force underlying all human life. To him Intellect or the Reason was secondary, having been brought into being by the Will to Power to effect its own purposes. And in this he was in complete harmony with Darwinian science. Schopenhauer held that this Will to Life produced more painful than pleasurable effects. In his own words, "Pleasure is never as pleasant as we expect it to be and pain is always more painful. The pain in the world always outweighs the pleasure. If you don't believe it, compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is eating the other." Schopenhauer held that since the Will to Live was

responsible for this terrible excess of pain, the only road to happiness was to will to kill the Will to Live, that is to stifle and destroy all one's natural appetites and become a sort of ascetic philosophic monk.

Nietzsche accepted all of this philosophy save the ultimate conclusion. He believed that life, as it is, is not worth while; that man, as he is, is fit only for contempt. But he escaped Schopenhauer's terrible conclusions by his audacious, optimistic prophecy of the Superman.*)

To Nietzsche, Man, as he is, is utterly without meaning or significance, but as the forerunner of Beyond-man he becomes of the utmost significance. Listen to his triumphant strains of prophecy:

"I teach you beyond-man. Man is a something that shall be surpassed. What have ye done to surpass him?"

"All beings hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and are ye going to be the ebb of this great tide and rather revert to the animal than surpass man?"

"What with man is the ape? A joke or a sore shame. Man shall be the same for beyond-man, a joke or a sore shame.

"Ye have made your way from worm to man, and much within you is still worm. Once ye were apes, even now man is ape in a higher degree than any ape.

"He who is the wisest among you is but a discord and hybrid of plant and ghost. But do I order you to become ghosts or plants?"

"Behold, I teach you beyond-man!"

"Beyond-man is the significance of earth. Your will shall say: beyond-man shall be the significance of earth.

"I conjure you, my brethren, *remain faithful to earth* and do not believe those who speak unto you of superterrestrial hopes! Poisoners they are whether they know it or not."

* * * *

"Man is a rope connecting animal and beyond-man,—a rope over a precipice.

Dangerous over, dangerous on-the-way, dangerous looking backward, dangerous shivering and making a stand.

What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal: what can be loved in man is that he is a *transition* and a *destruction*."

I do not see how any of us can help feeling that Nietzsche, the magnificently assured prophet of BEYOND-MAN, is *our* Comrade, though we cannot but grieve that his ideal included a vast

*) I have here used the term "Superman", because Bernard Shaw has familiarized it to the English-reading public. Alexander Tille, the translator of "Thus Spake Zarathustra", always uses "Beyond-Man", which seems to me the better translation of Nietzsche's thought.

mass of suffering and exploited humanity, a "herd" or "rabble" over which his Beyond-men were to reign in glory and dionysian joy.

Where Nietzsche approaches most nearly to Marx is in his description of the origin of Christian ideals and ethics. Here, though he doubtless knew nothing of the Materialist Conception of History, he accounts for the dominant characteristics of Christianity by the economic condition of the slaves and poverty-stricken wretches who were its first adherents. I wish that space would permit me to quote the fine passage from "A Genealogy of Morals" in which he describes how "*ideals are manufactured on earth.*" He shows how the early Christians, being slaves and victims of oppression, could not have the manly virtue of freemen and warriors, and consequently made a virtue of necessity and glorified weakness, humility, submission and non-resistance, not to say cowardice. He depicts them as huddled cowering in a dark cellar where they falsify weakness into a merit, "impotence which requiteth not" into goodness, submission to those whom one hates into obedience "(namely to one whom they say commands this obedience; they call him God)". "Not-to-be-able-to-take-revenge they call not-to-will-revenge, perhaps even forgiveness."

Thus they developed a slave-religion and a slave-ethic. Here we are on solid Marxian ground. Marx too saw just as clearly that Christianity was essentially a slave-religion. But we Marxians, while recognizing this, see that during all the long 1900 years before Science and Capitalism had so multiplied man's productive powers as to make Plenty for All a possibility, a religion and ethic that tended to make slaves contented with their lot and to some slight extent to mollify the harshness and cruelty of the master-class, worked on the whole beneficially to human progress and happiness. But to-day, so far as the slave-ethic of Christianity has any influence on the working-class to make them contented with their slavery and keep them from rebelling under the Red Flag, that influence is wholly deadly and damnable. *To-day the World's workers need not Jesus, but Dionysos.*

But Nietzsche saw that the self-denial, self-sacrifice, and sympathy for the weak and suffering inculcated by Christianity were fatal to the healthy Will to Power he wished to inspire in the progenitors of his Supermen—his pet "immoralists" whom he never wearied of exhorting to be "brave, unconcerned, scornful, violent,—thus wisdom would have us to be: she is a woman and ever loveth the warrior only." His hatred for sympathy, as a symptom of weakness, led him to iterate and re-iterate his great commandment: "BE HARD!" In his eyes the influence of Christianity was wholly pernicious from the start, and his hatred for Christianity grew upon him until in the end it would scarcely be

going too far to say, it was an insane obsession. In 1872 when he published his first book, "The Birth of Tragedy", the great conflict that he depicted was between Apollo and Dionysos. But as his insanity developed in the latter eighties he seemed more and more to replace Apollo with Christ as the great antagonist of Dionysos; and by 1888 when he wrote *Der Anti-Christ*, he had reached a condition of mind where the mere thought or mention of Christianity produced the same effect upon him that a red flag has upon a bull or a capitalist police officer, or that an attempt to hold a meeting of the unemployed has upon Inspector Schmittberger of the New York police force, or that the sight of an educated man of wealth busying himself with Socialist propaganda has upon Police Commissioner Bingham of New York, or that the sight of an inoffensive, consumptive foreign lad attempting to deliver a letter has upon Chief Shippy of Chicago. Nietzsche was not the last victim of insane hysteria.

The Superman is the crowning glory of Nietzsche, the prophet; but the Superman is likewise the fatal weakness of Nietzscheism as a philosophy. Supernatural religion has never recovered from the blow that Feuerbach dealt it when he showed that all the gods of all men, including Jehovah and the Christian God, were simply reflections and creations of the human mind. Nietzsche had digested this wisdom of Feuerbach's, for he puts into Zarathustra's mouth these words: "Alas! brethren, that God whom I created was man's work and man's madness, like all Gods!" But Nietzsche's Superman was just as much a subjective abstraction, a reflection and creation of man's mind as was the Triune God of Christian theology. And yet Nietzsche made of this subjective abstraction, without objective reality, about which there could in the nature of things be no certain knowledge, of which no two Nietzscheans would give the same description, the very centre and fundament of his system. Its relation to the Superman was the sole criterion by which any and everything was to be judged. And this criterion was vague, uncertain, indefinite, and as it passed from one Nietzschean to another changed color as readily as a chameleon. Compare Nietzsche's Beyond-man with Bernard Shaw's Superman: the former was a fierce and violent great blond beast, the inverted reflection of the hypochondriac invalid, Nietzsche; the latter was a sort of glorified Fabian Socialist Lecturer with a dionysian contempt for orthodox Marxism. The latter would run screaming with fright, should he ever chance to meet the former.

Nietzsche had in "Human, All-Too-Human", in "A Genealogy of Morals" and in "Beyond Good and Evil", abundantly proved the relative and transitory character of all former ethical codes and standards. It was in this field that he had done his most effective iconoclastic work; he had tried to show that

conscience as a pain-giving agency was an effect of the perishing doctrine of Free Will, and that the healthy immoralist of the near future would be able to digest his own conduct of whatever sort without any conscience pains, just as the healthy man to-day digests his dinner without any stomach pains. Seeing as he did the relativity and consequent falsity of all those 'values' by which men in the past had judged of life and conduct, he had set himself the task, as the crowning of his life-work, of revaluing or trans-valuing all values. Insanity overtook him before he had begun this, which he meant to be the crown and apex of his philosophy. But no Nietzschean need regret that this work was never done, as the criterion he proposed to use in revaluing all values was their relation to that last of all gods, that ever-varying phantasm and chimera, the Superman. Insanity came in time to save him from this *reductio ad absurdum*.

Does some comrade ask: do you advise us to read Nietzsche? By all means read HUMAN-ALL-TOO-HUMAN. It was Nietzsche's earliest attempt to investigate scientifically human conduct and ethics, and the conclusions he reached are for the most part in perfect accord with those of most Marxian writers on ethics. In fact the argument on pages 130-135 of HUMAN-ALL-TOO-HUMAN is identical with that on pages 65-67 of my own SOCIALISM: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE; although at the time I wrote those pages I had never read a line of NIETZSCHE. In HUMAN-ALL-TOO-HUMAN "Nietzsche challenged", Mr. Mencken tells us, "the whole of current morality. He showed that moral ideas were not divine, but human, and that, like all things human, they were subject to change. He showed that good and evil were but relative terms, and that it was impossible to say, finally and absolutely, that a certain action was right, another wrong. He applied the acid of critical analysis to a hundred and one specific ideas, and his general conclusion, to put it briefly, was that no human being had a right, in any way or form, to judge or direct the actions of any other human being." This is a very fair and intelligent summary of the teaching of Nietzsche in this book, but Mr. Mencken adds in a footnote a qualification of especial importance to Socialists. "It must be remembered," he tells us, "in considering all of Nietzsche's writings, that when he spoke of a human being, he meant a being of the higher sort—i. e. one capable of clear reasoning. He regarded the drudge class, which is obviously unable to think for itself, as unworthy of consideration. Its highest mission, he believed, was to serve and obey the master class. But he held that there should be no artificial barriers to the rise of an individual born to the drudge class who showed an accidental capacity for independent reasoning."

If reading this little volume gives you an appetite for more Nietzsche, and the Panic has provided you with the blessing or

curse of plenty of leisure, and you want to enjoy a series of strong mental stimuli, you cannot do better than to read "*Thus Spake Zarathustra*". The stimuli will come from the great thoughts of a weak man, for no really strong man ever shrieked as wildly and incessantly as Nietzsche did. But when his frenetic fury has wearied you, as it surely will, you will unfailingly find calm and sanity, strength and refreshment in the ever-welcome wisdom of Walt Whitman and Joseph Dietzgen.

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