

LITERATURE

THE GOSPEL OF SUPER-HUMANITY.

NIETZSCHE'S PREDECESSOR.

Lord Acton, who, as became a patrician, had a poor opinion of T. H. Buckle's "History of Civilisation," complained of the historian's disregard of Arthur de Gobineau's "The Inequalities of Human Races," of which the first edition appeared in the fifties of last century, and of which Mr. William Heinemann has given us a new edition, with an introduction by Dr. Oscar Livy. Buckle, it will be remembered, assumed human character, and therefore human action, to be subject to definite, unvarying laws which by a study of environment may be ascertained. As everything which conduces to character or action must proceed from within or without the mind, Buckle set himself to consider whether the primary cause is to be looked for in the sphere of mental or physical laws. He observed that unless the natural conditions in which man is placed are such as to make Nature subordinate to him, and induce him to undertake and prosecute the conquest of Nature, the balance is inclined so powerfully against man, and Nature so injures and overwhelms him, that he is incapable of a high civilisation. This may happen in countries within the frigid zone. But countries within the torrid zone, too, are fatal, though in another way, to a high civilisation. Oxidised food, the main requirement of the inhabitants of a hot climate, is procurable from vegetables, and the copiousness of tropical vegetation provides a ready supply. And very little food suffices, for in a hot climate men require little to maintain animal heat, and are so inactive as to undergo little physical waste. Satisfied with the minimum of existence, the colored man has no hope or wish to better himself, and thus permanent types are formed, and as in India, Egypt, Mexico, and Peru, indigenous society gets fixed in a non-expanding mould. All this so strikingly commends itself to the reason that the wonder is that it should not have occurred to Gobineau. But there is

have occurred to Gobineau. But there is an alternative theory much favored by those who pin their faith to "blood." It is that among races, as among the individuals of a race, there are aristocratic strains in the cultivation of which lies the secret of civilisation and social progress. Disraeli, in his novels and political utterances, preached this doctrine very vigorously, and conservatives generally agree upon it. The doctrine would have found very few votaries in any age if it did not carry with it a recognition of the right of the "blue-blooded" to a monopoly of the good things of the earth; and why the democratic view expounded in the American Constitution is so bitterly assailed in such quarters is that it involves a challenge to the hereditary right of a select few to a greater abundance of leisure, pleasure, and treasure than falls to ordinary mortals. Acton was not above the tendency he attributed to Buckle to dislike "whatever was opposed to his own conclusions," and the corresponding tendency to approve what told in their favor. Show that some nations are distinguished from others by the quality of their blood, and you raise a strong presumption that some individuals are distinguished from others in the same way. It will then follow that if my blood is superior to yours, I should have a better time on this earth than you, and you should recognise this truth, and try with all your might to make my earthly existence as Paradisaical as possible. Now this doctrine, we know, has been preached very vigorously for many years in Germany, and as Dr. Oscar Livy shows, it is deduced very largely from the writings of Gobineau, of whom Nietzsche and Houston Stewart Chamberlain are merely disciples. There is one nation that towers above all others in intellectual and moral excellence. It is the German nation. If there is any doubt about this their own assurances will dispel it. But it often happens that people are not taken at their own valuation; and the Germans are not unmindful of this too prevalent scepticism. It is not required, they say to other nations, that you should think much or little of us; it is only re-

quired that you should do what we desire, and allow us to ride roughshod over you, seize your territories and wealth, massacre your males, violate your females, and enslave you all. We do not require that you should think us supermen, but we insist on your acting as though we were. Hence the present war, which is the outcome of this doctrine, is not only advocated but

Hence the present war, which is the outcome of principles vehemently advocated by de Gobineau, as afterwards by Nietzsche. Says Dr. Livy:—

Gobineau was a very remarkable thinker, a man of daring and original mind, who, absolutely untouched by all the democratic influences of the nineteenth century, elaborated views which were clearly out of harmony with the thought of his own age. He believed in blood, in race. He recommended the virtues of the aristocracy quite as much as ever Disraeli did in his novels, and he prophesied a miserable future for humanity precisely because its older and more genuine aristocratic stocks had dwindled and disappeared, and had lost their virtue owing to successive adulteration of the original blood.

Gobineau's theory of national decadence was in complete contradiction to Buckle's. The unfriendliness of nature in certain spots on the earth's surface, he held, had nothing to do with the progress or degeneration of peoples. Nor would he concede any greater effect to other causes, such, for example, as irreligion, immorality, luxurious living, or misgovernment:—

Christianity can no more save a race than it can create a race, for by teaching the equality of all men it actually helps in the watering down of ancient nobility on which degeneration depends. If a nation goes downhill there is only one reason. It is that its blood—the race itself—is deteriorating, and it is deteriorating just in proportion as it is mixed with other elements. Now, there has only been one race which, because it possessed an element of order and a certain controlled and healthy imagination, has been able to create a civilisation—the Aryan race. Supposing that the world had produced nothing but Aryans, humanity would have been more or less perfect, at all events eminently capable of perfection. But as we know there have been other races besides—the black races, the yellow races—and these always and everywhere have been adulterating the pure white blood.

The yellow and black races may have benefited by such mingling with the Aryan blood, but the mingling has attenuated the virtues of that blood and filled the world with half-castes, men void of courage, inventiveness, or strength. It is a feature of Gobineau's theory that he offers no suggestion how the disaster can be averted. Shall the higher races keep their blood pure? Then they are confronted with the evils of inbreeding and a deterioration of the stock. The principle by which races are benefited at an earlier stage accounts for their decline at a later:—

If a society is to be developed it can only be by incorporating other and alien elements with its original members. Now, this very process of incorporation brings with it a tendency to decline, for socie-

this very process of incorporation brings with it a tendency to decline, for societies, having grown to be tolerant and inclusive, gradually lose the purity of their original blood. Thus the Roman blood was successively watered down, just because it gathered so many races into its comprehensive Empire. And the same thing holds true of the Greek nationality and some of the tribes of the Indian Peninsula. The tendency to expansion, therefore, is in its essence destructive, and yet without such expansion societies cannot develop. That is the fatal and inescapable circle within which humanity is bound.

It is here that the German philosophers part company with Gobineau. His teachings are cordially accepted up to a certain point. They believe with him in the saving qualities of a racial aristocracy, but they hold that as long as Prussia remains a breeding-ground for supermen the world will never be at a loss for its indispensable masters. Curiously enough, they are able to some extent to cite Gobineau's authority for this view. Of the old German tribes he had an exalted opinion. He rejoiced to think that in Central Europe they should have displaced the Latin civilisation. For the modern Germans, however, it is to be remembered he had Nietzsche's contempt. But it was quite sufficient, Dr. Livy reminds us, that Gobineau should have held the opinion he did about the early Teutonic stock—sufficient, that is, for the renegade Englishman Houston Chamberlain to rear upon it his superstructure of Teutonic greatness:—

Chamberlain's "Foundations of the Nineteenth Century" bore the imprimatur of the Kaiser. It was distributed throughout the length and breadth of the land to all the schools and universities. The salvation of mankind depends on the purity of blood—so much was accepted as a starting-point. But the large assumption had to be made that the German blood was purer than any

other. And thus the Teuton stands before us as a full-blown representative of all the most valuable elements in humanity.

To Gobineau, as to Nietzsche, the qualities of race pride, egotism, disdain of others, and ruthlessness, contrasted with the virtues of charity, mercy, humility, and unselfishness were "as sunlight unto moonlight and as water unto wine." And as with Nietzsche, the Christian code was only fit for slaves, a defensive armor worn by the conquered to secure consideration by the conqueror. These maxims, it is to be hoped, will be remembered when the Allies enter German territory. Whether they will be preached with the same energy by the German leaders is another

they will be preached with the same energy by the German leaders is another matter. Gobineau, it should be added, was drawn to the Renaissance as having been the last despairing effort of Paganism to defeat Christianity; and in his work on the subject he quotes with approval the passage in which Pope Alexander VI. defends his son, Caesar Borgia, to the latter's sister, Lucrezia, whose husband Caesar had strangled:—

"Know that for that kind of persons whom Fate summons to dominate others, the ordinary rules of life are reversed, and duty becomes quite different. . . . Now the great law of this world is not to do this or that, to avoid one thing and run after another. It is to live, to enlarge, and develop one's most active and lofty qualities in such a way that from any sphere we can always hew ourselves out a way to one that is wider, nobler, more elevated. Walk straight on. Do only what pleases you, and only do it if it likewise serves you. Leave to the small minds, the rabble or underlings, all slackness and scruple."
