

NIETZSCHE AND RELIGION.

"If anyone is feeling spiritually drowsy," said the Rev. G. E. Hale at the Unitarian Christian Church last Sunday evening, "let him read Nietzsche and unpose himself as one of those spineless individuals whom Nietzsche satirises, he will buckle on his Christian armor again, realising that the supremacy of Christ in the Western world is far from being an accomplished fact." It might be an ugly thought, continued the preacher, but there was a large body of silent opinion which supported Nietzsche's cavalry attack on most that we had come to revere in Christianity as honorable, lovely, and true. Christianity to Nietzsche was "the one immortal scum on mankind." The modern Christian "asphyxiated" him. This was because Christianity had sided with the weak, and was pre-eminently a religion of pity. For reasons that are not quite clear he refrained from hurling his stinging invectives at Jesus, and reserved them for Paul, although it was from Jesus rather than from Paul that this exhortation to be pitiful came. The explanation of this terrible onslaught lay partly in the fact that Nietzsche was of a neurotic temperament, which finally led to insanity. His life was characterised by increasing loneliness. He saved but few friends, and was twice rejected in his proposals for marriage. But even had his life been normal as regards health and companionship, his attack upon Christianity was inevitable in view of what he believed ought to be the future of mankind. For he was the brilliant, ardent proponent of the Superman. "I teach you the Superman," he said. "Man is something to be surpassed. The Superman is the meaning of the earth." He thought of a race of beings who should surpass anything that had hitherto been attained, beings who would rise above the pettiness, the "bovine" nationalism of his day. He, however, vitiated his argument for the Superman by his belief in the Everlasting Return, and by his vigorous denial of the possibility of free-will in man. How could we "will" the Superman unless our wills were free? Nietzsche contradicted himself in many ways. But in so far as his Superman idea was consistent it had features that were distinctly anti-Christian. His Superman would scorn the weak under-man, and advance at his expense. To a woman in delicate health, Nietzsche once said, "Madam, if what I publish is true a woman like you would have no right to live!" This surely was eugenics in a very unattractive form. The Christian Superman, on the other hand, would advance only in so far as he lifted the fallen and strengthened the weak. His superiority would consist in his willingness to stoop and to save. And that was the glory of Christianity, not its shame. But the central idea of the Superman was one that all should cherish. Christianity could remain the religion of pity and still appreciate the dignity of Nietzsche's summons. "Oh, my brethren, I consecrate you and point you to a new nobility. Let it not be your honor henceforth whence ye came but whither ye go. Not backward shall your nobility gaze, but outward. Exiles shall ye be from all fatherlands and fore-fatherlands. Your children's land shall ye love. Let this love be your new nobility—the undiscovered in the remotest seas. For it do I bid your souls search and search."