

THE FAILURE OF INTELLECT.

Career of Friedrich Nietzsche.

The career of Friedrich Nietzsche affords a striking instance of human intellect striving against its own limitations and finally, baffled and exhausted, lapsing into stark insanity (says Professor Harry Thurston Peck, in the "Scrap Book").

Nietzsche was born in Saxony in 1844, and received an exceptionally rigorous and careful training at the Universities of Bonn and Leipzig. He was saturated with the literature of Greece; and he had, besides, studied the Oriental philosophies, whose strange and subtle mysticism deeply tinged his own imagination.

In modern philosophy he was fascinated by the gloomy doctrines of Arthur Schopenhauer, whose disciple he at first became. His earliest essays declare that man's willingness to live is quite irrational, and that any desire for individual happiness is an evil. There are, he says, just three types of the truly virtuous man—the saint, the philosopher, and the artist. These three are virtuous, because each has put aside his individual self. The saint has conquered his will and trampled on the animal within him through asceticism. The philosopher has reached the same end by losing his own personality in the region of pure thought. The artist has done the same through the intense striving after artistic perfection.

This was the beginning of Nietzsche's remarkable series of philosophic works. But such a man as he could not long remain the follower of another. He possesses great natural talents, a bold and vigorous intellect, a power of acute reasoning, and, finally, the creative imagination of a great artist. He had, moreover, extraordinary literary gifts, and he developed a style that is unique in the literature of philosophy. Nervous, vivid, full of fire, and of splendid vitality, it coruscated like a glowing flame, and moulded his native language into movements that are lyrical in their boldness, and that have a swing and sweep which recalls the odes of Pindar.

It is not strange that Nietzsche soon eschewed the asceticism of Schopenhauer. His strong vitality of temperament led him into a sort of Paganism which defied desire, enthroned the joys of sense, and preached the doctrine of what he called a "Dionysian pessimism," striving to make men superior to their surroundings, to civilisation, and even to mortality. Here he brought forward his notion of *Das Uebermensch*, the Over-Man. Man at the present time, says Nietzsche, represents an intermediate stage of evolution. In the early days of the world he was a magnificent blond beast, roaming wantonly about in search of victory and prey. To-day he is weak and sentimental, cowardly and degenerate; but in the future he will attain a noble development such as will make him a hero, almost a god, confronting all things with strength and pride and

him a hero, almost a god, confronting all things with strength and pride and scorn, and attaining a moral mastery of them all.

As Nietzsche went on in still bolder flights he raged over the whole field of ethical speculation, flashing his mind into every dark corner of morbid thought, and dragging to light stray fragments of almost every doctrine. By turns he was pessimist, optimist, sceptic, and individualist, straining his intellect to comprehend and to explain the mysteries of human life, yet becoming more and more involved in boundless contradictions. In fact, he paid the penalty which anyone must pay who seeks to go beyond the limits that have been set to the power of the human mind. His insistent reason beat furiously against the bars that hemmed it in, and it finally recoiled from them with an impotent sense of failure. Strange and frightful imaginings gloomed upon his fancy. Against them he fought through sleepless nights, while his frame shook with spasms of nervous fear.

In the end it was clearly seen that his brilliant intellect had been shaken to its foundations. After 1879, tortured by insomnia, he became unfitted for the duties of life, and resigned the chair which he had held in the University of Bale. He still wrote on; but what he wrote was little more than disconnected raving. Finally, he was consigned to an asylum for the insane, where he died in 1900.—"Public Opinion."