

Neglect of Nietzsche

SIR.—"In every country in Europe, except England, Nietzsche is acknowledged unhesitatingly as one of the most original and most influential thinkers of modern times." Thus wrote your reviewer of December 24 in an article entitled "New Nietzsche Biography." And he hints that this neglect of Nietzsche may be due to those "most depressing individuals, the usual Nietzsche commentators such as Oscar Levy and Ludovici," who apparently by their lack of wit and insight have disgusted the Anglo-Saxon public, eager as it is and was for all sorts of high class philosophy.

May I suggest that this is a little unjust? May I point out that the English public was not at all eager to greet Nietzsche? Long before I took up the editorship of the authorised translation another attempt for a Nietzsche translation had failed and had brought its publisher to the bankruptcy court. This was in the nineties of last century, and when I, in 1908, began my new translation I found no publisher ready to take Nietzsche up, and I had to finance print translation and publication out of my own pocket.

Then, when at last a public was won for Nietzsche, the war broke out and Nietzsche was successfully accused by British propaganda of having misled the virtuous German into his famous four Declarations of War against Europe. Some of the greatest names of English literature, which, for charity's sake I shall not now mention, joined in confirming this attitude towards a great and super-national genius. In America our friend, H. L. Mencken, who had published the first book on Nietzsche in U.S.A., was even visited by the police and asked to explain "why he was a friend of that German monster Nietzsche" (who had been dead then for fifteen years). I could add further examples by the score, but do not wish to be "depressing."

So I think it a little rash to attribute to us the neglect of Nietzsche in England. I do not consider ourselves to be superior and infallible exponents, but may not our audience likewise have been somewhat to blame for that singular neglect? It is Nietzsche's vision, in my opinion, that was (and is) disliked by our readers; and it is a poor game, now that the beauty of this vision is recognised more and more abroad, to saddle with the consequences of a secret hostility the English pioneers of Nietzsche who, however, have learned from their Master not to expect gratitude for a labour of love.—
I am, sir, &c.

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