

THE SUPERMAN

Nietzsche's Challenge

NINETY YEARS LATER

Ninety years have passed since Friedrich Nietzsche first saw the light of day at Rothen, in Saxony. He was destined to become the last of that grande lignee of European thinkers which includes such names as Goethe and Kant, Darwin and Spencer, Comte and Taine, Stendhal and Dostoevsky, Schopenhauer and Tolstoi. The common tie linking masters of such varied characteristics and divergent aspects is not homogeneity of ideals and interests, but similarity in the vastness of the scope of the influence wielded by them in shaping the thought of the Western world. In this sense they belong to no individual nation, but to that community of European culture which attained its high-water mark in the nineteenth century, and which the disruptive developments of the past two decades bid fair to destroy altogether, writes Mary Corringham, in the Sydney "Morning Herald."

The extraordinary diversity of the influence exerted by Western culture on highly trained minds necessarily produced an almost boundless dissimilarity in the responsive chords struck by the great thinkers on the keyboard of European literature. And this was an essentially healthy sign, since the criterion of advancing culture is the heterogeneity of its manifestations, when the agreement of the ignorant has been succeeded by the disagreement born of increasing knowledge and reflection.

Nietzsche struck the most harshly dissonant note of all on that keyboard. He proclaimed the revaluation of all values, including all those first principles that humanity has long been accustomed to consider as axiomatic truths, such as the fundamental postulates of the theory of knowledge and of the moral law. Defiantly he flung the gauntlet at Western culture in its entirety, calling in question its most cherished notions, challenging its most sacred convictions, denying the validity of ideas that had been held as absolute.

It is not necessary that anything should be true, he says; it is only necessary that we should believe something to be true. The very foundations of knowledge merely possess, according to him, a utilitarian value. Truth is not an entity superior and exterior to humanity, immutable and independent; it is synonymous with what is useful for the maintenance of a species, consequently it is an instrument for ensuring survival in the struggle for existence. Hence Nietzsche abolishes truth as a "thing in itself," and with it all those fundamental concepts on which the whole theory of knowledge is based that is to say, the

theory on which the whole theory of knowledge is based that is to say, the notions of causality, space and time.

Similarly there is no such thing as good or evil in an absolute sense. The so-called categorical imperative of the conscience, Nietzsche affirms, reduces itself on examination to mental habits acquired partly from heredity, partly from education, partly from experience. It is controllable by nothing except itself; hence its claim to infallibility and immutability is absurd. As a matter of fact, so Nietzsche asserts, a moral law has never existed. There are only fundamentally dissimilar systems of morals belonging to the "masters" and to the "slaves," respectively.

CONFLICTING CODES.

Here the essence of Nietzsche's moral and social philosophy is reached, namely the permanent and irreconcilable inequality of the various "races" of humanity and their differentiation into two fundamental types a superior and an inferior one. The moral system of the superior races or "races of masters," exalts the characteristics of such races, such as bravery, love of danger for its own sake, hardness, boldness, daring, skill, ability to appreciate and endure and also to inflict suffering, the taste for conquest and adventure, the lust for domination. The characteristics of feebleness and timidity inherent in the inferior races, or "races of slaves," on the other hand, are reflected in their system of morals, which raises sympathy, love, pity, humility, and kindred mental states to the rank of virtues. Thus the two systems of morals are diametrically opposed to each other. What is meant for the "slaves" is poison for the "masters," and vice-versa.

There is no such thing as an immortal soul, but the evolution of the world, according to Nietzsche, brings back an indefinite number of times the same phases and combinations; it is a gigantic wheel, revolving in eternal space and eternal time. Everyone has, therefore, lived this life an indefinite number of times, and will continue to live it over and over again, eternally.

This doctrine of the everlasting return of all things is, in Nietzsche's mind, the supreme affirmation of life, and also has the sanction of the "Superman," celebrated with lyrical enthusiasm by Zarathustra. The Superman is himself the ultimate and most glorious achievement of the "superior" races, whose dauntless intrepidity and unflinching hardness find in him their most exalted embodiment, since he alone is capable of envisaging without anguish the prospect of the everlasting return with all that it implies—a prospect of no ordinary mortal can contemplate without quailing.

Nietzsche predicted for the twentieth century an era of great wars, the most terrible and devastating which mankind has witnessed. And he gloated over the prospect, since the result of those

the prospect, since the result of those wars would, according to him, be the establishment of a new governing caste, by which he looked as to the only possible saviour of humanity from the degeneracy to which the domination of the "slaves" has condemned it. Such a governing caste, he believed, composed of men habituated to command and to rule, would set Europe new and loftier aims and ideals.

The first prediction has begun to be amply verified by events, and the present state of the world certainly points to the grim process of verification being carried further by further indulgence of lengths. But, so far, at any rate, the second has not. The world is flourishing much more happily today in the morass of what Nietzsche called "little States and national exclusivism," than ever it did in his time. And the advent of a new caste of supermen is not yet perceptible.