FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

III

SO far I have attempted to follow with little or no comment what seems to me the main current of Nietzsche's thought. It may be admitted that there is some question as to which is the main current. For my own part I have no hesitation in asserting that it is the current which expands to its fullest extent between 1876 and 1883 in what I term Nietzsche's second or middle period; up to then he had not gained complete individuality; afterwards came the period of uncontrolled aberrations. Thus I am inclined to pass lightly over the third period, during which the conception of "master-morality" attained its chief and most rigid emphasis, although I gather that to Nietzsche's disciples as to his foes this conception seems of primary importance. This idea of "master-morality" is in fact a solid fossilized chunk, easy to handle for friendly or unfriendly hands. The earlier and more living work—the work of the man who truly said that it is with thinkers as with snakes: those that cannot shed their skins die—is less obviously tangible. So the "master-morality" it is that your true Nietzschian is most likely to close his fist over. It would be unkind to say more, for Nietzsche himself has been careful to scatter through his works, on the subject of disciples and followers generally, very scathing remarks which must be sufficiently painful to the ordinary Nietzschian.

We are helped in understanding Nietzsche's philosophic significance if we understand his precise ideal. The psychological analysis of every great thinker's work seems to reveal some underlying fundamental image or thought —often enough simple and homely in character—which he has carried with him into the most abstract regions. Thus Fraser has found good reason to suppose that Hegel's main ideas were suggested by the then recent discovery of galvanism. In Nietzsche's case this key is to be found in the persistent image of an attitude. As a child, his sister tells us, he had been greatly impressed by a rope-dancer who had performed his feats over the market-place at Naumburg, and throughout his work, as soon as he had

attained to real self-expression, we may trace the image of the dancer. "I do not know," he somewhere says, "what the mind of a philosopher need desire more than to be a good dancer. For dancing is his ideal, his art also, indeed his only piety, his 'divine worship.'" In all Nietzsche's best work we are conscious of this ideal of the dancer, strong, supple, vigorous, yet harmonious and well-balanced. It is the dance of the athlete and the acrobat rather than the make-believe of the ball-room, and behind the easy equipoise of such dancing lie patient training and effort. The chief character of good dancing is its union of the maximum of energetic movement with the maximum of well-balanced grace. The whole muscular system is alive to restrain any excess, so that however wild and free the movement may seem it is always measured; excess would mean ignominious collapse. When in his later years Nietzsche began, as he said, to "philosophize with the hammer," and to lay about him savagely at every hollow "idol" within reach, he departed from his better ideal of dancing, and his thinking became intemperate, reckless, desperate.

Nietzsche had no system, probably because the idea that dominated his thought was an image, and not a formula, the usual obsession of philosophers, such as may be clapped on the universe at any desired point. He remarks in one place that a philosopher believes the worth of his philosophy to lie in the structure, but that what we ultimately value are the finely carven and separate stones with which he builded, and he was clearly anxious to supply the elaborated stones direct. In time he came to call himself a realist, using the term, in no philosophic sense, to indicate his reverence for the real and essential facts of life, the things that conduce to fine living. He desired to detach the "bad conscience" from the things that are merely wicked traditionally, and to attach it to the things that are anti-natural, anti-instinctive, anti-sensuous. He sought to inculcate veneration for the deep-lying sources of life, to take us down to the bed-rock of life, the rock whence we are hewn. He held that man, as a reality, with all his courage and cunning, is himself worthy of honour, but that man's ideals are absurd and morbid, the mere dregs in the drained cup of life; or, as he eventually said—and it is a saying which will doubtless seal his fate in the minds of many estimable persons—man's ideals are his only *partie honteuse*, of which we may avoid any close examination. Nietzsche's "realism" was thus simply a vigorous hatred of all dreaming that tends to depreciate the value of life, and a vivid sense that man himself is the *ens realissimum.*

To recognize the free and direct but disconnected nature of Nietzsche's many-sided vision of the world is to lessen the force of his own antagonisms as well as of the antagonisms he has excited. The master-morality of his later

days, on which friends and foes have alike insisted, is a case in point. This appears to have been hailed, or resented, as a death-blow struck at the modern democratic *régime*. To take a broad view of Nietzsche's philosophic development is to realize that both attitudes are alike out of place. On this matter, as on many others, Nietzsche moved in a line which led him to face an opposite direction in his decay from that which he faced in his immaturity. He began by regarding democracy as the standard of righteousness, and ended by asserting that the world only exists for the production of a few great men. It would be foolish to regard either of the termini as the last outpost of wisdom. But in the passage between these two points many excellent things are said by the way. Nietzsche was never enamoured of socialism or democracy for its own sake; he will not even admit, reasonably enough, that we have yet attained democracy; though the horses, indeed, are new, as yet "the roads are the same old roads, the wheels the same old wheels." But he points out that the value of democracy lies in its guarantee of individual freedom: Cyclopean walls are being built, with much toil and dust, but the walls will be a rampart against any invasion of barbarians or any new slavery, against the despotism of capital and the despotism of party. The workers may regard the walls as an end in themselves; we are free to value them for the fine flowers of culture which will grow in the gardens they inclose. To me, at least, this attitude of Nietzsche's maturity seems the ample defence of democracy.

Nietzsche was not, however, greatly interested in questions of government; he was far more deeply interested in questions of morals. In his treatment of morals—no doubt chiefly during the last period—there is a certain element of paradox. He grows altogether impatient of morals, calls himself an immoralist, fervently exhorts us to become wickeder. But if any young disciple came to the teacher asking, "What must I do to become wickeder?" it does not appear that Nietzsche bade him to steal, bear false witness, commit adultery, or do any other of the familiar and commonly-accepted wickednesses. Nietzsche preached wickedness with the same solemn exaltation as Carducci lauded Satan. What he desired was far indeed from any rehabilitation of easy vice; it was the justification of neglected and unsanctified virtues.

At the same time, and while Nietzsche's immoralist is just as austere a person as the mere moralists who have haunted the world for many thousand years, it is clear that Nietzsche wished strictly to limit the sphere of morals. He never fails to point out how large a region of life and art lies legitimately

outside the moral jurisdiction. In an age in which many moralists desire to force morals into every part of life and art—and even assume a certain air of virtue in so doing—the "immoralist" who lawfully vindicates any region for free cultivation is engaged in a proper and wholesome task.

No doubt, however, there will be some to question the value of such a task. Nietzsche the immoralist can scarcely be welcome in every camp, although he remains always a force to be reckoned with. The same may be said of Nietzsche the freethinker. He was, perhaps, the typical freethinker of the age that comes after Renan. Nietzsche had nothing of Renan's genial scepticism and smiling disillusionment; he was less tender to human weakness, for all his long Christian ancestry less Christian than the Breton seminarist remained to the last. He seems to have shaken himself altogether free of Christianity—so free, that except in his last period he even speaks of it without bitterness—and he remained untouched by any mediæval dreams, any nostalgia of the cloister such as now and then pursues even those of us who are farthest from any faith in Christian dogma. Heathen as he was, I do not think even Heine's visions of the gods in exile could have touched him; he never felt the charm of fading and faded things. It is remarkable. It is scarcely less remarkable that, far as he was from Christianity, he was equally far from what we usually call "paganism," the pasteboard paganism of easy self-indulgence and cheerful irresponsibility. It was not so that he understood Hellenism. In a famous essay, Matthew Arnold once remarked that the ideal Greek world was never sick or sorry. Nietzsche knew better. The greater part of Greek literature bears witness that the Hellenes were for ever wrestling with the problems of pain. And none who came after have more poignantly uttered the pangs of human affairs, or more sweetly the consolations of those pangs, than the great disciples of the Greeks who created the Roman world. The classic world of nymphs and fauns is an invention of the moderns. The real classic world, like the modern world, was a world of suffering. The difference lies in the method of facing that suffering. Nietzsche chose the classic method from no desire to sport with Amaryllis in the shade, but because he had known forms of torture for which the mild complacencies of modern faith seemed to offer no relief. If we must regard Nietzsche as a pagan, it is as the Pascal of paganism. The freethinker, it is true, was more cheerful and hopeful than the believer, but there is the same tragic sincerity, the same restless self-torment, the same sense of the abyss.

There still remains Nietzsche, the apostle of culture, the philosopher engaged in the criticism of life. From first to last, wherever you open his

books, you light on sayings that cut to the core of the questions that every modern thinking man must face. I take, almost at random, a few passages from a single book: of convictions he writes that "a man possesses opinions as he possesses fish, in so far as he owns a fishing-net; a man must go fishing and be lucky, then he has his own fish, his own opinions; I speak of living opinions, living fish. Some men are content to possess fossils in their cabinets —and convictions in their heads." Of the problem of the relation of science to culture he says well: "The best and wholesomest thing in science, as in mountains, is the air that blows there. It is because of that air that we spiritual weaklings avoid and defame science;" and he points out that the work of science—with its need for sincerity, infinite patience, complete self-abnegation—calls for men of nobler make than poetry needs. When we have learnt to trust science and to learn from it, then it will be possible so to tell natural history that "everyone who hears it is inspired to health and gladness as the heir and continuer of humanity." This is how he rebukes those foolish persons who grow impatient with critics: "Remember that critics are insects who only sting to live and not to hurt: they want our blood and not our pain." And he utters this wise saying, himself forgetting it in later years: "Growth in wisdom may be exactly measured by decrease in bitterness." Nietzsche desires to prove nothing, and is reckless of consistency. He looks at every question that comes before him with the same simple, intent, penetrative gaze, and whether the aspects that he reveals are new or old he seldom fails to bring us a fresh stimulus. Culture, as he understood it, consists for the modern man in the task of choosing the simple and indispensable things from the chaos of crude material which to-day overwhelms us. The man who will live at the level of the culture of his time is like the juggler who must keep a number of plates spinning in the air; his life must be a constant training in suppleness and skill so that he may be a good athlete. But he is also called on to exercise his skill in the selection and limitation of his task. Nietzsche is greatly occupied with the simplification of culture. Our suppleness and skill must be exercised alone on the things that are vital, essential, primitive; the rest may be thrown aside. He is for ever challenging the multifarious materials for culture, testing them with eye and hand; we cannot prove them too severely, he seems to say, nor cast aside too contemptuously the things that a real man has no need of for fine living. What must I do to be saved? what do I need for the best and fullest life?—that is the everlasting question that the teacher of life is called upon to answer. And we cannot be too grateful to Nietzsche for the stern penetration—the more acute for his ever

present sense of the limits of energy—with which he points us from amid the mass to the things which most surely belong to our eternal peace.

Nietzsche's style has often been praised. The style was certainly the man. There can be little doubt, moreover, that there is scarcely any other German style to compare with it, though such eminence means far less in a country where style has rarely been cultivated than it would mean in France or even England. Sallust awoke his sense for style, and may account for some characteristics of his style. He also enthusiastically admired Horace as the writer who had produced the maximum of energy with the minimum of material. A concentrated Roman style, significant and weighty at every point, *ære perennius*, was always his ideal. Certainly the philologist's aptitudes helped here to teach him the value and force of words, as jewels for the goldsmith to work with, and not as mere worn-out counters to slip through the fingers. One may call it a muscular style, a style wrought with the skilful strength of hand and arm. It scarcely appeals to the ear. It lacks the restful simplicity of the greatest masters, the plangent melody, the seemingly unconscious magic quivering along our finest-fibred nerves. Such effects we seem to hear now and again in Schopenhauer, but rarely or never from any other German. This style is titanic rather than divine, but the titanic virtues it certainly possesses in fullest measure: robust and well-tempered vigour, concentration, wonderful plastic force in moulding expression. It becomes overemphatic at last. When Nietzsche threw aside the dancer's ideal in order to "philosophize with the hammer," the result on his style was as disastrous as on his thought; both alike took on the violent and graceless character of the same implement. He speaks indeed of the virtue of hitting a nail on the head, but it is a less skilled form of virtue than good dancing.

Whether he was dancing or hammering, however, Nietzsche certainly converted the whole of himself into his work, as in his view every philosopher is bound to do, "for just that art of transformation *is* philosophy." That he was entirely successful in being a "real man" one may doubt. His excessive sensitiveness to the commonplace in life, and his deficiency in the sexual instinct—however highly he may have rated the importance of sex in life—largely cut him off from real fellowship with the men who are most "real" to us. He was less tolerant and less humane than his master Goethe; his incisive insight, and, in many respects, better intellectual equipment, are more than compensated by this lack of breadth. But every man works with the limitations of his qualities, just as we all struggle beneath the weight of the superincumbent atmosphere; our defects are even a part of our qualities, and it

would be foolish to quarrel with them. Nietzsche succeeded in being himself, and it was a finely rare success. Whether he was a "real man" matters less. With passionate sincerity he expressed his real self and his best self, abhorring, on the one hand, what with Verlaine he called "literature," and, on the other, all mere indigested material, the result of that mental dyspepsia of which he regarded Carlyle as the supreme warning. A man's real self, as he repeated so often, consists of the things which he has truly digested and assimilated; he must always "conquer" his opinions; it is only such conquests which he has the right to report to men as his own. His thoughts are born of his pain; he has imparted to them of his own blood, his own pleasure and torment. Nietzsche himself held that suffering and even disease are almost indispensable to the philosopher; great pain is the final emancipator of the spirit, those great slow pains that take their time, and burn us up like green wood. "I doubt whether such pain betters us," he remarks, "but I know that it deepens us." That is the stuff of Nietzsche's Hellenism, as expressed in the most light-hearted of his books. *Virescit volnere virtus.* It is that which makes him, when all is said, a great critic of life.

It is a consolation to many—I have seen it so stated in a respectable review—that Nietzsche went mad. No doubt also it was once a consolation to many that Socrates was poisoned, that Jesus was crucified, that Bruno was burnt. But hemlock and the cross and the stake proved sorry weapons against the might of ideas even in those days, and there is no reason to suppose that a doctor's certificate will be more effectual in our own. Of old time we killed our great men as soon as their visionary claims became inconvenient; now, in our mercy, we leave the tragedy of genius to unroll itself to the bitter close. The devils to whom the modern Faustus is committed have waxed cunning with the ages. Nietzsche has met, in its most relentless form, the fate of Pascal and Swift and Rousseau. That fact may carry what weight it will in any final estimate of his place as a moral teacher: it cannot touch his position as an immensely significant personality. It must still be affirmed that the nineteenth century has produced no more revolutionary and aboriginal force.

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