

-the first of thirteen pages-

NIETZSCHE AND THE GREAT WAR

Nietzsche was first artist, then scientist, then prophet. Since it is from the prophetic period that we derive most of his war literature, it is important to take into account his prophetic style and manner of utterance.

Certainly, Nietzsche is a craftsman of the first rank. He manipulates language with a rare virtuosity, and consciously avails himself of all of the means and devices of a brilliant style. He is rich in striking antitheses, in elaborate pictures, in pertinent coinages, as well as in unexpected plays upon words. He understands the art of inducing a cumulative effect even to the point of explosive violence, as well as the art of delicate allusion, of sudden dumbfounding and silence.

These properties of style emerge especially at the time when he began to write in aphorisms, in the compact brevity of which close attention to form is required. Nietzsche understood pre-eminently how to manipulate the rhetorical arts in his aphorisms. But quite apart from this, aphorisms as such are an effective device of style—single thoughts appear much more sharply and appealingly in their abrupt particularity than would be the case if they were soberly placed in their order and sequence, not grounded in the antecedent nor softened by the consequent. Each single thought appears in harsh one-sidedness, as if sprung from nothingness,—and this makes all the stronger impression. Let such short sayings be uttered with prophetic poignancy and dignity, and they force the reflective mind into activity far more effectively than long-winded argumentation could do.

Nietzsche speaks in such short, sharp precepts—like the founder of a religion. They are compressed texts, and everybody finds peculiar charm in making his own gloss for the texts. As I say, the first writings of Nietzsche do not show this form, but *neither do they speak of war*. Only since 1876 did he so write. It is a style in which literary people are inclined to accord him the uncontested palm of mastership.

And now, to this purely historical art and finesse of the aphorist, we must add the art of the lyric poet in Nietzsche. Others

to the last contest with France, the most deplorable is that German culture was also victorious in the struggle. This error is in the highest degree pernicious. French culture remains as heretofore, and we Germans depend upon it as heretofore. Our culture did not even help toward the success of our arms. Severe military discipline, natural bravery and sustaining power, the superior generalship, unity and obedience in the rank and file—in short, factors which have nothing to do with culture, were instrumental in making us conquer an opponent in whom the most essential of these factors were absent.”

So, in the very hour of Germany's greatest triumph, 1871,⁴ Nietzsche dared tell his countrymen that the culture of vanquished France was incomparably superior to theirs. Again and again he denounced German State-idolatry, its militarism, its fanatical patriotism, the Bismarckian worship of success and the arrogant creed of Deutschland: “Deutschland über alles.”

Again Nietzsche writes: “But nothing shall stop me from being rude and from telling the Germans one or two unpleasant home truths: who else would do it, if I did not? I refer to their laxity in historical matters.” Here in caustic terms he denounces the “political puppets” and “tyrannical politicians” who alter and touch up history so that there is constant danger of murder and war. Then Nietzsche turns to Treitschke and exclaims contemptuously: “There is such a thing as writing history according to the lights of Imperial Germany; there is also anti-Semitic history; there is also history written with an eye to *the Court*, and Herr von Treitschke is not ashamed of himself.”

Nietzsche asserts also that readiness for war involves the withdrawal, year after year, of “the ablest, strongest, and most industrious men in extraordinary numbers from their proper occupations and callings to be turned into soldiers.”

If a nation would count as a Great Power, as we shall see below, it must “constantly sacrifice a number of its most conspicuous talents upon the ‘Altar of the Fatherland’.” This meant a “public hecatomb,” he said. The individual could no longer live his

³ *Thoughts Out of Season*, Vol. I, p. 3 (abridged, but meaning unaltered).

⁴ See Nietzsche's *Dawn of Day*, Secs. 189, 190; *Joyful Wisdom*, Sec. 104.

⁵ *Human, All-too-Human*, Vol. I, Sec. 481. See also below.

own life, and one might well ask whether it pays in the end. Nietzsche objects to an excessive preoccupation with military matters in time of peace. Conscription may be a good thing as an antidote against decadence, but there are, he thinks, other preventives of decadence which do not entail such a waste of energy.

Moreover, he had his suspicions about the honesty and the wisdom of the doctrine of "Armed Peace". His criticism here is well worth noting.⁶

To one more item I would refer in this connection—Nietzsche's own ideal was not the dominance of any one people, but a cosmopolitan culture. This is attested by his most favorite phrase, "European men." He insists that the day of separate, hostile nationalities is passing, that it has been preserved mainly in the interest of certain royal dynasties, or of social and commercial classes, but that a blending is now to be looked for. In *Human, All-too-Human* he cries: "We should just fearlessly style ourselves 'good Europeans', and labor actively for the amalgamation of nations."⁷

So much at least may be adduced in support of the thesis that Nietzsche was anti-militaristic. On the other side, there is the following passage in *Human, All-too-Human*, on war as a remedy for national weakness:—

"For nations that are growing weak and contemptible war may be prescribed as a remedy, if indeed they really want to go on living. National consumption as well as individual admits of a brutal cure. The eternal will to live and inability to die is, however, in itself already a sign of senility of emotion. The more fully and thoroughly we live, the more ready we are to sacrifice life for a single pleasurable emotion. A people that lives and feels in this wise has no need of war."⁸

Again, Nietzsche makes an emphatic pronouncement in favor of war as indispensable:—

"It is nothing but fanaticism and beautiful-soulism to expect very much (or even, much only) from humanity when

⁶ *Human, All-too-Human*, 241; *Thoughts Out of Season*, also.

⁷ *The Wanderer and His Shadow*, p. 336 (Sec. 284).

⁸ *Human, All-too-Human*, Vol. II, Sec. 187.

The Sewanee Review

it has forgotten how to wage war. For the present, we know of no other means whereby the rough energy of the camp, the deep impersonal hatred, the cold-bloodedness of murder with a good conscience, the general ardor of the system in the destruction of the enemy, the proud indifference to great losses, to one's own existence and that of one's friends, the hollow earthquake-like convulsion of the soul, can be as forcibly and certainly communicated to enervated nations as is done by every great war; owing to the brooks and streams that here break forth, which, certainly, sweep stones and rubbish of all sorts along with them and destroy the meadows of delicate cultures, the mechanism in the workshops of the mind is afterwards, in favorable circumstances, rotated by new power. Culture can by no means dispense with passions, vices, and malignities. When the Romans, after having become imperial, had grown rather tired of war, they attempted to gain new strength by beast-baitings, gladiatorial combats, and Christian persecutions. The English of to-day, who appear on the whole also to have renounced war, adopt other means in order to generate anew those vanishing forces; namely, the dangerous exploring expeditions, sea voyages and mountaineerings, nominally undertaken for scientific purposes, but in reality to bring home surplus strength from adventures and dangers of all kinds. Many other such substitutes for war will be discovered, but perhaps precisely thereby it will become more and more obvious that such a highly cultivated and therefore necessarily enfeebled humanity as that of modern Europe not only needs wars, but the greatest and most terrible wars,—consequently occasional relapses into barbarism,—lest, by the means of culture, it should lose its culture and its very existence.”⁹

And finally, touching certain detriments inherent in High Politics, Nietzsche writes:—

“Just as a nation does not suffer the greatest losses that war and readiness for war involve through the expenses of the war, or the stoppage of trade and traffic, or through the maintenance of a standing army,—however great these losses may now be, when eight European States expend yearly the sum of five milliards of marks thereon,—but owing to the fact that year after year its ablest, strongest, and most industrious men are withdrawn in extraordinary numbers from their proper occupations and callings to be turned into soldiers; in the same way, a nation that sets about practising high politics and securing a decisive voice among the great Powers does not suffer its greatest losses where they are usually supposed to be. In fact, from this

⁹ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, Sec. 277.

-the last of thirteen pages-

Nietzsche and the Great War

time onward it constantly sacrifices a number of its most conspicuous talents upon the 'Altar of the Fatherland' or of national ambition, whilst formerly other spheres of activity were open to those talents which are now swallowed up by politics. But apart from these public hecatombs, and in reality much more horrible, there is a drama which is constantly being performed simultaneously in a hundred thousand acts; every able, industrious, intellectually striving man of a nation that thus covets political laurels, is swayed by this covetousness, and no longer belongs entirely to himself alone, as he did formerly; the new daily questions and cares of the public welfare devour a daily tribute of the intellectual and emotional capital of every citizen; the sum of all these sacrifices and losses of individual energy and labor is so enormous that the political growth of a nation almost necessarily entails an intellectual impoverishment and lassitude, a diminished capacity for the performance of works that require great concentration and specialization. The question may finally be asked: 'Does it then *pay*, all this bloom and magnificence of the total (which indeed only manifests itself as the fear of the new Colossus in other nations, and as the compulsory favoring by them of national trade and commerce), when all the nobler, finer, and more intellectual plants and products, in which its soil was hitherto so rich, must be sacrificed to this coarse and opalescent flower of the nation?' ¹⁰

The case is substantially before the reader.

If I may express a personal opinion in closing this paper, it would be this: According to Nietzsche, the best—the aristocratic in that sense—shall rule, and by means of force. In that respect Nietzsche approved of war, but by the term war he usually meant the battle of life. Life was to him an *ἀγών*, as the Greeks say. We have then, to *train* for the contest. The body which is whole and healthy will possess the *mens sana*. Nietzsche puts it before us that we ought unflinchingly and courageously to take our part in the eternal fight, and to face the struggle like gods. The principle of contest is an essential part of the eternal order, as Nietzsche with his naturalism and evolutionism well knew, and so he held a gladiatorial theory of existence.

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¹⁰ *Human, All-too-Human*, Vol. I, Sec. 481.

wrote polished aphorisms—La Rochefoucauld and Pascal, Lichtenberg and occasionally even Schopenhauer; but Nietzsche is more—he is a lyrist. This lyrical quality of his style shows itself in the emotions which he supplies, in the flow of passion with which he speaks, in the subjective coloring which everything assumes. An extremely temperamental ego speaks to us in all his utterances. In all those aphorisms we get the inner experience of the author, his personal joy and pain. This lyric element mounts to formally poetic altitudes occasionally;—prose fails him and Nietzsche seizes upon poetic form in the shape of the dithyramb. This is especially true of his *Zarathustra*, the glowing and profound lyric thought of which reminds us of Giordano Bruno and of Hölderlin.

But as we must add to the aphoristic the lyric, so we must add to the lyric the symbolistic. Symbolism especially characterizes Nietzsche's main work, *Zarathustra*. The figure of Zarathustra himself and his story is symbol to Nietzsche, a poetic construction, a parable. In Zarathustra Nietzsche materializes himself (to use the language of spiritism) and his ideal: in the fate of Zarathustra we behold the necessary mutations and upheavals of his own nature, the dissonances and their resolutions in his own inner being. But this parable, in the case of Nietzsche, never becomes dry, didactic allegory, but remains living symbol. On the other hand, the parable is never too distinct and obtrusive, but remains always in the *clair-obscur* of the intimated, of the *dawn of day*, and so, of just the symbolie. And the *clair-obscur* of symbol rises occasionally to the heights of enigmatic mysticism, where deeper, more mysterious backgrounds are unveiled behind what is said.

It has been necessary to call attention at some length to this stylistic character of Nietzsche's writings, for if one forgets this style as Nietzsche treats of war, and of woman, and takes his words as prosaic, literal, matter-of-fact, scientific, and not aphoristic, lyric, symbolic, mystic, one will misunderstand many a passage and will fail to gain an insight into his true position on these and other subjects.

Before we go into the question of content, shall it be held that content is rooted in Nietzsche's *personality*? Should the per-

sonal characteristics of the man be disengaged? Perhaps it were better to do so, yet I hesitate, so great is the difference between a character-sketch and real life! In Nietzsche's case it is quite certain that the philosophic impulse is the fountainhead from which his personality is to be understood. The delineation of the personality of Nietzsche, then, is tantamount to the delineation of the philosophic personality of Nietzsche. But the philosophic impulse can be preponderatingly understanding, theoretical thought, or feeling, or will—that is, it can make intellect, feeling or will serviceable, employ either as vehicle in order to live out this impulse in life. And so we have, in the one case, a *scientific* philosopher (Leibnitz, Wundt); in the next case, an *artist*-philosopher (Plato, Schopenhauer); in the third case, the *prophetic* philosopher (Pythagoras, Empedocles). Of course, a *scientific* philosopher investigates, establishes: an *artist*-philosopher feels and forms: the *prophetic* philosopher proclaims and demands and enlists. Now, master-thinkers belong predominantly to one or another of these groups. But of Nietzsche one cannot say this; for, to reiterate, now he is artist, now investigator, and now prophet—frequently all three at once—no one ever exclusively.

This *triplicity* is the most peculiar thing in Nietzsche's philosophic individuality. Perhaps this is the reason why neither as artist, nor as scholar, nor as prophet, Nietzsche quite became a star of the first magnitude. This triplicity in coördination of its factors is the reason again why we cannot describe the theoretical Nietzsche apart from the emotional Nietzsche, or *vice versa*. We must abandon the effort to understand the heart and head of Nietzsche sundered from each other. If now we seek the most important properties in which there is an interplay of the two, we shall find two things, which I choose to call intensity and finesse, or, more simply, *strength and fineness*. Strength and fineness,—these constitute the personality of Nietzsche. I agree with Mügge's striking phrase: "*Nietzsche's intellect was as hard as iron, but his heart was soft as down.*"

Are the war utterances of Nietzsche to be interpreted from the point of view of the hardness of his intellect, or from that of the softness of his heart, or both? It is the union of this

hardness and softness that accounts for the fanaticism of Nietzsche.

We shall have to supply another word, however, as to the relation between life and doctrine, man or personality and work, in the case of Nietzsche. Two erroneous views are current among us. One is the belief that the superman is the enlarged portrait of Nietzsche himself; the other is the belief that the superman is the exact opposite of Nietzsche and that therefore the work has nothing to do with the man. The first view is entirely wrong; we know that the higher type man, which Nietzsche would breed, is the hard, hilarious, pitiless, master-man. But there is little of all this to be traced in the personality of Nietzsche. Nietzsche was himself—his intellect aside—effeminate, tender, devoted, affectionate, sympathetic. He warns his mother, sister, friends, not to read his writings, saying: "Every profound thinker fears more being *understood* than being misunderstood." His vanity may suffer from the latter, but from the former suffers his heart, his fellow-feeling, which avers: "I would not have it as hard with you as with me. He was grieved that his attack upon Strauss caused the latter sorrow and perhaps death. He showed mildness, tenderest regard for friends, giving or lending money right and left. His eyes looked goodness or melancholy, not the divine wickedness and hilarity which he preached. His moral conduct was *bourgeois*. "Everything illegitimate is offensive to me," he writes.

But some take certain extremes in Nietzsche's doctrines—the glorification of Napoleon, Cesare Borgia, etc.—as self-exaltation. The answer to this is that these types praised by Nietzsche are the exact opposite of himself. But because the opinion of the one is erroneous, that of the other is not on that account correct. The second group recognize the diversity between the norms and the philosopher's own features; but they do not recognize the intimate bond which unites the two. The truth is that the closest connection exists between the pronounced opposites of these two factors. There are two kinds of philosophic personalities to be distinguished here. In one kind the ethical views are the ideals of one's own actions and feelings. The ideal is the Platonic idea of the author—Spinoza, Kant, Fichte!—or else,

The Sewanee Review: April - June, 1920
-the fifth of thirteen pages-

Nietzsche and the Great War

the logically developed ideal grows out of one's own being, the dissatisfaction with one's own deeds. Then there arises a dualism, a dividedness—*Zerrissenheit*—in the nature of the preacher of the ideal. The more powerful this nature, all the more glowing is its need of redemption, all the more counter to its own life and being is its ideal;—such is the case with Schopenhauer, Wagner, and Nietzsche. As Nietzsche said: "Our defects are the eyes with which we see the ideal. In both cases the theory of value is intimated, intergrown with the kernel of personality, whether the content of personality be in identity or contrast with that theory of value."

Here, then, is Nietzsche's personality of strength and fineness, of hardness and softness, of delicacy of sentiment and refinement of taste; a personality of storm and calm; a personality of the elegance and good taste and æsthetic qualities of the artist, of the sincerity and truthfulness of the scientist, of the heroism and venturesomeness and tumultuousness of the prophet;—here is this personality revealing itself in every line, in every aphorism. In his own eyes his philosophy was the expression of a personality, of a character, of a temperament.

And surely, we must take this into account, along with his style, when we read what he has to say on war and woman and religion, especially. For example, when Nietzsche cries: "Be hard, O, my brothers, be hard!" what does he mean? "Give your friend a hard bed!" he adjures us. "War and courage have done more great things than love of neighbor has." "Not your sympathy but your bravery rescues the unfortunate."

Nietzsche's head is as hard as iron, like Darwin's; his heart as soft as down, like Schopenhauer's. If the reader relate Nietzsche's hard doctrine to his soft heart, and his tender utterance to his hard head, or make any other adjustment of the matter, he must of course take the consequences in interpretation.

Another question should be raised here, which bears upon our problem along with style and personality, namely,—the antecedents of Nietzsche's hard doctrine. These antecedents begin with the Greek sophists, especially with Kallikles, who in Plato's *Gorgias* developed similar doctrines as to the rights of the stronger. Moral and religious limitations are not "from Nature," but

"Nietzsche And The Great War"
-the sixth of thirteen pages-
The Sewanee Review

through precept; laws are made only by the weak, the miserable, the many, for the purpose of their protection against the strong. But Nature wills dominion on the part of the strong. According to Nature it is right that the stronger rule over the weaker and that the mightier have an advantage over the less mighty. The more powerful, the stronger, shall rightly, according to natural law, conquer. This sophistic antimorality thus considers moral laws as unnatural fetters, which the strong snap without hesitation, with a good conscience, in order that they may fulfill the will of Nature.

Other phenomena of antiquity may be recalled,—the Cynics, for example. Some baptize Nietzsche's tendency simply as neocynicism. Or, the skeptics (Anaxarchus, teacher of Pyrrho), who accompanied Alexander the Great on his triumphal exploits, and fortified Alexander later to be a superman and to exercise his right to rise above all restrictions. Or, again, certain phenomena of the Middle Ages may be remembered, especially the Assassins, with whom Nietzsche consciously associated himself. Often Nietzsche adopted their slogan: "Nothing is true, everything is permissible." Again, there were the Renaissance men, among whom Nietzsche sought the exemplar of his superman—Machiavelli, Agrippa von Nettesheim, Montaigne. Many others see in Thomas Hobbes a forerunner of Nietzsche's *Homo homini lupus*.

Still other exemplars may be found among the *illuminati* of the eighteenth century, Mandeville, Marquis de Sade, or even Vauvenargues. Then there is that Frenchman with whom Nietzsche is so often compared—Rousseau, the preacher of a return to nature from the aberrations and the decadence of hyperculture.

In Germany also at that time there was a movement in which one may find parallels to Nietzsche—the period of *Sturm und Drang*—the Genius time with Genius morality, from which the young Goethe did not stand aloof. Reference may be made to a similar phenomenon in the nineteenth century—Romanticism, fastening itself to Fichte's doctrine, finding its typical expression in Schlegel's malodorous novel *Lucinde*.

Finally, Nietzsche is often tied up with Max Stirner, who employed the Hegelian dialectic to ridicule Feuerbach's Humanity

war sanctifies every cause—for your enemies ye must have hateful adversaries, not contemptible adversaries. Ye must be proud of your enemy, then the successes of your enemy will be also your successes.”

In Nietzsche's opinion the open war of rival and contrary forces is the most powerful instrument of progress. Such war shows where there is weakness, where there is physical and moral health, where there is disease. War constitutes one of those dangerous 'experiments' undertaken by the wise man to further the progress of life, to test the value of an idea, of a thought, from the point of view of the development of life. Hence war is beneficial, good in itself; and thus Nietzsche predicts without dismay or regret that Europe is not far from entering into a period of great wars when nations will fight with one another for the mastery of the world.

Is Nietzsche then responsible, in his measure, for Prussian militarism, so-called, and the recent great war? Without special pleading, I will present the evidence on both sides, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions.

First: To Nietzsche the term war did not primarily suggest battlefields, but something quite different. He thought of it in the sense in which it was used by Heraclitus, for whom Nietzsche felt the warmest admiration, and whose philosophy suggested to him so much of his own. As a general rule, when Nietzsche speaks of war, he means the interplay of cosmic forces or the opposition to oppressive conventions, or the struggle with one's own passions and impulses to secure self-mastery.

Second: His war doctrine was evolved after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. In the very hour of German triumph, he was most scathing in his criticism of the tendencies he observed in the Fatherland. Here I wish to make a number of brief quotations from Nietzsche:—

“Public opinion in Germany seems strictly to forbid any allusion to the evil and dangerous consequences of a war, more particularly when the war in question has been a victorious one. Writers are jubilant in their praise of war, and of the powerful influence war has brought to bear upon morality and culture and art. But of all evil results due

The Sewanee Review

Nietzsche was Darwinian also in his thought of the individual man's career. He conceived the life of man as an heroic battle against all error and illusion. Nature appears to him to be a terrible and often maleficent force. History seems to him "brutal and senseless." The mission of the higher man is to give no quarter to whatever is bad, to dispel all errors, to denounce all false and overrated values, and to show himself pitiless toward all the weaknesses, all the meannesses, all the lying of civilization. "I dream," he writes in *Ideals of the Future* (Section 8) "of an association of men who will be entire and absolute, who will pay no regard to their conduct or discretion, and will call themselves destroyers; they will submit everything to their criticism, and will sacrifice themselves to truth. Whatever is bad and false must be brought into the light of day! We will not construct before the proper time; we do not know whether we can ever build, or whether it would be better never to build at all. There are lazy pessimists, resigned ones—we shall never be of their number."

Nietzsche's ideal man hates and despises the vulgar worldly prosperity aimed at by the average man; and destroys everything that merits destruction, heedless of his own suffering, heedless of the suffering he causes those about him, borne up in his painful journey through life by his resolute will to be true and sincere at all costs.¹

The wise man, according to Nietzsche, does not promise men peace and the quiet enjoyment of the fruits of their toil. Nietzsche exhorts men to war²—he dazzles their eyes with the hope of victory. "You shall seek your enemy," says Zarathustra; "you shall fight your fight, you shall do battle for your thought! And if your thought succumbs, your loyalty must rejoice at its defeat." "You shall love peace as a means to new wars, and the short peace more than the long." "I do not counsel you to work, but to fight. I do not counsel peace, but victory. Let your work be a fight; let your peace be a victory." "A good cause, ye say, sanctifies even war; but I say unto you that a good

¹ *Schopenhauer as Educator* (Sec. 4).

² *Zarathustra: War and Warriors*.

The Sewanee Review: April - June, 1920
-the ninth of thirteen pages-
Nietzsche and the Great War

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