

ARTICLE V.

NIETZSCHE MADNESS.

BY PRINCIPAL CHARLES H. LERCH, A.M., EASTON, PA.

A CHARGE might be brought against the critic of Nietzsche who was not born and bred to the traditions of German thought and literary expression, that he is naturally disqualified from grasping the full connotation and content of what might seem to him mere philosophical gerrymandering. The writer of this paper, however, puts his confidence in his competent translators and interpreters, and keeps to a line of thought which has been so often reiterated that it has become Nietzsche commonplace. The philosophical attitude of the poet-philosopher is fairly evident, notwithstanding the ramifications of thought or no-thought which a fanciful hermeneutics might direct.

Lack of sympathy with our philosopher, due to foreign birth and long-range acquaintanceship, it might be charged again, is at least the foster-mother, if nothing more, of unfair insouciance. Be it granted. How can it be otherwise with any one who has carelessly, even, read Nietzsche! The very key-note of his teaching is, Do not have any sympathy for any one; do not yield to that weakness which Christianity exalts as a virtue. To interpret the philosopher sympathetically would be to place him before the world in any way but the true light. If ever the stoical attitude of Matthew Arnold, that one in forming correct judgments must get rid of himself, must be assumed, it is necessary for the student of Nietzsche, for his master inculcates it. If one were

brought to bay by his admirers for handling unsympathetically and uncongenially things Nietzsche, he might defend himself by the verbal weapons forged by the philosopher himself, "Let them go to the devil and to statistics."

It would not be in good form to assault the ramparts of this earth-philosophy with the ordinary weapons of commonplace critical batteries. The superman critic must dirempt himself of all things man. The superman critic may snap his superfingers at all present trumpery ideals of criticism. He must live alone, straight-jacketed within his own mental content, looking out upon the four corners of things with no outward disillusionment. He must hold, with our New England transcendentalist, "our actual knowledge very cheap. Hear the rats in the wall, see the lizard on the fence," comments this philosopher, "the fungus under foot, the lichen on the log. What do I know sympathetically, morally, of either of these worlds of life? The idiot, the Indian, the child and unschooled farmer's boy stand nearer to the light by which nature is to be read than the dissector or the antiquary." Likewise the German transcendentalist holds our actual knowledge somewhat cheap and, perhaps, it might be said with justice, that the idiot or the Indian, or even the untutored swain, stands nearer the light by which his meaning may be interpreted than does the sapient critic. In reading Nietzsche one has much the same experience as did a certain English statesman, who, during a period of recovery from some physical ailment, picked up one of Emerson's Essays and attempted to read. After some effort at comprehension he handed the book to his wife, and made this significant inquiry, "Am I insane?" Thus spake Zarathustra: "What with man is the ape? A joke or a sore shame. Man shall be the same for beyond-man, a joke or a sore shame.

Ye have made your way from worm to man and much within you is still worm. Once ye were apes, even now man is ape in a higher degree than any ape." According to this philosophy even the superape may not come far short of the glory of playing the rôle of a critic, for only the language of an ape is intelligible to an ape.

Without soliciting sympathy, and with the hauteur of the beyond-man, what can hinder the critic of Nietzsche from taking him at his own word? He is to brook no master, but to develop the spirit of egoism. "Egoism," says our philosopher, "belongs to the essence of the distinguished soul; I mean by that the immortal belief that to a being like us, other beings are naturally in subjection and have to sacrifice themselves. The distinguished soul accepts this fact of its egoism without any question, without any feeling of harshness, compulsion, or arbitrariness about it." In the light of this egotistical envisagement the critic becomes a law unto himself. He is absolutely the master of his own inerant spirit, and brings into subjection all other critical spirits to himself. If you think that he plays havoc with your conception of the truth, which your beloved philosopher inculcates, you must yield your will to the supercritic, who has the absolute right, with obeisance to none, to hand down such opinions as he lists. It would not be a mark of distinction if the supercritic even so much as glanced about him to take note whether there are others around who dared to dispute his right of supremacy. Sympathy and humility cannot be predicated of the nature and character of the beyond-man student of Nietzsche.

And yet, in spite of all the protest against sympathy and altruism, the admirers of the poet-philosopher who translate and expound his meaning are absolutely under his sway.

Some of them are altruistic to such a degree that it seems to us they are willing to sacrifice their sanity. "Sympathy," says their master, "preserves what is ripe for extinction." We believe that sympathy only has kept, and still keeps, alive a great deal of Nietzsche, which by its very nature and substance is rotten and morally putrid. These fond lovers of his are trying to systematize the wild ejaculations of the mad immoralist, and thus, out of sympathy, read their own meaning into him. "An effort has been made," says one of the publishers of Zarathustra, "to render the meaning clearly in language worthy of the lofty theme." Quite an effort, the reader of this book must think, it would take to render the meaning of insanity into language comprehensible by the sound mind. In all this the lovers are not true to the teachings of the master. They preserve what is ripe for extinction, and thus prevent his immoral taking-off,—an event which should have transpired long ago. System and meaning cannot be predicated of the sayings and teachings of any man who is in an abnormal condition of mind and body; they can only be discovered by those who read liberally and sympathetically between the lines. "Nothing in our unsound modernism," advocates Nietzsche, "is unsouder than Christian sympathy." "The weak and ill-constituted shall perish." It was Christian charity which pensioned him when, quite early in life, he became incapacitated to continue in his professorship. Nietzsche for the last twenty-four years of his life was not a case of the survival of the fittest. Yet it was through these years that his teachings emerged out of the shattered fragments of his battered ego and brought him a following. At his own request the weak-minded and ill-constituted transcendentalist should have been permitted to perish long ago. Sympathy, his much-despised Christian

sympathy, shielded him through all these years, and it is this same feeling which keeps his spirit alive to-day.

Goldwin Smith in his life of the English poet Cowper says, "Once for all, the reader of Cowper's life must make up his mind to acquiesce in religious forms of expression. If he does not sympathize with them, he will recognize them as phenomena of opinion and bear them like a philosopher. He can easily translate them in the language of psychology or even physiology, if he thinks fit." That is to say, if one cannot fall in with the religious spirit of the poet he is at liberty to interpret such words as these,—

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
 Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
 And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
 Lose all their gilty stains,"—

in terms of psychology or physiology as he may see fit. It is one of those convenient ways that the scientific scholars have of translating the expression of the spirit, which transcends the bounds of the vacuous jargon of absolute science, into the content of neurosis and psychosis. Thus Paul, no doubt, after such a declaration as, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me," or, "In all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us," is in danger of creating suspicion in some quarters, that, at the time of his pronouncement, he was physically impaired, or suffering from some mental disturbance. John the Baptist was nothing more than a raving maniac as he shouted from the borders of the wilderness, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Christian experience, as viewed by these same men, who are not given to hallucinations, and who do not allow their emotional nature to give evidence of resil-

ience, is synonymous with mental aberration, if not with insanity.

But how about Nietzsche? In what terms are we to translate his mind as he comes out of the wilderness of his retirement from active life and shouts like one in whom neurosis and psychosis seem to be in tortuous torment: "A being capable of purely altruistic actions alone is more fabulous than the Phoenix. Never has a man done anything solely for others and without any personal motive. How could the ego act without the ego? Suppose a man wished to do and to will everything for others, nothing for himself, the latter would be impossible for the very good reason that he must do very much for himself in order to do anything at all for others." "In order to subsist the highest morality must positively enforce the existence of immorality." "Christianity," he raves further, "is the one great curse, the one great spiritual corruption, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are too poisonous, secret, subterranean, or mean." If Paul, John, and other Christians were giving evidence, through their teachings, of neurological disturbances, would it be too much to say that, from these and other sayings of the German philosopher, we believe that he was afflicted with madness? Well, the fact is that Nietzsche was during the greater part of his life physically and mentally far from normal. He was compelled to give up his professorship quite early in his career; and between 1876 and 1900, we are told, he passed "through a long valley of desolation, illness, and solitude . . . a change afflicting and obscure had come over him. . . . Alone and often suffering, he lost his self-control." "Are then the meditations of a mind so disordered worth pursuing?" asks one of his reviewers.

We know how exact scholarship would regard in the re-

ligious world the mawkish and grotesque ejaculations of a madman. In fact, one need not depart far from the hypothesis and postulates of the orthodoxy of so-called exact science before he will be viewed with some suspicion of mental errancy or deflection of some kind. Preserve your equanimity, let not your cold intellect be swayed in the slightest degree by the unholy emotions of your flesh or spirit, are the demands of science, or of scientific accuracy in any field of knowledge. Exact scholarship pretends only to take seriously the intellectual output of a phlegmatic temper and a clear brain. Imagine how much consideration Paul, Peter, and John would receive from these sticklers for Knowledge that must not be tainted by the imagination or the emotions, if it were so much as hinted that any one of these had been compelled to give up his preaching, even for a short time, because of a nervous break-down or physical wreckage of some kind! Suppose that it were a well-known fact that one of the most stirring, suggestive of New Testament writers had been necessitated, during the last twenty-four years of his life, as was the case with Nietzsche, to spend his time at health-resorts seeking health and finding none, and that at last he had collapsed, being consumed, as it were, by the fire of his theological or philosophical ravings, would learned professors in universities have paid their respects to him or would they do so now? We fear it would not help the cause of such an unfortunate apostle, if it were suggested that, in his moments of *Aufklärung*, he had propounded great questions, and had called the attention of the thinking men to great issues.

But there is another indictment against the German philosopher which ought to minister against the worth of his teaching; and that is that his temperament is poetic. His ad-

mirers call him the poet-philosopher. He was not a trained philosopher, but a self-made one. The earliest evidence of his real bent discloses itself first in his philological writings. In theology or science in general, an untrained scholar would not receive serious recognition, and the poetic aspect of his mind would not help him out. Many scientific men, we fear, agree, in other than a figurative sense, with Macaulay, that the truth of poetry "is the truth of madness." It is often the chief criticism upon religious writers that they sacrifice the truth at the altar of the imagination. Accordingly, Christ himself hides his meaning in parables, in figures of rhetoric; and his truth is therefore the truth of madness and illusion, and is to be regarded with suspicion and indifference. With Nietzsche, however, it is different. Poetry, which the truth-builders often reject, becomes the chief corner-stone of his master-structure. His poetic style, which is the pride of his own heart, covers a multitude of sins.

In spite of all protest, in spite of common sense, the reactionary spirit of the German egoist, it seems, is becoming somewhat of a *Zeitgeist* in some quarters. "If there be gods," says he, "how could I endure not to be one of them?" That is the spirit of rebellion against the powers that be, especially against the tyranny of blood and iron in the Fatherland. Man desires freedom here below, emphatically here below, since the earth-song of Nietzsche has blown upon the breeze. Hence apparently sane men are ready to throw away their reason and to subscribe to the incendiaryism and unreason of the poet-philosopher. Courses of lectures, we understand, are devoted to him in many of the universities of his native country. New art, new literature, new life in general, is to be a function of the development of his teaching and personality.

What, then, are some of these inspirational truths which draw men's attention Nietzsche-ward? To study the philosopher fragmentarily is allowable, for the whole of Nietzsche is not in every part. "A being capable of purely altruistic actions alone is more fabulous than the Phoenix. Never has a man done anything solely for others, and without any personal motive. How could the ego act without the ego?" Who has ever seen a being so purely altruistic that the ego disappeared entirely in the sacrifice? If he imagines such altruism taught by Christianity, we think that he is mistaken. When in a moment of Christian inspiration the multitudes, on one occasion, laid almost all their possessions at the apostles' feet, and when it seemed as if all things might be consumed by the altruistic fire of love, there were still a few egos left unscathed and uninjured. Peter, John, James, and Paul stood the altruistic test, and came out of the pressure in a rational, sound frame of mind. Not all virtue had gone out of them. There was still sufficient consciousness of the ego to be found in Peter and John, after they had performed their altruistic service of helping a lame man to locomotion, so that one of them cried out to the marveling crowd, "Why fasten ye your eyes on us?" Christ never taught an altruism which would result in self-effacement. "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands." No man after the Christian fashion can be truly altruistic without receiving assets to his ego. No man can be a worthy ego without being altruistic. If Jesus on one occasion says, "Leave all and follow me," on another he exhorts, "Seek, and ye shall find." The Christian injunction

Be not anxious about to-morrow is answered by "Work while it is called to-day." The man who works his talents, whether silver, or gold, or brains, is commended. The Christian ethic teaches self-help for and through the assistance of others.

An ego, it must not be overlooked, cannot thrive in a vacuum. "A man," writes Emerson, "is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world. . . . Put Napoleon in an island prison, let his faculties find no men to act on, no Alps to climb, no stake to play for, and he would beat the air and appear stupid." Was the Emperor an ego? Yes, not second in rank to our poet-philosopher. Was he an altruist after the manner of Nietzsche's Imagining? Did he not strive to out-ego all other egos? Did he succeed? Was Napoleon great because of his selfishness or in spite of it? Suppose that his creed had been service, self-sacrifice, would he have been the inferior master as he had played the rôle of a diligent servant? An ego that is worth while is the product of altruism, not its ruling spirit. If Nietzsche had not been considerable of an altruist, he would not have allowed a single sentence of his to go into print. A man who constantly harbors such an ugly sentiment towards humanity as he expresses in these words: "There are only three respects in which the masses appear to me to deserve a glance — first, as blurred copies of great men, executed on bad paper and from worn-out plates; secondly, as opposition to the great; and lastly, as instruments for the great; for the rest let them go to the devil and to statistics," would not care to utter a word in bare recognition of it. If it is answered that he expressed himself solely for the interests of the superman, and that only the ideal man, who is to be, the reply to that might be, that underneath his surface contempt for the

race there must be a spirit of sympathy for the interest of the best of mankind.

It seems to us an extremely difficult matter to bring any kind of order out of the chaos of Nietzsche's thinking; and that extreme admiration for him, alone, can put out the critic's eyes. If you quote him on a certain question and hold him responsible for the stand which he is taking, a devotee of his might fetch you up from some other quarter of his teaching a saying which is not the presentation of another phase of the larger truth, but a contradiction of the basic evaluation of his former position. If you would censure him for being a zealot in his quest for the superman, one might cite him as declaring, "Everything good is instinct, and consequently easy, necessary, free." When he speaks of the human ideal as consisting in "the spiritualization of sensuousness," you might remind him that in another place he says, "It is the voice of the healthy body." "Ye are only bridges. Would that higher ones would stride over you unto the other side! Ye signify stairs. Then be not angry with him who riseth above you unto his own height," is an exhortation which does not bring good cheer to the ambitious soul who feels, "If there be gods, how could I endure not to be one of them?" And so through page after page he flounders, leaving the reader to the destiny of discovering his meaning.

In one respect, however, his position is clear; and that is in his attitude towards Christianity, as he interprets it. The only Christian that ever lived, he contends, died on the cross. He can hardly conjure up enough contempt for others who fall so far short of the pattern in the mount. But how about Nietzsche himself in relation to his superman ideal? Did he, in his own life, attain to the glory of that conception? Sim-

mel, a German critic, suggests that perhaps the constant gnawing sense of the discrepancy between the Zarathustra self of his prophetic vision and the Nietzsche self of the nineteenth-century reality was one of the principal features of the strain which eventually brought about his mental collapse. Christianity or quasi-Christianity as it is lived, or half lived, is one thing; as it is conceived by its Founder and expounded as an ideal life, it is another thing. It is our conviction that the German philosopher's hostility is nothing short of an expression of rebellion against the very idea of God himself. The first tenet of Nietzsche's decalogue, we imagine, might read, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"; "If there be gods, how could I endure not to be one of them?"

The God of the Christian, says our philosopher, is dead; hence he must create one for himself and those who, like himself, are also in search of one. "I teach you beyond-man." The beyond-man is the creation for which we shall allow ourselves to be sacrificed and for which others must sacrifice. "Be not angry with him who riseth above you"; "Ye signify stairs." This superman is not to be an ogre in morals, in spite of Nietzsche's teaching that "in order to subsist, the highest morality must positively enforce the existence of immorality." Whatever he means by immorality, whether as commonly accepted or in a unique Nietzsche-sense, the friends of the philosopher say that he was not immoral himself. Yet "The moralists," he expounds, "seem to have a hatred of the primeval forest. . . . People utterly misunderstand the beast of prey and the man of prey (Cæsar Borgia, for example)." The superman character, we have a right to believe, should display virtue "free from any moralic acid," and should be of the primeval-forest, Cæsar-Borgia type. But to send man back to the primeval forest and to

instinct is to flatly contradict that other high-sounding teaching of the advocate of immorality, "Once ye were apes, even now man is ape in a higher degree than any ape." "Man is something that shall be surpassed. What have we done to surpass him?" Just to be an ape or a Cæsar Borgia does not require effort. His superman is to be an absolute product of the earth. "Beyond-man," he emphasizes, "shall be the significance of earth"; "I conjure you, my brethren, remain faithful to earth, and do not believe those who speak unto you of superterrestrial hopes"! Nietzsche strove hard to confine his superman god to earth, but he would break his chains and escape heavenwards. We imagine that the words of Æneas as he tried to embrace the ghost of his wife would express the state of mind of the poet-philosopher as the un-material ghost of his superman creation was constantly eluding him, even to madness:—

"Ter conatus ibi collo dare brachia circum;
Ter frustra comprehensa manus effugit imago."

But was Nietzsche's superman simply an earth-born Titan? Was he ever fully realized? "I teach you the beyond-man" is his mission, as he tells us again and again. The beyond-man never is, but always casts his shadow before him as he recedes into the future. He is an ideal, and cometh from afar, and not out of the earth. He is made, largely, we fear, of pure mind stuff, as Kingdon Clifford would put it, and should be consigned to mythology. The elements which are mixed in his supercreation and which add to it some human stability are also imparted and are superterrestrial. Whatever is decent and respectable about the overman is Christian, and not of the earth earthy. If Nietzsche strove hard to be Greek or Heathen, he was still somewhat of a Christian in spite of himself. He was born in a Christian family, and could not

altogether dirempt himself of his early influences. If out of his mouth proceed sayings which might stanp him a degenerate, his enthusiastic admirers would have us believe that as far as his character is concerned he was not the living exponent of his teaching. "Nietzsche never accepted for himself," says a writer about him, "the dictates of his cruel philosophy. The Greeks, whom he worshiped, would have left the wounded privates on the field. Why should any one take trouble to preserve the lives of slaves?" The philosopher, however, in war time, traveled with his ambulance, night after night, tending the sufferers, exposing himself to the maladies which follow in the wake of destruction. If men are the creators of their gods, as Nietzsche and some others seem to imagine, then it is not out of the heart of the philosopher, which his friends claim was a fountain of purity and nobleness, that such a demon of selfishness as the overman could be evolved. We must look for the origin of this superinhuman creature elsewhere.

Can man be the creator of his God? Is it possible for him to be an out-and-out maker of anything? Does he manufacture his concepts and ideals, or do they come to him as the result of growth and evolution through obedience? Was Nietzsche not, like the Christian, obedient to the superterrestrial calling as he abandoned himself to an ideal which he insisted must be mundane, but which would elude him and dwell in the region of the super-mundane?

"Ideas and ideals, through obedience, grow
As grows the grass,
Art might obey but not surpass,
The passive master lent his hand
To the vast soul that o'er him planned."

The vast soul, terrestrial soul, vast in the extent of evil and damage it wrought in the mind of the poet-philosopher, which entered greatly into the content of his thought, was Schopenhauer, or some other spirit from whom he could not altogether free himself in spite of his boast of intellectual independence. It was quite early in his life when he came across the path of Schopenhauer, who overturned his theory of all values, and started him on the road to destruction. So infatuated did the pupil become with the master, so imbued with his spirit, that he called the pessimist his father. There can be no greater delusion than that of a man-creation. Ideas only rise and develop as man allows himself to become the diligent servant of a self, vaster than himself, that over him plans. Nietzsche's superman conception matures in proportion to the various intellectual forces which fecundate his mind. The influence is from without and not from within.

Nietzsche's antagonism to Christianity is due either to a wilful misunderstanding or ignorance of the spirit of its ethics. He despises it because its kingdom is not of this world. He does not seem to be aware that though it has the forward look, the earth is its habitation, and seat of its activity. If unnatural, impractical asceticism has been the law and expression of its past life, it does not follow that such an interpretation was the original intent of its Founder! Nietzsche was far more of a recluse than Christ. Jesus never lived apart from men, but spent a life of service in the midst of them. His exhortations are practicable and apply to the present: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," now; "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find," now. These are the ethical teachings which are meant for the life that now is; and without the present possession of life all the outlook for the future will be barren. "As you

sow" now, "so shall you reap" hereafter. "Work," now, "while it is called to-day."

As for rewards and punishments which are to stimulate men to correct living, upon the idea of which the German philosopher pours out his vials of wrath, there is a glorious misunderstanding. Rewards, we might say, are in the nature of the case. Nietzsche himself says, "Never has a man done anything solely for others and without any personal motive." If that is so, what objection can there be to the doctrine? "Great is your reward in heaven." But does the Gospel message inculcate the spirit of service for reward only? "Whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant. Even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many." The personal motive, if any, becomes a kind of unconscious or subconscious cerebration with the true Christian as he loses himself in spiritual activity. The superman of Nietzsche does things for others by yielding to the selfish motive altogether. He is to ride on in majesty in defiance of the rights and privileges of others. What he leaves behind him in his self-aggrandizement is wreckage, not life. Through selfish seeking of his own life he loses it. That has been the history of every superman monster that gave himself first, last, and all the time to his own interests. "How could the ego act without the ego," says Nietzsche. Not very well, we must answer. But what is left of the ego after it has out-egoed itself in its selfishness? History bears evidence to the fact that he that loses his life in the help of others finds it, and he that meanly seeks his own loses by and by that which he now possesses. Nietzsche's teaching of the overman ethics is just as much a doctrine of reward as that of the Christian which he maligns. It is not more terrestrial or of the present. "Upward, life itself,"

says the philosopher, "striveth to build itself with the pillars and stairs unto far distances, it longeth to gaze and outwards after blessed beauties. Therefore it needeth height." "For what would be my love for beyond-man, if I spake otherwise?" Is it not the beatific vision of the superman that fecundates his spirit to climb the celestial stairs? Is not the Christian caught up into the heaven of a similar enthusiasm as he forgets himself in his pressing forward to the mark of the high calling? The Christian's ideal is not a superman monster, a Borgia, or a Cæsar, but the Strong Son of God, who does not take away life, but gives it abundantly. The reward is not insanity, spiritual destruction, but peace and joy now and hereafter. It is this very peace and joy which Nietzsche is unconsciously seeking; but his perverse and degenerate teaching and spirit, we fear, never find it. A caricature of Carlyle, in the energetic style of Lowell, sets forth realistically the case of the poet-philosopher: "Constitutional monarchy is a failure, representative government is a gabble, democracy a birth of the bottomless pit. There is no hope for mankind except in getting themselves under a good driver, who shall not spare the lash. . . . Meanwhile the world's wheels have got fairly stalled in mire and other matter of every vilest consistency and most disgustful smell. What are we do do? Carlyle will not let us make a lever with a rail from the next fence, or call in the neighbors. . . . No, he would have us sit down beside him in the slough and shout lustily for Hercules. If that indispensable demigod will not or cannot come we can find a useful and instructive solace, during the interval of shouting, in hearty abuse of human nature, which, at the long last, is always to blame."