

False Philosophy and True Religion.

THE present awful condition of the world, it is now generally agreed, is to be traced, not to material causes only, or even mainly, but to causes which are predominantly moral and spiritual. In ancient times the pressure of population—hunger, in a word—drove peoples into conflict. Nowadays, though this same cause may operate, the world is aware that war is a wasteful and mischievous way of dealing with the evil. Emigration and commercial and industrial organization are more economical and more effective. And no people are more fully enlightened on this matter than the Germans.

This gigantic war is due to the determination of the German people to create a world-empire and to dominate mankind. For forty years they have been bending all their energies to this end. With that thoroughness and care for detail which is characteristic of them, they created first the greatest army the world has ever seen, and then a powerful navy. In addition, they organized a world-wide system of intelligence, and prepared the way for their great enterprise by the most elaborate plans for offence and defence in relation to neighbouring countries. Everything was thought out beforehand; nothing was left to chance.

It is indeed a most wonderful thing to see a great and populous nation devoting themselves to a definite purpose, with such infinite pains, for more than a generation. We, with our curiously disconnected and haphazard ways, may well feel incredulous as to such a thing. But the literature of Germany during the past thirty years leaves no doubt possible. When to this is added the ruthlessness with which the war has been waged; the effort, carefully organized, to inspire terror; the denial of ordinary human rights to the peoples whose countries have been invaded, it becomes clear that the whole undertaking is the most clearly purposed and coldly calculated war which history records.

What is the mind of the people which has done this thing? What is the nature of their terrible inspiration? These are questions which inevitably suggest themselves.

Much has been said and written about German philosophy. The names of Nietzsche and Treitschke are specially mentioned. It is considered by many that the so-called philosophy which these men represent supplies the clue to the problem. It is certainly true that the German mind is more open to influence on the side of thought than is our own. The British people are intensely practical in their ways of thinking. They are not carried away by theory. The Germans are otherwise. It was said of them by Madame de Staël that "Thought, which calms other minds, inflames the German." It is therefore possible that German philosophy may give us the necessary key. But even if this be true, we are not to conclude that philosophy is essentially an evil thing. On the contrary, if false philosophy can effect so much, what may not true philosophy do? If there is any truth in the supposition that the German mind is to be understood by means of its philosophy, we have the greatest possible proof of the tremendous power of thought in human affairs; we have a demonstration that *doctrine*, true or false, is a matter of supreme importance.

No thoughtful Christian can wisely underrate philosophy, for it is essentially the effort of the human mind to know something of the ultimate nature of the universe. Whenever we try to give any clear shape to our thoughts about the world, the soul, or God, we are engaging in philosophy. Theology is essentially a philosophical study. It is the effort to interpret religion in the terms of some philosophy. The New Testament and the Creeds bear witness to this truth. The term which marks the theme of the prologue of the Gospel of St. John, and which, indeed, sums up the teaching of that Gospel, is a philosophical term. The *Logos* marks the meeting-point of Greek thought and Christian faith. So, in the Creed, the historic phrase, "homo-ousion," which stands through all the centuries as the symbol of the victory of truth over false-

hood, of Christianity over paganism, is fundamentally philosophical. The fact is, it is impossible to present to the mind the ideas which are involved in religious experience in anything like systematic shape without using, or framing, a philosophy.

When we regard the world in a large way we shall, I think, find that in general there is a very close connection between the philosophy of a people and their life. Only in the case of some intensely practical peoples, like the ancient Romans or the modern British, do we find that certain practical principles take the place of more comprehensive schemes of thought. In Germany the relation between thought and life seems to be very close. Therefore we do well to trace the outlines of recent German philosophy and compare them with the revelations of German character which have been made in the present war. Therefore also it is a matter of great importance to the world to consider what type of philosophy prevails in the world of German thought.

When, with these reflections in mind, we turn to the actual history of German philosophy, the result is profoundly interesting. There can be no greater mistake possible than to include all German philosophy in one universal condemnation. A wide view of the history of modern German thought reveals two great periods, two distinct schools. The former is marked by idealism and moral enthusiasm, the latter by materialism and earthly-mindedness. The characteristic name of the former is Kant; the outstanding personality of the second is Haeckel.

It is noteworthy, in connection with both these schools of thought, that the inspiration came from Great Britain. The German mind is more subject to the influence of philosophy than the British, but it possesses no superior originality. On the contrary, the original impulse seems more frequently to come to Germany from without, and especially from Great Britain. Thus, Kant was not only himself of Scottish origin, but he expressly states that it was British thought which awoke him from his dogmatic slumber. German idealism, in fact,

sprang out of the great epoch-making investigations of Locke, Hume, and Berkeley. The English Locke, the Scottish Hume, and the Irishman Berkeley, set to the world the great problem which Kant and his followers endeavoured to solve.

Let me briefly point out the main positions of Kant. He denied the power of metaphysics to solve the problem of the universe, but exhibited the reality of the constructive power of thought, thus affirming man's existence as a spiritual being. He showed the necessity of assuming certain great postulates—the soul, the world, God. Regulative in the theoretical sphere, these principles become constitutive in the practical, yielding a firm basis for morality and religion. As a moralist Kant was rigorous to the last degree. The fundamentals of his system are these: First, goodness is a quality of the inner nature of the will; it is no mere external thing. "There is nothing in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, but a good will." Secondly, the moral imperative is, in essence, the regarding every human being as an end in himself, never as a means only. These principles are the very essentials of Christian morality as taught by our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount—the inwardness of true goodness and the law of love. Goodness is of the heart, and "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is no wonder that, starting from these principles, Kant in his old age set forth his views of world-politics in an essay on "Eternal Peace." It is a dream of how the nations of the world might eliminate war and reorganize themselves on lines which would make for universal concord—a vision of a Kingdom of God on earth. Here we find all the recent methods and doings of Prussian militarism condemned root and branch by implication. In Kant's view, *might* should be the servant of *right*. No treaty of peace should involve a secret reservation that it can be discarded when convenient; no State should forcibly interfere with another State; no State at war should commit acts which would destroy mutual trust in future. He forbids assassination, treachery, cruelty, and every horror which

Germany has been guilty of in this war. He asserts, with splendid clearness and strength, the principle that moral relations should exist amongst States and peoples as amongst individuals in the same community.

Kant was the founder of the idealistic school of philosophy in Germany. His greatest successor was Hegel. Of him also it must be said that he was a teacher of righteousness. This is not the time to enter upon an exposition of the system with which the name of Hegel is identified. Various interpretations of his philosophy have been adopted, ranging from a naturalism which is hardly distinguishable from materialism, to a spiritualism which is decidedly Christian. To Hegel himself, his system of thought seemed essentially spiritual and Christian. It yielded, in the moral sphere, the principle of victory through sacrifice—the principle of the Cross. “Die to live” is for it the maxim of all true progress.

It must be admitted that in Hegel is found the beginning of that peculiar exaltation of the State at the expense of the individual which has been characteristic of the Prussian military system in modern times. It was said of him that he identified the kingdom of Prussia with the Kingdom of Heaven. True it is that his view of the relation of the State to the individual was not as large nor as human as that of Kant. Kant's conception of the Kingdom of Ends, in which every individual soul is an end in himself, is a fuller expression of the essential principles of Christian morality than is Hegel's doctrine, in which the individual is subordinated to the State. Yet Hegel was as opposed as Kant to the modern Prussian doctrine of the State as the possessor and expression of *force*—force supreme and uncontrolled. Not force, but freedom, was for him the essential principle of the State.

These two great teachers represent the higher movement of German thought in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the earlier part of the nineteenth. It will be seen that their principles are lofty and spiritual, and in the main in accordance with the fundamental truths of the Christian faith. It was a

glorious period in the history of Germany—a period adorned with noble names in literature, in music, in learning, in religious thought, and in all that expresses the higher side of humanity. That is the Germany that we learned to love and revere—a Germany full of a noble faith in God and in righteousness, a Germany whose scholars and theologians were in the van of enlightenment and of spiritual progress, a Germany which gave to the world a noble band of pastors and teachers in the things of Christ.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there came a great change. The way for this change had been prepared by Schopenhauer. This philosopher was a pessimist and the chief of the pessimists. But it is not with this that we are concerned. It is important to mention him because he marks a turning-point in philosophy. Schopenhauer criticized the Kantian school for laying too much stress on thought and reason. The true essence of things, he holds, is to be found in *will*. Will, regarded as impulse, whether conscious or not, is for him the ultimate fact. In the physical world this will appears as force; in the psychical world as desire, effort, volition. Life is miserable because it is a continual striving after ends which are either not attained, or, when attained, prove unsatisfying. We need not discuss this doctrine further. Students of Eastern thought are very familiar with its fundamental idea. I mention Schopenhauer's doctrine of will because it is one of the sources from which Nietzsche derived his characteristic ideas. Nietzsche has been much discussed in connection with the terrible doctrine of aggressive force which is so awfully exemplified in the German war policy of our time; and with good reason. He stands for the spirit of that policy more perfectly than any other thinker of modern times. Moreover, there can be no question that his ideas have had an immense influence. Though a bitter critic of German ways and denounced by many leaders of German thought, Nietzsche's so-called philosophy has been absorbed by the mind of the "intellectuals" of modern Germany; and in this fact we have very largely the explanation

of the extraordinary solidarity of the German people in their support of the war policy of their Government.

How this has come to pass we must now consider. I have said that in the middle of the nineteenth century there came a great change in the spirit of the German people. It is not too much to say that from that time onwards the tendency of German thought, when regarded as a whole, has been away from the spiritual view of the world, and has been definitely in the direction of aggressive materialism. And in this instance again the inspiration came from England. As in the eighteenth century the thought of Locke, Hume, and Berkeley, set going the great movement initiated in Germany by Kant, so in the nineteenth century J. S. Mill, Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, moved Germany far more thoroughly than England. The English mind is not easily loosed from its moorings. It has no craving for logical consistency. Not so the German. Systematic in all things, the Teutonic mind, when it seizes on a new idea, hastens to apply it universally. The thoughtful Englishman, impressed with a sense of the complication of the universe, distrusting theories, believing greatly in the practical test of opinions, while admitting that there is some truth, probably, in a new scientific or philosophic doctrine, is yet always convinced that there is another side to every question, and that his wisest course is to "wait and see." The theory of evolution as taught by Darwin, and the agnosticism and naturalism of H. Spencer and Huxley: these views upset many thoughtful minds in these countries; but they produced no revolution; they left our deepest convictions, in all essentials, unshaken. The Darwinian doctrine, considerably modified by further investigations, and adjusted after much discussion to our moral and spiritual convictions, has gained very wide acceptance amongst educated people. It is for us an important scientific theory, which must be taken account of in all scientific investigations, but which leaves our moral and religious life intact.

In Germany these ideas operated in a far more revolu-

tionary manner. Professor Ernst Haeckel became their interpreter. Gifted with striking powers of exposition and a forceful style, and bitterly hostile to Christianity, he preached the new doctrines as though they formed a new gospel for the world. His "History of Creation," and at a later date, his "Riddle of the Universe," had an enormous circulation. They became textbooks of a creed which might be termed Antichristian Naturalism. This creed, coming with all the prestige of scientific discovery, and taught as part of that science which has shown its wonderful power in enabling man to master the giant forces of Nature, appealed with irresistible persuasiveness to the German mind. We in this country have often wondered at the way in which the old scholarly orthodoxy of German Universities—the orthodoxy of men like Dorner and Delitzsch—seemed suddenly to wither up, and to be replaced by a type of thought which, however it may profess to honour the person and teaching of Christ, turns away ashamed from the smallest admission of a true Divinity in Him or in His work. Here is the explanation. In the course of a single generation the attitude of the German people towards the things of the spirit had undergone a complete revolution. To be a Christian in the old sense came to be regarded as utterly out of date. To profess to be a *Theist* is permitted; but even this kind of belief in God is not so much conviction as to what actually is as a value-judgment, a principle which must be accepted in order to validate certain kinds of experience. God, in fact, is a formula which enables us to enjoy a useful spiritual anodyne.

No wonder that Christianity of this kind fails to hold the people, that churches are empty, and ministers of religion have become mere agents of the State.

In Germany at the present day we see the true outcome of a materialistic creed, and that outcome finds its perfect expression in Nietzsche. This is what makes his teaching to be so supremely significant just now. We have seen that he derives an important part of his thought from Schopenhauer. The latter regarded *will* as the essential reality. On this he founded

his pessimistic creed. Nietzsche makes another use of the doctrine. For him *will* is the greatest thing in the world. Schopenhauer had spoken of the *will to live*, and counselled its negation. Nietzsche taught the *will to power*, and made it the one hope for humanity. Force, might, self-assertion, the dominance of the strong over the weak—these are, for him, the essentials. Love, pity, sympathy, the salvation of the lost—these excite his contempt and loathing. Haeckel rejects the creed of Christianity in view of scientific discovery. Nietzsche attacks Christian morality as the basest of things. It is the morality of slaves.

When we have reached this point, we are able to see what is the other element in the teaching of Nietzsche. From Schopenhauer he derived his doctrine of will; from Darwin he got his doctrine of progress through the dominance of the strong. He looks for the coming of the superman through the survival of the strongest in the great age-long struggle.

It is characteristic of Nietzsche that, just as he professed a bitter hostility to Germany and the Germans, so did he hate Schopenhauer and Darwin. Incapable of a sane, balanced judgment on any question, his enmity was especially directed against his teachers. It was a mark, perhaps, of the insanity which finally overwhelmed him.

It is well that we should be very clear that the use which Nietzsche made of the Darwinian principle was not in accordance with the teaching of Darwin himself. While holding that progress in the natural order is mainly due to the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence, Darwin expressly maintained that this struggle should tend to disappear in civilized human society. He writes: "Important as the struggle for existence has been, and still is, yet, as far as the highest part of man's nature is concerned, there are other agencies more important. For the moral qualities are advanced either directly or indirectly much more through the effects of habit, the reasoning powers, instruction, religion, etc., than through natural selection."

Nietzsche, and indeed Haeckel also, took Darwin's scientific

doctrine, and, in defiance of their teacher, applied it beyond its sphere as a moral principle. No more disastrous misapplication could be imagined. The moral element in man's nature lifts him out of the horrible welter of greed and savage brutality, and these men, in defiance of the teaching of all human history, seize upon a scientific doctrine of how certain things happened, preach it as the supreme law of life, and endeavour to drag man back into the abyss. We may truly say of such that

"Dragons of the prime
Which tare each other in their slime
Were mellow music matched with them."

And now we see a people, in whose hearts these awful teachings have taken root, acting on them with perfect consistency. We see the law of the tiger and the ape applying all the resources of science for its own ends. We see rage and the madness of lust and hellish hate let loose systematically by a military despotism. We see a doctrine of devils working itself out in murder and outrage, rending the loveliest garments of our civilization, laying waste happy homes, desolating fair countrysides, inventing hideous tortures and mutilations. A year ago these things would have seemed impossible. We did not realize the terrible potency of the false doctrines which are characteristic of our age.

That we are not exaggerating the influence of these doctrines appears from the fact that they inspire a number of writers who have given the fullest expression to the spirit which is animating the Germany of to-day. Principal amongst these is the historian Treitschke. He is, however, an historian with a purpose. That purpose is the glorification of the Prussian State, and the assertion of its supremacy over all other authorities. Prussia alone, according to him, possesses a real monarchy. It is therefore bound to extend its power over other lands. The essence of the State is power, and as the Prussian State is the only true State, it must assert itself against all rivals. It is indeed, he holds, the best thing that could happen any people, to be brought into subjection to the Prussian system. The extension of this

system in the world is to be brought about by war. And the one supreme duty of the State is to perfect itself in war, that so it may be able to assert its power.

The ideas of Treitschke have found expression in Bernhardt, in the hateful German War-Book and in other writings which have been attracting such attention of late. If this is to be called philosophy, it is the philosophy of the swelled head combined with the morals of the wolf. But neither Nietzsche nor Treitschke are philosophers. Nor is Treitschke properly an historian. These men are prophets—false prophets; not even prophets of Baal, but prophets of Moloch. Their doctrines have had the dreadful effectiveness which they have shown because they have coincided with the organization of a great nation for war and with a long career of conquest. When side by side with this teaching and the modern history of Prussian advance we place the official piety of the Kaiser's pronouncements, we can only conclude that the German State, assuming as it does more than Divine attributes, has no difficulty in appropriating to itself all the language in which religion is accustomed to express the highest sanctions. The Deity has become a mere name for the genius of the nation.

What must be our conclusion? Surely it is this: We need nothing so much at the present time as a revival of genuine Christianity. No mere Theism can suffice. We need to see afresh the vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We need that teaching and that experience which make men realize God as redeeming love, and every human soul as infinitely precious in His sight. The simple words, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," contain the corrective for those terrible perversions which we have been considering. Meanwhile it rests with each of us to do our duty to the point of the utmost sacrifice in the awful crisis of our time.

CHARLES F. DOWN.

