

## DEUSSEN'S RECOLLECTIONS OF NIETZSCHE.

BY THE EDITOR.

PROFESSOR Paul Deussen, Sanskritist and philosopher of Kiel, was Friedrich Nietzsche's most intimate friend. They were chums together in school in Schulpforta, and remained friends to the end of Nietzsche's life. Nietzsche had come to Schulpforta in 1858, and Deussen entered the next year in the same class. Once Nietzsche, who as the senior of the class had to keep order among his fellow scholars during working periods and prevent them from making a disturbance, approached Deussen while he sat in his seat peacefully chewing the sandwich he had brought for his lunch, and said, "Don't talk so loud to your crust!" using here the boys' slang term for a sandwich. These were the first words Nietzsche had spoken to Deussen, and Deussen says<sup>1</sup>: "I see Nietzsche still before me, how with the unsteady glance peculiar to extremely near-sighted people, his eye wandered over the rows of his classmates searching in vain for an excuse to interfere."

Nietzsche and Deussen began to take walks together and soon became chums, probably on account of their common love for Anacreon, whose poems were interesting to both perhaps on account of the easy Greek in which they are written.

In those days the boys of Schulpforta addressed each other by the formal *Sie*; but one day when Deussen happened to be in the dormitory, he discovered in the trunk under his bed a little package of snuff; Nietzsche was present and each took a pinch. With this pinch they swore eternal brotherhood. They did not drink brotherhood as is the common German custom, but, as Deussen humorously says, they "snuffed it"; and from that time they called each other by the more intimate *du*. This friendship continued through life with only one interruption, and on Laetare Sunday in 1861, they stepped to the altar together and side by side

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Paul Deussen's *Erinnerungen an Friedrich Nietzsche*, Leipsic.

received the blessing at their confirmation. On that day both were overcome by a feeling of holiness and ecstasy. Thus their friendship was sealed in Christ, and though it may seem strange of Nietzsche who was later a most iconoclastic atheist, a supernatural vision filled their young hearts for many weeks afterwards.

There was a third boy to join this friendship—a certain Meyer, a young, handsome and amiable youth distinguished by wit and the ability to draw excellent caricatures. But Meyer was in constant conflict with his teachers and generally in rebellion against the rules of the school. He had to leave school before he finished his course. Nietzsche and Deussen accompanied him to the gate and returned in great sorrow when he had disappeared on the highway. What has become of Meyer is not known. Deussen saw him five years later in his home at Oberdreis, but at that time he was broken in health and courage, disgruntled with God, the world and himself. Later he held a subordinate position in the custom house, and soon after that all trace of him was lost. Probably he died young.

This Meyer was attached to Nietzsche for other reasons than Deussen. While Deussen appreciated more the intellectuality and congeniality of his friend, Meyer seems to have been more attracted by his erratic and wayward tendencies and this for some time endeared him to Nietzsche. Thus it came to pass that the two broke with Deussen for a time.

The way of establishing a state of hostility in Schulpforta was to declare oneself "mad" at another, and to some extent this proved to be a good institution, for since the boys came in touch with each other daily and constantly in school, those who could not agree would have easily come to blows had it not been for this tabu which made it a rule that they were not on speaking terms. This state of things lasted for six weeks, and was only broken by an incidental discussion in a Latin lesson, when Nietzsche proposed one of his highly improbable conjectures for a verse of Virgil. The discussion grew heated, and when the professor after a long Latin disquisition finally asked whether any one had something to say on the subject, Deussen rose and extemporized a Latin hexameter which ran thus:

*"Nietzschius erravit, neque coniectura probanda est."*

On account of the declared state of "mad"ness, the debate was carried on through the teacher, addressing him each time with the phrase: "Tell Nietzsche," "Tell Deussen," "Tell Meyer," etc., but in the heat of the controversy they forgot to speak in the third person, and finally addressed their adversaries directly. This broke the

spell of being "mad" and they came to an understanding and a definite reconciliation.

Nietzsche never had another friend with whom he became so intimate as with Deussen. Deussen says (page 9): "At that time we understood each other perfectly. In our lonely walks we discussed all possible subjects of religion, philosophy, poetry, art and music. Often our thoughts ran wild and when words failed us we would look into each other's eyes, and one would say to the other: 'We understand each other.' These words became a standing phrase which forthwith we decided to avoid as trivial, and we had to laugh when occasionally it escaped our lips in spite of us. The great ordeal of the final examination came. We had to pass first through our written tests. In German composition, on the 'advantages and dangers of wealth' Nietzsche passed with No. 1; also in a Latin exercise *de bello Punico primo*; but in mathematics he failed with the lowest mark, No. 4. This upset him, and in fact he who was almost the most gifted of us all was compelled to withdraw."

While the two were strolling up and down in front of the schoolhouse, Nietzsche unburdened his grief to his friend, and Deussen tried to comfort him. "What difference does it make," said he, "if you pass badly, if only you pass at all? You are and will always be more gifted than all the rest of us, and will soon outstrip even me whom you now envy. You must increase but I must decrease."

The course of events was as Deussen had predicted, for Nietzsche though not passing with as much distinction as he may have deserved nevertheless received his diploma.

When Deussen visited Nietzsche with his wife in August 1907 at Sils-Maria, Nietzsche showed him a requiem which he had composed for his own funeral, and he added: "I do not believe that I will last much longer. I have reached the age at which my father died, and I fear that I shall fall a victim to the same disease as he." Though Deussen protested vigorously against this sad prediction and tried to cheer him up, Nietzsche indeed succumbed to his sad fate within two years.

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Professor Deussen, though Nietzsche's most intimate friend, is by no means uncritical in judging his philosophy. It is true he cherishes the personal character and the ideal tendencies of his old chum, but he is not blind to his faults. Deussen says of Nietzsche: "He was never a systematic philosopher. . . . The great problems of epistemology, of psychology, of esthetics and ethics are only tenta-

tively touched upon in his writings. . . . There are many pearls of worth upon which he throws a brilliant side light, as it were in lightning flashes. . . . His overwhelming imagination is always busy. His thoughts were always presented in pleasant imagery and in language of dazzling brilliancy, but he lacked critical judgment and was not controlled by a consideration of reality. Therefore the creation of his pen was never in harmony with the actual world, and among the most valuable truths which he revealed with ingenious profundity there are bizarre and distorted notions stated as general rules although they are merely rare exceptions, as is also frequently the case in sensational novels. Thus Nietzsche produced a caricature of life which means no small danger for receptive and inexperienced minds. His readers can escape this danger only when they do what Nietzsche did not do, when they confront every thought of his step by step by the actual nature of things, and retain only what proves to be true under the touchstone of experience."

Between the negation of the will and its affirmation Nietzsche granted to Deussen while still living in Basel, that the ennoblement of the will should be man's aim. The affirmation of the will is the pagan ideal with the exception of Platonism. The negation of the will is the Christian ideal, and according to Nietzsche the ennoblement of the will is realized in his ideal of the overman. Deussen makes the comment that Nietzsche's notion of the overman is in truth the ideal of all mankind, whether this highest type of manhood be called Christ or overman; and we grant that such an ideal is traceable everywhere. It is called "Messiah" among the Jews; "hero" among the Greeks, "Christ" among the Christians, and *chiün jan*, "the superior man," or to use Nietzsche's language, "the overman," among the Chinese; but the characteristics with which Nietzsche endows his overman are unfortunately mere brutal strength and an unscrupulous will to play the tyrant. Here Professor Deussen halts. It appears that he knew the peaceful character of his friend too well to take his ideal of the overman seriously.