

NIETZSCHE, FRANCE, AND ENGLAND.

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Translated from the manuscript by Caroline V. Kerr. Cf. the article "A Visit to Elizabeth Foerster-Nietzsche" in our last issue.

THE distinguished philologist Friedrich Ritschl once said to my brother: "We German intellectuals have always had a genuine fondness for France, but it is an unfortunate love and will ever remain so. Do what we will, the French will never understand us, nor reciprocate our feelings. Despite the infamous calumnies written about us in France [Ritschl here referred to the press campaign during the Franco-Prussian War] Germans of the intellectual class will retain their affection for the French, even though the German nation as a whole continues to regard France as its arch-enemy."

My brother was among these literary Francomaniacs who fell under the spell of French belles-lettres and philosophical literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and he was so strongly imbued with the French spirit that his own philosophical concepts, according to Ritschl, were like "the writings of a French romancer."

One of my brother's fondest dreams was to make a long stay in Paris with his friend Rohde, and there is a pleasant passage in one of his letters referring to this plan. He writes, "I can picture to myself a couple of philosophic *flâneurs* with serious eyes and smiling lips, strolling through the boulevards and becoming well-known figures in the museums and libraries, in the Closerie des Lilas and in the cool recesses of Notre Dame."

But nothing came of this plan, owing to the fact that Nietzsche had barely finished his studies when he was called to the faculty of the University of Basle (1869) and was still there when the war came to destroy at one rude blow his French affinities.

My brother was a passionate patriot, and Richard Wagner was wont to compare him to one of the famous Lützow Brigade of 1813.

He was determined to join the ranks of the German army as a volunteer and to this end presented a request to the Swiss government. But to preserve the nation's strict neutrality, the Swiss government resolved to grant leave of absence to the German professors in its employ only on the condition that they would not enlist for active service.

Greatly depressed because he was not allowed to join the active ranks, Nietzsche went to Erlangen to take a course of training as a field-nurse. While there he wrote to our mother, "Our national civilization is at stake, and no sacrifice could be too great to defend it. These accursed French tigers! . . ." And after learning what actual warfare meant he wrote, "There is such a thing as bravery, genuine German courage, which is an essentially different quality from the *élan* of our pitiable neighbors." His feeling against France was strengthened by cruel practices with which he became acquainted in his work as a field-nurse. These experiences must have been of a very painful character, as he always begged his friends not to question him about them. But eventually he came to the conclusion that an entire nation should not be held responsible for the deeds of some cruel and inflamed individuals. Gradually his sympathies swung back to his first love, France, the more as he began to view with growing distrust the new Germany, and he often sighed for the days when Germany was not yet politically united, and for her former virtues.

In one of his letters of that time he writes, "The German is wonderful as a soldier and greatly to be admired as a scholar and scientist, but otherwise he is only moderately admirable."

About this time, a spirit of literary self-glorification, not at all justified by actual conditions, began to make itself manifest in Germany, and as Nietzsche understood by culture the unity of artistic style in all manifestations of national life, he believed that this could only be found in France, where tradition and national spirit combined to produce such conditions.

I should not like to be misunderstood on this point; it was not the France of the nineteenth century that my brother prized, as he always spoke with indignation of the "democratic clamor" of modern France. It was the France of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her profoundly passionate genius, her refined literary ingenuity, that commanded his admiration. He adored Montaigne, of whom he once said, "That such a man has lived and written, can only increase our desire to live and labor." If he regarded Montaigne as, in a certain sense, the founder of French intellectual

aristocracy, Pascal was to him the embodiment of the deep, passionate forces of his century. He often said that he loved Pascal as he would a brother, and felt closely akin to him in spirit. Voltaire, whom he always called a "*grand-seigneur* of intellect," he prized as the last great dramatist. It was to Voltaire that the first edition of *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* was dedicated. It is necessary to explain, however, that this dedication was occasioned by the hundredth anniversary of Voltaire's death, and not by any great affection my brother entertained for the philosopher. A letter written in June, 1878, contains a passage which throws light upon the deep and tragic meaning which Nietzsche attributed to this dedication:

"To me there has always been a terrifying symbol in the fate of this man, about whom, even after a hundred years, it is impossible to get an unbiased judgment; it is toward the emancipators of intellect that the world is most implacable in its hatred and most indiscriminating in its love."

Nietzsche always insisted that the "modern French idea" of the eighteenth century was of English origin, and regarded it as a complete perversion of French intellect and intuition. He always was hostile to Rousseau, although in his youth he was a passionate admirer of the picture of oppressed mankind as drawn by this French writer. "In every socialistic upheaval, it is ever the man Rousseau who is moving like the hidden forces imprisoned under Mt. Etna. When oppressed and half crushed by the arrogant caste spirit and merciless wealth of the world, when perverted by the priesthood and humiliated by the ridiculous laws of conduct established by convention—man turns to nature in his hour of need, and is suddenly made to realize that she is as remote as was ever an Epicurean god. It is because man, himself, has sunk so deep in the chaos of an unnatural world that his prayers never reach nature's sanctuary."

Later in his life my brother conceived a great antipathy to Rousseau because, as he said, "Rousseau remained a plebeian and raised the mobile *vulgus* to the dignity of the goddess of Justice." He also believed that it was Rousseau who sowed the seeds of the French Revolution, thereby destroying the old aristocratic France.

Despite my brother's abhorrence of the great French Revolution, he entertained the greatest admiration for Napoleon, who, he said, restored his faith in the tremendous power of the individual, that is to say, in his own doctrine of the *Herrenmoral*. He always emphasized the fact that Napoleon was not French but Corsican,

and spoke of him as "the condottiere as a genius in the grand style." Like Napoleon, Nietzsche had a strong aversion to Madame de Staël, whom he pronounced "an unsexed woman, who had the audacity to recommend the Germans to the sympathy of Europe as gentle, good-hearted, weak-willed literary blockheads." Nietzsche himself could be very severe in his criticisms of Germany and the Germans, but he boiled with indignation when such criticism came from a foreign source.

Irrespective of political transitions from republic to empire and back again, the France of the nineteenth century was unsympathetic to him, but he was broad-minded enough to admit that French intellect deepened after the war of 1870-71. "France is still the seat of intellectual culture and the great school of literary taste, but one must know where to look for these qualities. Those who belong to this France hold themselves aloof; they are few in number, and among them are persons who are unsteady on their legs—fatalists, engloomed souls, diseased minds, fragile and over-sensitive spirits, who feel the need of shunning the glaring light of the every-day world. But one thing they all possess in common, and that is the ability to close their ears to the insane stupidity and clamorous gabble of the democratic bourgeoisie."

Only a very few of the Frenchmen then considered leaders of thought excited Nietzsche's admiration: Renan he pronounced "a sweetish bonbon"; Sainte-Beuve was "a disappointed poet who smacked of soul-snuffing, and would only too gladly have concealed from the world the fact that he possessed neither stability of will nor of philosophy—and was lacking *in artibus et litteris*, which is not surprising in view of the shortcomings just mentioned"; for Victor Hugo he coined the phrase, "Pharus standing on the shore of the ocean of nonsense"; George Sand was *lactea ubertas*, the milch cow with a beautiful soul; les frères de Goncourt were "the two Ajaxes in battle with Homer, set to music by Offenbach"; "the joy in evil smells," was the aphorism he coined for Zola.

In his judgment of Flaubert and Baudelaire, Nietzsche was more lenient. "Flaubert, owing to his strength of character, was able to endure lack of success and loneliness (unusual qualities among Frenchmen) and occupies a preeminent place in the field of romantic esthetics and style." Of Baudelaire, the pessimist, Nietzsche wrote, "He belongs to that almost incredible species of literary amphibian, which is equally German and Parisian in spirit; there is something in his poetry which in Germany is called 'sentiment' or 'infinite melody,' in less elegant phraseology, we sometimes

call it the 'moral blues' [*Katzenjammer*]; for the rest, Baudelaire has a very decided, if somewhat decadent taste, and with this he tyrannizes over the irresolute souls of his time." Mérimée was characterized as a "genuine, if not a particularly rich nature, living in spurious surroundings, but enough of an optimist to play his part in the comedy without becoming nauseated."

My brother always entertained the greatest reverence for Taine, whom he regarded as the foremost historian of Europe, a scholar whose courage and will-power never succumbed to the fatalistic pressure of learning.

With the exception of Brandes, Taine was the only European scholar of note who wrote words of recognition and appreciation to my brother; I am always moved when I read the following passage in my brother's note-book, which undoubtedly refers to Taine, although his name is not mentioned: "There really exist in France, at present an understanding and an appreciation of those rare and rarely satisfied souls, whose outlook on life is too broad to admit of any petty patriotism, but who understand how to love the south even though they be from the north, or the north even though they be from the south."

Toward other French historians my brother was more critical, reproaching them with having elbowed their way into the souls of men in whose class and company they did not belong. "For example, what has such a perspiring plebeian as Michelet to do with Napoleon, quite irrespective of the fact as to whether he hated him or loved him? The single fact that he shouts and rants is sufficient to bar him from the company of a Napoleon." And then: "What had the elegant, mediocre Thiers to do with this same Napoleon? He creates a laugh, this little man, when with the gesture of a wise judge, he admires Napoleon and compares him to Cæsar, Hannibal, and Frederick the Great. . . . Personally, I rank an historian much higher who has the courage to admit that certain ground is too sacred for his feet."

It will be seen that my brother had a wide range of affinities for modern French literature. Shortly before his last illness, he spoke to me of French writers whom he particularly enjoyed. Among these were Paul Bourget, Pierre Loti, Gyp, Meilhac, Anatole France, Jules Lemaitre, and Guy de Maupassant, the latter "a pronounced Latin who makes an especial appeal to me." Up to the time of his mental paralysis, Nietzsche always turned to French books in his moments of leisure, saying that he found solace in the deep sense of style combined with the "grace of saneness" [*Grazie der Nüchternheit*].

He could not find sufficient words to praise the psychology of the French intellectuals, and he considered German psychologists not measuring up to French standards. Half ironically he once said: "Two centuries of psychological and artistic discipline, my gentlemen of Germany. But you will never catch up with them!" Had my brother lived to witness the development of German psychological work of the past twenty years, he would unquestionably have revoked this statement.

After I had married and gone to live in Paraguay, he wrote to me: "Now that you and Gersdorff [one of his best friends] have both run away and left me, I find my only recreation in French books. On the whole, I cling to my old friends which we once enjoyed together; only a few new acquaintances have been added to the list, among them Galiani and Taine, whom, however, you will only appreciate after you have become a skeptical old woman."

French literary circles, on the other hand, had shown a marked interest in Nietzsche, and by 1905, his complete works had appeared in a French translation. However, it is very much to be deplored that my brother's admirers in France did not bring any more searching criticism to bear upon the French edition, as they would have found that the translators had taken unpardonable liberties with the spirit of the text, and had, consciously or unconsciously, created an impression of unwarranted chauvinism on the part of my brother when comparing France and Germany. But as the translators had been awarded prizes by the French Academy, their work was naturally not questioned.

My brother's antipathy to England and the English was as marked as his predilection for the French, despite the fact that Shakespeare and Lord Byron were the literary gods of his school days and commanded his allegiance throughout life. The one Shakespearean character which he loved and admired above all others was Julius Cæsar, and only a few days before his mental paralysis he wrote: "I can find no higher formula for Shakespeare than that he was able to conceive a man of the type of Cæsar, to whose tragic friendship with Brutus the dramatist's finest tragedy was dedicated. . . . Independence of soul is here emphasized; if one loves freedom, one must be able to sacrifice his dearest friend, even though this friend be the most splendid specimen of manhood, an ornament to society, and an unparalleled genius. No sacrifice can be deemed too great if the freedom of a great soul is threatened by friendship. Shakespeare must have felt this, as the manner in which he exalts

Cæsar forms the highest tribute he could have paid to Brutus. First he raises the inner conflict in the soul of Brutus to a supreme tragedy, and then portrays the tremendous soul-power by which he was enabled to break the bonds which bound him to Cæsar."

My brother always believed that in his *Julius Cæsar* the poet had placed on record documentary evidence of some obscure experience or unknown adventure in his own life, and if I remember rightly, it was just this tragedy that confirmed my brother in his belief that the poet whom the world knows as Shakespeare was none other than Lord Bacon.

Nietzsche often criticized the lack of moderation in Shakespeare, on this point agreeing with Byron who once said, "I consider Shakespeare the worst possible model of style, notwithstanding the fact that he is a most extraordinary poet."

To my brother's mind, Byron only lacked thirty years of experience to have become the greatest of modern dramatists. Like Goethe, he admired the boldness and grandeur of Byron's life and works, finding in *Manfred* the nearest approach to his own philosophic ideals. It was in his early Byronic rhapsodies that Nietzsche first made use of the expression "Superman" (a term belonging to Goethe by right of priority) which indicates the original significance attached by Nietzsche to this much-interpreted word.

Another of his prime favorites was Sir Walter Scott, whom he called the "English Homer," by reason of his spirited description of England's past, and his tendency to glorify the valorous deeds and heroic achievements of his countrymen. In the course of time I read aloud to my brother sixteen of the Waverley Novels, besides many works of Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot, but he was never carried away by the pictures of English life as there portrayed. Nietzsche always felt the discordant note in the English national character, and was unpleasantly affected by the intellectual cumbrousness, the religious insincerity, and the lack of genuine artistic perceptions. He often said that the English had no music in their souls, and complained that "the most highly cultivated Englishman was totally lacking in rhythm, both in his soul-vibrations and in his physical movements."

I don't remember ever hearing my brother agree with English sentiment on any subject whatsoever; the only thing arousing his admiration being the recognition English scholars accorded one another even when of diametrically opposed opinion. This manifestation of good-will and broad-mindedness, he regarded as something quite unique and exemplary. If I should attempt to single

out the one quality which repelled Nietzsche in the English character, I should say it was cant, which he often said was the inborn vice of the English. He found this spirit of cant even in the writings of English philosophers, and despite his high opinion of such men as Darwin, John Stuart Mill, and Herbert Spencer, he had but an ill-concealed contempt for what he called their utilitarian spirit and their utter lack of an ideal.

He did not regard the English as a race of philosophers, and although he had words of genuine appreciation for Locke and Hume, and in certain points admitted them to be in the right as opposed to Kant, his estimate of English philosophy on the whole might be summed up in what he once said of Carlyle: "What is lacking and always has been lacking in England, was well known to that half actor and rhetorician, the harebrained Carlyle, who by means of passionate gestures and grimaces endeavored to conceal from the world what he realized to be his own inherent lack, namely, a genuine depth of intellectual insight—in other words, of philosophy."

Nietzsche feared that the influence of English philosophy with its plebeian tendencies and intellectual mediocrity—as he expressed it: "the influence of England's small-mindedness [*Kleingeisterei*]"—might some day prove a real danger to the whole of Europe. "One should not lose sight of the fact," he wrote, "that England's utilitarian spirit has already depreciated European intellect, in fact, reduced it to the lowest level."