The Twilight of the Idols; or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer. The Antichrist: Complete Works, Volume

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

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THE TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS

BY

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Or, How to Philosophise with the Hammer

THE ANTICHRIST

NOTES TO ZARATHUSTRA, AND ETERNAL RECURRENCE

TRANSLATED BY

ANTHONY M. LUDOVICI

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

The First Complete and Authorised English Translation

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THE ANTICHRIST

ETERNAL RECURRENCE

NOTES TO ZARATHUSTRA

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The Twilight of the Idols was written towards the end of the summer of 1888, its composition seems to have occupied only a few days,—so few indeed that, in _Ecce Homo_ (p. 118), Nietzsche says he hesitates to give their number; but, in any case, we know it was completed on the 3rd of September in Sils Maria. The manuscript which was dispatched to the printers on the 7th of September bore the title: "_Idle Hours of a Psychologist_"; this, however, was abandoned in favour of the present title, while the work was going through the press. During September and the early part of October 1888, Nietzsche added to the original contents of the book by inserting the whole section entitled "Things the Germans Lack," and aphorisms 32-43 of "Skirmishes in a War with the Age"; and the book, as it now stands, represents exactly the form in which Nietzsche intended to publish it in the course of the year 1889. Unfortunately its author was already stricken down with illness when the work first appeared at the end of January 1889, and he was denied the joy of seeing it run into nine editions, of one thousand each, before his death in 1900.

Of _The Twilight of the Idols,_ Nietzsche says in _Ecce Homo_ (p. 118):—"If anyone should desire to obtain a rapid sketch of how everything before my time was standing on its head, he should begin reading me in this book. That which is called 'Idols' on the title-page is simply the old truth that has been believed in hitherto. In plain English, _The Twilight of the Idols_ means that the old truth is on its last legs."

Certain it is that, for a rapid survey of the whole of Nietzsche's doctrine, no book, save perhaps the section entitled "Of Old and New Tables" in _Thus Spake Zarathustra,_ could be of more real value than _The Twilight of the Idols._ Here Nietzsche is quite at his best. He is ripe for the marvellous feat of the transvaluation of all values. Nowhere is his language—that marvellous weapon which in his hand became at once so supple and so murderous—more forcible and more condensed. Nowhere are his thoughts more profound. But all this does not by any means imply that this book is the easiest of Nietzsche's works. On the contrary, I very much fear that, unless the reader is well prepared, not only in Nietzscheism, but also in the habit of grappling with uncommon and elusive problems, a good deal of the contents of this work will tend rather to confuse than to enlighten him in regard to what Nietzsche actually wishes to make clear in these pages.

How much prejudice, for instance, how many traditional and deep-seated opinions, must be uprooted, if we are to see even so much as an important note of interrogation in the section entitled "The Problem of Socrates"—not to speak of such sections as "Morality as the Enemy of Nature," "The Four Great Errors," &c. The errors exposed in these sections have a tradition of two thousand years behind them; and only a fantastic dreamer could expect them to be eradicated by a mere casual study of these pages. Indeed, Nietzsche himself looked forward only to a gradual change in the general view of the questions he discussed; he knew only too well what the conversion of "light heads" was worth, and what kind of man would probably be the first to rush into his arms; and, grand psychologist that he was, he guarded himself beforehand against bad

company by means of his famous warning:—“The first adherents of a creed do not prove anything against it.”

To the aspiring student of Nietzsche, however, it ought not to be necessary to become an immediate convert in order to be interested in the treasure of thought which Nietzsche here lavishes upon us. For such a man it will be quite difficult enough to regard the questions raised in this work as actual problems. Once, however, he has succeeded in doing this, and has given his imagination time to play round these questions _as_ problems, the particular turn or twist that Nietzsche gives to their elucidation, may then perhaps strike him, not only as valuable, but as absolutely necessary.

With regard to the substance of _The Twilight of the Idols,_ Nietzsche says in _Ecce Homo_ (p. 119):—“There is the waste of an all-too-rich autumn in this book: you trip over truths. You even crush some to death, there are too many of them.”

And what are these truths? They are things that are not yet held to be true. They are the utterances of a man who, as a single exception, escaped for a while the general insanity of Europe, with its blind idealism in the midst of squalor, with its unscrupulous praise of so-called “Progress” while it stood knee-deep in the belittlement of “Man,” and with its vulgar levity in the face of effeminacy and decay;—they are the utterances of one who voiced the hopes, the aims, and the realities of another world, not of an ideal world, not of a world beyond, but of a real world, of _this_ world regenerated and reorganised upon a sounder, a more virile, and a more orderly basis,—in fact, of a perfectly _possible_ world, one that has already existed in the past, and could exist again, if only the stupendous

revolution of a transvaluation of all values were made possible.

This then is the nature of the truths uttered by this one sane man in the whole of Europe at the end of last century; and when, owing to his unequal struggle against the overwhelming hostile forces of his time, his highly sensitive personality was at last forced to surrender itself to the enemy and become one with them—that is to say, insane!—at least the record of his sanity had been safely stored away, beyond the reach of time and change, in the volumes which constitute his life-work.

* * * * *

Nietzsche must have started upon the “Antichrist,” immediately after having dispatched the “Idle Hours of a Psychologist” to the printers, and the work appears to have been finished at the end of September 1888. It was intended by Nietzsche to form the first book of a large work entitled “The Transvaluation of all Values”; but, though this work was never completed, we can form some idea from the substance of the “Antichrist” and from the titles of the remaining three books, which alas! were never written, of what its contents would have been. These titles are:—Book II. The Free Spirit. A Criticism of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement. Book III. The Immoralist. A Criticism of the most Fatal Kind of Ignorance,—Morality. Book IV. Dionysus. The Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence.

Nietzsche calls this book “An Attempted Criticism of Christianity.” Modest as this sub-title is, it will probably seem not quite modest enough to those who think that Nietzsche fell far short of doing justice to their Holy Creed. Be this as it may, there is the solution of a

certain profound problem in this book, which, while it is the key to all Nietzscheism, is also the justification and the sanctification of Nietzsche's cause. The problem stated quite plainly is this: "_To what end_ did Christianity avail itself of falsehood?"

Many readers of this amazing little work, who happen to be acquainted with Nietzsche's doctrine of Art and of Ruling, will probably feel slightly confused at the constant deprecation of falsehood, of deception, and of arbitrary make-believe, which seems to run through this book like a litany in praise of a certain Absolute Truth.

Remembering Nietzsche's utterance in volume ii. (p. 26) of the _Will to Power,_ to wit:—"The prerequisite of all living things and of their lives is: that there should be a large amount of faith, that it should be possible to pass definite judgments on things, and that there should be no doubt at all concerning values. Thus it is necessary that something should be assumed to be true, _not_ that it is true;"—remembering these words, as I say, the reader may stand somewhat aghast before all those passages in the second half of this volume, where the very falsehoods of Christianity, its assumptions, its unwarrantable claims to Truth, are declared to be pernicious, base and corrupt.

Again and again, if we commit the error of supposing that Nietzsche believed in a truth that was absolute, we shall find throughout his works reasons for charging him with apparently the very same crimes that he here lays at the door of Christianity. What then is the explanation of his seeming inconsistency?

It is simple enough. Nietzsche's charge of falsehood against Christianity is not a moral one,—in fact it may be taken as a general

rule that Nietzsche scrupulously avoids making moral charges, and that he emains throughout faithful to his position Beyond Good and Evil (see, for instance Aph. 6 (Antichrist) where he repudiates all moral prejudice in charging humanity with corruption). A man who maintained that “truth is that form of error which enables a particular species to prevail,” could not make a _moral_ charge of falsehood against any one, or any institution; but he could do so from another standpoint He could well say, for instance, “falsehood is that kind of error which causes a particular species to degenerate and to decay.”

Thus the fact that Christianity “lied” becomes a subject of alarm to Nietzsche, not owing to the fact that it is immoral to lie, but because in this particular instance, the lie was harmful, hostile to life, and dangerous to humanity; for “a belief might be false and yet life-preserving” (_Beyond Good and Evil,_ pp. 8, 9).

Suppose, therefore, we say with Nietzsche that there is no absolute truth, but that all that has been true in the past which has been the means of making the “plant man flourish best”—or, since the meaning of “best” is open to some debate, let us say, flourish in a Nietzschean sense, that is to say, thanks to a mastery of life, and to a preponderance of all those qualities which say yea to existence, and which suggest no flight from this world and all its pleasure and pain. And suppose we add that, wherever we may find the plant man flourishing, in this sense, we should there suspect the existence of truth?—I If we say this with Nietzsche, any sort of assumption or arbitrary valuation which aims at a reverse order of things, becomes a dangerous lie in a super-moral and purely physiological sense.

With these preparatory remarks we are now prepared to read

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