Ecce Homo: Complete Works, Volume Seventeen

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

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ECCE HOMO

(_NIETZSCHE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY_)

BY

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HYMN TO LIFE (_composed by F. NIETZSCHE_)

The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche

The First Complete and Authorised English Translation

Edited by Dr Oscar Levy

Volume Seventeen

T.N. FOULIS

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CONTENTS

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION
AUTHOR'S PREFACE
WHY I AM SO WISE
WHY I AM SO CLEVER
WHY I WRITE SUCH EXCELLENT BOOKS
- The Birth of Tragedy
- Thoughts out of Season
- Human, All-too-Human
- The Dawn of Day
- The Joyful Wisdom
- Thus spake Zarathustra
- Beyond Good and Evil
- The Genealogy of Morals
- The Twilight of the Idols
- The Case of Wagner

WHY I AM A FATALITY
EDITORIAL NOTE TO POETRY

POETRY--
Songs, Epigrams, etc.
Dionysus-Dithyrambs
Fragments of Dionysus-Dithyrambs
HYMN TO LIFE, COMPOSED BY F. NIETZSCHE

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Ecce Homo is the last prose work that Nietzsche wrote. It is true that the pamphlet _Nietzsche contra Wagner_ was prepared a month later than the Autobiography; but we cannot consider this pamphlet as anything more than a compilation, seeing that it consists entirely of aphorisms drawn from such previous works as _Joyful Wisdom, Beyond Good and Evil, The Genealogy of Morals,_ etc. Coming at the end of a year in which he had produced the _Case of Wagner, The Twilight of the Idols,_ and _The Antichrist, Ecce Homo_ is not only a coping-stone worthy of the wonderful creations of that year, but also a fitting conclusion to his whole life, in the form of a grand summing up of his character as a man, his purpose as a reformer, and his achievement as a thinker. As if half conscious of his approaching spiritual end, Nietzsche here bids his friends farewell, just in the manner in which, in the _Twilight of the Idols_ (Aph. 36, Part ix.), he declares that every one should be able to take leave of his circle of relatives and intimates when his time seems to have come--that is to say, while he is still _himself_ while he still knows what he is about, and is able to measure his own life and life in general, and speak of both in a manner which is not vouchsafed to the groaning invalid, to the man lying on his back, decrepit and exhausted, or to the moribund

victim of some wasting disease. Nietzsche's spiritual death, like his whole life, was in singular harmony with his doctrine: he died suddenly and proudly,--sword in hand. War, which he--and he alone among all the philosophers of Christendom--had praised so whole-heartedly, at last struck him down in the full vigour of his manhood, and left him a victim on the battlefield--the terrible battlefield of thought, on which there is no quarter, and for which no Geneva Convention has yet been established or even thought of.

To those who know Nietzsche's life-work, no apology will be needed for the form and content of this wonderful work. They will know, at least, that a man either is, or is not, aware of his significance and of the significance of what he has accomplished, and that if he is aware of it, then self-realisation, even of the kind which we find in these pages, is neither morbid nor suspicious, but necessary and inevitable. Such chapter headings as "Why I am so Wise," "Why I am a Fatality," "Why I write such Excellent Books,"--however much they may have disturbed the equanimity, and "objectivity" in particular, of certain Nietzsche biographers, can be regarded as pathological only in a democratic age in which people have lost all sense of graduation and rank and in which the virtues of modesty and humility have to be preached far and wide as a corrective against the vulgar pretensions of thousands of wretched nobodies. For little people can be endured only as modest citizens; or humble Christians. If, however, they demand a like modesty on the part of the truly great; if they raise their voices against Nietzsche's lack of the very virtue they so abundantly possess or pretend to possess, it is time to remind them of Goethe's famous remark: "_Nur Lumpe sind bescheiden_" (Only nobodies are ever modest).

It took Nietzsche barely three weeks to write this story of his life. Begun on the 15th of October 1888, his four-and-fourtieth birthday, it was finished on the 4th of November of the same year, and, but for a few trifling modifications and additions, is just as Nietzsche left it. It was not published in Germany until the year 1908, eight years after Nietzsche's death. In a letter dated the 27th of December 1888, addressed to the musical composer Fuchs, the author declares the object of the work to be to dispose of all discussion, doubt, and inquiry concerning his own personality, in order to leave the public mind free to consider merely "the things for the sake of which he existed" ("_die Dinge, derentwegen ich da bin_"). And, true to his intention, Nietzsche's honesty in these pages is certainly one of the most remarkable features about them. From the first chapter, in which he frankly acknowledges the decadent elements within him, to the last page, whereon he characterises his mission, his life-task, and his achievement, by means of the one symbol, _Dionysus_ versus _Christ,_--everything comes straight from the shoulder, without hesitation, without fear of consequences, and, above all, without concealment. Only in one place does he appear to conceal something, and then he actually leads one to understand that he is doing so. It is in regard to Wagner, the greatest friend of his life. "Who doubts," he says, "that I, old artillery-man that I am, would be able if I liked to point my heavy guns at Wagner?"--But he adds: "Everything decisive in this question I kept to myself--I have loved Wagner" (p. 122).

To point, as many have done, to the proximity of all Nietzsche's autumn work of the year 1888 to his breakdown at the beginning of 1889, and to argue that in all its main features it foretells the catastrophe that is imminent, seems a little too plausible, a little too

obvious and simple to require refutation. That Nietzsche really was in a state which in medicine is known as _euphoria_--that is to say, that state of highest well-being and capacity which often precedes a complete breakdown, cannot, I suppose, be questioned; for his style, his penetrating vision, and his vigour, reach their zenith in the works written in this autumn of 1888; but the contention that the matter, the substance, of these works reveals any signs whatsoever of waning mental health, or, as a certain French biographer has it, of an inability to "hold himself and his judgments in check," is best contradicted by the internal evidence itself. To take just a few examples at random, examine the cold and calculating tone of self-analysis in Chapter I. of the present work; consider the reserve and the restraint with which the idea in Aphorism 7 of that chapter is worked out,--not to speak of the restraint and self-mastery in the idea itself, namely:--

"To be one's enemy's equal--this is the first condition of an honourable duel. Where one despises one cannot wage war. Where one commands, where one sees something beneath one, one ought not to wage war. My war tactics can be reduced to four principles: First, I attack only things that are triumphant--if necessary I wait until they become triumphant. Secondly, I attack only those things against which I find no allies, against which I stand alone--against which I compromise nobody but myself.... Thirdly, I never make personal attacks--I use a personality merely as a magnifying-glass, by means of which I render a general, but elusive and scarcely noticeable evil, more apparent.... Fourthly, I attack only those things from which all personal differences are excluded, in which any such thing as a background of disagreeable experiences is lacking."

And now notice the gentleness with which, in Chapter II.,

Wagner--the supposed mortal enemy, the supposed envied rival to Nietzsche--is treated. Are these the words and the thoughts of a man who Has lost, or who is losing control?

And even if we confine ourselves simply to the substance of this work and put the question--Is it a new Nietzsche or the old Nietzsche that we find in these pages? Is it the old countenance with which we are familiar, or are the features distorted, awry, disfigured? What will the answer be? Obviously there is no new or even deformed Nietzsche here, because he is still faithful to the position which he assumed in _Thus spake Zarathustra,_ five years previously, and is perfectly conscious of this fidelity (see p. 141); neither can he be even on the verge of any marked change, because the whole of the third chapter, in which he reviews his life-work, is simply a reiteration and a confirmation of his old points of view, which are here made all the more telling by additional arguments suggested, no doubt, by maturer thought. In fact, if anything at all is new in this work, it is its cool certainty, its severe deliberateness, and its extraordinarily incisive vision, as shown, for instance, in the summing up of the genuine import of the third and fourth essays in the _Thoughts out of Season_ (pp. 75-76, 80, 81, 82), a summing up which a most critical analysis of the essays in question can but verify. Romanticism, idealism, Christianity, are still scorned and despised; another outlook, a nobler, braver, and more earthly outlook, is still upheld and revered; the great yea to life, including all that it contains that is terrible and questionable, is still pronounced in the teeth of pessimists, nihilists, anarchists, Christians, and other decadents; and Germany, "Europe's flatland," is still subjected to the most relentless criticism. If there are any signs of change, besides those of mere growth, in this work, they

certainly succeed in eluding the most careful search, undertaken with a full knowledge of Nietzsche's former opinions, and it would be interesting to know precisely where they are found by those writers whom the titles of the chapters, alone, seem so radically to have perturbed.

But the most striking thing of all, the miracle, so to speak, of this autobiography, is the absence from it of that loathing, that suggestion of surfeit, with which a life such as the one Nietzsche had led, would have filled any other man even of power approximate to his own. This anchorite, who, in the last years of his life as a healthy human being, suffered the experience of seeing even his oldest friends, including Rhode, show the most complete indifference to his lot, this wrestler with Fate, for whom recognition, in the persons of Brandes, Taine, and Strindberg, had come all too late, and whom even support, sympathy, and help, arriving as it did at last, through Deussen and from Madame de Salis Marschlins, could no longer cheer or comfort,--this was the man who was able notwithstanding to inscribe the device _amor fati_ upon his shield on the very eve of his final collapse as a victim of the unspeakable suffering he had endured.

And this final collapse might easily have been foreseen. Nietzsche's sensorium, as his autobiography proves, was probably the most delicate instrument ever possessed by a human being; and with this fragile structure--the prerequisite, by the bye, of all genius,--his terrible will compelled him to confront the most profound and most recondite problems. We happen to know from another artist and profound thinker, Benjamin Disraeli, who himself had experienced a dangerous breakdown, what the consequences precisely are of indulging in excessive activity in the sphere of the spirit, more

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