SEVEN BOOKS OF THE MONTH

I

Daniel Halévy's "Life of Nietzsche"*

What would the mere name of Nietzsche have brought to the imagination of Balzac? Would he, on finding Nietzsche was a peripatetic philosopher wrestling with bad eyes and a congestion of ideas, have exclaimed, as he did on discovering Marcas was a tailor: "He deserved a better fate"? Or would the name have merely suggested a sneeze—like that of Shagpat which shook a nation? It is hard to say. To-day Nietzsche comes trippingly to the tongue; the Superman is a platitude of conversation, people can even spell his name and quote what Bernard Shaw has said about him. And all this in ten years! Taine, in France, had reached out to this lover of chloral and Carman and had felt the force of his dynamic phrases; George Brandes, actually his discoverer, had already begun to reveal to Europe the strange thoughts of this hater of hypocrisy and weakness; Gustave Strindberg—the misogynistic dramatist of three matrimonial experiences and a resulting dislike for the modern woman—had already introduced into his savage plays the *motifs* of the German's anti-femininism, and Havelock Ellis—expounder of sex psychology—had offered in his *Affirmations* a word from England, when the long twilight settled on Nietzsche's mind and in that twilight his star was found. The tragic close of his life and his fierce denunciations of Wagner caught the popular ear, and from curiosity came fame and with fame influence. To-day it is secure; generated in a subjective isolation, his influence rushed out in weird hissing phrases against the rock-made conventions of man—those habits of a community; and in making us question our own ideals he has done us an infinite service. It matters little that we have discovered, in spite of his vigorous rousing of us from the cosy sentimentalisms we are prone to, it was the glamour of his armour rather than the strength of his philosophy which has halted us.

Reams have been written explaining him, and he has been lost in his disciples, misunderstood by his contemporaries. Thanks to the devotion of his sister, Madame Förster, the man is emerging, and in the book before us Daniel Halévy has succeeded in a clever fashion in condensing the outlines and presenting us with an admirable and accessible biography. *The Life of Frederick Nietzsche* differs from Dr. Mügge's well-known *Nietzsche and His Work* in that the emphasis is placed on the manner in which the external facts of his life influenced his thoughts rather than with a detailed exposition of his thought as such. Yet his life had few high spots save of subjective value; to many it would seem uneventful, and though it embraced a long relation with Wagner it was mainly a tragedy of thought—a series of mental adventures while in the search for spiritual and physical health.

These adventures began in childhood and, as M. Halévy points out, Nietzsche's private journal was a wonderful revelation of a child's mind, since he posed there the same questions in answering which his entire life was concerned. His years at school were prosaic, though he fell in love for the first time, discovered Plato and Æschylus, found himself a poet and learned to worship Schumann and Beethoven, whom he played with ease. It was a versatile, searching mind which he took, when eighteen, to the University of Bonn. He entered into the spirit of the place. He even fought a duel to become a "finished" student. Lacking an enemy, he had to choose a friend. "I am new this year," he said, "and I want to fight a duel. I rather like you. Let us fight." Nietzsche received a rapier thrust and felt he had achieved manhood. But he soon became morbid and introspective—till he found Schopenhauer; this was the great event of his youth. Henceforth, though philology was his profession, philosophy became his love. "What do we seek?" he had written to his sister. "Is it repose or happi-

*The Life of Frederick Nietzsche. By Daniel Halévy. Translated by J. M. Hone. New York: The Macmillan Company.

ness? No, truth alone, however terrible and evil it may be." He never changed this attitude.

Shortly after this he met Wagner, through Madame Brockhause, the sister, and this proved the great critical event in his life. M. Halévy presents the facts of this famous intimacy in many pages and bears out Huneker's statement that "these two became friends through a series of mutual misunderstandings." The days at Triebschen were days of illusion: in Nietzsche Wagner saw a brilliant revealer, in Wagner Nietzsche saw a god who would make philosophy possible through art. It was this direct contact with the musical genius which inspired Nietzsche's activity in Greek thought: Dionysius was reborn. Nietzsche's thoughts began to steer from set philosophies into original channels. The Franco-Prussian War broke out at this time, and being technically a Swiss citizen, as he held the chair of philology at Basle, he could only participate as a member of the ambulance corps.

Some unfortunates were given into his charge; he did his duty with kindness and courage, but experienced a singular emotion, a sacred and almost enthusiastic horror. For the first time he considered without repulsion the labour of the masses. He watched those millions of beings, some struck down and marked by death, others marching the roads or standing under arms; he considered them without contempt, he esteemed their destiny. Under the menaces of war these men have something momentous about them. They forget their vain thoughts; they march, they sing, they obey their chiefs, they die. Frederick Nietzsche was recompensed for his pains; a fraternal impulse uplifted his soul; he no longer felt his solitude; he loved the simple people who surrounded him. "All my military passions awake," he writes, "and I cannot satisfy them! I would have been at Rezouville, Sedan, active, passive, perhaps. This Swiss neutrality always ties my hands." . . . He is no longer the loyal Swiss of another time; he is a man among men, a German proud of his Germany. A war has transformed him; he glorifies war. War awakes the energy of men; it even troubles their spirits. It obliges them to seek in an ideal order, an order of beauty and duty, the ends of a life which is too cruel.

The change which had taken place within troubled him when he saw Wagner again. "To sway the people is to put passions in the service of an idea." He felt Wagner was compromising, and to accomplish his end was changing, chameleon-like, to each school of philosophy whose support he wished. M. Halévy cleverly traces the growing coldness between the two men until finally, in the tragedy of disillusionment at Baireuth, Nietzsche recognised despairingly that he had allowed himself to be captured by the gambols of a giant. His ardent love had been deceived. He had given his heart to this man who had trifled with a sacred gift. He wrote in his Notes of which his friends did not know:

Let us really ask ourselves what is the value of the time which adopts the art of Wagner as its art? It is radically anarchical, a breathless thing, impious, greedy, shapeless, uncertain of its groundwork and quick to despair; it has no simplicity, it is self-conscious to the marrow, it lacks nobility, it is violent, cowardly. This art unites pell mell in one mass all that still attracts our modern German souls; aspects, ways of feeling, all come pell mell. A monstrous attempt of art to affirm and dominate itself in an anti-artistic period. It is a poison against a poison.

Nietzsche felt humiliated because he had betrayed truth, and again his thoughts were driven deeper into the search for the meaning of life. Yet a curious and naïve idea occurred to him on being invited to see Wagner.

Did he merely wish to affirm his independence or did he wish to *correct* Wagner? He took a score of Brahms, whom he admired, and whom Wagner pursued with a jealousy that was comic at times, slipped it in his trunk, and, early in the first evening, put it well in view on the piano. It was bound in the most beautiful red. Wagner perceived it and, without doubt, understood; he had the sense to say nothing. Next day, however, Nietzsche repeated the manœuvre. Then the great man exploded; he screamed, raged and foamed; then dashed off, banging the doors behind him. He met Nietzsche's sister, who had come with her brother, and, suddenly laughing at himself, gaily related the anecdote.

"Your brother has again thrust that red score on the piano, and the first thing I see

on entering the room is it! Then I fell into a fury like a bull before a red flag. Nietzsche, as I knew well, wanted me to understand that that man, too, had composed beautiful music. I exploded—what is called exploding."

And Wagner laughed noisily. The bewildered Fräulein Nietzsche sent for her brother.

"Friedrich, what have you done? What has happened?"

"Ah, Lisbeth, Wagner has not been great."

The thought of a *Parsifal* was more than he could bear when he heard Wagner was thus to proclaim himself a Christian. Yet he struggled to enjoy the opening performances of the *Ring* at Baireuth. Each evening was a triumph that only added to his distress—*Rhinegold, Valkyrie,* souvenir of his youth, *Siegfried,* of Triebschen, this latter being the only one he could listen to without remorse. Then followed the *Götterdämmerung.*

It was the end. The curtain fell slowly and the spectators rose suddenly, with one accord, and gave vent to a loud burst of cheering. Then the curtain rose once more and Richard Wagner appeared, alone, dressed in a redingote and cloth trousers, holding his little figure erect. With a sign he called for silence; every murmur ceased.

"We have shown you what we wished to show you," he cried, "and what we can show you when all wills are directed to one object; if, on your side, you support us, then you will have an art."

He retired, then returned again and again. Nietzsche watched his master standing in the limelight, and he alone in the hall did not applaud.

"There he is," he thought, "*my ally* . . . the Homer who has been fertilised by Plato."

The curtain fell for the last time and Nietzsche, silent, lost in the crowd, followed his tide like a wreck.

For many months after this he fought death—his struggles with pain throughout his wracked life were indeed heroic—and yet he always worked, even if with the caprice of his mind he changed his ideas and reversed every thesis he ever held. A glimpse of his loneliness and search for disciples is found in an anecdote told by a student at Basle.

I attended Nietzsche's lectures. I knew him very slightly. Once, at the end of a lecture, he chanced to be near me, and we walked side by side. There were light clouds passing over the sky. "The beautiful clouds," he said to me, "how rapid they are!" "They resemble the clouds of Paul Veronese," I answered. Suddenly his hand seized my arm. "Listen!" he said; "the holidays are coming; I am leaving soon; come with me, and we shall go together to see the clouds of Venice." . . . I was surprised. I stammered out some hesitating words; then I saw Nietzsche turn from me, his face icy and rigid as death. He moved away without saying a word, leaving me alone.

It is near the lakes of Italy that the labour of *Zarathustra* took place. The doctrine of the Eternal Recall was the first thing to bring him back to his old mental activity.

On my horizon thoughts rise, and what thoughts! I did not suspect anything of this kind. I say no more of it, I wish to maintain a resolute calm. Alas! my friend, presentiments sometimes cross my mind. It seems to me that I am leading a very dangerous life, for my machine is one of those which may go to smash. The intensity of my sentiments makes me shudder and laugh—twice already I have had to stay in my rooms and for a ridiculous reason: my eyes were inflamed. Why? Because while I walked I had cried too much; not sentimental tears, but tears of joy; and I sang and said idiotic things, being full of a new idea which I must proffer to men.

It is impossible to follow all the curious quirks which the external happenings had upon his thought—the Superman was born and his lapidary phrases built up slowly the most monumental chaos man has ever conceived. Only broad outlines were to be given by him: the task was too impossible with his failing mind and health. The indifference of the public had its effect—his own ego became audience as well as actor, and proportion was lost. But he was a long while breaking up. The famous love episode with Lou Salomé did little to settle him. M. Halévy gives all the facts as are known: all that is essential is that Nietzsche suffered again a complete disillusionment. Nietzsche met her through his intimate and helpful friend, Fräulein von Meysenburg.

A few days after their first interview, Miss Salomé and her mother left Rome. The two philosophers, Nietzsche and Rée, went with her, each of them enthusiasts for the young girl. Nietzsche said to Rée: "There's an admirable woman; marry her." "No," answered Rée; 'I am a pessimist; marry her yourself; she is a companion that you want." . . . Nietzsche dismissed this idea. Perhaps he said to his friend, as he had said to his sister: "I marry! Never. I would have to be a liar somewhere or other."

The months that followed, including the days when they were alone at Tautenburg, are secret history. She married Rée later and wrote a book about Nietzsche. Perhaps Madame Förster broke off the affair—one will never know. Some time after, when Rée offered to dedicate his philosophical work to Nietzsche, he refused. A letter written by George Brandes in 1888 shows us Paul Rée living in Berlin with Miss Salomé as "brother and sister," according to both their accounts. But Nietzsche was completing *Zarathustra* alone in the mountains. He began to take chloral, and gradually his mind went to pieces. He was probably insane from 1888—just when fame was beginning to settle upon him her reward, and he was feeling the leavening influence of his ideas. His last days were but fragments of flashing thought—the old brilliancy and the gradual dissolution. He died at Weimar the 25th of August, 1900.

Whatever criticism is to be made of M. Halévy's volume, admirably translated by J. M. Hone, rests solely on its lack of a chapter showing Nietzsche's influence. This, however, is in a measure removed by T. M. Kettle's introduction. In this is found perhaps the best comment on M. Halévy's book: "It exhibits Nietzsche as better than his gospel, a hundred times better than most of those disturbers of civilisation who call themselves his disciples."

George Middleton.