A CRITICISM OF CHRISTIANITY

THE ANTICHRIST



FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

TRANSLATED BY H. L. MENCKEN

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AEVVM LECTIO

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Translated from the German
by H. L. Mencken

Preview edition

Aevum Lectio

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Introduction

by H. L. Mencken

Save for his raucous, rhapsodical autobiography, "Ecce Homo," "The Antichrist" is the last thing that Nietzsche ever wrote, and so it may be accepted as a statement of some of his most salient ideas in their final form. Notes for it had been accumulating for years and it was to have constituted the first volume of his long-projected *magnum opus*, "The Will to Power." His full plan for this work, as originally drawn up, was as follows:

Vol. I The Antichrist: an Attempt at a Criticism of Christianity.

Vol. II The Free Spirit: a Criticism of Philosophy as a Nihilistic Movement.

Vol. III The Immoralist: a Criticism of Morality, the Most Fatal Form of Ignorance.

Vol. IV Dionysus: the Philosophy of Eternal Recurrence.

The first sketches for "The Will to Power" were made in 1884, soon after the publication of the first three parts of "Thus Spake Zarathustra," and thereafter, for four years, Nietzsche piled up notes. They were written at all the places he visited on his endless travels in search of health—at Nice, at Venice, at Sils-Maria in the Engadine (for long his favourite resort), at Cannobio, at Zürich, at Genoa, at Chur, at Leipzig. Several times his work was interrupted by other books, first by "Beyond Good and Evil," then by "The Genealogy of Morals" (written in twenty days), then by his Wagner pamphlets. Almost as often he changed his plan. Once he decided to expand "The Will to Power" to ten volumes, with "An

Attempt at a New Interpretation of the World" as a general sub-title. Again he adopted the sub-title of "An Interpretation of All That Happens." Finally, he hit upon "An Attempt at a Transvaluation of All Values," and went back to four volumes, though with a number of changes in their arrangement. In September, 1888, he began actual work upon the first volume, and before the end of the month it was completed. The Summer had been one of almost hysterical creative activity. Since the middle of June he had written two other small books, "The Case of Wagner" and "The Twilight of the Idols," and before the end of the year he was destined to write "Ecce Homo." Some time during December his health began to fail rapidly, and soon after the New Year he was helpless. Thereafter he wrote no more.

The Wagner diatribe and "The Twilight of the Idols" were published immediately, but "The Antichrist" did not get into type until 1895. I suspect that the delay was due to the influence of the philosopher's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche, an intelligent and ardent but by no means uniformly judicious propagandist of his ideas. During his dark days of neglect and misunderstanding, when even family and friends kept aloof, Frau Förster-Nietzsche went with him farther than any other, but there were bounds beyond which she, also, hesitated to go, and those bounds were marked by crosses. One notes, in her biography of him—a useful but not always accurate work—an evident desire to purge him of the accusation of mocking at sacred things. He had, she says, great admiration for "the elevating effect of Christianity … upon the weak and ailing," and "a real liking for sincere, pious Christians," and "a tender love for the Founder of Christianity." All his wrath, she continues, was reserved for "St. Paul and his like," who perverted the Beatitudes, which Christ intended for the lowly only, into a universal religion which made war upon aristocratic values. Here, obviously, one is addressed by an interpreter who cannot forget that she is the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and the grand-daughter

of two others; a touch of conscience gets into her reading of "The Antichrist." She even hints that the text may have been garbled, after the author's collapse, by some more sinister heretic. There is not the slightest reason to believe that any such garbling ever took place, nor is there any evidence that their common heritage of piety rested upon the brother as heavily as it rested upon the sister. On the contrary, it must be manifest that Nietzsche, in this book, intended to attack Christianity headlong and with all arms, that for all his rapid writing he put the utmost care into it, and that he wanted it to be printed exactly as it stands. The ideas in it were anything but new to him when he set them down. He had been developing them since the days of his beginning. You will find some of them, clearly recognizable, in the first book he ever wrote, "The Birth of Tragedy." You will find the most important of all of them—the conception of Christianity as *ressentiment*—set forth at length in the first part of "The Genealogy of Morals," published under his own supervision in 1887. And the rest are scattered through the whole vast mass of his notes, sometimes as mere questionings but often worked out very carefully. Moreover, let it not be forgotten that it was Wagner's yielding to Christian sentimentality in "Parsifal" that transformed Nietzsche from the first among his literary advocates into the most bitter of his opponents. He could forgive every other sort of mountebankery, but not that. "In me," he once said, "the Christianity of my forbears reaches its logical conclusion. In me the stern intellectual conscience that Christianity fosters and makes paramount turns *against* Christianity. In me Christianity … devours itself."

In truth, the present philippic is as necessary to the completeness of the whole of Nietzsche's system as the keystone is to the arch. All the curves of his speculation lead up to it. What he flung himself against, from beginning to end of his days of writing, was always, in the last analysis, Christianity in some form or other—Christianity as a system of

practical ethics, Christianity as a political code, Christianity as metaphysics, Christianity as a gauge of the truth. It would be difficult to think of any intellectual enterprise on his long list that did not, more or less directly and clearly, relate itself to this master enterprise of them all. It was as if his apostasy from the faith of his fathers, filling him with the fiery zeal of the convert, and particularly of the convert to heresy, had blinded him to every other element in the gigantic self-delusion of civilized man. The will to power was his answer to Christianity's affectation of humility and self-sacrifice; eternal recurrence was his mocking criticism of Christian optimism and millennialism; the superman was his candidate for the place of the Christian ideal of the "good" man, prudently abased before the throne of God. The things he chiefly argued for were anti-Christian things—the abandonment of the purely moral view of life, the rehabilitation of instinct, the dethronement of weakness and timidity as ideals, the renunciation of the whole hocus-pocus of dogmatic religion, the extermination of false aristocracies (of the priest, of the politician, of the plutocrat), the revival of the healthy, lordly "innocence" that was Greek. If he was anything in a word, Nietzsche was a Greek born two thousand years too late. His dreams were thoroughly Hellenic; his whole manner of thinking was Hellenic; his peculiar errors were Hellenic no less. But his Hellenism, I need not add, was anything but the pale neo-Platonism that has run like a thread through the thinking of the Western world since the days of the Christian Fathers. From Plato, to be sure, he got what all of us must get, but his real forefather was Heraclitus. It is in Heraclitus that one finds the germ of his primary view of the universe—a view, to wit, that sees it, not as moral phenomenon, but as mere aesthetic representation. The God that Nietzsche imagined, in the end, was not far from the God that such an artist as Joseph Conrad imagines—a supreme craftsman, ever experimenting, ever

coming closer to an ideal balancing of lines and forces, and yet always failing to work out the final harmony.

The late war, awakening all the primitive racial fury of the Western nations, and therewith all their ancient enthusiasm for religious taboos and sanctions, naturally focused attention upon Nietzsche, as upon the most daring and provocative of recent amateur theologians. The Germans, with their characteristic tendency to explain their every act in terms as realistic and unpleasant as possible, appear to have mauled him in a belated and unexpected embrace, to the horror, I daresay, of the Kaiser, and perhaps to the even greater horror of Nietzsche's own ghost. The folks of Anglo-Saxondom, with their equally characteristic tendency to explain all their enterprises romantically, simultaneously set him up as the Antichrist he no doubt secretly longed to be. The result was a great deal of misrepresentation and misunderstanding of him. From the pulpits of the allied countries, and particularly from those of England and the United States, a horde of patriotic ecclesiastics denounced him in extravagant terms as the author of all the horrors of the time, and in the newspapers, until the Kaiser was elected sole bugaboo, he shared the honors of that office with von Hindenburg, the Crown Prince, Capt. Boy-Ed, von Bernstorff and von Tirpitz. Most of this denunciation, of course, was frankly idiotic—the naïve pishposh of suburban Methodists, notoriety-seeking college professors, almost illiterate editorial writers, and other such numskulls. In much of it, including not a few official hymns of hate, Nietzsche was gravely discovered to be the teacher of such spokesmen of the extremest sort of German nationalism as von Bernhardi and von Treitschke—which was just as intelligent as making George Bernard Shaw the mentor of Lloyd-George. In other solemn pronunciamentoes he was credited with being philosophically responsible for various imaginary crimes of the enemy—the wholesale slaughter or mutilation of prisoners of war, the deliberate burning down of Red Cross hospitals, the utilization of the corpses of

the slain for soap-making. I amused myself, in those gaudy days, by collecting newspaper clippings to this general effect, and later on I shall probably publish a digest of them, as a contribution to the study of war hysteria. The thing went to unbelievable lengths. On the strength of the fact that I had published a book on Nietzsche in 1906, six years after his death, I was called upon by agents of the Department of Justice, elaborately outfitted with badges, to meet the charge that I was an intimate associate and agent of "the German monster, Nietzsky." I quote the official *procès verbal*, an indignant but often misspelled document. Alas, poor Nietzsche! After all his laborious efforts to prove that he was not a German, but a Pole—even after his heroic readiness, via anti-anti-Semitism, to meet the deduction that, if a Pole, then probably also a Jew!

But under all this alarmed and preposterous tosh there was at least a sound instinct, and that was the instinct which recognized Nietzsche as the most eloquent, pertinacious and effective of all the critics of the philosophy to which the Allies against Germany stood committed, and on the strength of which, at all events in theory, the United States had engaged itself in the war. He was not, in point of fact, involved with the visible enemy, save in remote and transient ways; the German, officially, remained the most ardent of Christians during the war and became a democrat at its close. But he was plainly a foe of democracy in all its forms, political, religious and epistemological, and what is worse, his opposition was set forth in terms that were not only extraordinarily penetrating and devastating, but also uncommonly offensive. It was thus quite natural that he should have aroused a degree of indignation verging upon the pathological in the two countries that had planted themselves upon the democratic platform most boldly, and that felt it most shaky, one may add, under their feet. I daresay that Nietzsche, had he been alive, would have got a lot of satisfaction out of the execration thus heaped upon him, not only because, being a

vain fellow, he enjoyed execration as a tribute to his general singularity, and hence to his superiority, but also and more importantly because, being no mean psychologist, he would have recognized the disconcerting doubts underlying it. If Nietzsche's criticism of democracy were as ignorant and empty, say, as the average evangelical clergyman's criticism of Darwin's hypothesis of natural selection, then the advocates of democracy could afford to dismiss it as loftily as the Darwinians dismiss the blather of the holy clerks. And if his attack upon Christianity were mere sound and fury, signifying nothing, then there would be no call for anathemas from the sacred desk. But these onslaughts, in point of fact, have behind them a tremendous learning and a great deal of point and plausibility—there are, in brief, bullets in the gun, teeth in the tiger,—and so it is no wonder that they excite the ire of men who hold, as a primary article of belief, that their acceptance would destroy civilization, darken the sun, and bring Jahveh to sobs upon His Throne.

But in all this justifiable fear, of course, there remains a false assumption, and that is the assumption that Nietzsche proposed to destroy Christianity altogether, and so rob the plain people of the world of their virtue, their spiritual consolations, and their hope of heaven. Nothing could be more untrue. The fact is that Nietzsche had no interest whatever in the delusions of the plain people—that is, intrinsically. It seemed to him of small moment *what* they believed, so long as it was safely imbecile. What he stood against was not their beliefs, but the elevation of those beliefs, by any sort of democratic process, to the dignity of a state philosophy—what he feared most was the pollution and crippling of the superior minority by intellectual disease from below. His plain aim in "The Antichrist" was to combat that menace by completing the work begun, on the one hand, by Darwin and the other evolutionist philosophers, and, on the other hand, by German historians and philologians. The net effect of this earlier attack, in the eighties, had been the collapse

of Christian theology as a serious concern of educated men. The mob, it must be obvious, was very little shaken; even to this day it has not put off its belief in the essential Christian doctrines. But the *intelligentsia*, by 1885, had been pretty well convinced. No man of sound information, at the time Nietzsche planned "The Antichrist," actually believed that the world was created in seven days, or that its fauna was once overwhelmed by a flood as a penalty for the sins of man, or that Noah saved the boa constrictor, the prairie dog and the *pediculus capitis* by taking a pair of each into the ark, or that Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, or that a fragment of the True Cross could cure hydrophobia. Such notions, still almost universally prevalent in Christendom a century before, were now confined to the great body of ignorant and credulous men—that is, to ninety-five or ninety-six percent. of the race. For a man of the superior minority to subscribe to one of them publicly was already sufficient to set him off as one in imminent need of psychiatrical attention. Belief in them had become a mark of inferiority, like the allied belief in madstones, magic and apparitions.

But though the theology of Christianity had thus sunk to the lowly estate of a mere delusion of the rabble, propagated on that level by the ancient caste of sacerdotal parasites, the ethics of Christianity continued to enjoy the utmost acceptance, and perhaps even more acceptance than ever before. It seemed to be generally felt, in fact, that they simply *must* be saved from the wreck—that the world would vanish into chaos if they went the way of the revelations supporting them. In this fear a great many judicious men joined, and so there arose what was, in essence, an absolutely new Christian cult—a cult, to wit, purged of all the supernaturalism superimposed upon the older cult by generations of theologians, and harking back to what was conceived to be the pure ethical doctrine of Jesus. This cult still flourishes; Protestantism tends to become identical with it; it invades Catholicism as Modernism; it is supported by great numbers

of men whose intelligence is manifest and whose sincerity is not open to question. Even Nietzsche himself yielded to it in weak moments, as you will discover on examining his somewhat laborious effort to make Paul the villain of Christian theology, and Jesus no more than an innocent bystander. But this sentimental yielding never went far enough to distract his attention for long from his main idea, which was this: that Christian ethics were quite as dubious, at bottom, as Christian theology—that they were founded, just as surely as such childish fables as the story of Jonah and the whale, upon the peculiar prejudices and credulities, the special desires and appetites, of inferior men—that they warred upon the best interests of men of a better sort quite as unmistakably as the most extravagant of objective superstitions. In brief, what he saw in Christian ethics, under all the poetry and all the fine show of altruism and all the theoretical benefits therein, was a democratic effort to curb the egoism of the strong—a conspiracy of the *chandala* against the free functioning of their superiors, nay, against the free progress of mankind. This theory is the thing he exposes in "The Antichrist," bringing to the business his amazingly chromatic and exigent eloquence at its finest flower. This is the "conspiracy" he sets forth in all the panoply of his characteristic italics, dashes, *sforzando* interjections and exclamation points.

Well, an idea is an idea. The present one may be right and it may be wrong. One thing is quite certain: that no progress will be made against it by denouncing it as merely immoral. If it is ever laid at all, it must be laid evidentially, logically. The notion to the contrary is thoroughly democratic; the mob is the most ruthless of tyrants; it is always in a democratic society that heresy and felony tend to be most constantly confused. One hears without surprise of a Bismarck philosophizing placidly (at least in his old age) upon the delusion of Socialism and of a Frederick the Great playing the hose of his cynicism upon the absolutism that was almost identical with his own person, but men in the

mass never brook the destructive discussion of their fundamental beliefs, and that impatience is naturally most evident in those societies in which men in the mass are most influential. Democracy and free speech are not facets of one gem; democracy and free speech are eternal enemies. But in any battle between an institution and an idea, the idea, in the long run, has the better of it. Here I do not venture into the absurdity of arguing that, as the world wags on, the truth always survives. I believe nothing of the sort. As a matter of fact, it seems to me that an idea that happens to be true—or, more exactly, as near to truth as any human idea can be, and yet remain generally intelligible—it seems to me that such an idea carries a special and often fatal handicap. The majority of men prefer delusion to truth. It soothes. It is easy to grasp. Above all, it fits more snugly than the truth into a universe of false appearances—of complex and irrational phenomena, defectively grasped. But though an idea that is true is thus not likely to prevail, an idea that is *attacked* enjoys a great advantage. The evidence behind it is now supported by sympathy, the sporting instinct, sentimentality—and sentimentality is as powerful as an army with banners. One never hears of a martyr in history whose notions are seriously disputed today. The forgotten ideas are those of the men who put them forward soberly and quietly, hoping fatuously that they would conquer by the force of their truth; these are the ideas that we now struggle to rediscover. Had Nietzsche lived to be burned at the stake by outraged Mississippi Methodists, it would have been a glorious day for his doctrines. As it is, they are helped on their way every time they are denounced as immoral and against God. The war brought down upon them the maledictions of vast herds of right-thinking men. And now "The Antichrist," after fifteen years of neglect, is being reprinted….

One imagines the author, a sardonic wraith, snickering somewhat sadly over the fact. His shade, wherever it suffers, is favoured in these days by many such consolations, some

of them of much greater horsepower. Think of the facts and arguments, even the underlying theories and attitudes, that have been borrowed from him, consciously and unconsciously, by the foes of Bolshevism during these last thrilling years! The face of democracy, suddenly seen hideously close, has scared the guardians of the reigning plutocracy half to death, and they have gone to the devil himself for aid. Southern Senators, almost illiterate men, have mixed his acids with well water and spouted them like affrighted geysers, not knowing what they did. Nor are they the first to borrow from him. Years ago I called attention to the debt incurred with characteristic forgetfulness of obligation by the late Theodore Roosevelt, in "The Strenuous Life" and elsewhere. Roosevelt, a typical apologist for the existing order, adeptly dragging a herring across the trail whenever it was menaced, yet managed to delude the native boobery, at least until toward the end, into accepting him as a fiery exponent of pure democracy. Perhaps he even fooled himself; charlatans usually do so soon or late. A study of Nietzsche reveals the sources of much that was honest in him, and exposes the hollowness of much that was sham. Nietzsche, an infinitely harder and more courageous intellect, was incapable of any such confusion of ideas; he seldom allowed sentimentality to turn him from the glaring fact. What is called Bolshevism today he saw clearly a generation ago and described for what it was and is—democracy in another aspect, the old *ressentiment* of the lower orders in free function once more. Socialism, Puritanism, Philistinism, Christianity—he saw them all as allotropic forms of democracy, as variations upon the endless struggle of quantity against quality, of the weak and timorous against the strong and enterprising, of the botched against the fit. The world needed a staggering exaggeration to make it see even half of the truth. It trembles today as it trembled during the French Revolution. Perhaps it would tremble less if it could combat the monster with a clearer conscience and less burden of compromising theory—if it

could launch its forces frankly at the fundamental doctrine, and not merely employ them to police the transient orgy.

Nietzsche, in the long run, may help it toward that greater honesty. His notions, propagated by cuttings from cuttings from cuttings, may conceivably prepare the way for a sounder, more healthful theory of society and of the state, and so free human progress from the stupidities which now hamper it, and men of true vision from the despairs which now sicken them. I say it is conceivable, but I doubt that it is probable. The soul and the belly of mankind are too evenly balanced; it is not likely that the belly will ever put away its hunger or forget its power. Here, perhaps, there is an example of the eternal recurrence that Nietzsche was fond of mulling over in his blacker moods. We are in the midst of one of the perennial risings of the lower orders. It got under way long before any of the current Bolshevist demons was born; it was given its long, secure start by the intolerable tyranny of the plutocracy—the end product of the Eighteenth Century revolt against the old aristocracy. It found resistance suddenly slackened by civil war within the plutocracy itself—one gang of traders falling upon another gang, to the tune of vast hymn-singing and yells to God. Perhaps it has already passed its apogee; the plutocracy, chastened, shows signs of a new solidarity; the wheel continues to swing 'round. But this combat between proletariat and plutocracy is, after all, itself a civil war. Two inferiorities struggle for the privilege of polluting the world. What actual difference does it make to a civilized man, when there is a steel strike, whether the workmen win or the mill-owners win? The conflict can interest him only as spectacle, as the conflict between Bonaparte and the old order in Europe interested Goethe and Beethoven. The victory, whichever way it goes, will simply bring chaos nearer, and so set the stage for a genuine revolution later on, with (let us hope) a new feudalism or something better coming out of it, and a new Thirteenth Century at

dawn. This seems to be the slow, costly way of the worst of habitable worlds.

In the present case my money is laid upon the plutocracy. It will win because it will be able, in the long run, to enlist the finer intelligences. The mob and its maudlin causes attract only sentimentalists and scoundrels, chiefly the latter. Politics, under a democracy, reduces itself to a mere struggle for office by flatterers of the proletariat; even when a superior man prevails at that disgusting game he must prevail at the cost of his self-respect. Not many superior men make the attempt. The average great captain of the rabble, when he is not simply a weeper over irremediable wrongs, is a hypocrite so far gone that he is unconscious of his own hypocrisy—a slimy fellow, offensive to the nose. The plutocracy can recruit measurably more respectable janissaries, if only because it can make self-interest less obviously costly to *amour propre*. Its defect and its weakness lie in the fact that it is still too young to have acquired dignity. But lately sprung from the mob it now preys upon, it yet shows some of the habits of mind of that mob: it is blatant, stupid, ignorant, lacking in all delicate instinct and governmental finesse. Above all, it remains somewhat heavily moral. One seldom finds it undertaking one of its characteristic imbecilities without offering a sonorous moral reason; it spends almost as much to support the Y. M. C. A., vice-crusading, Prohibition and other such puerilities as it spends upon Congressmen, strike-breakers, gun-men, kept patriots and newspapers. In England the case is even worse. It is almost impossible to find a wealthy industrial over there who is not also an eminent non-conformist layman, and even among financiers there are praying brothers. On the Continent, the day is saved by the fact that the plutocracy tends to become more and more Jewish. Here the intellectual cynicism of the Jew almost counterbalances his social unpleasantness. If he is destined to lead the plutocracy of the world out of Little Bethel he will fail, of course, to turn it into an aristocracy—*i. e.*, a caste of

gentlemen—, but he will at least make it clever, and hence worthy of consideration. The case against the Jews is long and damning; it would justify ten thousand times as many pogroms as now go on in the world. But whenever you find a Davidsbündlerschaft making practise against the Philistines, there you will find a Jew laying on. Maybe it was this fact that caused Nietzsche to speak up for the children of Israel quite as often as he spoke against them. He was not blind to their faults, but when he set them beside Christians he could not deny their general superiority. Perhaps in America and England, as on the Continent, the increasing Jewishness of the plutocracy, while cutting it off from all chance of ever developing into an aristocracy, will yet lift it to such a dignity that it will at least deserve a certain grudging respect.

But even so, it will remain in a sort of half-world, midway between the gutter and the stars. Above it will still stand the small group of men that constitutes the permanent aristocracy of the race—the men of imagination and high purpose, the makers of genuine progress, the brave and ardent spirits, above all petty fears and discontents and above all petty hopes and ideals no less. There were heroes before Agamemnon; there will be Bachs after Johann Sebastian. And beneath the Judaized plutocracy, the sublimated *bourgeoisie*, there the immemorial proletariat, I venture to guess, will roar on, endlessly tortured by its vain hatreds and envies, stampeded and made to tremble by its ancient superstitions, prodded and made miserable by its sordid and degrading hopes. It seems to me very likely that, in this proletariat, Christianity will continue to survive. It is nonsense, true enough, but it is sweet. Nietzsche, denouncing its dangers as a poison, almost falls into the error of denying it its undoubtedly sugary smack. Of all the religions ever devised by the great practical jokers of the race, this is the one that offers most for the least money, so to speak, to the inferior man. It starts out by denying his inferiority in plain terms: *all* men are equal in the sight of God. It ends by erecting that inferiority into a sort

of actual superiority: it is a merit to be stupid, and miserable, and sorely put upon—of such are the celestial elect. Not all the eloquence of a million Nietzsches, nor all the painful marshalling of evidence of a million Darwins and Harnacks, will ever empty that great consolation of its allure. The most they can ever accomplish is to make the superior orders of men acutely conscious of the exact nature of it, and so give them armament against the contagion. This is going on; this is being done. I think that "The Antichrist" has a useful place in that enterprise. It is strident, it is often extravagant, it is, to many sensitive men, in the worst of possible taste, but at bottom it is enormously apt and effective—and on the surface it is undoubtedly a good show. One somehow enjoys, with the malice that is native to man, the spectacle of anathemas batted back; it is refreshing to see the pitchfork employed against gentlemen who have doomed such innumerable caravans to hell. In Nietzsche they found, after many long years, a foeman worthy of them—not a mere fancy swordsman like Voltaire, or a mob orator like Tom Paine, or a pedant like the heretics of exegesis, but a gladiator armed with steel and armoured with steel, and showing all the ferocious gusto of a mediaeval bishop. It is a pity that Holy Church has no process for the elevation of demons, like its process for the canonization of saints. There must be a long roll of black miracles to the discredit of the Accursed Friedrich—sinners purged of conscience and made happy in their sinning, clerics shaken in their theology by visions of a new and better holy city, the strong made to exult, the weak robbed of their old sad romance. It would be a pleasure to see the *Advocatus Diaboli* turn from the table of the prosecution to the table of the defence, and move in solemn form for the damnation of the Naumburg hobgoblin….

Of all Nietzsche's books, "The Antichrist" comes nearest to conventionality in form. It presents a connected argument with very few interludes, and has a beginning, a middle and an end. Most of his works are in the form of collections of

apothegms, and sometimes the subject changes on every second page. This fact constitutes one of the counts in the orthodox indictment of him: it is cited as proof that his capacity for consecutive thought was limited, and that he was thus deficient mentally, and perhaps a downright moron. The argument, it must be obvious, is fundamentally nonsensical. What deceives the professors is the traditional prolixity of philosophers. Because the average philosophical writer, when he essays to expose his ideas, makes such inordinate drafts upon the parts of speech that the dictionary is almost emptied these defective observers jump to the conclusion that his intrinsic notions are of corresponding weight. This is not unseldom quite untrue. What makes philosophy so garrulous is not the profundity of philosophers, but their lack of art; they are like physicians who sought to cure a slight hyperacidity by giving the patient a carload of burned oyster-shells to eat. There is, too, the endless poll-parrotting that goes on: each new philosopher must prove his learning by laboriously rehearsing the ideas of all previous philosophers.... Nietzsche avoided both faults. He always assumed that his readers knew the books, and that it was thus unnecessary to rewrite them. And, having an idea that seemed to him to be novel and original, he stated it in as few words as possible, and then shut down. Sometimes he got it into a hundred words; sometimes it took a thousand; now and then, as in the present case, he developed a series of related ideas into a connected book. But he never wrote a word too many. He never pumped up an idea to make it appear bigger than it actually was. The pedagogues, alas, are not accustomed to that sort of writing in serious fields. They resent it, and sometimes they even try to improve it. There exists, in fact, a huge and solemn tome on Nietzsche by a learned man of America in which all of his brilliancy is painfully translated into the windy phrases of the seminaries. The tome is satisfactorily ponderous, but the meat of the cocoanut is left out: there is actually no discussion of the Nietzschean view

of Christianity!… Always Nietzsche daunts the pedants. He employed too few words for them—and he had too many ideas.

* * *

The present translation of "The Antichrist" is published by agreement with Dr. Oscar Levy, editor of the English edition of Nietzsche. There are two earlier translations, one by Thomas Common and the other by Anthony M. Ludovici. That of Mr. Common follows the text very closely, and thus occasionally shows some essentially German turns of phrase; that of Mr. Ludovici is more fluent but rather less exact. I do not offer my own version on the plea that either of these is useless; on the contrary, I cheerfully acknowledge that they have much merit, and that they helped me at almost every line. I began this new Englishing of the book, not in any hope of supplanting them, and surely not with any notion of meeting a great public need, but simply as a private amusement in troubled days. But as I got on with it I began to see ways of putting some flavour of Nietzsche's peculiar style into the English, and so amusement turned into a more or less serious labour. The result, of course, is far from satisfactory, but it at least represents a very diligent attempt. Nietzsche, always under the influence of French models, wrote a German that differs materially from any other German that I know. It is more nervous, more varied, more rapid in tempo; it runs to more effective climaxes; it is never stodgy. His marks begin to show upon the writing of the younger Germans of today. They are getting away from the old thunderous manner, with its long sentences and its tedious grammatical complexities. In the course of time, I daresay, they will develop a German almost as clear as French and almost as colourful and resilient as English.

I owe thanks to Dr. Levy for his *imprimatur*, to Mr. Theodor Hemberger for criticism, and to Messrs. Com-

mon and Ludovici for showing me the way around many a difficulty.

H. L. MENCKEN

Author's Preface

This book belongs to the most rare of men. Perhaps not one of them is yet alive. It is possible that they may be among those who understand my "Zarathustra": how *could* I confound myself with those who are now sprouting ears?—First the day after tomorrow must come for me. Some men are born posthumously.

The conditions under which any one understands me, and *necessarily* understands me—I know them only too well. Even to endure my seriousness, my passion, he must carry intellectual integrity to the verge of hardness. He must be accustomed to living on mountain tops—and to looking upon the wretched gabble of politics and nationalism as *beneath* him. He must have become indifferent; he must never ask of the truth whether it brings profit to him or a fatality to him.... He must have an inclination, born of strength, for questions that no one has the courage for; the courage for the *forbidden*; predestination for the labyrinth. The experience of seven solitudes. New ears for new music. New eyes for what is most distant. A new conscience for truths that have hitherto remained unheard. *And* the will to economize in the grand manner—to hold together his strength, his enthusiasm.... Reverence for self; love of self; absolute freedom of self....

Very well, then! of that sort only are my readers, my true readers, my readers foreordained: of what account are the *rest*?—The rest are merely humanity.—One must make one's self superior to humanity, in power, in *loftiness* of soul,—in contempt.

FRIEDRICH W. NIETZSCHE

END OF SAMPLE

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