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Ernst Haeckel, Scientist---An Appreciation

WITH the death of Ernst Haeckel, we have the usual flood of ignorant vaporings from the Capitalist Press. Editorial comment whenever anything unusual happens in the scientific world illustrates the abysmal ignorance of the average bourgeois in matters scientific. They are now commiserating Haeckel on his ill fortune in not dying four or five years ago. Then his illustrious fame would not have been dimmed by his action in supporting the Central Powers in the recent world madness. Of course, they cannot but admit his service to science, but unlike the true-born British scientist, he went "further than the facts warranted."

Haeckel has perhaps roused the ire of the orthodox more than any scientist of the last century; and his "Riddle of the Universe" created more than apprehension in the sheep fold of the Lord. This was not because of the matter and method of treating the subject, so much as the instantaneous popularity of the work. Published in 1899, the entire issue of ten thousand was sold in a few months, and the English translation sold over one hundred thousand of the cheap edition in one year. This in itself was sufficient to condemn the author, and the more so because the book contained the latest facts of science, and made a deliberate attack on the dualistic method of thought.

When in 1905, after the death of Virchow, Haeckel's great opponent, he was invited to speak in Berlin, and delivered his three lectures entitled, "Last Word on Evolution", his last of the three on "Ideas of Immortality and God," caused a five-days' sensation. Several sentences of this lecture appeared to foreshadow a change in religious ideas and the word went forth that the great German Darwinist had returned to the orthodox fold. Such expressions as "Orthodox historical Christianity is not directly destroyed by modern science but by its own learned and zealous theologians," (emphasis original); "Our Monistic system, 'the connecting link between religion and science,' brings God and the world into the unity in the sense that Goethe willed, that Spinoza clearly expressed long ago, and Giordano Bruno had sealed with his martyrdom." The concluding sentence especially bids the God-blighted human rejoice: "The will of God is at work in every falling drop of rain and every growing crystal, in the scent of the rose and the spirit of man."

Small wonder the froth-fed fanatics who never look deeper than the surface whereon floats their favorite food, saw reason for hope. Their triumph was short-lived, however; Haeckel was only waxing poetical. Amidst all the rhetoric the stern facts of science still proclaimed God to be "a gaseous vertebrate" and the soul "attenuated ether."

Had Haeckel been desirous of the praise of a vanishing priesthood, or its ignorant and feeble following, he should have died in 1905, and let his lecture go as it looked. They would have done the rest; for no child ever contented itself more with make-belief than does your orthodox Christian! An

ambiguous sentence or garbled quotation from an eminent scientist is worth more to them than the signs and wonders that converted Constantine of Rome or Saul of Tarsus. No medical monk hawked with greater glee the spurious relics of Christ and the Madonna, than does the Great Lying Press the metaphysical madness of a Lodge or a Russell.

Haeckel was jealous of his fame as a scientist, and unless mankind undergoes a complete change, that peculiar mental affliction which prompts great men to seek renown in future ages will never suffer. His tremendous labors in his special fields of zoology and embryology will command the attention of mankind, long as the written word remains a factor in human affairs. And outside of a few ignorant priests or editors, no one will ask what he thought of the past war, or what he did during its course. No Frenchman today remembers that Goethe fought against France in 1792, yet what man of France would care to admit ignorance of the authorship of Faust? Nor yet could a German confess having never heard of that monumental human achievement, "The Mechanism of the Heavenly Bodies," but the fact would fail to recall that other fact—Laplace was a minister of Napoleon the Great, at the same point of time.

The death of Haeckel, however, recalls the statement of his translator, Joseph McCabe, written in 1905: "For him (Haeckel) the red rays fall level on the scene and the people about him. It may be that they light up too luridly, too falsely, the situation in Germany; but the reader will understand how a Liberal of Haeckel's temper must feel his country to be between Scylla and Charybdis, between an increasingly clear alternative of Catholicism or Socialism, with a helmsman at the wheel whose vagaries inspire no confidence."

And that is a matter of interest to us.

Haeckel, as he himself has said, was "wholly a child of the nineteenth century," and had determined with its close to draw the line under his life's work. That he did not we have reason to rejoice, for his "Wonders of Life" was written in the twentieth, and his metaphysical morality regarding the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, might charm the hearts of a few sentimentalists, but can never blotch his life's work.

Far other might be said of other children of the nineteenth century; Blatchford and Hyndman, for instance, who spent that century raving against the evils of Capitalism, and reserved this century to bolstering up the conditions they professed to abhor. Plechanov and Kautsky might also have done well to have set a period at their life's work when last century closed. It is said that a wise choice of birth would go far to make a man, and for those who regard the good wishes of posterity as vital, a long life will go far to marring one.

But about Scylla and Charybdis. Virchow, the discoverer of cellular pathology, was the master of Haeckel at Wurtemberg University, at first a professed Darwinist and Monist, he became a reactionary, which Haeckel charges in his lecture, "Ideas

of Immortality and God," partly to his (Virchow's) psychological metamorphosis, and partly to political motives. . . . It might interest the priests and editors to learn that Darwin, whom they profess had true British caution and regard for truth, said of Virchow, "his conduct is shameful and I hope he will some day feel the shame." Those who are acquainted with Darwin's writings will realize how strong a censure lies in these few words.

Well then, four years after the Paris Commune, of 1875, the Gotha Congress united the German Socialists and in 1877 the Socialist vote in Germany reached almost half a million. In the same year Virchow made a bitter attack on the theory of Evolution, declaring that "Darwinism leads directly to Socialism." The scientific fat was in the fire with a vengeance, the halls and the magazines of science reeked of it. Haeckel was the champion of Darwinism. The battle raged lustily. Schmidt declared that Socialists, if wise, "would do their utmost to kill, by silent neglect, the theory of descent, for that theory most emphatically proclaims that the Socialist ideas are impractical." Haeckel said, "as a matter of fact there is no scientific doctrine which proclaims more openly than the theory of descent, that the equality of individuals toward which Socialism tends, is an impossibility." Of course, Socialists, far from taking the advice of these protagonists of evolution, heartily embraced, and strongly propagated this theory which was supposed to spell disaster to their ideas.

Then came the Anti-Socialist Laws, and in 1881, the Socialist vote fell to three hundred thousand. Science, please God, was saved, likewise Society. But Gott in Himmel, (I trust this is not treason) 1884 saw over half a million votes for Socialism, in spite of the fact that Socialists were outlaws. Seeking no mercy, this fact might, nevertheless, commend itself to the police magistrates of Winnipeg, and elsewhere for that matter.

So Virchow cut the painter and boldly entered the camp of Rome. Very sad. But this vale of tears is full of sadness—and Socialism. And we see that a scientist who should be as careful of his scientific integrity as a maiden of her chastity, who should follow truth, even into the Auto-da-fe, and beyond, braving the terrors of hell and the wrath of a crazy and jealous God, that the truth might prevail, yea, even this man "blows now east now south" as the Socialist vote waxeth and waneth. But Virchow and Haeckel might rest in peace. Whether the German Ulysses be swallowed by Charybdis or consumed by scylla beyond all recognition: the power to build rests with the working millions alone, and from their dire need will arise a new world, in which, as with Ulysses, we shall see that no unseemly idlers waste our substance and corrupt our maidens and youths, and in that new world, Germany will doubtless be remembered, because Haeckel lived there when it was so named. Because of men like him, other parts of that old world shall also be remembered in the new, and their names "clothed in honorableness." J. H.