

A VISIT WITH PROFESSOR HAECKEL.

BY THE EDITOR.

WITH Ernst Haeckel as honorary president and Dr. Heinrich Schmidt as secretary (both of Jena), a German Monistic Alliance has been formed into a confederacy against traditional dualism, and supports the cause of a scientific world-conception by appropriate publications. The first number of a proposed series of "fly leaves" lies before us, bearing the title "Monism and Natural Law,"* by Ernst Haeckel himself.

Prof. Ernst Haeckel is a leader in battle for the new world-conception that sails under the flag of monism and though he is personally one of the most courteous and amiable of men, he can deal blows and call his enemies names if sufficiently provoked by them. The present pamphlet is mainly directed against O. Chwolson, professor of physics in St. Petersburg, and author of an excellent and learned work on physics. Incidentally Paulsen of Berlin and Loofs of Halle come in for their share of rebuke. While on the one hand extravagant insults have been heaped upon Ernst Haeckel, he has on the other hand received the highest honors which the state government to which Jena belongs has power to bestow on a professor, in the character of *wirklicher Geheimer Rath* with the title "His Excellency," ordinarily given only to ministers of state and officials of high rank, and in this country reserved for the President only.

We need not enter into details, for the points made on both sides are repetitions of the old arguments. We are far from agreeing with Haeckel. On the contrary, we have criticised him on several occasions and claim that in philosophical questions he makes many rash statements which he could not maintain. We even differ from him in his conception of monism, but for all that we have re-

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mained friends, and good friends too. We know that Professor Haeckel in some of his popular writings has given a wrong impression to the reading public which has misled some of his critics to such an extent that they look upon his books as irreligious and dangerous. Their zeal has shown itself in violent attacks which did little good and only served to embitter the combat.

Professor Haeckel's monism is mainly a denial of the old dualism which assumes the independent existence of a soul entity. Our monism insists first of all on the unity of the world as it appears in the oneness of its constitution. There is but one truth, and there cannot be two different truths contradictory to one another. All laws of nature are practically one and the same law applied to different conditions, and, corresponding to this inner unity of the cosmos, the world presents itself externally as one interrelated system in which all our notions are glimpses limited to special and definite features. They are abstractions made for the purpose of limiting our attention to special points, but none of them exist as things in themselves. Spirit, soul, body, energy, matter—yea, even beings like ourselves are artificial concepts each one of them being a portion or a feature of the world, the existence of which can not be understood except when considered in its relation to the whole.

Professor Haeckel lays emphasis mainly upon the materialistic side, and his expositions give the impression that he underestimates the significance of all spiritual factors, degrading them to a kind of secondary position. If this is not the case we will state here without fear of contradiction among the large circles of Professor Haeckel's readers that his writings certainly make that impression upon the public. In this context we may refer our readers to the exposition of our differences with Professor Haeckel which were discussed mainly in *The Monist*, "Haeckel's Monism," Vol. II, p. 598, and *The Open Court*, "Professor Haeckel's Confession of Faith," Vol. VII, p. 3528. See also "Haeckel's Theses for a Monistic Alliance," *The Monist*, XVI, p. 120.

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In this connection a few personal comments may be helpful for a better understanding of the situation in Europe. During my stay abroad I met Professor Haeckel at Jena on May 8. There was a company of representative monists present and we enjoyed a pleasant outing in a forestry restaurant built among the tall pines on top of a mountain in the vicinity of that quaint university town.

I had the honor to sit at the right hand of the Professor, and in a friendly chat we discussed our common interests and also our disagreements. But we succeeded in establishing only the former, not the latter. Professor Haeckel is not the man who would agree to disagree; he is too congenial for disagreement. Many of the offending statements which appeared in his books and called down upon him a storm of indignation, must not be taken too seriously. They were made in the dash of the fight when he felt that he had to bear the brunt of battle. He is not so irreligious as he is assumed to be by his enemies and he has most vigorously declared that his ideal of monism should satisfy not only the demands of our rational nature but also the yearnings of the heart. His zeal is only roused by the thought of the continuation of the superstitions contingent upon a dualistic conception of the world. If these would be abolished, he would live in peace with the Church.

And that this is true is borne out by the following incident: Professor Eucken, Haeckel's philosophical colleague, told me that according to an old regulation the professors of the University were exempt from Church taxes. This condition seemed unfair to some, and it was proposed that those members of the faculty who agreed with them should send in a voluntary contribution. Many were curious as to what Haeckel would do in this case and were greatly astonished when his subscription proved to be the most generous of all.

It is true that Haeckel has said and written many things which have been resented, sometimes wrongly, sometimes rightly. He has made many wild statements that are exaggerated; he has blundered in theology and philosophy. But have not his adversaries done the same? Have they not strained at gnats and swallowed camels, and have they not forgotten or temporarily overlooked the enormous value of the systematization he has done in his specialty? For instance, he has coined terms which have been universally accepted, because of their perfect clearness and comprehensiveness, and this should be sufficient acknowledgment of his significance in science.

There are perhaps few of his scientific colleagues who would endorse Haeckel's philosophy or take the same militant attitude toward religious doctrines and institutions, but for all that his great accomplishments are, and for justice sake should be, recognized.

I can not speak here for others, and do not intend to mention names, but I know that I express an opinion which is typical of quite a number of prominent naturalists who regret that Haeckel



HAECKEL, IN HIS STUDY.

ever wrote either the *Welträthsel* or *Lebenswunder*, believing that these, his most popular works, are among the weakest of his writings.

Haeckel suffered in his childhood from the tyranny of a wrong pietism, under the régime of a dualistic and anti-natural religion. His whole heart protested against it, and this feeling of rebellion is evident in his writings. In my opinion he has not succeeded in propounding a true monism which would be also just to the lower stages in the evolution of religious institutions. He has not as yet



THE SCHILLER HOUSE AT JENA.

been able to work out the positive aspects of a monistic religion because his zeal has kept him busy fighting the innumerable wind-mills of dualistic superstitions.

For his own religious needs Professor Haeckel has no doubt found the solution of the world problem. We can see it by merely looking at the serene expression of his countenance. Jena is a small

university town where he can live in close contact not only with nature but also with the noblest literary traditions of the German nation.

Whenever Haeckel comes to the Institute or returns to his pleasant home in Ernst Haeckel Street (a short walk of but a few minutes) he passes the historic spot where Schiller lived, a small house whose chief beauty is a pleasant garden which stretches down to the rippling Ilm. It is now public property, and on one side of it



STONE TABLE IN SCHILLER'S GARDEN.

stands the observatory of the university. At the end of the garden the traveler may still see the stone table, of which Goethe said in his *Conversations with Eckermann*: "Here Schiller lived. At this table of stone we have often sat, and many a good word and great, have we exchanged with each other." The stream of American tourists is generally directed to Weimar and rarely touches this idyllic spot.

During the day Professor Haeckel may always be found in his beloved Institute, for he is restlessly active and has much unfinished work on hand. There in his study he is surrounded with many curious specimens preserved for the lessons which they teach.

Before the window of his study in the Zoological Institute stretches a landscape where in the farthest distance a mountain top may be seen, the goal of many walks taken by citizens of Jena with their families on pleasant Sunday afternoons. This little peak is the last point upon which the evening sun sheds its beams, and it is



MOUNTAIN PEAK FROM HAECKEL'S STUDY WINDOW.

this spot that Schiller greets in the opening lines of his well-known poem "Der Spaziergang."

"Hail, mine own mountain, whose summit
Is reddened in rays of the evening!
Hail to the Sun, whose beams
Brightly embellish thy peak."

“Sei mir gegrüsst, mein Berg
 Mit dem röhlich strahlenden Gipfel!
 Sei mir, Sonne, gegrüsst,
 Die ihn so lieblich bescheint!”

This poem written in distichs undertakes to sketch within its compass a general synopsis of human life.

A street corner adjoining the garden of the Zoological Institute is cleared for the foundation of a new building which is to be an Ernst Haeckel Museum, a monument erected by the admirers of the



PROFESSOR HAECKEL RETURNING HOME.

Professor to preserve and continue his life work. The day which I spent in Jena Professor Haeckel had a consultation with the architect to settle definitely the problem of the site. I took a snapshot at him at the historic moment when he was just returning from this conference.

In spite of his advanced years Professor Haeckel has remained young, and if the word of Christ is true, that unless a man becomes

like a little child he shall not enter the kingdom of God, Professor Haeckel can not be condemned. He possesses the elasticity, the amiable directness, frank openheartedness, the refreshing simplicity, and even the taste of a child. He is very abstemious in alcoholic drinks, and has yet to smoke his first cigar, which, however, His Excellency will probably never do. What appears irreligious in him to many pietistic minds, is his love of truth, his trust in nature, and his eagerness to liberate the soul from the bonds of captivity.