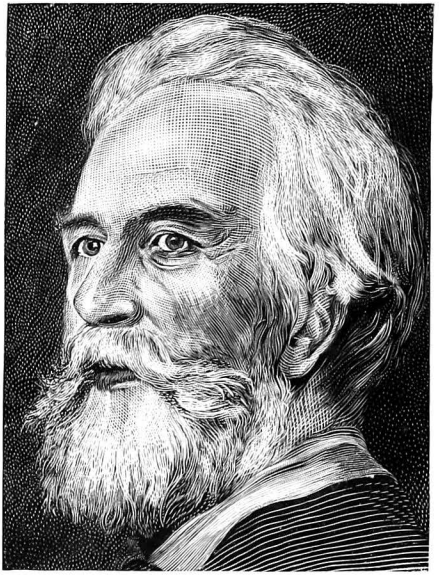
HAECKEL'S CRITICS ANSWERED

JOSEPH McCABE



From the painting by Franz von Leubach, 1899 (reproduced in "Jugend")

HAECKEL'S CRITICS ANSWERED

BY

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[*Issued for the Rationalist Press Association, Limited*]

WATTS & CO.,

17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1910

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

SINCE the first edition of this work appeared, the continued and unparalleled success of Professor Haeckel's book has attracted a further series of criticisms. The fact that the *Riddle of the Universe* circulates to the extent of nearly half a million copies in England and Germany, and has been translated into nearly a score of languages, is a sufficient answer to those who would belittle its significance Unfortunately, the "replies" to it are rarely worth serious perusal, and I need say only a few words on the latest crop of straggling criticism

In particular, I must comment on an effort that has been made to discredit Haeckel's work by asserting that the venerable zoologist has confessed to having tampered with, or "falsified," the illustrations to his scientific works. As I showed in the *Literary Guide* (May 1, 1909), the charge, as it is circulated in this country, is a complete misunderstanding, if not a deliberate misstatement, of the facts A German writer of little repute, Dr Brass, first published the accusation, and Haeckel humorously replied that "six or eight per cent." of his drawings were so "falsified" The publication of these words in the religious Press, without the explanation he at once added, and without any notice of the later development, is only a piece of the lamentable insincerity with which Haeckel has been treated He plainly explained (*Berliner Volkszeitung*, December 29, 1908) that he had merely done what "the vast majority" of scientific men were accustomed to do in the illustration of their works The supposed confession was merely an ironic refusal to take the charge seriously To say, moreover, that there was anything misleading in Haeckel's drawings of embryos is ludicrous He gives the drawings of many other embryologists, and even photographs, for the purpose of comparison, side by side with his own. Where he sketches a hypothetical animal—which is extremely rare—he plainly indicates this

The sequel also must be recalled At once forty-six eminent scientists of Germany signed a strong repudiation of the charge, and one of them —Professor Rabl, one of the leading German embryologists—retorted with deadly effect (in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and the *Freidenker*, March 15, 1909) that Dr. Brass himself had been flagrantly guilty of the very practice he was

unjustly charging against Haeckel Professor Keibel and Professor Hertwig, two other authorities of the first rank, passed equally severe strictures on the scientific work of Dr Brass

That so ridiculous a charge should have been circulated in this country, and the sequel wholly concealed, is, unhappily, typical of the whole controversy The fresh replies to the *Riddle*, which lie before me, are generally tainted with the same dishonesty of tactic and triviality of aim. As I pointed out in 1903, Haeckel has the great majority of his colleagues with him in most of his conclusions Where a certain number of them differ from him is on certain high and distinct issues, especially on the question of deity, and serious criticism should be directed to these Instead of this, the fresh series of critics, like the older ones, lose their way, and confuse their readers by assailing positions (such as the "law of substance"—*i e*, the indestructibility of matter and energy—and the fact of evolution) which are an established part of science, and waste whole pages on phrase-chopping, misquoted or misunderstood statements, and irrelevant issues

Two eminent men of science in this country have entered the field to some extent since 1903 To Sir Oliver Lodge I have replied in a separate publication (*The Origin of Life*), and to Principal Lloyd Morgan, whose fine attitude towards his great colleague in zoology is a standing rebuke to the clerical Lilliputians who have heaped abuse on Haeckel, I have devoted a few pages (as well as to several other critics, such as Dr Saleeby) in the preface to the fifth edition of the *Riddle* (1906) Principal Lloyd Morgan is a Monist He admits the evolution of mind and rejects the doctrine of personal immortality, but retains a belief in a supreme controlling intelligence This is generally the attitude of those few of our scientific men who to-day profess any form of religion That attitude must be considered with respect, and I must refer the reader to the seventh chapter of the present work for my appreciation of it

On the other hand, most of the criticisms are too trivial or uninformed to be taken seriously Such are the slight and superfluous papers published by Dr Marcus (*Monism*), the Rev L C C Hunt (*Rationalism Controverted*), Allen Clarke (*Science and the Soul*), and Robert Blake (*Haeckel's Fallacies*), and two anonymous works, *Hegel, Not Haeckel* (which does not touch Haeckel) and *Haeckel's Riddle Criticised* (the least informed of all) Hardly more worthy of notice, in spite of their authorship, are the Rev J F Tristram's *Haeckel and His Riddles* and Professor J G Tasker's pamphlet, *Does Haeckel Solve the Riddles?* The former is an encyclopædia of petty

criticisms without point, or founded on misquotation or misinterpretation of Haeckel Its author's acquaintance with science may be judged from his airy assurance that "few scientists" now admit the origin of the living from the non-living The overwhelming majority of zoologists admit it, in the only sense in which Haeckel does Professor Tasker's few pages bring no new point to the controversy, and are marred by much misinterpretation of the words both of Haeckel and myself.

More pretentious are the works of the Rev Mr Ballard (*Haeckel's Monism False*) and Father Gerard (*The Old Riddle and the Newest Answer*) If Mr Ballard had reduced his 600 pages to 100, had been more sparing with his vulgar abuse of his opponents, and had not so frequently manipulated the passages he quotes from the *Riddle* and the present work, he could have given us a readable criticism As it is, his work is merely an enlargement of that unfortunate apologetic of his to which many pages—too many pages, my readers say—have been devoted in this work, where all his serious points are met The Jesuit writer, Father Gerard, has given us a remarkable work If it had been written forty years ago, it would not have been without point, as a recent publication it can only serve to establish finally the charge that we bring against Catholics of lagging half-a-century behind the world Nine-tenths of his authorities are at least twenty years old He spends pages in proving that Haeckel does not know the meaning of scientific "law," or in refuting such plain scientific truths as the evolution of the horse He tells us that science has thrown no light whatever on the origin of life or sense, and that the scientific way to approach the question of the primitive origin of life is to study its condition to-day! The culmination of all this extraordinary ignorance of recent scientific progress is reached when he gives (in an old form) Haeckel's twenty-two stages in the pedigree of man, and quotes some ancient writer as saying that "not one of these creatures has ever been seen, either living or fossil" Father Gerard not only approves this, but adds, "In this way Haeckel habitually solves the Riddle of the Universe" Any tyro in science could have informed him that to-day *we know every single one of these stages*, either in living or fossil form, or both The whole work is stultified by this complete ignorance of the last twenty years of scientific progress

J M

January 1, 1910.

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