

## All of these images can be enlarged for greater detail

### CHAPTER VIII.

I have already called attention several times to the fact that Darwinism is indeed on the wane among men of science, but that it has gradually penetrated into lay circles where it is now posing as irrefragable truth. Especially the circles dominated by the social democrats swear by nothing higher than Darwin and Haeckel. In fact, only a short time ago Bebel publicly professed himself a convert to Haeckel's wisdom.

It is inevitable, however, that light should gradually dawn even in these circles, for it would be indeed strange, if no honest man could be found to tell them the truth regarding Darwinism. This has occurred sooner than I dared to hope. This chapter can announce the glad tidings that even in "social-democratic science" Darwinism is doomed to decay. Much printer's ink will, of course, be yet wasted before it will be so entirely dead as to be no longer available as a weapon against Christianity; but a beginning at least has been made.

In the December number of the ninth year of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, a social-democratic writer, Curt Grottewitz, undertakes to bring out an article on "Darwinian Myths." It is stated there that Darwin had a few eminent followers, but that the educated world took no notice of their work; that now, how-

118

ever, they seemed to be attracting more attention. "There is no doubt, that a number of Darwinian views, which are still prevalent to-day, have sunk to the level of untenable myths. True, the main doctrine of Darwin—the origin of new species from existing ones—is incontestably established, but apart from this even some very fundamental principles, which the master thought he discerned in the development of organisms, can scarcely be any longer maintained."

It may be well to remark here, that this was not really Darwin's main doctrine, for it already existed before his time (Lamarck, Geoffroy St. Hilaire). Darwin's main doctrine is the explanation of the origin of species by natural selection operating through the struggle for existence. It is therefore the old error repeated: Darwinism is confounded with the doctrine of Descent, of which it is merely one form. It is not our intention to derogate in the least from Darwin's merit, which consists in the fact that he gained general recognition for the doctrine of Descent; but that was not his main work. He wished above all to explain the *How* of Descent; this is his doctrine, and this doctrine we attack and declare to be on the point of expiring.

Grottewitz very frankly continues: "The difficulty with the Darwinian doctrines consists in the fact that they are incapable of being strictly and irrefutably demonstrated. The origin of one species from another, the conservation of useful forms, the existence of countless intermediary links,

119

are all assumptions, which could never be supported by concrete cases found in actual experience." Some are said to be well established indirectly by proofs drawn from probabilities, while others are proved to be absolutely untenable. Among the latter Grottewitz includes "sexual selection," which is indeed a monstrous figment of the imagination. There was moreover really no reason for adhering to it so long. It is eminently untrue, that the biological research of the last few years proved for the *first* time the untenableness of this doctrine, as Grottewitz seems to think. Clear thinkers recognized its untenableness long ago, and surely Grottewitz and the whole band of Darwinian devotees as well, could have known that as early as twenty-five years ago this doctrine had been subjected to a *reductio ad absurdum* with classic clearness in Wigand's great work.

It is certainly a very peculiar phenomenon; for decades we behold a doctrine reverently re-echoed; thoughtful investigators expose its folly, but still the worship continues, the *Zeitgeist* must have its idol. It appears, however, as if the *Zeitgeist* were gradually tiring of its golden calf and were on the point of casting it into the rubbish-heap. Misgivings arise on all sides; here one class of objections are considered, there another. A closer examination reveals that these are by no means new reasons, based on new researches, but the very oldest, urged long ago and perhaps much more clearly and forcibly. At that time, however, the *Zeitgeist* was under the spell of the suggestion of individual men: it heard and saw nothing but the captivating,

120

obvious simplicity of the doctrine; but now when the subject begins to be tedious and the discussion lags, the interest consequently abates and the *Zeitgeist* suddenly grasps the old objections, presented in a new garb, and what was hitherto truth, clear and irrefutable, now sinks into the dreary, gray mists of myth. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

This has been the history of Darwinism, and especially of Darwin's theory of sexual selection. What Grottewitz urges against it, was advanced decades ago by other and more eminent men; then people would not listen, to-day they are inclined to listen. Of very special interest is the further admission, that "the principle of gradual development" has been "considerably shaken" and is "certainly untenable." Grottewitz points out that it has been demonstrated that the progeny of the same parents are often entirely dissimilar, and that new organs very suddenly spring up in individuals even when they had had no previous existence. "A slight variation from the parent form is of no utility to the progeny; they must acquire at once a completely developed, new character, if it is to be of any use to them." Quite right! but this one admission is destructive of the entire doctrine of natural selection. If one accepts saltatory evolution, as for instance, Heer, Koelliker, and Wigand did long ago, then, as Grottewitz now discovers, the difficulty arising for Darwinism from the absence of the numerous intermediary forms which it postulates, naturally disappears.

Grottewitz attributes sudden variation to the influence of environment, just as Geoffroy St. Hilaire had already

121

done before Darwin. He likewise repudiates Darwin's doctrine of adaptation and the theory of "chance," which is bound up with all his views. "Darwin's theory of chance seems to me to be especially deserving of rejection." The article closed with these words: "There must evidently be a very definite principle, according to which the frequent and striking development from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from the no-longer adapted to the readapted, proceeds. We all of us are far from considering this principle a teleological, mystical or mythical one, but for that matter, Darwin's theory of chance is nothing more than a myth."

He is most certainly in the right. To place this whole wonderful, and so minutely regulated world of organisms at the mercy of chance is utterly monstrous, and for this very reason Darwinism, which is throughout a doctrine of chance, must be rejected; it is indeed a myth. We are grateful to Grottewitz for undertaking to tear the assumed mask of science from this myth and expose it before his associates. He should, however, have done so even more vigorously and unequivocally and should have stated plainly: Darwinism is a complete failure; we believe indeed in a natural development of the organic world, but we are unable to prove it.

In the conclusion of the article quoted there is, of course, again to be found the cloven-hoof: by all means no teleological principle! But why in the world should we not accept a teleological principle, since it is clearly evident

that the whole world of life is permeated by teleology, that is, by design and finality? Why not? Forsooth, because then belief in God would again enter and create havoc in the ranks of the "brethren."

But however much men may struggle against the teleologico-theistic principle and secure themselves against it, it is all of no avail, the principle stands at the gate and clamors loudly for admission; and if Grottewitz could but bring himself to undertake a study of Wigand's masterful work, perhaps his heresy would increase and we might perhaps then find another article in the "Sozialistische Monatshefte" tending still more strongly toward the truth.

But what will Brother Bebel with his Haeckelism say to the present article?

All in all, instead of calling his article "Darwinian Myths" Grottewitz might just as well have entitled it "At the Deathbed of Darwinism." May he bring out a series of "deathbed articles" to disclose the truth regarding Darwinism to his associates.