

THE GLAMOUR OF EUCKEN

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that no abstract philosopher of our time, with the possible exception of Bergson, has made such a popular appeal to the minds of ordinary men as has Professor Rudolf Eucken, whose death was recently announced. To begin with, he was gifted with a singularly fascinating and magnetic personality. From every part of the world, students flocked to his classrooms. Once within those magic doors, they capitulated unconditionally to the resistless spell of his wizardry. He won from them, not only their unhesitating assent to the propositions that he so forcefully enunciated, but the generous homage of their hearts. Those who sat at the feet of Eucken in the cloistral and classical atmosphere that he wove about himself at Jena carried his revered image in their hearts forever afterwards and were never happier than when singing their illustrious master's praises. To study under Eucken was to admire him, to honour him, to trust him. For, above all else, Eucken was the soul of sincerity. He was transparent as the daylight. He taught nothing that he did not with all his heart believe. He was reared in an atmosphere of Puritanical severity; and he carried the love of simplicity which he then imbibed into the academic realms which he afterwards invaded. Whilst still a youth he made it clear that he was never so happy as when wrestling with profundities and sublimities which ordinary minds abandoned in despair. No metaphysical theme was too abstruse for him: no theological doctrine too nebulous or terrifying. His hungry mind applied itself with avidity and seriousness to the most baffling riddles of the universe. Even as a boy he felt himself to be a citizen of infinity.

It was by his downright honesty, his unflinching loyalty to his convictions, that he won his extraordinary fame. He was, it goes without saying, the possessor of phenomenal gifts. In the early days of his academic career, he studied under Lotze. His teacher's philosophy and his own were poles apart. Eucken could scarcely accept one of Lotze's dazzling but unsatisfactory conclusions.

ing but unsatisfactory conclusions. It is always a delicate situation for a student to occupy. Many a man, so circumstanced, surrenders his own pre-conceived ideas, and accepts, without further question, the findings of his master. Is it not for that very purpose that he has placed himself, or been placed, at the professor's feet? Others, endowed—or afflicted—with greater self-assurance, would involve themselves in ceaseless and interminable controversies with their instructor, and, seeming to set themselves up as teachers of their teacher, would win for themselves an ugly reputation for intellectual bumptiousness. Into neither of these pitfalls did young Eucken fall. He listened with the closest attention to every word that fell from Lotze's lips: just occasionally he asked a particularly incisive and suggestive question: and there he let the matter rest. He passed through the trying ordeal with his convictions unshaken, but with his mental horizon immeasurably enlarged. A very similar situation was created when, in 1871, Eucken was appointed Professor of Philosophy at Bale. Two years earlier, Nietzsche had been made Professor of Classical Philology in the same University; and the two were associated as colleagues. On the face of it, the idea of Nietzsche and Eucken running in double harness appears ludicrous, preposterous, farcical; a sort of practical joke. Eucken's philosophy of life is as different from Nietzsche's as light is from darkness. It would be interesting to know what the students who came under the influence of both men made of it all! Yet there is no evidence of a clash. Nietzsche was like a packet of fireworks: the slightest spark caused a violent explosion. But Eucken seems to have emitted no such spark. His grave demeanour, his quiet strength, his generous appreciation and his engaging qualities subdued the savagery of Nietzsche and elicited the best from him. Nietzsche called Wagner a clever rattlesnake. The divergence between the philosophy of Nietzsche and that of Eucken was infinitely greater than the divergence between the philosophy of Nietzsche and that

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of fragrant yet there is no record of vituperation. Eucken knew how to learn and he knew how to teach; but the arts of wrangling and abuse were far beyond him.

Eucken was essentially the Apostle of Common-sense. Herein lies the secret of his world-wide appeal. It is recorded of Abraham Lincoln that he was one day presiding at a meeting of his Army Council when the discussion turned on the ideal physique of a recruit. "How long," asked one of the officers, "how long ought his legs to be?" "If you ask my opinion," exclaimed Lincoln, "I believe they ought to be long enough to reach to the ground!" The embarrassing quality about most abstract philosophers is that their lower limbs do not comply with that essential condition. Their feet do not touch solid earth. Their ideas are in the air. With Eucken it was otherwise. He was a man of the world. He took things as he found them. Like a man crossing a stream by stepping from stone to stone, he reasoned his way from reality to reality. He accepted, as the groundwork of all his speculations, that impregnable historical basis which the philosophy of the nineteenth-century had so newly but sensibly adopted. In this respect he was a true successor of Hegel who reigned in the University of Jena before him. In the celebrated manuscript that Hegel concluded on the night of the battle of Jena, with the guns roaring around him, he enunciated the wholesome doctrine that, by a rational interpretation to men of the slow evolution of history, philosophy must make it her supreme business to treat of the organic principles that underlie real life at every conceivable point. Schopenhauer, it is true, scouted such a theory. He was with Seneca in declaring that philosophy has nothing to do with pots and pans. History, he hotly averred, was humanity's confused and troubled dream: it had nothing to teach. But, in spite of such wild negations, Hegel's conclusions triumphed. There is nothing in the life of the past, he held, from which philosophy may not learn; there is nothing in the life of the present, or of the future, to which it cannot yield some priceless hoard. It must have eyes for everything and ears for everything. Life, real life, is the subject of its contemplation; life, real life, is the field of its activ-

life, real life, is the field of its activity; and the same real life is the theatre of its beneficent service. The dramatic awakening of the historic consciousness has been the most epoch-making event of the past half century in the experience of the philosophical schools; and among those whose heroic labours have served to promote this end the name of Rudolf Eucken must be conspicuously and gratefully mentioned. As a result of his valuable lifework, philosophy has become more sane, more open-eyed, more practical; and, for many years to come, his influence will deepen, his axioms will be quoted, and the memory of his superb character will be affectionately cherished.