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WEISMANN AND HAECKEL: ONE HUNDRED YEARS¹

By Professor A. FRANKLIN SHULL

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THE human spirit in which there exists the spark of desire to commune with itself on any philosophical question needs only the breath of a round-numbered anniversary to fan the spark into flame. When it is blown upon by two such anniversaries, even if or perhaps particularly if from different directions, there may well be a conflagration. And when the vagaries of some organized body's activities happen to present to such a spirit the opportunity of communing with others of like mind to furnish intellectual tinder, the result would naturally be a holocaust. I give you fair warning, but trust it may not be needed. The American Society of Naturalists has agreed to devote its energies to fundamental biological matters and

specifically names evolution as an example. If, when the society conferred on me the privilege and duty of making this address, it had had its eye on the calendar of the centuries, it could scarcely have failed to foresee what topic would be selected.

What form shall our commemoration of the birth of the arch selectionist and the arch genealogist take? Shall we eulogize them? That has been done recently for both in public or semi-public ways. Shall we criticize them and their views? That was done roundly in their active lifetimes in a manner which must have been regarded by them as quite ample. Shall we bring forth their chief doctrines, dust them off to give them a deceptive freshness and proceed to find in them the germ of all the essential modern views of evolution? That is much the commonest way of celebrating anniversaries. Such commendation was years ago bestowed on Weismann by an

¹ Presidential address delivered at the annual dinner of the American Society of Naturalists at Pittsburgh, December 29, 1934. Contribution from the Zoological Laboratory of the University of Michigan.

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