

**RUDOLF EUCKEN'S
MESSAGE TO OUR AGE
- AN APPRECIATION AND
A CRITICISM**

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Rudolf Eucken's Message to Our Age - an Appreciation and a Criticism by Henry C. Sheldon

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UNIV. OF
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TO THE
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PREFACE

It was with no thought of publication that the essay on the teaching of Rudolf Eucken was written. Only the plea that it would afford useful guidance to many who are asking what they ought to think of the system of the distinguished philosopher has led us to consent to have it placed before the public. We trust that the reader will notice the relatively large space which is given to an appreciative exposition, and will not allow the criticism which is passed upon some phases of Professor Eucken's theological thinking to stand in the way of a high valuation of his philosophy proper.

Boston University,
January, 1913.



I

Two main endeavors come to very emphatic manifestation in the writings of Rudolf Eucken, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Jena. On the one hand, he aims to uncover with utmost distinctness the great deficiencies of the age. On the other hand, he seeks to direct to the remedy which is alone adequate. Whatever may be the estimate of his success in his chosen task, no one can question the deeply earnest and religious spirit in which he has taken up and pursued that task.

Letting the Professor speak as far as possible for himself, we will forthwith illustrate his view on the characteristic deficits of the age by citing a few paragraphs from writings recently given to the public. In his book on *The Truth of Religion* he writes as follows:

"We witness with painful clearness

to-day a strong decline of inward culture; ever less does man find definite satisfaction in all the bustle of our modern mechanism; ever more is the inward life lowered in its pitch to the commonplace; and ever clearer it becomes apparent that all the gain on the periphery of life cannot counter-balance the loss which occurs at the center. In the last resort it is true that we live our existence from out the center, and, although this fact may be forgotten in our relationship to the environment, it can never be permanently lost. . . . It is an age afflicted with an immense contradiction. It is wonderfully great in its mastery of and achievements within the enviring world; but, on the other hand, it is deplorably poor and insecure in regard to the problems of the inner life and the inner world."¹

In another volume Professor Eucken remarks:

¹ Pp. 117, 118, 805.

"The position at the present moment conclusively proves that the content of man's life is not the easy, unsought product of a natural process of historical development, for, after all the weary work of many thousand years, we are to-day in a condition of painful uncertainty, a state of hopeless fluctuation, not merely with regard to individual questions, but also as to the general purpose and meaning of life."¹

Again he observes:

"A paralyzing doubt saps the vitality of our age. We see a clear proof of this in the fact that, with all our astounding achievements, we are not really happy. There is no pervading sense of confidence and security, but rather a tendency to emphasize man's insignificance, and to think meanly of his position in the universe. A closer scrutiny reveals the presence of a

¹ *The Problem of Human Life as Viewed by the Great Thinkers*, p. 565.