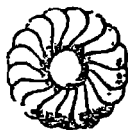


# Carl Diener and Modern Paleontology

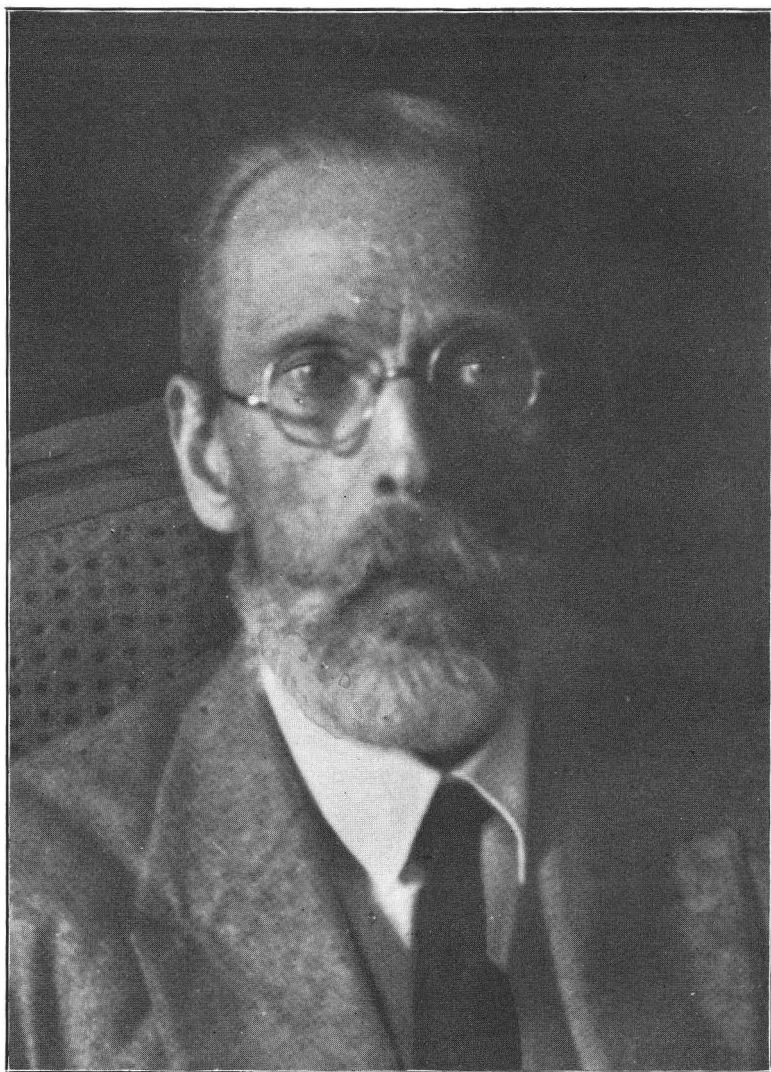
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*Carl Vallery*

## CARL DIENER AND MODERN PALEONTOLOGY

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With the demise of Dr. Carl Diener, Professor of Paleontology at the University of Vienna, on January 6, 1928, Europe loses one of her foremost paleontologists. Not only do his numerous students, but the entire scientific world pays him highest tribute as research worker and teacher.

Professor Diener was born in 1862 in Vienna. In 1879 he was graduated with distinction at the State Gymnasium of the third district of Vienna. Then he turned to the University of Vienna, studying geography under F. Simony, geology under E. Suess, and paleontology under M. Neumayr. His degree of Doctor of Philosophy was conferred upon him in 1883; and he was promoted under the auspices of the Emperor, one of the highest distinctions in imperial Austria. The following year he started research work in the Alpine Trias of Raibl. Later he spent several months in Syria, studying the mountain ranges of Lebanon and Antilebanon. The results of these researches were rewarded with the *venia legendi* at the University of Vienna, where he established himself 1886 as privat-docent in geography.

During the following years he did field-work in the Auvergne, in the Pyrenees, and in the Western and Eastern Alps. In 1891 he first became known in America through his participation in the International Geological Congress sitting in Washington; and he

acquainted himself with the Rockies and the Grand Canyon especially.

Decisive for his future career was his taking part in the expedition to the Himalayan Mountains which was equipped 1892 by the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Vienna, jointly with the government of India. The remarkable "Klippen" of Chitichuna were discovered, and a rich collection of fossils was made, the study of which was entrusted to Diener. The result of this work was published in *Palæontologia Indica* (1895-1915).

Thus Diener was led from geography to paleontology and geology; becoming in 1893 privat-docent, and in 1897 extraordinary professor of geology. In the meantime he made studies in Spitsbergen; then in the Ural Mountains and in the Caucasus, on the occasion of the International Geological Congress of St. Petersburg. Intensive research work in the Eastern Alps followed, which resulted in the monograph *Bau und Bild der Ostalpen*, written for the International Geological Congress in Vienna, held in 1903. He was secretary general of this congress. In the same year Diener was appointed extraordinary professor of paleontology at Vienna University; and three years later he took this chair as ordinary professor, holding it to his death.

Since the expedition to the Himalayan Mountains the main work of Diener was concentrated on paleontology. For many years his time was taken up with the Indian fossils. Then he described material of Japan and Timor. In 1915 he summarized his extensive knowledge of the Triassic marine organisms in a splendid work entitled: *Die marinen Reiche der Trias*. In 1925 he published another excellent summary of his studies: *Die Elemente der Biostratigraphie*, which was reviewed at some length in this journal, volume XLVI, pages 101-110, 1926.

Although Diener was all his life connected with the University of Vienna, he promoted his global relations by attending the international meetings of geologists; in 1891 he was in the United States, in 1906 he was in Mexico, in 1910 in Stockholm, in 1913 in Toronto, attending the Geologic Congresses. Before the latter Congress he studied the Japanese Islands Hondo and Shikoku, and visited Hawaii on his way to Canada. Finally, international relations after the war being re-established, Diener was present at the

Congress of Madrid in 1926 and, despite ill health, he partook of the excursion to the Canary Isles. There he collapsed and never recovered completely. On November 13, 1926, he wrote to the author of this sketch: "In Teneriffe I acquired a bad dysentery which led in Sevilla to a complete collapse of my nervous system. I had to rest in Vienna for two months to recover my strength. Today my condition is satisfactory. My physician promises a complete recovery, and I feel myself still on the ascending branch of my life. I again took up my lectures before a rather large number of hearers. It is remarkable that in spite of bad prospects, still so many students select the unpractical studies of the philosophical faculty." (The photograph accompanying this sketch was taken at that time and shows Diener in his lecture room.) Diener was faithful to his work to the last. Alas, he was called away, too early for his numerous friends.

Diener's prominence in scientific research found ample acknowledgement from scientific institutions, both at home and abroad. In 1919 Diener became Dean of the philosophical faculty of the University of Vienna; and in 1922 he was elected to the highest honor, the Rectorate of the same University. In 1914 he was elected active member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and in 1926 honorary member of the Geographical Society of Vienna. He was corresponding member of the Sociedad científica "Antonio Alzate" in Mexico, and of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, honorary member of the British Association of the Advancement of Science, active member of the Russian Academy of Science (1925), honorary member of the Paleontological Society of Russia (1926), and active foreign member of the Geological Society of London (1926).

Diener was a thorough worker, gathering above all facts and abstaining from premature speculations. In tectonic geology he was rather conservative; and he warned, in opposition to some of his colleagues, emphatically against the "geopoetry" of the extreme Deckentheory type. In the same spirit he was a sworn enemy of Hæckel's fanciful pedigree of man. In discussing evolution he did not fail to call the attention of his students to the gaps still existing between the main groups of the animal kingdom, which cannot be filled up by wild speculations. As to the process of evolution Diener

wrote in a booklet, *Palæontologie und Abstammungslehre*, second edition, 1920; "Endeavoring to understand the transformations of the organic world by purely mechanical causes, we are invariably led to factors which we cannot immediately grasp by natural science. The knowledge of adaptations is a matter of experience; but the explanations, as to how such an adaption of tissue groups of a complicated organism is possible, belongs already in the realm of metaphysics" (p. 135). Similar ideas Diener expressed in his formal address at his inauguration as Rector of the University (1922). His conservatism is also shown in his opposition to modern opinions in paleogeography, especially to Wegener's hypothesis. He wrote to me: I am not fond of "wanderlustige Pole und Kontinente."

Thus Diener had a wholesome influence on his students, who will always be thankful that he trained them for the serious work of sober investigations and kept them away from lofty speculations, so alluring to youthful spirits. And all men of science stand at the bier of Diener to mourn the loss of one of their best and greatest leaders.