BRITAIN'S PREMIER AS A SCIENTIST.

Mr. Balfour, President of the British Association, Delivered the Annual Address at the Meeting in Cambridge, His Subject Being the Electric Theory of Matter.

CAMBRIDGE, Aug. 24.—To most of the members of the British Association the annual meeting is an occasion of recreation as well as a serious business. From this point of view the condition of the weather has been unfortunate. It had rained during the night, and it has been raining for a great part of the day. The railway trains brought in hundreds of members and friends. Locomotion, however, was greatly hindered by the wet weather, especially in the morning and early part of the afternoon, and the Guildhall and other places of rendezvous, which the hospitality of the municipal and university authorities had made available, were at times crowded by sheltering visitors. Notwithstanding this temporary drawback, there was every indication that this, the seventy-fourth meeting of the association, will be successful alike in attendance and in popular and scientific interest. The people of Cambridge have vied with one another in facilitating the arrangements, so far as it is in their power to do so. Though this is the fourth meeting of the association in this town, it is forty-two years since the association last met here. Thus novelty has added not a little to the appreciation of the present visit; but the fact that the president for this year's meeting is the prime minister, and one of the most distinguished sons of the university, has given still further zest to the welcome. Nor has it been left out of account that this is the first time upon which the chair of president of the association has been occupied by a statesman during his tenure of office as prime minister.

The desire to hear Mr. Balfour's address was so great amongst members, visitors and residents, that the corn exchange, which is the largest building in Cambridge, was crowded long before the time for the proceedings to begin. The exchange is an immense oblong structure, but by placing the platform in the middle, instead of at one of the ends, the best possible means had been taken that the audience should be brought within reach of Mr. Balfour's voice, whilst as befitted a learned body like the British Association, the resources of science, in the provision of a sounding board, and a temporary hanging roof of sateen, were effectively employed to improve the acoustic properties of the meeting place. In other respects the exchange had been well adapted for the meeting. Mr. Balfour entered the exchange at about half-past eight o'clock, accompanied by the outgoing president, Sir Norman Lockyer. He was very cordially received.

Mr. Balfour began with an apologetic reference to the fact that he was about to follow the invariable practice of his predecessors by reading his address. He was not sure that in so doing he was serving either the interests of his audience or his own, but, in any case, he would do his best—an intimation which was received with general applause. The address occupied about seventy minutes. It was, therefore, one of the shortest of the presidential addresses of recent years, some of them having exceeded two hours in delivery. Mr. Balfour accomplished his task with comparative ease. He showed no signs of the fatigue which a long parliamentary session might have been expected to cause. His voice was clear, musical and penetrating, and his general manner vivacious. It is hardly possible to give to the reading of a philosophic and scientific discourse the appearance of extemporaneous delivery. Mr. Balfour faced the fact squarely, and did not make the attempt. His reading, however, was faultless. The matter of the address was very generally pronounced to be admirable in its simplicity and orderly arrangement; but it was remarked that Mr. Balfour did not take sufficient account of the work done in Germany and in America in relation to the subject dealt with, and that his natural partiality for his own university seemed to have caused him unduly to appraise the work of Cambridge. A few of the personal references in the address, notably that to Lord Kelvin, were well appreciated by the audience.

THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS.

Mr. Balfour said: The meetings of this great society have for the most part been held in crowded centres of population, where our surroundings never permit us to forget, were such forgetfulness in any case possible, how close is the tie that binds modern science to modern industry, the abstract researches of the student to the labors of the inventor and the mechanic. This, no doubt, is as it should be. The interdependence of theory and practice cannot be ignored without inflicting injury on both, and he is but a poor friend to either who undervalues their mutual co-operation. Yet, after all, since the British Association exists for the advancement of science, it is well that now and again we should choose our place of gatherings in some spot where science rather than its applications, knowledge, not utility, are the ends to which research is primarily directed. If this be so, surely no happier selection could have been made than the quiet courts of this ancient university. For here, if anywhere, we tread the classic ground of physical discovery. Here, if anywhere, those who hold that physics is the true Scientia Scientiarum, the root of all the sciences which deal with inanimate nature, should feel themselves at home. For, unless I am led astray by too partial an affection for my own university, there is nowhere to be found, in any corner of the world, a spot with which have been connected, either by their training in youth or by the labors of their maturer years, so many men eminent as the originators of new and fruitful physical conceptions. I say nothing of Bacon, the eloquent prophet of a new era; nor of Darwin, the Copernicus of biology; for my subject today is not the contributions of Cambridge to the general growth of scientific knowledge. I am concerned rather with the illustrious line of physicists who have learned or taught within a few hundred yards of this building — a line stretching from Newton in the seventeenth century, through Cavendish in the eighteenth, through Young, Stokes, Maxwell, in the nineteenth, through Kelvin, who embodies an epoch in himself, down to Rayleigh, Larmor, J. J. Thomson and the scientific school centred in the Cavendish Laboratory, whose physical speculations bid fair to render the closing years of the old century and the opening years of the new as notable as the greatest which have preceded them.

THE UNALTERABLE FAITH OF SCIENCE.

Now, what is the task which these men, and their illustrious fellow-laborers out of all lands, have set themselves to accomplish? To what end led these "new and fruitful conceptions" to which I have just referred? It is often described as the discovery of the "laws of connecting phenomena." But this is certainly a misleading, and in my opinion a very inadequate, account of the subject. To begin with, it is not only inconvenient, but confusing, to describe as "phenomena" things which do not appear, which never have appeared, and which never can appear to beings so poorly provided as ourselves with the apparatus of sense perception. But apart from this, which is a linguistic error too deeply rooted to be easily exterminated, is it not most inaccurate in substance to say that a knowledge of nature's laws is all we seek when investigating nature? The physicist looks for something more than what, by any stretch of language can be described as "co-existence" and "sequences" between so-called "phenomena." He seeks for something deeper than the laws connecting possible objects of experience. His object is physical reality: a reality which may or may not be capable of direct perception, a reality which is in any case independent of it; a reality which constitutes the permanent mechanism of that physical universe with which our immediate empirical connection is so light and so deceptive. That such a reality exists, though philosophers have doubted, is the unalterable faith of science; and were that faith per impossible to perish under the assaults of critical speculation, science, as men of science usually conceive it, would perish likewise. If this be so, if one of the tasks of science, and more particularly of physics, is to frame a conception of the physical universe in its inner reality, then any attempt to compare the different modes in which, at different epochs of scientific development, this intellectual picture has been drawn, cannot fail to suggest questions of the deepest interest. True, I am precluded from dealing with such of these questions as are purely philosophical by the character of this occasion, and with such of them as are purely scientific by my own incompetence. But some there may be sufficiently near the dividing line to induce the specialists who rule by right on either side of it to view with forgiving eyes any trespasses into their legitimate domain which I may be tempted during the next few minutes, to commit. Let me, then, endeavor to compare the outlines of two such pictures, of which the first may be taken to represent the views prevalent towards the end of the eighteenth century, a little more than a hundred years from the publication of Newton's "Principia," and, roughly speaking, about midway between the epoch-making date and the present moment. I suppose that if at that period the average man of science had been asked to sketch his general conception of the physical universe, he would probably have said that it essentially consisted of various sorts of ponderable matter, scattered in different aspects under the influence of chemical affinity and temperature, but through every metamorphosis obedient to the laws of motion, always retaining its mass unchanged, and exercising at all distances a force of attraction on other material masses, according to a simple law. To this ponderable matter he would (in spite of Rumford) have probably added the so-called "imponderable" heat, then often ranked among the elements, together with the two "electrical fluids" and the corpuscular emanations supposed to constitute light.

THE UNDULATORY THEORY OF LIGHT.

In the universe as thus conceived the most important form of action between its constituents was action at a distance; the principle of the conservation of energy was, in any general form, undreamed of; electricity and magnetism, though already the subjects of important investigation, played no great part in the whole of things, nor was a diffused ether required to complete the machinery of the universe. Within a few months, however, of the date assigned for these deliverances of our hypothetical physicist, came an addition to this general conception of the world, destined profoundly to modify it. About a hundred years ago Young opened, or reopened, the great controversy which finally established the undulatory theory of light, and with it a belief in an interstellar medium by which undulations could be conveyed. But this discovery involved much more than the substitution of a theory of light which was consistent with the facts for one which was not, since here was the first authentic introduction into the scientific world-picture of a new and prodigious constituent — a constituent which has altered, and is still altering, the whole balance (so to speak)of the composition. Unending space, thinly strewn with suns and satellites, made or in the making, supplied sufficient material for the mechanism of the heavens as conceived by Laplace. Unending space filled with a continuous medium was a very different affair, and gave promise of strange developments. It could not be supposed that the ether, if its reality were once admitted, existed only to convey through interstellar regions the vibrations which happen to stimulate the optic nerve of man. Invented originally to fulfil this function, to this it could never be confined. And accordingly, as everyone now knows, things which, from the point of view of sense perception, are as distinct as light and radiant heat, and things to which sense perception makes no response, like the electric waves of wireless telegraphy, intrinsically differ, not in kind, but in magnitude alone. This, however, is not all. If we jump over the century which separates 1804 from 1904, and attempt to give in outline the world-picture as it now presents itself to some leaders of contemporary speculation, we shall find that in the interval it has been modified, not merely by such far-reaching discoveries as the atomic and molecular composition of ordinary matter, the kinetic theory of gases, and the laws of the conservation and dissipation of energy, but by the more and more important part which electricity and the ether occupy in any representation of ultimate physical reality.

PROGRESS OF ELECTRICITY.

Electricity was no more to the natural philosophers in the year 1700 than the hidden cause of an insignificant phenomenon. It was known, and had long been known, that such things as amber and glass could be made to attract light objects brought into their neighborhood, yet it was about 50 years before the effects of electricity were perceived in the thunderstorm. It was about 100 years before it was detected in the form of a current. It was about 120 years before it was connected with magnetism, about 170 years before it was connected with light and ethereal radiation. But today there are those who regard gross matter, the matter of everyday experience, as the mere appearance of which electricity is the physical basis; who think that the elementary atom of the chemist, itself far beyond the limits of direct perception, is but a connected system of monads or sub-atoms which are not electrified matter, but are electricity itself; that these systems differ in the number of monads which they contain, in their arrangement, and in their motion relative to each other and to the ether; that on these differences, and on these differences alone, depends the various quantities of what have hitherto been regarded as indivisible and elementary atoms; and that while in most cases these atomic systems may maintain their equilibrium for periods which, compared with such astronomical processes as the cooling of a sun, may seem almost eternal, they are not less obedient to the law of change than the everlasting heavens themselves. But if gross matter be a grouping of atoms, and if atoms be systems of electrical monads, what are these electrical monads? It may be that, as Professor Larmor has suggested, they are but a modification of the universal ether, a modification roughly comparable to a knot in a medium which is inextensible, incompressible and continuous. But whether this final unification be accepted or not, it is certain that these monads cannot be considered apart from the ether. It is on their interaction with the ether that their qualities depend; and without the ether an electric theory of matter is impossible. Surely we have here a very extraordinary revolution. Two centuries ago electricity seemed but a scientific toy. It is now thought by many to constitute the reality of which matter is but the sensible expression. It is but a century ago that the title of an ether to a place among the constituents of the universe was authentically established. It seems possible now that it may be the stuff out of which that universe is wholly built. Nor are the collateral inferences associated with this view of the physical world less surprising. It used, for example, to be thought that mass was an original property of matter, neither capable of explanation nor requiring it; in its nature essentially unchangeable, suffering neither augmentation nor diminution under the stress of any forces to which it could be subjected; unalterably attached to, or identified with, each material fragment, howsoever much that fragment might vary in its appearance, its bulk, its chemical or its physical condition.

THE NEW THEORY OF MATTER.

But if the new theories be accepted, these views must be revised. Mass is not only explicable, it is actually explained. So far from being an attribute of matter considered in itself, it is due, as I have said, to the relation between the electrical monads of which matter is composed and the ether in which they are bathed. So far from being unchangeable, it changes, when moving at very high speeds, with every change in its velocity. Perhaps, however, the most impressive alteration in our picture of the universe required by these new theories is to be sought in a different direction. We have all, I suppose, been interested in the generally accepted views as to the origin and development of suns with their dependent planetary systems; and the gradual dissipation of the energy which during this process of concentration has largely taken the form of light and radiant heat. Follow out the theory to its obvious conclusions, and it becomes plain that the stars now visibly incandescent are those in midjourney between the nebulae from which they sprang and the frozen darkness to which they are predestined. What, then, are we to think of the invisible multitude of the heavenly bodies in which the process has been already completed? According to the ordinary view, we should suppose them to be in a state where all possibilities of internal movement were exhausted. At the temperature of interstellar space their constituent elements would be solid and inert; chemical action and molecular movement would be alike impossible, and their exhausted energy could obtain no replenishment unless they were suddenly rejuvenated by some celestial collision, or travelled into other regions warmed by newer suns. This view must, however, be profoundly modified if we accept the electric theory of matter. We can no longer hold that if the internal energy of a sun were, as far as possible, converted into heat, either by its contraction under the stress of gravitation or by chemical reactions between its elements, or by any other interatomic force; and that, were the heat so generated to be dissipated, as in time it must be, through infinite space, its whole energy would be exhausted. On the contrary, the amount thus lost would be absolutely insignificant compared with what remained stored up within the separate atoms. The system in its corporate capacity would become bankrupt — the wealth of its individual constituents would be scarcely diminished. They would lie side by side, without movement, without chemical affinity; yet each one, however inert in its external relations the theatre of violent motions and of powerful internal forces. Or put the same thought in another form. When the sudden appearance of some new star in the telescopic field gives notice to the astronomer that he — and, perhaps, in the whole universe, he alone— is witnessing the conflagration of a world, the tremendous forces by which this far-off tragedy is being accomplished must surely move his awe. Yet not only would the members of each separate atomic system pursue their relative course unchanged, while the atoms themselves were thus riven violently apart in flaming vapor, but the forces by which such a world is shattered are really negligible compared with those by which each atom of it is held together.

THE FEEBLER FORCES OF NATURE.

In common, therefore, with all other living things, we seem to be practically concerned chiefly with the feebler forces of Nature, and with energy in its least powerful manifestations. Chemical affinity and cohesion are on this theory no more than the slight residual effects of the internal electrical forces which keep the atom in being. Gravitation, though it be the shaping force which concentrates nebulae into organized systems of suns and satellites, is trifling compared with the attractions and repulsions with which we are familiar between electrically-charged bodies; while these again sink into insignificance beside the attractions and repulsions between the electric monads themselves. The irregular molecular movements which constitute heat, on which the very possibility of organic life seems absolutely to hang, and in whose transformations applied science is at present so largely concerned, cannot rival the kinetic energy stored within the molecules themselves. This prodigious mechanism seems outside the range of our immediate interests. We live, so to speak, merely on its fringe. It has for us no promise of utilitarian value. It will not drive our mills; we cannot harness it to our trains. Yet not less on that account does it stir the intellectual imagination. The starry heavens have from time immemorial moved the worship or the wonder of mankind. But if the dust beneath our feet be indeed compounded of innumerable systems, whose elements are ever in the most rapid motion, yet retain through uncounted ages their equilibrium unshaken, we can hardly deny that the marvels we directly see are not more worthy of admiration than those which recent discoveries have enabled us dimly to surmise. Now, whether the main outlines of the world-picture which I have just imperfectly presented to you be destined to survive, or whether in their turn they are to be obliterated by some new drawing on the scientific palimpsest, all will, I think, admit that so bold an attempt to unify physical nature excites feelings of the most acute intellectual gratification. The satisfaction it gives is almost aesthetic in its intensity and quality. We feel the same sort of pleasurable shock as when, from the crest of some melancholy pass, we first see, far below us, the sudden glories of plain, river and mountain. Whether this vehement sentiment in favor of a simple universe has any theoretical justification I will not venture to pronounce. There is no a priori reason that I know of for expecting that the material world should be a modification of a single medium, rather than a composite structure built out of sixty or seventy elementary substances, eternal and eternally different. Why, then, should we feel content with the first hypothesis, and not with the second? Yet so it is.

SECRETS OF NATURE.

Men of science have always been restive under the multiplication of entities. They have eagerly noted any sign that the chemical atom was composite, and that the different chemical elements had a common origin. Nor, for my part, do I think that such instincts should be ignored. John Mill, if I remember rightly, was contemptuous of those who saw any difficulty in accepting the doctrine of "action at a distance." So far as observation and experiment can tell us, bodies do actually influence each other at a distance. And why should they not? Why seek to go behind experience in obedience to some a priori sentiment for which no argument can be adduced? So reasoned Mill, and to his reasoning I have no reply. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that it was to Faraday's obstinate disbelief in "action at a distance" that we owe some of the crucial discoveries on which both our electric industries and the electric theory of matter are ultimately founded; while at this very moment physicists, however baffled in the quest for an explanation of gravity, refuse altogether to content themselves with the belief, so satisfying to Mill, that it is a simple and inexplicable property of masses acting on each other across space. These obscure intimations about the nature of reality deserve, I think, more attention than has yet been given to them. That they exist is certain; that they modify the indifferent impartiality of pure empiricism can hardly be denied. The common notion that he who would search out the secrets of nature must humbly wait on experience, obedient to its slightest hint, is but partly true. This may be his ordinary attitude; but now and again it happens that observation and experiment are not treated as guides to be meekly followed, but as witnesses to be broken down in cross-examination. Their plain message is disbelieved, and the investigating judge does not pause until a confession in harmony with his preconceived ideas has, if possible, been wrung from their reluctant evidence. This proceeding needs neither explanation nor defence in those cases where there is an apparent contradiction between the utterances of experience in different connections. Such contradictions must of course be reconciled, and science cannot rest until the reconciliation is effected. The difficulty really arises when experience apparently says one thing and scientific instinct persists in saying another. Two such cases I have already mentioned; others will easily be found by those who care to seek. What is the origin of this instinct, and what its value; whether it be a mere prejudice to be brushed aside, or a clue which no wise man would disdain to follow, I cannot now discuss. For other questions there are, not new, yet raised in an acute form by these most modern views of matter, on which I would ask your indulgent attention for yet a few moments.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE NEW VIEWS.

That these new views diverge violently from those suggested by ordinary observation is plain enough. No scientific education is likely to make us, in our unreflective moments, regard the solid earth on which we stand, or the organized bodies with which our terrestrial fate is so intimately bound up, as consisting wholly of electric monads very sparsely scattered through the spaces which these fragments of matter are, by a violent metaphor, described as "occupying." Not less plain is it that an almost equal divergence is to be found between these new theories and that modification of the common-sense view of matter with which science has in the main been content to work. What was this modification of common-sense? It is roughly indicated by an old philosophic distinction drawn between what were called the "primary" and the "secondary" qualities of matter. The primary qualities, such as shape and mass, were supposed to possess an existence quite independent of the observer; and so far the theory agreed with common-sense. The secondary qualities, on the other hand, such as warmth and color, were thought to have no such independent existence, being, indeed, no more than the resultants due to the action of the primary qualities on our organs of sense-perception; and here, no doubt, commonsense and theory parted company. You need not fear that I am going to drag you into the controversies with which this theory is historically connected. They have left abiding traces on more than one system of philosophy. They are not yet solved. In the course of them the very possibility of an independent physical universe has seemed to melt away under the solvent powers of critical analysis. But with all this I am not now concerned. I do not propose to ask what proof we have that an external world exists, or how, if it does exist, we are are able to obtain cognizance of it. These may be questions very proper to be asked by philosophy; but they are not proper questions to be asked by science. For, logically, they are antecedent to science, and we must reject the sceptical answers to both of them before physical science becomes possible at all. My present purpose requires me to do no more than observe that, be this theory of the primary and secondary qualities of matter good or bad, it is the one on which science has in the main proceeded. It was with matter thus conceived that Newton experimented. To it he applied his laws of motion; of it he predicted universal gravitation. Nor was the case greatly altered when science became as much preoccupied with the movements of molecules as it was with those of planets. For molecules and atoms, whatever else might be said of them, were at least pieces of matter, and like other pieces of matter, possessed those "primary" qualities supposed to be characteristic of all matter, whether found in large masses or small.

THE PHYSICAL UNIVERSE.

But the electric theory which we have been considering carries us into a new region altogether. It does not confine itself to accounting for the secondary qualities by the primary, or the behavior of matter in bulk by the behavior of matter in atoms; it analyzes matter, whether molar or molecular, into something which is not matter at all. The atom is now no more than the relatively vast theatre of operations in which minute monads perform their orderly evolutions; while the monads themselves are not regarded as units of matter, but as units of electricity; so that matter is not merely explained, but is explained away. Now, the point to which I desire to call attention is not to be sought in the great divergence between matter as thus conceived by the physicist and matter as the ordinary man supposes himself to know it, between matter as it is perceived and as it really is, but to the fact that the first of these two quite inconsistent views is wholly based on the second. This is surely something of a paradox. We claim to found all our scientific opinions on experience; and the experience on which we found our theories of the physical universe is our sense-perception of that universe. That is experience; and in this region of belief there is no other. Yet the conclusions which thus profess to be entirely founded upon experience are to all appearance fundamentally opposed to it; our knowledge of reality is based upon illusion, and the very conceptions we use in describing it to others, or in thinking of it ourselves, are abstracted from anthropomorphic fancies, which science forbids us to believe and Nature compels us to employ. We here touch the fringe of a series of problems with which inductive logic ought to deal, but which that most unsatisfactory branch of philosophy has systematically ignored. This is no fault of men of science. They are occupied in the task of making discoveries, not in that of analyzing the fundamental presuppositions which the very possibility of making discoveries implies. Neither is it the fault of transcendental metaphysicians. Their speculations flourish on a different level of thought; their interest in a philosophy of nature is lukewarm; and howsoever the questions in which they are chiefly concerned be answered, it is by no means certain that the answers will leave the humbler difficulties at which I have hinted either nearer to or further from a solution. But though men of science and idealists stand acquitted, the same can hardly be said of empirical philosophers. So far from solving the problem, they seem scarcely to have understood that there was a problem to be solved. Led astray by a misconception to which I have already referred, believing that science was concerned only with (so called) "phenomena," that it had done all that it could be asked to do if it accounted for the sequence of our individual sensations, that it was concerned only with the "laws of Nature," and not with the inner character of physical reality; disbelieving, indeed, that any such physical reality does in truth exist, it has never felt called upon seriously to consider what are the actual methods by which science attains its results, and how those methods are to be justified.

INDUCTIVE THEORY.

If anyone, for example, will take up Mill's logic, with its "sequences and co-existences between phenomena," its "method of difference," its "method of agreement," and the rest; if he will then compare the actual doctrines of science with this version of the mode in which those doctrines have been arrived at, he will soon be convinced of the exceedingly thin intellectual fare which has been hitherto served out to us under the imposing title of inductive theory. There is an added emphasis given to these reflections by a train of thought which has long interested me, though I acknowledge that it never seems to have interested anyone else. Observe, then, that in order of logic sense-perceptions supply the premises from which we draw our knowledge of the physical world; it is they which tell us there is a physical world; it is on their authority that we learn its character. But in order of causation they are effects due (in part) to the constitution of our organs of sense. What we see depends not merely on what there is to be seen, but on our eyes. What we hear depends not merely on what there is to hear, but on our ears. Now, eyes and ears, and all the mechanism of perception, have, as we know, been evolved in us and our brute progenitors by the slow operation of natural selection. And what is true of sense-perception is, of course, also true of the intellectual powers which enable us to erect upon the frail and narrow platform which sense-perception provides, the proud fabric of the sciences. Now, natural selection works through utility. It encourages aptitudes useful to their possessor or his species in the struggle for existence, and, for a similar reason, it is apt to discourage useless aptitudes, however interesting they may be from other points of view because being useless, they are probably burdensome. But it is certain that our powers of self-perception and of calculation were fully developed ages before they were effectively employed in searching out the secrets of physical reality — for our discoveries in this field are the triumphs of but yesterday. The blind forces of natural selection, which so admirably simulate design when they are providing for a present need, possess no power of prevision, and could never, except by accident, have endowed mankind, while in the making, with a physiological or mental outfit adapated to the higher physical investigations. So far as natural science can tell us, every quality of sense or intellect which does not help us to fight, to eat, and to bring up children, is but a by-product of the qualities which do. Our organs of sense-perception were not given us for purposes of research; nor was it to aid us in meting out the heavens or dividing the atom that our powers of calculation and analysis were evolved from the rudimentary instincts of the animal. It is presumably due to these circumstances that the beliefs of all mankind about the material surroundings in which it dwells are not only imperfect, but fundamentally wrong. It may seem singular that down to, say five years ago, our race has, without exception, lived and died in a world of illusions; and that its illusions or those with which we are here alone concerned, has not been about things remote or abstract, things transcendental or divine, but about what men see and handle, about those "plain matters of fact" among which commonsense daily moves with its most confident step and most self-satisfied smile. Presumably, however, this is either because too direct a vision of physical reality was a hindrance, not a help, in the struggle for existence; because falsehood was more useful than truth; or else because with so imperfect a material as living tissue no better results could be attained. But, if this conclusion be accepted, its consequences extend to other organs of knowledge besides those of perception. Not merely the senses, but the intellect, must be judged by it; and it is hard to see why evolution, which has so lamentably failed to produce trustworthy instruments for obtaining the raw material of experience, should be credited with a larger measure of success in its provision of the physiological arrangements which condition reason in its endeavors to turn experience to account.

NATURAL SCIENCE.

Considerations like these, unless I have compressed them beyond the limits of intelligibility, do undoubtedly suggest a certain inevitable incoherence in any general science of thought which is built out of materials provided by natural science alone. Extend the boundaries of knowledge as you may; draw how you will the picture of the universe; reduce its infinite variety to the modes of a single space-filling ether; retrace its history to the birth of existing atoms; show how under the pressure of gravitation they become concentrated into nebulae, into suns, and all the host of heaven; how, at least in one small planet, they combined to form organic compounds; how organic compounds became living things; how living things, developing along many different lines, gave birth at last to one superior race; how from this race arose, after many ages, a learned handful, who looked round on the world which thus blindly brought them into being, and judged it, and knew it for what it was—perform, I say, all this, and, though you may indeed have attained to science, in no wise will you have attained to a self-sufficing system of beliefs. One thing at least will remain, of which this long-drawn sequence of causes and effects gives no satisfying explanation; and that is knowledge itself. Natural science must ever regard knowledge as the product of irrational conditions, for in the last resort it knows no others. It must always regard knowledge as rational, or else science itself disappears. In addition, therefore, to the difficulty of extracting from experience beliefs which experience contradicts, we are confronted with the difficulty of harmonizing the pedigree of our beliefs with their title to authority. The more successful we are in explaining their origin the more doubt we cast on their validity. The more imposing seems the scheme of what we know, the more difficult it is to discover by what ultimate criteria we claim to know it. Here, however, we touch the frontier beyond which physical science possesses no jurisdiction. If the obscure and difficult region which lies beyond is to be surveyed and made accessible, philosophy, not science must undertake the task. It is no business of this society. We meet here to promote the cause of knowledge in one of its great divisions; we shall not help it by confusing the limits which usefully separate one division from another. It may perhaps be thought that I have disregarded my own precept—that I have wilfully overstepped the ample bounds within which the searchers into Nature carry on their labors. If it be so I can only beg your forgiveness. My first desire has been to rouse in those who like myself, are no specialists in physics, the same absorbing interest which I feel in what is surely the most far-reaching speculation about the physical universe which has ever claimed experimental support; and if in so doing I have been tempted to hint my own personal opinion that as natural science grows it leans more, not less, upon an idealistic interpretation of the universe, even those who least agree may, perhaps, be prepared to pardon.—London Standard.