

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

plasm and its compounds (plasma-products). The soul, on the other hand, is an immortal, immaterial being, a spiritual agent, whose mysterious activity is entirely incomprehensible to us. This trivial conception is, as such, spiritualistic, and its contradictory is, in a certain sense, materialistic. It is, at the same time, supernatural and transcendental, since it affirms the existence of forces which can exist and operate without a material basis; it rests on the assumption that outside of and beyond nature there is a "spiritual," immaterial world, of which we have no experience, and of which we can learn nothing by natural means.

This hypothetical "spirit world," which is supposed to be entirely independent of the material universe, and on the assumption of which the whole artificial structure of the dualistic system is based, is purely a product of poetic imagination; the same must be said of the parallel belief in the "immortality of the soul," the scientific impossibility of which we must prove more fully later on (chap. xi.). If the beliefs which prevail in these credulous circles had a sound foundation, the phenomena they relate to could not be subject to the "law of substance"; moreover, this single exception to the highest law of the cosmos must have appeared very late in the history of the organic world, since it only concerns the "soul" of man and of the higher animals. The dogma of "free will," another essential element of the dualistic psychology, is similarly irreconcilable with the universal law of substance.

Our own naturalistic conception of the psychic activity sees in it a group of vital phenomena, which are dependent on a definite material substratum, like all other phenomena. We shall give to this material basis of all psychic activity, without which it is inconceivable,