

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

The slow, gradual degeneration of the higher mental powers, which characterizes senility, usually sets in at the commencement of the seventh decade—sometimes earlier, sometimes later. Memory, receptiveness, and interest in particular objects gradually decay; though productivity, mature consciousness, and philosophic interest in general truths often remain for many years longer.

The individual development of consciousness in earlier youth proves the universal validity of the *biogenetic law*; and, indeed, it is still recognizable in many ways during the later years. In any case, the ontogenesis of consciousness makes it perfectly clear that it is not an "immaterial entity," but a physiological function of the brain, and that it is, consequently, no exception to the general law of substance.

From the fact that consciousness, like all other psychic functions, is dependent on the normal development of certain organs, and that it gradually unfolds in the child in proportion to the development of those organs, we may already conclude that it has arisen in the animal kingdom by a gradual historical development. Still, however certain we are of the fact of this natural evolution of consciousness, we are, unfortunately, not yet in a position to enter more deeply into the question and construct special hypotheses in elucidation of it. Palæontology, it is true, gives us a few facts which are not without significance. For instance, the quantitative and qualitative development of the brain of the placental mammals during the Tertiary period is very remarkable. The cavity of many of the fossil skulls of the period has been carefully examined, and has given us a good deal of reliable information as to the size, and, to some extent, as to the