

CONCLUSION

THE number of world-riddles has been continually diminishing in the course of the nineteenth century through the aforesaid progress of a true knowledge of nature. Only one comprehensive riddle of the universe now remains—the problem of substance. What is the real character of this mighty world-wonder that the realistic scientist calls Nature or the Universe, the idealist philosopher calls Substance or the Cosmos, the pious believer calls Creator or God? Can we affirm to-day that the marvellous progress of modern cosmology has solved this “problem of substance,” or at least that it has brought us nearer to the solution?

The answer to this final question naturally varies considerably according to the stand-point of the philosophic inquirer and his empirical acquaintance with the real world. We grant at once that the innermost character of nature is just as little understood by us as it was by Anaximander and Empedocles twenty-four hundred years ago, by Spinoza and Newton two hundred years ago, and by Kant and Goethe one hundred years ago. We must even grant that this essence of substance becomes more mysterious and enigmatic the deeper we penetrate into the knowledge of its attributes, matter and energy, and the more thoroughly we study its countless phenomenal forms and their evolution. We do not know the “thing in itself” that lies behind these knowable phenomena. But why trouble about this