

research, or by both combined, as we shall have abundant opportunity of showing in detail in the following chapters.

It is of greater importance for my present purpose to bring under the preliminary notice of my readers the fact that in the course of the last forty years the attitude of the critical mind towards this problem of fundamentals and origins, of the foundations in thought and the beginnings in time, has gradually and radically changed. The confidence with which, from many sides, the ideas of Darwin and Helmholtz were received, has gradually vanished, so far at least as the hope is concerned that on those lines of research any finality may be attainable. The study of origins appears to us now to mean, not the study of the beginnings, but only that of an endless process without beginning or end; the genetic process has reduced itself to a genealogical record.¹ Nor has the study of foundations and fundamentals revealed to us any secure basis of thought; it has rather indicated that even the seemingly most certain of sciences, geometry and dynamics, rest upon conventional assumptions, as indeed David Hume had already foreshadowed. At the end of the century, the critical process has thus not realised the expectations with which both in theoretical and practical questions it was methodically started a hundred and twenty years ago. Rather it has resulted in a general unsettlement favourable both to scepticism and pessimism, and to a

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Unsettle-
ment due to
criticism.

¹ From this point of view the title of Darwin's work is really misleading, as it deals with the problems of transformation and descent rather than with that of origin—a problem which, as Darwin himself admitted in later years, was really insoluble.