

and regularity, and the law of nature is merely an abstract expression of this regularity of external occurrences. As forces can be seen and measured only in the motions they produce, so the laws of nature can be seen only in the multitude of examples or single instances and occurrences which exhibit sameness and regularity. In fact, laws do not govern the things of nature; they are simply the abstract expression of the properties of these things themselves. The attributes of the word law which recommend it to the popular understanding as a something which turns chaos into order and maintains it, are derived from the artificial statutes of a human society, and do not belong to the laws of nature.

It is easily seen that those views of nature which I termed above the astronomical and atomic views—through the conception of forces acting at a distance and of external things as consisting of larger or smaller but discrete particles of matter—lent themselves readily to those popular conceptions of natural forces and natural laws which it was the first duty of a true philosophy of nature to get rid of. And, indeed, these prejudices and hidden attributes which recommended the mechanical conception to the popular understanding were got rid of quite as much by a change in the scientific ideas themselves as through a critical analysis such as was contained in the polemical writings of Lotze and other prominent thinkers. The change I refer to has been fully described in former chapters, which dealt with the kinetic and physical views of nature. The former destroyed the idea of imponderable matter and of action

22.
Change in
scientific
conception