

THE NATURE AND PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY.

EVERY age, as well as every individual, owes its intellectual and spiritual vitality to the dominating and fructifying influence of some one comprehensive idea. The present age owes the greater portion of its mental life to the principle of evolution—an idea which has become the very atmosphere of all enquiry in the domain of art, of science, and of religion. In the popular consciousness it is accepted without dissent that the principle of evolution first appeared in its application by Darwin to the facts of biology, and that its extension to the sphere of mental life was an afterthought. As a matter of fact, however, the systematic and more pregnant application of the principle in the domain of history, of art, of philosophy, and of religion, had been made by Hegel almost half a century before the time of Darwin; and even Hegel cannot legitimately lay claim to its discovery. Nevertheless, it lends such a living interest to the past development of all organisms, institutions, and creeds, that it has now become a difficult matter to put ourselves in the place of those who were without the idea.

The historical study of philosophy and religion has led to a deeper insight into their nature and the necessity of both for the human spirit, and has revealed their perennial existence in that the object of both is the most deep-seated and radical impulse of the human mind. Both breathe, as it were, an ever new and immortal life. It is this conception of development that has caused the history of philosophy to be considered a part of philosophy itself. In place, too, of the negligence formerly bestowed, there is an increasing appreciation of the different systems which the history of philosophy presents as being the progressive effort of the human spirit towards a fully articulated conception of the world as rational, and as having as their principle some one branch of the same universe of thought. Carlyle said that each world-theory was "telling the universe what o'clock it is." Yet here, as in the realms of art and religion, there has been the spiritual ebb and flow; but with each return there has always been advance. "The refutation of a system," says Hegel,