

THE MYSTERY OF LIFE.

“**M**ATTER and Force” seems the watchword of modern science; and not without reason, for by these magic words she has exorcised the host of potent spirits which during past ages ruled in the heavens, the earth and the sea, and even tyrannized over man himself. But while science has driven the gnomes from their subterranean realms, and swept the dæmons from their rule over the planets, installing force in their place, there is danger lest she claim for force too wide a kingdom, giving us one despot for many. While we cannot help seeing the beauty of fitness, of law and order, in the inanimate things around us, while we cannot but admire the mathematical precision of the forms which matter under the guidance of force assumes in a crystal, yet we feel that this endless rule of force has become tyranny; we have no sympathy with lifeless matter in its passive obedience to inexorable law; we long for something lawless.

Life is the only rebel against the stern slavery of nature's laws throughout the wide universe; and, accordingly, not one of us, as a free man, can help having a feeling of sympathetic interest in anything which lives. We may admire the regular form and flashing brilliance of a crystal, but how different the feeling with which we look upon a living creature, be it plant or animal, not passively influenced from without, but utilizing every advantageous circumstance and struggling against every hostile one. Hostile circumstances may be too strong for it but while life lasts it struggles on.

Life force is to us the most important of all forces, yet the one of which we know the least. One by one we are solving the mysteries of inanimate nature; we even catch the errant influences, light, heat and electricity, and force them to tell us what they are, and what tidings they bring from the infinity beyond; but life—that presence which dwells in us and around us, which is the very essence of ourselves, though the best minds of all ages have pondered over it, though the best