

The Riddle of the Universe: At the Close of the Nineteenth Century



Those readers who know the authors other writings can easily anticipate the character of the pages within this book, which are founded upon the reaction of thought, brought about in consequence of scientific research and its results during the closing century. To quote the translator, Ernst Haeckel herein summarizes the evidence for the evolution of the mind in a masterly and profoundly interesting fashion. The author himself considers this work, *The Riddle of the Universe*, collates and marks the close of his studies on the monistic conception of the universe. He says that the earlier plan, projected by him many years ago, of constructing a complete system of monistic philosophy on the basis of evolution cannot now be carried into effect, owing to his failing strength. He adds that being wholly a child of the nineteenth century, with its close I draw the line under my lifes work. There is a touch of sadness in these words, which we trust is only caused by temporary indisposition at the time of writing. The scheme of the book before us is a brilliant review of the labours and discoveries of most of the important investigators in the field of scientific research. These are collated and applied by the author to the construction of a philosophy of which he is the apostle. The subjects touched upon by him are briefly: the nature of the problem of the universe, including the condition of civilisation and thought at the close of the nineteenth century; he fundamental importance of anatomy, both human and comparative; the cellular theory with regard to mans place in Nature; the development of the study of physiology from the Middle Ages; embryonic development and the theories of preformation and scatulation; the history of our species, with an account of the fossil *Pithecanthropus* of Dubois; the nature of the soul; psychic gradations; the embryology of the soul; the phylogeny of the soul; consciousness, giving the various

theories of Descartes, Darwin, Schopenhauer, Fechner, and Schultze; the immortality of the soul; the law of substance, including the chemical law of the constancy of matter and the physical law of the conservation of energy; the evolution of the world; the unity of Nature; God and the world; knowledge and belief; science and Christianity; monistic religion and ethics: the solution of the world problems ; and a brief conclusion, in which he points out that the number of world-riddles has been continually diminishing in the course of the nineteenth century, through the progress of a truer knowledge of Nature. Yet, as says the author, one comprehensive riddle of the universe still remainsthe problem of substance, otherwise the Cosmos. The author goes on to say we do not know the thing in itself that lies behind the knowable phenomena of matter and energy by which the universe is continued.

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