

forces—in that inextricable net-work of organisms by turns developed and destroyed—each step that we make in the more intimate knowledge of nature leads us to the entrance of new labyrinths; but the excitement produced by a presentiment of discovery, the vague intuition of the mysteries to be unfolded, and the multiplicity of the paths before us, all tend to stimulate the exercise of thought in every stage of knowledge. The discovery of each separate law of nature leads to the establishment of some other more general law, or at least indicates to the intelligent observer its existence. Nature, as a celebrated physiologist* has defined it, and as the word was interpreted by the Greeks and Romans, is “that which is ever growing and ever unfolding itself in new forms.”

The series of organic types becomes extended or perfected in proportion as hitherto unknown regions are laid open to our view by the labors and researches of travelers and observers; as living organisms are compared with those which have disappeared in the great revolutions of our planet; and as microscopes are made more perfect, and are more extensively and efficiently employed. In the midst of this immense variety, and this periodic transformation of animal and vegetable productions, we see incessantly revealed the primordial mystery of all organic development, that same great problem of *metamorphosis* which Göthe has treated with more than common sagacity, and to the solution of which man is urged by his desire of reducing vital forms to the smallest number of fundamental types. As men contemplate the riches of nature, and see the mass of observations incessantly increasing before them, they become impressed with the intimate conviction that the surface and the interior of the earth, the depths of the ocean, and the regions of air will still, when thousands and thousands of years have passed away, open to the scientific observer untrodden paths of discovery. The regret of Alexander can not be applied to the progress of observation and intelligence.† General considerations, whether they treat of the agglomeration of matter in the heavenly bodies, or of the geographical distribution of terrestrial organisms, are not only in themselves more attractive than special studies, but they also afford superior advantages to those who are unable to devote much time to occupations of this nature. The different branches of the study of natural history are only accessible in certain positions of social life, and do not, at every sea-

* Carus, *Von den Urtheilen des Knochen und Schalen Gerüsts*, 1828
 † Plut., in *Vita Alex. Magni*, cap. 7