

CHAPTER X.

ON THE VITALISTIC VIEW OF NATURE.

IN the foregoing chapters, where I have treated of the several distinct aspects of nature which have become helpful in science, I have always used the word nature in its widest sense as comprising everything which is revealed to us by our external senses, directly or indirectly.

The title of the present chapter may suggest to some of my readers that I am now narrowing down the meaning of the word,—the vitalistic view of nature being possible only where life is present. The astronomer might say, Life is only known to exist in an infinitesimally small portion of the universe, on the surface of our planet. This infinitesimal area has nevertheless for us the greatest importance, inasmuch as all that we know of the larger outlying world is only won by inference from observations made in this restricted portion. Independently of this, the conception of life itself has always fluctuated between the two extremes of considering it as a universal property of all matter, or on the other hand as quite a casual and accidental occurrence attached to conditions which, from a wider point of