

life has—as an inevitable corollary—come more and more into prominence. It has been the subject of much discussion, as a phenomenon which is felt to require a mechanical explanation.

The problem of the continuity in time of the forms and properties of living matter forced itself on the great propounder of the modern theory of Descent, on Darwin. He looked upon the principle of “Reversion”¹—this power of calling back to life long-lost characters—as the most wonderful of all the attributes of inheritance.”

52.
“Pan-
genesis.”

At the end of his second great work, ten years after the appearance of the ‘Origin of Species,’ he ventured on a hypothetical explanation, his theory of “Pangenesis,” “which implies that the whole organisation, in the sense of every atom or unit, reproduces itself; hence ovules and pollen-grains, the fertilised seed or egg, as well as birds, include and consist of a multitude of germs thrown off from each separate atom of the organism.”² This idea, as the author himself admitted, and as has since frequently been pointed out, was not fundamentally new: it had been anticipated by Buffon in his celebrated “organic molecules,” and since Darwin it has been restated and adapted in various modified forms. It is hardly an explanation, but it is a statement which emphasises the great fact of modern biology,—the fact brought out by the cellular theory, that the units of life are not the large visible organisms which were formerly studied by preference, but the innumerable, infinitesimal living beings

¹ ‘Animals and Plants under Domestication,’ vol. ii. p. 372.

² ‘Animals and Plants under

Domestication,’ chap. 27, vol. ii. p. 358.