

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE NATURE OF CERTAINTY.

I AM setting out to inquire what we mean by *certain* knowledge, and under what conditions, if any, we may expect to secure it. The question has sometimes been put as a question about *necessary* knowledge. It is not obvious, however, that necessary and certain mean the same thing; and I may therefore start by considering 'necessary' truth. This is a term which plays so important a part in philosophy that many philosophers refuse to call anything knowledge which falls short of it.

The most obvious meaning of necessity is that of formal logic. Certain propositions, namely, are found to involve as part of their meaning another proposition; and the last then is logically necessary, in that, so long as we hold the premises true, and keep our meaning unchanged, we cannot possibly deny it. Practically, of course, we are often able to deny things that logically we are bound to accept, because we can refuse to see the identity involved; we either forget all about the premises while we are denying the conclusion, or we hold our ideas so loosely and vaguely that we hardly know just what we do mean, or we slip inadvertently into a different, though a definite, meaning. There is nothing to prevent a man from doing any of these things if he chooses, except the fact that by so doing he sets up different rules of the argumentative game from his fellows, and thus loses the advantages of success in argument. But when he really takes the trouble to realize clearly his own meaning, he finds it impossible to refuse to assent to the claims of logical necessity. If he sees