

THE
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE PROBLEM OF METAPHYSICS.¹

MANY tendencies in recent thought indicate a revived interest in the problem of metaphysics. While philosophers for the last few decades have never wholly neglected the problem, their treatment has been, until very recently, largely historical. Old theories have been restated in the light of renewed study, but the statements have usually followed traditional lines which had become fixed. There have been few instances of attempts to state and solve the metaphysical problem as an immediate problem of human experience. But the recent work in logic and epistemology, with its return to the immediate facts of life for its subject matter, has tended to turn our attention to the same source for the study of metaphysics. The work of science in criticising its fundamental conceptions has been largely metaphysical in its character, even when writers like Mach and Brooks repudiate, with feeling, the imputation. *Energy* begins to take its place along with *matter* and *spirit* as a metaphysical concept indicative of the nature of reality. These newer tendencies have something of scorn for traditional and historical philosophy. With a boast, akin to that of Descartes, they would claim to be without presupposition, without hypothesis, and without substantial dependence on the past. But this is an idle boast. These newer tendencies are what they are because of the history of thought which has preceded them. They get their freshness because much of the work of the past has won general recognition, and it is, consequently, possible to

¹ Read as the Presidential Address at the third annual meeting of the Western Philosophical Association, April 10, 1903.