

MR. CHARLES S. PEIRCE'S ONSLAUGHT ON THE DOCTRINE OF NECESSITY.

THE problem of necessity lurks at the bottom of all problems, and according as we accept or reject the idea of necessity we shall be led to two entirely different world-conceptions.

The conception of indeterminism generally offers itself first to the doubting mind ; and it is apparently a pleasant idea. It promises freedom, it leaves room for the imagination, it makes the world and its possibilities wide, much wider than it could be on the plan of determinism. Determinism is at first sight an oppressive notion and we naturally shrink from it. It seems to destroy the freedom of the will and all moral responsibility. From infinite possibilities it narrows the world down to one single actuality ; and thus it seems to destroy all the charms of life.

The former view may be represented as conceiving the all-power of the whole in which and through which we live as a well meaning and yielding ruler or a kind-hearted parent who if strongly plied with prayer, will for a trifle in order to please an importune favorite change his decisions. The dispensations of his government will be full of exceptions, of private cabinet decrees, of counter orders and irregularities. The latter view, however, would represent the entirety of the All as an inexorable and uncompromising sovereign, or as a severe educator, a stern father who unflinchingly clings to his principles. He leaves full independence to his children, he does not prevent their mistakes, yet rigidly lets them bear the consequences of their actions. He never answers prayers except that the prayer itself has its educating effects upon him who prays ; but he