PURPOSE AND GENERAL CONDITION OF THE ANIMATED CREATION.

We have now to inquire how this view of the constitution and origin of nature bears upon the condition of man upon the earth, and his relation to supra-mundane things.

That enjoyment is the proper attendant of animal existence is pressed upon us by all that we see and all we experience. Everywhere we perceive in the lower creatures, in their ordinary condition, symptoms of enjoyment. Their whole being is a system of needs, the supplying of which is gratification, and of faculties, the exercise of which is pleasurable. When we consult our own sensations, we find that, even in a sense of a healthy performance of all the functions of the animal economy, God has furnished us with an innocent and

very high enjoyment. The mere quiet consciousness of a healthy play of the mental functions—a mind at ease with itself and all around it—is in like manner extremely agreeable. This negative class of enjoyments, it may be remarked, is likely to be even more extensively experienced by the lower animals than by man, at least in the proportion of their absolute endowments, as their mental and bodily functions are much less liable to derangement than ours. To find the world constituted on this principle is only what in reason we would expect. We cannot conceive that so vast a system could have been created for a contrary purpose. No averagely constituted human being would, in his own limited sphere of action, think of producing a similar system upon an opposite principle. But to form so vast a range of being, and to make being everywhere a source of gratification, is conformable to our ideas of a Creator in whom we are constantly discovering traits of a nature, of which our own is but a faint and far-cast shadow at the best.

It appears at first difficult to reconcile with this idea the many miseries which we see all sentient beings, ourselves included, occasionally enduring. How, the sage has asked in every age, should a

Being so transcendently kind, have allowed of so large an admixture of evil in the condition of his creatures? Do we not at length find an answer to a certain extent satisfactory, in the view which has now been given of the constitution of nature? We there see the Deity operating in the most august of his works by fixed laws, an arrangement which, it is clear, only admits of the main and primary results being good, but disregards exceptions. Now the mechanical laws are so definite in their purposes, that no exceptions ever take place in that department; if there is a certain quantity of nebulous matter to be agglomerated and divided and set in motion as a planetary system, it will be so with hair's-breadth accuracy, and cannot be otherwise. But the laws presiding over meteorology, life, and mind, are necessarily less definite, as they have to produce a great variety of mutually related results. Left to act independently of each other, each according to its separate commission, and each with a wide range of potentiality to be modified by associated conditions, they can only have effects generally beneficial: often there must be an interference of one law with another, often a law will chance to operate in excess, or upon a wrong object, and thus evil

will be produced. Thus, winds are generally useful in many ways, and the sea is useful as a means of communication between one country and another; but the natural laws which produce winds are of indefinite range of action, and sometimes are unusually concentrated in space or in time, so as to produce storms and hurricanes, by which much damage is done; the sea may be by these causes violently agitated, so that many barks and many lives perish. Here, it is evident, the evil is only exceptive. Suppose, again, that a boy, in the course of the lively sports proper to his age, suffers a fall which injures his spine, and renders him a cripple for life. Two things have been concerned in the case: first, the love of violent exercise, and second, the law of gravitation. Both of these things are good in the main. In the rash enterprises and rough sports in which boys engage, they prepare their bodies and minds for the hard tasks of life. By gravitation, all moveable things, our own bodies included, are kept stable on the surface of the earth. But when it chances that the playful boy loses his hold (we shall say) of the branch of a tree, and has no solid support immediately below, the law of gravitation unrelentingly pulls him to the ground, and thus he is

hurt. Now it was not a primary object of gravitation to injure boys; but gravitation could not but operate in the circumstances, its nature being to be universal and invariable. The evil is, therefore, only a casual exception from something in the main good.

The same explanation applies to even the most conspicuous of the evils which afflict society. War, it may be said, and said truly, is a tremendous example of evil, in the misery, hardship, waste of human life, and mis-spending of human energies, which it occasions. But what is it that produces war? Certain tendencies of human nature, as keen assertion of a supposed right, resentment of supposed injury, acquisitiveness, desire of admiration, combativeness, or mere love of excitement. All of these are tendencies which are every day, in a legitimate extent of action, producing great and indispensable benefits to us. Man would be a tame, indolent, unserviceable being without them, and his fate would be starvation. War, then, huge evil though it be, is, after all, but the exceptive case, a casual misdirection of properties and powers essentially good. God has given us the tendencies for a benevolent purpose. He has only not laid down any absolute obstruction to

our misuse of them. That were an arrangement of a kind which he has nowhere made. But he has established many laws in our nature which tend to lessen the frequency and destructiveness of these abuses. Our reason comes to see that war is purely an evil, even to the conqueror. Benevolence interposes to make its ravages less mischievous to human comfort, and less destructive to human life. Men begin to find that their more active powers can be exercised with equal gratification on legitimate objects; for example, in overcoming the natural difficulties of their path through life, or in a generous spirit of emulation in a line of duty beneficial to themselves and their fellow-creatures. Thus, war at length shrinks into a comparatively narrow compass, though there certainly is no reason to suppose that it will be at any early period, if ever, altogether dispensed with, while man's constitution remains as it is. In considering an evil of this kind, we must not limit our view to our own or any past time. Placed upon the earth with faculties prepared to act, but inexperienced, and with the more active propensities necessarily in great force to suit the condition of the globe, man was apt to misuse his powers much in this way at first, compared with

what he is likely to do when he advances into a condition of civilization. In the scheme of providence, thousands of years of frequent warfare, all the so-called glories which fill history, may be only an exception to the general rule.

The sex passion in like manner leads to great evils; but the evils are only an exception from the vast mass of good connected with this affection. Providence has seen it necessary to make very ample provision for the preservation and utmost possible extension of all species. The aim seems to be to diffuse existence as widely as possible, to fill up every vacant piece of space with some sentient being to be a vehicle of enjoyment. Hence this passion is conferred in great force. But the relation between the number of beings, and the means of supporting them, is only on the footing of general law. There may be occasional discrepancies between the laws operating for the multiplication of individuals, and the laws operating to supply them with the means of subsistence, and evils will be endured in consequence, even in our own highly favoured species. But against all these evils, and against those numberless vexations which have arisen in all ages from the attachment of the sexes, place the vast amount of happiness which

is derived from this source—the basis of the whole circle of the domestic affections, the sweetening principle of life, the prompter of all our most generous feelings, and even of our most virtuous resolves—and every ill that can be traced to it is but as dust in the balance. And here, also, we must be on our guard against judging from what we see in the world at a particular era. As reason and the higher sentiments of man's nature increase in force, this passion is put under better regulation, so as to lessen many of the evils connected with it. The civilized man is more able to give it due control; his attachments are less the result of impulse; he studies more the weal of his partner and offspring. There are even some of the resentful feelings connected in early society with love, such as hatred of successful rivalry, and jealousy, which almost disappear in an advanced stage of civilization. The evils springing, in our own species at least, from this passion, may therefore be an exception mainly peculiar to a particular term of the world's progress, and which may be expected to decrease greatly in amount.

With respect, again, to disease, so prolific a cause of suffering to man, the human constitution is merely a complicated but regular process in

electro-chemistry, which goes on well, and is a source of continual gratification, so long as nothing occurs to interfere with it injuriously, but which is liable every moment to be deranged by various external agencies, when it becomes a source of pain, and, if the injury be severe, ceases to be capable of retaining life. It may be readily admitted that the evils experienced in this way are very great; but, after all, such experiences are no more than occasional, and not necessarily frequent —exceptions from a general rule of which the direct action is to confer happiness. The human constitution might have been made of a more hardy character; but we always see hardiness and insensibility go together, and it may be of course presumed that we only could have purchased this immunity from suffering at the expense of a large portion of that delicacy in which lie some of our most agreeable sensations. Or man's faculties might have been restricted to definiteness of action, as is greatly the case with those of the lower animals, and thus we should have been equally safe from the aberrations which lead to disease; but in that event we should have been incapable of acting to so many different purposes as we are, and of the many high enjoyments which the varied action of

our faculties places in our power: we should not, in short, have been human beings, but merely on a level with the inferior animals. Thus, it appears, that the very fineness of man's constitution, that which places him in such a high relation to the mundane economy, and makes him the vehicle of so many exquisitely delightful sensations—it is this which makes him liable to the sufferings of disease. It might be said, on the other hand, that the noxiousness of the agencies producing disease might have been diminished or extinguished; but the probability is, that this could not have been done without such a derangement of the whole economy of nature as would have been attended with more serious evils. For example—a large class of diseases are the result of effluvia from decaying organic matter. This kind of matter is known to be extremely useful, when mixed with earth, in favouring the process of vegetation. Supposing the noxiousness to the human constitution done away with, might we not also lose that important quality which tends so largely to increase the food raised from the ground? Perhaps (as has been suggested) the noxiousness is even a matter of special design, to induce us to put away decaying organic substances into the earth, where

they are calculated to be so useful. Now man has reason to enable him to see that such substances are beneficial under one arrangement, and noxious in the other. He is, as it were, commanded to take the right method in dealing with it. In point of fact, men do not always take this method, but allow accumulations of noxious matter to gather close about their dwellings, where they generate fevers and agues. But their doing so may be regarded as only a temporary exception from the operation of mental laws, the general tendency of which is to make men adopt the proper measures. And these measures will probably be in time universally adopted, so that one extensive class of diseases will be altogether or nearly abolished.

Another large class of diseases spring from mismanagement of our personal economy. Eating to excess, eating and drinking what is noxious, disregard to that cleanliness which is necessary for the right action of the functions of the skin, want of fresh air for the supply of the lungs, undue, excessive, and irregular indulgence of the mental affections, are all of them recognised modes of creating that derangement of the system in which disease consists. Here also it may be said that a limitation of the mental faculties to definite mani-

festations (*vulgo*, instincts) might have enabled us to avoid many of these errors; but here again we are met by the consideration that, if we had been so endowed, we should have been only as the lower animals are, wanting that transcendently higher character of sensation and power, by which our enjoyments are made so much greater. In making the desire of food, for example, with us an indefinite mental manifestation, instead of the definite one, which it is amongst the lower animals, the Creator has given us a means of deriving far greater gratifications from food (consistently with health) than the lower animals appear to be capable of. He has also given us reason to act as a guiding and controlling power over this and other propensities, so that they may be prevented from becoming causes of malady. We can see that excess is injurious, and are thus prompted to moderation. We can see that all the things which we feel inclined to take are not healthful, and are thus exhorted to avoid what are pernicious. We can also see that a cleanly skin and a constant supply of pure air are necessary to the proper performance of some of the most important of the organic functions, and thus are stimulated to frequent ablution, and to a right ventilation of our parlours

and sleeping apartments. And so on with the other causes of disease. Reason may not operate very powerfully to these purposes in an early state of society, and prodigious evils may therefore have been endured from disease in past ages; but these are not necessarily to be endured always. As civilization advances, reason acquires a greater ascendancy; the causes of the evils are seen and avoided; and disease shrinks into a comparatively narrow compass. The experience of our own country places this in a striking light. In the middle ages, when large towns had no police regulations, society was every now and then scourged by pestilence. The third of the people of Europe are said to have been carried off by one epidemic. Even in London the annual mortality has greatly sunk within a century. The improvement in human life, which has taken place since the construction of the Northampton tables by Dr. Price, is equally remarkable. Modern tables still shew a prodigious mortality among the young in all civilized countries—evidently a result of some prevalent error in the usual modes of rearing them. But to remedy this evil there is the sagacity of the human mind, and the sense to adopt any reformed plans which may be shewn to be necessary.

By a change in the management of an orphan institution in London, during the last fifty years, an immense reduction in the mortality took place. We may of course hope to see measures devised and adopted for producing a similar improvement of infant life throughout the world at large.

In this part of our subject, the most difficult point certainly lies in those occurrences of disease where the afflicted individual has been in no degree concerned in bringing the visitation upon himself. Daily experience shews us infectious disease arising in a place where the natural laws in respect of cleanliness are neglected, and then spreading into regions where there is no blame of this kind. We then see the innocent suffering equally with those who may be called the guilty. Nay, the benevolent physician who comes to succour the miserable beings whose error may have caused the mischief, is sometimes seen to fall a victim to it, while many of his patients recover. We are also only too familiar with the transmission of diseases from erring parents to innocent children, who, accordingly suffer, and perhaps die prematurely, as it were for the sins of others. After all, however painful such cases may be in contemplation, they cannot be regarded in any other light than as ex-

ceptions from arrangements, the general working of which is beneficial.

With regard to the innocence of the suffering parties, there is one important consideration which is pressed upon us from many quarters, namely—that moral conditions have not the least concern in the working of these simply physical laws. These laws proceed with an entire independence of all such conditions, and desirably so, for otherwise there could be no certain dependence placed upon them. Thus it may happen that two persons ascending a piece of scaffolding, the one a virtuous, the other a vicious man, the former, being the less cautious of the two, ventures upon an insecure place, falls, and is killed, while the other, choosing a better footing, remains uninjured. It is not in what we can conceive of the nature of things, that there should be a special exemption from the ordinary laws of matter, to save this virtuous man. So it might be that, of two physicians, attending fever cases, in a mean part of a large city, the one, an excellent citizen, may stand in such a position with respect to the beds of the patients as to catch the infection, of which he dies in a few days, while the other, a bad husband and father, and who, unlike the other, only attends such cases with selfish ends, takes

care to be as much as possible out of the stream of infection, and accordingly escapes. In both of these cases man's sense of good and evil—his faculty of conscientiousness—would incline him to destine the vicious man to destruction and save the virtuous. But the Great Ruler of Nature does not act on such principles. He has established laws for the operation of inanimate matter, which are quite unswerving, so that when we know them, we have only to act in a certain way with respect to them, in order to obtain all the benefits and avoid all the evils connected with them. He has likewise established moral laws in our nature, which are equally unswerving, (allowing for their wider range of action,) and from obedience to which unfailing good is to be derived. But the two sets of laws are independent of each other. Obedience to each gives only its own proper advantage, not the advantage proper to the other. Hence it is that virtue forms no protection against the evils connected with the physical laws, while, on the other hand, a man skilled in and attentive to these, but unrighteous and disregardful of his neighbour, is in like manner not protected by his attention to physical circumstances from the proper consequences of neglect or breach of the moral laws.

Thus it is that the innocence of the party suffering for the faults of a parent, or of any other person or set of persons, is evidently a consideration quite apart from that suffering.

It is clear, moreover, from the whole scope of the natural laws, that the individual, as far as the present sphere of being is concerned, is to the Author of Nature a consideration of inferior moment. Everywhere we see the arrangements for the species perfect; the individual is left, as it were, to take his chance amidst the *mêlée* of the various laws affecting him. If he be found inferiorly endowed, or ill befalls him, there was at least no partiality against him. The system has the fairness of a lottery, in which every one has the like chance of drawing the prize.

Yet it is also to be observed that few evils are altogether unmixed. God, contemplating apparently the unbending action of his great laws, has established others which appear to be designed to have a compensating, a repairing, and a consoling effect. Suppose, for instance, that, from a defect in the power of development in a mother, her offspring is ushered into the world destitute of some of the most useful members, or blind, or deaf, or of imperfect intellect, there is ever to be

found in the parents and other relatives, and in the surrounding public, a sympathy with the sufferer, which tends to make up for the deficiency, so that he is in the long run not much a loser. Indeed, the benevolence implanted in our nature seems to be an arrangement having for one of its principal objects to cause us, by sympathy and active aid, to remedy the evils unavoidably suffered by our fellow-creatures in the course of the operation of the other natural laws. And even in the sufferer himself, it is often found that a defect in one point is made up for by an extra power in another. The blind come to have a sense of touch much more acute than those who see. Persons born without hands have been known to acquire a power of using their feet for a number of the principal offices usually served by that member. I need hardly say how remarkably fatuity is compensated by the more than usual regard paid to the children born with it by their parents, and the zeal which others usually feel to protect and succour such persons. In short, we never see evil of any kind take place where there is not some remedy or compensating principle ready to interfere for its alleviation. And there

can be no doubt that in this manner suffering of all kinds is very much relieved.

We may, then, regard the globes of space as theatres designed for the residence of animated sentient beings, placed there with this as their first and most obvious purpose—namely, to be sensible of enjoyments from the exercise of their faculties in relation to external things. The faculties of the various species are very different, but the happiness of each depends on the harmony there may be between its particular faculties and its particular circumstances. For instance, place the small-brained sheep or ox in a good pasture, and it fully enjoys this harmony of relation; but man, having many more faculties, cannot be thus contented. Besides having a sufficiency of food and bodily comfort, he must have entertainment for his intellect, whatever be its grade, objects for the domestic and social affections, objects for the sentiments. He is also a progressive being, and what pleases him to-day may not please him to-morrow; but, in each case he demands a sphere of appropriate conditions in order to be happy. By virtue of his superior organization, his enjoyments are much higher and more varied than those of any of the

lower animals; but the very complexity of circumstances affecting him renders it at the same time unavoidable, that his nature should be often inharmoniously placed and disagreeably affected, and that he should therefore be unhappy. Still unhappiness amongst mankind is the exception from the rule of their condition, and an exception which is capable of almost infinite diminution, by virtue of the improving reason of man, and the experience which he acquires in working out the problems of society.

To secure the immediate means of happiness it would seem to be necessary for men first to study with all care the constitution of nature, and, secondly, to accommodate themselves to that constitution, so as to obtain all the realizable advantages from acting conformably to it, and to avoid all likely evils from disregarding it. It will be of no use to sit down and expect that things are to operate of their own accord, or through the direction of a partial deity, for our benefit; equally so were it to expose ourselves to palpable dangers, under the notion that we shall, for some reason, have a dispensation or exemption from them: we must endeavour so to place ourselves, and so to act, that the arrangements which Providence has

made impartially for all may be in our favour, and not against us; such are the only means by which we can obtain good and avoid evil here below. And, in doing this, it is especially necessary that care be taken to avoid interfering with the like efforts of other men, beyond what may have been agreed upon by the mass as necessary for the general good. Such interferences, tending in any way to injure the body, property, or peace of a neighbour, or to the injury of society in general, tend very much to reflect evil upon ourselves, through the re-action which they produce in the feelings of our neighbour and of society, and also the offence which they give to our own conscientiousness and benevolence. On the other hand, when we endeavour to promote the efforts of our fellow-creatures to attain happiness, we produce a re-action of the contrary kind, the tendency of which is towards our own benefit. The one course of action tends to the injury, the other to the benefit of ourselves and others. By the one course the general design of the Creator towards his creatures is thwarted; by the other it is favoured. And thus we can readily see the most substantial grounds for regarding all moral emotions and doings as divine in their nature, and as

a means of rising to and communing with God. Obedience is not selfishness, which it would otherwise be—it is worship. The merest barbarians have a glimmering sense of this philosophy, and it continually shines out more and more clearly in the public mind, as a nation advances in intelligence. Nor are individuals alone concerned here. The same rule applies as between one great body or class of men and another, and also between nations. Thus if one set of men keep others in the condition of slaves—this being a gross injustice to the subjected party, the mental manifestations of that party to the masters will be such as to mar the comfort of their lives; the minds of the masters themselves will be degraded by the association with beings so degraded; and thus, with some immediate or apparent benefit from keeping slaves, there will be in a far greater degree an experience of evil. So also, if one portion of a nation, engaged in a particular department of industry, grasp at some advantages injurious to the other sections of the people, the first effect will be an injury to those other portions of the nation, and the second a re-active injury to the injurers, making their guilt their punishment. And so when one nation commits an aggression upon the property or rights

of another, or even pursues towards it a sordid or ungracious policy, the effects are sure to be redoubled evil from the offended party. All of these things are under laws which make the effects, on a large range, absolutely certain; and an individual, a party, a people, can no more act unjustly with safety, than I could with safety place my leg in the track of a coming wain, or attempt to fast thirty days. We have been constituted on the principle of only being able to realize happiness for ourselves when our fellow-creatures are also happy; we must therefore both do to others only as we would have others to do to us, and endeavour to promote their happiness as well as our own, in order to find ourselves truly comfortable in this field of existence. These are words which God speaks to us as truly through his works, as if we heard them uttered in his own voice from heaven.

It will occur to every one, that the system here unfolded does not imply the most perfect conceivable love or regard on the part of the Deity towards his creatures. Constituted as we are, feeling how vain our efforts often are to attain happiness or avoid calamity, and knowing that much evil does unavoidably befall us from no fault

of ours, we are apt to feel that this is a dreary view of the Divine economy; and before we have looked farther, we might be tempted to say, Far rather let us cling to the idea, so long received, that the Deity acts continually for special occasions, and gives such directions to the fate of each individual as he thinks meet; so that, when sorrow comes to us, we shall have at least the consolation of believing that it is imposed by a Father who loves us, and who seeks by these means to accomplish our ultimate good. Now, in the first place, if this be an untrue notion of the Deity and his ways, it can be of no real benefit to us; and, in the second, it is proper to inquire if there be necessarily in the doctrine of natural law any peculiarity calculated materially to affect our hitherto supposed relation to the Deity. It may be that, while we are committed to take our chance in a natural system of undeviating operation, and are left with apparent ruthlessness to endure the consequences of every collision into which we knowingly or unknowingly come with each law of the system, there is a system of Mercy and Grace behind the screen of nature, which is to make up for all casualties endured here, and the very largeness of which is what makes these

casualties a matter of indifference to God. For the existence of such a system, the actual constitution of nature is itself an argument. The reasoning may proceed thus: The system of nature assures us that benevolence is a leading principle in the divine mind. But that system is at the same time deficient in a means of making this benevolence of invariable operation. To reconcile this to the recognised character of the Deity, it is necessary to suppose that the present system is but a part of a whole, a stage in a Great Progress, and that the Redress is in reserve. Another argument here occurs—the economy of nature, beautifully arranged and vast in its extent as it is, does not satisfy even man's idea of what might be; he feels that, if this multiplicity of theatres for the exemplification of such phenomena as we see on earth were to go on for ever unchanged, it would not be worthy of the Being capable of creating it. An endless monotony of human generations, with their humble thinkings and doings, seems an object beneath that august Being. But the mundane economy might be very well as a portion of some greater phenomenon, the rest of which was yet to be evolved. It therefore appears that our system, though it may at first appear at

issue with other doctrines in esteem amongst mankind, tends to come into harmony with them, and even to give them support. I would say, in conclusion, that, even where the two above arguments may fail of effect, there may yet be a faith derived from this view of nature sufficient to sustain us under all sense of the imperfect happiness, the calamities, the woes, and pains of this sphere of being. For let us but fully and truly consider what a system is here laid open to view, and we cannot well doubt that we are in the hands of One who is both able and willing to do us the most entire justice. And in this faith we may well rest at ease, even though life should have been to us but a protracted disease, or though every hope we had built on the secular materials within our reach were felt to be melting from our grasp. Thinking of all the contingencies of this world as to be in time melted into or lost in the greater system, to which the present is only subsidiary, let us wait the end with patience, and be of good cheer.