

did examination. To such an examination I now invite your serious attention.

It is not my object to appeal to the Scriptures to prove the divine benevolence. That were an easy task. So, were this an unfallen world, every object and event would be redolent of God's goodness. But where sin and death abound, that goodness must assume a different aspect, since its unmixed manifestation would work mischief. Now, the point aimed at in this lecture is to ascertain whether natural religion can point out decisive evidence of divine benevolence. We can conceive it quite possible that in a fallen world God might find it necessary so to mingle displays of justice with those of goodness, that man might be in doubt which predominated.

There is another reason for considering this subject apart from Scriptural evidence. We need to establish the doctrine of divine benevolence as a basis on which to rest the evidences of inspiration; or, rather, we want to be able to assume God's benevolence, in arguing for the truth of the Bible, and in judging of its contents. This doctrine, therefore, is one of the most important, as it is certainly the most difficult, in natural theology.

Obviously the first step in this investigation must be to ascertain what is the real state of this world, as a manifestation of the benevolence and justice of God. In other words, we need to ascertain what exhibitions of these attributes are presented to us in nature, and in the economy of Providence, and how much of the evil in the world is to be imputed to man's perversion of the gifts of God. I shall proceed, therefore, to state the main points on this subject which fair and candid reasoning seems to me to sustain. When these points are before us, with a summary of the evidence by which they are supported, we shall be prepared to deduce important conclusions respecting God's character and dispensations, and man's position and destiny.

*In the first place, then, I maintain that benevolence decidedly predominates in the present system of the world.*

Let this proposition be fully understood. It does not mean that there is no mixture of evil in the operations of nature, but only that good decidedly overbalances the evil. And by the operations of nature I mean those processes resulting from natural laws, which are uninfluenced by the perverseness of