

difference to their happiness, would not have introduced this power of adaptation into their natures; for it is certain that their continued existence might have been secured in some other way, had no reference been had to their happiness.

I base my fourth argument for the predominance of benevolence, in the arrangements of nature, upon the aggregate results of the most destructive and terrific agencies which she employs.

The immediate effects of these agencies are often so appalling and so unmixed with good, that men view them only as penal inflictions; or, when the sufferers are unconscious of guilt, as mysterious dispensations of evil, which need the light of another world to reconcile with infinite benevolence. When the tornado or sirocco's hot breath sweeps over the devoted land; when the river overflows its banks, and ingulfs the defenceless inhabitants along its course, or the giant waves of the ocean roll in upon the devoted shore; when the heaving earthquake overturns in a moment vast cities, and the earth swallows them in its bosom; or when the volcano pours out its suffocating smoke and its scorching lava, and obliterates from earth the defenceless town, as once Herculaneum and Pompeii were converted into petrified cities: in the midst of such desolating agencies, where can we discover a gleam of benevolence? Not surely in the immediate effects. But suppose the tornado, the flood, the earthquake, and the volcano are essential to the preservation of the earth from a far wider ruin, so that, in fact, while they destroy some property and life, they preserve a far greater amount, and are essential to such preservation, why is it not benevolence that gives a slight play to these terrific elements, while it checks their wild war so soon as the requisite security has been obtained? When the storm has sufficiently purified the atmosphere, when the flood has enriched the wide alluvial fields, and the earthquake and the volcano have given vent to the pent-up fires in the earth, so that they no longer threaten to rend a continent asunder, then a restraining power is put upon them, and they are allowed no more range than is essential to the general good. We may not, indeed, see why the good could not be secured without the evil. But this question leads to the inquiry, whether the present system of the universe is the best possible; and that it is so we have the guarantee of the divine perfections. Those