

circumstances are but combinations of effects, over the causes of which we have no control. We did not choose a country for ourselves, nor yet a condition in life; nor did we determine our modicum of intellect, or our amount of passion; we did not impart its gravity to the weightier part of our nature, or give expansion to the lighter; nor are our instincts of our own planting. How, then, being thus as much the creatures of necessity as the denizens of the wild and forest,—as thoroughly under the agency of fixed, unalterable causes as the dead matter around us;—why are we yet the subjects of a retributive system, and accountable for all our actions?”

“You quarrel with Calvinism,” I said; “and seem one of the most thoroughgoing necessitarians I ever knew.”

“Not so,” he replied. “Though my judgment cannot disprove these conclusions, my heart cannot acquiesce in them; though I see that I am as certainly the subject of laws that exist and operate independent of my will as the dead matter around me, I feel, with a certainty quite as great, that I am a free, accountable creature. It is according to the scope of my entire reason that I should deem myself bound; it is according to the constitution of my whole nature that I should feel myself free. And in this consists the great, the fearful problem,—a problem which both reason and revelation propound; but the truths which can alone solve it seem to lie beyond the horizon of darkness, and we vex ourselves in vain. ’Tis a sort of moral asymptote; but its lines, instead of approaching through all space without meeting, seem receding through all space and yet meet.”

“Robert, my bairn,” said my aunt, “I fear you are wasting your strength on these mysteries, to your ain hurt. Did ye no see, in the last storm, when ye staid