

and houses and churches; and closing on them with a snap, and smashing them to pieces; and then perhaps opening again, and casting them out with a flood of dirty water from some river or lake that had been gulped down with them. Now, all this, and much more, is literally true, and has happened over and over again; and when we have imagined it all, we shall have formed a tolerably correct notion of some at least of these visitations. And perhaps some may have been tempted to ask why and how it is that God has permitted this fair earth to be visited with such destruction. It can hardly be for the sins of men: for when these things occur they involve alike the innocent and the guilty; and besides, the volcano and the earthquake were raging on this earth with as much, nay greater violence, thousands and thousands of years before man ever set his foot upon it. But perhaps, on the other hand, it may have occurred to some to ask themselves whether it is not just possible that these ugly affairs are sent among us for some beneficent purpose; or at all events that they may form part and parcel of some great scheme of providential arrangement which is at work for good, and not for ill. A ship sometimes strikes on a rock, and all on board perish; a railway train runs into another, or breaks down, and then wounds and contusions are the order of the day; but nobody doubts that navigation and railway communication are great blessings. None of the great natural provisions for producing good are exempt in their workings from producing occasional mischief. Storms disperse and dilute pesti-