

argument to show that the divine benevolence is not unmixed,) I maintain that the highest virtue and the most consummate prudence cannot avoid all the evils of life.

Such prudence and virtue will not secure any one against many destructive natural agencies and operations to which he is exposed. Miasms productive of fatal disease may contaminate the atmosphere we breathe, unperceived by us; poison may exist in the food which we take as our necessary sustenance; the mechanical violence of the elements, or of gravity, may crush us; the lightning may smite us to the earth; the wild beast may rush from his unnoticed lair as we pass; or the deadly insect, or serpent, may inject its poison into our blood at an unexpected moment; or the floods may overwhelm, or the fire consume us.

Now, although prudence and virtue may defend us against many evils, they afford no security against such as I have named, in very many instances. We are often ignorant of their existence or proximity till we become their victims, and suffering, often intense, is the consequence. Indeed, the greatest of all physical evils, I mean death, is as sure to visit every son and daughter of Adam as any event can be; and nothing but insanity, or its religious synonyme, fanaticism, has ever pretended to be proof against disease and death. You cannot, indeed, point out any particular organ or agency, whose direct object is to produce disease and death; but they are nevertheless the inevitable result of organic operations and agencies in such a world as this.

It will be said, perhaps, that the good resulting to the whole from even the most severe of these sufferings, overbalances the evil, and therefore they are indications of benevolence in such a world as ours. True, as things are, this may be so. But the question is, Why is there such a constitution given to nature as made it necessary to introduce disease, accident, and death? Would not unmixed benevolence have conferred the good, but have withheld the evil? Had there not been something in man's character requiring the discipline of trials, would pure benevolence have sent them? At least, we should suppose that they might all have been avoided by prudence and virtue. Why should benevolence make such severe drawbacks upon the happiness even of the virtuous, if something were not radically wrong in the human constitution?

Thirdly. The great sterility of so large a part of the earth,