

warded and punished, but only that they *may* be so dealt with. The foregoing remarks are a very strong confirmation of the proof of a future state of retribution.

CHAPTER IV.

"Our present life is a probation for a future state."

The moral government which we were speaking about in the preceding chapter, implies, in the notion of it some sort of trial, difficulty or danger. There is a moral possibility of acting wrong as well as right in those who are the subjects of this government. And the doctrine of religion, that the present life is in fact a state of probation for a future one, is rendered credible from its being analogous throughout to the general conduct of God toward us with respect to this world; in which prudence is indispensable to secure our temporal interests; in the same way we are taught that virtue is necessary to secure our eternal interests; and both are put in our own keeping. So that religion points us to a future world, and tells us that the state of trial which we are in, is only a part of a stupendous whole, which scheme has the requirement of antecedent probation for consequent adjustment of misery or happiness. A complaint may be raised that it must be a bad scheme that places great and ultimate good at a goal so hard to reach, considering the frailties of our nature, the feeble attempts we make to seek good, and to eschew and resist evil. "Is it not an intolerable grievance that we should be punished for what is natural, and only rewarded for an obedience which, save in the cases of a select and privileged few, is greatly beyond the reach of nature?" Man may raise obstacles and doubts in regard to the manner in which God is said to deal with him in the future and unseen world. He may impiously call the doctrines promulgated in religion a grievance, and charge them with inconsistency. He who does this, however, should consider that the cry thus uttered against the probationary system, in order to its being plausible, must chord with the events of life transpiring around us. The way to our temporal good is a way of labour and self-denial; the way to our eternal good is beset by similar toils and temptations,—they *may* be the forerunners and the preparatives of our happiness in another state of being.

The causes of our trial, in both capacities, are the same.

I. Something in our external circumstances.

II. Something in our nature.

Our trials, in both these instances, are the same in so far that their effects are identical. Religion tells us that our trials are greatly increased by the bad behaviour of others, by an education which has been wrongly directed, by the indulgence of sloth and the gratification of passion, by bad behaviour, and even by the corruptions of religion; so experience tells us concerning our temporal capacities, that they are increased by a foolish education, by the extravagance and carelessness of others, by mistaken notions concerning temporal happiness, and by our own negligence and folly. In both we behold the same heedlessness of consequences, the same defiant inconsiderateness, and the same mis-judgment. In both cases a future and greater good is sacrificed to present indulgence and present ease.

That this is just, and that even in this state of degradation there is equity, may be vindicated in both cases by the same considerations, viz: That there is no more required of men than they are *able to do*, and we can no more complain of this, with

regard to the God of Providence, than his not creating us higher intelligences; making us nobler beings and giving us other and better advantages. Whatever facts teach us of a state of trial in our natural capacity, makes it possible, probable, although not absolutely certain, that we are in such a state in our moral capacity, and although there may be difficulties connected with it, we are not warranted to banish the doctrine from the field of reflection.

CHAPTER V.

"Our present life is a state of probation, intended for moral discipline."

This chapter treats of nearly the same subject as the former, with only this difference, while the former speaks of probation in a general way, this one speaks of a state of trial as being a state fitted for a particular end. All the reasons for our being placed in such a condition, may at present be beyond our comprehension. The end is to train us in the practice of virtue; to improve us in piety, being requisites for a future state of participation and happiness.

One thing appears certain from experience and from observation, viz: That there must exist an aptitude of accommodation, a correspondence or relations between our mental and physical nature, our passion, appetites and desires, and the condition or state in which we are placed. In this life nature and external circumstances must go hand in hand. There must be a mutual agreement, an alliance formed between the two in order to ensure happiness and even life; in like manner we are taught to believe, and analogy echoes the same doctrines, that there must be some qualifications and character consonant with what must of necessity, be the home of the holy, without which persons cannot but be incapable of the life of "just men made perfect."

Man does not come into the world, as it were fully fledged, possessing all the faculties of mind and body in active and vigorous exercise. He has latent power, but it must be elicited. The germ is placed in the soil of human society, but it requires the influence of sensational experience to cause it to produce fruit, in short we are capable of improvement. Our maker has framed our constitution (I speak of man) such that we are capable by nature of entering new spheres of life, of becoming qualified for states of existence, for which we were once wholly unfit. A new character may be formed by acquirement. We are able to beget new habits each day we live—habits of body and habits of mind. The former created by external acts, and the latter by continual and assiduous culture of inward practical principles.

There is not only the capability for improvement, but also such improvement is necessary to prepare us for the state of life which we must be placed in when we ripen into maturity. Nature has put it within our power to improve ourselves. She has placed us in a condition fitted for it; childhood is a state of discipline for youth; youth for manhood and manhood for old age. Strength of body, and maturity of understanding, are acquired by degrees. Both require continual exercise and attention on the part of beings thus situated, not only in the beginning of their career but also through the whole course of it. As the antecedent parts of life are preparatory to those that follow, so this may be a state of discipline for the world to come, and although we do not apprehend in what way this is so, it does not follow that our ignorance will overthrow this plausible supposition, no more than that because children do not discern how food, exercise, &c., can benefit them, they are not benefited, the fact stands notwithstanding.