

of all. But it may be denied that there is any longing of the human mind for an external revelation. Many who admit that the irrepressible yearning of the human soul towards the Infinite is an argument for the expectation of a secret revelation of God in the depths of the yearning spirit nevertheless refuse to admit the force of this appeal in favour of a revelation coming from above with all the external appendages that belong to the Christian Faith. It is sufficient to reply that this style of argument ignores the fact that the relation of man to God is such as to demand an external communication as well as an internal. If he were, as he should be, at peace with the Object he seeks, the communion with his Maker might be conducted altogether within. Yet even then not altogether within; for the whole universe around him would be full of symbols, the visible revelation of his Creator. But he is, by the very supposition, estranged from God. The original conditions have ceased to exist; and no argument can be based upon them. The unutterable longing to which Christianity responds is that of a guilty spirit; not only dependent on the Supreme, but trembling before Him. Man looks up to heaven—as his Greek name, *ἄνθρωπος* or *ὁ ἄνω ἄνθρωπος*, testifies; but he looks up to an outward Judge and not within to an interior God; and expects and hopes that the Supreme will appear to him and speak to him by some being, or voice, or token. And this is the germ of all revelation. Moreover, it is undeniable that in every age and in every region men have longed for and believed in an external expression of the Divine mind. In fact, Christianity is but one of many responses to man's groaning unutterable towards God. But this leads to a further stage in our credentials, to which what has been said is only introductory.

CORRECTION OF THE RELIGIONS OF MANKIND.

The
Anticipation
of
Mankind.

Religion
in the
Race.

As Divine revelation responds to the spirit in man, so it explains and responds to the great Anticipation of the Human Race, as testified by its universal Religions. This also is a most mighty credential, which may be regarded under several aspects.

1. The Christian Religion explains the religiousness of mankind, and pays respect to the forms in which this has been

expressed. St. Paul, the amplest expositor of Natural Theology, preaches in the Acts, and teaches in the Epistle to the Romans, that the whole world has always been under a Divine education: drawn by God's works of creation to contemplate His power, and by the benefits of His providence to consider His goodness, in order that it might thus be prepared for a third revelation which should display both His power and His goodness in redemption. The Apostle, as the leading representative of this argument, professes only to DECARE or preach,—καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν—the UNKNOWN GOD Whom all the world had been ever consciously or unconsciously seeking: that world which is, as Tertullian said of the human spirit, naturaliter Christianus. He makes God Himself, in a certain sense, the universal *Teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity*, διδάσκαλος ἐθνῶν; and heathenism, like the law, a schoolmaster unto Christ. In other words, this representative of Christianity traces all forms of religious faith and practice among the nations to a yearning for revelation from heaven. And he in fact gives us the argument we now use: the strong presumption from the Consensus Gentium, the consent of all the world, in favour of a communication from God to mankind. For, Christianity, which is revelation made perfect, or rather the only true revelation, appeals to the anticipation it explains. Tracing to their ultimate cause both the truth and the error, it makes both subservient to its own credentials. It must be remembered that the New Testament is in this the successor and continuator of the Old. The whole Bible appeals from beginning to end, that is since the time that external religion began, to the common, tribal or national, instinct of the peoples of the earth. This argument we shall hereafter use in demonstration of the existence of a Divine Source of all things: namely, the very fact that the Bible regards it as already a secret thought, ready to be revealed, in the hearts of all men. Our present argument supposes that the being of God is admitted. And its strength is this, that that God has in every age been training the nations for a full disclosure of Himself. As it is written: *He correcteth the Gentiles*; or places them under discipline.

Acts xviii.
23.

1 Tim. ii.
7.

Ps. xciv.
10.

Elements
of Truth

2. All this has taken for granted that the forms of religion always existing in heathenism have possessed certain elements of

truth. Otherwise they would be worthless as evidence of a universal aspiration towards communion with heaven. Whatever strong assertions we may find in the Old and New Testaments of the doctrinal errors and moral abominations of heathenism, we discern everywhere an acknowledgment of something good lying at their root, of which they are only the perversions. Much truth is tacitly recognised in the sacred traditions of mankind, however waning and ready to perish : that is to say, much truth dispersed among them and variously represented, though no one system may be said to exhibit even the perversions of all truths. Perhaps almost all the great tribal or national expressions of the feeling after the Infinite have more or less paid their tribute to the unity and supremacy of the One Unknown God, with a dim perception of a plurality in that unity ; to the existence of intelligences higher than man, as it were between God and man, this notion being disguised in a thousand ways, from Polytheism down to the personification of all the forces of nature ; to the degradation of man himself through a fall, and the universality of sin as personal guilt and liability to punishment ; to a mysterious Deliverer desired of the nations ; to the sense of the necessity and acceptableness of worship by sacrifice ; in the ethical domain to the rights of the Right and the goodness of the Good ; to the inextinguishable hope of immortality, more distorted perhaps than almost any other truth. Now it is a credential of the Christian revelation that it acknowledges all this ; or rather that all this is true. Professing to be the supreme, the only direct communication from God to man, it points to a universal consent among the nations that some such revelation was expected and was needed.

Errors. 3. But this leads to the further argument, that Christianity explains and corrects these errors while it confirms the truth underlying them all. It comes as the correction of every delusion into which it declares the Eternal had permitted the world to fall

Rom. i. 28. as the consequence of its resistance of His Spirit. It teaches the true doctrine concerning God, sweeping away the pantheism, the polytheism, the atheism of the nations ; it amends the doctrine of sin, by connecting it with redemption ; it substitutes the true Divine-human Sacrifice, its expiation cleansing the heathen temple, its gift of the Spirit supplying the need of the heathen philo-

sophical schools ; it reforms the whole economy of worship, by revealing a Mediator ; it supplies the defects and reproves the corruptions of the world's ethical systems ; and it brightens and simplifies its doctrine of the future state.

4. Such are the credentials of the Christian revelation : such **Summary**
are its claims to be heard. No further plea is at present urged than this. No other system, among the many candidates for acceptance, has ever made such pretensions as these. No ancient creed or religion, however missionary in its spirit, ever professed to come from God with the explanation and sure guidance of the world's spiritual desires. Christianity alone explains heathenism, with a solution at once gentle and stern. And it alone brings in the time of a universal reformation. This is, however, laid down only as its credential : as such it has all the force, although no more than the force, of a preliminary demand for profound respect and solemn attention to its appeals.

5. Objections to this credential, as such, and limited strictly to the present stage of the argument, may be noticed at once and disarmed in a few sentences. It will be said by the Atheist, or the Antitheist, that Christianity, in common with every other form of the religious sentiment among men, is no more than an invention of the human mind—or that subtle action of matter which is called the mind—and the most beautiful, though not always the most beautiful, evolution in man of those strange phenomena which in the lower orders of creation make man himself their object. All the history of religion, in every part of the world, and among all the tribes of mankind, is only the record of the evolution of something in man that has no name, no object, and apparently no meaning. We are not at present concerned with the Atheist ; and may postpone further reference to this subject. Meanwhile, there is another form of the objection which cannot be thus summarily dismissed. **Objection.**

(1.) It appears to many students of what may be called Comparative Theology that the existence of so many other religions, containing so many noble and uncontested truths, is a bar to the acceptance of Christianity as the one definitive revelation of God. They deny the distinction between natural religion and supernatural, between natural theology and revealed. They assert that **Distinction Denied.**

all the faiths or mythologies of mankind are natural or supernatural alike, according as these words are understood. All are supernatural, in the sense that the Creator has lodged in the spirit of man a faculty for the Infinite, which has developed in a few great historical religions; just as the Creator gave man a supernatural endowment of language, which has been developed into a few great families of speech. All are natural, in the sense that all have their natural pedigree, and may be traced through the various nationalities as, equally with language and perhaps more than language, the foundation of race distinctions. Hence, the Science of Religion distinguishes in various ways the religions of mankind. There are the religions which should be traced to individual founders: such as Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Confucius, Lao-tse, Christ, and Mohammed. And there are those which are national, and have never been connected with human names: the religions of the ancient Brahmans, the Greeks, Romans, Teutons, Slavs, and Celts. Again, we have the Faiths which have Sacred Books, and those which are without them: of the former eight being reckoned, Brahmanism and Buddhism among the Hindus; Zoroastrianism among the Persians; among the Hebrews, Mosaism and Christianity; among the Arabs, Mohammedanism; among the Chinese, Confucianism and the religion of Lao-tse. These distinctions rise at last into the division of two or three great families. First, the Aryan, subdivided into the Brahmanism of the Veda, Buddhism which sprang from it and revolted against it, and Zoroastrianism, which departed from the ancient Vedic faith. Secondly, the Semitic, with its Old and New Testament religions, the latter transferred, however, into Aryan soil; and Mohammedanism. These have played the most distinguished part in the history of the world hitherto; but a third must be added, the Turanian, to which the branches of Chinese religion belong. The argument deduced from the study of Comparative Theology is simply this: that there is not one religion which is of Divine right, and must needs be separated from all the rest. In plain words, whatever other distinctions there are—between Monotheistic and Polytheistic, Documentary and Traditional, Cultivated and Fetich—the distinction between true and false religions is not to be allowed

There is no final, definitive, supreme religion for mankind, any more than there is one universal language for mankind. This science, which is comparatively new, makes a fair show of zeal for all religions; and, indeed, most triumphantly vindicates the truth, depth, and universality of the Godward tendency in our nature. But this is at the expense of Christianity, however seemingly on its side. In fact, it takes away all the strength of the credential now under consideration, so far as it concerns Christianity, while leaving it in its full force so far as it concerns revelation generally, or the religion of nature. What then is to be said in defence of our argument?

(2.) First, and foremost, the Science of Religions pays too much honour to the Faiths of the World when it brings Christianity into conjunction or comparison with them. After allowing all that the catholic Apostle asserts as to the religiousness of mankind—our argument has done justice to that—we must not forget his dark testimony against the outward forms of that religiousness. *The world by wisdom knew not God.* Comparative Theology collects a number of sublime sayings about God to which Hindoo devotion gave birth; but it is undeniable that the system of Brahmanism was at almost all points a gigantic parody on the religion of supernatural revelation. Attempt after attempt from age to age was made to reform it; but its greatest reformation, that of Buddhism,—now one of the most extensively held faiths in the world—was and is in reality a religion without a God: the vastest waste of Atheism that has ever been known. Christianity is not one of the religions of the world: responding, like others, to the common instinct, only in bolder and sublimer terms. Once more, Christianity is not what the Science of Religions makes it: an offshoot from Mosaism, and an improvement on it, as Buddhism rose out of the old Vedic faith and put away its old gods. It is the one only religion that the world has ever received directly from heaven. In its present form, and with its present name, it originated in the midst of Judaism, at a certain epoch, and struggled for and won its ascendancy much after the manner of other religions. But Christianity as Divine Revelation is only the consummate form of a truth, or a system of truths, that has been in the world from the beginning of human history.

Christianity
and other
Religions

1 Cor. i. 21