

But this will introduce another very important aspect of our credentials.

The Per-
fecting of
Revela-
tion.

CHRISTIANITY THE PERFECTING OF FORMER REVELATIONS.

It is a continuation of the same argument to say that Christianity is itself an explanation of the preparatory disclosures of revealed truth, and the consummation of them all.

From the
Beginning

1. This is, in fact, the crowning presumptive argument in its favour, that it is the end and completion of a revelation that has been going on from the beginning. It is not a religion that literally began in Judæa with the advent of Jesus. It does not profess to be the first supernatural communication to mankind: it is not the opening of the heavens for the first time. It finishes a testimony that began with the fall of man: in the best sense, it is therefore as old as the Creation. This last sentence has been made the watchword of English Infidelity: as if its being coeval with the human race were a disproof of its Divine original. But this is in fact its glory. It is the last accent of a Voice which spoke first at the gate of Paradise. That voice was the Primitive Revelation from the perversions of which all the innumerable forms of mythology arose. But that Voice awakened the desire of the human race to which all revelation has been a response, and has constantly deepened that desire whilst it responded to it. But only in a peculiar line, and within a limited area. On either side of that line, and beyond that area, men groped after the lost Creator and the forfeited Paradise in their own way: being dealt with both in justice and in mercy. The mercy of the Supreme has in every age guided the instincts of all the sincere. St. Peter is as catholic as St. Paul on this subject. Discerning in Cornelius the best religion of the Gentiles, he said: *I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him.* But justice abandoned the races as such to the consequences of their own perverseness: *because that, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* Thus the two Apostles agree: as to individuals the sincere have been guided towards an

Acts x.
34, 35.

Rom. i 21.

unknown Saviour; as to the races the just Providence of God dealt with them according to their inventions. Meanwhile, there has been in every age a clear, distinct, though not voluminous announcement of the will of God, delivered to a chosen and faithful people. And the peculiarity of these preliminary revelations has been this, that every word has at once satisfied human aspiration and kindled it to higher desire. Christianity is the final answer to a continuous expectation kept up from age to age. It is the response to what may be called a third form of the great anticipation: besides the instinct in every human spirit, and in the human race as such, man has had, though all men have not had, an express testimony of the Mind of the Supreme, leading human hope onward to the perfect revelation of Christ. Christianity comes as the perfecting of its earlier Self: the final and sufficient response to the expectation it had kept up from the beginning. This is its supreme preparatory credential. It is the last of many words, and leaves nothing more to be desired in the present estate of mankind.

2. The force of this credential will be felt only by those who **Mysteries** already accept, or are disposed to accept, the revelation of Jesus. The more it is pondered the more satisfactory will it seem to all who take a large view of the dealings of Providence with man. There are, of course, unsearchable mysteries in the subject: mysteries so perplexing that they have driven some speculatists to the renunciation of a God. To those who do believe in God the gradual education of a world free and responsible is a thought to be accepted and reposed in. It is more tolerable at least than other thoughts which would displace it. It is more in harmony with every high conception of the Supreme to suppose that He has in every age been communicating His will with more and more clearness to mankind, having always in view a final and full disclosure, than to suppose that He planted a religious germ in man's heart which has been always developing with infinite variety in every variety of soils, no provision whatever being made for the survival of the best, without indeed allowing that there is or that there can be any best.

(1.) But the objection may be urged that it is below the dignity **Delay of Revelation.** of a Divine revelation to keep the world so long in suspense. In

answer to this we can only refer to the analogy of all the other dealings of God which come within our cognisance. The earth as man's abode, the history of all the creatures that it inherit, especially the progress of everything pertaining to its chief inhabitant, has been under a law of secular and slow evolution. Supposing the entire economy of things to be under the government of one Supreme Mind—that is to say, supposing the God of revelation to be the Author of nature—there can be, or there ought to be, no difficulties in the way of considering at least the claims of a revelation which professes to describe the methods of a gradual education of the human race. To the Theistic advocates of development this ought to be a strong recommendation of the Holy Scriptures, and of their final solution of all mysteries in Christianity. With its Materialistic or Positivist advocates of course we have nothing to do: there are no credentials which appeal to them. They must give up their delusion of Nescience or unintelligent and meaningless Law, and first be reconciled to a Personal Author of all things, before the Christian Revelation even looks their way. But those who admit that the laying of the material foundations of the superstructure of intelligent life required incalculable ages ought not to shrink from the preliminary announcement that God has at sundry times and in divers manners spoken to the human race, and finally consummated all His words in His Son.

Part of an
Unlimited
Scheme.

(2.) If, once more, it be pointed out—as it constantly is—that what professes to be the last revelation is after all only a partial response to the deep questions of mankind, this may be granted as a fact, but it is robbed of its force as an argument by the suggestion that even Christianity is only part of a scheme, understood only by the Infinite Mind, the first elements of which alone are brought within the range of our faculties. It will be shown hereafter that there is not a solitary question of the human spirit, on the answer to which its present peace and its probation for eternal happiness depend, which the Holy Oracles do not satisfy. More than that we have no right to expect. Had the revelation of Jesus professed to leave no mystery unexplained, that would have been a stronger plea against its Divinity than infidelity has ever yet been able to find.