

REASON OR REVELATION;

OR, THE RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY, AND CIVILISATION OF THE ANCIENT HEATHEN, CONTRASTED WITH CHRISTIANITY AND ITS LEGITIMATE CONSEQUENCES.

PART I.—No. I.

In discussing this subject, there are two main objects aimed at:—

1st. To endeavour to correct prevalent errors, and show the worthlessness and falseness of that would-be intellectuality of those who foster and propound them; and who perpetually bring up the ancient past for admiration, and ascribe, with an inexcusable ignorance, or wilful perversion, great excellencies to ancient systems and times; to the deterioration of Christianity. Singular and inconsistent as it may seem, there are not a few who make a nominal profession of the recognition of the truth of the gospel, who are too ready, from the pride of reason, the desire to dignify what they call "the god-like qualities of humanity," and from hasty, unhistorically-supported conclusions, to magnify the great era of heathen power and philosophy, and to hold it up as the golden age of the world's intellectual might and social refinement, and to present a Solon, a Socrates, or a Plato, as a specimen of all that is wise and good, and to elevate such to a level with that "Teacher who came from God," and who "spoke as never man spoke;" and thus would carry us back, and have us believe that "the former times were better than these." There is a disposition in many to read the works of the ancient sages—at any rate to boast of their acquaintance with them, however shallow that may be—and to treat the wisdom of Jesus as if it were too common-place, too familiar to the vulgar to demand attention, and too humble to be worthy of quotation. This ascription of intellectuality and refinement to the pre-Christian era is at the basis of infidelity, and most unduly exalts the one, while it most unjustly degrades the other. It is a practice which originates in that little learning which is a dangerous thing; which has been encouraged by a modern "vain philosophy," and propagated by a certain class of ethical writers, and the flimsy and sceptical *litterateurs* of the present day.

2d. The next object in view is, to maintain the true prominence of Christianity, as the only system that is competent to elevate the world, and which embodies in it all the elements of true religion, true morals, true philosophy, and true civilisation. And by advocating Christianity, it is not to sermonise, but to take up the system in its principles and operations, and compare and contrast it with all other systems. There is a prevailing misconception of it—a one-sided view of its principles and tendencies, which amounts to an error—by which it is not extended to its perfect work but circumscribed and contracted in its design and powers. It is not sufficiently viewed as a complete, divinely given system, for the restoration and government of the world. It is looked at too often solely as teaching the fact of a better world, and how we may attain it—and that is a great and most important part—but it is not confined to that; for it does not only simply inculcate our devotional obligations, but it embraces every thing that relates to our temporal state and social improvement. It contains the true principles of political economy, and of all legislative science; and gives the grand directions for the amelioration of the physical world, and the education, refinement, and happiness of man. It is the moral lever for upheaving the earth, and all that it inhabit, from every existing false and ruinous position. As the curse was universal on nature, brute and man, Christianity is universal, as the universal antidote. In this sense, the true, whole sense, we mean it, and fearless as to the issue, we invite that it be contrasted with all the speculations, theories, and systems of men.

It must be obvious to all, that the subject is one of very great extent, as, in fact, it ransacks the history of the ancient heathen world, and the conclusions cumulate in proportion to the scrutiny that is made of Paganism, and the contrasting investigations into the developements of Christianity. Volumes might be written on it; and very necessary and profitable ones too: for though several of its parts, under various titles, have been discussed by Tholuck, Spring, and one or two others, yet, as a whole, it is a fresh and most important topic for the earnest mental enterprise of some writer on the Christian Evidences. But extensive, important, and fascinating as it is, and though there is no want of facts and arguments, we are limited in this mode of presenting it, to a reasonable brevity, and therefore instead of going minutely over the whole field of enquiry, must look only at the chief points; and instead of giving quotations in proof of what is asserted, must simply state what we believe are

facts, and dogmatically draw our conclusions, leaving the readers, whether they doubt or believe, to investigate fully for themselves. Indeed, we would rather provoke personal inquiry, for we are well assured that no one who will candidly and diligently set himself to the study, and draw the contrast, but will arrive at the conclusion, not simply that Christianity, with its whole offspring of piety, philosophy and civilization, is pre-eminent over all kinds and degrees of heathenism, but, that it is absolutely necessary for the true and the best, physical and temporal, spiritual and eternal, interests of mankind. As the sun in its gorgeous majesty confers more blessings on this world, than all the stars that gem the night sky; and as by day their light is unseen because of a greater, and it is only in the night, when there is no sun, that their lustre is perceived; so, Christianity rises on the moral horizon of the world, and as it ascends to its meridian altitude, the systems of men which might shine when they had no such competitor, now sink away, and are obscured as lights that were, but whose glory is outshone. The religious systems of the pagan world were as the torches of men, kindled at the fires of the natural mind, but this is "THE LIGHT, THE TRUE LIGHT, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and which is kindled at the source of the God-head. The others were the twinklings of unaided or distorted reason, but this is the effulgence of divinity, the bright shining of the Sun of Righteousness.

I. The first part of the subject is, the religion, philosophy, and civilization of the ancient heathen; or the evidence that reason alone is not a competent instructor and guide for man. Under this part we consider

1st. The moral and spiritual characteristics of the various systems of ancient religion. Undoubtedly the first religion was divine in its origin. Man was created in his Maker's image, and his religion was part of that image—it was written on his heart, and might be called constitutional; but after he fell from pristine purity, that was lost, and a new type of religion was introduced—a kind caused by new necessities—a system not of simple obedience, love, and communion, but of reconciliation; and though we have not the precise form, we have the historical fact in the recognition of a divinely-appointed mode of worship. In the case of Cain, we find not only the first introduction of religious error, or self-will, in forming what he conceived to be religious obligation, when he attempted to worship by a mode that had not the divine sanction, but also, that there was a mode which he would not embrace. He took the ground of a proud moralist, and not that of a humble suppliant. He brought his thank-offering, but not his sin-offering. He prayed, "give me this day my daily bread," but would not pray, "forgive me my trespasses." He refused to acknowledge the doctrine of propitiation; and this proves that this doctrine had been divinely taught; for why condemn him for what he knew not? or why approve of Abel's sacrifice of the "firstlings of his flock," additional to his offering of the fruit of the ground, if he did it only by accident? and if Cain had not known better—if he had not had some revelation as to the duty, nature, and design of certain sacrifices—why should the language of God be addressed to him as one who knew his duty but would not do it?—"If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door;" that is, at his door, because he refused to comply with the Divine mode through which God would accept the sinner.——The religion of the patriarchs—a succeeding and slightly enlarged edition of the former—was still of the same primal or elementary character. It recognised the one true God, the facts of sin and a way of propitiation, exhibited by a symbolical confession of the one, and faith in the other, on the ground of the early promise of the coming Messiah, the seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent.——The religion of the Jews was of the same character. It was the full enlargement and completion of the elementary or typical system; but though it was wrapped up in symbols, and carried out by a laborious and costly ceremonial, still, it contained in it all the great principles of religious truth. The tendency of the rude and uneducated mind is to imagery and ceremony, and God thus adapted religion to the mental and social progress of man, and invested its truths in forms and customs best suited to those to whom it was communicated, and by which it was most likely to be retained. The world was not then prepared for a completely spiritual religion, and it only received that which it was capable of appreciating. As the child requires a peculiar training and adaptation of means to his desires and faculties, so the childhood of the world required