

THE TRUE RATIONALISM

BY

THE REV. M. POWER, S.J.



ST LOUIS, MO

B. HERDER

17 SOUTH BROADWAY

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THE TRUE RATIONALISM

Nihil obstat.

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THE TRUE RATIONALISM

A LECTURE DELIVERED IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW BEFORE
ST NINIAN'S SOCIETY

BY THE REV. M. POWER, S.J., B.A.

Τὸ ἔργον ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατὰ λόγον.

—ARISTOTLE, *Eth Nic.* i. 6

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FOREWORD

THIS Lecture was somewhat hurriedly put together after a long illness—an extenuating circumstance which may be charitably thought to account for some of its defects and omissions.

Throughout its composition, I have had before my eyes and mind the figures of Aristotle, founder of the Peripatetic school of philosophy, and his great Christian commentator, St Thomas Aquinas. It has long been my ambition to reproduce, however inadequately, some of the features of these two illustrious Rationalists, in the conviction that their account of, and plea for, the headship of human Reason, were never more sorely needed than in an age when the many derivatives of the

word *Ratio* (Reason) are in constant and vigorous circulation, while the faculty itself is left unregarded, unanalysed, and undisciplined, to the detriment, if not the ruin, of philosophy and religion alike.

To Mr W. L. Marsh, Organising Secretary of St Ninian's Society, University of Glasgow, I am very grateful for the invitation to join the ranks of Lecturers in the Union Hall of the University. I disappointed him once, for the reason above stated, but he kindly renewed his request, and the Lecture was duly given on the 24th February 1908.¹

Messrs Hodder & Stoughton, London, E.C., have undertaken to publish next autumn the series of Lectures delivered by many speakers before St Ninian's Society during the Winter Session of 1907-8, and covering a wide field of philosophical and religious thought.

It was with some misgivings that, at the instance of friends, I approached this eminent firm of publishers and craved permission to

¹ Professor Phillimore in the Chair.

anticipate the large volume in which my Lecture is to be embodied, and to publish it thus early in the year in booklet form. Throughout their correspondence with me, they showed much consideration and courtesy, and granted my application without reserve or condition. To them, as well as to the members of St Ninian's Society, who gave me a cordial welcome and an attentive hearing, my best thanks are due and tendered.

M. POWER, S.J.

LAURISTON STREET,

EDINBURGH, *April 27, 1908.*

THE TRUE RATIONALISM

INTRODUCTION

GENTLEMEN,—To lull all fears to rest, and as part requital of the great favour you have done me, I think I can promise that I shall not overpass the philosophical boundaries of my title, nor raid the realm of Theology, nor trouble you with hard sayings touching Divine Revelation or the Supernatural. Thus I hope to confine myself to the elementary psychology which is the basis of Rationalism.

Some apology may be due for a title which seems to imply that there are two distinct forms of Rationalism—one true, the other false. Rationalism, like Christianity, has no plural. False Rationalism is a contradiction in terms, implying that a man may follow the guidance of the light of reason, follow it irrationally, and be

landed in unreason. There are true and false Rationalists, as there are true and false Christians: that is to say, there are people who take a good name in vain; nevertheless the thing underlying the name is one, and not two. When, then, in the course of my lecture, I am found to prefix the epithet "true" or "false" to Rationalism, you will understand that in the first case, I plead guilty to an innocent tautology, and in the second, I am indulging in a *façon de parler* which, though not logical, is deservedly popular.

On this difficult subject I shall do my best to be clear. I am an old schoolmaster, not a Gifford lecturer, and I fail to see why it is incumbent on me, when addressing an educated audience, to doff the week-day style which goes down with my collier-friends, and to don the Sunday clothes of a stiff and stilted phraseology. I may have two suits of clothes, but I have only one kind of style; for men are the same everywhere and I am everywhere the same with men.

The Rationalism I shall try to expound has had the start of the Rationalism, say, of the Rationalist Press Association, by about 2200 years, and has drawn to it the greatest intellects of the world from Aristotle through St Thomas Aquinas down to the little group of Oxford scholars who are now engaged on a new edition of the *Opera Omnia* of the founder of the Peripatetic school. I am old-fashioned enough to believe that this long duration through the centuries and this wide-spread influence exercised over the choicest and weightiest of medieval minds, establish some sort of presumption that the old system is at least as worthy of investigation as the new. Not even to us of the twentieth century has antiquity lost all its charms. The only quarrel I have with the University of Glasgow—a quarrel much accentuated in the case of the University of Edinburgh—is, that it is not older than the Papal Charter dated 7th January 1450. Perhaps you would all be better pleased if your *alma mater* had as many grey hairs on

her head—or should I say was as bald-headed?—as Paris or Bologna or Oxford, or even St Andrews. The younger the baby, the more beautiful it is. So say some mothers. The older the institution, the more venerable it is. So say I. But we may both be wrong—the mothers and I. Anyhow, what I call the True Rationalism of the Aristotelian school once sat in the chairs of Glasgow University in pre-Reformation and post-Reformation days, figures largely in the works of Robert Baillie, the very capable and very Calvinistic Principal of the seventeenth century, and, for aught I know, is still enthroned within these walls. In such company I am not ashamed to own myself a Rationalist of the ancient type.

I.—RATIONALISM OR FOOLISHNESS?

Before we come to a scientific definition of Rationalism, let me call attention to this point—if we are not Rationalists, we are fools. But

there is no one here deserving of this reproach. Therefore all of us here are Rationalists. That is a syllogism beloved of the Peripatetics ; it is also a comfort to this assembly. Between Rationalism and Foolishness there is no *tertium quid*. In human nature—*qua*¹ human nature—the only light is reason. Where that is not given at all, even in germ, you have not men before you, but lower animals. When the use of that faculty which makes a man a man, is impeded by physiological or pathological conditions, we are imbeciles. If we extinguish that light ourselves by a course of physical or psychical excess, we are self-made lunatics, *pro rata, i.e.*, in proportion to the mental area which we empty of light or invest with darkness. Rationalists or Irrationalists we must all be in every moment of conscious or deliberate action. If any course of speculative thought is seen to be irrational, we are obliged,

¹ *Qua*, a favourite relative particle with the schoolmen. It is the Aristotelian η , and is getting into English books, and even into leaders in *The Glasgow Herald*.

in deference to the law of reason, not to enter that path, or to quit it if entered. If we do not, we are, I shudder to say it, intellectual fools, *pro rata*. Similarly, if in the moral sphere, a course of action is known by the light of reason to be unreasonable, we are constrained to leave that action undone, and if we persist in doing it, we are moral fools—again *pro rata*.

To come to particulars. If Christianity is shown by reason to be irrational or anti-rational, it is, gentlemen, your duty and mine to abandon it to-morrow or perhaps to-night. Again, if ultra-Socialism commends itself to calm and dispassionate reason as the sole and sufficient remedy for all social ills, we must, as consistent Rationalists, evacuate our present position, go over in a body to the Glasgow Socialists, and embrace the Manifesto which was painted with the flaming brush of Confiscation as recently as November last. The one great human force to keep us in the old paths of the Faith is Rationalism. The one impelling power to necessitate our migration

to opposite fields of thought and action is Rationalism. If man is a rational animal, we cannot get out of Rationalism any more than we can get out of our skin.

I take it, then, we are all Rationalists, and our determination to remain so is strengthened by the consideration that the type of the non-Rationalist is the born idiot, and the type of the anti-Rationalist is—Mr Robert Blatchford.

II.—PRAISE OF RATIONALISM

*Bonum rationis est hominis bonum.*¹

*Homo maxime est mens hominis.*²

A panegyric is not always rational in its substance, and its length sometimes makes it highly irrational. Hence I must not linger long on this section. Besides, as we are all

¹ "The good of reason is the good of man."—St Augustine, *De Trin.*, vi., 8.

² "Man is pre-eminently the mind of man."—St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, I-2, q. 29, art. 4.

Rationalists, because all non-fools, too much praise of Rationalism might be considered flattery of us Rationalists, and thus stir up the vanity latent, if not blatant, in every human breast. Hence, to escape the danger of anything like complicity in guilt, I shall let much of the praising be done by others. *Summum animæ est ipsa ratio*,¹—“It is Reason which is the summation of the soul,” says St Thomas, the interpreter *par excellence* of Aristotle, and the faithful disciple of the Greek master whom he always calls “*the* Philosopher.” And again : *Causa et radix humani boni est ratio*,²—“The cause and root of man’s good is Reason.” And more strongly still : *Nihil est majus mente rationali nisi Deus*,³—“There is nothing greater than the thinking mind, except God.”⁴

¹ St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, 2-2, q. 53, art. 3.

² *Ibid.*, 1-2, q. 66, art. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, Supplem., q. 16, art 6.

⁴ St Augustine had written the same sentence with “human” instead of “thinking” mind. St Thomas, who was a great believer in angelic spirits and their resplendent intelligences, remembers that in the mental scale they come between man

Rationalism is often said to be a formidable foe of Religion. It was once thought to be its best friend. There is some mistake here, that prompts me to refer you to a foregoing remark about Rationalism true and false. Let Rationalism grow from more to more in Religion, and Religion will be all the better for it. If reason got a fair chance, would it, think you, lead us into the welter of doubt and strife and recrimination in which this dear land is plunged, and plunged so long that it is matter of conjecture whether she will ever emerge with breath enough in her body to pronounce the name of God? An enemy hath done this thing, and no friend. The best human friend of Divine Truth is the thing that makes man most like to the mind of God, and that is reason. If Rationalism, through such agencies as the Rationalist Press Association, proclaims itself the enemy of Christianity, make sure, with the aid of your reason, which and God, and so adroitly changes the word "human" to "thinking."

kind of Rationalism is speaking, the false or the true. If "Modernism" poses as the friend of Religion, let reason pause and see whether such friendly professions come well from a system which belittles and belies reason, and is therefore the death of Rationalism, rather than the life of Religion. "We *could* not believe," says St Augustine, "if we had not rational souls."¹ With rational souls men can disbelieve, but is it the rational element in the soul that is in arms against Faith, or has their reason capitulated to such foes of reason as ignorance, passion, or pride? In the religious sphere, which constitutes, as Matthew Arnold says, "the three-fourths of life," there is room for the exercise of reason, and yet this department is just the one where reason is exercised least. This looks badly for truth, considering that, in the words of Bishop Butler, "Reason is the only faculty we have wherewith to judge concerning anything, even religion itself."² In the search for the true

¹ *Epist.*, 120, n. 3.

² *Analogy*, etc.

religion, reason is wanted, even more than in the search for anything else. "It is a disgrace," cries St Augustine, "to believe any man without good reason. Why expect and importune me to do it?"¹ And St Thomas adds, "A rational man should not believe unless he sees that the proposition believed were worthy of his belief, by reason of the evidence of accompanying signs, or for some good reason."²

Dispraise of a great thing may be as culpable as praise of what is ignoble. Rationalism is the highest of all the "isms." To underrate it is to deride, and to denounce it is to forswear the noblest attribute of human nature. Outside of it no one can find human salvation. Whatever views philosophers have held of the genesis of man, whatever theories about his essence have been broached, established, attacked, or exploded, whether we be illimitable nothings or the sum

¹ *De Utilitate Credendi*, xiv., 31.

² *Summa*, 2-2, q. 1, art. 4.

of all things, the sport of chance or the objects of design, the scions of brutes or the sons of God, the expansion of a bodiless idea or the resultant force of dead matter, the cunning workmanship of demiurges or the clumsy experiment of one of nature's journeymen; whencesoever we are and whithersoever tending, all are agreed that there is in us such a thing as thought, and to this thinking power in the last resort, the truth or falsehood of every judgment that sweeps the area of consciousness must be referred, and by this power the final word of acceptance or condemnation on every imaginable creed, system, or hypothesis must be pronounced.

III.—DEFINITION OF RATIONALISM

It is no grave fault of mine, I submit, to have deferred the definition of Rationalism so long; it is rather a covert compliment to you,

gentlemen, that you know the thing before I define it.

A very conspicuous feature of the old Rationalists is the love of definition. They not only could not get on without it; they simply revelled in it. Were it only to humour them, let us define Rationalism to be that system of philosophy which upholds the headship of human reason.

Exception may well be taken to this form of words as a near approach to tautology. It comes to this, that human reason upholds the headship of human reason. It is to be hoped it does. What else is head within man except his head? A man sticks up for himself, why not reason for itself, especially as there is nothing else worth sticking up for? The man indeed may be in the wrong in his self-defence, whereas reason cannot err in its declaration that it cannot knock under to something inferior, that it cannot abdicate or substitute in its place a *locum tenens*. If any such competitor or rival or representative is to be found,

reason asks, where is it? and there is no answer. There is only one runner in the race, and it has a walk-over. Cast about for the main thing in the material universe, and your mind will not only light upon, but get fixed on, man, and your scrutiny of man can lead to no other conclusion than that the biggest thing amidst all his littlenesses is his power of thought. "Narrow the world, roomy the brain of man," says Schiller. With equal truth, perhaps, we could reverse the epithets and speak of the roomy world and the narrow brain, but it is not a question of space here, but of relative positions in the scale of being.¹ The thinking power lodged in the convolutions of the little organ called the brain of man, is confessedly of a higher order than the vast stretch of ether "which bathes the shores of the farthest star," and comes under the designation of the "lower creation." Reason, then, knows itself to be head, and this fact will

¹ This "scale" is a great favourite with Pope in his *Essay on Man*.

enable us to leave out all reference to reason as upholding herself, and define Rationalism more simply as the headship of reason.

“Supremacy” would not do as well. It means too much. We may stand head and shoulders above all that is of the earth earthy, but we are certainly not supreme over it, as we find to our cost, when we try to tackle it and bring it under control. In this tussle, if anything is supreme, it is not our minds but certain “laws of Nature” which are not only not of our making, but are often directly opposed to our will. If Sir Gilbert Scott, the architect of this University, saw a stone at the bottom of the ravine, and judged it worthy to mount to the top of the tower on Gilmorehill, you know how little he could do with his mind and will, if, furnished with these weapons alone, he entered into conflict with the phenomena of gravitation, and commanded the stone to rise. The stone would not move, and the bystander might laugh. A happy compromise between Nature and Sir Gilbert would follow,

and the block and pulley would lift the stone into mid-air. All the while this mechanical device would be as much under the "law of gravity" as the weight moved. We may coax Nature and play into her hands, but it is folly to talk of supremacy over forces which we are powerless to check or change in any substantial way. "Supremacy," then, has no place in our definition. We are really and truly heads over some things, but what are we supreme over? I, for one, don't know.

IV.—INERRANCY OF THE SENSES

My panegyric of reason was pretty strong. As I went on, somebody may have regarded me as a kind of Rugby footballer who was going a little too fast and furious, and ought to be stopped. I am afraid I must go on, and take my chance of a tripping. I am going to call reason inerrant or infallible. The shock may

possibly be intensified when I add that the senses of man, inferior though they necessarily are to the dominant reason, are themselves entitled to be called inerrant.

Applying a little of the old Rationalism to *Sensism*, I venture to assert with the Aristotelian scholastics that our senses are *per se* infallible guides in their limited domain. Never wrong themselves, they do seem to mislead us, especially when the organs of sense are ill-equipped, to begin with, or have suffered some lesion, or are forced to work under abnormal conditions. Hampered or vitiated though they be, they do the only thing they can do—their mechanical best—and if error of judgment follows, it cannot be imputed to the non-judging sense, but to some other faculty in us. When a sense is from any cause, congenital or other, defective in structure or function, it fails, of course, but it cannot turn false witness. Aristotle applied to this breakdown of a sense a Greek phrase which is nearly always mistranslated by the English

“accidentally” or “casually.”¹ There is no such thing as chance. No cataract on the eye comes “casually.” Another thing which the Peripatetics always did with mishaps among the senses, was to ignore them and turn back to the general rule of their normal operation—and we cannot blame them. They were not oculists, or aurists, or specialists, but only philosophers.

The proper object, say of the sense of vision, is that condition of the thing seen which we call its colour, and nothing else, not hardness nor softness, nor nearness, nor distance. The normal eye—and we always assume unless positive proof to the contrary is forthcoming, that all our eyes are normal—can distinguish between red and green in coloured objects. Ten thousand pairs of eyes set in the skulls of ten thousand rational men, see a train passing a signal at express speed and hurrying to destruction. This great body of spectators

¹ This famous term is *κατὰ συμβεβηκός*; medieval Latin, *per accidens*. It generally means out of the normal course of nature, and approximates to *παρὰ φύσιν*.

gives evidence, we will suppose, as to the colour of the signal lamps. All are positive it was a red light. We are making no inquiry into the mental processes going on in the minds of the eye-witnesses, but are only concerned with their eyes. Are we absolutely convinced, after hearing the signalman and the ten thousand, that the red colour was seen by this vast crowd? I think we are. We received their united assertion with confidence. They could not be mistaken. The evidence is overwhelming. We are sure of the infallibility of the host of witnesses, but, be it observed, not more sure of it than they are of the infallibility of their sense of sight which recorded the sensation which they call the sensation of redness. The reactive sense has had an impression made on it. It cannot have more, and it cannot have less. If it had less, it could not be a sense in action; if it had more, the added element would be foreign matter to the simple sense. It records because it cannot help recording, and it does

no more than record because it has not got it in it to do more. The eye must act under the stimulus of light, and act as necessarily and as "rightly" as vibrations in the ether; equally for the ether and the optic nerve, there is no room to go wrong in. This is at once Rationalism and common sense. The objection that some out of the ten thousand are suffering from colour-blindness would be dismissed by the Aristotelians with the remark that these few had better see the oculist, as men whose eyes were "ill-disposed" or filled by some redundant "humour." Not a very scientific way of putting it, yet not against common sense. These sufferers, not having fulfilled the conditions of the test, are politely informed that their evidence about their own visual experiences is not questioned. In its morbid condition their retina acted with the perfect accuracy of an imperfect organ, as a "game" leg kicks with all the little force it can command. The sensation of green in the case in point was, in view of the damaged apparatus, rightly

recorded, and no other record could be made. Nevertheless, the colour-blind are asked to retire from the public court, with condolence on their weakness, but without a stain on their visual honour. This done, the main thesis remains in possession—the eye “in being,” which confines itself, as it must, to the perception of a lighted or coloured surface, is infallible in its record of its own peculiar sensation.

The conclusion may be applied with profit to the other senses. The ear is infallible, though the deaf man hears no thunderclap; the taste is infallible though the furred tongue of the patient reports that sweet is bitter and bitter sweet. Everbody calls the holly-leaf prickly though the thick-skinned hand does not feel it. In all such cases of sense-impression, the sense-impressed are infallibly sure—the hearing man of the sound, the eating man of the taste, and the wounded man of the puncture.

It may be doubted *a priori* whether the master-factor in man is in worse case than the lower recipients of sense-impressions. It is a

great thing not to be able to go wrong. The senses, as shown, cannot err in their respective provinces. Can it be inferred that the reason is similarly endowed? The question will be best answered after something has been said of the origin of ideas generated in the mind from material objects, through the senses.

V.—MATERIALISTIC BASIS OF RATIONALISTIC IDEALOGY

The immediate object of sense perception having been discussed, the question arises: What is the immediate object of the intellect of man?—You will notice that I carefully refrain from slighting your intelligence by any reference to the theory that sense and intellect are one.—Dub me a materialist, when you hear the answer. The immediate object of the intellectual faculty is the essential *nature* of material objects brought under its notice by the action of the senses. If the play of the

senses does not fall on a material object, or if, for any reason, that play becomes inoperative, not only does no mental process follow, but all such processes are impossible. Next to our dependence on God comes our dependence on matter. Over-emphasis on the dependence of our original ideas on God leads to a false mysticism; over-emphasis on the dependence of thought on matter leads to a false idealogy, which inevitably issues in a blend of blank materialism and craven agnosticism. The agnostic is constantly harking back to the empirical truth that the highest intellectual ideas have their source in the low stratum of material objects. Then false analogy comes in, tumbling on the top of phrases—the stream cannot rise higher than its source; (it can by the pump); the ill-bred boy must grow into the vulgar man (not always); base blood will out (unless it be refined); you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear (dermatologists can do something very like it). Hence it is argued that intellectual ideas must pay the

penalty of their lowly origin, and can never look up with steady gaze at the supra-materialistic conceptions of the alleged science of Natural Theology. Yet somehow, in spite of the warning words of the wise, and in the midst of all these sagacious head-shakes, we do manage to do the trick. As a matter of stubborn fact, and apart from all flimsy theory, we do get on, weighted though we are with ideas of materialistic origin. We do contrive to look through Nature up to Nature's God. Lowly though they are in the beginning, our ideas are fairly detachable from the matter which gave them birth, and can and do rise, as in the case of Lord Kelvin of Belfast and Glasgow—*O clarum et venerabile nomen!*—to a conspicuous place on a highly exalted spiritual plane. Higher and higher is the ascent, but we do not quail, not even when we come to the First Cause of all. "*Ecce Deus vincens scientiam nostram.*"¹ Lo! it is God, and God known, and God still overtopping our knowledge. That God is

¹ Job xxxvi. 26, in Vulgate.

known to the great Biblical poet is shown by the magnificent passage on the material creation, that follows this striking text.

Outside this world of sense there are realities, and they are reached through the world of sense, and when so reached they are found with earthly vapours about them, and wearing the poor texture in which our material senses could not but clothe them, and of which our loftiest aspirations after truth cannot wholly divest them. They are truly known, though far from adequately and with many limitations. They are apprehended by reason mediately, through the bodily organs, and somewhat distortedly, like things seen in the dusk, but not mockingly and not fallaciously. They are ours, but not by insight or intuition. Freed from the bonds of matter themselves, they lend no support to the theory of our emancipation from what Plato called a thralldom, and Aristotle a natural necessity. We have to wait on the senses before we become their masters. We must take the consequences of

the essentially materialistic origin of ideas, and confess that the strongest intellect that ever took wing aloft, does not enter into possession of the full meaning of any one supra-sensible truth. *Cognitio earum [veritatum] non est humana possessio*,—"Clear knowledge of these truths is not in the possession of man."¹ Thus speaks the true materialism of the old Rationalism, and it was in this sense that I invited you to call me a materialist. Just as I said that we must be Rationalists or fools, I may add now that we must either be materialists in our psychology, or demi-gods or some such preposterous thing. No matter how the spiritual faculty within may seize on, transform and idealise sensations previously derived from material substances, there *can* be no grist for the intellectual mill except that which is borne through the canals of the senses. Thus the disembodied spirit of the infant whose first breath is its last is doomed, unless there be wondrous modes of tuition in

¹ St Thomas following Aristotle.

the spirit-world, to go through its eternity without a single vestige of the thought and ratiocination which mortals can acquire, solely through the use and study of the material creation.¹ Where there is no kind of physical stimulus or molecular motion in the organ of the brain, the scientific fear may well be entertained that the mental correlative of this material change will never appear in the form of an intellectual idea.

Granted there are no innate ideas — and no one has ever gone within measurable distance of proving it—whence are ideas to come save from the senses? Perhaps from spirit acting on spirit; but this is speculation. A melancholy corollary is that some medical students who depart this life in the bloom of their “first year,” may remain for ever as destitute of all notions of anatomy as the infant may be of all forms of intellectual life — and who can contemplate without a shudder a medical eternity without an idea of a human skeleton!

¹ No reference will be expected here to the supernatural state of the baptised infant.

The very intangible, because highly spiritual, action of mind on an object of sense may possibly be illustrated thus:—A man and a cat seated together at the fire are looking together at a common object, say a coal-scuttle. The same sense-impressions, we may assume, are made on both, but the man is thinking and the cat—I beg pardon of some students of feline psychology—is not, and cannot. Abstracting from the *thisness* and *thusness* of the object, the man sees at a glance that it is a vessel for coal. Note the significance of the indefinite article. The moment we say in our mind “*a* vessel” we are putting the scuttle in a class, we are generalising or forming a *generic* idea not of the individual piece of metal, but of the *genus* “vessel” to which we assign it. And this is a small thing, you say, this overlooking of all the individualising notes of the coal-scuttle and this formation of the large concept of *vessel*. Why, every definition in a dictionary does this, and who respects the lexicographer?

Seriously, gentlemen, this process that comes so easy to you and to me as we gaze at the scuttle, is of such vast import that if you write down this ridiculously simple definition, "A coal-scuttle is *a vessel* for coal," an expert in the old Rationalism will undertake to prove to you that you are possessed of a faculty far transcending sense, a faculty non-material and spiritual, and therefore indivisible and therefore indestructible; in a word, that you have a soul and an immortal one too. Wherever there is a mental leap from the individual to generalisation about the individual, it takes a spiritual soul to perform the feat. Matter moves only in its own plane. It never jumps up out of it, for it knows of no such relation as *up* or *down*, nor of anything outside or above its concentrated self. It never refers an object which is seen to a class of objects not seen. You *see* a harmonium; you *think* of reed instruments and class it with them. You are doing what is impossible to matter or mere sense. No animal has ever been

known to make the smallest attempt at the universal idea that lurks in the simplest definition of the commonest object of sense. Every line in the despised dictionary is a proof of the non-material character of the mind. No trained horse or dog or elephant, in spite of the magniloquent puffs of their trainers, has come within shouting distance even of the clumsy definition that has made a certain boy immortal. "A button is what, when it isn't sewed on, makes breeches fall down." In the wide sweep it takes of a large class of wearing apparel, the definition is a noble generalisation and essentially intellectual. The idea underlying the word "thing" or even the slang, "thingamy," is that of Being in general; by its very simplicity it defies analysis, and dwells in so rarefied an atmosphere that no material organ or function has ever moved a step in its direction; yet it is the concept that is never wanting in each and every operation of the human mind.

Take another example of intellectual power not

shared by any being below the level of man. From one tiny bit of radium, the student of this mysterious substance, who has some knowledge of its inner (not innermost) nature, will be able to generalise, and feels himself irresistibly prompted to generalise and to assert with absolute confidence that the phenomena he has been exhibiting will be repeated in every piece of radium, should that mineral be discovered lying in numberless beds, each a hundred feet thick, in the uttermost parts of the world. How does the one piece in his hand—and few men have ever held two—tell him that? It does not tell him. He could not rise an inch above the specimen he holds between finger and thumb, unless he had within him the far-carrying pinions of a spiritual soul. Conscious or sub-conscious, this power of generalisation is always present to the thinking man, and the general ideas which he forms and formulates with lightning speed and inexhaustible fertility and often without an effort, are invariably

absent from the world of matter and sense.

The triumph of the Idea over the matter in which it was cradled can be studied in a variety of daily experiences. The eye of the observer stationed on a long stretch of railroad, sees convergence in the parallel lines of rails; the mind while admitting the optical necessity of this phenomenon, knows that the rails are at every point equally far apart, that they neither meet nor tend to meet.¹ It has grasped the *idea* of parallelism, and has travelled a long way in idealism since the eyes first rested on two parallel lines. Again, in a badly drawn diagram, where the radii of a circle are anything but equal, the geometrical student pursues the protracted course of his reasoning, undisturbed by the glaring inequality revealed by the compass, discards all the defects of the draughtsman, and finally arrives at the ideally perfect conclusion

¹ The mistake of John Stuart Mill on this point is now very generally recognised and even ridiculed.

that the angle $ABC = DEF$, which is obviously not the case on paper. His mind is soaring high above the figure, though all the concepts it is manipulating and combining, came in the first instance from the drawn symbols seen long ago.

The process started by matter ends in the spurning of matter under the springy foot of mind.

VI.—INERRANCY OF REASON

The phrase "Inerrancy of Reason" may be at once irritating and mirth-provoking. Anyhow, it sometimes causes a look of disgust and sometimes a giggle. The human mind, groping after the shadow of truth, or, worse still, running amok of truth, is hardly a fit subject for truth to abide in. It is not always doing as you say, reply the scholastics, and it is gross exaggeration to say that it is. There are two noble definitions of Aristotle which of themselves would seem to disprove the state-

ment that the chief function of reason is to go wrong. (1) Man is a rational animal. (2) Truth is an equation between the subject knowing and the object known. Against this latter, all the forces of Kant and the German metaphysicians are engaged in a truceless war, but the definition stands unshaken. Certitude is attainable, and we are as conscious at times that we have it as that we are possessed of free will.

Take the so-called simple, but really amazing, process of the immediate mental apprehension of the generic nature of a material object. In this the human mind is inerrant. The simplest case of simple apprehension is perhaps found in the experience of seeing an undefined object moving in the dark. It may be inanimate, or a man or a beast. On this we pronounce no judgment, and if we did we should probably be in error. All we say of it is that it is "a moving thing." The insignificant looking word "thing," as has been noted, implies the widest possible generalisation: it is the embodiment of the most transcendental

of all concepts—that of Being—and is always a standing witness to the existence and action of mind. Of this and this only we are certain—that there is before us a moving *thing*. Here, if ever, the truth has been taken in, and vague though the object of thought is, the truth has been apprehended in such perfection that a true equation of cognition has been established between the cognising subject and the object cognised. We are certain that there is a moving thing under our eyes, and that we have mentally grasped it and annexed it, and this without the least possibility of doubt. What is true of the senses is true of the mind. The mind is inerrant in the act of simple apprehension of a material thing. Challenge this conclusion and the way is opened wide for the introduction of a scepticism which would make a clean sweep of the possibility of knowledge. If this inerrancy in the primary action of the mind is denied, it would follow that no judgment pronounced by the same faculty can be trusted, not even the judgments

embodied in the axioms of Euclid. "The whole is greater than the part." That is a judgment, and is universally regarded, except by the out-and-out sceptic, as an infallible one; but it is worthless unless the simple apprehension of the subject and predicate of the proposition has been infallible too.

As to these judgments, the number of which I fear is often understated, little need be said. They are to be found most thickly clustered in pure mathematics, and constitute a class of propositions which carry on their face the unquestioned and unquestionable evidence of their truth. Of these, in turn, it must be said that unless they are known at a glance of reason to be infallible, no mathematical reasoning based on them has the slightest claim to validity. To assume them is unreasonable, for assumptions are made in the twilight, and these propositions in the lustre of reason. Nor can any man prove such a statement, as that two parallel lines indefinitely produced will never meet. It is one of the *principia per se nota*,

the fundamental propositions known through themselves and not through antecedents; and to try to go below any one of them would be the same as to try to descend a lower rung than the lowest rung of a ladder. One cannot get under truths which have no under-side, so deep are they imbedded in the roots of rational nature.

Not only in the region of mathematics are these inerrant judgments found. Science is full of them, and without them she cannot teach or even live. As a scientist, you are sure you have got at the essentially carbonic nature of a piece of coal. You know nothing, we will suppose, about the extent of the coal-fields that nature has laid out. For all you know, they may yield only ounces or billions of tons; yet you are certain, that whatever the output is, be it as small as radium or as large as water, all the specimens, if they be really coal, will have carbon as a main constituent. What makes you so confident? The confidence is not based on any assumption about

the “uniformity of nature.” You have explored only an infinitesimal portion of nature, and an assumption of the kind, like the Kantian assumption of the reality of the external world, is anathema to reason, which loves the light and shuns the darkness. Examine your own consciousness and you will find that you are sure of all coal in nature, because you are sure of the correctness of your universal concept of coal, derived from the examination of this single sample in your laboratory. If you deny your certitude here, you have no right to generalise about what you have not seen or analysed—that is, you must hold your peace, resign your chair of chemistry, and give no more scientific lectures on coal or carbon.

Better for you and better for your classes to maintain with Rationalism that on a vast number of scientific problems the judgment of men of science is simply inerrant. That on a vaster number they go wrong, I do not deny, but sooner or later they will be found out, and

the finder-out will again be human reason, and human reason again inerrant.

Passing from this department of rational judgments, we are not to assume that the next step forward will land us in the boundless field occupied by the mental freaks and vagaries, blindnesses and blunders of the human mind. If the easy work of the simple apprehension of a moving object of sense is infallibly done, and if the more complex process of formulating the judgments of the mathematician and the scientist can be infallibly performed, it is likely enough that these latter, when linked logically together, will lead to a whole series of propositions that can be known to be as infallible as the antecedent ones that have occupied and satisfied the mind. Thus we are prompted to extend the area of the inerrancy of reason to an indefinite number of cases of ratiocination.

The propositions of geometry supply the aptest illustration. After the long process of reasoning required to establish the truth that the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of

the squares on the other two sides of a triangle, the mind of the student is convinced that his final conclusion is quite as stable and unassailable and impossible to doubt, as any one of the axioms which were taken up and utilised on his way to the goal.

Thus we find ourselves in a position to sum up our triple division of the infallible operations of human reason.

- (1.) In the simple apprehension of material objects duly presented by the senses, reason is infallible.
- (2.) In many judgments, notably those of pure mathematics and applied science, the same claim of reason must be allowed.
- (3.) In many forms of ratiocination, the same infallibility for the same faculty must be asserted.

This granted, the ground may be said to be cleared for what at first sight will appear an overbold generalisation. It is this:—Reason,

as such, is always inerrant. The rational man, needless to say, can go wrong both in his judgments and in his ratiocination. He may judge from a rubicund nose that a teetotaller is a hard drinker. He may work out a long reasoned problem in algebra, and find that his solution comes to this impossible equation: $(a + b) (a - b) = a^3 - b^3$. But it is to be observed that it is not his reason that has betrayed him into these mistakes. Something that is more like unreason than reason has insinuated itself into his psychical states, and, without any conscious co-operation on his part, has fallen foul of his reason, warped it, distorted it, stifled or ejected it, with the result that the rational processes he was engaged on are dislocated, enfeebled, or destroyed. It is not his reason that has failed; it is the factor of ignorance or inattention or self-confidence or prejudice or passion that has brought about the wreck of what was intended to be a highly rational work. The "intromission," to use a legal phrase, of this foreign factor has

rendered the labours of the rational man abortive and his conclusions false. So does it happen with the youthful, or even the mature, arithmetician. The boy knows his arithmetic table and knows it to be infallible, but some disturbing cause like carelessness creeps in, or some "brain-storm" of distraction blows, and the answer to the long sum issues in a shape which can only be true if $2 + 2$ are 5. The something wrong is not due to the printed tables, but only to the boy's departure from this unerring code.

If reason as such and in its own sphere were liable to error, we may well ask, what is there to put the error right? The only possible answer is "reason." But *ex hypothesi* reason is of itself and at its own work liable to error. How, then, can it undertake to eliminate error? But it can, and it is the only way.

The final conclusion, I own, is startling to modern ears, but it is none the less inevitable, and has been reached by the chief of the schoolmen long ago. No one of the

multitudinous errors that find entrance into the mental states and processes of the rational man, can be referred to reason as its source. They come from other causes too numerous to mention here and too deep for me to unearth. Reason as such is inerrant. I may be blind, but I do not see what there is to say against this summing-up.

VII.—REASON IN COMMAND

Where there are warring interests in a kingdom the government, if it is to hold its own, must keep those forces under supervision and control. Of the conflicts between the higher and lower natures in man, I need say nothing, except that we all have the same experience as St Paul, and know that the struggle is there, and chronic and truceless.

Of the necessity of preserving order in the midst of a rebellion, in which we well know which is the rightful authority and which the lawless usurper, we are equally well aware, but

I am not going to dwell on it, lest I should rise or degenerate into a preacher. No Rationalist, I suppose, can doubt that reason must stick to the helm and weather the storm as best it can, while the wild waves are saying, "Oh, how jolly to be a fool!" Granted that reason has got the headship and is the only faculty at all fitted for high station, it is clear that it must keep its position, and that in two main departments—(1) in abstract thought; (2) in concrete operation.¹ In the first, reason claims to direct all mental processes; in the second, to preside over the whole field of human action, which is in turn subdivided into (*a*) intelligent action on external nature, (*b*) moral action, with all its concomitants.

(1) The rule for this headship in speculative thought may be laid down thus:—Conclusions arrived at in all complex mental processes are then and then only fully rational and certainly valid when they are reducible to first principles which no sane man can deny. Thus the most

¹ *In speculativis; in operabilibus*, in Scholastic Latin.

elaborate investigations of the pure mathematician can be justified to himself, or to others on demand, if he can show that on analysis these conclusions can be brought down to some formula as impregnable as this—two straight lines cannot enclose a space.

(2) (a) To test the conclusions arrived at by the practical reason, engaged on intelligent action on matter, the rule is much the same. Such conclusions are good if, on examination, they are found to be directly or indirectly conformable to some practical principle of mechanico-rational work. Thus a great engineering scheme is shown to be sound when it is analysed into such feasible details as damming a dammable stream, or tunnelling a hill which lends itself to tunnelling.

(2) (b) Closely analogous to the above, is the rule for testing the conclusions of the practical reason or conscience¹ when the

¹ The labyrinthine difficulties in which modern philosophers have become entangled since they called "Conscience" a "faculty" distinct from reason, and hoisted it into a position above reason, were not known to the ancients.

subject matter is moral action. Thus every form of business transaction which can be shown not to fall within the proscribed area of theft or fraud, and which is therefore proved to be in harmony with an elementary principle of the natural law, is pronounced by reason to be morally right and just.

The rule is capable of endless extension, not only to personal but to political morality. Thus, if a civil Government proposes a revolution in matters educational and recommends its new Bill as fair and righteous, it must be able to show that the moral character claimed for the measure is in full accord with such primary principles of morality as that the rights of parents over children have the first claim, and that all alleged rights in conflict with these are grievous wrongs.¹

¹ The teaching of the old Rationalism on this point is outspoken and fearless. *Lex hūmana in tantum habet rationem legis, in quantum est secundum rationem rectam*,—"Human law has in it the true character of law, only in so far as it is conformable to right reason."—(St Thomas, *Summa*, 1-2, q. 93, art. 3). Again, *Oportet quod lex sit aliqua ratione regulata; et hoc modo intelligitur quod voluntas principis habet vigorem*

It would seem, then, that the headship of reason covers a very wide sphere, within man and outwith, and that this queen has *de jure* a vast host of subjects, though many of these are *de facto* engaged in, or preparing for revolt.

VIII.—THE HEADSHIP OF ALL HEADSHIPS

The rational survey of things beneath us is good ; of things around us is better—*Circumspice!* of things above us is best—*Suspice!* Artists in colour bewail the fact that to most men who walk this earth, cloudland is an unknown land, because they will not take the trouble to see what a pageant is prepared in the skies for the man with eyes uplifted. The survey of things at our feet is not enough. If

legis : alioquin voluntas principis magis esset iniquitas quam lex,—“Law must have for its regulator some character of reason ; and in this way is the saying to be understood that the will of the Governor has the force of law ; otherwise the will of the Governor would be tyranny rather than law.”—(St Thomas, *Summa*, I-2, q. 90, art. 1).

too protracted; it may be positively injurious. If there is anything above our heads, it behoves us to look up and see what it is, especially if there is reason to believe that along with the sight destined for our eyes, there is a voice from heaven that is meant to reach our ears. Reason knows it is set above something, but knows it not more infallibly than it knows that someone sits above it. To every man with anything like good will, even though his hearing of her is listless and his service grudging, queen-reason has the same message to deliver. She is where she is by divine appointment, and she is not supreme. Then she points upwards, and though men cannot mistake the gesture, they prefer not to follow it, and their truant eyes go down again.

It is a good thing, gentlemen, as you stand at a level crossing on a railroad to look both ways, up and down. If you look only down, there may be an express on the other side hurling itself at you with the ferocity of death. There are, it is to be feared, many Rationalists

who train themselves systematically never to look above themselves, and this, they think, is to pay court to reason. They are satisfied when they have heard the very partial message of reason concerning her own headship, that they are on the top—top-dogs, I think, is the slang for them—and that as very much lies within them and beneath them, and nothing at all towers above them, they have nothing to look up at. That is their position, and were it my business to criticise it, I should be compelled to begin a long treatise on Natural Theology and the knowableness of God. There they are, but does reason bid them stay there or go up higher? They say they are high enough on the peak of reason, but it is not the pretty things they say of reason that count; it is what reason bids them do. She cannot acquiesce in her own worship; she rends her garments at the thought, and bids them go to a higher mount and there adore her God and theirs. If they would only hearken to her voice, as they profess to do,

they would go. "The knowledge of God," says Bossuet, "is the most certain of all the kinds of knowledge that we have through reasoning."¹ The old Rationalism gave out that it had proved the existence of God from reason. The whole of the then learned world, which had eyes as keen as ours and possibly thoughts far deeper,² was satisfied on examination that the proofs amounted to demonstrations. In our own day the proofs are said to be no proofs, but the saying is all we can get out of the "Rationalist"; the proofs are not disproved. In other branches of knowledge, as in astronomy, the old "proofs" that the earth was flat or stationary, have been manfully tackled and torn to pieces. To the old proofs of the existence of God, drawn from causation, this honour of refutation has not been accorded. They are flouted, not refuted, and the Rational-

¹ "La connaissance de Dieu est la plus certaine de toutes celles que nous avons par le raisonnement."—*Traité du libre arbitre*, c. iv.

² Cardinal Newman expresses the same opinion far more strongly.

ist who joins in the jeering chorus is really engaged in giving battle to reason, humouring a fashion and endorsing an untruth.

The worst offence you can commit against reason is to discredit and give the lie to its own protestations that it came from God and is under God. The reason which makes us rational men and thus capable of offering these half-reasoned insults to our nature, declares that the autonomy claimed for it is a fiction, and that it will have nothing to do with it.

Of course, if reason be really autonomous, the flag of the old Rationalism must be struck. Then truly is queen-reason supreme, because there is no reasonable God above her. Her being she owes to no one. Her pre-eminence is her own. She is free as the air to say what she lists within herself, and to prescribe what she likes to her subordinates, to keep them in check if she so desires, or to give them a loose rein. She is equally in possession of Home Rule and Home Misrule, and has no one to thank for the gift. She has never strayed, because she

was never tethered ; she never rebels, because she was never a subject ; she cannot be called unruly or ungoverned, because such terms imply a relation to a ruler or a government, and that is just what a truly autonomous power must repudiate—with as much warmth as the Principal of the University of X., who, on being told by a common constable to move on, remarked that he was the autonomous head of an autonomous institution—“which is all rot,” said the officer as he moved him on.

You have heard the declaration of autonomy. I am not going to subject it to analysis, still less to hold it up to scorn, but I ask you, Is this the voice of reason or of unreason? Does the rational being use this language, or the irrational? Does reason know that it is a product of a higher reason, as surely as it knows that a watch is made by a watch-maker¹ and life comes from life? It is for

¹ Paley's old argument about the watch has often been called “childish.” It is easy to call it names, but hard to refute it. Feeble as it is said to be, it is stronger than the attack on it, and still holds the field.

you as Rationalists to answer the question. And if you reach to a higher reason as the efficient cause of your lower one, you must go on with your inquiry till you touch the Highest Reason, and that is God ; and if God has or rather *is* Reason Itself, He is surely at liberty to express His Reason as we do ours in language spoken or written, and to enter into intimate relationship with men through a Man He chooses to send. With all the vigour of reason in you, judge of the Life of this Man, who was wise and not foolish, who was truthful and never lied, who asserted and proved the assertion, that He was sent from God, and was God, and to be obeyed as God.

It looks as if the Rationalist was becoming obedient and submissive. Becoming ! He was never anything else. Reason is always obedient to something higher than itself. Only unreason rebels. To wean myself and you from this tempting subject, I turn to the splendours of Ruskin.

“Restraint is always the more honourable

. . . It is restraint which characterises the higher creature and betters the lower creation. From the ministering of the archangel to the labour of the insect, from the poising of a planet to the gravitation of a grain of dust, the power and glory of all creatures and all matter consists in their obedience, not in their freedom.

. . . That principle to which policy owes its stability, life its happiness, faith its acceptance, and creation its continuance, is obedience. . . .

That is a treacherous phantom which men call liberty, most treacherous indeed of all phantoms, for the feeblest ray of reason might surely show us that not only its attainment but its being was impossible. . . . If by liberty you mean chastisement of the passions, discipline of the intellect, subjection of the will ; if you mean the fear of inflicting, the shame of committing wrong ; if you mean respect for all who are in authority, and consideration for all who are in dependence, veneration for the good, mercy to the evil, sympathy with the weak ; if you mean watchfulness over all thoughts, temperance in

pleasures, and perseverance in all toils, why do you name this by the same word by which the luxurious mean license and the reckless mean change, by which the rogue means rapine and the fool equality, by which the proud mean anarchy and the malignant mean violence. Call it by any name rather than this, but its best and truest is Obedience.”

A moment ago I referred to the proof given by Christ of His Godhead, and meant, of course, the Resurrection of His dead Body. That is challenged, and by Rationalists too.

IX.—THE OLD AND THE NEW RATIONALISM *SUB JUDICE*

It were impossible to enter here into the question of the Resurrection, but I cite it as a good illustration of the way in which the true Rationalist is often called on to decide on the rationality or irrationality of opposing argu-

ments. There is one thing he is not allowed to do, and that is to shirk the responsibility of thinking for himself or to parry all appeal to his own reason by the cowardly device of declaring that learned men are equally divided on this or that contentious matter—and who is he to decide when doctors disagree?

The little story I append will make my meaning clear, and will also give me an opportunity of *not* supplying you with a solution to a difficulty which you can solve for yourselves.

Some time ago, I was in conversation with an intelligent Lithuanian Jew, and we got on the subject of the Resurrection of our Lord. My friend rose from his chair, opened a drawer and turning to me said, “I leave this gold piece here and I close the drawer. In a few hours I return, open the drawer, and lo! the coin is gone. What am I to conclude? This and this only: A thief has been and done it. So was it with the abstraction of the body of your Messiah.”

Straightway the words of another Jew, St Matthew, flashed to my mind: "Say ye his disciples come by night and stole him away while we slept . . . and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews and endureth until this day."¹

Now, it is clear from the whole trend of this lecture, that they cannot both be Rationalists—the man who upholds and the man who denies the Resurrection. Who is to judge between them? You with your reason; you as Rationalists. It is for you to say, in all these attacks on Christianity, which is the man who is using his reason and which the man who is unconsciously blindfolding it. And I say it without fear of challenge or contradiction, that there are scores of modern theories against the Resurrection, that are no better or no worse than the chest-of-drawers argument of my Hebrew friend. The evidence is before you—that I take for granted—and you are required, as I was required in that little incident, to

¹ Matt. xxviii. 13, 15.

keep your reason on the judicial bench, to come to a well-balanced decision, and to establish yourselves, even if you fail to win others, in Rationalism and Truth

