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# SCIENTIFIC INFALLIBILITY<sup>1</sup>

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WHEN the invitation came to speak before *The Technology Club* I was delighted. The reason is plain. The world over, scientific people have the same mentality, and when they foregather, the spirit of intellectual congeniality is present.

Mentality of any kind originates in the acceptance of some moral or intellectual position. To it the mind is anchored, and from it as a central ganglion, thought and feeling function in doing work. Peoples as well as individuals have their mentalities. That of the Attic Greek is clearly seen in the beautiful art of his loved Athens. It is also uncovered by the persistent use made of his keen and abundant mental machinery in attempting to arrive at the satisfactory meaning of life. The Roman had his mentality which is best seen in stating his leading characteristics. He was severe and strong, well-disciplined and trustworthy as far as his own interests were concerned. He was self-confident, and self-righteous, and accordingly was never troubled over moral issues. He lacked seriously in artistic and moral imagination. He was a heavy feeder and a lover of gladiatorial contests. His mentality was given expression in an uninspiring and massive architecture, in his logical but cold literature, and was the main compulsion of his greedy and merciless state policy of world conquest. The ponderous German mentality is stamped on Berlin. That of the French is best seen in the delicate but strong lines of his filigree art and literature. The mentality of the Turk is in abundant evidence in the shiftless and incapable native life of Constantinople. The sullen spirit that pervades Peking is the direct output of the Chinaman's religious mentality. He never removes his stare from the darkness shrouding his ancestors. The light of the new day strikes him on

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered before The Technology Club, Syracuse, New York, June 1, 1922.

the back, and not in the face as with us Westerners. His pose is abnormal, and therefore he sours.

The scientific mentality originates in Law, and draws from it constant nourishment for enlargement. Law is the way Almighty God does things, and because things are being done everywhere, its realm is the universe and its reign is as extensive. There is no method of escape from either. Pruning Burke's definition of involved phrases, the essential truth remains that all are born in subjection to immutable and persistent Law. It is prior to all our desires and is above all our contrivances. It is antecedent to our existence and will be here when we have passed away. Men, in politics and religion, make with much dignity compacts and conventions; any one and all have sanction and force as they are rooted in Law. Before some sane voices aroused their fellows from yielding to the intellectual fascination of the French Revolution, the great and glorious Richard Hooker in his rural parish had written of the realm and reign of Law. He said: "The Law doth speak with all indifferency; the Law hath no side respect to the person [of men]; the Law is as it were an oracle proceeding from wisdom and understanding." Furthermore, all the energies of Law as expressed in terms of love and power, work steadily for a larger betterment. The modern scientist has removed a few shovelfuls in uncovering the hidden physical energies of boundless power and advantage. The moral Law was uncovered at Sinai, and was given the ultimate spiritual Personal Expression at Bethlehem.

It seems needful to say that laws are the human interpretation of the fundamental principles which bear the whole creation up. For a time they are directly useful in increasing the betterment of the social body, and then give place to new increments of knowledge of the basic and constructive energies.

But more in particular of the scientific mentality, where did it come from and how has it fared as it has traveled through the centuries? In a large but accurate way there are two mentalities. One is generated by the recognition of Law and obedience to it. The other is rooted

in opinion after it has ripened into hardened tradition. It is very clear that the physical condition of mother earth today is the result of many past ages of geological activity. It is just the same with present-day civilization. The ancient processes of thought and feeling are throbbing in it. The conception of the realm and reign of Law was the originator of the Hebrew mentality and the educator of all soul exercises. How the prophet-statesmen of that old day labored in good and evil condition to have the Law written on the tables of the hearts of the people is not within this presentation. Nor is the reliability of the persistent belief that it was delivered to them through Moses. The facts are simply cited. Certain it is that the great legislator was always emphatic that the Law was not the result of his cogitations, and he was intolerant of others who made the suggestion. He knew both sides of the subject, because he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," which was reasoned opinion from first to last. His insistence in this matter was that of all the prophets, and the Greatest of them made the Law the one unalterable and constructive force in mental and moral culture. He said: "Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled."

As everyone knows, the chief end Moses sought in uncovering the realm and reign of moral Law, was for securing the social and spiritual education of the individual and the nation. This does not need argument. The all-important secondary fact is that the moral standard controls and gives endurance to thought of physical things. Many mechanical and materialistic philosophies of life have been fabricated. With the blare of trumpets the moral has been left out; but ignoring it has neither banished nor destroyed it. And so they have limped a little and then tumbled down. Sound money is the most condensed form of wealth. The person measuring its value by individual use and ambition keeps it in his pocket. When converted to the privileges of the Cross, he yields to a new compulsion in the use of wealth. And so the dogma that Almighty God does things in grace according

to Law, germinated and gave form to the scientific position that He works the same way in nature. This is the motive to the first verse of Genesis, and it unfolds in power with each successive stage of the creation narrative. Moreover, it is all through this ancient Hebrew literature, and grows in strength and proportion with the intellectual advance of the people. Of course, it does not attain to anything like the modern statement; but the germ idea grows and is never lost in the various floods of pagan opinion. The poets of a people give the most elevated and refined expression to its great and controlling thoughts. Over and over again the Psalms speak of the direct divine operation of Law in physical nature. With unapproachable beauty and force Psalm 19 combines His working by Law in nature and grace. In a less degree of perfection so do 104, 119, and so on.

In time at Jerusalem the fluid interpretation of Law hardened into adamantine tradition. This effectually prevented progress, because it allowed no direct appeal to the throbbing realm of Law so as to gain a larger store of its outbursting fullness. And so the rudimentary scientific method was driven across the desert to the great Hebrew school at Alexandria. From there it went to the Hebrew college at Cordova, and thence to the University of Paris. There Roger Bacon possessed it and took it to England. All scholars are quite generally agreed in ranking this man as the father of the modern scientific method of investigation and reasoning.

The place where the other mentality received its highest form and polish was the pagan schools of Ancient Athens. A compulsion common to all men is to arrive at a final standard of authority in social and religious matters. This was strong in the Greeks and they loved to use their keen mental faculties to find it. After they had outgrown the Homeric imaginations, the quest for the final authority was taken up and seriously prosecuted. Before going further it should be said that it is the verdict of legal authorities that neither in the Iliad, nor in any other Greek literature, is there any trace of Law, nor any germ out of which its realm and reign could

have been developed. And so, for a beginning, they relied on their own reflections and reasonings. Pythagoras started the process of logically developing this mentality by affirming that "mind is the source and measure of all things." But the mind in its attempt to arrive at safe conclusions needs guidance. And so Aristotle stated his *generals* for the guidance of all intellectual operations. Of course, these were only the opinions of a great man, but in time they hardened into traditions of adamant. They formed the classic mentality, and, as M. Taine well says, never with it "are we on the solid and visible ground of personal observation and narration, but always in the empty air, in the empty space of pure generalities."

This mentality passed unchallenged into the Middle Ages and was zealous to prevent all freedom of thought and investigation. The reason is a clear and everyday one. Allow opinion to sit in the seat of authority, and men hang on to it with a death grip. It is directly responsible for a long list of the most odious crimes. Because the Prophet of Galilee spake in the terms of Law, the Jewish theologians became greatly alarmed over such startling teaching: soon they saw clearly, that their traditions, that is, hardened opinions, were in serious peril. And so special pains were taken to confute Him in His talk. But the more they tried, the more they failed, and the end of their fixed opposition was vented in nailing Him to the cross. Opinion murdered Socrates and burned Bruno at the stake. It accounts for the many horrors of the "Holy Office," the burnings at Smithfield and the ecclesiastical beheadings at London Tower. It persecuted Roger Bacon into utter discouragement. It mattered not at all that he

"Saw the vision of the world,  
And all the glories that would be."

He soon was made to know that to confront reasoned opinion with experience, or to break away from the authority of scholastic metaphysics, was an unpardonable offence. It would have laid its crushing hand on Francis Bacon, had it dared to. The fundamental position of

Martin Luther was that the final authority in religion is personal opinion. The German peasants believed him, and gave a terrible social expression to their belief in the devastating Thirty Years' War. When Erasmus wrote him that he had "let loose the dogs of war," he was promptly and with characteristic vehemence, consigned to the devil. This teaching of Luther on the seat of religious authority was worked over by Hegel with much philosophical verbiage. It exactly suited the Prussians, and burst forth furiously in the World War. Socially, this mentality fosters and breeds crime enormously. The criminal of every grade and color puts his opinion of what he may do in the seat of authority and above the laws of the land. That is what makes him the enemy of the social body.

It should be said that the scientific man has opinions—plenty of them—and more all the time. They are his tools for tracing the working of some principle operating for betterment; they are the scaffolding from which he builds the temple of truth. Having served this end, they are tossed into the junk heap of the discarded.

There are many confirmations of the statement that Law not only has its way, but pulverizes antagonistic opinion. The vital Law of commerce and trade is that a just equivalent shall be given for that received. There have been many organized denials of this Law: their overthrow has come quickly, with loss and suffering. Generally, society has gained wisdom from the experience. More prominent than others was the Tulip Craze of Holland, the South Sea Speculation of London, the Panama Scheme of Scotland, and the Sixteen to One fanaticism of recent date. Today the political and financial egotists of Russia are eating the sour and poisonous stuff produced by an organized repudiation of this Law. In ample measure they have as reward industrial deadness, physical disease and death, and inability to borrow a penny.

In the realm of morals and politics, the vindication of the infallibility of Law is slower than in nature, but it comes all the same. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" has always been actively present. Aristotle in

his cogitations just got a glimpse of it, and said "man was a social being." But he had no moral authority to define and enforce it. The Prophet of Galilee did not call this principle into existence; it was true before He stated and defined it. For twelve remarkable centuries Rome went her way of world conquest and rule, and then collapsed amidst a universal verdict of execration and hate. Other than herself, she never loved anybody. Her state policy had no ingredient of mercy, no element of socially redemptive effort, and so the great constructive Law crushed her. As long as Napoleon Bonaparte fought battles for the liberation of the people from the accursed political doctrines of Imperial Rome, he was continuously successful. After the battle of Austerlitz, his thoughts were for his personal despotic elevation; and from that day he walked deeper and deeper into the valley of defeat. The central person of the World War said frankly that he aimed at the world-wide establishment of his imperial house. France was to be bled white, then England would be made a German principality, and, in due time, heavy tribute would be levied on the United States. Much has been said that this war was for world trade, or, in other words, that the life of the individual nation consists in meat and drink. To the moral student of history, this view is exceedingly superficial. From the first assault on Belgium to the Armistice, the issue was that of the supremacy of the reign of moral Law over physical force. The final issue, therefore, was never in doubt.

The present and future world-supremacy of Anglo-Saxon social and political ideals seems assured. But how has it come about that one people has belted the globe with its cultural standards, and, in particular, government by discussion? Over and over again, the "little islander," or regional sentiment, has protested vigorously against reaching out to the ends of the earth, and always just in the nick of time, an unescapable compulsion has forced reaching out. The result has been that government by discussion has gone from ocean to ocean, and into the seven seas. The upbuilding principle involved, and the oft-repeated command given by Moses, and for the



first time in history, is this: "There shall be one law for the homeborn and for the stranger within the gates." This makes the king the creature of Law as well as the peasant. It grows personal self-respect and ripens the sense of associated responsibility. On the other hand, the Latin political culture makes the most of the *prince* and rules that the people are just good enough to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. These two political mentalities have been in clash all through the modern centuries. The fact is in the open that the men of our race, indeed our own sons, have been the ones to shatter the forces of despotic political opinion. Here is the record:—The subjugation of the Latin Norman into respect and adoption of the old Laws and liberties of the realm. Away back yonder, the men of our blood gained by inches and held by clinches; were slow to contention and slower to quit; that was the way the victory was gained by the old Saxon grit. Then came the forcing of King John to sign the Great Charter, the victory of Marlborough at Blenheim, the sharp success of Wolfe on the Heights of Abraham, Waterloo, and The Argonne. There never need be any serious concern that the Law will accomplish that whereunto it has been sent.

There is just one infallible thing in this world, and that is Law. The scientific mentality is rooted in it, and the scientific man is ready to stake the interests of his soul upon it for both the now and the ever. He is in good company with the Prophet of Galilee, Who had it absolutely. Because all things, seen and unseen, are under the reign of Law, he insists that the way to understand them is through their principles of life and expression. Christian character is a real thing. Therefore he asks to be shown the principles originating and perfecting it. In such a very serious matter, he is filled with amazement to be piously told that it does not much matter what is believed. That sort of stuff is obnoxious and antagonistic to his whole system of thinking.

One prominent attempt to fix religious infallibility is that of pronouncing the literature called the Bible infallible as mere literature. This literature, like all other,

is a human product; and to call anything human infallible is plainly absurd. As a matter of fact, there is not in existence a single original manuscript. All are copies, and probably have been copied a great many times. And yet, there is carried by this literature the unescapable grip and compulsion of absolute moral certainty and final spiritual authority. Into whatever language it is translated, these two facts of religious infallibility are conspicuously present. While there is much in the Bible that has no uplifting effect whatsoever, these two ingredients compel consideration. The explanation given by St. Paul is entirely satisfactory, because true to the facts. He says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." This treasure is the uncovered moral and spiritual Law governing the universe. It is found in this literature, and it is not found in any other place.

A corollary of the two mentalities is that each has its method of uncovering the future. Scientific prophecy forecasts events in the terms of Law now in operation. This will be true of things physical as long as they shall last. It is true now, and will be true of moral things, world without end. Geologists rest their conclusions on this dogma with absolute confidence. A bit of evidence near home on earth movement, is illustrative. It is now known that there is such an upward movement and tilt of the upper lake region, that its waters, in time, will again use their ancient channel to the sea through the Illinois river valley. In 500 years their flow through this old outlet will be clearly marked. In 1,000 years they will be rushing through it, and in 1,500 years Niagara will be a memory.

The Hebrew teachers and statesmen vested their forecasts of events upon the reign of moral Law. To them it was a very definite and constructive energy among men and nations. It uncovered the way of history and the seat of justice and punishment. When Ezekiel pronounced death upon the soul knowingly breaking the Law, he was thought crazy. When the great empires of that old world were strong and hungry for more conquest, it was thought stark lunacy for a Hebrew, every now and

then, to speak of their downfall. When those men in whom lived the consciousness of the movement of Law, predicted that "when the fullness of time had come," the moral Law would be personalized in Human Form and Life, those of the pagan mentality said, Nonsense, and passed on. The statement of Isaiah of the certain and enduring action of Law is good science. He says, "It shall not return . . . void, but it shall accomplish that which I please and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." The evidence of the centuries is confirmatory of this true description of the persistent working of Law.

People having the religious mentality of opinion have earnestly striven to see into the future. The story of the origination of pagan shrines is more or less well known. By means of them, the portals of the unseen world were supposed to be opened and desired information was obtained. As everyone knows, these places were wrecked when their organized deception had played itself out. Athens was a great religious centre; so was Jerusalem. Both were captured and plundered. The religious leaders of Athens were in despair because they had nothing left. A rabbi in Esdras speaks thus of the loss of the City of David: "The heathen have taken our city, but we have left the Holy One and His Law." Nothing serious had happened: there never does, when the reign of Law is in the soul.