

# **RATIONALISM AND REVELATION**

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Rationalism and revelation by Anonymous

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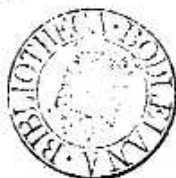
**RATIONALISM  
AND REVELATION**



# RATIONALISM

AND

# REVELATION.



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"Every where we perceive a certain innocent but futile labour, which attaches itself to questions and inquiries equally inaccessible and without results—which has no other object than to satisfy the restless curiosity of minds. \* \* \* \* \*"

"What time and talent have men wasted in metaphysical lucubrations!"—GIZOR'S "Lectures on Modern History."

"The Soul is the principle of Faith."—SCHLEGEL'S "Philosophy of Life."

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## FAITH AND REASON.

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If, when standing on the brink of a coal-pit, we gaze down the black abyss, and observe the waggons laden with the fuel, successively mounting through that Erebus-like darkness, we, in these enlightened days may exclaim, without fear of being considered visionary speculatists, "Coal is the embodiment of power derived from the sun!" Nay, so far from our assertion being considered as false, visionary, or unphilosophical, the whole array of modern science and discovery supports and verifies our statement. A thin slice of coal when subjected to microscopic analysis, presents to us the cellular and vascular structure peculiar to the organization of plants, and which we look for in vain in all other mineral or inorganic substances. Again, the product of the chemical analysis is altogether vegetable: *tannin* and *resin*, two compounds peculiar to the vegetable kingdom, have been discovered in it; and the artificial formation of coal from wood, by Sir James Hall, has silenced

all doubts on the subject.\* However, had such a theory been advanced a very few generations past, the rash enthusiast, as he would in that age have been deemed, would have either been treated with scorn, or taken care of by his friends, to say the least of the consequences of his rashness. Indeed, that black, ugly, dirty substance which we call coal, brought up as it is from such Egyptian-like darkness, and from amidst noxious gases—gases so noxious that without due precaution animal life is extinguished by them—this black, ugly, dirty substance, both from its appearance and from the depth and darkness of the

*difficile antrum, nulloque penetrabile astro,*

whence it is taken, appears so utterly opposed to all our ideas of sunlight, of beauty, and of life, that we cannot, except through the aid which modern science has given us, conceive that coal is decomposed vegetable matter, and that the plant from which it was formed—those of the carboniferous æra—were graceful, lovely, and elegant, as those which now beautify and adorn the mountain, the valley, and the plain.

Not only this, but that substance called *shale*, which is in immediate contact with coal—in which

\* Professor Phillips: indeed, Modern Science is entirely unanimous upon the vegetable origin of coal.

as it were, coal is encased—this shale, contains the most exquisitely delicate, well defined, and perfect impressions of the plants of the carboniferous period. Sometimes these impressions are contained in the body of the coal-seam itself, layers of shale and coal alternating with each other. This kind of deposit is the most remarkable for the great delicacy and beauty of the vegetable impressions found between the laminae of coal. These beds strongly resemble a mass of tobacco-leaves, as they are pressed closely together in a hogshead, and still retain their brownish-yellow colour, when first exposed to the air.\* Yet, in former times, such appearances were considered mere *lusi naturæ*—mere freaks of nature—and not as enforcing the truth of any particular hypothesis; and during those periods of intellectual darkness, any attempt at innovation was surely followed by condign punishment. The history of the progress of science may be said indeed to be a history of persecution. The mind at the mention of the progress of science is insensibly carried back to the days of Galileo and the Inquisition; to the days of the first anatomists; and to those dark periods of history when attempts at human progress were certain to be combated with all the

\* Professor Phillips. Consult also any standard work on the subject.



rigour of superstitious bigotry and Inquisitorial cruelty ; to those times when to be scientific was deemed to be heretical ; and when to be content to remain quietly ignorant was considered as one of the best proofs of Christian orthodoxy. If in those dark times of the enslavement of the human mind by the intolerant conservatism of a bigoted and jealous priesthood, such a theory had been advanced as the carboniferous theory, it would have condemned the promoters either to the dungeons of the Holy Office, or the flames of an *Auto da fé*. But to resume. We know now perfectly well that the solar rays must be considered as the cause which enabled the vegetation of the carboniferous period (as it is usually termed) to extract the peculiar kind of nourishment it required from the oxygen with which that peculiar kind of nourishment was combined ; in fact, to take carbon from the oxygen with which that carbon was combined. So then, "Coal is the embodiment of power originally derived from the sun." This fact is arrived at by a process of pure reasoning and demonstration.

Lord Bacon long ago asserted that "heat is to be regarded as motion." This, to his contemporaries, must have seemed a most rash and indefinable assertion ; yet modern experimental

science has demonstrated the correctness of Bacon's theory. Sir William Armstrong and Captain Noble determined, by experiment, the loss of effect in a shot (due to its crushing against iron plates) *by the heat elicited by the shot*; Joule's law (as it is termed) and the known velocity of the shot, enabled them to compute the number of dynamical units of heat, representing the whole mechanical power (and *momentum* is neither more nor less than *weight* multiplied into *velocity*) of the projectile, and by ascertaining the number of units developed in it by impact, the power which took effect upon the shot, instead of upon the plate, was arrived at.\* Here, again, we have reasoning accompanied by demonstration.

Major Navez, of the Belgian Artillery, has invented a beautiful instrument to determine, by means of electro-magnetism, the velocity of projectiles. Nature is thus compelled to yield up her secrets, vanquished by her own weapons—

*Natura suis armis victa!*

Now, these facts which we have been considering are not aimed at merely by guess-work, or by chance, or by any process of intellectual divination—*natura non facit saltum*—nature is calmly progressive in her *modus operandi*, and so is science,

\* British Association, 1863.

seeking to comprehend these things, also calmly progressive in its method of proceeding. And yet so infinite are these operations of nature, that however many facts we may discover, there is no fear of the human intellect ever penetrating more than a very limited number of them! Happy for the scientific man perhaps that it is so; for could he know all, having no more to discover,

“*Æstuat infelix angusto in limite mundi.*”

might well be applied to the mind possessing such attainments. No fear of that, for now we only “know in part,” and never learn really much

“ — whilst this muddy vesture of decay,  
Doth grossly close us in — ”

Science will admit nothing as fact which is not capable of demonstration. She will not be convinced by the most ingenious dialectics unless demonstrations accompany them. Yet, when by means of laborious and jealous experiment, the demonstration — the actual demonstration — is arrived at, no vision of poet or magician ever presented to their votaries such wonders as are seen by the enraptured student, when the mysteries (so to speak) of nature are disclosed to him as the reward of his patient and long prosecuted labours.

We frequently find whilst considering the great minds which adorned mankind before the