

8. "O my judges—for in calling you judges I should call you rightly—something marvellous has happened to me. Hitherto, the Oracle of the Divinity, which is familiarly about me, with great frequency has opposed itself, even in very little things, if I were about to act in any way not rightly. But now there has befallen me, as you yourselves see, that which men may think, and most men do account, to be the greatest of evils. And yet this morning, neither when I came from home did the sign from the god oppose itself, nor when I came up hither to the court of judgment, nor anywhere during the defence I was about to make; although in other speeches it has often restrained me in the very midst of speaking. But now in this affair it has not anywhere opposed me, either in any deed or word. What, then, do I suppose to be the cause? I will tell you. That which has happened to me seems to be a good thing; and if we think death to be an evil, we are in error. Of this I have a sure evidence; for it can not be that the accustomed sign would not have opposed itself to me if I were not about to do something which is good.

9. "Wherefore, O my judges, you ought to be of good hope about death, and to know this to be true—that no evil can happen to a good man, whether in life or in death; nor are his affairs neglected by the gods. Nor are my affairs at this time the result of chance. But this is clear to me—that it were better for me now to die, and to be set free from troubles. Wherefore the sign has in nothing opposed me. I am, therefore, in no way angry with those who have condemned me, nor with those who have accused me; though they have condemned and accused me with no good will, but rather with the thought to hurt me. This, indeed, in them is worthy of blame."

### III.

#### 90. THE INTERIOR MONITOR.

THE Supreme Being is of a certain character, which, expressed in human language, we call ethical. He has the attributes of justice, truth, wisdom, sanctity, benevolence, and mercy, as eternal characteristics in His nature, the very Law of His being, identical with Himself; and when He

became Creator, He implanted this Law, which is Himself, in the intelligence of all His rational creatures. The Divine Law, then, is the rule of ethical truth, the standard of right and wrong, a sovereign, irreversible, absolute authority in the presence of men and angels. "The eternal law," says St. Augustine, "is the Divine Reason or Will of God, commanding the observance, forbidding the disturbance, of the natural order of things."—"The natural law," says St. Thomas, "is an impression of the Divine Light in us, a participation of the eternal law in the rational creature."

2. This law, as apprehended in the minds of individual men, is called "conscience"; and though it may suffer refraction in passing into the intellectual medium of each, it is not thereby so affected as to lose its character of being the Divine Law, but still has, as such, the prerogative of commanding obedience. "The Divine Law," says Cardinal Gousset, "is the supreme rule of actions; our thoughts, desires, words, acts, all that man is, is subject to the domain of the law of God; and this law is the rule of our conduct by means of our conscience. Hence it is never lawful to go against our conscience; as the Fourth Lateran Council<sup>1</sup> says, 'Whatever goes against conscience builds up toward hell.'"

3. This, I know, is very different from the view ordinarily taken of it, both by the science and literature and by the public opinion of this day. It is founded on the doctrine that conscience is the voice of God, whereas it is fashionable on all hands now to consider it in one way or another a creation of man. Of course there are great and broad exceptions to this statement. It is not true of many or most religious bodies of men; especially not of their teachers and ministers. When Anglicans, Wesleyans, the various Presbyterian sects in Scotland, and other denominations among us speak of conscience, they mean what we mean, the voice of God in the nature and heart of man, as distinct from the voice of Revelation.

4. They speak of a principle planted within us before we

<sup>1</sup> The Fourth Lateran Council, opened its sessions November 11 so called on account of having been 1215, and closed November 30, held at the Lateran basilica, Rome, though sessions were held in January, 1216, was convened by Pope Innocent III.,

have had any training, though such training and experience is necessary for its strength, growth, and due formation. They consider it a constituent element of the mind, as our perception of other ideas may be, as our powers of reasoning, as our sense of order and the beautiful, and our other intellectual endowments. They consider it, as Catholics consider it, to be the internal witness of both the existence and the law of God. They think it holds <sup>1</sup> of God, and not of man, as an angel walking on the earth would be no citizen or dependent of the civil power. They would not allow, any more than we do, that it could be resolved into any combination of principles in our nature more elementary than itself; nay, though it may be called, and is, a law of the mind, they would not grant that it is nothing more; I mean, that it was not a dictate, nor conveyed the notion of responsibility, of duty, of a threat and a promise, with a vividness which discriminated it from all other constituents of our nature.

5. This, at least, is how I read the doctrine of Protestants as well as of Catholics. The rule and measure of duty is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor state convenience, nor fitness, order, and the *pulchrum*.<sup>2</sup> Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with one's self, but it is a message from Him who, in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal<sup>3</sup> Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its p<sup>er</sup>emptoriness, a priest in its blessings and an<sup>ath</sup>'emas,<sup>4</sup> and, even though the eternal priesthood throughout the Church could cease to be, in it the sacerdotal<sup>5</sup> principle would remain and would have a sway.

6. Words such as these are idle, empty verbiage<sup>6</sup> to the great world of philosophy now. All through my day there has been a resolute warfare, I had almost said conspiracy, against the

<sup>1</sup> H<sup>o</sup>lds, derives right or title.

<sup>2</sup> P<sup>u</sup>l'chrum, the beautiful.

<sup>3</sup> A<sup>b</sup> o r<sup>i</sup>g'i nal, first; original; primitive.

<sup>4</sup> A n<sup>ath</sup>'e ma, a ban or curse pronounced with religious solemnity

by ecclesiastical authority.

<sup>5</sup> S<sup>a</sup>c'er d<sup>o</sup>'tal, relating to the priesthood; priestly.

<sup>6</sup> V<sup>e</sup>r'bi age, the use of many words without necessity; profusion of expression without much sense.

rights of conscience, as I have described it. Literature and science have been embodied in great institutions in order to put it down. Noble buildings have been reared as fortresses against that spiritual, invisible influence which is too subtle for science and too profound for literature. Chairs in universities have been made the seats of an antagonist tradition. Public writers, day after day, have indoctrinated the minds of innumerable writers with theories subversive of its claims.

7. As in Roman times, and in the middle age, its supremacy was assailed by the arm of physical force, so now the intellect is put in operation to sap the foundations of a power which the sword could not destroy. We are told that conscience is but a twist in primitive and untutored man; that its dictate is an imagination; that the very notion of guiltiness, which that dictate enforces, is simply irrational, for how can there possibly be freedom of will, how can there be consequent responsibility, in that infinite eternal network of cause and effect in which we helplessly lie? and what retribution have we to fear, when we have had no real choice to do good or evil?

8. So much for philosophers; now let us see what is the notion of conscience in this day in the popular mind. There, no more than in the intellectual world, does "conscience" retain the old, true, Catholic meaning of the word. There, too, the idea, the presence, of a Moral Governor is far away from the use of it, frequent and emphatic as that use of it is. When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the Creator, nor the duty to Him, in thought and deed, of the creature; but the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting, according to their judgment or their humor, without any thought of God at all. They do not even pretend to go by any moral rule, but they demand what they think is an Englishman's prerogative, to be his own master in all things, and to profess what he pleases, asking no one's leave, and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer, unutterably impertinent, who dares to say a word against his going to perdition, if he like it, in his own way.

9. Conscience has rights because it has duties; but in this age, with a large portion of the public, it is the very right and freedom of conscience to dispense with conscience, to ignore a

Lawgiver and Judge, to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a license to take up any or no religion, to take up this or that and let it go again, to go to church, to go to chapel, to boast of being above all religions, and to be an impartial critic of each of them. Conscience is a stern monitor, but in this century it has been superseded by a counterfeit, which the eighteen centuries prior to it never heard of, and could not have mistaken for it, if they had. It is the right of self-will.

REV. J. H. NEWMAN, D.D.

#### IV.

##### 91. CONSCIENCE.

AS we have come upon conscience and its rights, I will say a few words on this subject, which has been already so ably and eloquently dealt with by Dr. Newman. There is no need of repeating his statements, unless where this may be unavoidable on account of their connection with what I am going to add. What, then, is conscience? It is a practical judgment concerning the lawfulness, or unlawfulness, or obligation, of doing an act which is in one's power, and of doing or not doing which there is question at the time. Under the name of *an act* I include an *omission*, which, in moral matters, is equivalent to an act. The act may be internal only—for thoughts are acts—or external also, and *speaking* is, of course, comprised.

2. Conscience, I have said, is a judgment. It is, therefore, itself an act, an act of the mind, and lasts only while it is being produced. This is, strictly speaking, the case. Yet conscience is spoken of as a permanent thing, and this not without reason. For these judgments are formed by an enduring faculty; they belong to a special department of the understanding. Then there is a continuous series of them; they are, besides, remembered, recorded, and reproduced on the recurrence of similar circumstances. Still, in rigorous philosophical and theological language, conscience means a judgment, a dictate, a passing act of the mind.

3. This, however, does not detract in the least from its authority, or influence, or efficiency; for if it were conceived as something permanent, its whole force would be in its operation,

its actual exercise. It is a *practical* judgment, practical in the last degree. It does not regard general rules, categories of cases, abstract questions. It views each action as clothed with all circumstances of time, place, and the rest. It is each one's own, and nobody else's. My conscience is confined to myself. It is concerned about my own actions alone; it regulates my actions alone. I may have duties with regard to others and with regard to *their* duties, but my conscience exclusively governs *my* duties, taking in, of course, those duties of mine about others and their duties. My conscience tells me, on each given occasion, that I may do this, or that I may not do that, or that I am bound to do one thing or abstain from another, always in the present circumstances. My conscience does not pronounce on what is generally allowed, or forbidden, or required, because that is not its business, but on what is allowed, or forbidden, or required in my regard at this time.

4. This conscience, this judgment, is either correct or incorrect, either in conformity with the truth or not—in theological language, *right* or *erroneous*. My conscience may tell me that I am justified in doing what in reality is prohibited and in itself wrong. In this my conscience errs. The error is perhaps one which I have at present no means of correcting; I am not in a position to find out the mistake. If so, my conscience is said to be invincibly<sup>1</sup> erroneous; not because there is nowhere in this world a good reason to confute and overcome it, but because there is no good reason at this moment within my reach, because I have no doubt or suspicion which, being properly attended to, would lead to the correction of my judgment. An invincibly erroneous conscience holds, to all intents and purposes, the place of a right conscience. It affects a person and his conduct precisely in the same way, and if any conscience can be safely followed, so far as moral rectitude is concerned, *it* can.

5. Where the error admits of correction, not only in itself—which is very little to the purpose—but on the part of the person, when he has the practical opportunity and power of understanding the real condition of things and substituting a true dictate for the false one, the case is altogether different.

<sup>1</sup> In *vin'ci bly*, not to be conquered or overcome.

It would be a great mistake to imagine that one is justified in doing whatever he *in some kind of way* thinks is proper. There are undoubtedly those who do what they well know to be wrong, and here there is no delusion. But men *often*, too, take for granted, or persuade themselves, that they may act in a way they are not warranted to act. They may say with truth, "I think this is lawful," and yet they have no business to think so. Their conscience is *vincibly*—culpably<sup>1</sup>—*erroneous*. No one is ever justified in *acting against* his conscience; neither is a man always justified in *following* it, but may be bound to *correct* it. Where the conscience is *right*, or else *invincibly erroneous*—and therefore for practical purposes *right*—it is a safe guide; not, if it be *vincibly* erroneous.

6. All that I have been saying is true and certain, and held in substance by all Catholic theologians. But why is it so? Let us look to the reason of the thing. Every moral agent must have a rule to go by in every thing he does: he must have an immediate rule, a proximate<sup>2</sup> rule, a rule that comes quite down to himself and his action. No number of distant, remote rules will do. They may be sound and good in themselves, but they are of no use except as they are applied. Now this application can only be made by the understanding of the man concerned. It is by each one's understanding that his will is to be directed, and conscience is the dictate of the understanding as to what is just now right or wrong for the man's will to choose. If he had no knowledge he would not be responsible, and he is not responsible beyond the limits of his knowledge. Whatever is outside of that is to him as if it were not. He is responsible to the extent of his practical knowledge of duty, and this practical knowledge of duty comes to him from his conscience. This is why conscience can not be lawfully gainsaid. This is why a right conscience must be followed; and the same is true of an invincibly erroneous conscience, because, like that which is every way right, it is the last resource he has. Not so with a vincibly erroneous conscience, because there is yet another conscience—a right one—which tells him he must reform the mistaken one.

<sup>1</sup> Cūl'pa bly, in a manner to merit censure; blamably.

<sup>2</sup> Prōx'i mate, nearest; next immediately preceding or following.

7. Conscience is not a legislator nor a law. It is a judgment—not an arbitrary judgment, but a judgment according to law and to evidence, as the decisions of judges and juries are supposed to be. And, in truth, forensic<sup>1</sup> judgments afford a very good illustration of the office of conscience in every man. It is the business of the practical reason—the practical department of the understanding—to ponder the law, Divine and human, which bears on each particular detail of conduct, to observe well the facts of the case, and apply the law to them; and the resulting determination as to what may, or ought, or ought not to be done, is precisely the conscience of which we have been speaking. The more important the matter is, the greater care should be bestowed on the process—the deliberation premised<sup>2</sup> to this judgment. The knowledge of the principles on which such judgments depend is permanent, more perfect in some than in others, according to their ability and education; but all are bound to keep themselves informed proportionally to their condition and circumstances, and, in particular instances of special moment, care ought to be taken to learn more, and counsel sought from those who are qualified to give it. Conscience dictates that all this should be done. Conscience is ever at work pronouncing on our proposed acts or opinions, and, among the rest, telling us what we must do to have our conscience what it ought to be. To put the thing in correct but unusual terms, which I have already employed, one conscience prescribes how we are to form another.

8. Conscience is not a universal instinct which intuitively<sup>3</sup> discerns right from wrong. There is no universal instinct of this kind. There are some things manifestly right and others manifestly wrong. There is also, in many particular instances, a rapid and almost imperceptible process of reasoning which brings home to a man the duty of doing or avoiding certain acts, and the result is a strong dictate of conscience. There is, besides, a moral sense which, especially when it is properly cultivated, helps us to discern good from evil, and this is closely

<sup>1</sup> Fo rēn'sic, belonging to courts of justice; used in courts or legal proceedings.

in order to make plain what follows.  
<sup>3</sup> In tū'i tīve ly, in an intuitive manner, or without reasoning.

<sup>2</sup> Pre mised', set forth beforehand

connected, and more or less identified, with conscience. There is often, also, a rectitude of purpose, a love of virtue and hatred of vice, that serves to guard against serious mistakes in moral matters, but this is for the most part the effect of grace and of a good use of it. The regular working of conscience is of a business-like character. It is a deliberate sentence pronounced in a cause sufficiently heard and weighed. The hearing and the weighing often take but a short time, and do not need more, because we are familiar with the principles and their application, and with the facts too. But in obscure and complicated questions of conduct, especially where the issue is momentous,<sup>1</sup> we may not go so quickly. Even in easier instances it would be dangerous to rely on certain inclinations of the mind which may in reality come from prejudice, or passion, or self-love and self-seeking, or from false principles that have been unwarily adopted. We are familiar with the saying that the wish is father to the thought. It is equally true that the wish is not unfrequently father to the conscience.

REV. EDMUND O'REILLY, S. J.

## SECTION XXII.

### I.

#### 92. ETERNAL ROME.

##### PART FIRST.

[From a discourse delivered before the Accademia of the Quiriti, in Rome, on the 2615th anniversary of that city, April 21, 1863.]

THOUGH Aristotle, in his *Rhetorica*, tells us that it is an easy task to praise Ath'ens among the Athenians, I find it no easy task to celebrate Rome in the hearing of Romans. Of what shall I speak? Among the constellation of its glories, ancient, medieval, and modern, both in the natural and the supernatural order, which shall I choose as my theme? and how shall I speak of it? How will the delicate Roman ear of

<sup>1</sup> Mo mēnt'ous, of consequence; important; weighty.

such an auditory as I see before me, endure the strangeness of our accents and of our thoughts in speaking of that which is so dear and so intimate to your hearts? Nevertheless, I must adventure as I may, confiding only in the largeness of your clemency.

2. I dare say we can all remember how, in our boyhood, the title "the Eternal City" inspired us with awe and wonder; but how in after years, when the first antipathies of criticism began to work in us, we resented the use of such an epithet as a pagan apotheosis<sup>1</sup> of the *Dea Roma*.<sup>2</sup> And yet, as time goes on, and reflection becomes mature, we can perceive under it a truth so singular in its kind and so vast in its proportions as to render this great title, not a literal definition indeed, but a symbol of the greatest history the world has ever seen. It would be to say little if I were to compare the duration of Rome with the duration of any other city. It would not be to say too much if I were to affirm that the only city which has not only overpassed the duration of all others, but has alone borne any proportion to the destinies of the whole human race, is the city of Rome.

3. In order to express this truth, I shall not need to clear away the sands which hide from the eyes of men the very sites of Nin'evē and of Babylon, nor to point to the cities of Central America, the outlines of which are as marked to this day as the extinct craters which denote the volcanic activity of the past along the line of your Apennines. I shall not attempt to play the antiquary, nor to inquire into the date of Vaticanum or Saturnia, of Tarquinium or Romuria, or of the nine Romes which, we are told, crowned the seven hills before Rome was. It will not help my theme to affirm, "Rome existed before Romulus; from her Romulus derived his name." I am not now speaking of a mere duration of time—of an antiquity numbered by years—but of a duration of power and dominion, of beneficence and sovereignty, which, in the history of mankind, Rome has possessed and wielded beyond all other cities of the world. Let me, then, say a few words on this great title—the Eternity of Rome.

<sup>1</sup> Ap o thē'o sis, the act of deifying, or raising a mortal to the rank of the gods.  
<sup>2</sup> De'a Rō'ma, goddess Rome.