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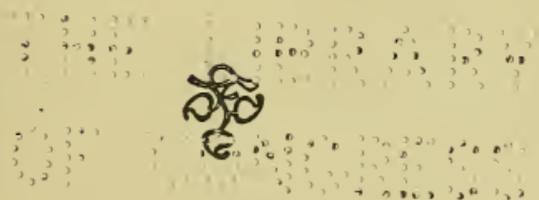
# DISCOURSES ON MIRACLES.

BY

BISHOP S. M. MERRILL, LL. D.

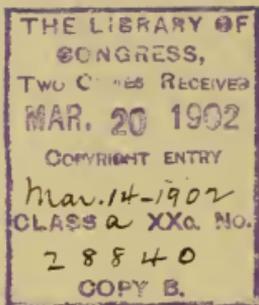
AND

BISHOP HENRY W. WARREN, LL. D.



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## PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

THE two discourses composing this book may be regarded as the outgrowth of recent discussions on the credibility of miracles as recorded in the Scriptures, of which discussion Chicago seemed to be the storm-center. The one by Bishop Merrill was delivered, by request, before the Methodist Ministers' Association of that city, and so satisfactory was it to that body that it was unanimously adopted as the sense of the meeting on the question then being so vigorously discussed by the public press. It was printed in the *Northwestern Christian Advocate*, and also issued in pamphlet form, and many thousands of copies circulated. At the request of the Publishers, the Bishop has revised and enlarged it considerably for presentation in this volume.

A few weeks later Bishop H. W. Warren addressed the Methodist Social Union of Chicago on the same subject, by request of that body. This is a representative body, and the audience of over seven hundred, mostly composed of the laity, was greatly delighted with the address, and requests for its publication became both numerous and insistent; so much so that we were glad to be able to comply. As the two discourses treat the subject from different standpoints, and cover the ground so completely, we have thought it wise to issue them in a single volume, to which arrangement both bishops have very promptly assented. We send them forth with the hope and prayer that they may satisfy many who have become entangled with doubts, and strengthen those who believe in miracles as recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

JENNINGS & PYE.

# MIRACLES.

BY BISHOP S. M. MERRILL, LL. D.



## MIRACLES.

“I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; **A Word who was conceived by the Holy Personal.** Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.” Then, of course, I believe in miracles.

My faith in the Bible as the Word of God has not been shaken by any new discoveries in science, history, archæology, or criticism; nor has my mind been disturbed

by any recent agitation touching the possibility of miracles, or the probability of their having occurred just as reported in the gospel records. There is no reason for alarm in the presence of the fullest and freest investigation of all the facts which modern learning is supposed to have found in opposition to the faith we have long cherished. God has not left himself without witness, and his truth will triumph in spite of the boastings of adversaries. In fact, the matters alleged as new discoveries, antagonistic to the Scriptures, whether in science, or philosophy, or history, or philology, or exegesis, are not nearly so numerous nor so decisive in bearing, so far as the issue between faith and unbelief is concerned, as they are supposed to be, or as the enemies of the gospel would have us believe. It is really astonishing, when we take the whole situation into the account, how little there

is in the heresies of modern times that can not be traced to the times before the period of the Reformation, and what small advances the skepticism and rationalism of to-day have made beyond the infidelity of centuries gone by. From what we hear about the discoveries of our times, and of the progress of knowledge which sheds light on the moral relations of men and on the dispensations of the Almighty, one would be led to suppose that scholarship is a new thing—that we are just emerging from barbarism—and that the men who laid the foundations of our civilization, of our governments, of our schools, and of our Churches, were pigmies in comparison with the giants of our day, if not ignorant and deluded fanatics.

It is not denied, however, that the shiftings of unbelief and the changes of method in the attacks upon the citadel of our faith

call for new adjustments of the defenses of truth and new statements of the grounds of our allegiance to Him who is

**General Principles.** himself the miracle of the ages, the incarnate Word of God. More and more we are coming to recognize the fact that the object of our faith is the person of the Son of God, and that the hottest battles of the future, as of the past, will rage about this central idea of the manifestation of God in human flesh. All other questions and issues, and all speculations and theorizings about miracles and inspiration, will pass from the front and become incidental in the presence of this supreme issue. "What think ye of Christ?" is the question of questions, and so momentous is it that an answer of some kind must be given from every person who pretends to possess and exercise the gift of reason. If Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ, he was what he

claimed to be, not only in position and office, but in origin and nature, coming down from heaven, and bearing the image and perfections of God. He was above nature—superior to nature—independent of nature in the essential elements of his being, and therefore able to control all the natural forces that stood between him and any result necessary to reveal God or to accomplish the object of his mission. What he did of an extraordinary character was done to declare what he was, and to make known the purpose for which he came into the world. If he was not a supernatural person, he was either deceived or a deceiver, and either conclusion is fatal to his pretensions as a Teacher sent from God. But if he was himself supernatural, then supernatural works were his natural testimonials and his proper witnesses. To these he appealed, and on their testimony he depended

for his success in planting his kingdom among men.

It is true that we depend more largely than formerly upon the internal evidences of the authority of the Scriptures, and possibly give higher place to the inner attestations of consciousness and of conscience and reason, but we do not discard, and would not discount the external evidences which have been so valuable in the past. Miracles and prophecy, verified as real, have ever stood, and ever will stand, as competent and accepted proofs of the Divine approval of those who come as messengers of God. Prophecy is also miracle; for he who foretells contingent events beyond the possible knowledge of the unaided human intellect gives the highest proof of supernatural endowment and of the inspiration which is from God. A miracle of knowledge is not less a miracle than the most wonderful ef-

fects produced in the realm of physical nature.

Miracles in their nature are extraordinary, out of harmony with the ordinary course of things, having a sphere of their own, and are not to be expected in ordinary conditions; nor are they to be reduced to order, or to be classified as events to be brought under the cognizance of reason, or to be explained as to their process or mode, but only to be attested as to the fact of their occurrence, either by the senses of those present to witness them, or by a sufficiency of testimony vouchsafed to those who are not in reach for ocular demonstrations. All the works of God are wonderful, but all the wonderful works of God are not miracles. Miracles are prodigies, but all prodigies are not miracles. All miracles are the work of God, and so manifestly the work of God that both the senses and the reason

apprehend the agency of God at once upon witnessing them, while reason does the same in those to whom the testimony of their occurrence comes with convincing power. The immediate agency of God is the essential thought, and that whether they are wrought with or without human or other visible instrumentalities, and therefore they are wonderful to us, and incomprehensible, not only in the phenomena attending and attesting them, but also in their occasion and design.

The attitude of any particular person towards miracles must depend on his conception of God, and of the relation

**God and  
Nature.**

of God to the external universe.

If, like Spinoza, or in any Pantheistic way, he identifies God with the universe or with nature, then what God does nature does, and nature works blindly and of necessity, and miracles are out of the question; for in

such a system nature alone works, and all events, whether more or less marvelous, are results of fixed law, and without moral design. Neither Pantheism nor outright Atheism can find any place for miracles.

The old Augustinian conception of God working in nature by immediate agency and arbitrary will, almost to the exclusion of any intrinsic force in matter, or any other thing worthy the name of natural law, shuts out the idea of miracles nearly if not quite as effectually as does that of the Pantheist. If God in his immanence is so efficient in nature that his will is the only law, and second causes have no place, that inference is not rash which holds all effects and all events, whether seemingly ordinary or extraordinary, to be alike natural and alike miraculous. Unless we can distinguish God from nature, and conceive of him as above nature, and independent of it, and yet recog-

nize nature as a system governed by law—the laws enstamped on nature being so related to the system as to be an essential part of it—it is not possible for us to form an adequate idea of either nature or of miracles. God is God, and nature is nature. This is absolute truth. God is no part of nature, and nature is no part of God. God is not of nature, but nature is of God. “For of him, and through him, and unto him are all things.” If God of his own fullness created the universe and ordained its laws, and has never abdicated his sovereignty, he is its Proprietor and Ruler, and may at his will touch and retard or hasten any movement of its vast machinery, or interject new forces without violence or interruption to its general order or harmony. In this conception only do we find a place for miracles, and here we find ample room.

The denial of the divinity of Christ and

of his supernatural birth does not necessarily exclude miracles, as God has sometimes wrought miracles, according to the Scriptures, by the hands of men of like nature with ourselves; but the denial of the possibility of miracles shuts the door against the belief in his supernatural birth, and against any conception of an incarnation. It requires that he who claimed to come from God, as other men do not come, be looked upon as making a false claim, and therefore as consciously or unconsciously deceiving the people. No more serious implication of his wisdom or his integrity can be made. Infidels hesitate not to make it, nor do Pantheists, if any distinction between these classes be allowable; but so-called "liberalists," who profess respect for the Scriptures, and for the Founder of Christianity as the wisest and best of men, can not with any consistency take such

ground, although the necessities of their prior and chief assumption compel them to do it.

This rejection of the testimony concerning the supernatural birth is sometimes rated among the new things brought to light by late discoveries, or as resulting from the advanced thought of our day, which has just reached the point of freedom from the bondage of supernaturalism and subserviency to myths and legends. But it is in fact an old, old heresy, the reproduction of Socinianism, with scarcely the semblance of new clothing with which to cover its ancient deformities. It may be "liberalism," but it can not be Christianity. Although labeled all over with Scripture names and phrases, its kinship and fellowship must be with the enemies of the cross of Christ, and, as will appear later, its legitimate outcome is the repudiation of the Son of Mary as an open

fraud. It is the sheerest folly to reject the Scriptural account of the miracles of Christ—those attributed to him—and yet to speak respectfully of him and of his apostles who wrote or inspired the record of his sayings and doings. If their testimony can not be received as to facts, or concerning the events daily occurring in his life and in their own lives, much less can it be relied upon when it purports to give account of his parables, addresses, and teachings in relation to the mysteries of God's purposes and works. Until one is ready to go to the extent of denouncing the entire record as the fabrication of designing men, there is neither reason nor propriety in rejecting part of it, while holding respect for the parties to its production. It is all honest, or it is all dishonest.

What, then, is the real attitude of the skeptic with regard to the New Testament

record? An accurate portrayal would bring us a picture full of contradictions, of grotesque and absurd posturings, of **The Attitude of Sceptics.** deeply colored with the most repulsive bigotries. Rationalists and "liberalists" join hands in cherishing doubts and in casting opprobrium upon belief in the supernatural; but beyond this their harmony disappears. All manner of fantastic conjectures take the place of sober investigation, while abounding credulity usurps the sphere of intelligent faith. Loosened from loyalty to a Divine personality, they plunge into the wildest speculations, forgetting, apparently, that they are bound to believe something of a positive character, as well as those who receive the record as an authoritative revelation from God. It is not enough that they disbelieve in miracles; they must believe in something that excludes miracles. It is not enough that they reject the evidences that

Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God; they must believe he was human, without any other divinity than such as they attribute to all men, and that he was a victim of deception, or a willful deceiver. Their negative posture in unbelief must carry with it some kind of positive belief with regard to the origin of the world, and the sources and efficiency of the laws of nature, and the forces which hold the universe in its course through the ages. Practically they at once admit and deny the credibility of the gospel records, admitting them with full confidence for some purposes, and denying them for others. Most of them aver that Jesus of Nazareth was a good man, and yet a deceiver; that he was the embodiment of the highest human wisdom, and yet a deluded fanatic; that he was modest, sincere, and humble, and yet egotistical, pretentious, and self-asserting to the last degree. The fact

is that to all classes of doubters, of every type and grade, he is to-day, as of old, the stumbling-block and foolishness. All things pertaining to faith hinge on the view taken of him who is the Founder of the Church, the subject and substance of the gospel, the Alpha and Omega of the scheme of human redemption. What he was in himself is and must be determinative of what he was to the universe, and especially of his relation to humanity, and of the works proper to reveal him to the intelligent apprehension of those with whom he came in contact. If he himself was superhuman, it is not strange that supernatural works attended him and attested his words. This is the last analysis, and by it faith in Christianity and in miracles must stand or fall.

Think not that we venture too much in placing such stress on the evidences of his divinity. The risk is great, but it is here.

There is no evading it. He was all that he claimed to be, and all that the gospel claims for him, or he was not. We accept this claim, or we reject it. There is no middle ground. The most inconsistent of men are they who deny his divinity, and yet regard him as the ideal man of virtue and wisdom.

Nor do we perpetrate the fallacy of arguing in a circle, proving his divinity by his miracles, and his miracles by his divinity; but, depending on competent and adequate testimony for the facts in the record of his life, including his miracles and his teaching, we discover that his mighty works are not out of harmony with his nature, and that these being attested to us as the product of his power, are not to be rejected or treated as if affirmed to be the result of ordinary human agency or the product of natural law. Miraculous deeds flow from

such a source with less wonder to us than from a man of our own type, and when we study them it is necessary to apply rules and tests suited to the higher order of being. Then, discovering that his works are above the capacity of human power, we rationally conclude that he who performed them is superhuman. Thus his works testify of him that his claim to affiliation with God is well founded, and with this fact attested we no longer hesitate to accord to him the divinity which makes miracles possible and credible. How different this attitude from that of the skeptic, and especially that of the "liberalist!"

It has been a question, through all the conflicts of faith and unbelief, as to whether

**Human** any human testimony is capable  
**Testimony.** of satisfying the demands of reason as to events so extraordinary as miracles. It is to the interest of unbelief

to assume the negative on this point, as it does in almost every question, denying and denying, and calling for proofs, while persistently refusing to accept any proof tendered as at all competent or satisfying. The habit of doubting and denying grows with use, and becomes a sort of nature in men who cherish it, rendering it next to impossible to give fair play to reason in weighing testimony that tends to establish an unwelcome fact or an undesired proposition. Thus, by an easily explainable process, the habitual doubter becomes a prey to his extreme cautiousness, hampering the faculty which he aims to cultivate, and subjects reason to prejudice, instead of enthroning it as the guide of his life. It is a familiar saying that it is easy to believe what one wishes to believe. There is, doubtless, some truth in this; but there is much more force in the principle when applied

the other way—that is, that it is hard to believe what one does not wish to believe. This palpable fact has given rise to that other saying, “Convince a man against his will,” etc.

Aside from all this, it is not denied that the demands of reason are variable in different individuals, so that what will satisfy one and command ready assent, will fall far short of proving satisfactory to another. There are innate differences in men in this respect, as in almost everything relating to the mind, the dispositions, and the will. All these forces, idiosyncracies, and inclinations come into exercise in connection with the activities of the reason in determining the value of testimony, especially where the emotions and passions are to be affected by the conclusion. One man has a vivid imagination, with a predisposition to the marvelous, while another is cold, unimpressible, scarcely

at all susceptible to influences from the supersensuous; and still another is stolid, sensual, and greatly lacking in the power of spiritual perception. Plainly it is easier for some men to believe in miracles than it is for others, as some men more easily apprehend moral truth, and more readily yield to its sway, than do others. In view of this diversity of human gifts and capabilities, it is scarcely other than a truism to allege that it is easier for some men to be saved than it is for others. It is therefore impossible to fix upon any standard, or grade, or character of testimony that is indispensable in all cases, or that should be deemed adequate for all persons and under all circumstances. As in everything relating to the building up of human character, there comes a point where each one must exercise the ultimate power of his selfhood, and decide what shall be the controlling

motive of his life, so in the matter of belief there is necessity that every man's reason and conscience shall act independently in deciding as to the degree of preponderance of testimony required in determining whether to receive or reject what purports to be the truth of God. In other words, a forced decision, if not impossible in itself, is out of harmony with that invincible freedom which is the highest endowment of our nature, the essential of virtue and vice in personal character, and the basis of responsibility. Whether we agree to it or not, or whether we comprehend in our consciousness or not the standard governing our decisions, human testimony is a chief factor in every step of our advancement in knowledge, and in all the progress we make in science and in achievement. It controls us in the highest concerns of this life, in business, in social re-

lations, and in much that makes for character; and unless we utterly mistake the bearings of conduct and character on the great hereafter, the influence of human testimony will enter largely into the determination of our destiny forever. We would neither magnify nor disparage its power in matters of faith, but we must accord to it the office it holds of necessity, and certainly we can do nothing less than recognize its agency and work where it becomes, as it so often does, the only possible channel for transmitting to us, and from us to others, the highest forms of knowledge which intellect, reason, or conscience can receive or impart.

To decry human testimony is a favorite exercise with those who reject the supernatural in the Scriptures, and deny the miracles therein recorded. They seem to emphasize deliberately what the psalmist ut-

tered in haste as an impulsive outburst of disgust when things went badly. It is well

**The** for us not to imitate their ex-  
**Celebrated**  
**Argument.** ample or spirit, but to treat their difficulties with candor. They feel the force of the reasoning of unbelievers of a former generation, and whatever of force there is in it must be met with all soberness. It is not enough that it has been answered again and again, for so long as it is reiterated as something newly discovered, it will be necessary to look it in the face as if never seen before. Hume put the argument against miracles into the shape which has been the standard with rationalists ever since his day, and the later efforts of skeptics have not improved it.

It assumes to balance human experience against human testimony, always to the disadvantage of human testimony. If the balancing could be done fairly, with all the

elements in the scales, there might be something of value in the process, but the conditions for a complete test are impossible. All the experiences and observations should be obtained under the same circumstances in order to a rightful comparison; but as this is out of the question, the result is that we are only called to consider the experience of persons not present to witness alleged phenomena, set over against the experience of those who were present, and who testify positively and intelligently as to what they saw and heard. The assumed balance of experience against testimony is such only in name.

**A False  
Balance.**

To those who witnessed the alleged miracles of the New Testament, the senses of the body and mind, the faculties of reason and judgment, performed the office which human testimony performs for us. As the observed phenomena impressed the reason of

the living witnesses through the senses, so the testimony which comes to us through human agency addresses itself to the understanding, appeals to reason, and sways the judgment, according to our apprehension of the facts, showing that the materials of faith in us differ less widely from those which determined the minds of actual witnesses than we ordinarily suppose. In both cases faith is founded upon experience, in the one case the experience being from personal observation, while in the other it is from testimony which can be studied and weighed, and so tested as to cause its voice to approach the certainty which we rightfully attach to the testimony of our senses. We lose nothing by conceding that we depend on human testimony for our knowledge of miracles wrought before our day. Conceding this, we can go further, and concede also that there is for us no personal observation

or experience of contact with external things that is capable of confirming the human testimony on which we depend, for the reason that we can have no experience of any kind with regard to things or events before we were born. But what is true of us in this regard, is equally true of our neighbors. Those who deny the miracles of the New Testament have no more experience to sustain their denial than we have to sustain our faith. We therefore hold that present human experience is just as incapable of testifying against miracles as for them. The only experience that can have any evidential value for us is our own individual experience, and since that is necessarily restricted to the range of our personal consciousness, it can shed no light on the question of fact raised by the allegation of miracles in a former generation.

If it be alleged, as it has been with great

confidence, that our experience has to do with human testimony, and proves that it is variable and uncertain, it is enough to reply that experience does not prove that all human testimony is variable and uncertain, but, on the contrary, it proves that on matters of the greatest interest human testimony is reliable, and that by far the greater part of the recorded testimony of men in public positions is trustworthy in a very high degree. Those who speak for the public and for future generations are apt to speak substantial truth, unless some powerful motive for falsification presses upon them; and this is true also of those who are not specially constrained to such a course by religious convictions. Self-respect and proper regard for the good opinion of others will ordinarily induce men of average morality to adhere to the truth, at least in all utterances likely to be subjected to close

scrutiny by other people. Even such as may lack something in the way of the strictest integrity do not willingly run into the liability of public exposure and contradiction. It is therefore safe and proper in all cases to hold him who challenges the veracity of a witness responsible for making good his accusations, putting upon him the burden of proof. In another respect also does our experience with human testimony fall short of making out the case of the unbeliever. While it fails to prove all such testimony untrustworthy, it fails signally in showing the impossibility of discriminating between the true and the false, and of determining, by the application of proper tests, that which may be received with confidence, and that which is doubtful. In this lies our safety. The public is not easily deceived for any great length of time by the fabrications of designing men, and in noth-

ing has there ever been greater alertness than in the presence of attempts to impose upon the people a new religion in opposition to the traditional faith. It was this conservativeness that made the progress of the gospel so slow among the Jewish people, even with the overwhelming testimonies it presented when it could gain a hearing. That it made headway at all under existing conditions is evidence that it had proofs of its divinity at hand that could not be gainsaid.

In still another respect is this celebrated argument from the balancing of experience against human testimony at fault. Its supposed strength is in asserting that, while our experience proves that human testimony is sometimes uncertain, it also proves that the course of nature is uniform and uninterrupted; and that therefore our experience is wholly against the occurrence of miracles.

The fact is that our experience on the subject of miracles is entirely negative. It has no testimony to give for or against them. It is not a factor in the discussion at all. The real question is not as to the uniformity of the course of nature in our day or at any other time, but as to alleged exceptions to this uniformity during the existence of a generation long since gone. It is not possible for the experience of one generation to prove anything concerning the experience of a former generation with regard to exceptions to the uniformity of the course of nature. If the men of a preceding generation testify to their experience of exceptions to the uniformity of the course of nature in their day, there is no possibility of the experience of the men of a later generation contradicting that testimony. It is not a case of experience against experience, nor of the experience of many against that of a

few, but it is a case of alleged experience on one side against the utter absence of experience on the other side. In other words, it is a plain question of testimony to be decided by the competency and credibility of the witnesses, and by the possible presence of agencies sufficient to make the alleged exceptions to the course of nature possible. That the course of nature is ordinarily uniform is admitted on all sides, but to assume, as does the denier of miracles, that no exception to this uniformity has ever occurred, is to assume the point in dispute—to beg the question—besides affirming that which nothing short of the universal experience of all generations of men can adequately attest.

In connection with this matter of the uniformity of the course of nature, and before considering further the credibility of human testimony, let us think of the oft-repeated

allegations that learning has discarded miracles, and that science has demonstrated their impossibility. These assertions seem to cover the whole ground, and render the situation serious. When flippantly repeated, as they often are, they remind us of a class which an apostle had before his thought when he said, "Their mouth speaketh great swelling words"—for to those who are charmed by the sound of words, without considering their source or testing their meaning, these great swelling words probably suggest the end of controversy as well as the overthrow of faith. Beloved, "let not your heart be troubled!" Looking into a muddy pool, one can imagine the water deep because he can not see the bottom. Is it true that learning has discarded miracles? When and where has it done this? So serious a thing should be known. Language is flexible, and sometimes

**Learning and  
Science.**

the terms are changed without a change of meaning, and then we meet the assertion that scholarship is against miracles! Verily, again, and what is scholarship apart from the person who possesses learning? Where do we find this scholarship, and where its authoritative pronouncement? Is its voice a unit in discarding miracles? Is there even a preponderance of the scholarship and learning of the world against the record of miracles, and against the supernatural in religion? We do not accept the assertion. It can not be accepted by any one whose intelligence is not overborne by inordinate self-consciousness. The voice of learning is divided on the subject. There have been men of high scholarship on the side of unbelief from the beginning. Some are infidels in spite of their learning. They do not like to retain God in their knowledge. A cultured intellect is no more a guarantee

of personal faith than it is of purity of heart. Yet there is no hazard in claiming that the completest scholarship of the age accepts miracles, and sustains the evidences of a supernatural element in Christianity and in the Bible. It does this particularly with reference to the person of the Founder of Christianity. It believes in the Son of God, in his incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection. The Christian scholarship of the world takes no second place in any aggregation of learning on the earth. The appeal is to facts.

Nor is there any ground at all for the other assertion—that science has demonstrated the impossibility of miracles. It is scarcely possible to conceive of a bolder assumption, or of one of greater arrogance. How fluently men speak of the demonstrations of science! “Great swelling words,” again. Science is a delightful thing. Within

its sphere it has a divine mission. What science demonstrates is true beyond question. No Christian cares to dispute this. But we must inquire a little more closely. What is science? What is its sphere? What does it know of God? What of his power? When and where has it demonstrated that miracles are impossible? Where does it find a limit for the Almighty? What science has done this? Has it been done by physical or by metaphysical science? Generalizations are not sufficient. The aid of some devotee of rationalism is needed at this point. Rattling words prove nothing unless applied. Let us come down to particulars. Of necessity there are many sciences, and each one has principles of its own, as well as its own sphere, and each must be studied in the light of its own laws and limitations. We can not learn astronomy by studying the laws and facts of chemistry. We can not become

mathematicians by studying geology. We can not learn medicine by studying law. Neither can we learn anything about miracles by pondering the forces of nature. If the whole system of nature were comprehended, and a science found complete enough to cover every part of it, even the minutest, it would still be within its domain, as law touches and pervades all being, all life, all substance, and all phenomena of every class and type belonging to nature; and yet it would not reach the sphere of miracles, nor gain a point where it could stand and give any testimony as to the possibility or impossibility of miracles. Its only proper attitude towards miracles is profound silence. A science of miracles is an utter impossibility. Then what mean these boasted demonstrations of science? Has astronomy proven that a man sent from God, clothed with Divine power, could

never open the eyes of the blind? Has geology demonstrated that Jesus could not walk on the water? Have late discoveries in electricity or chemistry proven beyond question that the Man of Nazareth was unable to heal a leper by a word or a touch? Has the psychologist analyzed the ultimate powers of the soul of Jesus? Then, again we ask, what has any science done in the way of demonstrating that miracles are impossible?

Let us anticipate the answer. It will not be specific, but general and slightly vague, **Uniformity of necessity.** The rationalist **of Nature.** will tell us that the course of nature is uniform—that natural law works steadily and persistently and invariably, and that it is resistless in its sphere, and incapable of fluctuations or exceptions. Very good, so far; and we shall make no denial—but what then? Simply this—that

natural law can work no miracles. This is the scope and the end of the demonstrations of science. It can prove this and nothing more. It is therefore settled that natural law can work no miracles. But who ever said it could? Who ever charged miracles to the account of natural law?

The uniformity of the course of nature is a stupendous fact. Natural law works steadily and persistently. Gravitation abides. The sun shines as ever. The moon and stars march onward in their courses. The earth revolves on its axis, the seasons come in turn, the tides ebb and flow, and all things continue as they were from the beginning. This is what is meant by the system of nature, and the course of nature, and in this great system no provision is made for interruptions, as no laws or forces are ordained in nature for the purpose of working miracles. What then? Miracles

are not natural events, and they can not occur unless God interpose and produce them by his own power.

This leads us to a higher realm and to a broader view. Where is the sphere of **Sphere of Miracles.** miracles, and what is their nature and their end? Where shall we look for them, and for the agencies necessary to bring them to pass? Is there anything above and beyond the system of nature of which we have spoken, and which is governed by natural law? Is there a God distinct from the universe? Is there a Creator and upholder of all things, or is nature self-created and self-sustained? A universe with God is one thing, and a universe without God is quite another thing. The difference is not worldwide merely, but infinite. Which shall we choose? If nature is all, the choice is made. God is excluded. The forces of nature are su-

preme, as there is neither person nor power to interrupt their course, or to interfere to produce results that do not inevitably flow from their operation. In such a world miracles are impossible. This is the universe of the rationalist and of the so-called "liberalist," whether either acknowledges it or not. With their view of the supremacy of natural law, Atheism and Agnosticism are the highest wisdom—the only legitimate outcome of the denial of the supernatural and of the possibility of miracles. Neither rationalism nor liberalism will concede this, but the inexorable necessities of logical thought compel the conclusion.

What can be more illogical than for a man to stand up in the presence of intelligent people, and say with or without an air of superior wisdom, "I believe in a personal God, and yet I believe miracles are impossible?" What a combination is this! A

personal God unable to perform a miracle! A God who made a world which he can not control! A God who ordained laws which have gone beyond his power! Is this the culmination of rationalistic wisdom? Such is not the God of the Christian, nor the God of the older philosophical theism. If God is personal, and not identical with the universe, nor bound and fettered by its laws to abject helplessness, as with Pantheism, then he is free, independent, eternal, and self-existent, with infinite power and wisdom; and then, also, there is a realm of rational existence above the universe of matter and natural law, a spiritual domain in which are possibilities unknown to science, and phenomena unrevealable through the laws that control the system of nature. The forces of this higher world, this supermundane sphere, and the power and wisdom of the infinite God, must be taken into the

account, and his immanence, and the overlappings of the natural by the supernatural, must be considered in determining the question of the possibility of miracles. Of course, neither science nor human reason can comprehend this higher universe, and therefore neither the one nor the other can give any authoritative utterance on the subject of events traceable to the direct agency of God. If miracles belong to this higher sphere in their origin and in the forces producing them, and touch the world of nature only in their manifestations and results, their study necessarily carries us beyond the range of science, and into realm of faith—faith not blind but rational, guided by the revelations of God in effects tangible to our senses, seen and felt in the natural world, but coming from causes found only in the supernatural world. Neither science nor human learning alone can penetrate the

hidden mysteries of that ineffable brightness in which only pure spirits live in fellowship with the God of glory and power.

We are now ready for the right conception of miracles. This we must have, and **Right Conception of Miracles.** having it we obviate the most formidable difficulties that obtrude in the pathway of our study. Miracles are not natural events, and therefore they are not dependent on natural laws, nor on any of the forces with which science has to do. Natural possibilities need not be considered in relation to them, as they are not the product of natural forces, and can neither be hindered nor disproved by them, nor by any science that is limited to the sphere of their operations. If we had a science capable of taking into its scope and vision the entire range of the supernatural, and of searching out God to perfection, so as to disclose the hidings of his power, and

the limitations of his love, such a science might speak with the voice of authority, and explain to us intelligently whatever hindrances there are, if any exist, in the way of the manifestation of miracles; but there is no such science, and no such voice will ever greet our ears however eagerly we may listen to hear it. We study miracles in the light of the supernatural, as we study natural events in the light of science. How then shall we define them? This is not an easy task. They are effects of a cause we can neither trace nor comprehend. A definition of an effect ought to indicate somewhat of the nature of the event, and also convey some idea of the process of its occurrence; but since in miracles the process is unrevealed and unknown, a complete or perfect definition is out of the question.

It may not be wise to speak of miracles as violations of the laws of nature. They

may or may not be such in fact, but so far as we can know there is no element of transgression in them. Nor is it

**Definitions.** best to speak of them as contradictions of law. Only that is to be contradicted which is erroneous or false; but the laws of nature are all true—true to nature and true to the ends and purposes of their ordination. Miracles are effects above the laws into whose domain they come, although they may be in perfect keeping with some higher law which rules in the supernatural world, and according to which the power of God proceeds when for great moral ends he touches the forces of the natural world to produce miraculous results. In some way the laws of nature are subordinated to the power which causes miracles, and whether they are suspended, or interrupted, or overruled, or overcome by the intervention of a superior law, the

result is substantially the same. The agency of God in them is the great fact, and whether in effecting them he employs second causes or not, and whether he observes a rule or method fixed in his own mind or not, is indifferent to us, so that his relation is such that he himself is the cause and the miracle the effect. A miracle is therefore the effect of a Divine act, wrought with or without the employment of instrumentalities in themselves inadequate, and with or without the intervention of a law superior to the one contravened.

Whether we succeed in defining miracles satisfactorily to ourselves or not, there are certain characteristics necessary to distinguish them as miracles, and also to assure us of their adaptation to the end for which they were wrought. There is in every one of them a greater

**Necessary  
Character-  
istics.**

or less departure from or interruption of the course of nature. This is necessary to make it clear to us that they are from God. This interruption of the course of nature is the serious aspect and calls for careful guarding. It is scarcely possible to speak of such an interruption without suggesting what would be in fact an exaggeration; for the interruption intended is not such as impresses itself on the popular thought when the phraseology is used. Having conceived of the course of nature as a system so immense, so permanent, so harmonious, and so beautiful and beneficent in its onward movements, the thought of an interruption to it at once takes on proportions of exceeding vastness, and almost infinite consequences. But the language does not mean that the whole system of nature is disturbed—that the sun, moon, and stars are thrown out of their courses,

or that the law of gravitation is either reversed or suspended. The law contravened when a miracle occurs may be the law of health or life in an individual, or the law of decay under which disease makes inroads upon the vitality of the person; or it may be the law of attraction or gravitation in its application to a person or a local object, with results so limited that the interruption, while positive and impossible without Divine agency, will have no effect whatsoever on other persons or things, or on the system of nature as a system. The miracle is not therefore to be thought of as something alarming, or as necessarily so great as to send a shock throughout the universe. A deaf man cured, or a blind man given his sight, or a leper cleansed, or a dead man restored to life, is an interruption to the course of nature, a veritable miracle, and as clearly

a manifestation of God's agency as would be the putting out of the light of the sun or the turning of the moon into blood.

Among the objections to miracles on the ground that they imply interruptions to the course of nature, and the one used as frequently and with as much effect as any other, is the assumption that such interruptions could only be justified on the supposition that there were defects in the system which could only be remedied in this way. All such assumptions are vain and sophistical, as the purpose of the interruptions—that is, of the miracles—is always outside of the system, and looks not to the betterment of the laws of nature, but to the comfort and blessing of the subjects or witnesses of the miracles. This objection is altogether too superficial to be impressive. It is an appeal to ignorance. If the laws of nature were imperfect or

variable the lesson of their interruption would be lost. It is their perfection that renders miracles proper and necessary as means to the ends proposed.

Miracles, in order to answer their purpose, must be publicly wrought, and of such tangible character as to remove all suspicion of deception. If privacy be observed or arranged for in connection with them, or only selected witnesses allowed to be present, the impossibility of collusion and fraud will not be as obvious as is necessary to command the confidence of all classes of people. They must be able to endure the most rigid scrutiny, not only as to the fact of their occurrence under the conditions alleged, but as to their nature, exhibiting phenomena to be observed and inspected by the senses, and to stand any reasonable test that the inquirer may wish to apply.

Another characteristic of miracles should be freedom from lightness or ostentation, not looking to spectacular effect, but to beneficent and worthy ends. Some such as do not meet this requirement have been attributed to our Lord in the Apocryphal Gospels, and are justly rated as myths and legends, unworthy of the high mission that brought him into the world. The only useful purpose served by these spurious records of false miracles is found in the contrast they afford with those reported in the New Testament. They may also be used as illustrations of the style and achievements of men who set out to gather legends and construct myths. As compared with these, the simplicity, the dignity, and the manifest honesty of the records of the evangelists become impressive, lifting us at once into an atmosphere of sincerity and purity.

There ought also to be variety in miracles

intended to substantiate the claim to a divine commission on the part of him who works them. Wonders of a single sort, such as healing a particular kind of disease, would not be thoroughly satisfying. They might astound and excite amazement, but they would do nothing more than reveal their author as a specialist of extraordinary character. But the miracles attributed to Jesus meet this demand completely. They were numerous, and of almost every imaginable description. They touched nearly every department of nature. The winds and the waves were affected and shown to be subject to the control of his word. Diseases of every kind yielded to his sway. The deadened eyes and ears of men, and the disordered faculties of the mind, responded to his command, and resumed normal conditions without delay or failure. Even the unfruitful fig-tree declared his power, and

evil spirits fled from the majesty of his presence. So numerous and varied were his wonderful works that John's hyperbole appears the appropriate expression of the astonishment created by the perception of the variety and greatness of what he did. It was another way of saying that they could not be written up in full, and that it was not necessary that they should be. Those described were only examples or samples of what were performed.

It should be remarked also that for the purposes intended in the display of miracle-working power, there should be no pecuniary or other temporal gain or advantage accruing to the parties interested in the exhibition of that power. Magicians, soothsayers, diviners, and pretenders of various kinds played upon the credulity of the people, and made large gains. Trickery is always sordid. Greed for money hampers the

influence of any reformer, and the mercenary spirit betrays its possessor into lines of conduct out of harmony with the law of love. Nothing of the kind was found in the life of Jesus Christ or his disciples. No miracle was wrought for pay. Neither worldly honors nor emoluments figured at all in that circle. Unselfishness and charity abounded. Treasures in heaven were placed above all the glitter of earth.

The factors necessary to miracles are few and simple. A supreme power, a supreme will, and a moral reason, are quite sufficient. Given these, **Factors.** and miracles are possible and probable. Any science or argument that overlooks these factors misses the mark, and appears only as an intruder in this discussion, with no voice that reason is bound to respect. A science without a God of infinite power has no place for miracles, has no use for them,

sees no reason why they should occur, and has no testimony to give either for or against them as possibilities or facts. "All things are possible with God," is a statement of deep and broad significance. If he made the world and ordained its laws, and still sits upon the throne and wields the forces which proceed from his fullness, he is able to touch any spring in the line of causation that may be necessary to bring fire from heaven, or sight to the blind, or healing to the leper, or food to the famishing, or life to the dead, or comfort to the sorrowing, or calm to the storm-driven waves of the sea, or peace to the agitated soul.

It is exactly upon this ground that Jesus of Nazareth put all miraculous interpositions. When confronted by the Sadducees with their rationalistic difficulties, without entering into an elaborate exposition of his views, or any analysis of their

troubles, or disquisition upon the laws and forces of nature, he simply said: "Ye do therefore err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God." This answer covers every objection to the possibility of miracles that has ever been brought in the name of any science or any philosophy, in ancient or modern times, and stands as the perpetual rebuke of skeptics and rationalists of every grade and type. "The power of God!" This is the prime agency. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible that God should raise the dead?" Why limit God? The proposition has been submitted and has never been controverted, that it is impossible to frame an objection to miracles and clothe it in human language, that does not impose a limit on the power of God.

This presentation, it is quite true, has little application to the Atheist or Pantheist, who denies God altogether, or makes nature

God, but to the "liberalist," who acknowledges a personal God apart from nature and

**A Vain** above nature, it applies with  
**Distinction.** tremendous pertinence and force.

Indeed, almost every turn of the argument puts this class of objectors in the most unhappy light. They join with infidels in reasoning against miracles, and in ridiculing them and the record that reports them to us, and then part company from their associates, and take ground which is less tenable than that of open unbelief, because it acknowledges God and limits him, and compliments Jesus Christ as a good man and yet a deceiver, and eulogizes the apostles as being wise and great, and yet weaklings and fanatics. Of all men whose attitude towards God and his Son calls for commiseration and censure at the same time, these "liberalists" occupy the first rank. Nor is their position less preposterous in

another respect. They profess to receive the teaching of Jesus and hold it in high esteem, and yet deny his works—to believe he revealed God and divine truth, and yet wrought no miracles. They want no attestation of his divine mission, if indeed he had any divine mission, and look for no proofs of supernatural power, because they deny him a supernatural birth and nature. Theirs is an extremely unique position. With them it is an easy thing to say in the same breath that the record of his sayings is true, and the record of his doings false. Of course, this is not the way they put it, but it is an accurate representation of what they mean. With marked enthusiasm they accept his ethical teaching, giving his words their natural meaning, and often insisting upon their most literal construction; and then they tell us that the record of his miracles is not to be taken

as historical, but as made up of myths and legends. With them, Strauss, and Baur, and Rénan are evidently greater favorites than Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, especially on the subject of miracles.

To the ordinary student it is as manifest as sunshine that the record of the words and works of the Son of man is a unit—that the proofs of his teaching and of his miracles are precisely the same. We confess to finding in the gospel the identical evidences of his divine personality and miracles that we find of his sinless life, and of his having spoken the parables attributed to him. If he was a man of ordinary birth and merely human endowments, the blameless life he lived in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation was itself as really a miracle as was his act of turning water into wine, and as difficult to account for, without resort to supernatural influences,

as any of the wonderful works which rationalists pronounce mythical. His words and deeds stand or fall together. As he "spake as never man spake," so he did "the works which no other man ever did."

Whether Jesus Christ wrought miracles or not, it is next to impossible to resist the persuasion that he intended his disciples and the public to believe that he did. Was he deceived, or did he deceive others? How often this dilemma forces itself on our attention! Either horn involves serious results, yet both have been taken by doubters, but only to increase the confusion and augment the difficulties that beset the pathway of unbelief. It is a hard alternative for any one to be driven to choose between making the greatest Teacher of the ages a deluded fanatic, on the one hand, or an impostor, on the other hand; but when his divinity is denied there is no other choice

open. This is hard even for the self-respecting infidel, but still harder for the "liberalists," who calls himself a Christian, and boasts of advanced thought, and delights in eulogizing the virtues of the person whom he thus involves, and in commending his ethics and example, while he rejects his miracles. Such a one speaks in glowing terms of the excellency of what he styles the "Christianity of Christ"—whatever that may mean—and holds it up for the admiration of that particular "scholarship" which distinguishes itself by honoring the record of what Christ taught, and dishonoring the record of what he did. He also presents this so-called "Christianity of Christ"—the ancient Socinian heresy—in sharp contrast with the orthodox Christianity which accepts Jesus as the Son of God, the Worker of miracles, and the crucified and risen Savior of men.

Then what of the mythical theory, of which so much is said? What is its significance, and what its ground? **The Mythical Theory.** It has been abroad for many years, and now and then gains a convert, but it develops nothing new, and certainly it contains little to satisfy an anxious mind, as the reasoning that supports it is vague and of a dreamy character, dealing largely in negatives and conjectures rather than in facts and positive data. In whatever form it appears it questions the accuracy of the evangelical narratives, denies their authority as historical documents, and interprets their contents as a medley of fact, tradition, legend, and conjecture. It is necessary to its purpose that it find the Gospels written at a later date than is claimed for them, and some of them by other persons than those in whose names they stand. The field is too wide to be canvassed in this discourse,

but it is amply covered by works which discuss the canon of Holy Scripture.

Perhaps Strauss is the ablest advocate, and has done more to build up the theory that the narratives of the New Testament describe myths, and are composed largely of impossible legends, than any other man; yet in his later deliverances he modifies his original grounds, and follows Baur in his assumption that many of the reported miracles were invented by dogmatists for effect upon pending doctrinal controversies. These efforts to evade the historical integrity of the Gospel records reveal the animus of the opposition, and betray an utter disregard for scientific methods of searching for truth, with mind and heart open to welcome conclusions which flow from established premises, whether they accord with previous convictions or not. Without impugning personal motives in these things,

we can not overlook the evidences of powerful biases and predispositions of mind, which inevitably interfere with clearness of vision, and disastrously affect the logical consistency of those whose writings have become standards on the skeptical side in this discussion. Rénan's evident fondness for legends as the key to the New Testament writings justly exposes him to the suspicion of bending his great gifts to the support of his theory with less respect for the soundness of his argument than his general probity would lead us to expect. His biases appear plainly on the surface of his rhapsodies. Yet if these men would furnish us with the sources of the legends with which they assure us the Scriptures abound, we would feel obliged to examine them; or if they would point to any hint or intimation given by the Master himself that the things in the Old Testament which the people ac-

cepted as truth were either myths or legends, we would patiently pursue the investigation; and then, also, we would be prepared to listen with still greater patience to their allegations that the mighty works which Christ declared to be from the Father, and which he cited as proofs that he came forth from God, were myths, or tricks of legerdemain, or impositions or deceptions of any kind.

The record of myths and legends is not apt to deal with names and dates and circumstantial details, as does the record of the mighty deeds by which Jesus approved himself unto the people as the sent of God. Not a sign of the unreal appears in the account of anything attributed to Christ, whether of word or work. There is no mark of ornamentation, nothing for rhetorical effect, no effort to explain difficulties, and nothing given to excite admiration, to please

the fancy, or to attract the attention of the curious. The simple truth satisfied every wish and purpose of the writer.

It is said to be a hard thing to be a good falsifier. If one attempts such a thing in writing, he has need of a good memory and of much accurate information—otherwise he will fail in details or contradict some fact well known. Does any one imagine that a gatherer of myths and legends to be put forth as veritable history, would begin as Luke began the history of the manhood life of Jesus? Take the following passage: “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the

wilderness.” Does this sound like preparation for the introduction of fables, myths, legends, or falsehoods of any kind? For an explanation of such carefulness, read Luke’s own introductory note to this book. It suggests the most thorough preparation, a candid purpose, and a good reason for writing. With regard to the above passage an intelligent writer has said: “Here in one sentence are twenty historical, geographical, political, and genealogical references, every one of which we can confirm by references to secular historians. The enemies of the Lord have failed in their attempts to disprove one out of the hundreds of such statements in the New Testament.” Evidently Luke, the writer of the latest of the Synoptical Gospels, was not a recorder of traditions, nor a reporter of myths, nor a falsifier of facts. He was an educated physician, the companion of Paul, an intelli-

gent observer, a capable and honest historian, and a faithful man of God.

Mark was well instructed in all that related to the life and work of Christ. He was the son of that Mary of Jerusalem at whose house the disciples were gathered in prayer-meeting at the time Peter was released from prison by the angel of God; and when Barnabas and Paul had completed their business in that city, and returned to their widening field in the regions about Antioch, they took Mark with them, and from that onward he was with these two apostles, and with Peter, till he became thoroughly familiar with the history of the ministry of Christ as known by Peter and his fellow-workers in the kingdom. Why should he become the writer of legends and exaggerations?

Matthew, being one of the twelve, had full knowledge of the facts he incorporated into

the earliest biography of his Master and Lord. The only incident in his book that has the slightest appearance of legend is his account of the flight into Egypt to save the young child from the wrath of Herod. That was not mentioned by Luke, the only other one who wrote of the birth and childhood of Jesus, but Luke leaves ample room for the event when Matthew is rightly interpreted. In all the record of miracles there is not a sign of an invented story, or of the rehearsal of overgrown reports. The Gospel written by John, the latest of all, has withstood the fiery ordeal of the most relentless criticism, and stands as the unique and unrivaled product of the mind and heart of the disciple whom Jesus loved; while the second book of Luke, the Acts of the Apostles, bears on every page the evidences of minute, accurate, and truthful history. With this glance at the record, we dismiss

the mythical and legendary theories as vain inventions, totally inadequate to account for the personality and works and words of Christ, and inconsistent with the character and circumstances and habits of those who founded Christianity, and gave it the marvelous success it achieved in its first century.

The moral reason for miracles must have a word in passing. This is not found in the persons of those on whom they were wrought, nor in the witnesses of them, nor in any local conditions existing at the time and in the places when and where they occurred. They were mostly of a beneficent character, bringing immediate good, but their moral purpose was of a wider scope—not circumscribed or limited by any environment of age or country. They were the credentials of his Messiahship, attesting his divinity and his mission for all the generations of men. By them he was

**Moral  
Reason.**

declared to be the Son of God, the Anointed of the Father, the Savior of sinners, the Hope of the world. Such an attestation was their high purpose—a motive and moral reason sublime in itself, and worthy enough to warrant all the interruptions to the course of nature involved in them.

Jesus himself thus explained their purpose: "I have greater witness than that of John; for the works which the Father gave me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." Again: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in him." John, his beloved disciple, also declared this to be the purpose of the miracles: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book,

but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Whether it was because of the rudeness of the age in which he appeared or not—although rudeness is not the descriptive term to apply to the period of the Cæsars—the fact is beyond dispute that miraculous gifts were deemed necessary, as they were the most fitting to arrest the attention of the people, to confound opposers, and to convince the learned and thoughtful that he who came in the name of God was truly sent from God.

The credibility of the testimony by which the miracles of the New Testament are assured to us as historical events **Credibility** is of such character as not to be **of Witnesses.** questioned, when properly understood, by men whose intelligence and reason hold sway over passion and bigotry. We say this be-

cause it was given by men of such numbers and under such conditions as to preclude all motives for falsifying in that direction, and to include the highest possible motives for adhering to the truth, and accompanied by such acts of self-sacrifice in its behalf as to indicate the most inflexible integrity, and to reduce the probability of deception or fraud on their part to an absolute minimum, if not to a moral impossibility. The witnesses whose testimony makes the record were not all learned men, but they were men of good sense and common honesty, practical and watchful, with ample opportunity to know what they were doing, ready to resent any attempted impositions, but not qualified to invent or circulate myths and legends as facts seen and known. The Gospel records made by them have been subjected to every possible test, and have come unscathed through the fiery ordeal. Infidel-

ity has done its utmost to impeach their integrity. Their authorship, date, and uncorruptness have been assailed from every conceivable point of view, and with the skill and learning of high culture and the keenest intellect, as well as with the virulence of passion and the bitterness of partisanship and bigotry; and yet not a link has been broken in the chain of testimony which brings them to us as veritable history. Corroborations of their essential averments are found in public documents of the times, and in the contemporaneous writings of others than Churchmen. Public institutions and ceremonies—the sacraments and the Lord's day—traceable to the origins they declare, stand as monumental demonstrations of their integrity, and challenge the world to overthrow their testimony. The acceptance of these records is neither presumption nor superstition, and, accepting them, the obli-

gation comes to interpret them rationally, according to their spirit and intent. This requires that their contents be studied in whole and in detail, in the light of their times and circumstances, and in view of their scope and purpose. A wide field this, in which Christian scholarship has wrought results of highest value, in comparison with which the achievements of doubt sink into insignificance.

Still the question recurs—since the evidential value of miracles was not to be re-  
**Corroborations of Testimony.** stricted to those who witnessed them—as to whether they have been sufficiently attested to the generations following to command assent to them as historical realities, and to justify belief in their Author as the Christ, the Son of the living God. As we can not consistently accept the testimony concerning the leading facts of his life and teaching, without also

accepting that concerning his miracles, his death, and his resurrection, we anxiously inquire whether there is not some way of securing corroboration of the written testimony of the evangelists that will give it the higher character of testimony approved of God? If God has ceased to speak to us in words, will he not speak to our hearts? If the "canon" of formal revelation is closed, is there not open to each of us the privilege of an inward spiritual illumination—an experimental testing—which will confirm in us the truth of the written Word? If so, then after all our faith "stands not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Verily, there is for us in this form testimony direct from God—testimony written not in books for the eyes of men, nor in tablets of stone, but in the depths of our personal consciousness, by the Spirit of God. Thus the Master's words have been

corroborated in human experiences, through the Christian centuries, times without number: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." Taking Christ at his word, and making the divine will the supreme law of his life, the earnest soul finds springing up within himself an inward assurance of the favor and love of God, which is as satisfying as the highest form of knowledge could be—for is it not such in fact? Jesus says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." The burdened soul comes and finds rest. Again, it is written, "He that hath the Son hath life," and when the penitent opens his heart trustingly to receive the Son, the pulsations of a new life thrill his soul with emotions of "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Again the Word saith, "He that believeth

in the Son of God hath the witness in himself;" and to the believer the Spirit comes in answer to personal faith, and bears witness to personal adoption into the family of God. "Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." "And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." We live under the dispensation of the Spirit, and while revelations may not come to us beyond the contents of the Scriptures, the Spirit of God dwelling in us bears witness to the truth, takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us, giving infallible assurance of the divinity of our faith and of the open inspirations which are the heritage of believers forever. Here we rest. God is not absent, but revealed in Jesus Christ his Son, our Lord. God manifested in the flesh is a man in all human sympathy and tender-

ness—a man at once human and super-human, supernaturally born and supernaturally endowed, and believing this we fling to the winds all questionings as to his ability to finish the work the Father gave him to do.

THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT  
IN CHRISTIANITY.

BY BISHOP HENRY W. WARREN, LL. D.



## THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT IN CHRISTIANITY.

IN this brief treatise no intricate controversy will be attempted. Some things have been settled by the human mind in the employment of its best powers for nineteen centuries. There is in this world some primal granite that is not in a state of flux. Actual gravitation and order exist and not a Limbo of chaos and old night. I desire to state some beliefs, as well settled as a consideration for centuries of their every possible and imaginable phase can make them; to affirm and attempt to explain some facts that are as solid as the foundations of the earth; and to hail with joy some possibilities of our nature, when it is put in connection with

power that is above gravitation, steam, and lightning—I mean what Herbert Spencer calls “An Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed.”

First: Let me affirm that human testimony is fully competent to make credible, nay, certain to us, things wholly incomprehensible, unimaginable, and seemingly impossible. Human testimony can make it undeniably sure to one who has known water in its fluid state only, that it can exist as a solid, or as gaseous as the mobile air. Long before they knew anything of their various modes of working, millions believed and knew that gas lifted men from the earth; that imprisoned steam did more work in this country than every man, woman, and child in it; that the telegraph conveyed intelligence over the continent and under the sea with essential instantaneousness; that the telephone conveys afar all the delicate inflections of the

human voice, and that the same force carries inestimable burdens. I affirm that the so-called miracles of Christ, supported by such human testimony as they have, are not incredible, but in the highest degree credible and certain. I affirm that the reality of any event in ancient history is not so well supported by competent evidence as these mighty works of Jesus Christ. We have not so much evidence to believe that there was a battle at Marathon, a murder of Julius Cæsar, a siege and overthrow of Jerusalem, as we have to be sure that Christ wrought the mighty works recorded of him. To repudiate the record of his mighty works, compels an equal repudiation of his unique birth and resurrection from the dead. It silences the song of the angels at Bethlehem, and blots out of human hope all the glory of the cross. To repudiate superhuman works, repudiates a supernatural or second

birth for man. Being born again is certainly not a natural, but a spiritual event. Raising a soul, dead in sin, to being alive to God, is a greater work than raising the dead Lazarus to life. If this last is not true, neither is the first. The possibility of both depends on the same record.

I affirm that the common people who saw Christ's miracles believed in the reality of them. I affirm that the disciples who accompanied him believed in the reality of them. I affirm that Christ believed in his own miracles, and taught that it was a damnable sin for us not to believe in them.

I affirm that any man who can juggle these facts out of the Bible record, can juggle all fact and truth out of the Bible record or any other.

I have used the word supernatural. Permit me to explain. I used it in regard to a spiritual event. In the material world no

man knows where the natural leaves off and the spiritual begins. I presume every one of the so-called miracles of Christ was wrought according to law, and not contrary to it. Some laws of matter are stronger and some feebler; and the higher and stronger the law, the higher the result. All the lower are made to yield to the higher.

Coming hither I looked at my watch that has been working beautifully for forty years according to the laws of the watch world. Crossing from Western to Central time, I suddenly whirled the shadowy hand forward round the dial. Was that a violation of law? Yes, of mere watch law. But when it broadened toward the universe and took me in, whirling was quite in accordance with broader law. If we had gone further into universal law, my impulse to turn the shadow on the dial forward, might have been changed to whirl it backward, but no law of

the watch world would have been destroyed. Water has one world of laws for its fluid state. Add the broader realm of cold and it is solid; the broader realm of heat and it is working or volatile steam. Add some other realm and it may be wine; some other realm and it may bear up the footsteps of a man. Keep water permanently subject to the law of gravitation only, and the ocean reposes its vast weight on the earth. Add the laws of sunshine and it flies aloft by the hundred millions of tons. The lying heavily, or the flying lightly is as natural one as the other. Add another realm of law and the divided sea stands upright in heaps as naturally and as easily as flying aloft in air.

When I first went away from home to school, I saw my teacher of natural science light a candle by touching it with a piece of wet ice. I saw him put solid gold and silver into liquid-fluid, wet as water, and the

fluid ate up the metal and showed no visible trace of its bibulous absorption. But no natural law was broken. It was just in accordance with the nature of potassium to take fire by touching water. Broaden into some other realm and the fire on Carmel licks up the water in the trench as naturally as ordinary water puts out ordinary fire.

But why specify? Broaden all we know and all we do not know into the infinite realm, from which all must have come and by which it exists, and any known or unknown, imaginable or unimaginable, possible and seemingly impossible phenomenon is as natural as for water to run down hill. The realm of will embraces all. Creation certainly has been, re-creation certainly can be. Fear not confusion, wreck, and chaos come again. There is no place where a dozen laws and powers are not already in full play. The result is not chaos, but cosmos. Let the

water go up as mist and come down as rain. There are fruits and flowers and happy hearts instead of desert and death. Face the realm of all laws without fear; they are so many more possibilities for man. Let the lower yield and the higher prevail. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea. It is the coming of the new heaven and the new earth.

Some may think that that explanation of a broader realm may account for miracles in the material world, but will not avail in the world of mind. Is that too broad a chasm to be leaped or bridged? I think not. If the wind avails to divide seas, why not the breath of God avail to move a man's soul, which is the breath of God? Enlarge any department to embrace every other and there will be perfect order. The south wind can reach my spirit through the wind harp of

the pines, and I prophesy rain. The breath of a man can make me burn with shame or blush with joy. Why may not God find his means of playing on my spirit for joy or shame or for prophecy?

After these preliminary statements, what is a so-called or miscalled miracle? "It is an effect in nature not attributable to any of the recognized operations of nature, nor to the act of man, but indicative of superhuman power, and *erving as a sign thereof.*" In short, a miracle is an event with a superhuman meaning. It is an act of God for the purpose of giving credential and authority to some one as his messenger; it is a Divine indorsement, as if spoken from Sinai, of the message. How have men regarded them? Variously.

If you find an apple-tree interlaced and underlaid with clubs, be sure the apples are good. When the Cemetery Ridge at Gettys-

burg was furiously cannonaded for hours, and then charged with three lines of intrepid troops, it was clear that the enemy regarded that point as the key to the position. So, judging by the number and fierceness of the attacks on mighty works done for signs of Divine power, and commonly but erroneously called miracles, we may know that the enemies regard them as the greatest defense of the Christian faith. Hence they must be broken down and discredited at all hazards and by all means. The most terrific charge of modern times was that of the Russians at Plevna. But they only launched three successive columns against the Gravitza redoubt. They took it. Six distinct assaults have been made against the credibility and fact of the Bible miracles. They are yet untaken. Of course none of the first five were successful, or there would have been no sixth. The enemies of the faith concede by each

new attack that all the others have failed; else a new assault would only be, as Gavroche said, "Killing my dead."

Let us recapitulate these futile efforts. The first was made by his haters and murderers in Christ's own time. The people were convinced and said, this is the promised Son of David; but the Pharisees, while confessing the reality of the superhuman work, attempted to account for it—this man doth cast out devils because the prince of devils is in him, and he naturally rules them. Jesus answered on the spot so that it was never raised again. The Jewish assault was dead. The cause was still alive.

It is a great comfort that those sharp Pharisees, who were on the ground and knew all the facts and had experience in themselves concerning matters of that sort, actually confessed that a devil had been cast out. So in regard to the changing of a beg-  
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ging cripple into a rapturous, shouting, well man, leaping and praising God, the critical rulers said, "For that indeed a notable miracle has been wrought is manifest to all that dwell at Jerusalem, and we can not deny it." The men on the spot, both common people and wise men, believed in mighty works utterly surpassing the power of man.

The heathen assault followed, avowing that these works were wrought by some of the gods many and lords many with which imagination had filled the earth and air. The death of Polytheism took all the force out of that explanation of conceded miracles.

The third assault was pantheistic, led by Spinoza. He denied the possibility of miracles since it was contrary to his idea of God. Well, it might possibly be that his idea of God was surpassed by God's idea of himself. It is far from being modest to assert what God can not possibly do in nature be-

cause a man's conception of him will not allow it. The ridiculousness of this assault was like that of Don Quixote on the wind-mill—the assaulter was cast in the dirt and the mill went on.

The fourth attack was the skeptical one led by Hume. He insisted that miracles could not be made credible; they were not in accord with human experience. Neither did the steamship or telegraph accord with previous human experience; but they are now tolerably credible nevertheless.

The fifth was elaborated by Paulus in his Commentary published in 1800. He calls it rationalistic. We often find the darkest girls called Blanche or Lily. It is presumed that names and facts will make a good general average of complexion. This rationalistic theory said Christ did not make bread for the five thousand. He generously brought out his own stores, and the gen-

erous example induced others to do the same, till there was enough to feed the multitude and for twelve baskets of fragments. He did not tell Peter to catch a fish with a stater coin in his mouth, but to catch fish enough to sell for that amount. He did not raise Lazarus, but shrewdly guessed the time he would come out of a swoon.

The din of this assault quickly died away. Every honest Christian man who thought that language had laws and words had meaning, even every unbeliever who wanted even this poor respect for the Word of God obliterated, repudiated the theory. Assaulted in front and rear at once, this theory became so poor that there was none to do it reverence.

The sixth and last assault is called the historico-critical, and is represented by Woolston and Strauss. This method is as follows: How should there have been such

a crowd to hear Jesus preach at Capernaum, where he was so well known. Why need the four men bearing the sick of the palsy be in such a hurry? How could they get up to the top of the house? Where did the ropes and pulleys come from to let down the palsied? Where did they get axes to break up the roof? How could those below escape being hurt by falling plaster? And why did not the owner protest and send Jesus up to the roof instead of letting the palsied down?

Hear their higher significance of the so-called miracle of the healing of the palsy! His disease indicates a general dissoluteness of morals. The four bearers are the four evangelists. The house to which he is to be carried is the intellectual edifice of the world, otherwise called "wisdom's home." But to the sublime sense of the Scriptures, called the top of the house, man is to be taken. He is not to abide in the low and

literal sense of them. Then if he dare open the house of wisdom he will presently be admitted into the presence and knowledge of Jesus. To what ridiculous credulity men will come who are anxious to reject faith!

If Jesus came into the world to feed common people on this kind of fog and east wind, he certainly did not choose his methods wisely; for not one in a million ever perceived his meaning. We are not ready yet to shout, Great is Allah! and Strauss is his expounder and prophet. Strauss took clear things and muddled them, and left all his readers wailing, "He has taken away our Lord, and we know not where he has laid him."

Unbelief having done its best in six different attempts to batter down this rampart of the Christian faith, and utterly failed in all, let us now ask, What is the meaning of a miracle, and what is its value in the Christian system?

We are in the midst of mighty forces continually in full play. The worlds swing orderly, the mountains ascend, the waters gather in the valleys, volcanoes spout their cataracts of fire, earthquakes topple down the mountain crags, thunders roll, and lightnings flash. None of these great works are accounted extraordinary. They are in the regular order of nature. What, then, is a miracle? It is an event or effect differing from the regularly-established order of nature, given by the Creator to his messengers that they and others may know that such messengers are Divinely authorized. Hence they are signs from God, not mere wonders for men. "Signs" is the meaning of the main terms used in both the Old and New Testaments. The term miracle, meaning a wonder, is a mistranslation. It really means a sign or token given by God as a credential that men may believe his messenger and message.

This definition would seem to preclude the working of miracles, so called, for the mere benefit of them on whom they are wrought. And I think justly, else all the sick would have been healed and all the poor enriched. A miracle must have an educative and certifying effect. If the good done be a sign, the thing signified must be far more valuable than the sign. The sign on a man's store or office has little value compared with the goods or the man within.

Why are signs needed? Because we will accept no revealed religion unless it has sufficient proof. And the greater the religion—the more imperious the demand—the greater must be the proof. Why should we allow commandments to be laid upon us, restricting our liberty and controlling our acts, unless a supreme authority authenticates the revelation and stands behind the commands? There must be sufficient proof

when authority utters edicts from which there is no appeal. This is exactly God's idea in the matter. Jesus always spoke of his mighty acts as signs conducive to belief; that men would not be guilty for rejecting him had he not done sufficient works to give a perfect and sufficient credential for his demands. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But now they have no excuse for their sin. Believe me for my work's sake."

This is precisely the value Christ puts on these signs. In the discussion that rose from that sign of power that healed the man at Bethesda, helpless for thirty-eight years, Christ said, "The works that the Father hath given me to accomplish, those very works that I do bear witness that the Father hath sent me." Christ had such an

opinion of his mighty works that it was sin, damnable sin, not to accept them as authentication of his claim to be the Son of God. "Woe unto thee Chorazin, woe unto thee Bethsaida; for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which were done in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted to heaven? Thou shalt go down to Hades; for if the mighty works had been done in Sodom which were done in thee, it would have remained unto this day." Christ everywhere proceeds on the assumption that a religion that claims absolute power over acts, thoughts, and conscience must have sufficient proof. This proof can not rest on pleasure, recognized utility, nor general good, but on the supreme will of God, and this will must be convincingly avouched. The doctrines of the Bible do not sufficiently commend them-

selves to unassisted human reason. That God took our nature, suffered, died, and must be supremely and eternally worshiped, is not a discovery of the human intellect. Nor does it always accept it. Where is the proof? Partly by prophets, and partly the mighty works done as signs that are now before us.

To authenticate the prophets was a necessity. If they taught truth already known, no credentials were needed more than the preacher needs them to-day. But when any great advance in revelation was to be made, all earth and heaven stood subservient to its indorsement. All the ten plagues waited as ministrant proofs on Moses before Pharaoh, and all the dividing of the Red Sea, the giving of manna, the thunders and lightnings of Sinai, the opening of the earth to swallow the sons of Korah, waited on Moses to authenticate him before the chil-

dren of Israel. Without these credentials Moses would have been slain as an impertinent meddler by Pharaoh, or as an impious usurper by Israel. God constantly insists on this credential character of miracles. On the day of Pentecost, Peter says, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God unto you by mighty works and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you." And in Hebrews it is said the "great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers powers, and gifts of the Holy Ghost."

The proper feeling, then, for us to have at the sight or reading of any mighty work, such as feeding a multitude, stilling a tempest, raising the dead, is not a stupefying feeling of wonder, but an open-eyed

alertness of mind asking, What great truth does this authenticate? What great teaching is attempted? What great Teacher is declared to be sent from heaven in whom God is well pleased? The Chinaman or the child may regard powder as a means of making a fizz that ends with a cracker; but a full man must regard powder as a means of rending the heart out of a mountain, or as a power to annihilate the oppressors of the race and establish the freedom of man. So of these greater powers, those who are despisers must wonder simply and perish. But the signs which Jesus did were written that ye might believe the inexplicable truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, ye might have life through his name. The greater the doctrine, the greater the need of proof. If there were no great revelation offered us, we should need no great proof. But we are glad that

there are truths great enough to require all nature to groan in travail, to require that seas and lands be divided, that the sun be darkened, and the dead raised from their graves, sufficiently to certify their greatness and reality. All hail to truths so great that words of human origin and compass have no use! Concerning the stupendous fact of the self-resurrection of our Lord, Luke says it was made certain by many infallible proofs. But the greater fact, that we might have eternal life through his name, needs many more infallible proofs. But converted millions have declared that these proofs were blessedly sufficient.

Now, what is a sign, wonder, or miracle? It has already been said to be an event with a supernatural significance. It is not necessarily a supernatural event. A miracle may not be contrary to nature, as we ordinarily observe it, but superior to it. It rises above

ordinary material laws. But material laws are all made elastic, flexible, and easy to be overcome when a higher force is brought to bear. We overcome gravitation every time we rise or toss a ball in air. It is mastered when the sun lifts millions of tons of water and bears it over the continent. This is not thought to be unnatural in the case of the rain. Why should it be thought unnatural when the divided sea stood upright in heaps for Israel's forces to go through dry-shod? What is unnatural to the department of gravitation is perfectly natural to the department of sunshine. And what transcends the department of sunshine may be perfectly natural to forces that God sends to wait on the outstretched rod of Moses, that the Egyptians may know that he is the Lord. The miracles of earth are only the common things of the skies. All our forces come out of the spirit world, and

are inferior to those that have free play there. It is the Spirit that forms the worlds, bestows on them the so-called forces of nature, and upholds those forces by the word of its power. Hence, whenever the spiritual is brought to bear, all lower forces feel its mastering superiority. Man masters these lower forces in a thousand ways. And if man, shall not God? What Christ did was natural to him as breathing is to us.

I do not definitely determine the question whether Christ wrought his mighty work by so-called natural laws with which we are not yet acquainted, or by the exercise of his personal will. He began the creative work by his will before there were any natural laws, and can continue so to work, and suspend natural laws at will. These laws are not beyond the control of their Maker and Upholder. So, whether these mighty works were done in accordance with

or in defiance of natural laws does not matter. Man can accumulate a million volts of electricity out of its tideless sea for specific purposes. So Christ might hurry the vegetative processes of the grape, or wheat, to cheer a wedding or feed the hungry multitude, and no law of material nature be destroyed. It is only mastered by a higher force.

The term used by Matthew (xi, 20), and translated "mighty works," might as well be translated mighty faculties; so that healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, and raising the dead, were the ordinary outworkings of his faculties, or capacities. It was no more for him to turn water into wine in the jar than to do it in the grape; no more to make nourishment in his fingers than to do it in the growing wheat. If one has a God good for anything, expect great things of him. I have a couple of Aztec idols, made

of lava, hideous and useless. Eyes have they, but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not; neither speak they through their throat. I expect nothing of them. One got a jolt the other day, and rolled down the steps. I did not expect him to pick himself up. But our God made the heavens. He who could do that, and uphold them by the word of his power without fainting or being weary, can do anything. God has never sundered himself from nature. He constantly represents himself as doing personally what we relegate to the realm of what we call laws. Laws are only his ordinary way of working; so-called miracles are his extraordinary way of working. He is the immanent God, and worketh all things according to his own will.

How glad we should be if our best feeling, thought, action, electness, and effectiveness in speech ever equaled Christ's ordinary

feeling, thought, and action and expression! His every-day life utterly surpasses our rarest ecstasy. Of course, his deeds will be wonders and signs. Lofty deeds always wait on lofty thoughts. King Herod heard of these deeds, and accounted for them as follows: It is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; therefore mighty work do show themselves forth in him. To have been in the spirit world, and come back, is reason enough for mighty works. What of Him who came down out of the spirit world at first, and went back and forth as easily as we cross the boundaries between countries? Can we ever hope to touch his best, whose ordinary so surpasses us? Yes, he says we may enter into his joy and sit down on his throne. There can be no more intense expression. But between now and then we must expect signs and mighty works to teach mightier thoughts and feelings.

It is an unutterable joy to me that the Son of man, wearing our form and claiming to be our Brother, has such faculties, does mighty works as easily as I breathe, goes back and forth through the gates of death unscathed, and goes up from the earth in glory, sending his angel to say, "This same Jesus shall likewise come again in like manner." This vitality in all realms, this mastery of all laws and forces, has enlarged our thought, lifted up our humanity, and unspeakably glorified our kingship over all things. The great triumphs of our age in realms of power that seem like the very essence of God, are only the alphabet of the infinite realm where Jesus wrought. We know not now what we shall be, but we know that when this same Jesus shall appear we shall be like him. He that brings such extraordinary thoughts must have extraordinary credentials.

It will be remembered that the great outbreak of mighty works as signs was at the beginning of Christ's career, and not at the close. He must be authenticated at the first. It was at the very opening of his ministry, even before the Sermon on the Mount, that there was such a profusion of miracles that no attempt was made to describe them separately. They were summarized as follows: They brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those that were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy, and he healed them. Toward the close of his ministry miracles were rare enough to be described in detail. When once the teacher gets authority, let the wonders cease, that the truth may be regarded, unless greater and greater truth is to be revealed.

We see the proper result of every miracle

displayed in the blind man cured and the leper healed. They worshiped him. Why have the signs of Christ's power found almost universal acceptance, and the thousands of asserted miracles of Mohammed and the numberless saints of the Middle Ages almost universal repudiation? It is because Christ's signs had a perfect sunrise and mid-day of new truth to authenticate and endorse. The others had none.

How could miracles be such a great authentication? What certificates of Divine care do they bring? They were performed in the presence of critics and enemies anxious to repudiate them. Critics now say they would like to have these signs performed in a hall before a scientific committee of investigation. What sort of a hall would they desire for the plagues that covered the whole land of Egypt, and for the darkness that was over all the land of Judea from

the sixth to the ninth hour? What could their committee report if the earth swallowed them up with the other sons of Korah? There was a sharp, alert committee in every case, and they said, "That a great and notable sign has been wrought is manifest to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we can not deny it."

There was not one miracle merely, but many, covering many centuries and thousands of years.

Yet as prophecy had its periods, so did its sister sign, the miracle. Even the heathen poet Horace said, "Let not a god intervene unless there is a knot worth his untying." We must not call on God for things we need to do for ourselves. Hence these miraculous signs have great epochs. There are but two in the Old Testament, and one in the New. When Moses came to establish a new state and systematize religious observances, and

lead the Church up to Canaan, the whole heavens bent to aid, and lent all their superior forces to authenticate the Divine messenger and message. All Egypt, the Red Sea, the wilderness, Jordan, and the land of Canaan so thrilled and throbbed with the powers of the heavenly state that Peter referred to it at Pentecost, fifteen hundred years later, as one of the things best known to his auditors, "This man Moses led Israel forth, having wrought wonders and signs in Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness forty years." Again, when all the true religion in the world seemed in danger of going down before the witchery of idolatry, and Elijah said, "I alone am left who have not bowed the knee to Baal," then, once more, and by sheer necessity, God put the powers of the heavens into the hands of men. And they shut the skies that they rained not; called down a sort of fire from

heaven that could burn water; divided the river Jordan again, and raised the dead. Even an angel came to turn the army of Sennacherib into dead men. It seemed as if celestial powers could not do enough to save imperiled religion.

Then, seven hundred years later, Roman supremacy and corruption covered the earth. Even the very gods were debauchees. Worship was a debauchery. Skepticism was so universal that one whole sect of the Jews denied a future life. The other was made up of triflers, sneerers, and politicians who esteemed their own traditions and puerile ends above the kingdom of God.

Hence, in the time of direst need, the King, who had sent his servants that had been beaten, shamefully entreated, and killed, sends his Son. He must be plentifully credentialed. The signs are significant and sufficient, the voices are definite, "This

is my beloved Son, hear ye him." There could be no greater and more conclusive authentication.

But they hated religion, made the Word of God of none effect, disregarded the declared signs of his presence, and murdered the Prince of Life. What could be done with such a maniac world, homeless, helpless, sobbing or shrieking through the dark? The merciful heavens were not unmindful. The same Divine credentials are continued to establish the fact that the apostles are really commissioned and sent by Christ. They teach the same truths. Earth continues to borrow the potencies of heaven as proofs until the truth is established and has free course to run over the earth and be glorified.

What has followed? Not more miracles, but more and wider acceptance of the truth previously authenticated. Since that hour

we have had progress, and not backsliding. There has been no century that was not better than any preceding. We are closing one long morning of nearly nineteen hundred years. We look on gray hints in the east, auroral rays that shoot up the sky, clouds that change from darkness to glory, morning stars vanishing into greater brightness; we quaff fresh morning airs that seem like breaths from heaven; we hear songs, not of birds only, but of happy nations. It is all one long morning. What will the noon-day be?

Will there ever be another epoch of signs? I think not. When the Son of God comes he gives the highest ultimate truth. This can be expanded and developed, as it has been in every department, physical and mental, for two thousand years. We have not yet reached, in life and practice, the whole truth as it is in Jesus. Until we do,

there is no cause for new mighty works for authentication.

Let the sign eras close. The truths they authenticate are a thousand times more dear. It is something to say the devils are subject unto us, but we rejoice far more that our names are worthy to be written in heaven. It is something to have palsy cured, but it is so small that it is not mentioned in the haste of Jesus to say, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." A miracle-worker is great, but he is nothing to a truth-teacher. Christ showed many mighty works, but he said of him that believed on him as the Truth of all the worlds, "Greater works than these shall he do." His mighty works were recorded for our learning and encouragement.

The Power was always sufficient and infallible. There was no case that baffled the Worker, a resurrection being as easy as a birth. The stilling of a storm of a whole

sea turns on a word as readily as baffling the rage of one man. It made no difference, even to earlier and minor prophets, what sign was asked. To Ahaz Isaiah offered any sign. Make it deep unto hades below, or high in the vault of heaven above. And to Hezekiah it was no matter whether the sign should be the going forward or backward of the shadow on the dial. The ease of all these things makes belief in our greater things of the future possible. Glance ahead with the eye of prophecy. The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations, the precious light of our nineteenth century shall penetrate all places of darkness. The habitations of cruelty shall be full of kindness and love. Long after that, the world and all that is therein shall be burned up, pass away with a great noise; but we look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Creation certainly

has been. Re-creation is as possible. The new Jerusalem shall come down from God out of heaven adorned as a bride for her bridegroom as easily as we send up a balloon. We will remember that all these mighty works, unthinkably great, are still for signs of higher thought and greater ecstasy. The sea of glass, the streets of gold, the walls of precious stones, the glory that can not be borne by mortal vision, the painless, tearless state, the sound of shouts like the voice of many waters, the harpers harping with their harps, are not finalities, but are signs of inner states and spiritual joys. It has always been a matter of Christian faith that wrecks and destruction are not provocative of despair, but rather helps to soul states better than lost or recovered worlds. There is a sacred trust that can not be shaken. It is only heightened by miracles of disaster. The psalmist said: "God is our refuge and

strength. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." Such miracles of destructive power are only signs of the protective power to those whose refuge is in Him. So testifies Habakkuk, so Paul, so Peter. It is precisely the case of an old colored woman in the earthquake at Charleston. Houses were crashing down, the earth tossing like waves, men's hearts failed them for fear. They cried out and prayed in the agonies of despair. But she was shouting for joy. It was a sign of the power of her God. "Hallelujah! my Jesus has power to shake terribly the earth!" So with the wreck of the worlds. If that great event can be made a sign of power and an incentive to confidence in that power, all the

inhabitants thereof and all the spectators from heaven shall surge forward in one great sunburst of new faith. God would gladly wreck a world any time if the mighty work would give new trust to his humblest child. That is largely what death is for.

Previous to the great revelation of the future state, one great miracle may come to us all. The prophecies, providences, and miracles in our daily lives have come to be so common that we think of them as matters of course, naturally to be expected. We long for some fire to come down on our mountains; some voice that shall be as personal to us as the Father's was to our Elder Brother; some Jordan to be divided in our pathway to the promised land. Our Father is not unmindful. We come to the Jordan of death. In surprise we find ourselves passing over dry-shod. We say, 'There is no river. We hear a voice saying, with infinite

tenderness, "Lo, I am with you. Be not afraid." Thus there comes into our experience as great a miracle as ever came to Moses or Elias. It is a sign of a great idea, a new revelation. Faith bursts into full flower, and so the heavenly Canaan is entered. Thus death is ours, and its great miracle can bring such an outbursting faith that men of the best and highest life here may say, "To die is gain."



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