

The miracle at
Cana:

by

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* THE MIRACLE AT CANA

With an attempt at a Philosophy of Miracles.

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This Fourth Gospel was written long after Matthew, Mark and Luke. It was intended as a supplement to them. The Synoptics give us the main facts of Jesus' life and teaching, his works, his death, his resurrection. This Gospel gives us the explanation of the facts, in the eternity, the personality, the deity of Christ himself. It presupposes the previous Gospels and builds upon them, yet it adds but few facts to those which they relate. The miracle of Cana is the first miracle that Jesus wrought, and it gives the rule and type of all his miracles. The purpose of it is intimated when the evangelist tells us that "this beginning of his signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory".

That word "glory" takes us back to the first chapter of the Gospel, and we shall better understand the miracle if we consider the place which it occupies in the Gospel as a whole. True to his purpose of explanation, John begins with a thesis or proposition which he proceeds to demonstrate. He solves all the problems of the Synoptics by boldly asserting at the very start that the eternal Word of God has been manifested in Jesus of Nazareth. It is an argument from the divine to the human, as John's first Epistle is an argument from the human to the divine. The argument, however, is deductive rather than inductive. It propounds a principle and then proceeds to point out the operation of it. It declares Christ to be nothing less than Deity revealed, and then shows that this necessarily makes him not only the Christ for whom the Old Testament had prepared the way, but also the Son of God who has wider relations as Lord of the Universe and Savior of mankind.

The Synoptics had been content to trace Jesus' origin back to Abraham and to Adam. The Fourth Gospel asserts that before Abraham was born, Christ already was; nay, it maintains that Christ was the Creator not only of Abraham but of all humanity. It goes even further and holds that Christ is God's only medium of communication and activity; he is the preserver as well as the creator of all, and whatever has come into being is life only in him. Since he is the life of the universe, he can be its light, and all knowledge of God and of truth proceeds from him. Christ is the only Revealer of God. He has been revealing God throughout all human history. The darkness of sin has not been able to overcome or suppress his light, even among the heathen. But the incarnation has concentrated his

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rays. Better even than Moses and the Law are the grace and truth revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

There is opposition to Christ, but this very opposition is a proof of Christ's deity. Sin must resist holiness; selfishness must resist love. Holiness and love, however, will attract to themselves their like. There will be increasing faith on the part of some, though there is increasing unbelief on the part of others. Hence this Gospel is the record of two opposing tendencies. God's self-manifestation in Christ stirs up hatred that brings the Savior to the Cross, but it also awakens love that ensures the triumph of his kingdom. Side by side with the growing opposition on the part of the Jews is the growing devotion of Christ's disciples. They have every worldly example and inducement to forsake him. When they do yield to his claims and recognize his authority, the victory is won, the demonstration is complete, the thesis is proved. And this point is reached when Thomas, the most skeptical of the apostles, is moved after Jesus' resurrection to bow at his feet and cry: "My Lord and my God!" This is the proper end of the Gospel, and all that follows in the last chapter is only a supplement, designed to show why it was that John's service upon earth lasted so much longer than Peter's.

The progressive revelation of Christ's glory—this is the central theme of the Fourth Gospel. The first chapter, in which the thesis is stated and the witness of John the Baptist is given, is naturally followed by the second chapter, in which Christ manifests his glory, first by turning water into wine, and secondly by driving the traders out of the temple. There is an organic connection between the first chapter and the second which forbids us to regard the sublime declarations of the first chapter as of later authorship. The glory is declared in chapter one; the glory is manifested in chapter two. John, the protector and adopted son of Mary the Virgin, is the natural custodian and narrator of the miracle of Cana—a miracle wrought within a family circle, and therefore either unknown to the other evangelists, or seeming to them outside the range of Jesus' official ministry—an evidence that this Fourth Gospel had John for its author.

That this beginning of miracles was wrought in so humble a sphere is quite of a piece with the general plan of Christ—his kingdom did not come with observation. He was not born at Rome, but at Bethlehem; his crown was not of gold, but of thorns. He shows us what true glory is; self-abnegation reveals God best; to him the cross was a lifting up. Not among "the people", or "the world", was this wonder performed, but in the narrow circle of the family. Though he had just come from his baptism into death and from his struggle with infernal powers in the wilderness, he begins his ministry with no sounding of trumpets or clangor of arms. Instead of this, he enters sympathetically and joyously into the humble and common life of men, helping the poor, increasing their joy, consecrating their marriage.

The simplicity of the story carries conviction of its truth. The late arrival of Jesus and of his newly chosen disciples increased unexpectedly

the number of the guests. The mother, who had been already on the ground, perceived that the resources of the household were exhausted and that the married pair were exposed to embarrassment. With expectations, long suppressed, but newly awakened by reports of the Baptist's recognition of her Son at the Jordan, expectations of some revelation of his power, she whispered to him that "they have no wine". It is an intrusion of her motherly influence into a sphere that is above her. Jesus gently puts aside all authority but that of his mission and of the God who sent him. But at the same time he shows that Mary's expectations were not irrational, for he furnishes wine, and in such abundance that it serves as a symbol of the royal generosity of the gifts of God.

Why should we think of the story as merely a parable? All interpretations that ignore the miraculous element are even more far fetched and incredible than the miracle itself would be. "Jesus' conversation was so entertaining that the guests said: What good wine we have had!" All this is to contradict the plain teaching of the narrative. The evangelist evidently intended to describe a miracle. The testimony of the servants shows what was in the jars; the testimony of the ruler of the feast shows what it has become. The "filling to the brim" has no meaning, unless it is meant that the contents of all the six water-pots was changed to wine. The very superfluity of the provision was necessary to justify the solemn conclusion of the account: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory: and his disciples believed on him".

What was this glory, which the miracle made manifest? It was three-fold, and, in each of its three aspects, it had to do with nature, and with Christ's relation to nature. It was, first of all, the glory of Christ as the Life of Nature. We constantly tend to an atheistic and unchristian view of nature. We think of it as self-originated, as sufficient to itself, as independent of God. This miracle shows us on the contrary that nature is only the expression of the divine mind and will, and that this divine mind and will is the mind and will of Jesus Christ. He who created the universe has not abandoned the universe. Our gospel designates Christ's creative activity not by the preposition *upo*, "by", but by the preposition *dia*, "through". Creation is not the work of an absent, but of a present, Christ. And so with preservation. Only through his constant activity do the forces and laws of the universe maintain their existence. Matter is not dead but living, and it is Christ who upholds all things by the word of his power. And so we, who believe in Christ,

"Behind creation's throbbing screen
Catch movements of the great Unseen".

If all that has come into being is, as our gospel says, "life in him", then nature is plastic in the hand of Christ. His will is a free will. He is not an Ixion, bound to nature's wheel. He is nature's Lord. Hence it follows, secondly, that the glory which this miracle manifests is the glory of Christ as the Ennobler of Nature. He is not the victim of a past process. He adds to the process, and the successive additions from his living energy are

the secret of evolution ; indeed, no growth or progress is conceivable, until we take into account some intelligent and beneficent agent behind or within the process, who is reinforcing and guiding it to a preordained and rational end. If all growth and progress everywhere is the result of his activity, why should we hesitate to recognize his working here? In this miracle he simply shows the inner possibilities of nature, since it is under his control. He can subject it to the needs of man. The turning of water into wine is a prophecy of the transformation of this mortal body into the spiritual body, and of the coming of the new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

For this glory is the glory of Christ, not simply as the Life of Nature, and as the Ennobler of Nature, but as the Interpreter of Nature. All Christ's miracles were signs of something higher than themselves. This Fourth Gospel is especially concerned to point out the symbolism of Jesus' works. He opens the eyes of the blind, to show that he is the Light of the World ; he multiplies the loaves, to show that he is the Bread of Life ; He raises the dead, to show that he lifts men up from the death of trespasses and sins. The universe is moral and religious at its core. The progress is a progress toward the good, the better, the best. Present commonness, and even imperfection, is no measure of the final result. He who made the world is in the world, to counteract the evil and to cherish the good. Want, the effect of sin, is to be done away. Separation and isolation, such as an accusing conscience brings about, are to give place to a holy society. Love and joy are to prevail, such love and joy as springs from virtue and the fear of God. All this is to begin in humble spheres and from them to spread through all the world. Water is but the basis and foundation for wine, and the world that now is is but the preparation for the world that is to come.

But we cannot leave this first miracle without a further consideration of the philosophy of miracles in general. We must grant that the old conception of the miracle as a violation or suspension of natural law, has been superseded by a new conception of the miracle, as belonging to a higher order of nature—an order previously existing indeed, but unknown to men before. Miracle, then, is like the eclipse of the sun, whose rareness attracts attention, but is not unnatural ; like the cathedral clock, whose bell rings only at the advent of a new century ; like the action of the calculating machine, which presents to the observer in regular succession the series of units from one to ten million, but which then makes a leap and shows, not ten million and one, but a hundred million. The extraordinary and unique may nevertheless be the operation of a law of nature. The blossoming of the century plant is something very unlike its former flowerless condition ; no human being may ever have seen it blossom before ; yet the provision therefor is in the plant from the beginning.

The burning of the Windsor Hotel in New York City is thought to have been due to the gradual charring of the woodwork and to superheated steam pipes. The temperature rose imperceptibly, until the sudden addition

of a fraction of a degree changed heat into flame. The ellipticity of the earth's orbit might go on increasing by regular gradations until centrifugal force overbalanced the centripetal, and the earth from being a planet might suddenly become a comet, yet this change might be perfectly natural. There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in the philosophy of the ordinary scientist. Now miracle in a similar manner may be, and probably is, the operation of a law hitherto unknown to men, yet entirely within the range of natural forces, when once these natural forces are understood.

I say, when once these natural forces are fully understood. But these natural forces are never fully understood until they are recognized as divine. For matter is really spirit, and nature is only another name for God. The laws of nature are the habits of God. It is not true that God is the author of the miracle only in the sense that he instituted the laws of nature at the beginning, and provided that, at the appropriate time, miracle should be their outcome. This view fails to recognize in the miracle any immediate exercise of will. It also regards nature as a mere machine, which can operate apart from God—a purely deistic method of conception. If, however, we interpret nature dynamically, rather than mechanically, and regard it as the regular working of the divine will, instead of the automatic action of a machine, we may regard miracle as a perfectly natural phenomenon, while yet we see in it the action of a present and personal God. There is no such hard and fast line between the natural and the supernatural as some apologists have imagined. With the qualifications already suggested, we may adopt the dictum of Biedermann: "Everything is miracle,—therefore faith sees God everywhere; nothing is miracle,—therefore science sees God nowhere".

"The Hebrew historian or prophet regarded miracles as only the emergence into sensible experience of that divine force which was all along, though invisibly, controlling the course of nature". So says the Bishop of Southampton, and he speaks wisely. This principle throws new light upon many difficult narratives of Scripture. Miracle is an immediate operation of God; but, since all natural processes are also immediate operations of God, we do not need to deny the use of the natural processes, so far as they will go, in miracle. Such wonders of the Old Testament as the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, the partings of the Red Sea and of the Jordan, the calling down of fire from heaven by Elijah, and the destruction of the army of Sennacherib, are none the less works of God, when regarded as wrought by the use of natural means. At Cana Jesus took water to make wine, and on the hill-side of Galilee he took the five loaves to make bread, just as in ten thousand vineyards to-day he is turning the moisture of the earth into the juice of the grape, and in ten thousand fields is turning carbon into corn.

I do not hesitate to express my belief that all miracle has its natural side, though we may not be able to discern it. Recent investigations show the possibility of influence of mind upon body which go far toward explaining many of the cures of blindness, deafness, and paralysis, which meet us

in the gospel narrative. The virgin-birth of Christ may be an extreme instance of parthenogenesis, which Professor Loeb has demonstrated to take place in other than the lowest forms of life, and which he believes to be possible in all. Christ's resurrection may be an illustration of the power of the normal and perfect spirit to take to itself a proper body, and so may be the type and prophecy of that great change when we too shall lay down our own life and shall take it again. The scientist will yet find that his disbelief is not only disbelief in Christ, but also disbelief in science. Even though all miracle were proved to be a working of nature, the Christian argument would not one whit be weakened, for still miracle would evidence the extraordinary working of the immanent God, who is none other than Jesus Christ, and the impartation of his knowledge to the prophet or apostle who was his instrument.

Our unreadiness to accept this naturalistic interpretation of the miracle results wholly from our inveterate habit of dissociating nature from God, and of practically banishing God from his universe. This is the method of modern science, and since science deals with phenomena and not with their causes, science has its rights, and we cannot require it to enter a foreign field. But there is another field which belongs to religion, and the scientist is narrow and prejudiced who denies the existence of realities that are behind the phenomena. In his Commentary on Isaiah 33 : 14, George Adam Smith explains the passage : "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" He tells us that the prophet had no thought of future punishment here. It was the present retributions of divine justice that he had in mind—those retributions that the wicked ignore or deny. If you look at a great conflagration, he says, through a smoked glass, you can see the bricks falling and the walls collapsing, but you cannot see the fire. We may use the illustration for the subject before us. Physical science looks at the universe through a smoked glass. It sees phenomena, but not the cause of them ; it sees the sequences of nature, but not God. There is no antagonism between its view and that of religion—the two are simply complements of each other. Faith looks at the universe without the needless intervention of a smoked glass. Faith sees all that science sees, but it sees also the divine agency. It sees not only the falling bricks, but it sees also the fire. And so it can recognize the natural element in the miracle, while yet it recognizes in it the extraordinary agency and wonder-working power of God.

Those who see in Christ none other than the immanent God, manifested to creatures, find in this fact the explanation and the guarantee of his miraculous working. The Logos or divine Reason, who is the principle of all growth and evolution, can make God known to finite creatures only by successive new impartations of his energy. Since all progress implies increment, and Christ is the only source of life, the whole history of creation is a witness to the possibility of miracle. Every rational step already taken proves that other steps may follow. Miracle is not only possible but probable, for the reason that Christ is the Moral Reason of the world, as well as

its Intellectual Reason. The disturbances of the world-order which are due to sin are the matters which most deeply affect him. Christ, the life of the whole system and of humanity as well, must suffer; and, since we have evidence that he is merciful as well as just, we have the strongest of reasons for believing that he will rectify the evil by extraordinary means when merely ordinary means do not avail.

The miracle of Cana would not have been wrought if there had not been need of it. It was needed as a proof that Christ is the Life of Nature, the Ennobler of Nature, the Interpreter of Nature. It taught that he recognized the needs of the world and that he had come to supply them, not in man's time but in his own time, with such gradualness and in such proportion as best evince the wisdom and the munificence of God. He has come to make all things new, to make sacred every common relation of life, to turn earth into heaven. But he will do this through his own natural forces and laws. Every new manifestation of his power shall lay hold of and build upon and develop that which already exists, even as he uses the water to make wine. And these transformations of the lower into the higher have only just begun. Cana reveals the plan of Christ as a plan of evolution. After Law comes Gospel. After labor and sorrow and pain and tears come rest and reward and rejoicing and life forevermore. Sin gives its brief enjoyments at the first, and afterwards brings remorse and ruin. But Christ's gifts are ever increasing in richness and profusion. He keeps his best wine to the last.

May I sum up what I have said by a definition of the miracle? A miracle is an event in nature so extraordinary in itself and so coinciding with the prophecy or command of a religious teacher or leader as fully to warrant the conviction, on the part of those who witness it, that God has wrought it with the design of certifying that this teacher or leader has been commissioned by him. This definition has certain marked advantages over those that have been commonly accepted. It recognizes the immanence of God and his immediate agency in nature, instead of assuming an antithesis between the laws of nature and the will of God. It regards the miracle as simply an extraordinary act of that same God who is already present in all natural operations, and who in them is revealing his general plan. It holds that natural law, as the method of God's regular activity, in no way precludes unique exertions of his power when these will best secure his purpose in creation. It leaves it possible that all miracles may have their natural explanations and may hereafter be traced to natural causes, while both miracles and natural causes may be only other names for the one and self-same will of God. It reconciles the claims of both science and religion: of science, by permitting any possible or probable physical antecedents of the miracle; of religion, by maintaining that these very antecedents, together with the miracle itself, are to be interpreted as signs of God's special commission to him under whose teaching or leadership the miracle is wrought.

We are afflicted with a mental and moral astigmatism which sees a

single point or truth as if it were two. We see God and man, divine sovereignty and human freedom, Christ's divine nature and Christ's human nature, the natural and the supernatural, respectively, as two disconnected facts, when deeper insight would see but one. Astronomy has its centripetal and centrifugal forces, yet they are doubtless one force. The child cannot hold two oranges at once in its little hand. Our tendency to double vision should be corrected by Old Testament revelation, for that intimates that, in perfect consistency with the operation of natural law, the God of glory thundereth and in the heavens God himself is speaking with the living voice. The miracle of Cana is a New Testament corrective of our mental and moral astigmatism, for here Christ shows himself to be the Life of Nature, the Ennobler of Nature, the Interpreter of Nature, as only he can be who, as the Fourth Gospel declares, was in the beginning with God, and was himself God. To a transcendent and divine Personality miracle and nature are one.

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