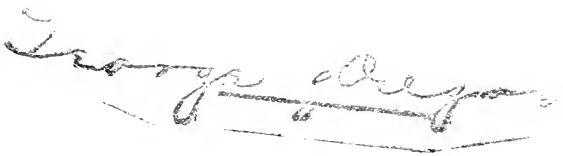
BEYOND THE NATURAL ORDER

NOLAN RICE BEST



Beyond the Natural Order

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Essays on Prayer Miracles and the Incarnation

By
NOLAN RICE BEST
Editor of "The Interior"

NEW YORK CHICAGO TORONTO
Fleming H. Revell Company
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

New York: 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago: 80 Wabash Avenue
Toronto: 25 Richmond Street, W.
London: 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh: 100 Princes Street

TO THE WIFE

Who also sat beneath the evening lamp while these pages were written

If any reader asks what coördinating thought lies beneath these disconnected essays, suffer the author to propose this: God, if He is our Father, must know His children personally and deal with them individually, for impersonal and mass relations never yet were fatherly.

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The Dynamics of Prayer

I

THE DYNAMICS OF PRAYER

THE prayer problem which is real to praying men is not the problem that speculative philosophers debate,—how the will of God may be moved by the petitions of His creatures,—but the profounder moral question why God must needs be besought at all in behalf of any good. To require a man to ask for his own blessings before they are given, may seem, if nothing more, an intelligible way of impressing a beneficiary with his dependence; but praying for one's self does not fill up the Bible ideal of prayer. Prayer subtends also a great arc of Scripture altruism. That believers should "pray one for another" is the letter of apostolic exhortation and the spirit of the prayer-teaching of Christ. The duty of intercession is emphasized in every New Testament epistle; the example of it abounds in the biographies of our Lord. On the prayers of his converts Paul himself relied both to procure him "a door for the word" and to assure him the grace to "speak boldly as I ought to speak." He even made the Christians of his time responsible for the conduct of the pagan governments under which they lived; for only as they offered "sup-

plications, prayers, intercessions, . . . for kings and all that are in high place," did the apostle hope for them to obtain that justice and public order under which they could enjoy "a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity." And not even these large uses comprehended in Paul's faith the utmost reach of prayer; looking beyond all his knowledge of his fellow mortals to the very horizons of his imagination, he thought it a reasonable and useful duty to pray "for all men."

If prayer is to be to the Christian only an exercise by rote, its formal rituals may be spread to any extent of words. But if the heart essays to invoke all good on all mankind, there rise forthwith distracting questions that enervate the spirit of prayer. Why should I, an erring mortal, be found beseeching the only good God to work good in the world? For what else does He sit on the throne of creation? Is not He infinitely more concerned than I to exalt righteousness on earth? Will He have neglected aught that He might have done for true religion's sake; or will my puny reminder recall Him to a slighted obligation? Are not missions His own cause in which He has dispatched His chosen agents to the remotest lands, and has He now so forgotten them that I should beg Him to prepare them "a door for the word"? By what presumption shall I dare to intercede for men and women far

godlier than I, who have already intrusted to the Father for themselves their least and greatest concerns; will He wait to regard their pleas until I interpose my unworthier petitions?

In such perplexities I long strove to content myself with the reflection that altruistic prayer is certainly a cultivation of altruism, and may be enjoined for that purpose. Without dispute it is a good first step towards loving men to begin to pray for them. And yet this is not sufficient to satisfy. Any solely subjective explanation of the worth of prayer gives me an unpleasant sense of imputing dishonesty to God. That certain very considerable reflex values accrue from the exercise of prayer to him who prays, is reasonably believable; but that wholly for the sake of such reactions in a man's own life God encourages a man to suppose that he is reaching divine favour, is a proposition that ultimately becomes impossible. It attributes to God an uncandid makeshift. A kindergarten teacher, in order to keep the children interested in their calisthenics, may make believe with them that they are brave knights with javelins; but even though we be children, prayer is not a game. When I hear the voice of God inciting me to pray that good may come into the world, I must seriously conceive that somehow my prayer is capable of bringing in the good. Otherwise I shall not pray.

It was out of a verse in the epistle of James that there first flashed on me a suggestion towards the solving of this puzzle. The unique rendering of our modern revisers held my attention: "The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working" (Jas. 5 : 16). The word "effectual" in the version long accepted had been replaced by the last three words of the revised sentence,—"in its working." Even my slight acquaintance with the original could on examination make out the necessity which compelled the change. No mere proleptic adjective, duplicating what the verb "avail" would express without it, can show the lively and aggressive force of the Greek participle involved. It would endure an even stronger rendering: "A prayer toiling earnestly availeth much." I trust I have learned due caution about loading single words of Scripture with emphasis; the Bible writers no more than other earnest men stopped to weigh scruples and grams of philology. And yet a diction so simple and straightforward as James uses would scarcely employ a word so energetic about prayer unless an idea of active energy stood behind it. James conceived prayer, it would seem, as a force at work. And why should I deny the validity of his conception? May it not be true in literal fact that supplication is a deed? If a man turns his hand to do a kindly and righteous act in the world, I say he works for God.

If he strives to persuade his fellow men of the salvation which is in Jesus Christ, I say he works for God. Even if he thinks a great thought and tells it for men to think after him, I say he works for God. If he prays for men, shall I call him idle?

Perchance prayer is not after all a petition to move the will of God; perchance it is a power put at the disposal of God wherewith to move the will of men. Perhaps praying is achievement. Physical science has its doctrine of the conservation of energy,—at this moment mayhap set in some question of the universality assumed for it until radium was known, but certainly not shaken from any great area of its sway over nature. Within all the range of average human observation it still remains indisputable that kinetic force is nowhere obtained except at the expense of force in some other form. The consumption of energy is the only creation of energy. Work is always a sort of combustion; results prove the eating up of fuel. Why may there not then be in the spiritual world the analogue of this law? May it not be as impossible to move spiritual means to spiritual effect as physical means to physical effect without the process of wear which liberates power? And may not prayer be the combustion of a soul?

This suggestion I should not be satisfied to have accepted simply as a graphic metaphor. It has come to be to me something other than a

figure of rhetoric. Power is no more a metonomy in the realm of mind—perhaps less—than in the realm of matter. I am persuaded that the human soul in the act of passionate willing and wishing is a living dynamo. It is conscious with itself of the forthputting of energy; it suffers afterwards the weary reactions of toil. The man who has longed mightily for great success or great blessing knows that "virtue" has gone out of him thereby. And if the thing wished for is within the scope of human achievement, one may recognize ocular and tangible demonstration that the steadfast purpose of the mind is an achieving power. There is a fiat force even in the will of finite man. But when the wish of the soul reaches upward to the things which human hands are impotent to mold, shall all its travail of desire, now ennobled by aspirations purer and more unselfish than in lower spheres, lose efficacy by very reason of its loftier spiritual exaltation? If a small longing is force to accomplish the possible, can a great longing to accomplish the impossible have no force at all? Is there no law of conservation in the spiritual world,—no economy to gather up the outraying spiritual energies of men and employ them for work of a spiritual sort? Surely we may be bold to say that such a law there ought to be, or else we must think that the God who amid all the atomic excitements of suns, planets, satellites and star-dust gathers up

the fragments of dynamics that nothing be lost, has somehow betwixt the universe of the temporal and the universe of the eternal forgotten His divine frugality.

No, there is a conservation of spiritual energy, and the law of it is the law of prayer. Prayer is something better than presenting ourselves in the audience chamber of God and suing for favour in our own behalf or the behalf of those we love. Prayer is summing up together our noblest and ultimate desires, all that far excess of longings which are beyond any capacity of ours to realize save in dreams, and bringing all these hopes, so futile in us, to the throne of the Omnipotent. Intrusted with the sincere aspirations of His people, God will waste, I dare believe, not so much as one disheartened sigh. A man's first soul-felt desires for "the profit of the many" go by honest instinct into his work, wherein it is his high honour to be "God's fellow worker." But a good man's wish for better things in an improving world very soon surpasses all his most zealous toil, and prayer is a provision for banking his overplus with God. And when God employs an unselfish human wish as a part of the capital of His providence and so fulfills it, a greater marvel has come to pass, for God appears a Fellow Worker with man. The Christian pities his neighbour, and works the pity into a home-made, hand-turned kindness. Ere long, with that

benign discipline, his enlarging heart has begun to pity the world—or some far-spread section of it. But he cannot be kind to a whole world; is he then helpless? How shall his pity avail? He shall pray, says his Lord, and his supplication shall "avail much in its working,"—working in large and distant places where the man could not reach to work. What miracle of potentiality then is this which is thus conferred on creatures of clay! If by prayer we can labour, neither mountain nor chasm of difficulty shall be able to hinder us. We are at the end of our own devices? Doubtless so. But we are not defeated. It has simply come time to pray. With such an enfranchisement for every hope, from what hope —from what aspiration—shall "height or depth or any other creature" forbid us?

But if prayer is the going forth of energy into the spiritual universe, we can scarcely escape acknowledging that much of what we call prayer ill deserves to be known by that name. Our calm and urbane petitions, filling their modulated place in our habitual worship, can hardly be suspected of being ebullitions of vital force. Not that I would seem to attribute virtue to vehemence; we are not supplicating a deaf Baal. But if not vehemence, certainly there must be intensity in the voice of a heart that it is putting itself forth for the world's sake in a passion of Christly good will. At the gateway of prayer as

at every other gateway to the capital seat of the kingdom "men of violence take it by force." An overmastering wish does not march sedately down the smooth-laid pavement of marble words; it runs and cries aloud. There are no hearts of real prayer beating in our bosoms when we stand and pray thus with ourselves: "It would gratify us greatly, O Lord, if Thou wert pleased to bless everybody in general very agreeably." Still as of ancient times the ground of Peniel is beaten hard with the feet of the wrestlers.

To be sure, there is a prayer of rest and serenity, and it has its sweet and efficient place in the experience of the devout. When we commit to our loving and providential Father the issues of our own welfare in the world, no stress of soul is imposed upon us. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him." Just the gentle truthful word which tells Him what we feel of our want of Him and how we throw ourselves upon Him for all our necessities,—the quiet whisper which speaks in His ear our confidence that according to His promise He will not forget,—these outbreathings of the soul at peace with God are by right unruffled with any stir of the intense, active emotions. In every case of his own fortunes "it is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Jehovah." Neither for bread nor for garments do the trustful need to beg;

only to say we are looking to the Father for them is enough. But where sin is involved—either our own sin or others'—and stands in the way to be conquered, prayer passes from a breath of calm communion to an implement of pitched warfare, and we must use it for blows struck heavy and hard. Of the devils in ourselves and the devils in other men, it is ever true as the Master said: "This kind can come out by nothing save by prayer."

A more excitable generation going before our own would not believe that men and women could be converted to the way of our Lord Jesus Christ, except as with weeping and wailing they came through some strenuous agony of grief at the "mourners' bench." These forefathers were wrong, of course, psychologically and religiously, in supposing that the spiritual revolution of a life can be effected by the physical simulation of any process or supposed process of the inner nature. Yet none the less they had sight of a great soul fact far beyond them, and their error was greatly less than ours if we imagine, on the opposite hand, that a few placid reflections on the beauty of goodness can set a man free from his habits of sin. The exorcism of the demons is by prayer that strains the sinews of the soul,—not by some languorous sentimental expectation that God will be sorry for us, seeing that we are not near as good as we should really love to be. When head

and heart, the whole man is in fiery revolt against the tyranny of evil, and life has become one terrific outcry for deliverance from "the body of this death," then the victory is at hand. But the highway that leads away from our sins towards God is forever a path of battle,—a path to be traversed only with prayer at every step—all prayers of might and main. And the battling prayer availeth much.

It is not different when we undertake to pray our friends out of the same bondage. We may from some sanctimonious sense of duty keep lists of persons within our acquaintance who are not yet Christians, and day by day may name them over, adding punctiliously with each, "O God, please save this man," but there is not energy enough in the whole of such petitions to save one of them. We have small ground to take any comfort of conscience out of the custom, seeing what meagre results come from it. But when some day the horror of our neighbour's estrangement from God, the despair of his rebellion against the divine rule, the desperation of his helplessness in the teeth of sin, all rush upon us to grip our own throats like the assault of furies in the dark, then we begin to pray. Then we ourselves feel the pall fall on our own lives. Then the agonized soul of sympathy nerves itself to storm, if need be, the uppermost, innermost citadel of heaven ere it yields its vicarious pleading

for the sinner's rescue. And then the fallen begin to be saved. The mighty prayer of love itself becomes dynamic; it lifts men from the pit. Its very earnestness is intrinsic force, and God makes that force efficient. Men, planning for revivals, ask money and organization for bringing their plans to pass; God asks only prayers. He can have a revival anywhere if He may but have enough prayers of the right kind to work with.

So with all manifold forms of Christian enterprise,—whether the measures and methods of the local church or the cosmopolite mission agencies of the church general,—prayer is the secret of motive power for all alike. The only successful type of Christian enginery which God has at work anywhere, is prayer-burning. When that fuel fails, the machine stands still. No amount or character of what we call Christian work will suffice as a substitute. Work is indeed of itself an obligation. The man who knows what to do and how to do, ought to put himself with great force into direct, sinewy toil. But not with all force; a part of his vital energy he ought always to save for prayer. When from our days of feverish, anxious effort we come home at night too tired to pray, we have doubtless defrauded God of a part of His resources on which He depended more than upon our active deeds. Our Father appears to have peculiar need of our

prayers for His greater purposes in the world. There are some objects which manifestly He cannot accomplish with only our labour in hand. Our planning and proclaiming and persuading do not reach very far in the kingdom. But our prayers, rising beyond what we see and handle to all that we long for and dream of, sweep in their currents of force round the outer horizons of mankind, and in God's infinite mechanics may serve for immeasurable results. Busy here and there, preoccupied with tangible duties, we may very possibly be doing only the lesser things, while meanwhile those who pray affect races and ages.

Prayer, one can well imagine, may be especially useful for those atmospheric influences which change the inclinations of communities. The missionary in a foreign land, may labour long and with painful diligence to gain the heed of his pagan neighbours, and win scarcely casual interest from a very few. Converts he probably has none, until behind the scattered impressions which he has been able to make on one and another by personal touch, there rises mysteriously a background of favourable disposition amidst the populace at large. A better air prevails ; the missionary can speak with more freedom, more joy and more hope, and ears that listen begin to reveal hearts that receive. He realizes the subtle aid which buoyed up the apostles in Jerusalem—"favour with all the people." The worker can-

not explain what has come to pass; he knows it is no new power which he has acquired; he can only give glory to God for providential aid. But no doubt if we could trace the whole chain of cause and effect, we should perceive that it is not a blessing wrought without means. Back in the homeland certain devout souls, remembering the missionary, have perchance wished for him a readier acceptance among the people to whom he had gone out, and that strong, selfless wish—that far-travelling missionary wish—they have told to God. It is not for mortals to surmise how divinely glad the Father must be, knowing well the discouragements of that servant of His, to grasp up those prayers and guide them hastily to the missionary's succour. And when enough such loving petitions have followed and lighted on the place, all the air around will grow warm and genial with the lively sympathy of hearts that care—and pray. In such tropic spiritual climate the vine which the Lord's hand has planted cannot fail to flourish.

Even more obvious is the connection between prayer and its outgoing spiritual effects in the home congregation. Many a disheartened minister has failed with woeful monotony in one attempt after another to win the faithless and unbelieving of his town. At every turn adamant barriers defied his most assiduous effort. Men with whom he argued and men with whom he pleaded and

men with whom he wept alike resisted his ministry. Then suddenly there came a change. His fellow citizens turned tacitly to acknowledge the importance of the eternal things; sneers ceased, and sinners erstwhile indifferent were moved to consider their ways; some ere long yielded their lives to the Saviour. Here too the minister of God's message dared not account anything from himself to have worked the difference. But when he sought in quiet places for the clue, he has discovered somebody praying. And the prayers had wrought the revolution. God above was never uninterested in that town nor ever careless of the preacher's unrewarded struggles. But nobody had afforded the overlooking Lord enough prayers to use in that town, and it had never been sanitated of its sinful miasmas. Prayers rising from hearts that love God are like the salt airs that rise from the sea; they carry healing on their wings wherever the breath of heaven blows them. Abundance of prayer is a charter of health to any community.

If missionaries in heathen lands cannot succeed unprayed for, what treason to our brotherhood with them is it for us to forget and leave them unsupplied with this essential resource! If the minister in the pulpit of the home church must be surrounded with prayers before he is strong, what cruel faithlessness to let him stand in his place unshielded and unsupported! For

the smallness of our material gifts to the great causes of good we may excuse ourselves by our poverty of purse, but how shall we excuse ourselves for our penuriousness of prayer. In wealth of praying we might any one of us be millionaire helpers,—if we but seriously put ourselves to the trouble of it. Grant that this is the true working wealth of evangelization far and near, and what a reversal of all our common standards of importance at once ensues! No longer is the indispensable strength of the congregation in the dignified elder who discourses of profound theology in the week-night prayer-meeting, nor in the adroit trustee who contrives to rescue the annual balance sheet from deficit, nor yet in the eloquent pastor whose sermons are the praise of his community. But the person on whom the success of the church most radically depends is that member who has learned to pray, —not as a dress-parade evolution in open meeting but with the inevitable outflowing of a soul that for great love of God and people cannot contain itself. Most likely it is some aged saint, long educated in the spirit and long practiced in the mystic skill of prayer, who on the records of heaven is written down as the most important member of such and such a church. Obscure on earth, the giants of secret, heart prayer are known of God, His greatest lieutenants no doubt in the conquests of His universal kingdom.

The first objection to this teaching may readily be anticipated. It will be said that the doctrine makes the Creator a dependent subordinate of His creatures, bound to wait their interest and will for permission to accomplish His intents,—even beholden for resources of power to the finite works of His own omnipotence. It is bootless to deny the contradiction, but the contradiction is no disproof while as great a paradox exists, unexplained but undeniable, in the manifest fact that God's plans linger likewise for men's labour. It is no less mystery that God should abide slow and reluctant human service than that He should abide the unfervent sluggishness of human prayers. Yet the centuries are witness that He will have no other method of bringing forward His kingdom on earth than the endeavours of His earthly servants. The evangel which He might have summoned quick angels to preach in every land ere the morning of His command had faded to its night, still remains in many corners of the inhabited earth an unknown story, because the Author of the message commits its proclamation only to an unresponsive and heavy-footed race. A thousand evident purposes of providence remain through long years unfulfilled because no man cares enough to lend his toil to these divine objects. A sovereign God whose unaided word might in the twinkling of an eye miraculously perform the last and greatest of

"His bright designs," denies Himself the hasty satisfaction rather than take back to Himself an atom of the work He has laid upon men to do. And it is only another like marvel of inscrutable patience if He has also bound Himself to tarry from His purposed consummations until the men who are working have also prayed. The going forth of the missionary is no more an outputting of the strength of the church than is the going forth of a fervent prayer, and the one is no more needful than the other.

And in a thorough analysis it will clearly appear that to teach thus is not to teach that any one has limited God, nor yet to attribute power to another than He. The very essence of the principle of the conservation of energy in the science of physics consists in its ultimate hypothesis—that all power which is manifested in mundane phenomena is derived more or less directly from the sun. The reason that there is a certain sum of force in the world neither increased nor diminished in its constant mutations, lies alone in the fact that the great solar centre is the world's only producer of energy; energy can come from nowhere else. So too this spiritual parallel implies the same conception,—that there is but one Source of the power of the human soul. Far beyond the political sense in which Paul used the expression, it is true in a great cosmic sense: "There is no power but of

God." The Creator does not abdicate His own omnipotence when He invests mankind with prerogatives of directing certain forces that radiate from Him; He rather sets up new seats, new viceroyalties, of His sovereignty. Men rule in His name and stead when they handle the lightnings by His laws; they do no more when they bring things to pass by the agency of prayer. And if the Sovereign endures laxness in those who fail of the duty which He commits to their charge, it is but another phase in that strange abstinence from His own liberty by which God makes any human liberty possible. This human liberty may indeed stop God's work; that half of the reflection is staggering; but the other half thereof should stir a true man's soul like a challenge to heroism and mighty zeal, for it is also man's possibility to make God, by God's power, triumphant.

Explicit qualifications in every paragraph have been designed to avert the suspicion that some new theory of occult telepathy is being here inculcated. It is not meant to affirm—indeed, it is explicitly meant to deny—that prayer effects anything by direct impact. Prayer is not a vagrant incantation wandering abroad among men to lay a spell where it may chance to rest. True prayer is directed to God, and to God it goes. And whatsoever it accomplishes is accomplished because God has taken hold of it and

guided it to its destined result. The Father is a Master-Worker with prayers; He knows how to get the most out of them—how to turn them to the best advantage. And this is why we so often do more by praying than by working. Our endeavours, no matter how earnest, we often blunder with, not knowing in what place to put them nor how to fit them in the place they should go. But our prayers go out of our management, and God neither experiments nor blunders when He applies their force direct to the point of first need.

To ask why God has staked the progress of good among men on the precarious contingency of our faithfulness in either toil or prayer, is pushing far into the arcana of the divine discretions. We could accept the fact, if need be, without even guessing the reason, and our nearest explanation will hardly be more than a guess. But doubtless the use of responsibility in developing human character lies somewhere close to the centre of the secret. To say this is not to hark back to a subjective accounting for the power of prayer. A method of discipline is very different from a mere inspiring suggestion to the mind. If God employs prayer to exercise character, it is not a phantom appearance of instrumental good on which he relies, but an actual tool of actual service. Had the Father in heaven provided for some means of direct

heavenly appeal to human souls one by one, and so saved them with no brotherly intervention of other men, it is grievous to imagine what a selfish and slothful company of the pious would compose His church on earth. Taken as the condition stands, with warning on every page of Scripture and in every day of experience that our neighbours' spiritual and temporal welfare depends on our fidelity of Christian service to them, the church yet attains no great distinction for unselfishness. What would be its heartless state if no sense of responsibility enlivened its sympathy and care for the sin-fraught life by which it is surrounded! And if the commission to heal the wounds of the world and to preach in the world the glad tidings of the kingdom serves at all to rescue Christian hearts from the black stigma of unbrotherly isolation, much more should the commission to pray for the world, if seriously received, move them to a large and divine love of their race. For we may render the ministry of our hands only to a very few who live hard by our own dwelling places, and very parochial interests may go with exceeding zeal, when immediate and personal labour is that zeal's sole expression. But God is not parochial, and He will not have us abide at home in our hearts. He has other sheep beyond the seas whom He would fold in our sympathies. Therefore He sets us a task of prayer, and prayer circles the world,

and coming home again brings back our unseen brothers from far climes and rude nations. Our prayers are, please God, a blessing to them, but not to them alone, for "God hath provided some better thing concerning us that apart from us they should not be made perfect."

Of all plights into which men can fall this is the saddest—to have nobody to pray for them. Well-mothered boys well prayed for have a vast advantage in life, but what wonder is it that unprayed-for boys go far astray. And what a divine service to humanity childless and lone women may render if they will but take into their hearts the motherless boys to pray for them. And the weary shut-ins who so often call themselves useless and only a burden,—they have so much leisure to pray; let them remember with sacrifices of loving request the many for whom no one else ever thinks to pray. With such intercessions those who have so learned Christ may save untold hosts from the awful despair of believing that no man cares for their souls.

A godly minister whom in high admiration I venture to call friend has written of intercessory prayer as "A Mighty Means of Usefulness." And such most truly it is.

II

The Rationalities of Prayer

II

THE RATIONALITIES OF PRAYER

THOUGH the question of the possibility of divine answer to human petition, which was deliberately passed by at the outset of the foregoing chapter, is, as was there insisted, seldom a disturbing problem to a man of vital prayer experience, it is one of the earliest riddles advanced by the disputatious agnostic, and is doubtless an actual stumbling-block to some who crave the consolations of the faith from which this difficulty seems to debar them. There are, therefore, times when by one circumstance or another the Christian is challenged to give a reason for the confidence with which he offers his supplications, and as forearming him against that demand, some inquiry is justified into the rationality of trusting a "prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God." The discussion is not a scriptural one; what the Scriptures teach is plain enough; the question here is whether that teaching is agreeable to reason.

Those who deny fortify themselves with three characters of argument. It is alleged, in the first place, that the "reign of law" in the universe ex-

cludes the vacillation of a God who could be swayed by "whims," either His own or those of His favourites among men. Others, perhaps more devout, stand upon the insistence that an omniscient and all-benevolent Father has beforehand chosen what is best for each of His creatures, and if prayers might induce Him to change, it would necessarily be a change to some worse thing. On a third part it is contended that God's plans are comprehensive of the whole of mankind, insuring the highest good of the race en masse, but that it is idle to imagine that among the innumerable multitudes of men He can give specific heed to desires of individuals. Of these objections, the first is academic, the second mechanical, the third unimaginative.

The antagonism between law and prayer is created by exaggerating both ideas. The modern pride over discovering coördination in nature has made of modern thinkers a cult of law-worshippers. To hear their sweeping syllogisms one would imagine that a new race of divinities, by family name called the laws of nature, had established an absolute autocracy over the universe, in the grasp of which even the Creator Himself is a rule-ridden slave. Such a mode of speech either voices a wholly material pantheism, or else evinces indiscrimination of the various manners of God's action, which are summed up under this term—the laws of nature. Undoubt-

edly many of the great facts which mankind sees in creation the same from age to age are structural and in that sense necessary; they must be as they are or the universe would be something other than it is. Gravitation may fairly be said to be inevitable; human thought at least could not imagine its absence or its negative in a system of physical existence. So with the laws of morals; right is right and wrong is wrong, as immutably to God as to man, and the question of the patriarch, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" represents to the modern heart as to the ancient the primal necessity apart from which there may be no theistic faith. It may raise an insurmountable paradox to the reason to speak of God as obliged to do anything, but the instinct of conscience declares that He is obliged to be just, true and benevolent, and will not endure to have it otherwise. There can be no variation in the morality of God.

To this extent God's laws are changeless. But prayer does not come into conflict with either of these categories in His statutes. No man prays God to suspend the interplanetary attractions or to alter the colour composition of light. And no man wittingly desires God to do an evil thing. The requests of intelligent prayer are requests for what the suppliant at least believes to be within the lawful right of God to grant, without infringing on any of the estab-

lished principles of natural order or working any form of injustice to any. God's orator—to hark back to the old meaning of the word which now sounds so quaint—may be far astray in judgment as to the possibility of the thing he asks for; it may involve impossible consequences, of which his limited human sight has afforded him no suspicion; but his error of estimation in that particular does not destroy the general validity of his trust. He is right in refusing to believe that red tape of eternal precedents ties down the Governor of creation from doing yet and now what He will with His own. The heavenly Father is not a petrified Spirit whose choice and volition were exhausted in deciding on pre-creation decrees æons ago. He saves to Himself, and day by day enjoys, that liberty which energetic men count the first condition of success—the liberty to meet with new means the demands of new circumstances. And to God the new circumstances may very likely be new prayers for new blessings,—for God knows too well what prayers mean to treat them as negligible factors of any situation. Those laws of nature or the spiritual realm which are simply men's notations of God's habits, are not of any binding moral force upon Him; He determined the habit, and He may desert it, when He will, for another habit equally righteous. It is mere play upon words to call it law-breaking for Him thus to change His

method. And the beneficiaries of such changes may rightly be those who pray.

The relation of God to law in His universe may be illustrated in a homely analogy by a merchant's conduct of his business. Entering upon any commercial enterprise, the manager of affairs draws up a body of regulations for the conduct of trade. Some of these rules are determined by moral considerations, some by accepted principles of sound merchandising and finance, some by respect to local expediencies, and some by the mere need of having a uniform practice throughout the establishment. The chief, for discipline's sake, must require all his subordinates to obey all the regulations without discrimination, but he would be exceedingly fatuous if he left no freedom of exceptions to himself. To certain of his own laws he is indeed as firmly bound as the least of his employees; he cannot honourably suspend the rule of honesty nor the rule of courtesy,—they have the moral sanction which no shifts of condition may alter. He will have no desire to suspend the rule prescribing dignified advertising measures, for these are involved in the fixed character of the business. But the usual time of paying wages may in holiday week be advanced for a day or two or three in order to supply employees the sooner with their Christmas money, because this is no matter of principle but a rule of con-

venience, and for convenience or kindness may be altered. So, for another instance, the requirement of cash payment may be waived when a charitable institution with an empty treasury needs emergency supplies. A manager who cannot make exceptions is to be pitied; he needs a steel heart. There is nothing more cruel than an inflexible rule; somewhere it is sure to run over human rights and the instincts of brotherhood like a juggernaut. No kind man would ride such an uncontrollable machine.

Nor will God. It may seem gross to lay such a commonplace illustration parallel to the divine management of the world, but its plainness of meaning will atone for that. God, like a stable business man, has His fundamental rules which He will not, cannot, on any consideration, set aside. These are the rules which insure the continuance of nature and morality. But He has too His incidental rules, His nominal customs, which prevail in the absence of reason for something other, but from which He may at choice make exception,—as men would say, "to favour a friend." And the foundations are not unsettled when in such indulgent preference He answers a personal prayer with a personal blessing. If for his own prayer and the prayer of his friends some sick Hezekiah is reprieved from immediate death and granted fifteen years of added life, nothing has happened except a gracious kind-

ness to one family, of which the consequences are not at conflict with any larger purposes of God. It is idle rhetoric to insist that such a change from what would otherwise have been, makes it impossible to suppose that God cherishes fixed plans of action. Fifteen years of Hezekiah, living or dead, do not deflect history. Or if in case of straits a hard-working farmer prays for prosperity, it does not require that the science of meteorology must be undone in order to afford him a timely rain on a well tilled field. Indeed he can get that sort of answer only by means of the laws of meteorology specially brought to bear on his need,—which is no more lawless than to take the rule of three out from among the set "examples" in the arithmetic text-book and apply it to a problem arisen in the actual course of trade.

It is impossible, as it is needless, to go on to illustrate this point by all the different kinds of petition that men are prompted to offer. The purpose is by meagre allusion simply to indicate how wide the area in which there are at least no structural reasons why God should not answer prayer. It is granted that prayer cannot prevent the sun from rising in the morning, for the sun always does rise, and the presumption is that it must needs do so. But it is not granted that the prayer of sailors for the abatement of a storm is by necessity futile, for storms do abate, and if

God lives at all in His world, He must know a way of abating storms and must have a discretion in using that means. The centenarian may not pray to live to be two hundred years old, for there is an evident law against the extension of human life to two centuries. But the growing lad may pray to reach manhood, for boys do come to manhood. Where it is reasonable to wish, it is reasonable to pray, for a prayer is simply a wish based on theistic faith. There is nothing but empty bombast of words in declaring that infrangible law governs every deed of God; neither our experience of the variety of nature nor our experience of the liberty of personality in ourselves justifies such generalization. The ideal of pervasive law in the universe is a lofty thought, an enlargement for the mind it enters. But its nobility is forfeited when it grows so overbold as to try to put divinity in shackles. God's universe is orderly but not order-hampered. The broad current of His plans runs in a channel, not in a groove. All is lawful but not all is law.

It is still further beside the mark to charge God with whims if He shall choose to regard the petitions of men and consent to some of them. It is not represented on the part of any who believe in prayer that prayer is a compulsion on God. His Bible promises to answer those who call upon Him, in no wise bear the construction of con-

tracts to do all that may be asked. Prayer is not a secret spring by which every comer advised in the sleight of it may force open the treasure-box of creation and help himself as he will. Nor yet is it a requisition to be filled on sight according to the terms of demand. It is instead a humble petition presented to a just and discriminating Judge, who grants only so much as His own wisdom approves as of benefit to the petitioner. The will of the supplicant has absolutely no constraining influence on the will of the great Answerer,—as was submissively recognized by the best Praying Man who ever lived, the one whom we should have thought entitled to require just what He desired. And on God's part there is not the least suggestion that "whim" enters into the prayer interchange; His responses are not arbitrary but undoubtedly upon principle that looks on the one hand to the large rights of humanity, and on the other to the ultimate welfare of the individual soul that entreats favour. It may well be believed that in heaven the privilege of prayer is considered a critically important franchise for humanity, and as such is guarded from abuse with the most jealous care. Even good men must be watched lest they employ their access to the audience chamber of the King for the advance of selfish objects. Perhaps no prayer is ever granted for a purely personal blessing. Health is granted to a man, not so much

for his own sake, but because he may, if he will, use his strength to make others happy. A man is given a happy home, not to enjoy in his own life merely, but because a happy home can be made the centre of some of the truest outgoing social influences. So praying for one's self is not a purely individualistic exercise when we get into the final analysis of it; it chimes in with the music of the farthest spheres.

The argument that the Father has already chosen the best course of life for every creature of His, and that therefore a grant of requests offered in prayer is not only impossible, but would involve, if possible, a descent from God's ideal to some worse thing preferred only by human ignorance, is likewise a fallacy produced by overstretching truth. It is a precious and beautiful faith that, as Dr. Bushnell delighted to preach, "every man's life is a plan of God." We are not cast into this world at random for fit or misfit, as may chance. By divine forethought each soul is undoubtedly adapted to occupy a certain exact place in the organization of history, and while for sake of sacred human liberty the soul is permitted choice whether it will or will not discharge its destiny, yet the constraint of adaptations and environments is so strong that most men are probably to be found in approximately the places in the world for which God intended them. Nevertheless as the prevalence of law fixing the main

course of nature does not imply the fixing of every natural incident, so the marking out of a great ultimate usefulness for any one life does not needfully include at the same time the determination of all the intermediate experiences through which the life is to realize its appointment. It may be that A has been set apart in the counsels of providence to accomplish some great social reform, but until A has proved what manner of man he is, it may yet remain an open question whether he is to achieve his great deed in sore personal chastisement after tedious delay, or with joy and speedy triumphing. If A is headstrong and self-reliant, it may be impossible to grant his prayers for quick success; it might ruin him. But if he is a humble man, trusting solely in the aid of God, and his prayers attest his character, God may be able to meet his petitions with victory ere they have fairly risen from the warm altar of his lips.

To say that for a praying man God can do no more than He could do—and would do—by general benevolence for the same man if he did not pray, ignores the merit in the act and attitude of prayer. Any discreet earthly father should be able to understand how it is that more can be done in the home for the child who modestly and submissively asks kindnesses and is grateful on receiving them, than for either the child who is indifferent to loving gifts or the child who im-

pudently demands favours as his pampered right. So what God may do for men depends very greatly on how men treat God. His will to be kind is the same towards each of His children; His chance to be kind is in different cases very different. Blessings at best are dangerous things, and those which are unsolicited are most apt to be to the hurt of the recipient. It is a frequent theme of the Bible writers—and where else are there so shrewd analyzers of human nature?—how Jeshurun kicks when he has waxed fat. When the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, so that he had to pull down his barns and build greater, the bounty of the earth evoked no thought of God; it was a Voice wholly strange to him which that night called his soul. If therefore the common provisions of nature—the kindnesses of simple prosperity and health—exalt the proud hearts of men to self-sufficiency and rebellion, God would scarcely dare to confer on a prayerless man the choicest mercies that his yearnings of love could devise.

But if the man should somehow be brought to turn his mind back to heaven and pray, how gladly must the Father see the conversion of heart which makes possible a larger indulgence of His kind desires towards another child. For by coming with a petition the man confesses himself a dependent, abdicating his vain pretensions to win his own place and provide his own

way in life. Now if he receives special and unusual mercy, he may perhaps be trusted not to "glory as if he had not received it." Now the answer of his best hopes may not plume him with such éclat that he shall forget the dependence which his prayer confessed. Now he may remember to be grateful; now he may not, in proud satisfaction, tear himself from the leadership of the Hand that has blessed him. With a praying man there is hope that great mercy may not be ruinous. But towards the many, irreverent and contumacious, God must restrain Himself, lest by giving to the utmost of His divine impulses He might further harden the hearts of the thankless, as children are spoiled by the unreckoning indulgence of too complacent parents. Yet all that we know of the Father above persuades us that beyond all else He rejoices in being good—munificently good—to men. Is it then of sound reason to believe that by some predestinarian limitation He would tie Himself down to do no more for the son come humbly home to the Father's house than He may venture to do for the same son living the prodigal life in a far land? He would surely leave Himself the right to enrich the soul that bows and worships with at least all those mercies that He longed to give, but dared not, while in vainglory of unrepentant sin the soul would have nothing of Him. It would be an unjust heaven which could do

nothing more for the man of prayer than for the man who will not even draw near to the door of supplication to read the promise of its open portals.

God then will show mercy to the prayerless, but to the praying He will, as He can, show greater mercy. In this case the alternative of good is not evil but greater good. The suppliant is not complaining of the portion allotted him in the general ordering of human affairs; but he puts himself in willing personal relation to do still larger things for God, and if it be the divine will, to enjoy higher things from God. It is true enough that in prayer—so short is our earth-seeing sight—we often ask for things that are ill for us, and no real blessings at all. But this observation only requires it to be said again that there is no contract basis for prayer; God is free to refuse. And whoever prays in any wisdom at all implies with whatever he asks the qualifying petition that God may consider his desires and allow only what in the long account may be for his welfare. Prayer is only dangerous when pressed headstrongly; of such prayer the sufficient punishment may be its grant in full, bringing that sombre irony of prosperous fortune depicted by the psalmist:

> "He gave them their request,
> But sent leanness into their soul."

But from his spiritual tragedy—poverty in wealth—it requires only a simple and submissive heart to save a devout man. To ask the best the heart prompts; to receive the kindest God prepares,—this is the noble commerce of prayer.

In these paragraphs I am perfectly aware that "I speak after the manner of men." Back of this whole discussion remains unanswered the logical question: How may anything that God foreknows be treated as contingent? May we speak of His doing better or worse for a man according to whether or not the man prays? Does not God well know what He will do, and does not that knowledge shut up the man to the attitude which is antecedent to God's foreseen course? In answer I can only appeal once more to the native sense of personality which abides in every man's mind till excess of logic obscures it. By all our experience, observational and subjective, the finest type of human person is constrained to follow righteousness and constrained to keep law, but in decisions of expediency and in adaptations of means to ends is unconstrained and self-willing. And it is the natural naive instinct of the human heart to attribute to the God of heaven the best things that it perceives in the qualities of great and good men. The teaching of Jesus, especially as regards the divine Fatherhood, justifies the instinct. It is indeed a noteworthy sign of how truly the Bible is a book

of life and not of philosophy, that it is so human in its representation of God—so anthropomorphic, if you will. No trace appears there of this metaphysical puzzle over the necessary predeterminations of Omniscience. The primitive portions of the book calmly represent God as changing His mind even to the extent of repenting for past actions; and when the reader has advanced to the passages most intellectually refined, he still finds Paul, the very indoctrinator of predestination, bidding his Gentile converts beware lest the Power that grafted them into the gospel tree might for unbelief cut them off again, and fearing for himself that his Redeemer may in the end of all judge him not worth saving.

Doubt of God's ability to attend to each of His creatures on earth individual by individual is, on the other hand, an induction from human personality to divine personality which quite misleads. It is an argument not from man's highest possibilities but from one of his narrowest limitations. This is a faculty soon exhausted with us—the power of holding in eye or mind separately the units of a mass. The eye may see a group of eight or ten as so many persons; after that it takes them in as a company unless they are separated by a laborious process of counting. And the mind of the average man finds it difficult to form and keep distinct im-

pressions of all the several members of a school, society or congregation after the number has risen much above a hundred. Even in a community where he has lived long and has abundant social fellowships with his neighbours, the ordinary citizen would not likely call more than a thousand men acquaintances,—many fewer friends. And it is because we have these experiences of our own to suggest the difficulty of individualizing even a few out of the great gray conglomerate of human life which walls us in, that we disbelieve the heavenly Father's discriminate knowledge of the billion and a half atoms in the aggregate of the race. But it is a disbelief that will not endure analysis; it comes to be trivial and almost ridiculous when we realize that we are making out a thing impossible to God just because it is staggering to us. We do not so hamper the greatest men among us; we admire and applaud those whose extraordinary capacity for details accomplishes feats of management that we acknowledge impossible for ourselves; or to take the very case that we are here considering,—it is the topic of comment in the life of almost every famous statesman that he had a marvellous gift for accumulating and remembering acquaintances. If these lines of enlarging faculty run on out beyond the best abilities of the world of men as known to men, by what human compasses shall their arc be spanned when they have come

to infinity? Measure the distance from the most ambitious human mechanics to the mechanism of the starry heavens,—from the administration of the vastest human plans to the ordering of that divine plan which covers eternal history,—and say whether these are any lesser distance than from the acquaintanceship of men with their friends to the acquaintanceship of God with His hosts of earthly charges from pole to pole and the world around. If we consent to infinity, let us not deny infinitude.

The ideal of the fatherhood of God has a singular appeal to the human heart—an appeal that even agnostics are fain to acknowledge. But it is very clear that there is no Fatherhood in the universe unless this individual dealing of God with individuals is a literal and commonplace fact. That type of man whose affairs have got out of his hands by overgrowth; who now has so many subordinates at work for him that he cannot possibly know them longer by name and face and with personal interest, is no longer to be called a father to his dependents, as in the old days of patriarchal industry a good employer might very appropriately have been styled. The distinctive product of the stupendous modern factory system is the general manager, who has not men to do the work for him but a force to do it under him. The business has grown to such immense proportions that the general

manager can no longer consider men at all; he is barely able to keep the business itself in sight through his elaborate system and routine. Now the whole question here at stake is whether the business of governing mankind has likewise grown so enormous and distracting that it has reduced God to the hard-driven rôle of a general manager. It would be pity of pity if that had indeed happened; all the unmoral conditions of our modern industrial situation have followed the change that obliterated personal relations from between employer and employed, for a man and a mass can never be in love. A like unmorality would soon disrupt a universe where there was only a God and a mass to deal back and forth between earth and heaven. Once again the heart revolts; understanding all that the theory of impersonal providence means, it will not have it so. The soul cries out for a Father and will not be orphaned by its own logic.

Fatherhood will not content itself with providing for the family a general fund of support, out of which each child may get for himself the best that by shift and scramble he can secure. Fatherhood will not be satisfied with the discipline of a reform school where uniform dress and treadmill exercise make every boy like all the rest. The true father rejoices to make distinction among his children—not the distinction of favouritism, not the injustice of taking from

the one to bestow upon the other, but the kindly discrimination which answers to the peculiar traits of each with the exhibits of love most suitable thereto. How sadly would a father convict himself of lack of insight and lack of interest if he brought home to his children identical Christmas presents for all. He has entered but poorly into their hearts if he has not learned how to suit with varying gifts the instinctive bent of their various natures. He cannot teach different laws of righteousness to different children, but he must teach the same laws with different emphasis and by adapted methods of impression if he would affect each of the young lives equally. And when it comes to matters of education, the father must plan still more diversely; he must study the inborn talent, the native trend, of son and daughter, and afford to each the advantages that will serve most effectually their respective development. All this is a parent's special providence—done not in contradiction of his comprehensive duty to all the family but as a required part and phase of that duty without which the inclusive obligation would have been left incomplete. And it is for such individual adaptation of His divine bounties that we look to a loving God above, before whom none of us are more than children; with whom it is honour and riches enough to be that alone. And here again our faith is only that

simple faith which the Master justified: "Of which of you that is a father shall his son? . . . how much more shall your heavenly Father!"

There is then room in reason for a logical belief in individual providence—in prayer heeded at the Centre of the universe and answered when it agrees with the Universal Will. There remains of course the experimental question—whether in actual living men do enjoy these prayer answers which are rationally possible. For that question no reply can be written in a book. It must be answered by test. It is for every man to try and see. It is for every man to look and see. Yet those who put the reality of prayer to trial, either in the study of other men's lives or in the outworking of their own, must beware not to conclude their opinions too hastily. Certain manifest principles are to be taken into account which some have blindly ignored who are ready to proclaim prayer a delusion.

It will not do, for example, to hold that praying is vain because such and such a godly man, having asked for a good favour, did not obtain it. Still less is it to be argued that prayer is discredited because in a devised case various persons have agreed to ask for some curious sign and have not received it. A remark so obvious as this latter I should scarcely think it needful to

make if in a recent work by an eminent Christian scholar I had not read a serious challenge to praying men to concoct a laboratory experiment—to settle on some unlikely thing and pray for it to come to pass as a demonstration of special providence. The author rather brutally intimated that the devout are afraid of such a test, expecting no result and shrinking from the ungrateful disillusion. To a man who can argue so the scathing responses of Jesus Christ to the Pharisees who "sought of Him a sign from heaven," seem not to have penetrated. God is not an exhibitor of wonders. He answers prayers as He does all His work—for concrete ends of good. Like the supreme court of our land, the Supreme Court of heaven passes on no hypothetical matters; the petitioner must have a real case in order to obtain attention. Moreover,—and this especially,—not the most select coterie of the veriest saints on earth would have any right to present their prayers as demands upon God. No matter how thoroughly persuaded they might be that they asked only what was good; no matter how real in their opinion might be the need for the supply of which they made intercession, it would be far beyond the conscious fallibility of all wise men to assert that Goodness and Power and Knowledge in the absolute could do no better than to do their way. All the piety in the world of men could

not frame one complete prayer without "Thy will be done" for its climax.

If prayer framed by a multitude of counselors for objects external to their own interests cannot be certified to God as safe to indorse without examination, prayer offered by the individual soul for blessings within its own life boundaries, liable to the admixture of adulterant selfishness, may hardly claim God's "carte blanche" in return. Indeed, it is the necessary groundwork of any sane faith in prayer to have it understood that God answers not with the "let it be so" of some lazy despot, but with active deliberation and contriving of His own highest wisdom for our advantage not merely immediate but ultimate. There would be no genuine comfort in the permission to pray if it gave only access to a reservoir of power with no discretion but our own to determine the use of power. Any soul that knows itself right well knows only too well that it needs, more than the supplement of weakness, the correction of folly. And the profoundest satisfaction of prayer in the heart that considers its privileges truly, is not the thought that what is asked is now about to be obtained, but that what is asked is submitted to the wisdom of Another who in all-wise love will deny harmful things sought in ignorance. Every full grown man is thankful now for some of his father's refusals that seemed harsh in boyhood. Taking

into account the aspect of life which always lies before our physical sight, it is perhaps not blameworthy that the most of our prayers are for material blessings. But the God who is wholly spirit must necessarily count spiritual things of more worth, and He cannot be expected to bestow a blessing for the body which would be a detriment to the soul. He must be expected on the contrary to secure spiritual growth even at material expense, where by any chance the spiritual and material may be at odds. It would be a sad miscalculation therefore to count on an agreeable response to every prayer for temporal good fortune.

This observation is, however, not intended to substantiate that mediæval monkish notion that all the good things of the present world are enjoyed, if at all, at so much fixed cost to the spirit and its religious life. Under the influence of that idea a few were courageous enough to renounce every temporal joy for the sake of the soul's cultivation, but the most were not equal to the unnatural and needless sacrifice. A truer apprehension sees that normally it is the purpose of God that His obedient children shall enjoy the best things of earth—the actually best. The lesson is not that those who would please Him must voluntarily devote themselves to gloom and asceticism, but only that they should try to hold the external delights of life at their true valuation

—which, of course, sensible men must be prepared to surrender for any more lasting satisfaction that excludes them. In part it is the man's duty to study such exclusions and adopt them of his own motion for the sake of the higher life, but in larger part he needs the lesson to reconcile him to the ordering of God, who takes away the pleasant bauble that He may bestow the genuine jewel. Over against the unquestionable fact that the good people of the earth, taken all in all together, do have much better fortune in life than the bad people, must be set the other fact, quite as far above dispute, that many good people are made better and many bad people turned back to righteousness by being deprived of their pleasures and thrust into loss, affliction and sorrow. The man absorbed in his tangible possessions, having lost them, thinks more of treasures in heaven. The man who in health and strength carried with him a proud sense of self-sufficiency, begins in sickness to feel his need of a stronger arm. It is not to be supposed that from the viewpoint of the spiritual Governor of men, there could be a moment's hesitance to cast away health and property for these spiritual results. Moreover the heavenly Father, while heartily delighting to fill the cup of goodness and mercy to the brim for those whom He cherishes, must keenly feel the necessity of breaking the link between goodness and prosperity now and again in

order to save the suspicion that goodness has a commercial purchasing value at the marts of providence. "Doth Job fear God for naught?" Well, sometimes at least he must, both to stop the mouth of Satan and to save Job himself from putting a price on character. And it seems apparent at any rate that it is by moderate gifts of earthly benefits that God conveys the fullest joy; the wicked He punishes either by dire poverty or excessive wealth.

It may be said that such remarks leave the signs of prayer-answer so uncertain that no man can make test of the theory practically. By this reasoning failure to secure the gift prayed for may be as good a sign of providence as the coming of the gift. Nothing then is proved either way. And this I think true as respects any one given circumstance. I should not venture to fix on any one blessing in my life as proof that God is concerned for my welfare. Nor of all the remarkable instances that I have heard narrated by others do I recall any entirely convincing. In truth I doubt the serviceableness of the industry shown by some who go about labelling unrelated incidents "Marvellous Answers to Prayer." It is too easy for the unpersuaded to reply, "Coincidences!" But the real proof comes in the consonant experience of a whole life together—a form of demonstration which means more, of course, to the man him-

self than it can mean to any other. But that limitation is also doubtless intended; God would have this faith more for the sustenance of each life within itself than for retailing far abroad. One occasion of blessing may be a coincident, but a whole life of blessing is not strung together from happen-sos. Not simply a single circumstance convinces, but two, three, a dozen, a thousand circumstances in a conspiracy of good pile up the cumulative proof that finally commands the invincible faith of the happy soul. And especially when a man is able to discover in some disaster or affliction the direct agent for helping him up to a loftier attainment than would otherwise have been possible to him, he has made the demonstration absolute. Only a divine intervention can produce from the rock the sweetness of honey and the cool drink of living fountains. As from stage to stage of life one goes on to find, as Paul says, that all things work together for his good,—light and shadow blending and major and minor chords singing themselves into harmony,—a comprehending, foreseeing thought of it all becomes more and more necessary to explain the mystery of the lengthening agreement. And who should be the thinker of that thought save Him who spake to Israel: "I know the thoughts that I think towards you, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you hope in your latter end."

Special providence in the affairs of the many is a more hidden problem. Human calamities of the sort for which the names Pelee, Iroquois and Slocum stand in the shuddering memory of the present-day man, are tangled puzzles. Their place in the governmental policy of God it may be beyond the earthly mind to discern. But some considerations of various degrees of pertinence may be recalled as emphasizing at least the ignorance that forbids us to say that God is unjust. Perhaps the most pertinent is to remind ourselves of the outstanding note of this discussion—that indulgent blessing is not the first principle of God's sway. The fundamental standard of His dealing with men is the law of righteousness; His fundamental purpose not to make men happy but to conform their characters to that everlasting law. He can then never extend His benevolence to a point where it might obscure the statutes of His kingdom. His love and pity may have carried men many days of old, and yet when they begin to presume upon His mercy and to persuade themselves that He no more exacts the penalties of sin, He must wreathe His chariot with clouds again and let the lightnings strike. Then men know that judgment has not perished from the heavens. When those charged with responsibility for the lives of their fellows have grown reckless of their duty, how shall God recall them to fidelity and the sav-

ing thought for others except by leaving them to the due consequences of their neglect? The nature of those consequences is of course such as involves the innocent with the guilty—the innocent perhaps in far the greater suffering. But that too is of long fixed law. A part of the punishment of the wicked is the shame of bringing undeserved evil upon the heads of the righteous. The awful lesson of the disasters in burning building and burning ship just recurred to, would have been a lesson incomplete and by so much less efficient if some miracle of selection had provided for the escape of all the women and children. The sacrifice of these white lives was just what cut through hardened consciences to the quick. The volcano's outburst is, by candid admission, a still heavier theme for faith to handle, but its reason also, if we could probe to it, would doubtless appear to be a reason of government on the one hand and perchance likewise a reason of sin on the other.

Men who see other men only by externals can never know "how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past tracing out." God sees the hidden desert. A punishment falling on what appears to us a blameless life may actually have searched out some secret sin aggravated by prolonged and gross offense against light. It may be the exaction of a score long overdue, forgotten by all except by the One who

never forgets. Some far-spread misfortunes are undoubtedly disciplinary for peoples as individual sufferings are disciplinary for single souls. Many are hurt in the mischief of their mistakes who are not condemned for sin; for the God who forgives, still, as with Moses and Aaron and Samuel of the patriarchs and prophets, takes vengeance of the doings of the good. And withal, while we debate these seemingly harsh providences there remains to remember the Christian story of a life beyond which forbids us to call death the supreme calamity. If righteous men are to live again in a better state than this, an ordering of human affairs which hastens them thither cannot be reasonably treated as a cataclysm of disaster for them. Men most inconsistently profess the Christian doctrine of immortality and belie their own profession by speaking of death as if it were the last abyss of irrevocable disaster. Let us not coddle our faith by denying the hard questions of life, but in our questionings let us give God at least the benefit of His own truth.

And when we are weary of the weighing of minute doubts and their answers, let us rest ourselves with a wider view. Take account of the beginning of the race, and behold to-day's stage of its march towards its yet invisible destiny. Is there any man of the stubborn hardihood to deny that all the path hither has been in one direction forward and by steady rise upward to

things higher and better than racial infancy had the imagination to dream of? Then who is Leader on the road? Is it by wilderness wandering that humanity has come so far? Nay; look again and see "the fiery, cloudy pillar." The methods of providence may not be vindicated on every page of history, but they will be vindicated before the volume is closed. A redeemed society, a purified earth, a loyal kingdom, will yet prove the age-long Worker in His glorious work. The event let us await in the sweet Quaker bard's confidence:

"Believe and trust; through stars and suns,
Through life and death, through soul and sense,
His wise paternal purpose runs;
The darkness of His providence
Is star-lit with divine intents."

III

The Possibility of Miracle

III

THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLE

RESPECTING Bible miracles the one correction of view that would go furthest to clear the popular mind would be a dispelling of the notion that a miracle is God's first preferred method. Our own predilections are debased by our lust for the spectacular; we love to accomplish our designs by the most singular and bizarre methods that we can invent. We tire of routine and plan to amaze all onlookers by doing some new thing in an outlandish way. In our smallness we imagine that it must be for some like reason that the Lord works—or has worked—miracles.

At the utmost remove from such a conception, the Bible consistently implies that God employs miracle with reluctance and only in extreme necessity—where no other method is available. It is particularly apparent that Jesus deliberately subordinated the miracle element in His own ministry, doing wonders sparingly,—except, it may be, as to miracles of healing,—and seeking to reduce the area of each miracle with as many adjuncts of natural circumstance as possible. Before He fed the five thousand, He gathered together all the natural food supply of the camp;

before He called Lazarus from the grave, He had neighbours' hands roll back the sepulchre door. And herein without question the Master truly pictures His Father and ours. The ordinary course of nature is not to God an irksome humdrum from which at every trivial excuse He flings Himself forth into erratic excursions of magic. This is not a discredited arrangement of affairs under which the world runs on, one common day after another. It is the superior arrangement. The common way of things is the best way; the order of nature the most excellent order. Above all, it is the normal and, in the most comprehensive sense, the natural way—natural to the human soul as well as to things material and inanimate. How could it be otherwise? Why should God ordain it to be usual if it were not best? Would He drive a heavy-wheeled chariot year after year in order to save a better chariot for His occasions of state?

Miracle then is abnormal; it meets conditions abnormal among men, and provides for emergencies unprovided for in the regular working specifications of the universe. It is extorted by crisis. The greatest miracle recorded in history is that God gave His Son to become flesh for the salvation of men, and the worst abnormality in the world—the fact of sin—made that miracle necessary, for the natural mechanism of creation included no apparatus for forgiving sins. So like-

wise have other deficiencies of humanity required miracle. As the Saviour taught so plainly, the Father seeks worshippers to render their homage spiritually. By the still voice that speaks without words in the secret heart of the inner man, God had rather come to His children. But He can avail Himself of other means if He must. In the olden time He brought forth out of a degrading bondage a race singularly suited to His providential purposes. It was a race potentially spiritual, but at that epoch of development still too gross for strictly spiritual influences to touch either its faith or its will. Must this people then go uninstructed because their King could not speak to their understanding in the language of the heavenly courts? By no means; if heart speech will not reach them, He will make them understand in the sign language of the deaf. How vain it would have been to bid them study the linking together of life's commonplaces—to hope that in the daily dovetailing of ordinary blessings they would see tokens of a Hand of divine skill. It must be a great, startling object-lesson by which such untutored slaves learn providence, and that object-lesson they shall have, —a wind-blown sea-bottom safe till they have escaped, then a mortal snare to their enemies. Fresh from a land where all the gods were imaged in tangible shape, they could not conceive at once a God unembodied and present with

them invisibly. But Jehovah, though He could not lend His glory to a graven image, was not baffled. A pillar of fire sentinelling their camp by night, of cloud guiding it by day; the lightning-riven smoke veiling the mountain crest; the banquet table spread before the mysterious sapphire vision in Sinai's high recess,—with one device and another the spiritual God made Himself real to this unspiritual people. And so long years together and patiently He bent Himself to education of these childish wards of His by ways that behooved the Teacher of children.

But will He therefore desire to come now in an elder age of mankind and manifest His presence before His worshippers again by wonders of the fiery cloud and the earthquaking trumpet? Verily, no; "for ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched and that burned with fire, and unto blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, . . . but ye are come unto Mount Zion and unto the city of the living God." After all these centuries of wooing the souls of men to know Him as Father of their spirits, what pity if of all those who gather in His courts He could yet address few or none in that spiritual speech which is the native tongue of Deity. That God should ever need to speak in thunders is no doubt to Him a painful requirement, as to a gentleman obliged to shout aloud in the market-

place. He loves rather quiet heart-to-heart converse heralded by no external sign, nor by any sign in the soul itself, save the sweet glow of warmth excited when a Friend draws near. Vast, then, would be the error which expected to see Sinai repeated where enlightened congregations of His saints appear to-day. And even among those who do not know Him well, it is a truer introduction of the Holy Self wherein He would become Companion and Helper, if His voice is heard pleading and gentle,—a word very nigh them, wakening their ears to hear as those that are taught. Any other fashion of address is an exceptional expedient to reach a desperate case,—as was the smiting of Saul in the Damascus highway.

The obvious question which, with unphilosophical people at least, makes all the difficulty in reading miraculous Bible history, is the question why there are not miracles now if there were miracles in Bible times. The prevalent treatment of the subject in the churches points logically to the conclusion—though to come out there would evoke horror—that God lacks some power that He once had. It is constantly assumed that supernatural manifestations of His omnipotence are God's special delight,—even His forte, if one may say so reverently. By presumption from that viewpoint, it could be argued that God would crowd into the world now and always all the miracles

that He could manage. But reverse the presumption, and we come out on what agrees with history as we have it,—that as the world develops and comes nearer to the ideal towards which God is working, miracles grow fewer and fewer, because there is less and less need of them. From the day of Eden until now God has had humanity in school. He began in the kindergarten, and He had to use kindergarten methods. Modern followers of Froebel have merely been picking out in the latter generations principles of pedagogy that the Creator applied from the eozoic hour of His human enterprise. The teacher of the youngest learners gives shaped blocks and coloured cards and paper figures for lessons—concrete things for minds to grasp which are not yet able to hold to things abstract. These least folk must learn the primary processes of mathematics on an abacus of bright beads; even written symbols—not to speak of unaided mental calculations—are beyond them. But will the educator argue that because child-training has begun with kindergarten objects, it must be continued to high school and college with the same apparatus? Not so; the beads are soon superseded by chalked signs on the blackboard, and the skilled teacher is by no means content until even the conventional symbols are gone and the ready scholar can think the process through by mathematic imagination. So all education pro-

gresses, leaving behind the things of form and body and going on to the things fixed in mental conception alone. Even physical science leads the student through such development,—first the observation of the evident phenomena, then the experimental search for phenomena hidden and elusive, finally the generalization from phenomena to nature's unwritten statutes. From tangible to intangible, from crudely apparent to fundamentally inherent, is the road of all human learning.

And such likewise is the road of human advance in religion. The race grows religiously from primary school to high school. It grows from apprehension with the eyes to apprehension with reason and affections. And the fact that there should have been physical miracles formerly to attest the presence of God and no physical miracles now, is no more strange than that there should be gaily coloured blocks in the kindergarten and text-books in the university. The centuries do not elapse in vain; the race acquires education. It would make a certain doubt of the pedagogic wisdom of God if it should appear that to the highly developed humanity of the current age He had no appeal different from that which served to command the faith of the nomadic patriarchs. Sometimes it is alleged to be a suspicious count against the miracle stories that they come from a time when miracles were constantly expected by the populace. On the contrary this

fact substantiates the stories, for it signifies that God used the high common sense of giving to His message the form that suited the age to which it was dispatched. It shows that God is not above expedients that "reach the masses." It is a striking note of verification in the narrative of the wise men who came to worship the infant Christ that they are said to have travelled to Judæa in obedience to a star sign. The Zoroastrian Magi are historically known to have been devoted astrologers and to have entertained expectations of a Messiah. The revelation of Jesus was consequently in their case made meet for astrologers. That a star in the Persian sky should have been to them a true guide to the world's Redeemer proves not that God upholds astrology, but that men who seriously seek religious guidance through a delusion, may be compassionately met and aided by a watchful Lord even in the field of their delusion. God's earthly preachers may have much anxious care for the dignity of their methods; God evidently is concerned only that the method be honest and kindly, effectual both in reaching men and for showing truth.

Nevertheless the Father in His ministry to men does not forever follow with indulgent grace the vagaries of the superstitious. Gently, gradually, He draws them out to a clearer path and a brighter light. He grants the crutch of the miraculous to help halt feet, but at the same time He

would teach the strong to run without it. Jesus Christ came at a time when it is improbable that anybody would have acknowledged His divineness if He had done no "mighty work." Such works were the universally expected manifest of incarnate God. The Master, therefore, did perform certain wonders which He offered as His credentials. Yet they were not wonders promiscuous and unlimited. Without exception He made them benevolently useful to the needy and offered none as baits to curiosity-seekers. Likewise they all had the singularly beautiful distinction of being in no way for His own advantage or personal comfort. Repeatedly He refused skeptical challenges to make exhibition of His power; He had no answer at all for the insolent question: "What doest Thou for a sign that we may see and believe Thee; what workest Thou?" To the undeveloped common people He would accommodate His teaching as their ignorance might require, but to stubborn, proud bigotry, the Pharisaic blindness that with pompous confidence led the blind, He would afford no encouragement. It must have been great joy to Him to be sought out by such a Jewish grandee as Nicodemus, who asked no more signs but desired to hear the truth of God to which the signs pointed. Were Jesus Christ to come again on a preaching mission to a time and nation like our own,—enlightened enough to comprehend in

some degree the mysteries of nature itself as divine,—He would doubtless do nothing more supernatural in a physical way than the great human preachers of our generation are doing. The manifestation of His glory He would make just as exclusively spiritual as conditions around Him would allow. If He came instead to the cruder heathen of uncivilized nations, the miracles might be as necessary as of old. And indeed the argument suggests in passing the observation that nearly all the well authenticated instances that smack of miracle in modern times are reported from the mission fields. China alone, for example, seems to furnish a recognizable present-day analogue for demoniac possession and its cure in the name of Christ.

The Bible is not a miracle book. To say this is, of course, to contradict a prevalent impression, for to most casual-minded people the miracles are the most characteristic feature of the Scriptures. The theme and outlook of the Book are indeed distinctly supernatural, and every page carries the high faith that God has directly to do with the affairs of men, and orders the march of events by the interposition of His providence. But for the most part the method of action is His accustomed action familiar and expected to this day. It is only of comparatively rare occasion that the governing King is recorded to have accomplished His counsel among men by means so unique as

properly to be termed miraculous. If this were a volume of marvel tales got up out of the folk-lore of a credulous peasantry, or concocted for the religious impression which the legends were expected to convey, its authors would not have produced so meagre a showing. Where mere wonder-mongering runs to, when licensed imagination is at work, any one may see by reading the apocryphal gospels or the mediæval lives of the saints. Every paragraph can display its amazing prodigy in that kind of writing; the authors of such works apparently feel themselves discredited if the story gets down for even a little interlude to the hard ground of every-day plausibility. There are on the contrary long stretches of Bible history as clear of the marvellous as any rationalistic critic could demand. The great mass of the miracles of the Bible are grouped in a very few cycles—a circumstance unaccountable if they are simply expressions of the credulity of semi-civilization, which is a constant factor, but entirely explicable if it be admitted that God resorts to miracle only in crises. Among these miracle epochs the chief are the times of the migration of Israel from Egypt to Canaan; the times of threatened destruction of Israelitish nationality under the chaotic government of the judges; the times of religious decay when Elijah and Elisha were the Lord's commissioned reformers, and finally the times of the

showing of the Christ and the establishment of His church.

These were all great times in the history of that people among whom God undertook to preserve and foster the germinal stock of the tree whose leaves were in later ages to heal the nations. They were doubtless eras in which the success of the colossal experiment was most in jeopardy, and exceptional measures had become absolutely requisite. But they were not the eras which a romantic patriot writing an epic hero history of the fatherland would naturally have selected for adornment with demi-deistic legend. The fanciful traditions of shepherds' tents and villagers' cottages would not have gathered by mere gravitation around memories of religious apostasy or tribal vagabondage. The days of national power instead would have thrilled the racial imagination of the Jews,—the more especially since that period of glory was identified with the two characters most dazzling in all the Hebrew story. Had it been solely by slow process of legendizing that Bible miracles had been created, they would infallibly have attached themselves to the names of David and Solomon. David peculiarly would have suited the hero rôle in a great patriotic saga, and his valorous deeds, if the Hebrew mind had worked with the Olympian imagination of the Greek, would have been the natural seed of growing myths. But

of such a tendency there is not the least sign to be traced in the extant record. The Bible biography of David contains no incident of human action and only one of divine intervention that could be dubbed incredible by the most skeptical criticism. The killing of Goliath could easily have been the nucleus of a cycle of tales as wonderful as the twelve labours of Hercules. But as a matter of fact the biblical account is so reserved that the greatest improbability that can be picked out in the whole of it is Saul's failure to recognize his former minstrel. The action of the narrative is a simple illustration of a military maxim newly proved in every generation—that mobility and marksmanship are better fighting assets than bulk. So with Solomon; glamourous figure of magnificence he is, and yet the most extraordinary thing written of him is that he heard God speak in a dream. These lives are no product of myth-making. The place and pitch of the miracle strata in the Bible are not explained by theories of folk-lore; they do not occur where the folk-lore would have been deposited. They are like the geologic strata in the earth—the records of genuine life.

When the question of the authenticity of miracles is pending, the issue divides itself into two. One inquiry is whether in the nature of things there can be miracles; the other is whether, supposing miracles to be possible, those

recorded in the Bible are credibly attested. Respecting the first matter much ground has been cleared if the argument of the foregoing chapter for special providence has seemed reasonable. If it is allowed that God enjoys liberty enough in His world for kindnesses to individual creatures, there is room sufficient for miraculous kindnesses, since those who doubt do not dispute God's power but only His freedom in the presence of universal law. It has already become plain, I trust, that this book veils no purpose to derogate from the sublime thought of law as the norm of God's governmental action over man and matter. But while it is gladly recognized that there are universal laws which guarantee the integrity of righteous principle throughout the realm of creation " forever and a day,"—those oath-confirmed " immutable things in which it is impossible for God to lie,"—yet it is insisted that God is not a mere administrative officer whose discretions are confined to a statute book. The large fundamentals of His sway are eternally fixed, continuous and infrangible; the incidentals await His sovereign pleasure to be adapted to incidents as they arise. Part of what we call the laws of God are the manifestations of His unchanging goodness; part the expressions of His comprehensive ageless purpose. The latter no concern of a day or year or generation may affect. But many apparent laws do not

partake of that all-embracing character. They are from God's standpoint only the normally preferable manner of fulfilling His fatherly obligations to men. Knowing Him as a God of order,—it may even be said, of habit,—it is natural for us to expect His future action to run according to His known and experienced past action. And indeed there is presumption—in the absence of known exceptional conditions—that all His past action has been uniform. But it is certainly conceivable that difference of condition may at any time make different action expedient. And where the difference involves no breach of honour, honesty or fidelity, there is no more impropriety—not to speak of impossibility—in a change of method on God's part than on the part of any faithful man. As for its likelihood, it would seem the more likely by as much as God's omniscient insight would give Him surer notice of deep conditions demanding change. And if for divine expediency on any day He departed from His ordinary custom of dealing with men, that would be a miracle.

Miracles, therefore, are not mere eccentricities. Nor, on the other hand, are they radical revolutions in principle. They do not alter the essential relations of things, nor derange the moral character of creation. And it is a notable point to observe and verify that no marvel announced in the Bible overruns the limits set

by these negative definitions. It is narrated that the migrating tribes of Israel, being in imminent peril of starvation in a land that could not possibly afford them natural sustenance, were supplied with a miraculous food. Laying aside for the moment the historic probability of the story, it cannot be contended that such a provision for an obscure people diverted the rule of seed-sowing and harvest in nature, unsettled the principle of toil as price of bread in economics, or destroyed the penalties of indolence in morals. After the emergent circumstances were passed, Israel went back to the ordinary experience of the race at large, and found no law weakened by their temporary, though prolonged, living under exceptional conditions. Again it became necessary for them to till the ground and rely on rain and sunshine. Meanwhile the rest of mankind were totally unaffected either for advantage or detriment. Certainly there is no rational ground for arguing that such a special measure of providence for a peculiar need of a few nomads would dislocate the order of nature or the sanctions of morality. And it is simply an affectation to allege that it would shake the confidence of men thereafter in the impartial sway of cause and effect in the world; millions who have believed this history true have none the less trusted the usual provision for human support and adapted them-

selves to it. Likewise it is recorded in the Bible that certain persons were raised from the dead, but such a fact did not suspend the law of mortality nor occasion in others a hope of returning from the grave. The risen died again under universal law, and all the rest of men continued one by one to meet death as the "dread, inevitable hour." Even though Christ walked on the water, calculations of specific gravity are not thereby invalidated. No biblical wonder is of a character that could have demoralized nature. The "standing still" of the sun at Gibeon is the only debatable exception to this claim, and the supposition of mirage is quite sufficient to render that—if one may so say—innocuous. Or let us allow, as the text does indeed seem to justify, that the passage is exuberantly metaphorical.

When this subject is more closely analyzed, it is clear that by conformity to natural law we mean simply conformity to our own experience, or at the most, conformity to the experience of the men of our own times. A miracle is a miracle not because it is wonderful or even inexplicable,—modern science can often enough amaze and mystify us,—but only because it has never happened within the range of this experience by which our expectation is formed. Yet no living man would be foolish enough to aver that his own knowledge or even the combined knowledge of all men covers to the uttermost

limits all that is possible. Fifteen years since civilized men were quite as proud of their understanding of the processes of nature as they dare to be to-day; and yet it would have then been deemed impossible that rays of photographic power could penetrate bodies then styled opaque. Ten years ago it would have been regarded still farther from possibility that electrical messages could be transmitted through the air without wire connection,—just as seventy-five years ago electrical communication of any kind was incredible. The revelation of these possibilities has not of course increased the sum of natural law, but only demonstrated anew what had appeared innumerable times before—that the measure of human knowledge is no measure of the forces existent in God's creation. Most evidently, except for sheer contradictories of facts already fully ascertained, it lies within no man's province to say that any imaginable thing is not possible. The only hypothesis required to bring any miracle of the Bible within the field of law is to suppose that the mind directing the miracle was aware of, and could command, some force not available to a mind on the human plane of that given time. And from the premises of the Bible-story that hypothesis is reasonable. The Scriptures do not tax us to believe tales of black art wrought by other men on strength of their own occult information. Every

miracle of the word of God is based on the personal will and action of the Creator or of His appointed Representative in the world, Jesus Christ. Is it irrational to assume that a divine Governor of "this universal frame" knows powers and possibilities contained within it which His ever-learning creatures have not yet discovered? Or is there improbability in conceiving that His Messenger commissioned to the world shared in that larger and divine knowledge? Even though we should consent to consider that Christ's emptying of Himself—the "kenosis"—deprived Him in His earthly life of both omniscience and omnipotence, it is still common sense to believe that He must have retained all supernatural endowment practically useful to His mission—the skill of miracles among other skills if miracles could be serviceable to His purposes and God's.

The miracles of Christ would not be "explained away" but rather certified if the laws by which they were accomplished should later come to light in human discovery. It begins to be said on some hands that the Lord did works of healing by that mysterious means which modern medical men are just now coming to recognize—the power of mental suggestion. Not all of the cures effected by the Lord are open to this explanation, but certain of them may be. And it would in no wise class Christ as a charlatan hypno-

tist to admit His use of psychic force to destroy bodily disease; it would rather be an indirect proof of His divine origin if it should thus appear that by independent knowledge He could seize upon and put to a proper, beneficent use a law which nineteen centuries later mere human minds still discern but dimly and employ mostly in insincere, mountebank fashion. And it may yet remain for scientific research to reveal other laws and operations through which He worked others of His profounder wonders. It would not in the least detract from His unique position in His own age and place if, following long eras after, men tardily should succeed in duplicating some of the deeds of Jesus. The groping of science in that direction is to be neither feared nor resented, even though, as is most unlikely and yet is to be contemplated with perfect equanimity, it should result in making manifest the secret of the premier miracle of all—the making of life. The chemistry of foods, completely comprehended, might very possibly cover a process that would make water into wine in the midst of an open jar as well as beneath the purple skin of the grape. Perhaps the growth principle in the seed does not altogether forfeit its mystic potentiality when it passes into bread; it might be that multiplying the loaves was as scientific as sowing the seed. And as for the stupendous miracle of Christ's resurrection, it is expressly taught in the

Bible that this was but the prior application of a law which is yet to become applicable to the whole human race. And men who believe that God has a power of creating ought not to make difficulty over allowing Him a power of re-creating.

By such argument I would defend the proposition that there lies against the miraculousness of the Bible no *a priori* impossibility. The consideration remains whether the specific miracles therein reported are plausible in detail. To that large and still more crucial phase of the subject it seems better to devote another chapter.

IV

The Probability of Miracles

IV

THE PROBABILITY OF MIRACLES

To show that God can do miracles is not, of course, to show that He ever has done a miracle. Indeed, the platform of many rationalists lies just here—that the miraculous is possible enough but as a matter of fact has never appeared; that the faultless theory has nothing to substantiate it in actual event. And candour will admit that certain presumptions stand against all miracle narratives which affirmative reasons must overcome before such stories can be rationally accepted. The preceding chapter was itself in large part an attempt to establish a presumption against frequent and promiscuous miracle in God's world. There was besides confessed the inertia of experience, which drives our natural expectation of the future along the straight line of all that we have most familiarly seen and heard heretofore. Reflexively the same disposition inclines us to believe from the past whatever moves most nearly in the same plane with present commonplaces. And perhaps more suggestive of skepticism than all else is the suspicion which we have learned to entertain of the credulity of the

elder races. All reading men know how cruder ages than our own have been wont to frame half-reverent, half-affrighted accounts, all surcharged with mystery, respecting events to them unusual, finding it easier to attribute a strange happening to supernatural influence than to investigate its real causes.

By reason of these obstacles to belief, I feel obliged without debate to confess that it is quite out of the question to advance at this late day indubitable and conclusive evidence of any one miraculous incident in Scripture. To say this is not to "give the whole case away." The same thing might be said of almost any incident of secular history torn apart from its connection. Historians do not floor their readers with "knock-down arguments"; they hold to lines of probability and win belief by accumulation of likelihoods. The signing of the Declaration of Independence can be demonstrated; the original document exists to prove it. So also some of the oldest history of the world is proved by documents—in stone, in clay and on buried papyri. But most of what we know of the human story has been learned through much more precarious transmission in manuscripts, themselves transient. The Bible shares this uncertainty of manuscript succession without signed, sealed and surviving proofs. Those portions of Scripture which approach

most nearly the documentary character as to their contents and contemporary production,—the epistles of Paul being the striking examples,—are not historical in cast. Thus even ordinary events in the Bible we may not term demonstrable in a mathematical sense,—much less miraculous events.

But all this by no means puts away full, faithful, rational belief from the Bible narrative, either as to its natural or as to its supernatural features. It is perhaps with a wiser phrase than we appreciate that at times we say of things not positively provable that they are "morally certain." There is undoubtedly a disciplinary moral effect in the open choice of truth, where opposing possibilities are to be balanced and the decision for the more probable is partially influenced by a love of the nobler and grander alternative in believing. At least it is not conceivable that a quality of character has been added to a man when he adopts a proposition in geometry which he simply could not deny unless he was ready for a madhouse. Religious faith is a more live, more voluntary thing than that. And it is a more than superficial suggestion that herein may lie the very reason why religious truth, historical or theological, is never presented to men in a fashion to compel acceptance. The compulsion would destroy the live assimilating power of the soul. Therefore, to grant that single incidents of scrip-

tural history cannot be set beyond doubt does not admit that they must fall short of "moral certainty." Taken not singly but collectively, not as arithmetical problems but as pictures of life, not for idle tales of imagination but for—what they purport to be—a serious effort to explicate God's relations to mankind, the chapters of the Bible story rise by degrees of cumulative dignity to a point where their total effect challenges the honest heart—not irresistibly but with the power of a mighty spiritual magnetism—to come and take them for its creed and counsel. Over against those anti-miracle presumptions which have been so freely confessed, there rise, when the whole Bible is taken in evidence, a number of distinct elements of likelihood that seem ample to turn the scale. To avoid an appearance of special pleading, let us enumerate seriatim considerations to which a candid man would naturally look to determine whether any narrative—in itself of an improbable sound—was supported to his credence by circumstances external to it or purposes tacitly implied in it. Any of the following observations would help to confirm it:

1. A high moral and intellectual standard in the literature bearing the story would inspire belief. Superstitious and false records of contact with divinity presuppose a low degree of spiritual perception; wild and preposterous traditions live among peoples of crude mental perception. A

book which reveals the deficiency of its authors in these respects and suggests the childish disposition to revel in imagination of fairies and goblins, may well be suspected of dealing with tales of vagary when it penetrates wonderland. But if the reader has come upon a book which is boldly marked with lofty spiritual ideas of God, —a conception of His majesty that would logically put Him far aloof from the minor matters of mankind,—then reports therein contained that He descended to appear among men and engage in miraculous labours for their benefit take on an aspect different from the mere myth-spinning of maudlin grandsires in barbarian desert camps. A volume which shows divine largeness—mighty hymns to a spiritual Creator ruling the universe and preparing men for high destinies by stupendous means; pure prayers of aspiration lifted up not to bestial or licentious deities but to a holy and infinite King; a theology revealing a Friend and Father for men, viewless to the eyes but present to the heart,—a book of these sublime contents is not the product of weak and trivial mental powers on which the fancies and follies of superstition might endlessly impose. It is not a hodge-podge of savage tradition on the one hand nor an anthology of imaginative, poetic myth on the other. A great grave book of religion must be seriously taken; if it shows a sense of dealing with a mighty theme, it may

not rudely be affronted with charges of having brought debased materials to serve its exalted intention. Character backs the testimony of a book as it does the witness of a man.

2. A general sanity of view respecting the common things of life establishes strong reason for credence in occasional reports of things extraordinary. Writings that are amazed at all that happens are scarcely good reporters of things that should rightfully amaze. Where one reads continually of elves and sprites dwelling in the forests, nymphs and mermaids disporting in the fountains and the seas, gods and goddesses battling in the mountains and the clouds, nothing can possibly impress him as reflecting reality in the midst of so much unreal. History that turns on signs, horoscopes, divinations or ghostly appearances betrays a self-evident bias towards supernatural in preference to natural explanations of events, and is in consequence self-discredited. But in a library of manuscripts which accept the customary order of phenomena as wrought by natural—though divinely guided—forces, the chapters detailing phenomena not so wrought are plainly not vitiated by any such bias. Here is no expectation of being astonished momentarily by the descent of a divinity from the machine above ; no pressure to keep up a certain ratio of superhuman episodes. In manuscripts of this tempered sort, impartial towards unmirac-

ulous cause and effect, such miraculous marvels as are reported suffer no depreciation. They are at least not brought forth by a preinclination to wonders. These sober reports can indeed be fairly credited with a positive claim upon belief by sheer reason of this internal plausibility. If they were invented stories, they could scarcely fail to run to the unrestrained riot of pagan mythology.

3. A clear bill of unselfishness, when it can be accorded to writers reporting miracles, adds vastly to the believableness of their histories. It is familiarly known how many men have tried to make the multitudes accept their claims of supernatural power and have later revealed the animus of their self-advertising by using to their own personal profit the faith in themselves which they succeeded in awaking. But a record of much greater wonders will commend itself to far readier and more considerate attention, if it shall appear that no participant in these miraculous occurrences nor any historian of them had anything to gain of selfish advantage, emolument or luxury by having them become known abroad. In such a case the only motive that is supposable is the motive of enthusiasm for the truth and the hope that the knowledge of the truth may bring useful aid in living to other men. It is not impossible of course that honest men may be mistaken, but the writing of an

honest, philanthropic and unambitious man is far more to be relied upon—this is the simplest of moral axioms—than what is said by one to whom these virtues could not be heartily and quickly attributed. And if a number of such selfless men, taking up a common theme from varying points of original interest, should agree in the general terms of separate individual testimony, their consensus becomes convincing enough to avail in the court of history,—not to say, in a court of law. So too, if on matters not contemporary in time but connected by a linking of identical purpose, a successive line of witnesses, all above reproach for sinister designs, agree harmoniously as to the miraculous religious elements involved, it is easier to believe that they are telling the truth than that from century to century they have adhered to the same form of misrepresentation.

4. Finally, the preëminent test for the reality of a miracle story lies in the question whether it covers an occasion and circumstances that demand a departure from the ordinary processes of nature. The course of argument which we have been following is all based upon the principle that nature is by divine ordering made sufficient for all usual needs of men and conjunctures of history; that other processes than those of nature are to be expected only when a condition emerges to which the routine of the universe is

not adequate. The major premise laid down is that God may perform a miracle whenever He will, but that as matter of fact He will perform none unless His purpose in hand is otherwise unattainable. The reasoning is, of course, inductive from observation rather than deductive from revelation. But to one who accepts the soundness of the principle the clinching claim of a miracle to be believed appears when reason is shown for surmising that it was essential to some certain great object in the counsels of the Lord Jehovah. If we once can eliminate the suspicion of caprice and sleight-of-hand exhibition from any given marvel, we have brought it to a place where the intellect may receive it with entire consistency.

Thus we return once more to specific inquiry —whether the Bible as a whole fulfills the first three conditions of credibility and its narrations of miracle the last. The former division of this question I do not think it needful to debate. There can certainly be no denial of the unique spiritual exaltation of the Scriptures, the common-sense naturalism of its estimate of every-day phenomena, and the unselfishness of its proclamations and evangel. So far from seeking to attain advantage through His many benevolent services to His countrymen, the Master continually strove to prevent the wide advertisement of His kindness. And His disciples were as

entirely free from serving their own individual interests. Not only are these things evident, but I judge there will be equal consent to the proposition that the four evangelists are in harmony as witnessing conjointly to the miraculous character of the Saviour's ministry, and that the Bible authors in general from first to last present mutually corroborative pictures of the Creator's providential and potentially miraculous relations to His people. The strength of such agreeing historic evidence may therefore be claimed with assurance on the side of the miracles.

The other matter—whether the miracle accounts appear in such times, places and relations as imperatively demand supernatural action, natural action being obviously insufficient—is a valuation of circumstances which each man must make for himself if he is to feel the weight of the persuasion. It is a sort of matter on which conviction of the truth is not readily conveyed from one mind to another. To set the balances squarely, however, it must be recognized that with God moral ends are, by essence of the case, quite as compelling as any physical aims,—doubtless we should say far more compelling. We can imagine that God would call greater forces into play to make a good man than to save a sun from wreck. And it is likewise to be held in consideration, for due reserve of our estimates, that we can never be sure of sufficient

data to calculate the necessity that moves God. The calculation of likelihoods in the miracles must self-evidently count more strongly for affirmative than for negative conclusions. When one finds himself coming out to a negative answer, he is obliged to admit that the appearance of the matter might be vastly different if he knew more of antecedents and particularly more of consequents. I must honestly confess that there are some stories of wonders in the Bible which do not appeal to me as necessary in the sense which I am here trying to define, and I do not therefore feel assured of them specifically in the degree which I should gladly attain as corresponding to my general confidence in the Bible. Such are some of the miracles in the career of Elisha and the uncanny experience of Saul in the house of the witch at Endor. I mention these particular examples of my own difficulty both with the desire to be as candid as honourable discussion demands, and with the further intent of pointing out how these incidents are of a sort and class which are not characteristic of the Bible, being, as far as the record gives a clue, what Peter would call "of private interpretation," and not manifestly involved with the advance of the kingdom of God. For myself I should not expect the Lord to save me the expense of replacing a borrowed ax-head that I had lost, but I have to admit that I do not know what long chain of

disastrous results might have followed in the college of the prophets if the careless young man had been unable to return that particular ax. And I must certainly confess utter ignorance of the necessity which called a chariot of fire from heaven to wing Elijah past the mouth of the sepulchre and away bodily to an invisible world.

But the mass of the miracles of Scripture can be placed in striking contrast with such as these, evidencing on their face certain considerable purposes in view of which they were wrought. A large field of Bible-study here awaits painstaking work,—the careful review one by one of the supernatural interventions which the Book records, with the object of tracing in each the condition of crisis to which as an extraordinary emergency measure it answered. In some cases perhaps it might be needful to associate a train of miracles before there appeared a purpose controlling and unifying all; but on the whole, I believe, there would be very small area in which this analysis would yield no results accrediting the Scriptures. Take the great disciplinary period of the Israelitish tribes when they were set free from their Egyptian bondage; it was not physically necessary to lead them through the Red Sea in order to bring them to Canaan, but evidently there was a strategic importance in putting behind them a barrier past which they could not retreat. And more than that, there

was a religious importance in giving to such debased and blunted serf-peasantry a demonstration of the reality of the invisible Jehovah which they could comprehend and which would educate them to more spiritual conceptions of Him. To such end also served all the awesome manifestations at Sinai. The water and the food provided in the desert were physically necessary. And all of these miracles crowded one upon another not merely because it was a critical and turning hour in the annals of a then unknown nation but because there was at stake the prime world-scheme of God—His purpose to construct in the midst of this people (refractory material but the best at hand) an incandescent spiritual centre whence truth and salvation were to radiate to all the rest of mankind. The whole scheme was constantly imperilled by the uncertain conditions of this transitional time, and when either the physical survival or the spiritual integrity of these closely guarded tribes was in danger, God hurried to the rescue with any and every available means of precaution. For which reason miracle is specially heaped together on those Pentateuchal pages that relate the Israelitish wanderings.

In connection with the same divine enterprise, pursued from century to century, it often became imperative to support individual leaders among "a disobedient and gainsaying people" with special signs and assurances. These superficially

are individual miracles, but really they are national. Moses was granted a sight of the burning bush, and Gideon was indulged in his request for the sign of the fleeces wet and dry, not for their own sakes, but to strengthen them in their people's service. Elijah's success on Mount Carmel came at a time when true religion would probably have utterly perished from the true religious centre of the world except for some loan of miraculous aid to the sole preacher of Jehovah. The occasion was certainly desperate enough to justify the most heroic remedies. Of the miracles that attended our Lord's ministry something has been said already, and something remains to be said in a chapter to come. Here it suffices simply to point out that the earth-life of Christ marked the climax of that world-plan whose unfolding had been attended by wonders; the culmination might naturally be expected to be an hour of still mightier works. The necessity for Christ's miracles was doubtless subjective in the minds of those to whom He came; although it may be questioned whether even we should be able to read in His life all the abundance of the Father's loving kindness if His best deeds of mercy had not overrun the limit of our human inabilities. Miracles attending the founding of the church seem to have continued as long as the conditions of gospel propaganda required them. When Christianity had become so well estab-

lished in the hearts of men, that spiritual experience had risen to be an impregnable base of its operations, the cruder external signs which bolstered up a semi-materialistic faith passed away, and the more substantial form of soul trust, rooted in an invisible fellowship with God, took and held a stronger place.

This line of apologetic, however, does not assume that "the age of miracles is past." On the contrary, though recognizing the presumption that non-natural wonders are less probable now than once, this logic implies that wherever old conditions recurred to-day, the old miracles would recur. I am not prepared to deny all reported modern miracles at a sweep. Quite otherwise, I would accept any miracle of any date for which the moral certainty rises as high as in the Bible account. But the condition from which the miracle came, and the rationality and largeness of effect towards which it looked, would weigh more for plausibility than any amount of individual testimony. I do not at the present moment fix on any post-biblical miracle in which I should express belief, although it seems to me that many of the so-called "fortunate chances" on which history has turned for lasting good,—as the dispersion of the Spanish Armada by singularly opportune storms,—are essentially miraculous, even though accomplished by invocation of entirely familiar

laws. As has been remarked before, the door of providence opens directly into the hall of miracle.

The saying so bitterly resented by many—that miracles do not help the modern man to have faith—I have no hesitation to admit. In fact, it appears to follow from the principles of miracle which have here been written out. A miracle is an evidence to the eyes; its prime evidential value is by nature of the case for eye-witnesses only. Unlike a proof addressed to the reason, it cannot be transmitted in its full force by words either spoken or written. Even at the first remove from the actual seeing of it, a miraculous event has lost vastly from its convincing power. The witness perceived at a glance; the hearer at second-hand must summon his powers of judgment to weigh and decide whether the report is believable. And except for the incarnation and resurrection of Christ,—which involve certain outcomes reaching down to the present day,—I do not think any of the Bible miracles were wrought with any purpose of transmitting evidence to a later time; they were done for the help of the persons, few or many, immediately present. If as has been here held, we have come to a time in the evolution of religion where new miracles are not required for proving the gospel, evidently we have as little present need for proof arising from the old miracles. The

reason of the preservation of the miracle stories in Scripture is, therefore, not to sustain our present faith but to afford us a true history of what God's workings have been in the past. It was the fidelity of the record, not the progress of belief, which was at stake when these stories of marvel were committed to writing; and our reverent reading of them is important just as our reading of all history is important, teaching us to understand from what has been what now is. It is not therefore an occasion of distress to the faithful, but the condition inevitable—indeed, desirable—that to-day men should be found not believing in Jesus Christ because of the miracles, but—as in fact the most orthodox of us do—in the miracles because of Jesus Christ.

The man who, because he feels incapable of believing the miracles, patiently goes to work to sever the miraculous element in the Bible from its moral and spiritual teachings, in order that he may believe this remainder, has my sympathetic regard. I am glad to see him making such attempt rather than casting the whole of the Bible away together as utterly refuse. I am happy to perceive that his cherished remainder is as large as it is, and that his acceptance of it has such character-power in his life. Yet though I will praise him for having done so well with the Bible, I will not praise him as having done the best. I will not grant his

plea if he argues it is better for us all to drop the miracles from consideration and proceed hereafter to the teaching of the world as if there were no "powers" or signs in history. It is too much for him to assume that his difficulty is a prevalent difficulty,—his disability of belief universal. For myself I am anxious to believe as much as is really true in the world; it would be a loss not to believe anything that ought to be believed. Not all truth is necessary for life but all truth is worth accepting. Agnosticism—confessed, satisfied agnosticism—shall not prevent my following on to know as much as I am able. Doubtless, I shall not often have positive knowledge to guide me, but where I see the gleam of the brightest light, I shall at least pursue in hope of greater light. And if those who prefer the more trodden paths of common human experience do consider themselves closer companions of a logical reason, perchance it shall be my compensation to carry in my heart more of the past and present wonder of God.

V

The Miracle of Jesus

V

THE MIRACLE OF JESUS

THE most elaborate and connected—indeed, one might say, the only—attempt in the Scriptures to exhibit the rationale of a divine incarnation, is included in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. As I attempt to translate the argument from mystic oriental philosophizing to plainer occidental logic, it takes on for me a mightily convincing quality. It certainly makes the idea of incarnation intellectually plausible. The following I judge to be a fair paraphrase into modern terms of reasoning:

From all primal eternity the self-existing God put forth the Expression of Himself. He craved to do works that would make Himself known—as all personality must according to the very nature of personality. Therefore to declare God's infinite power and wisdom the Expression of Him created all the universal order of suns and satellites. Then, in order that what was expressed might become complete in being known, He peopled at least one world with conscious and cognizant lives. These sentient creatures were themselves a part of what was made manifest concerning God, being not only the superla-

tive tokens of His power but also essential replicas of His own spiritual individuality. Their gifts of soul and mind were all endowments which the divine Expression shared with them as revealings of God; all their lights were kindled from the one everlasting Light. But the great tragedy and pity of creation was that neither from the wonder of their own souls nor from the goodliness of the embodied frame of matter did men learn to perceive the revelation that God eternally longed to make. Age after age they plodded on through the world all unhearing the Voice that spoke to them out of every kind of existence. Yet never was the divine Expression silent or invisible; still on every man born into the world He bestowed heavenly affinities, and still throughout the world He shed the light which to seeing eyes would a "great Original proclaim."

But at length the eternal Father was no longer content to seek the understanding of men through the message of the creation alone nor merely through the consciousness of the human soul. He would go farther; His yearning Expression He would embody in the clear form of manhood; the Forth-Speaking of Himself should become flesh. So the divine Personality appeared in the world a human Person—the ultimate possibility in the stupendous enterprise of making known to mankind the nature of God.

This was the plainest, simplest, most complete epiphany of which the Expression of divinity was capable, and in this epiphany He dwelt familiarly with the humblest of men so that they might know Him heart to heart as friend is known by friend. Such was—almost so to say—the extravagance of God's eagerness for acquaintance with humanity. But the greater tragedy waited for this greater manifestation. When the Holy Expression clothed in flesh entered into the domain of His own earthly works, though all lesser things recognized their Lord, the men whom He came especially to woo not only knew Him not as the Messenger of Jehovah but utterly spurned the loving advances of His friendship. Yet a few did accept Him and attend to His message, and these learned from His teaching a blessed secret. He lifted them up into a nearer and sweeter relation to God than they had ever dared to imagine; He taught them to see in themselves not the mere creatures of an ineffable Power, but the royal sons of a kingly Father. By the gentle Expression thus led on from truth to truth, they entered into rights of fellowship with God whence they drew a life of more than human strength with joys of nobler than earthly origin. Day by day their communion with God's Expression revealed in Him a wondrous fullness of gracious virtues which joined with His perfect truthful-

ness to make a character of such glory as they instinctively felt to be the mirror of deity. Better than all, as they associated with Him,—and since He had gone away, as they tried to be loyal to Him,—they dared to say that little by little they were themselves acquiring some of those virtues which had burned so beautifully in Him. Still conscious of human limitations, they made no claim of having beheld the actual God-head, but having known His Expression, they doubted not that the Father in all His perfections had been fully "declared" to them.

The argument seems peculiarly satisfying. It is so consistent with fundamental things of our knowledge that it carries a sort of axiomatic force. The impulse of personality to photograph itself in work that it loves, we are all in some degree conscious of; we can understand the same impulse in God, and it makes a reason, vaguely seen but comprehensible, for creation. And after men had been created, it is natural that God should wish to be acquainted,—I sincerely trust that I seem to speak with as much reverence as I intend. All that we see around us is most intelligible when we interpret it as God seeking introduction to us and our fellows. From the mighty clouds that thunder in the heavens to the violet that blooms silently in the hidden copse, it is all God trying to speak to us—to speak to us

by His "Word," through whom "all things were made, and without Him was not anything made that hath been made." Yet we cannot help knowing how ill this language reaches the ears of the many; it is communication, but to the multitudes it does not communicate. Shall then God be baffled? What shall He do more? Confronting that question, I for one can only assent to the rationality of John's further teaching —that going on beyond the works of nature, God pressed still closer to the heart of mankind and caused His "Word" to become incarnate and dwell with men not as creating Spirit but as burden-sharing Friend. To say the least, God would not have tried the highest form of self-expressing speech to men without voicing Himself in a Man. Other forms of nature are a bodying forth of gross matter alone, but humanity is a clothing for spirits—spirits kindred to Himself. To hear then that God, who had exhibited His own character in every other work of His hands, at length employed the most refined medium of expression accessible—human personality—singularly accords with the fit evolution of such a purpose. A rational outlook might almost, one feels, have foreseen it unaided. When the potentates of nations would become friends, it does not satisfy to send gifts and letters; each must send to the other a man. Even so the whole of the message of heaven was not delivered

in the earth until there came forth from God an Ambassador—a Man.

Had John offered this reasoning as a theorem only, I think it would have impressed me enough to compel a search through history to find the One who fulfilled this rôle of the Interpreter of God. Could such a quest have ever rested at the feet of any other character than this Nazarene whom John adored while he wrote? Is there in all the world's chronicle another figure of whom an inquirer would dare to think as the very Expression of the Most High? Take this verse from the evangelist,—"We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father," —and can you write into it any name but Jesus and have the world heed you? But write "Jesus" there, and all the world will pay at least respect. Men cannot gainsay Jesus. Even those who will not allow that He came as God or from God, freely grant it no strange thing that His lovers believed they saw God in this Man's moral beauty. Nay, more; they confess that whoever in the will to know God studies the Galilean Master does not belie God in what he learns. By all agreement this Man is at the least One like unto the Highest. To substantiate the incarnation then, we have a chain of logic, interlinked from evident facts of nature and personality, which leads direct to such a manifestation, and beyond all the logic, we have a Personage in

history who perfectly suffices the ideal. Is it not a manifold proof? John wrote but a few decades after his Master had been taken away from his head, but his estimate of his beloved Friend continues, relative to personal qualities, the estimate of the intelligent world. Some decline John's theological deductions, but none disparage the "grace and truth" which he said filled the Lord's life. Yet certainly an appraisement of character which, at that near time and in spite of the bias of intimacy, was sane and sound enough to command the assent of the world until now, argues behind it a stable judgment whose account of the origin of that character also deserves the most serious weight in the minds of the candid.

By the reasoning of John the miracle of the incarnation comes under the rule of necessity which in a previous chapter has been proposed for a true credential of the miraculous. God's endeavour to make Himself known to men in the ordinary operation of nature, had, through men's stupidity, largely come to naught. But His desire to be known still persisting, He must needs go on to the next advance of method—the resort to human personality. There was no other available expedient. And this called for an unprecedented and therefore essentially miraculous entering of the divine existence into human conditions. Some element of miracle is inevitable by nature of the case; for this exhibitory union

of God with mankind is a thing done once for all —necessarily unique and unrepeatable. It cannot therefore become to any race or generation a matter of experience, and what men have not experienced they will of course esteem miraculous when it comes to pass. What means would be needful to procure a thoroughly true revelation of God in human guise, it is clearly impossible for any mundane mind even to guess; whether the phenomena that made this incarnation different from the birth of another child into the world would be apparent to observation or hidden away in those secret places where all life is a viewless mystery, not the wisest of thinkers might assume to decide *a priori*. There is a recognizable presumption of miracle, but not of any particular sort of miracle. Had we read, therefore, that the birth of the Lord was wholly after the ordinary physical manner, we should have held no reasonable prejudice against the account nor have needed to deny on that score the divine revelation in His nature. We should simply have supposed that the miracle in His coming to earth lay farther back in a spiritual sphere. But when we do read that He was not born by usual human parentage,—but instead of a virgin mother,—we should indulge as little prejudice, for, to speak entirely within bounds, it is at least not surprising that the moral miracle of God incarnate in human flesh should have a physical corollary.

Whether this corollary was involved in some necessary sequence of cause and effect—the human showing forth of divinity being attainable in no other way—or whether it was a mere incident appropriate to the conditions, the gospel writers do not affect to understand. Doubtless we moderns had better curb our speculations by the example of their reticence. In any case, the common theological account—that Jesus was born of woman alone in order that He might inherit a less contaminating heredity, a less portion of original sin—is scarcely more illuminating than convincing. It does occur to me, however, when I reflect upon the mother's mystic pre-natal influence on the character of her child, that for the pure and passionless Son of God it was a peculiar sanctification that no memory of the red desires of the flesh stained the white broodings of maternity above the forming members of His earthly frame.

The reticence of the evangelists from speculations concerning the virgin birth seems to be but part of a characteristic reticence throughout the early church about the fact of it. While Mary lived at least, the Christians appear to have felt the mystery of her marvellous Child too intimate and sacred a matter to be bruited abroad to the world ; it was a sacred knowledge esoteric to the church,—an incident of such delicacy that they would talk of it freely only where they were as-

sured that they would be heard with reverence. Their historians wrote down the true relation of the matter when they undertook to tell of the birth of their Lord; fidelity to truth demanded that, and at any rate these works were expected to be read chiefly among the faithful. But so far as can now be judged from what remains to us of the sermons of the first generation of preachers, the contemporaries of our Lord, the proclamation which they carried out to the world, bidding men repent and believe on Jesus of Nazareth for salvation from their sins, said nothing whatever about His having been born of a virgin mother. They preached Him fearlessly and without hesitance as the very Christ of God, but they did not deem it needful to cite His miraculous birth in proof of His divine character. The resurrection was to them the all-sufficient demonstration of His superhumanity, and they felt no need of supplementing that proof.

In this they merely followed a lesson which they had learned from the teaching of their Lord as He declared His own ministry. He, when pressed for a "sign" of His Messiahship, pointed forward to His rising from the dead, and would not turn back to lay even His reverent hand on the holy secret of His maternity, to bring that forth as a credential of His authority before a gapingly curious crowd. Undoubtedly thousands of the early Christians believed on His name as

the eternal Son of God—the Logos who in the beginning was with God and who was God—before they so much as heard that He was born into the world other than as all men are born. There are, to be sure, many critics who argue from these circumstances that the first gospel preachers had not heard of any miraculous nativity. But that assumption raises instantly inexplicable difficulties, of which the most insoluble is the impossibility of supposing that Paul, the prince of preachers, would be unaware or skeptical of any incident in the careful biography of Jesus prepared by his own faithful companion, Luke. I make this statement strong, because the present trend of New Testament study fortifies more stoutly than ever before the belief that the physician who travelled with Paul wrote the third gospel and wrote it as we have it now. The argument from silence to ignorance and thence to the unreality of the story is therefore a hazardous and unpersuasive path of reasoning. On the other hand, to think of the Christians delicately guarding among themselves a beautiful mystery concerning their Lord and His mother, which it was not necessary to publish for the salvation of the world, but which sweetly fostered their own veneration for the angel-visited home in Nazareth and the strawy manger bed in Bethlehem, agrees entirely with the face-appearance of the New Testament—gospels, Acts and

epistles together. And although the bit of sentiment cannot really be said to argue anything, it is pleasant to recognize, in this respectful hiding away of Mary's mother-secret while she lived, a chivalric gentlemanliness which beginning thus with the apostles—nay, with Jesus Himself—has continued to characterize pure Christian life until this day.

The omission of the fact of the virginal birth from the evangelistic preaching of the apostles is a circumstance of the largest value in estimating the credibility of the nativity narratives. Practically the sole reason why anybody who otherwise adheres to the evangelical faith entertains doubt of this birth story is the easily suggested suspicion that the early church felt anxious to establish some tale of Christ's supernatural origin in order to insure Him an exaltation suitable for the worship of His followers. But a very little serious study of the apostolic records shows conclusively that the early church felt no such necessity. Quite irrespective of the miracle of His parentage, His first disciples lifted up their Master's name above every name; no added incident of life or death could exalt Him in their esteem and in their preaching above that supreme pinnacle on which they placed Him by virtue of His own word to them and by virtue of His felt sway over their lives. There was therefore no conceivable incentive to include wonder legends

about Him in the characteristic literature of the church. It may, indeed, be alleged with a certain plausibility that Matthew had an unbalancing bias towards some story of virgin birth because he knew a passage in the prophecy of Isaiah which appeared to him to foretell that the Messiah would be thus born. But it seems critically assured that Matthew could never from his parents or the rabbis of his people have learned to connect that verse with Messiah; the Jewish interpreters of the Scriptures did not look upon the passage as Messianic, and among their manifold anticipations of a coming Son of David had no expectation of His being brought into the world without a human father. The only likely suggestion therefore which accounts for the publican apostle's use of this verse of prophecy is that after he had learned of the manner of Christ's entrance into the number of humanity, he lighted for himself upon Isaiah's words and made what seemed to him—after the fact—the obvious application. Otherwise he would have slipped over the passage unthinkingly, and never have dreamed of connecting it with Jesus. This assertion can be put forward with the more positiveness because Matthew's very apparent purpose in citing Old Testament quotations was to convince unbelieving Jews that the prophets had spoken of Jesus of Nazareth. But it would have been bootless for him to direct their attention

to a scripture which they did not apply to the "Anointed One," unless he had at hand the clearest proof that in the case of Jesus there had been a wholly unanticipated fulfillment of words whose predictive character nobody had before observed.

But whatever may be said of the reliability of Matthew, none can charge Luke with bias towards a story of miraculous conception. As a physician he would instead feel an almost inevitable repugnance to such a report. Medicine was not of course in those days the lofty science that it is to-day, but it was of all the vocations most familiar with the physical facts of existence, and had begun to accumulate something of the modern respect for the invariable processes of nature. With such training Luke would not readily believe an account of virginal birth. He would be the more incredulous because, as the introductory paragraph of his gospel evidences, he understood the danger that superstitious traditions would, among the ignorant, soon gather around the memory of an heroic popular figure. Indeed, his words appear to indicate his suspicion that already irresponsible persons had written misleading stories about the Master's life. He keenly foresaw that the world in time to come would be intensely interested in the life of Jesus, and he appreciated the importance of creating a record of painstaking accuracy to which all

future inquirers could refer with confidence. He estimated correctly the need of having this record made out by an impartial investigator while it was yet possible for him to collect data from eye-witnesses, and while nothing of consequence had to be taken at second hand. He wanted "certainty" himself and proposed to afford "certainty" to others.

An intelligent and educated author undertaking his task in this spirit of conscientious obligation to his inquiring fellows could hardly get astray on any considerable matter. And least of all would he be likely to be involved in telling a fiction about the birth of his Hero. Luke was too sophisticated a man of the world not to think at once what a turn the ribald would give to his account of how an unmarried woman became a mother; he certainly would not have exposed Mary to such a cruel slur—which afterwards both Jew and Roman infidels did visit upon her—if he could have been true to the truth without relating the story which he did write. And there could have been to Luke no allurement to draw for his Lord a parallel with the tales of deific paternity in the Olympian myths of his native tongue; their grossness could only have revolted his pure mind; they could not possibly have suggested to him a new way of honouring his Saviour. Moreover, the nativity chapters of Luke are not Greek; they are Hebraic—strongly Hebraic in their no-

ble psalmody not more than in their intense Jewish nationalism. But Hebrew minds could not have concocted artificially a legend of virgin birth for the elevation of their Messiah, for so fundamental and penetrating was the Jewish respect for family life that birth outside a family could not possibly have seemed on theory a greater honour. Several Old Testament women "got a man with the help of Jehovah," but they bore their sons by nature to their husbands. So these eminently Hebraic chapters are founded on an idea of which there is no prior Hebrew trace. The whole survey of the case narrows down from all sides to one only reasonable conclusion—that Luke wrote what he did about Nazareth and Bethlehem simply because, when he had diligently sought out the truth, the facts compelled him to this record. And God made the facts.

When a man says he does not believe in the virgin birth, it is usually quite uncertain what he means. If he intends to say that he possesses no indisputable evidence of it which would make it impossible to suppose the contrary, then he can only be answered that he is simply in the same case as all the rest of men—believers and unbelievers. But that is of little significance. The same thing could be said respecting almost any other single event of ancient history if taken in isolation. The corroborations of the past seldom rise to the point of demonstration. Yet such an

admission by no means abolishes believing, nor resolves all credence into credulity. Facts far from demonstrable are yet soundly established—established by the great overplus of probability which remains when all testimony and all likelihoods and all mutual dependences have been sifted, weighed and balanced with impartial calculation. No studious man can doubt that a sane historical judgment, practiced in this art of analyzing human chronicles, arrives at grounds of assurance on which the most unreserved faith may be lawfully and safely founded. The consensus of such faith in many men is in fact the world's belief in its own history. But if a man demands something more than such assurance for accepting the fact of the virgin birth, then it must frankly be admitted to him that there is nothing more. Indeed in one respect the virgin motherhood is more remote from demonstration than an ordinary matter of common record, for it never was demonstrable. Even the contemporaries of Mary had to accept it by faith in her purity and veracity. This observation, however, stands not at all against the truth of the asserted fact, since it is a condition that inheres in the circumstances. A fair man ought to make allowance for the circumstances in fixing the measure of proof which he must have to make him believe. A man who insists on more proof than normally belongs to the matter at issue makes me

question whether he is not seeking to evade belief rather than to attain it. Before such suspicion I cannot help it if at times my sympathy with the difficulties of the doubter rather suddenly evaporates. And if besides persisting in his own extravagance he blames me with dishonesty because I am willing to believe on more moderate allowance of corroboration, I resent the insolence and charge against him a still heavier score of unfairness.

For the other doubter who recognizes correctly that only average historic probability can be expected to substantiate any history—biblical or secular—but who does not find enough of such probability in this case to weigh down the affirmative side of his judgment, I entertain on the contrary the liveliest sympathy. If truly he "cannot believe," then I think it entirely legitimate to remind him of the fact already adverted to—that in apostolic times many undoubtedly received the Son of God to the regeneration of their souls all unwitting that there had been a virgin birth. What did not seem an essential doctrine of grace to the first preachers, no preacher has the authority to pronounce essential now. Therefore I should beg each honest seeker after God not to cease from following after Jesus for his doubts in this respect. He may be a Christian none the less, believing in the blessed Saviourhood of the crucified Lord

and trusting the leadership of the living Christ. Yet I would never say to such a man that it makes no difference whether he believes in the virgin birth or not. I am fully persuaded that there is gain in believing everything that is true and loss in disbelieving the slightest fact that has been or is. The universe is the sum of all truths, and the man who has refused—though under disability of the most conscientious doubt that ever possessed a man's mind—to receive any portion of that sum, has by so much put himself out of parallel with the universal movement of realities. What the penalty may be, or in how far for the credit of his honesty a compassionate God may commute an unbeliever's penalty, it is far from me to try to say. But I dare not think that it is as well with any man that he should disbelieve as that he should believe the fact of things. Therefore if our Lord Christ was born of a virgin, I desire to believe it; it may not be essential, but I cannot suppose it unimportant. And I do believe it, because when all considerations are summed up together, it appears to my judgment far more plausible that the nativity of Jesus was as the gospels relate than that stories so authenticated could have sprung up from seeds of either imagination or superstition.

Of the miracle of the resurrection not so much can be conceded as has been conceded concerning the virgin birth. The apostles did preach

the resurrection of Christ, and preached it centrally in their message to a sinning world which they sought to disciple for Him. Christ crucified was no stronger note in the apostolic sermons than Christ risen. In part, no doubt, this emphasis simply testifies to their own sense of the pressure of the world-old question: "If a man die, shall he live again?" The joy of having seen their dead and buried Master triumphantly alive once more after He had broken the bonds of the tomb remained with them a comforting and all-conclusive assurance that death would have no deadly sting when they came to encounter it. And they were human and brotherly enough to understand that through the dubious and groping pagan world no other ray of their gospel could so directly strike to the darkest vortex of prevailing spiritual despair; it must greatly have disappointed them that so often the men who most needed the story of the resurrection to answer and dissipate persistent fears would not receive it because it answered those fears too well; it was "too good to be true." But there was far more to the primitive preaching of the resurrection than merely a proclamation of comfort in face of a mysterious beyond. The early missionaries recognized themselves as commissioned warriors against the sin of the world, and they knew that in that desperate conflict they must needs have a living Champion. They were

evangelists to men who required indeed a Sacrifice for sins past, but who would be little bettered by a cancellation of old debts if they could not find besides a Helper now at hand, to lift them out of the foulness of their evil-disposed hearts and hold them steady to the clean ways of righteousness. Then as now sin demanded a "double cure"; sinners must be saved from both "its guilt and power." The resurrection was the Christians' pledge of such a Leader for their own enterprises of rescue and such a Helper to be commended to the multitudes whom they summoned with the call of God "commanding men that they should all everywhere repent."

Had their faith that "Jesus died and rose again," ever have been cleft in twain, and the victorious second clause of their creed wiped out, it would inevitably have destroyed both the courage and the confidence of their evangelism. They would have been left without a message. These downright and tremendously practical men would never have achieved the dilettante skill to repair the loss with artificial rhetoric about the beautiful ethical example of Christ. They must have a present Saviour—a past Example would not suffice. It was undoubtedly this feeling which made Paul say: "If Christ hath not been raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." It was this feeling which in

every missionary sermon forced him straight up to the climax of the Risen Man ordained of God not only for salvation but for judgment. And if he was unable to convince his hearers of this preëminent assertion in his preaching—as was the unhappy case at Athens—he quite despaired of bringing them to any saving faith in Jesus, and dejectedly resumed his journey in hope of lighting next upon a place where the prejudices of the people were not so obdurate before the central declaration of his evangel. When Peter preached to Cornelius and John wrote to the seven churches of Asia, the stress of doctrine was on the same pivotal point of life from the dead. It goes without saying that what all the apostles thus staked all their ministry upon, they all believed without hesitation or allowance. Whatever the church of the twentieth century may say of the resurrection, it is sure that the church of the first century never spoke dubiously of it. If there had been no resurrection, there would have been no church.

As concerns the crisis between the crucifixion and Pentecost, this latter remark has often been made, and its obvious force has been generally acknowledged. The immense reversal of conditions at Jerusalem, whereby a scattered party of discouraged peasants, dashed down to despair by the execution of their Prophet, were suddenly transformed into a bold and even defiant group

of propagandists, recklessly accusative of their rulers and absolutely indifferent to threatenings of persecution and death, is a historic puzzle for which no solution has ever been suggested except the solution which the New Testament authors all relate—that the downcast peasants saw their Lord again alive and responded with the stir of an unconquerable loyalty to His charge to preach His name everywhere coupled with His promise to be with them in their service "all the days even unto the consummation of the age." This amazing, radical and far-fraught change in a company of men who had had few or no native elements of initiative or aggressiveness in themselves, is, even by itself, almost a decisive proof of the rising of Christ, for with the rising the change is explicable and without it it is not. But the explicatory reach of the resurrection down the history of the development of the church goes much farther than merely to Pentecost. Without an actual and indubitable return of the Lord Jesus to life and to at least a temporary guiding fellowship with His disciples, the paramountcy of resurrection doctrine in the later preaching of their gospel would have been impossible. That other note which was in their preaching at first very noticeably and very naturally—how Jesus "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil"—would infallibly have

come uppermost if their later and more marvellous experience with their Master had not intervened with an equal reality between their apostleship and that sweet Galilean discipleship in which they knew Him only as a kindly wonder-worker. No matter how zealously they might have resolved upon some factitious allegation in His honour or how far they might have been beguiled by some fond illusion of His memory, their last and deepest real contact with such a personality as Jesus must in the long run dominate what they said about Him in their descriptions of Him to the world. The consistency of resurrection preaching in the apostolic church is therefore a singularly forcible substantiation of the truth of what was thus so often and so agreeingly declared. If to these considerations there shall be added the many independent strands of testimony to His appearances, in form not only visible but tangible, many days after the Romans had sealed His dead body in the tomb, it becomes no vain boast to claim, as some are wont to do, that the resurrection of Christ is fully as well attested as any other incident in the annals of mankind. It is difficult to harmonize all the varying accounts of the meetings of the Lord and His friends between the resurrection and the ascension, but the very multiplicity of such accounts and the manifest independence of the sources from

which they were taken down for record, makes stronger their united evidence to the one crucial fact—that Jesus of Nazareth was "alive after His passion."

It is of course impossible that the church of the present time should retain that same vivid experiential impression of a glorified Saviour, walking again amidst the former haunts of His humiliation, which was painted indelibly on the memories of those who companied with Him during those mystic forty days while He was "speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." The best substitute for it which we may enjoy is the liveliest historical imagination that the faithful study of their legacies to us will evoke. How exactly we must grasp up into minds of belief the precise circumstantial incidents which they remembered and recorded, in order that we also with them may realize Him as the Ever-Living One, I do not judge it needful here to try to analyze. But I do think it clear that if the church to-day desires to preach the same gospel to the same purpose as the church of the Lord's own age preached, it must be inspired with identically the same faith—that the Master who lived a revealing life and died a vicarious death in Judæa nineteen hundred years ago, still survives triumphant and reigning to this hour, ready with omnipotent strength and limitless good will to fight the fight of any struggling

man caught in toils of that enemy whom He Himself encountered in many a weary conflict in this world. The need of the present generation is as sore as that of any other generation for the "double cure" of sin, and whoever speaks of no contemporary Saviour offers but half a cure. And I do not conceive how any one can make mention of such a living salvation, except he allows for some triumph over death and time like to what the resurrection bespeaks. While emphasizing this great evangelistic meaning in the miracle, however, I cannot follow those who would load it with all the burden of questions about the mode of existence of immortal spirits after death. Whether the body which the disciples saw and were even allowed to touch when Jesus reappeared to them, was the typical embodiment of the happy dead, is scarcely an inquiry with which a religious faith in the rising of Christ should be entangled. It is sufficient to be assured that the Lord came back to those who loved Him in such guise that they were convinced of His actual personal presence with them again, and knew thereby that "it was not possible that He should be holden of death." This was the didactic worth of the resurrection; it cannot arbitrarily be required to stretch farther. So too the Lord's ascension need not be encumbered with crude difficulties about whither His body was transported from earth. It is

enough to know that His followers had at the end of their blissful month and ten days a sight before their eyes that told them their Leader was going away from them not dyingly but livingly into a realm invisible. And there faith still beholds Him abiding, yet not forgetful of the world in which He suffered for the race of mankind whom He "loved unto the end."

The apostles did not belie the earthly life of their Captain when they chiefly preached Him as the Conqueror of sin. That had been the outstanding character of His ministry. Granting that He was the true divine "Expression of God," He could not have put any phase or factor of His mission above or before His enmity to evil. When He "went about doing good," He beautifully revealed and exemplified that impartial benevolence of the Father who "maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." When He "healed all that were sick," He tenderly pictured to men the Father's constant thought for the health and welfare of the physical tenement made to house humanity. When He joined the festivities of happy homes, He made manifest the Father's joy in the joys of men. When He stilled the storm, He evidenced the Creator's command over creation. But these all were incidentals of revelation compared with what it meant for Him to say: "Son, be of good

cheer; thy sins are forgiven." This was the very master-word of His Messiahship; this the climactic note of His message to mankind. For the Father whom He came to express to men, is indeed kindly, sympathizing, protective and powerful, but above all these, He is righteous, holy, pure. The governance of nature, the support of life, the evolvement of humane society are without doubt great and grave concerns of God, but the overwhelming problem of the divine rule of the world is the problem of sin. The rebellion of men against the vast, just laws of heaven is the only threat of disorder in the whole universe. The vindication then of His own sovereignty, and even more than that, His infinite pity for the ruin in which men madly involve themselves by their transgressions, make the rooting out of human evil the fundamental task of the Most High—a task the more painful and precarious because it must be accomplished without forfeiture of the essential freedom with which man has been invested as his most glorious endowment. And if God's Ambassador faithfully represents Him among men, this must be also the superlative business of the Christ—to deliver men from sin and rid the world of its blight. An incarnation not intimately bound up with the questions of sin and of salvation would be an idle and inconsequential demonstration. It would serve no use equal to the power put into it.

And the Lord Jesus was not a failure in regard of this primary mission. He did not evade or minimize it. He came to close grapple with sin; He brought the revelation of the mind and heart of God to shine near and straight into the distorted face of evil. He thrust Himself fair into the midst of the sinning world, and when the undermined wrecks of wickedness fell, they fell on Him. He received upon and into Himself the weight of sin; He felt the impact of temptation; He knew what it was to be all but swept from His footing by the rush of it. By a telepathic sympathy in itself peculiarly godlike, He knew, without the stain, the shame of sin; He felt the strike-back of it into the life which it dishonours; He felt its hopelessness and its timid dreads. And it was out over the waste of such discouragement and desolation of hearts that He threw the great white light of His intrusted message. He had much to reveal. He had to reveal for the first clear time among men the paradox which in their gropings hitherto they had never quite discovered—that God hates sin and loves the sinner. Even the noblest of the prophets of Israel had never brought together the two halves of that principle into perfect harmony. When the smoke of the sacrifices rose, not only in Israel but even more in all pagan lands, the people thought of an angry face-averted Deity over them who hated them

because of their transgressions. Jesus uncovered a Face that is never turned away and never clouded with an unloving thought. He showed the Face infinitely pitiful for all their wanderings and all the sorrows which overtook them in their own paths far from the Father's house. He spoke of forgiveness in accents which offered not simply a gladly granted boon to the distressed, but which seemed to plead with men for a privilege—the privilege of casting all their sins behind the back of even Omniscient Knowledge and remembering their iniquities no more.

Yet it took infinite care—infinite pains, in a very literal sense—to keep the character of that offer exactly true to the nature of God. Jesus offered forgiveness, but there are two kinds of forgiveness in the world. It was crucially needful that there should never be any confusion such that men might mistake which sort God offered. There is an easy forgiveness which, too indolent to make issue with sin, wipes out the score in preference to being annoyed by it, or too tender to rebuke the sinner, glozes over the offense and dismisses the offender to repeat the same transgression when he will. This is the forgiveness of the weak and of the immoral; it is a truce with sin, not a conquest of it. It is the forgiveness by which slothful parents often sentence their boys and girls to ruin; it is forgiveness that

repeals the laws of righteousness and confounds evil with good. If God forgave thus, morality would disappear from the world over night. But there is another forgiveness—the forgiveness of great anguish. This is the forgiveness by which purity and honour and justice and love rescue the sinner and condemn the sin. There is no compromise in such forgiving; it surrenders nothing to the powers of darkness; it beats them off with mighty struggle and snatches the soul it loves from out their captivity. When a man is forgiven by such forgiveness, he does not jauntily imagine that he is the half-admirable hero of a trivial escapade from which he has had the good fortune to get free without discredit. He knows that he has been redeemed at "tremendous cost" from the peril of a life-and-death crisis. He understands that he has jeopardied not only his own soul but the soul that forgave. And this is the kind of pardon that we inherit from God—a pardon red with all the fierce bitterness of the conflict which God had fought against sin from the hour of the first iniquity; a pardon bleeding with all the suffering which God suffers when He beholds us, erring children of His boundless compassion, torn and distracted and thwarted by the due recompense of our own ill deeds. It is pardon given as from the immersement of the sinner's own despair—feeling all his helplessness, all his failure, all his

loss, all his pain, and all that his aspiration would be if from that depth he could behold the glorious heights of holiness. Truly it is painful pardon, but given gladly for the sweet sake of an immeasurable Love.

And how did Jesus Christ make sure that the world should not mistake the quality of the forgiveness which He came to make known? How could He, save in one way? He suffered before the world's sight according to the forgiving pain of God. He died on Calvary. As He pushed farther and farther into the black domain of the world's wickedness, it accumulated around Him and more and more impeded His way. Finally it bodied itself in human anger, and rose and slew Him. The woe which sin works in the world concretely and visibly befell Him. He died as a malefactor died, bearing without fault of His own the fit penalty of the faults of many others. He made Himself one with sinners in the most desperate of their distresses, because He submitted Himself to the deepest of their shames. Thus on the most colossal and sublime stage of history He showed forth the true parable of God undergoing the weight of mankind's wickedness. "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."

Will any man now, having beheld Cavalry, ask to be forgiven and imagine that he asks a light thing? Verily not. Let him look and see how

God sets us free from the burden and hurt of our sin only by receiving the burden of it upon Himself. Sin is real to God; it is not some ugly imagination cancellable with a wave of the hand. An eraser will not end it. It must be suffered out. Somebody must meet and face its dire reality. If God protects us from sin's consequences, it is only by interposing Himself in our stead to meet and deal with it in a more victorious strength than our unequal powers could muster. He settles the punitive judgment that in the eternal accounts of righteousness lies against us. The moralities of the divine government are preserved because sin is not extenuated or apologized for; it is borne, it is expiated. What divine love cannot endure to see its creatures bear, it bears itself. Men go free; divine love does the penance. Whether Calvary itself was symbol or act, this is the meaning of it.

The ever-living intercession of Christ is this eternal bearing of the sins and the other burdens of men. It is strange that theology should so long have persisted in seeing in the intercession an unending duel in heaven between justice and mercy. There is no conflict between justice and mercy in heaven or on earth. Love and wisdom dominate them everywhere where God reigns, and not only harmonize but unify them. The intercession of Christ is sympathy and interpretation at the very centre of the universe. "All the

days of old" the Saviour of men "in all their affliction was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them," and so it is even until this day; still He redeems and bears and carries them. By His own temptation He knows the temptations of men and fortifies them with His protection. By His own weakness in the flesh He pities our frequent frailties, and with new propitiations of His love forgives our recurring trespasses. By His sorrows He enters ours, and out of like strengthening as He received in the garden, He comforts us. Our feeblest motions after good He eagerly considers and magnifies them in His love and vitalizes them by His life. Long since He told His disciples that He would not pray the Father for them; "for the Father Himself loveth you;" it is quite inexplicable that while that word from His lips stood fast, any should have depicted the Christ as standing before a throne of wrath to plead away thunderbolts of vengeance. But He did promise that where He went He would remember those whom He loved on earth, and He bade those who believed in God to believe in Him and not be troubled. Sure then we may be that where God is and the destinies of men are decided, there is not only love for us but perfect understanding of us—the understanding of One who has lived our life and knows our trials, our failures, our better purposes and our dearest hopes. We shall

not be misjudged in heaven; we shall not be laden with burdens too heavy for us to bear; we shall not be forsaken when our needs grow keen and our strength grows small; "He ever liveth to make intercession for us."

There is only one deep cleavage through the religious thought of the world. There are some who conceive that men are but blind and unled "seekers after God," groping by one unmarked road and another through the dark on the chance hope that they may find Him here or there, but still unknowing whether they have come near to Him or not. Others joyfully believe that God has reached down to find men, cleared a path for them and bidden them come up to Him,—more than all, has sent a Guide to lend them a hand of help on the upward way. Among those to whom the latter faith is real, there may be many divergences which measure wide in the surveys of the schools, but from overhead the severance must appear shallow and insignificant. Only grant us a Father to love us and a Brother to lead us, and we shall not miss the way.

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