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## MIRACLES.—THE PROBLEM STATED.

(14) AFTER the unfounded assumption that the Bible affirms a genesis of the world which is demonstrably unscientific,<sup>1</sup> there is no point on which modern sceptics lay more stress than the undoubted fact, that the Bible records signs and wonders which imply a power above nature, if not against it. Perhaps the objection would be more accurately stated were they to say, that the miracles of the Bible imply the activity, in nature, of a Power of which our modern scientific interpretation of nature finds no trace. But, state the objection how we may, it is a formidable one, and has done much to unsettle the faith both of those who still believe, and of those who once believed, the Bible to be or to contain the word of God.

Now so long as the Church conceived of miracles as violations of the laws of nature, it was very natural, and even reasonable, that sceptics should declare miracles to be impossible: for how should God transgress his own laws? But now that the Church conceives of miracles as modifications of the ordinary course of nature, induced by the coming in of a higher force acting on a higher law, sceptics no longer pronounce miracles to be impossible indeed, but they still declare them to be incredible. How can they pronounce them impossible when even they themselves possess and wield a power by which the ordinary course of nature is constantly modified and overruled? When, to use a familiar illustration, I fling a stone into the air, I do not violate the law of gravitation; I simply modify, and to a

<sup>1</sup> For the previous sections of this Essay, see pp. 191-209.

certain extent override, its action by bringing a new force into play, that of my own will. The intelligence and will of man have changed the face of the whole earth. By hewing down forests, by ploughing and draining fields, by laying down roads and railroads, by building houses, cities, dykes, harbours, ships, we have not only modified the surface of land and sea, we have also invaded the kingdom of the air, and changed the very climates on which, in large measure, the life of nature depends. There is not a single square inch in England, probably there is not a square inch in the whole world, which is to-day what it would have been had it been left to the free play of purely natural forces. But if the will of man has so largely modified the action of these forces, who can doubt that the will of God might, should He, for some worthy end, think fit, modify it much more widely, subtly, and potently?

(15) "No," says the modern sceptic, "miracles are not impossible, if by miracle you mean simply a modification of the natural order by the introduction of a supernatural force, and if I admit that any such supernatural force exists. But though they are not impossible, they are incredible; for no adequate reason for them has ever been adduced, nor have they been submitted to the scientific tests by which alone they could be verified."

And if in our turn we ask: How, then, do you account for the fact that in a Book, confessedly the greatest and noblest in the literature of the world, and by men who seem to be very honest and competent witnesses, miracles are constantly affirmed, and are so blended with both the theology and the morality they taught—their theology, moreover, being the highest, and their morality the purest the world has ever seen—that the one cannot be disentangled from the other? The sceptic replies: "The miracles of the Bible can and must be disentangled from its teaching. They are late and legendary additions to it. They are of

the nature of those myths which we find in the earlier stages of the history of every race, the fabulous inventions with which every race glorifies its own origin, its own founders and heroes. The growth of such myths implies no insincerity; the allegation is not that they are wittingly or wilfully fabricated. Great teachers, warriors, rulers, benefactors, naturally live on in the memory and affection of their fellows long after they are dead. Their achievements are exaggerated, their character exalted, first by affection, then by tradition, till they grow to be of more than mortal stature; a halo gathers round their brows, and they are worshipped as gods, or at least as sons of the gods, while the far-resounding echoes of the great deeds they really did swell into monstrous and fabulous proportions."

And such a reply does not, at the first blush, seem to be unreasonable. It falls in with many vague notions which are floating in our minds, and comes to us with all the added strength which these vague notions lend it. It is only when we bring it to the Bible, and try to read the Bible in its light, that we discover how utterly this plausible hypothesis breaks down. For there we find both that the miracles of the Bible cannot possibly be disentangled from its teaching, and that these miracles bear no single trace, mark, or note of the legendary growth or mythical invention to which they are ascribed.

(16) That the miracles of the Bible cannot be detached from its theology and morality has been proved again and again, and proved most conclusively; for the sceptical argument has been broken down not at its weakest, but at its strongest, point. How often of late years, for example, and from how many quarters, have we been admonished to drop the supernatural and even the theological element in the Gospels, and to content ourselves with the pure, sweet, and lofty morality of the Sermon on the Mount; on which

Sermon those whom we call sceptics have lavished eulogies so nobly conceived and so eloquently expressed that it would be hard to match them from the writings of apologists and divines. But if for a moment we accept their advice and confine ourselves to the Sermon which, for them, sums up all that is most valuable in the Gospel of Christ, do we thereby exclude either theology or miracles from our field of view? On the contrary, not only do we find in this Sermon a doctrine of God, a doctrine of the Holy Ghost, a doctrine of Providence, a doctrine of Sin and of the Forgiveness of Sins, a doctrine of Prayer, and a doctrine of Heaven, but we also find that the motives to which its pure and lofty morality appeals are purely theological motives. We are to do good, hoping for nothing in return, we are to give alms without advertising them, we are to love all men, even our enemies, we are to requite good for evil and give a blessing for a curse, not from any merely ethical motive, but from purely religious motives,—that we may please our Father who seeth in secret, that we may prove ourselves to be his children, that we may become perfect even as He is perfect: we are not to be careful, because our Father careth for us; we are to forgive, because He has forgiven us; we are to ask for what we want, because our Father knows how to give us his good gifts, and we are not to be importunate in our prayers, because our Father knoweth what we have need of before we ask Him. In short, the whole round of motives in this sermon is purely theological.<sup>1</sup>

But *the motives* of any ethical system are its essence; they mould its character, they determine its quality. How, then, can we detach the theology of the Sermon on the Mount from its morality when, to do that, would be simply to detach the motive from its every precept, to rob it of its essence, and so to destroy its very existence?

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "The Foundations of Faith." By Rev. Henry Wace, D.D.

And as for detaching miracles from this Sermon, that is wholly impossible, except at the cost of vitally impairing its integrity. For not only does it imply a supernatural element throughout, but in the verses in which it culminates—verses than which none are more dear to the sceptic and the moralist, if only because they rebuke the hypocrisy of the Church,—our Lord represents some of his followers as claiming to have wrought miracles, nay, as having really cast out devils in his name, and in his name done many wonderful works; and as, nevertheless, being rejected by Him because they had not cast the devil out of their own heart, but had been workers of iniquity as well as workers of miracles. And yet how should He have spoken of them as working miracles, and working them in his name, if He Himself did no miracle? How should his mere Name have been so potent if He Himself exercised no supernatural power?

No, we can no more detach miracles than we can detach theology from the Sermon on the Mount. And if miracles, theology, and morality are inextricably blended in the very Sermon which the opponents of theology and miracles have selected as their battlefield, and which they so love and admire that they would fain reduce the whole teaching of Christ to the limits of this single discourse, we may be sure that in the other sections and books of the Bible miracles and teaching are still more obviously, if not still more intimately, intertwined.

(17) That the miracles of the Bible present none of the well-known notes or marks which characterize the myths of other ancient Scriptures or traditions becomes apparent as soon as we study them, and especially as we observe the manner in which they are distributed through its pages. These marks are so well known, so generally admitted, that I need only enumerate them.

Myths, then, belong to the earlier reaches of human

history, and tend to disappear as we come down the stream of time.

Myths tend to glorify a race or the origin of a race, and the great men who have illustrated and adorned it.

Myths take time to grow ; if a man is no hero to his own valet, so also no hero or prophet is exalted to divine honours by his own generation or in his own age and land.

I do not pause to argue these points. They are admitted axioms. But if we apply these axioms to the Bible story, fairly yet firmly, we are likely to be at once surprised and edified by the result.

(18) The first fact likely to strike a student of the Bible who seeks to acquaint himself with the story it tells is that, whereas in all other literatures myths abound in the earlier stages of history and gradually disappear as that history comes into clearer light, in the Bible we absolutely have no record of a single miracle, a single notable modification of natural laws by a supernatural power, for the first twenty-five centuries of the space it covers ! Creation is of necessity miraculous on any theory of it, and hence no candid reader will affect surprise at finding certain marvellous displays of supernatural energy in the document which records the creation of the world and of man. But if, as we are bound to do, we refuse to reckon as a miracle any event, however marvellous, which can be fairly attributed to natural or secondary causes—as, for example, the Deluge or the destruction of the Cities of the Plain—we are met by this most remarkable fact, that from the creation of the world down to the call of Moses, a period of two thousand five hundred years, the laws of nature hold on the even tenour of their way, unbroken by a single interruption, although these twenty-five centuries, since they are the earliest in the human story, ought, according to the mythical hypothesis, to be the richest in tales of wonder. Abraham wrought no miracle, nor Isaac, nor Jacob, though

these three patriarchs were the venerated fathers and founders of the Hebrew race, never forgotten in after years, never mentioned but with honour and pride; and although it is precisely the founders of a race with whom tradition and mythical invention are most busy, and round whose heads a legendary halo most naturally gathers.

With the call of Moses, indeed, the first miraculous epoch opens; there commences an extraordinary outburst of supernatural force; and so long as the sacred historian is narrating the exodus from Egypt, the wandering in the Wilderness, and the entrance into the Promised Land, signs and wonders meet us almost on every page. Here, then, the mythical theory may seem to win an easy triumph; for, confessedly, the origin of a race is apt to be glorified by legends which will not bear a critical examination. But this apparent triumph is turned into utter defeat the moment we mark that the miracles which attended the commencement of the national life do *not* glorify either Moses or the men whom he redeemed from their bondage and welded into a nation. So far as they were vouchsafed to Moses personally, they came, as we shall see, to compel him to an errand on which he was unwilling to go; so far as they were wrought by Moses for the people, they were wrought in vain, and were the reproach of the nation rather than their glory.

The first two miracles in his personal record are those of the staff turned into a serpent, and of the hand smitten with leprosy. Have these miracles, both of which attended his call to the service of God and of Israel, the look of myths invented by fond tradition to do him honour? What they really illustrate is his weakness, not his strength, his well nigh invincible obstinacy and unbelief. It was because he would not go on the errand on which he was sent, because he could not be persuaded that he was competent for the task to which he was called, that these



marvels were wrought. Even when they had been wrought, the historian tells us that he persisted in his obstinate reluctance and unbelief, until the anger of God was kindled against him. Is that in the tone of one who was inventing a mythic halo for the head of the Redeemer and Lawgiver of Israel, and who wanted to make him glorious in our eyes?

In like manner the miracles of the Wilderness, almost without exception, tell to the shame not to the honour of the men who, in the language of one of their own poets, there saw God, tempted Him, and proved his work. Forty years long was He grieved with them and provoked, working miracles only to still their murmurs, to quench their mutinies, to repair their mistakes, to rebuke their sins. Is it so much as conceivable that miracles such as these were invented by the poets of Israel in order to glorify their origin, to give dignity and heroic splendour to the men from whom they sprang? Or were they so clumsy that, intending to lift their fathers to heaven, they unwittingly cast them down into this hell of opprobrium, folly, obstinacy, and flat rebellion against the Hand which fed and guided them? That, surely, is a curious example of the patriotic legend which, instead of setting forth the fathers and founders of a race as heroes half divine, stigmatizes them as such incurable and stiffnecked sinners that the whole generation of them perished by and for their crimes in the Wilderness!

No sooner were the Jews led through the Wilderness and established in the Holy Land by Moses, and Joshua his minister and successor, than the display of miraculous power begins to decline, and for a period of six centuries we meet with only a dubious miracle here and there. In the long picture gallery of Holy Writ no men have a more legendary look than the border chieftains who rose to be Judges in Israel. The age of the Judges is confessedly the heroic age of the Hebrew chronicles; and heroes are the

very men round whose memories marvels, legends, fabulous exploits, most naturally collect. The Judges were succeeded by the Kings; and for whom should tradition weave its mythical wreaths, or exhale its bright magnifying mists, if not for Saul the warrior, for David the poet and darling of Israel, and for Solomon its sage? In these three we have the very style of man that attracts legends to himself as by a natural law—as indeed they have attracted them in chronicles less sober than those of the Bible. And yet in the era of the Judges only a few miracles are found, while in that of the earlier and nobler kings they are altogether wanting.

It may be said, however, "Miracles are not to be looked for in an age so enlightened as that of David and Solomon, when the Hebrews were brought into contact with other races and higher civilizations than their own; an age of commerce, literature, art, in which knowledge grew from more to more." How, then, are we to account for the fact that, two centuries later, we come on another extraordinary manifestation of the miraculous energy? Samuel founded the schools of the prophets indeed; but Elijah and Elisha seem to have been the men who first made prophecy a real and great power in Israel, who brought its broader theology and loftier moral ideal to bear on the national conscience. And with the advent of Prophecy to power there came a whole series of miracles as marvellous as any of which we read in the earlier and darker ages. At a period so late, and in a light so clear as to leave little scope for legend, we find marvels as numerous as ever, and as wonderful. Nor have these later marvels any trace of mythical invention upon them. Some of them illustrate the Prophet's weakness rather than his strength, tend to his shame, not to his glory, as, for instance, the miracle by which Elijah was fed in the Wilderness, after he had prayed that he might die rather than be sent back to a task so lonely and so hopeless;

while all of them tend to the shame, rather than to the glory, of the people of Israel, since they were wrought to recover them from their idolatries and sins to the service of God, and wrought, as the poets and chroniclers both confess, almost wholly in vain. Nor, again, is it to his miracles that Elijah owes his grandeur and the large heroic proportions he assumes in our thoughts, but to his character, to his indomitable courage, his passionate loyalty and devotion; just as Elisha stands in our imaginations as the type of all that is sweet, genial, gracious in the man of God, not because he did many mighty works, but because his works, like those of One greater than himself, were works of mercy and compassion.

Once more the glory declines as these two heroic figures pass from the scene, and the light of the miraculous Shechinah is involved in the cloud. And, now, we might well think the world was growing too old and too wise to babble of legends, and to delight itself in the wonders proper only to its childhood. Four centuries pass, illuminated only at scattered and distant points by the supernatural effulgence. The national existence of the Jews has come to an end. The land, once so populous and thriving, lies desolate. Of a people, once so mighty, only a few poor captives are left, who sit and weep by the waters of Babylon. And here of all places, at Babylon, fertilized by the waves of successive Eastern civilizations, among a people the most fierce, luxurious, and polished, the miraculous energy breaks forth once more, and Daniel and his compeers are so visibly guarded and taught by Heaven as to assure the dejected captives that God has not forgotten them, and to constrain the mighty Persian conquerors to unloose their chains and to send them back to the land of their fathers in peace. Yet even now this strange story tells against, rather than for, the people for whose redemption these marvels are wrought. Only an inconsiderable remnant of them

respond to the heavenly call, and return to re-commence their national life. Most of them reject the counsel of God against themselves, and fade out of history, absorbed by the races amongst whom their captivity has been spent; inso-much that the fate of ten out of the twelve tribes remains an insoluble problem to this day. Still, therefore, the miracles wear the same unmythical stamp. They are not legends which any race would have invented in its own honour. They proclaim its shame rather than its glory. For which of these later prophets did not the Jews reject or persecute? against which of these gifted and patriotic statesmen did they not rebel?

(19) In the minds of many readers this strange story, so far as it has yet gone, the story which the Bible tells of its own miracles, will, I imagine, awaken some surprise. For most of us have assumed that miracles are pretty evenly distributed through the pages of the Old Testament, and thus we have missed the obvious intention which goes far to vindicate and explain them. When we see that its miracles group themselves in three periods far removed from each other, and cluster round three events of prime importance, viz., the inception of the national life, the advent of the Prophetic power, and the redemption from the Babylonian captivity, we begin to get glimpses of a certain Divine purpose, a certain Divine order and propriety in them. We feel that, if God so loved men as to reveal Himself and his will to them when they could not find Him out, and were perishing for lack of that knowledge in which eternal life consists, it was natural that He should elect one out of the various races of men, and so manifest Himself to them as to train and prepare them to receive, and to impart, a growing revelation of his will. At the very lowest we see that there was a certain economy, such as characterizes all Divine works, in this selection of one race to receive the super-natural disclosure which was intended for the benefit of all

ances ; while in the fact that the miracles group themselves round the three critical points in the history of that elect race, we recognize a new illustration of that same economy of Divine power. Supernatural interventions are not lavished in unnecessary and wasteful profusion. They come only at the call of need. There is a certain unity in them. They conspire together for one great and worthy end ; they are meant to reveal God as the Father, Teacher, and Saviour of mankind. Even with this end in view, the laws of nature are not unnecessarily and perpetually modified. Only at long intervals, only to usher in some great birth of time, does the Creative Spirit look through the veil of secondary causes, only "at sundry times," and to meet some pressing necessity, does the light shine through the cloud in which it is ordinarily involved.

If, then, we listen, as we are bound to listen, to the story told by the Bible itself, and mark the law which governs the distribution of its miracles, the haze of difficulty which enshrouds them thins, in large measure it lifts and disappears ; and we can but confess that here, as everywhere else, God has revealed his will in a manner worthy of Himself.

(20) Even yet, however, the story is not fully told. The best is still to come.

Another wide interval, an interval of four centuries, is placed between the Restoration from the Captivity and the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ ; and during these four hundred years no miracle is recorded, and even the voice of Prophecy is dumb. But when, "in the fulness of the times," the Son of Man appeared to redeem the world from a more dreadful captivity than that of Babylon and Egypt, and to complete the revelation of God as the Teacher and Saviour of mankind, it was but natural that the miraculous energy, which had emphasized each of its previous initiatory stages, should break forth and shine with a splendour

beyond all precedent. If there was ever a moment in the history of man in which the Creative Spirit might be expected to disclose Himself in works natural to Him but supernatural to us, works in which that Divine force, his sovereign and almighty Will, should so modify the laws of nature and of human nature as to compel recognition, if not faith,—was not this such a moment? Whatever our private verdict, however, the Gospels steadily affirm that when the Son of Man, Himself the great miracle of time, manifested Himself to Israel, He wrought among them signs and wonders such as man had never witnessed before, and that He communicated this strange power to the men who “*accompanied with Him.*”

Now if we recall these familiar miracles, and ask ourselves whether they bear a single mark of a mythical or legendary origin, we cannot in candour deny that they are free from every trace of it, despite all the attempts of keen and erudite critics to fasten that colour upon them. Myths belong to the earlier stages of history; but this was the last stage in the national history of the Jews. Myths tend to glorify a race, or the great men of a race; but the Jews rejected Him to whom these miracles are ascribed; and, so far from placing Him among their greatest, they hate and deny Him to this day as a traitor and an apostate who brought shame and disaster on the blood from which He sprang. Myths take time to grow; but the miracles attributed to the Son of Man were attributed to Him in his lifetime, and were recorded by his own contemporaries.

We are told, indeed, that that age—late as it was, and albeit we have derived from it and the ages which immediately preceded it, all that is highest and best in the civilization of our own time—was a credulous age, in which legendary and marvellous achievements were freely ascribed to every personage who attained an heroic stature. But with what reason can we call that a credulous age in which

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the mythologies and legends of the great Pagan superstition were all crumbling into dust, when the Epicurean philosophy took the very tone adopted by our modern materialists, and the Stoic anticipated the very maxims insisted on by our modern advocates of a rational morality uncomplicated by the dogmas of theology?

(21) If any man objects: "But we are speaking of *Jews*, not of Greeks and Romans; and surely the Jews of that time were credulous and prone to see miracles where no miracles were?" we need not insist, in reply, on a fact for which there is nevertheless much evidence, viz., that even the Jews were deeply infected in the time of Christ, and for two or three centuries before that time, with the sceptical philosophy of Greece and Rome. There is an answer to it so conclusive that, though it has often been adduced, it has never been met, nor am I aware of any attempt even to refute it. For at this very age there lived a man who answered much more closely to the popular, and even to the Jewish, idea of a hero than Christ Jesus; a man, moreover, who made a far deeper impression on the imagination and memory of his fellows; and yet no miracle was ever attributed to him, whether in the Bible or out of it. John the Baptist was a Jew. The Jewish people recognised in him a prophet and more than a prophet. They would gladly have accepted him as the Christ. So profound was the impression he made that "all Jerusalem and all Judea went out after him;" so profound that Josephus, who dismisses Jesus with a single dubious sentence, has much to say of the character and mission of the stern unbending seer and moralist, who struck his contemporaries rather as an embodied and inspired voice than as a man of like passions with themselves. And yet no legend has gathered round this strange impressive figure, no halo gleams on his brow. Neither his own disciples nor the Jewish people, nor Josephus or any other writer of his time, credits him

with the supernatural power so freely ascribed to Jesus, and even to the meanest of his followers. So marked was the contrast between John and Jesus, that even the outlandish folk of Peræa were struck with it, and exclaimed, "John did no miracle, but all that John said of this man is true." It is, therefore, to beg the whole question, it is to evade rather than meet the point in dispute, when certain critics ascribe the miracles of Jesus to the credulous and myth-making tendencies of the age in which He appeared, although the most prominent and popular Jewish prophet of that age stands before us untouched by any ray of miraculous glory. Till this fact has been explained, this problem solved, we are hardly called upon to adduce any other argument against those who would reduce the wonders attributed to Christ to the level of worn-out and incredible myths.

(22) Yet there is another argument of no small weight. For, in the case of Christ, myths had no time to grow. It is true that sceptical critics have attributed our four Gospels to the middle or end of the second century. But it is also true that they have been led to affix this late date to them mainly by a desire to discredit them, and to leave room for the fabrication of myths. And it is still further true that they are now beginning to confess, that the Gospels must have been written at a much earlier date than they once supposed. Into this long and difficult controversy, however, we need not enter. For here again we can appeal to a fact which has never been denied, never seriously questioned even. The most sceptical critics admit that four of St. Paul's Epistles,—1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Galatians,—were written by the Apostle whose name they bear. But St. Paul was born, as they also admit, in about the same year as our Lord. He wrote these Epistles within twenty or thirty years of the death on the cross. In these Epistles he ascribes miracles and miracu-



lous powers to our Lord as clearly and emphatically as do any of the men who wrote the Gospels. He tells us that he had affirmed these miracles from the moment of his conversion; nay, that his own conversion was due to a miracle. Here, then, we have the testimony of one who was of the same generation with Christ—a testimony which leaves no time or scope for the invention of legends, for the growth of myths.

And what need we more? Are we to doubt St. Paul's testimony simply because he was a Christian? But he was not *always* a Christian. He had hated and persecuted Christ. What made him a Christian except that he could not resist a power which conquered even his stubborn and ardent antagonism? His conversion, fairly weighed, does but give new force to his evidence.

(23) At every point, therefore, the mythical hypothesis breaks down, although in some form this hypothesis is the only explanation of the Biblical miracles which the sceptical criticism of the day offers us. If we ask the Bible for its own account of its own miracles, it tells us that, instead of being common and constant, they are rare; that they come only at wide intervals, and to usher in some new and momentous epoch. It groups them round the commencement of the national and religious life of Israel, the advent of Prophecy to power, the redemption from the Captivity, and the coming of that great Prophet, like unto Moses, who was sent to give life to the whole world and to redeem all men from their bondage to vanity and corruption.

(24) Now, obviously, before we can attempt to *solve* the problem of miracles with any hope of success, we must *state* that problem: we must get the statement of the Bible itself. And in addition to all we have yet learned from the Bible, as a corollary or inference from all that we have yet learned, the Bible affirms that the four miracu-

lous epochs in the history of man mark four successive and ascending stages in God's revelation of Himself and of his will to the world. The need for such a revelation needs no proof. That man by searching cannot find out God, even in such poor "perfection" as is possible to man, is surely put beyond a doubt by the moral and religious confusion to which the world, after a search of so many centuries, was reduced at the advent of Christ. In proportion as any man is familiar with the moral and religious conditions of that age, he will admit, what Plato anticipated, that nothing short of a Divine self-revelation could have raised men from the shame and bondage of the pit into which they had fallen. And the affirmation of the Bible is that the revelation thus given in the person, teaching, and work of our Lord Jesus Christ was one for which long and patient preparation was necessary, and had been made; that *one* race had to be, and had been, trained century after century to receive and to disseminate it; that the miraculous epochs of which we have spoken were necessary parts of that training; that at each of these epochs a new and higher form of revelation was introduced; that miracles were necessary and were designed to compel attention to and illustrate the new stage, the loftier moral ideal, which had been reached, and to raise the chosen race from the lower stage which it had long occupied, and to which it had grown familiar and attached; and that in the fulness of times, when this training was complete—and, as it seems to us, long before it was complete—God sent forth his Son to make a final disclosure of his will, to fulfil and make good all which those who came before Him had promised and foreshadowed.

Now the true statement of any problem is an immense aid to the solution of it. And already, although as yet the statement of our problem is not complete, I think it must be admitted that it has grown simpler and easier to us;

that there is a certain harmony and consistency in all that we have heard the Bible say of its own miracles which is very reassuring, and which does much to relieve the problem of the difficulties and improbabilities that our false or partial statements of it have attached to it. Does not the Bible, when duly examined, set forth a worthy and sufficient end for the miracles it records? Does it not set them forth in a natural and noble sequence? If miracles are possible, can such miracles as these be altogether incredible, at least to those who believe in God and in any revelation of his will?

(25) To complete our statement of the problem, it only needs that we briefly glance at the miracles which accompanied the final or Christian stage of the Biblical revelation, and gather up what it has to say of the signs and wonders ascribed to our Lord.

Consider, then, *the quality* of the miracles attributed to Christ. So little legendary are they in form and substance, that even the most sceptical critics confess them to be the very perfection of sober good sense when once they are compared with the legends of the Hebrew writings not contained in the Bible, or with the marvels of any Pagan mythology which we are able to recover. Where, for example, do we meet in the Gospels with any "work" which even descends toward the level of the puerile fables which tell us how the boy Jesus breathed the breath of life into birds which he had moulded of clay, or that He gathered up in his "napkin" the water He had spilled from a broken jug?

Consider, again, how the miracles attributed to Him harmonize with all that the New Testament affirms of his nature, his character, his teaching. If, as the Gospels steadfastly assert, He was Himself a miracle, what more natural than that He should work miracles? If He was God as well as man, must not He shew forth the God

in Him as well as the man? If He was only what He meant when He called Himself "the Son of Man," if, that is, He was only the ideal Man, might He not naturally possess a greater power over the forces and laws of nature than we do, who yet are modifying those forces and laws by every breath we draw, and every action we perform? Might He not well rise to that absolute dominion over all the works of God's hands which the ancient seers claimed as the proper, though forfeited, heritage of man? Might not He whose will was invariably at one with the will of God, be *trusted* with a power which could not safely be confided to us while our wills are so weak and variable and prone to stray from their rest? If only He was without sin, as many admit who pronounce his miracles incredible, or deny his "proper deity," was not his very sinlessness the greatest of all miracles, supposing Him to have been a man of like passions with ourselves?

And how came He to speak as man never spake if He were not what man never was? Innumerable attempts have been made, indeed, to reduce the peerless Son of Man to the level of other great teachers of antiquity, attempts, however, which even the ablest and most fearless sceptics—*e. g.* Goethe, Carlyle, John Stuart Mill—have branded as utter and miserable failures: but if we would measure the distance between Him and them, we have only to compare the tone and bearing of Christ with those of Socrates, or Plato, or even St. Paul. In them we have ardent inquiry, lofty speculation, an earnest devotion to the best and highest aims of life, blended with a constant sense of ignorance, failure, dependence, personal uncleanness; while in Him, and in Him alone, we find from the first a calm that never wavers, a wisdom that knows no bound, a holiness unconscious of a single spot, an authority unbroken by a doubt.

Consider, too, how his teaching was illustrated by his

“works”: how, by opening the eyes of the blind, for example, He illustrated the saying, “I am the light of the world”; how, by raising the dead, He proved Himself to be “the Resurrection and the Life”; how, in short, by healing the diseases of men and redeeming them from their distresses, He proclaimed Himself to be the Saviour of the world.

What would the Gospel be to us if there were no forgiveness of sins? But He who forgives sins modifies the action of great moral laws, by bringing a new moral force into play; and shall not He who can thus modify and override moral laws also modify and overrule physical laws? Is it much that He who could say, “Thy sins are forgiven,” should also say, “Take up thy bed and walk?”

Consider, once more, the *self-consistency* of the Gospel miracles, how they all move in one plane and work together for one end. The Incarnation might be incredible to us if it introduced an ordinary life; but the life of Christ is an extraordinary one; through its whole course it answers to the greatness of its beginning. The resurrection and ascension of Christ might be incredible if they closed an ordinary career; but as the close of *his* career on earth they seem simply natural and appropriate.

Glance at his miracles, moreover, in the light of his mission, of the work He is yet to do. According to the Scriptures of the New Testament, He is to raise all men from the dead, to judge or rule them all, to overcome evil with good, to redeem the very creation from its bondage to vanity and corruption, to subdue all things unto Himself, and finally to hand over to his Father a perfected kingdom, a perfected universe. But if that is to be the crown and consummation of his work, is it unreasonable to expect that He who by a stupendous miracle, which involves the modification of all laws both physical and moral, is to reform and reconstitute the universe, should

give us some signs and foretastes of his power even from the first?

(26) Now we have no right to detach this miracle or that from the whole series of his mighty works, or from all else that the Bible tells us of Him, all that it tells us of his character, his teaching, his claims, his mission and final triumph, and consider them apart. We cannot so much as see them truly save as we see them in their full and natural connexions. The whole thing hangs together, and we are bound to deal with it as a whole. And if we thus deal with it, the mere Biblical statement of the problem goes far toward solving it. For taking it thus, we see that the Bible groups its miracles round the great epochs in the religious history of the race, each of these epochs pointing to and preparing the way for the last, and all culminating in the advent and work of Christ. We see that the Bible claims for Him a nature and character of which miracles would be a natural outcome. We see that all his "works" are good works; that they illuminate the truths He came to teach; that they are consistent with each other, as well as with his character and teaching; and that they are also consistent both with the redeeming work He did on earth, and the yet greater work which He has promised to do from heaven. All the lines of the Divine action and revelation in the past centre in Him; all their lines in the future ray out from Him.

If we once accept this simple, but most wonderful story, it is nothing to say that the miracles of the Bible bear no trace of mythical or legendary invention; it is nothing to say that no other or later "marvels" are worthy to be compared to them. We may go further and say, that the miracles of Christ become *credible* to us by their utter consistency with all else that the Bible contains; that they commend themselves to us as natural and inevitable features of the great story it tells.

(27) These, then, are the facts, and this is the argument which, as they should know, the sceptics and agnostics of the present day have to explain and refute before they can claim the attention of thoughtful and candid men. These facts and this argument are not stated here for the first time. They have been stated again and again for the last thirty or forty years; and that by men of sufficient note; by such men, for example as Bersier of Paris, Godet of Neufchatel, Newman Smyth, Phillips Brooks, Henry Ward Beecher, of America; by Thirlwall, Maurice, Kingsley, Stanley, Wace, Abbott, Lynch, Dale, Edward White, Martineau, and many more, in England. In short, they are the common property of that broader and more advanced school of thought in the Christian world which answers most nearly to the Darwinian school in the scientific world; though, for the special form in which they appear in this Essay, I am mainly indebted to Smyth's *Old Faiths in New Light*, and to Godet's *Lectures in Defence of the Christian Faith*. And I think we may fairly challenge a reply to it, precisely because it is not the product of a single mind, but the common property of a large and growing school of thought. As yet, however, I have not met with a single serious attempt to answer it; nor, indeed, with any serious attempt to understand how the Bible reads, to those who believe in it, in the light of the new scholarship and exegesis. Our modern sceptics, at least on the scientific side, so far as they condescend to argue with us, are content to ignore the last and most generous reading, and to carry themselves as though the Roman or the Puritan, the sacerdotal or the Calvinistic interpretation of the Biblical documents were all they had to meet; which is about as fair as if we should content ourselves with refuting the objections to the Christian Faith raised by the sceptics of the pre-Darwinian, or even of the pre-Keplerian and pre-Newtonian age, before Science had learned to utter "that sweet word" Evolution,

—a feat of which it is now so proud that it grows angry should one venture to hint that it may some day learn to pronounce a still larger and nobler word. Should, however, any man of science undertake to reply to this argument, we can promise him that many will listen to him with the most profound and eager interest, and will honestly confess the force of his argument at any point at which they may find themselves unable to meet it. And, till then, we who accept the new theology can afford to take very calmly the charge of a bigoted insensibility to reason so often alleged against us by votaries of the new science.

Indeed it may and ought to be said, even in the interest of science itself, that the charge of bigotry comes with an ill grace from the lips of men who kindle into an Athanasian ire against all who do not instantly accept as true what they themselves must acknowledge to be an unverified, though most probable, hypothesis. Bigotry, alas, is confined to no school of thought, though it is never so out of place as in the school of Christ. It is the offspring of ignorance and illwill; and is, it may be feared, quite as commonly found among those who profess to know as among these who profess to believe. For while it would be easy to name many a defender of the faith who has honestly weighed the latest hypotheses of science, and frankly accepted its "discoveries," it would not be so easy to name sceptical men of science who have earnestly studied the Bible for themselves, and have shewn an equal desire to weigh what it has to urge in its own behalf. And this, I think, we may fairly say, that until they meet the Christian argument in its best and most reasonable form, the form given to it by its most enlightened advocates; so long as they assume, for instance, that the Book of Genesis puts forward a scientific cosmogony obviously untenable, or that the Church still holds a miracle to be an infraction of law, or that the New Testament either



demands belief in doctrines rather than a good life, or teaches men to neglect the duties of this world in order to secure bliss in the world to come, and so makes selfishness rather than love its prime motive, or that it condemns the vast majority of men to an endless torment ; they shirk the real difficulties of the problem, evade the best and most advanced statement of the Christian hypothesis, and, in fine, behave themselves as foolishly as would the theologian or divine who should refute the scientific hypothesis in vogue a century ago, and pass by the science of to-day.

ALMONI PELONI.

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*DOUBLE PICTURES IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL  
AND THE APOCALYPSE.*

WE propose in this, and at least another paper of a similar kind, to speak of one of those peculiarities in their manner of thought which seem to distinguish the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse among all the other books of the New Testament. Our object is partly critical, for it will be found that our conclusions, if correct, exercise a most vital influence upon the interpretation of many important passages of both these books, especially of the latter of the two. But, while partly critical, it is mainly apologetic. The enquiry ought to throw at least some measure of light upon the great question, by no means as yet settled, whether the two books, notwithstanding all their differences, really proceeded from the same pen. This question is of the deepest interest, not merely in a Biblical, but also in a more strictly theological, point of view. While it has the closest possible bearing upon many difficult and delicate considerations relating to the principles upon which the canonicity of our New Testament books in general is to