

# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

## The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

Vol. VII., New Series. MARCH, 1903.

Number 3.

### The Question Of Miracles.

One would think it a principle too obvious to require insisting upon that every discussion of miracles should begin with a clearly defined conception of what a miracle is and what is asserted to have occurred when it is affirmed that a miracle has taken place. Nevertheless, this is a principle which has not been universally acted upon. Many of the debates which have been held as to the possibility and the actual occurrence of miracles have been vitiated *ab initio* by lack of agreement between the parties as to what it is they are talking about. If the question of miracles is only a question of size, as "theologians," according to Prof. BORDEN T. BOWNE (*The Independent* for January 15, 1903, p. 151) are apt to think—and so, a raising from the dead would be a miracle because it is so stupendous a thing and "an answer to prayer of moderate dimensions" would not,—the question could easily be settled by the simple use of a spiritual tape line. If the question is only a question of God's manifest presence and activity, then it is settled at once in the personal experience of every Christian, who in his closet or in his hours of danger or distress has "met

with God." If it is only a question of whether God's hand is outstretched for the governing of the universe, so that nothing occurs without his ordering and direction, then it is settled for every one having an eye for final causes, who will observe the course of nature or the progress of history at all; everything that occurs is a miracle. But if it is a question of something more specific than these things, we must surely begin by defining just what it is, that we may know precisely what to look for. Nor ought it to be so extremely difficult to say what we mean by a miracle that we should be justified in declining the task. Certainly, it may cost us some care. As Dr. C. M. MEAD points out in his admirable discussion of the definition of a miracle included in his volume of Stone Lectures (*Supernatural Revelation*, N. Y., 1889, pp. 96), our definition may err either by overstatement or by understatement.

**Overstatement:** "It is an overstatement," he says, truly,  
**"Violations Of Nature."** "when a miracle is spoken of as a violation, or suspension, or transgression of the laws or forces of nature." A miracle is not performed by or

through the forces of nature or according to its laws: but is, as MILL accurately defines it (*Logic*, Book III., ch. XXV., 32), "a new effect supposed to be produce' by the introduction of a new cause." It does not "violate" any law of nature that a new cause should produce a new effect. It does not "suspend" any law of nature that the intrusion of a new force should be followed by the appearance of a new result. It does not "transgress" any law of nature that the new force is productive of new effects. The mark of a miracle, in a word, is not that it is contra-natural, but that it is extra-natural and more specifically that it is super-natural. It is not conceived as a product of nature, different from or contrary to the ordinary products of nature; but as the product of a force outside of nature, and specifically above nature, intruding into the complex of natural forces and producing, therefore, in that complex, effects which could not be produced by the natural forces themselves. These effects reveal themselves, therefore, as "new"—but not as neo-natural but rather as extra-natural and specifically as super-natural.

**Understatement:** It is, therefore, on the other hand  
**Products of** an understatement,  
**Natural Forces.** when a miracle is spoken of as the product of the ordinary and known forces of nature under the manipulation of the infinite intellect of God, or even as the product of occult and so-called "higher" natural forces brought into action by the omniscient control over nature exercised by God. By such definitions miracles are reduced to the category of the natural. For the forces of nature, under whatever guidance, can produce nothing but natural effects. They are thus confused with what we know as "special providences." The

mark of a miracle is, on the contrary, just that it is not the product of "second causes," under whatever wise and powerful government: that it is not analogous, therefore, to the effects which we produce in our intelligent adaptation of the forces of nature; but that it is the product of a new force introduced into the complex of natural forces and producing in that complex a new effect.

**In Nature, But Not of Nature.** No doubt this effect thus produced is an effect in the complex of nature, and exhibits itself, in that sense, as a "natural" effect. But it is nevertheless an effect to the production of which—when conceived barely, in itself alone—the natural forces working along with the force which really produces it, contribute nothing whatever. These natural forces are continually operative during the whole process of the production of the miracle. The miracle takes place in and among them, not "violating," "suspending" or "transgressing" them. And therefore the new force acts in harmony with the natural forces operative at the time and place where the effect is produced; and the product of the new force appears thus without wrench in the complex of natural effects, and takes its place in this complex, as amenable to these forces so far as they are operative upon it, and, therefore, subject to all natural law. The wine made at Cana, *e. g.*, was true wine, and produced all the effects of wine; it was made under the conditions of the natural forces then and there operative, and became at once on its production subject to them; but it was not made by them, nor with their co-operation. The complex of nature furnishes thus the condition of a miracle; but in this sense only, that a miracle occurs in nature, and its product takes its place in the complex of nature; but it is in

no sense, in whole or in part, the product of nature. It is of the differentia of a miracle in a word, that it is, as distinguished from a subjective effect, objectively real, and takes place in the external world. And thus are set aside the attempts sometimes made to explain miracles "by transposing the marvels from the physical to the mental world"—as if the wine at Cana, for example, was not really wine, but men's sense of taste was so affected as to make what was really water seem wine to them.

**Definition Of Miracle.** A miracle then is specifically an effect in the external world, produced by the immediate efficiency of God. Its differentia are: (1) that it occurs in the external world, and thus is objectively real and not a merely mental phenomena; and (2) that its cause is a new, super-natural, force, intruded into the complex of nature, and not a natural force under whatever wise and powerful manipulation. ROBERT BROWNING has caught the idea when he cries:

"Here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can—  
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and lo! they are!"

The question as to miracles, therefore, is simply whether any such events as this have ever occurred. Have there ever occurred effects which are just a "flash of the will that can," of the will that exists behind all laws, that made them, and that acts at discretion through, along with, or apart from them? The question as to miracles is, therefore, not precisely the question of the supernatural. There are modes of the supernatural that are not miracles. There is the subjective supernatural: and miracles are objective occurrences in the external world. There are objective supernatural occurrences in the exter-

nal world, the proximate causes of which are to be found in what we know as "second causes," though these "second causes" are so utilized by God as to produce results to which they are inadequate when left to their "natural working:" these we call "special providences." There is the supernatural, of the entire world-order, due to the immanent concursus of God, by virtue of which the world-order is a providential order. The question is whether over and above all these, there is another mode of the supernatural,—the mode we call miracle,—the mode of the immediate as distinguished from all mediate operations of God's power in the external as distinguished from the subjective world.

**Grounds of Denial of Miracles.**

There are many, of course, who answer this question at once and emphatically in the negative. And the number of these, we are told, is increasing. The grounds taken up by such are generically three. They usually declare that such events are impossible; or that they are, though abstractly possible, incapable of being proved to have taken place; or that though, of course, sufficient evidence of their occurrence would be conceivable, as a matter of fact sufficient evidence of the occurrence of such events has never been produced. We have enumerated these three grounds in what seems their natural order, and the order moreover in which they probably actually lie in the minds of objectors. It may cheerfully be admitted, however, that they are ordinarily explicitly defined in the consciousness of objectors in the reverse order. When the evidence for a miracle presents itself before their minds it scarcely finds hospitable reception; and when that evidence is exceptionally abundant and cogent, they are

compelled to face the question, What kind and amount of evidence would avail to convince them that an event outside of the natural order had actually taken place. Honesty compels them to reply that no amount of evidence would convince them of the real occurrence of such an event, and they thus discover their real position to be that a miraculous event is as such incapable of proof. Why such an event should be incapable of proof, however, is not immediately obvious. If it occurs, it ought to be capable of being shown to have occurred. Ultimately, therefore, this ground will exhibit itself as incapable of occupation, except on the postulate that the occurrence of such an event is in itself impossible. The assumption of the impossibility of an event outside of the natural order may be believed, therefore, to underlie and condition, consciously or unconsciously, the thought of all those who at once and emphatically deny the existence of such events, whether they base their denial explicitly on this postulate, or on one of the other grounds enumerated. Logically, at all events, it seems to come to that.

**Fundamental  
Ground  
Confessedly  
Assumption  
Of Their  
"Impossibility."**

That this is true is naively allowed, indeed, with sufficient frequency. Mr. ALFRED W. BENN, for example, published some years ago in *The New World* (September, 1895), a paper, the whole purpose of which was to contend that disbelief in the supernatural, among historical investigators, is a *posteriori*,—the result, not the cause, of modern destructive Biblical criticism. The "science of historical evidence," he tells us, "refuses to accept any story not intrinsically probable, except on the testimony of eye-witnesses, or, at the very least of contemporaries" (p. 43 f).

Whence it would seem to follow that "the science of historical evidence" would accept even intrinsically improbable stories,—that is, in this context, accounts of miracles,—on the testimony of eye-witnesses; that it would be at least conceivable that the testimony of eye-witnesses could be so strong and convincing that it would compel the acceptance of such stories. Yet shortly afterwards (p. 440 f), Mr. BENN with great naïveté drops the remark: "If the evidence of eye-witnesses could convert the rationalists to a belief in miracles, incredulity on this point would long ago have ceased to trouble the apologist." The confession here that the testimony of eye-witnesses, as formerly demanded, is available for miracles; but that the rationalist is invincible of the reality of miracles by any testimony whatever—that is, that the possibility of miracles is *a priori* denied by him—is flagrant. Let us turn, however, from the incidental to a formal confession that this is the real state of the case. Dr. WILLIAM MACKINTOSH finds himself unable to admit that any supernatural events lie at the origin of the Christian religion. He says:\*

"With a large and ever increasing number of cultivated men we hold that miracles not only 'do not' but cannot happen. . . . We confess that as here stated in synthetic form, this assumption has all the appearance of an unwarranted begging of the whole question in dispute, and a summary setting aside of the claims of Christianity to be a supernatural revelation. This has been so strongly felt, that in order to avoid the appearance of a *petitio principii*, many even of those critics who deny the supernatural nature of Christianity, set out by admitting the possibility of miracles in the abstract, while maintaining that the alleged miracles of Christianity do not satisfy their canons of credibility: and no doubt

\**The Natural History of the Christian Religion*, p. 20.

this intermediate position has a certain air of judicial candour, and of dispassionate consideration. But it cannot be concealed that this mode of treatment opens the door to endless controversy and gives no hope of a conclusive settlement. . . . It is impossible to determine the amount of evidence which is necessary to prove the reality of an alleged miracle, or to say when it is that the presumption against such an abnormal occurrence is overcome. . . . Indeed, it is easy to see that to grant the possibility of miracle in the abstract, is to surrender the whole position to the orthodox theologian. To say the very least, it is to place the supernatural character of Christianity among the things which cannot be disproved, and to throw the door open to a never-ending because resultless controversy between the scientific and the religious spirit. . . . Nothing more need be said to demonstrate what an inconclusive procedure it is to rest the denial of the miraculous element of the Gospels, as KUENEN in Holland and HUXLEY in this country are disposed to do, on the inadequacy of the historical evidence. When a critic like KUENEN professes to believe, or not to dispute, the possibility of miracle in the abstract, and to be willing to leave that as an open and unsettled question, but at the same time shows himself very exacting as to the evidence for the miraculous element in Christianity as a whole, or for the miraculous works recorded of Jesus in particular, and declares that the evidence for these does not satisfy his canons of credibility; the likelihood is that unconsciously to himself, there is an *arrière pensée* in his mind equivalent to the denial of the possibility of miracles; at least, that is the impression which the rigour of his criticism will make on the minds of others."

We may suspect, then, that a more or less clearly formulated assumption of the impossibility of miracles, underlies the strenuous opposition to the admission of their reality, of all this class of writers: as we may contend that only on this assumption may the denial of their reality be made good.

Why Are  
Miracles  
"Impossible"?

When we ask for the grounds of this assumption, however, we shall seek long for a satisfactory answer. Certainly Dr. MACKINTOSH himself, who insists that the whole case must be based on this assumption, has no sufficient reason to give for making this assumption. He tells us that, in his own mind, the origin of the conviction of the impossibility of miracle was mediated by a general view of what he calls the "religious relation:"\* that is to say, he first came to believe that man's relation to God was that of a child to his father, and this "led him on to the position that miracle is impossible." How it did so extraordinary a thing he does not stop to tell us. He defends this position, however, solely by an appeal to what he considers the implications of scientific research.

"Science," he tells us:† "has brought into view certain considerations which strongly imply the impossibility of any infraction of the immanent laws of existence. . . . Science has pushed its investigations into almost every department of existence, and in every one, physical and psychological, to which it has gained access, it has found that all occurrences, phenomena, and sequences bear invariable witness to the control of law and to the sway of order—that what is called divine action never operates irrespective of such order, or otherwise than naturally,—i. e., through, or in accordance with such order. The inference is irresistible that the same thing holds true in those departments also, if such there be, which science has not yet invaded, and the tendency is fostered in the scientific mind to assume that every fact or event, however strange, and apparently exceptional or abnormal, admits of being subsumed under some general law or laws, either already ascertained or yet ascertainable."

Accordingly—

"Modern thought holds, in the

\*P. 20.

†P. 23.

form of a scientific conviction, what was matter of surmise or divination to a few of the leading minds in ages long past, viz., that the universe is governed by immutable laws inherent in the very nature and constitution of things,—by laws which are 'never reversed, never suspended, and never supplemented in the interest of any special object whatever.'"

So far as we are able to apprehend this reasoning, it appears to lay down as premise, the discovery by science of the uniform order of nature and the conviction arising from that, that the forces of nature are adequate for all the ends of nature; and then to draw from this premise, as intermediate conclusion, that this order of nature is never invaded by its author "for any special object whatever" not provided for in its own forces and laws; and then further, as ultimate conclusion, that miracles are "impossibles."

**Failure to Make Out Such "Impossibility."** The stringency of the steps in this reasoning does not readily appear. How we can infer from any study of the ordinary course of things, however protracted, profound or complete, that an extraordinary event never occurs; and how we can infer from the conviction that such an extraordinary event never occurs, that it is impossible; it is not easy to see. An extraordinary event is by definition outside the ordinary course. Whether it occurs or not is, then, not a matter of inference from the ordinary course, however completely investigated or understood; but a matter of simple observation. And whether in the absence of such observed extraordinary events, they are "impossible," is again not a matter of inference from their non-occurrence; but must rest on some principle deeper than experience can furnish. The fact is, in other words, that the impossibility of

miracles can be affirmed only on a *a priori* grounds: Dr. MACKINTOSH'S attempt to supply an *a posteriori* ground for it was predoomed to failure. The atheist, the materialist, the pantheist is within his rights in denying the possibility of miracle. But none other is. So soon as we adopt the postulate of a personal God and a creation, so soon miracles cease to be "impossible" in any exact sense of the word. We may hold them to be improbable, to the verge of the unprovable: but their *possibility* is inherent in the very nature of God as personal and the author of the universal frame.

**The Occurrence Of Miracles A Matter of Just Evidence.** But if possible, then, as Dr. MACKINTOSH admits, their actual occurrence is a matter of experience and is a proper subject for testimony. The question of miracles, then, is after all just a question of evidence. There may still remain room for dispute with reference to the kind and amount of evidence which should be held requisite to establish their actual occurrence. It is possible to say—men have said—that only miraculous evidence could establish the actual occurrence of a miracle. But it is also very possible to show that this is a position at least as untenable as the *a priori* denial of their possibility. For,—but that is another story, and too long a story to be entered upon here and now. Let it suffice for the present that the *a priori* assertion of the impossibility of miracles is shown to be an untenable position, and that, therefore, all denial of their actual occurrence based explicitly or implicitly on that assumption (and according to Dr. MACKINTOSH all denial of it is based at least implicitly upon that assumption) falls to the ground.

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# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

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Vol. VII., New Series.

APRIL, 1903.

Number 4.

Some writers are fond of emphasizing a difference between theology and religion, to the somewhat evident and decided discredit of the former. That there is a difference no discriminating mind will deny; but at the same time every thoughtful person will recognize between one's theology and his religion a constant and vital relation: a man's conception of religious truth will inevitably determine the character of that man's religious life. A disposition to minimize the importance of theological beliefs in favor of an emphasis upon the practical duties of religion betrays a lamentable ignorance of the necessary connection between the two, a connection analogous to that existing between the heart and the arteries. Any decided change in one's conception of religious truth will sooner or later infallibly register itself in a corresponding change in his religious life. This fact has been much obscured of late years. There has been a marked effort to divorce the two, to insinuate an independence between them, to ignore or at least depreciate the importance of doctrine, to institute and force a contrast between creed and life, to suggest mere theoretical abstraction in the former

and absorb attention in the latter as alone worth the serious thought of a practical age.

Cautious, conservative thinkers have long marked this tendency and have again and again deplored it, have repeatedly and insistently asserted the vital connection between the two and have plainly advertized what seemed to them an irreparable loss sure to follow a position so irrational. Their protests, however, have been either ignored or scorned and all danger scouted as mere imagination while the reading public was constantly and confidently assured that the modern tendency meant nothing but illumination and emancipation, only a larger liberty and a deepening spirituality, a baptism of fresh power that would be felt in every department of religious faith and religious feeling; that it promised gain and nothing but gain, no possible loss in any direction.

Any reader who has kept up with the discussion from the beginning must have noticed in the last few years a very gradual but a very marked disposition to abate these claims. A careful comparison between any article appearing within the last twelve months and one put forth ten or even five years ago will show this abatement most strikingly.

peror of his dissent from certain of the views expressed by the lecturer.

J. D. D.

\* \* \*

**The Question of Miracles Again.** The bald assertion that miracles are "impossible" is, for the theist, obviously mere unreasonable dogmatism. There are very many, therefore, who, while habitually acting on no other supposition, are yet unwilling to take up this position openly. An amusing instance is afforded by Prof. PAUL W. SCHMIEDL in the course of his much talked of article, "Gospels" in the *Encyclopedia Biblica*. He opens his discussion of "the miracle-narratives" included in the Synoptics, with the eminently just remark: "It would clearly be wrong, in an investigation such as the present, to start from any such postulate or axiom as that 'miracles' are impossible" (p. 1876). But he is soon found reasoning on precisely this "postulate." He believes himself able to point out "two cases in which even one strongly predisposed to believe in miracles would find it difficult to accept a narrative of this kind on account of the time to which it is assigned." The first of these cases he describes as follows: "Luke xxiii. 44 sq. expressly, and Mark xv. 33, Mat. xxvii. 45, also to all appearance, allege an eclipse of the sun, a celestial phenomenon which, however, is possible only at the period of New Moon—i. e., shortly before the first of Nisan—and cannot happen on the 15th or 14th of a month" (p. 1878). That is to say, we must without ado pronounce a darkening of the sun "impossible" unless it occurred at the time of the month when such things can happen—naturally. A "miracle" in other words is "impossible." If "even one strongly disposed to believe

in miracles" cannot accept a simple account of a miraculous occurrence except by transposing it to a time when the event "could happen"—i. e., naturally,—and so become "possible;" what shall one who is indisposed to believe in miracles hold as to their possibility?

**Are Miracles Incapable of Proof.**

A very common refuge for thinkers of this type—thinkers, that is, who are unwilling to assert miracles to be impossible, and are yet equally unwilling to act on the presumption of their possibility—lies in drawing a distinction between the objective and the subjective. They will not assert miracles to be objectively impossible: but they are quite ready to declare them to be subjectively incredible. They may happen or they may not happen, they say: but it is all one to us,—since they cannot be accredited to us as having happened.

Its classical expression has been given to this mode of thought by DAVID HUME in the famous tenth section of his *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*:

"A miracle," he says, "is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. . . . The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact which it endeavors to establish.' . . . When any one tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life . . . if the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates; then, and not till then can he pretend to command my belief or opinion."

This statement is obviously marred by a number of logical faults, which



even those who agree with it in the main are not slow to recognize. The grossest of these is the assumption underlying its very first clause that no miracles have ever occurred,—that there lies against their occurrence the record of a uniform and unbroken—nay an unbreakable—experience. This is the very thing in dispute. Accordingly JOHN STUART MILL has properly objected that the evidence for the unbroken uniformity of nature is diminished by whatever weight belongs to the evidence that certain miracles have taken place (*Logic*, II. 155); and Prof. HUXLEY that “all we know of the order of nature is derived from an observation of the course of events of which the so-called miracle is a part” (*Hume*, p. 131). Both of these writers, however, and many others who, like them, criticise the form HUME has given it, consider the essence of the argument sound. For exceptional events, they say, in effect, exceptional evidence is required; for unexampled events, unexampled evidence; for truly miraculous events—must we not demand truly miraculous evidence? It would need therefore a miracle to authenticate a miracle, and we are thus delivered to an endless chain of miracles. Suppose the abstract possibility of miracles, therefore, if you choose: their actual reality remains, they say, in the nature of the case, incapable of validation.

**What is the Object of Testimony.**

There is much that appears exceedingly plausible in this argument. But a sound estimate of its value will, require the making of certain distinctions. When we ask for testimony to a miracle, what is it, primarily, that we are asking testimony to? A miracle is an event in the external world produced by the immediate efficiency of God. Now, what is it that

we expect testimony to establish in the first instance? That an event that has occurred in the external world has been produced by the immediate efficiency of God? Or that an event which must be due to the immediate efficiency of God has occurred in the external world? Certainly the second rather than the first. We are not saying that testimony to the nature of the causality involved is illegitimate or cannot carry conviction. Such testimony may exist and may deserve our attention or command our assent: it may even be of “miraculous” quality and cogency and so meet the express requirements of HUME’S dilemma. But this is not the testimony to which in the first instance we appeal; and it is not necessary for us to confuse the issue by attending to it here. What we seek testimony for, in the first instance, is assuredly not the miraculous nature of the activity, but the real occurrence of the alleged effect. If the real occurrence of the alleged effect is established, our causal judgment can ordinarily be trusted to do the rest. If it is credibly testified to me, for example, that a man died, and was laid in his grave until corruption had set in, and then arose well and strong at the call of another, I need no express evidence to that effect to prove to me that here is “a flash of the will that can.” If indeed the event testified to were that the sun rose as usual on the Galilean hills one April morning, I might ask further evidence than the mere proof of its occurrence, to convince me that this was due to a special, supernatural intrusion of the Divine will: and one might well hold that only miraculous testimony could establish the miraculous character of such an effect. We must operate under the guidance of one causal judgment and on the principle of an adequate cause. If we perceive an effect to belong to the

natural order we shall find it hard to credit any amount of testimony affirming it to belong to the super-natural order. But on the other hand if we perceive the effect to lie outside the natural order, we require no testimony to assure us that it must find its account in an extra-natural, or specifically a super-natural causation. The thing to be established by testimony, therefore, is in the first instance, not the nature of the cause but the occurrence of the effect—simply and solely the phenomenal occurrence.

**Only One Kind Of Occurrence.** Now all phenomenal occurrences are surely, in themselves considered, much of the same order. It makes no difference what the implication of this or that one may be,—in themselves considered they are all just phenomenal occurrences and nothing else. BUTLER we take it, therefore, is, so far, quite right, despite the sharp criticism to which he has been subjected, in contending that the fact of the occurrence of an event which we must judge to be miraculous in its cause, stands, as regards the matter of testimony to its occurrence, much on the same plane with the fact of the occurrence of any other event whatever (*Analogy* II. 2). At this point, the cause of the event does not enter into consideration at all: the only matter to be considered is its phenomenal occurrence: and no more testimony can be demanded to establish its phenomenal occurrence than the testimony which is adequate to that single result. We may be more disposed to accept on uncriticized testimony a fact that falls in with our preconceived notions than one that confounds all our previous habits of thought. But after all, the actual evidence that establishes a fact is just the criticized evidence; and not that evidence reinforced or evacu-

ated, as the case may be, by our existing prejudices. This criticized evidence, if it is sufficient to establish a fact that we should like to believe, is equally sufficient to establish one that we should prefer not to believe. In any event, it is surely illegitimate to say that miraculous evidence is requisite to establish the occurrence of a simple objective fact. That Lazarus was dead; that he had lain three days in the tomb; that he came forth at Christ's mere command: surely something less than miraculous testimony can assure us of simple facts like these—level to any man's comprehension, open to any man's investigation, liable to any man's contradiction. Or take the man born blind, whose story we read in the ninth chapter of John. Was he blind, born blind? Did he see again? Did this occur on "the man that is called Jesus making clay and anointing his eyes and saying unto him, 'Go to Siloam and wash'"—which doing, he received his sight? What single occurrence in all this narrative is there, which the testimony offered, if it prove sound upon criticism, is not sufficient to establish? Whether it be a miracle or not that is here detailed to us, we can judge for ourselves,—as indeed the happy healed one challenges us to judge. But if we hold it a miracle it is primarily the consent of our minds to his reasoning and not the weight of his testimony that determines our conviction. For the facts we are dependent on the witnesses, and they are assuredly competent to establish them. But for our conclusion as to the cause of these facts, we are standing, in the first instant at least, upon our own rational judgment.

**Theories versus Facts.** What, then, can be the source of the demand that "miraculous" evidence should be produced

for the occurrence of miracles before they can be believed to have occurred? Obviously, nothing more than this: that we feel so assured of the absolute validity of a world-view which excludes miracles, that no evidence can accredit a fact to us which does not fall in with that world-view. We have formed our conviction that the universe is a closed system admitting of no intrusion from without: and we assume that this conviction is so solidly established that we can admit the occurrence of no event which is inconsistent with it. But this is just to say that we deny *a priori* the possibility of miracles. And what is that but to drop back onto the rejected principle that miracles are of themselves impossible, while pretending to admit their abstract possibility and to deny only that they can be proved? In all such demands we are really making the major premise in the examination of the credibility of any alleged fact of a miraculous nature, the precedent assumption of its impossibility. And, of course, if we begin with assuming that miracles are impossible, we shall find little difficulty in concluding that no conceivable evidence will accredit the occurrence of a miracle to us. The validity of this reasoning clearly depends, however, on the validity of our assumption of the irreflexibility of our non-miraculous world-view. And the question presses, Have we a right to assume that no event can possibly have occurred, which, if it occurred would compel a revision of the conception we have formed of the universe? The real dilemma, then, is clearly between the world-view we have formed for ourselves and the facts that come to us, accredited by testimony sufficient in itself to prove their reality—apart, that is, from the presumption cherished against them in our minds on the credit of our world-view. In other words, Are

the facts that are to be permitted to occur in the universe to be determined by our precedently conceived world-view? Or is our world-view to be determined by a due consideration of all the facts that occur in the universe? This is the simple dilemma that is raised. And it is clearly just the dilemma between an *a priori* determination of facts or an *a posteriori* determination of theory.

#### Plasticity of Theories.

From the point of view of the truly scientific spirit it cannot be doubtful on which side our decision should fall. We have the highest scientific authority for affirming indeed that no theory of the universe—or of any part of it—has any claim to finality. In a famous address, delivered at Belfast in 1874 (*Forty-fourth Report of the British Association*, p. xciv.), Prof. TYNDALL declared: "Every system which would escape the fate of an organism too rigid to adjust itself to its environment, must be plastic to the extent that the growth of knowledge demands." Twenty-eight years afterwards, speaking from the same platform, Prof. DEWAR announces the same principle of "the plasticity of scientific thought," as the very condition of scientific investigation. The scientific investigator, it seems, "does not claim for his best hypotheses, more than a provisional validity." "He does not forget that to-morrow may bring a new experience compelling him to recast the hypotheses of to-day." These are wise sayings. And on this doctrine of the plasticity of all truly scientific theories the door is thrown wide open for the admission of miracles,—on the sole condition that the occurrence of such fact-phenomena as find no explanation in the current anti-miraculous theories is established on appropriate and sufficient evidence. A demand for ex-

traordinary evidence for the establishment of the occurrence of such fact-phenomena is the measure of the non-plasticity of our hypotheses: and if this demand rises so high as to require "miraculous" evidence before a "miraculous" fact will be admitted to have occurred—that is to say, so high as practically to affirm the impossibility of miracles, their incredibility to the pass that no evidence could establish them—that is but the proclamation of the absolute non-plasticity of our theories. Or are we to contend that our hypotheses are to be plastic on all other sides, but absolutely rigid on this: that they may be corrected, revolutionized, replaced on the emergence of facts infringing on them in every other respect, but never in this respect: that no phenomenon can possibly be allowed to have occurred—whatever the evidence of its occurrence may be—which would entail the confession that God has intervened in nature, and would therefore compel such a revision of our theories as to the relation of God to the universe as would involve the confession that Law is not the sole sphere of his activity? Obviously this amounts merely to the arbitrary imposition of a dogmatic naturalism upon scientific theory. All revisions of scientific theory are to be welcomed, forsooth, except such a revision as will provide for the theistic conception of the free relation of the Creator of all to the

product of his handiwork! Such an arbitrary imposition of naturalistic limitations upon our theory of the universe can certainly have no claim to be called scientific. It is simply the culminating instance of a mode of procedure which Prof. TINDALL truly declared (with a different application in his mind, no doubt) has always "proved disastrous in the past, and is simply fatuous to-day." Not even the "scientist" can be permitted to erect his arbitrary theorizing into the rigid test of fact.

**Miracles a  
Matter of  
Evidence.**

There seems to exist no sufficient reason, therefore, why we should pronounce a miracle incapable of being proved to have occurred. A miracle in itself is just an occurrence in the external world. And it is hard to see why if it occurs it may not be shown to have occurred. Whether it occurs or not is just a matter of experience, and all actual experience is assuredly capable of being authenticated as actual. Unless there lies behind the assertion a veiled assumption of the impossibility of miracles, there is really no meaning, then, in the assertion that miracles are incapable of being proved to have occurred. There is along this pathway, therefore, no escape from the simple truth that whether miracles have occurred or not is just a matter of experience; and that means, just a matter of testimony. B. B. W.

# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

## The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

Vol. VII., New Series.

MAY, 1903.

Number 5.

### Thorough Dealing With Miracles.

Professor MÉNÉGOZ, a few years ago (1894), delivered a remarkable "opening lecture" before the Faculty of the Protestant School of Theology at Paris, on "The Biblical Notion of Miracles." He began by determining with unusual accuracy just what the Biblical notion of a miracle is, and ended by recommending his audience to adopt quite a different notion for their own. In the course of this lecture he reproaches "apologists" with too often contenting themselves with vindicating "the possibility of miracles in a theoretical, abstract manner, without applying their principle to the texts of the Bible as they stand." The establishment of the abstract possibility of an immediate intervention of God, he justly rejoins, is no proof of the reality of the miraculous facts recounted in the Bible (p. 32).

### The Thoroughness Of Their Assailants.

Certainly "apologists" cannot plead the example of the assailants of miracles as an excuse for any half-measures in dealing with the subject. Even those who intrench themselves in the assertion that

miracles are impossible are seldom inclined to rest their case on that apparently sufficient reason for rejecting the Biblical miracles. DAVID HUME, for example, who begins by assuming that miracles are impossible and proceeds by striving to demonstrate that they are incapable of proof, yet is not satisfied until he pronounces directly upon the actual evidence submitted for the occurrence of the alleged miraculous events lying at the foundation of the Christian revelation. As the result of his *a posteriori* examination he declares roundly that "there is not to be found in all history, any miracle attested" sufficiently to give us assurance that it happened; nay that "no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof." Mr. HUXLEY follows HUME in this. After having explained that no amount of testimony could ever prove to him that a miracle had occurred; but at the most would only enlarge his conception of the powers of nature; he nevertheless closes by adducing HUME's *a posteriori* declaration as the pronouncement of an historical expert, and therefore conclusive in the case. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this

"thorough" method is provided, however, by the author of *Supernatural Religion*. In the First Part of the book he argues quite on the line of HUME that miracles are impossible and incapable of validation *per se*. But then he suddenly turns and devotes much the larger part of his bulky work to a labored and detailed examination of the trustworthiness of the documentary evidence for the miracles of the Gospels. There is certainly something very odd in this procedure. The appearance is very strong that these reasoners do not themselves thoroughly trust their *a priori* reasoning, and feel the necessity of assailing the direct evidence adduced for the actual occurrence of miracles, before their case against them acquires solidity. In any event, it is made very clear to the Christian student that his task is not completed until he has faced fairly the assertion that no miracle has as a matter of fact ever been shown to have occurred.

**Two Separate Questions of Fact.**

We may perhaps wisely take a hint from the author of *Supernatural Religion* in approaching the consideration of the evidence for the actual occurrence of miraculous events. "Now it is apparent," he observes, on the last page of his First Part, "that the evidence for miracles requires to embrace two distinct points: the reality of the alleged facts, and the accuracy of the inference that the phenomena were produced by Supernatural Agency." That is as much as to say that the rejection of the miraculous element in the *origines* of Christianity, say for example—and it is with this that we are primarily concerned—may proceed on two distinct lines. It may either be affirmed that the extraordinary events recorded in the Scrip-

tural narrative never occurred. Or it may be admitted that these events occurred; but it be at once denied that they are in the strict sense miracles. Both lines of attack are actually in use, and they are sufficiently distinct to demand separate treatment. We shall take them up, therefore, in their order.

**The Biblical Miracles Certainly Happened.**

Is it possible, then, we may ask, first, to deny that the establishment of Christianity in the world was accompanied, or perhaps we may even say effected, by a series of extraordinary occurrences which were looked upon, at the time at any rate, and by the agents by whom Christianity was established and propagated, as "the wonderful works of God?" We do not ourselves see that it is possible to deny this. And we are gratified to observe that we have the fullest support in this judgment of so excessively cautious a writer (the epithet is used advisedly) as Dr. WM. SANDAY. In a recent paper (*The Expository Times*, Nov. 1902), Dr. SANDAY lays down at the outset of his study of the question of miracles "the proposition that miracles, or what were thought to be miracles, certainly happened." "The proof of this," he adds, "seems to me decisive:" and again, "the evidence is nothing short of stringent." "There is then, I conceive," he concludes, "practically no doubt that at the time when the miracles are said to have been wrought there really were phenomena which those concerned in them with one consent believed to be miraculous."

**The Evidence For Their Occurrence.**

Of course the evidence on which this historical judgment rests cannot be drawn

out in detail here. This evidence consists, it may be briefly said, not only in detailed and formal accounts of extraordinary occurrences narrated with a sanity and sobriety, a combined restraint and confidence, which is unique in all the literature of marvels. It includes also numerous incidental allusions to the occurrence of such events, as notorious matters of facts, such as implicate the whole community in the testimony in the most natural and convincing way. And it includes further historical sequences from these events such as interweave them so into the very fabric of all subsequent history, that history becomes inexplicable save on the assumption of their actual occurrence. Dr. SANDAY, in the brevity he required to study, contents himself with adducing the testimony of Paul, of Christ himself, and of the Gospel narrative, reinforced by the exceptionally good historical quality of the evidence given in each case. That such incidental allusions to his own extraordinary works as Paul lets fall in, say, Rom. xv. 18, 19; 1 Cor. xii. 5, 8-10, xiv. 18-19; 2 Cor. xii. 12; Gal. iii. 5, should be otherwise than true, Dr. SANDAY justly pronounces simply impossible. Such narratives as that of the Temptation, which turn just on the assumption of Jesus' power to work miracles, are wholly inexplicable if he wrought no miracles at all; and the whole character of these narratives negatives the hypothesis of invention. The detailed evidence of the Gospel narratives cannot be set aside on any critical hypothesis of the origin of the Gospels: for these narratives are on any theory of the composition of the Gospels imbedded in the sources that lie behind our Gospels, whatever these sources may be conceived to be. The hypothetical Ur-Marcus, the problematical Matthean

*Logia*, the supposed Lucan "Special Sources," the "triple tradition" operated with by Dr. ABBOTT—any and every "source" of the Gospel narratives conceived or conceivable—are all alike in this. They all give us not only a miracle-working Jesus, but a Jesus whose miracle-working is an essential element in his manifestation, and yet whose miracle-working is of a sort peculiar in its restraint and fitness to himself. The consistent historical portraiture that is the result of this varied representation is, as Dr. SANDAY well argues, of itself a crowning testimony to the reality of the details. Add that the very existence of Christianity, founded as it is on the preaching, say, of the Resurrection of Christ, adds its cogent evidence to the same effect. We do not think that Dr. SANDAY goes too far in saying that the proof in some of its elements is "as stringent as a proposition of Euclid," and in its entirety must carry conviction to every reasonable judgment. It really cannot be rationally doubted that such extraordinary events did happen.

**Can Criticism  
Vacate This  
Evidence?**

As over against this overwhelming weight of testimony to these extraordinary facts, those who are "set to oppose" their reality have really nothing to urge, except on the one hand an alleged cloud upon the authenticity of the witnessing documents, and on the other an *a priori* presumption against the occurrence of a series of facts so extraordinary. It would be idle to close our eyes to the vigor with which these lines of assault have been exploited. But it would be a crime to close our eyes to the futility of them at their best,—and worst. The critical assault on the genuineness and authenticity of our Biblical books has been a dismal failure.

After a century's conflict and the lavish expenditure of nothing less than splendid scholarship and the brilliancy of genius itself upon the assault, things remain just as they were before. As regards the New Testament, indeed, this has long been apparent to even the dullest apprehension; and we must not permit our perception of it to be clouded by the recent recrudescence of the turmoil of the hopeless battle. But even were the matter different, and the explosion of criticism that has filled all the nineteenth century with its noise, had really scattered the New Testament documents into fragments, the case for the real occurrence of these facts would remain essentially the same. For, as we have already pointed out, the testimony of these documents to the extraordinary accompaniments of the origin of Christianity is pervasive, and survives in the very fragments. Leave us only the four major epistles of Paul; leave us only the hypothetical *Logia*—leave us only the "triple tradition"—and we have essentially the same quiet, constant and convincing testimony to the occurrence of these extraordinary events. The fact is, this testimony is not the testimony of a document here and there only—much less of a passage here and there scattered sparsely through the documents: it is the testimony of all the remains of primitive Christianity, and you would have to destroy the entire body of remains of primitive Christianity to be rid of it. You would have to represent Christianity as having no *origines*: as growing out of nothing: as appearing suddenly full-fledged in the second century without historical beginnings: if you would be rid of its extraordinary foundations. It is safe to say that so far as the critical assault is concerned, the extraordinary events belonging to the first Christian age stand unassailable.

**What of the  
Presumption  
Against Such  
Events?**

It may well be enough to say that this presumption is *a priori*; and as such must pass away in the presence of the actually authenticated events. Such a presumption can be treated as a bar to the admission of facts, thoroughly authenticated, only when pressed beyond a presumption and turned into an *a priori* assertion of the impossibility of the extraordinary. It may not be without its uses, however, to examine a little into the nature and force of the presumption that can be said to lie against the actual occurrence of the extraordinary facts testified to in the Biblical record,—say, for instance, in the pages of the New Testament. To estimate this with any precision there are a number of distinctions which imperatively demand to be noted.

**These are  
Events Attested  
As Having  
Occurred.**

We must, then, in the first place, distinguish between the general presumption that lies against the anticipated occurrence of extraordinary events, and the particular presumption that lies against the attested occurrence of a particular extraordinary event. The improbability that a given extraordinary event will occur, considered in itself alone, is something very different from the improbability of a given extraordinary event having actually occurred which is testified to as having really occurred. We may calculate the chances, say, against a dead man's rising from the dead in the abstract, and appal ourselves by their immensity. Suppose, however, that such a rising from the dead is actually attested as having really taken place. We cannot carry our

What, then, shall we say of the presumption against the actual occurrence of such extraordinary events?



abstract calculation of chances over to this case. The matter is now very different. We have not the bare probability of the fact occurring to consider, but, in addition to that, the probability of the testimony offered to it being true. Nor is there here to be considered merely the abstract probability of the truthfulness of testimony in general; but the concrete probability of the particular testimony in hand for the special case under consideration being true. And the probability of this testimony being true rests in part on the known or presumable trustworthiness of the witnesses available in the case, anterior to their testimony to the particular fact now under consideration. To operate in such an instance with the bare abstract presumption against extraordinary events is in effect to deny *a priori* the value of testimony altogether.

**The Testimony To These Events Has Stood the Ordeal Of Criticism.** And now, another distinction claims our attention: the distinction, to wit, between the presumption against extraordinary facts presented to our acceptance upon the credit of uncriticized testimony, and the presumption against these same facts presented to our acceptance on the credit of criticized testimony. There does lie a presumption against the occurrence of extraordinary events, as such, because of their very character as extraordinary. And this presumption is not wholly lifted by the mere circumstances that a fact is brought before us not merely as a possible fact, with the query, what is the likelihood or unlikelihood of the occurrence of such a fact; but as an alleged fact, which is reported as having actually occurred. It is the natural effect of this presumption that the testimony to its occurrence should be carefully

scrutinized and subjected to a thorough criticism. Until this is done, we naturally and properly receive the alleged fact with a certain suspension of judgment. But the case is very different when the testimony stands the scrutiny, and comes forth from the criticism intact. We have no right in this case to speak autocratically of its being a common experience for testimony to be mistaken, or worse. We are no longer dealing with testimony in the abstract, but with this particular piece of testimony; and it must be estimated not on general maxims applying to testimony on the average, but must be accorded the particular degree of credit established as its right by this scrutiny. Otherwise we withhold *a priori* from a special piece of testimony the character it has vindicated for itself under tests,—it may be under stringent and most convincing tests.

**These Events Are Particularly Probable Events.** Nor is this all. We must distinguish further between the presumption that lies against extraordinary events in general and the presumption that can be held to lie against the particular extraordinary events we have under consideration. The special character of the extraordinary events under consideration has its bearing also, on the estimate we should form of the likelihood of their actual occurrence. Extraordinary events witnessed as actually occurring; and witnessed as occurring by exceptionally good testimony, which on testing approves itself as not likely to be mistaken or misleading; may yet raise a presumption against themselves by their character—or, on the other hand, may powerfully commend themselves to us by their inherent character, as events which assuredly ought to have occurred. We may not arbitrarily

withhold from the series of extraordinary events which are witnessed to us in the Biblical record for example, the advantage that accrues rightly to them from their exceptional nobility. "It is true," says J. H. NEWMAN—though Dr. NEWMAN had exceptionally strong temptations not to see this—"it is true, that the miracles of Scripture, viewed as a whole, recommend themselves to our reason, and claim our veneration, above all others, by a peculiar dignity and beauty." We have only to compare the miracles ascribed to Jesus in our canonical Gospels, for example, with those ascribed to him in even the soberest of the apocryphal Gospels; or the miracles accredited to the apostles in the Book of Acts with those accredited to them in the numerous apocryphal Acts; or in general the miracles described in the Biblical narratives with the marvels that crowd the pages either of the Greek romances or of their doubles, the early Christian hagiographies; to be smitten in the face with the unspeakable elevation of the former above the latter. If the latter may be taken as typical inventions of the mythopœic faculties, the former are immeasurably removed above their powers. This contrast is in no wise destroyed by the rare presence in the Biblical record of an isolated instance of a miracle in some degree assimilable to the type of the marvels of human imagination; or in the mass of frivolous or bizarre marvels that elbow one another in the uncanonical narratives, of a rarer instance of a marvel that in some degree approaches the Biblical miracles in dignity or appropriateness. The contrast is too striking to escape even the most careless eye; and it can scarcely be contended that the presumption against the occurrence of the one type of extraordinary events is as great as that that lies against the other.

**These Events  
Constitute a  
Mutually  
Supporting  
System.**

Nor yet can it be fairly contended that there is no distinction between the presumption that lies against the occurrence of an isolated marvel, and the presumption that can be held to lie against an extraordinary event which is a constituent part of a body of extraordinary events that are bound together in a system. It certainly would require far more evidence to accredit an extraordinary event lying off to itself out of all connection with others, than it would to accredit an extraordinary event standing in close relation with others like itself, which unite with it in a system creating a kind of "nature" within the limits of which each of the individual events—extraordinary as each is in itself—acquires a certain naturalness. The Biblical miracles are anything but a simple mass or congeries of unrelated marvels: they are organically related and constitute as a whole a sort of a penumbra around a great central fact which lends a kind of necessity to them all. They lead up to, manifest, and lead down from the Incarnation, and in its light appear as in a sense natural events. One might as well expect a lamp to burn without rays extending from it into the surrounding darkness, as the Son of God to descend from heaven without trailing clouds of glory as he came. We have gone beyond our purpose in the concrete manner in which we have stated this fact. We mean now only somewhat abstractly to call attention to the organic relation which the whole body of Biblical miracles bear to one another, sustained as a whole by a great central event, and to point out that in such circumstances the presumption against the occurrence of each of the constituent facts is something very different from the

presumption that might be held to lie against an isolated marvel standing off to itself.

**These Events  
Serve a High  
And Necessary  
End.**

Finally, we must assuredly distinguish between the presumption that lies against a meaningless marvel and the presumption that can be held to lie against an extraordinary event that serves an obvious purpose, apparently not to be served except by it. A series, or let us rather say a system, of extraordinary events that serve a high purpose; that are, so to speak, needed; and that find their excuse—if we can make use of so low a term where we ought rather to say, their necessity—in a lofty end which they attain; surely any presumption that lies against an isolated and meaningless marvel has no application to them. If we conceive of the universe as a machine made by God, and just because made by the All-wise and All-powerful One, perfect in its structure and in all its functioning; we shall hardly find adequate occasion for any extraordinary activities on his part. Within the limits of its operation why should he intervene to do of himself what he surely might leave his machine to do of itself? Any fancied need of interference might seem at bottom even an arraignment of the perfection of the great Artificer. Or leaving to one side this mechanical conception, if we think of the march of history through time as following a right line of development from the first creative impulse, working out its destiny without departure in any respect from its inherent and increate character, it might be difficult to credit the interposition of extraordinary events into the complex of its steady and straightforward movement. But conceive the entrance into this process of any deflection of movement from

the straight line of onward progress. Then, the interposition of corrective, that is to say, of extraordinary measures, becomes at once fully comprehensible. The entrance of sin into the world, is in this sense the sufficient occasion of the entrance also of miracle. Extraordinary exigencies (we speak as a man) are the sufficient explanation of extraordinary expedients. If, then, we conceive the extraordinary events of the Scriptural record as part and parcel of the redemptive work of God—and this is how they are uniformly represented in the Scriptural record itself—surely the presumption which is held to lie against them merely as extraordinary events, is transmitted into a presumption in their favor, as appropriate elements is a great remedial scheme, by means of which the broken scheme of nature is mended and restored.

**Real  
Significance of  
Miracle.**

A peculiarly happy expression is given to this essentially Biblical conception of the place of the extraordinary in the economy of God, by Dr. A. KUYPER. We cannot refrain from quoting a few sentences here (*Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*. E. T. p. 414, cf. pp. 420-428).

“A miracle is not to be conceived as an isolated phenomenon, which appears without causal connection with all that exists; but as the victorious, continuous working of the Divine energy, by which God breaks through all opposition, and in despite of disorder, brings his cosmos to that end which was determined for his cosmos, in his eternal counsel. It is out of the deeper basis in his will, whereon the whole cosmos rests, that this mysterious power works up into the cosmos; breaks to pieces the bonds of sin and disorder which hold the cosmos in their grasp; and so influences the whole life of the cosmos, out of the centre of humanity, that in the end it must attain the glory predestined for it by God, in order in that glory to render to God the purpose

God had in mind in the very creation of the cosmos. All interpretations of miracles as arbitrary incidents, out of connection with the palingenesis of the whole cosmos, to which our Lord refers in Mat. xix. 23, and thus as standing in no relation to the whole metamorphosis which awaits the cosmos at the last judgment, so far from exalting the honor of God, degrade the Creator of heaven and earth to the proportions of a juggler. The whole recreative action of the Divine energy is a continuous miracle that shows itself in the radical life-renewal of men through regeneration, in the radical life-renewal of humanity in the new Head which it receives in Christ, and shall finally produce a similar life-renewal of all nature. And it is only because these three effects do not run disconnectedly side by side, but are organically bound together, so that the mystery of the regeneration, incarnation and apocatastasis forms one whole, that this wondrous energy of recreation exhibits itself in one extended history, in which what once were considered incidental wonders could not be lacking."

**The Real  
Presumption is  
For Miracles.**

If there is any validity in this noble outlook, the presumption against the extraordinary events of the Biblical record seems fairly to be transferred to the other side of the account. It would be strange if in the process of the redemption of the world from sin, there were not thrown up in extraordinary occurrences signs of the extraordinary renewal in process. There appears to be no reason then why we should not affirm with all emphasis that the extraordinary events of the Biblical record must be accepted on their own appropriate evidence as facts that actually occurred. But we are no sooner preparing to claim the results of this conclusion than we find the hand of the author of *Supernatural Religion*—and not his hand alone, but with it that of many others—laid on our arm, and hear him saying, "Stop! Supposing it be granted that these

extraordinary facts occurred: you must yet face the further question whether they were in the strict sense of your definition miracles. Establishment of the reality of the alleged occurrences, still leaves open the accuracy of the inference that the phenomena were produced by direct supernatural agency." We are not so sure that this is at all the case. But to humour these who suppose it to be so, we shall, on a subsequent occasion, seek to give this specific question also some grounded reply, asking the question:—Are the extraordinary facts of the Biblical record to be held to be miracles in the strict sense?

B. B. W.

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"Primitive Semitic Religion To-day" is the title of a book from the pen of Dr. SAMUEL IVES CURTISS, and recently from the press of the Messrs. Fleming H. Revell Co. It is the record of the results of investigations extending over three years, and laboriously prosecuted through sixteen months. During the course of these investigations "Syria was visited three times, Palestine twice, and the Sinaitic Peninsula once."\* They were prosecuted at some personal peril, and at the cost of much personal hardship. The purpose of Dr. CURTISS' investigation was to provide an *a posteriori* and so a scientific answer to the question "What was the primitive religion of the ancient Semites?" While this was the primary problem to the solution of which Dr. CURTISS set himself, his ultimate problem—one of equal if not greater moment than that just mentioned—was to determine the relation between this "primitive religion of the ancient Semites" and the religion

\**Prim. Sem. Rel. To-Day*, p. 17.

# The Bible Student.

CONTINUING

The Bible Student and Religious Outlook.

Vol. VII., New Series.

JUNE, 1903.

Number 6.

## **Influence of the Apostle Paul.**

What a ceaseless source of inspiration and exhaustless fund of suggestion is furnished by the career of the apostle Paul! Writers seem never to weary of the study of his life, it seems to be an inexhaustible treasure house from which students are continually bringing forth things new and old. So deep and wide is the impress that he left upon the formative stage of Christianity that in these later years profound and philosophic writers of analytic cast of mind have set themselves assiduously to prove that he dominated the nascent theology of the Christian dispensation and perverted it from that simplicity which was in Christ into something Jewish, scholastic and hard, which they love to call Paulinism, and from which they aspire to lead a revolt.

To those wanting in philosophic profundity and critical acumen this attitude towards the apostle Paul has always seemed strange, particularly in view of his somewhat conspicuous loyalty to Christ and Christ's teachings: his uniform exaltation of Christ; his constant jealousy for Christ's name and honor; his habitual appeal to Christ's glory as the ground of every duty; his undeviating fidelity to

Christ's gospel as the sole theme, the ultimate and inexorable criterion of sound teaching, and the measure of abiding success; his personal and passionate devotion to Christ pulsating like an everlasting life all through his writings, reminding one of that classic illustration of his soldiers' love for the great Napoleon, when one of them said to the surgeon "Cut a little deeper and you'll find the Emperor"—all these familiar and constant characteristics of Paul make it hard for the plain reader to appreciate the justice of a view which seeks to prove a departure of Paul from Christ and to recognize any urgent call for a reform of Paulinism in the interests of him whose life and love was Paul's only inspiration, and whose gospel was his exclusive theme, and whose cross was his sole and his supreme glory.

Such analyses, however, do mightily emphasize the influence of the man; scarcely a greater tribute could be paid him than to call a theology dominant twenty centuries after his death "Paulinism."

**"The Great  
Apostle to the  
Gentiles."**

By common consent Paul is referred to as "the great Apostle to the Gentiles." This

quately, was the nice instrument prepared by God to work out his purposes, possessed the authority of God, was the instruction of God to Israel, was properly introduced by the statement, "Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel," and referred to as "the words of Jehovah."

**The Codification Of the Law by Moses Timely.** On the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt writing is mentioned as practised among them. Moses is the writer. It is expressly affirmed that he composed several songs, and wrote an account of the battle with Amalek, the Book of the Covenant, an itinerary of the journey of Israel from Pithom in Egypt to the eastern bank of the Jordan at Shittim: poetry, history, law statistics. Such productions of the mind and pen were not new to men. Human thought had long been finding literary expression in these divers manners. Written poetry in celebration of martial deeds was a form of literature familiar to the educated men of Egypt in Moses' time. It was, moreover, already the custom for Egyptians who traveled in foreign parts to write itineraries of their journeys. Kings had the story of their wars recorded in narrative form and depicted. History and literature had obtained a place for themselves in the life of men. And Moses was simply obeying the literary impulses of his times when he celebrated events in song, and recorded them in prose, and drew up a list of encampments. Was he doing so when he formed a code of laws? The codex of Hammurabi brilliantly answers that question. In the codification of the laws Moses was following the literary and practical instincts of his time. The practical value of codification and publication had long been discerned by man. And so it comes to pass that, exam-

ined in the light of history, the work that the Hebrew records ascribe to Moses is seen to be just such work as the enlightened founder of a nation and the organizer of its civil and religious life would, or at least might, have undertaken in the days of Moses. There is no anachronism in his work.  
J. D. D.

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**An Infinite Nature versus God.**

GOETHE is reported to have remarked once to LAVATER "A voice from heaven would not convince me that water burned or a dead man rose again." This sufficiently energetic expression of invincible scepticism is the index of the strength of the prejudice against the supernatural, which leads many into the adoption of any expedient rather than to admit the occurrence of real miracles. Mr. HUXLEY's expedient is not, like GOETHE, to deny that the event happens, no matter what the evidence for it may be; but to deny that any event that happens, no matter how extraordinary it may be, is beyond the powers of nature. "Nature," he says, "means neither more nor less than that which is; the sum of phenomena presented to our experience; the totality of events, past, present and to come. Every event must be taken to be a part of nature, until proof to the contrary is supplied. And such proof is, from the nature of the case, impossible."\* "No event," he explains, "is too extraordinary to be possible."† "Every wise man will admit that the possibilities of nature are infinite."‡ "In truth, if a dead man did come to life, the fact would be evidence, not that any law of nature had been violated, but that these laws,

\*Hume, p. 129.

†Ibid., p. 131.

‡Ibid., p. 133.

even when they express the results of a very long and uniform experience, are necessarily based on incomplete knowledge, and are to be held only as grounds of more or less justifiable expectation."§§ The most apparently impossible event, "for aught we can prove to the contrary," "may appear in the order of nature to-morrow."\*\* Accordingly on the happening of anything extraordinary Mr. HUXLEY would not infer "miracle," but only "enlarge his experience and modify his hitherto unduly narrow conception of the laws of nature;" that is, he would "frame new laws to cover our extended experience."\* To men of this mind, it is clear, the proof that the extraordinary events recorded in the Biblical narration really happened would never prove the occurrence of "miracles." They would assume at once only that they had hitherto misconceived the capabilities of the powers inherent in nature, and proceed to "frame new laws to cover the extended experience."

**Non-Miraculous Christianity.** A position not essentially different from this, is occupied by many Christian theologians of the "liberal" type. For example, Prof. MÉNÉGOZ in his address on *The Biblical Idea of Miracle*† argues that little towards the validation of "miracles" has been accomplished when it has been proved that the alleged facts are really historical—as he is frank to admit can be proved in the case of very many of them. It still remains to be proved that these historical occurrences are "miracles."

"When it has been demonstrated to us," he says, "that all the facts related in the Bible are *historical*, it has not yet been proved that they are

§Ibid., p. 181.

\*\*Ibid., p. 184.

\*Ibid., p. 183.

†P. 40.

due to a special and miraculous intervention of God. In certain cases it is possible to prove absolutely conclusively the reality of an extraordinary phenomenon; but the proof stops there; it cannot proceed further; it is impossible to demonstrate that this extraordinary fact is due to a supernatural divine action, that it is not the effect of a natural cause. We must make full account of the impossibility of proving a miracle. If the Academy of Medicine sees a leper healed by a word, it will seek for the natural causes of this effect, and will not regard itself as in any way bound to see in this cure the finger of God. Facts exceedingly extraordinary may be observed among the fakirs of India, the secret of which our Christian missionaries seek after, but in which, despite their miraculous character, they refuse to recognize supernatural phenomena."

To men like Prof. MÉNÉGOZ, therefore, the establishment of the actual occurrence of the extraordinary events narrated in the Scriptures, still leaves the question open whether "miracles," strictly so-called, have ever occurred. They are predisposed to refer all such events to natural causes, and to assume beforehand that they happen along the lines of natural law.

**Legitimate Enquiry After Law.** This attitude of dogmatic rejection of the very idea of a "miracle," it is scarcely worth while to turn aside to reason with. Essentially unreasonable in itself, it is not accessible to reason. To demand that, in all our investigations of the miraculous, we shall take with us, as our major premise, the proposition that the truly miraculous is impossible, is the foreclosure of all discussion. It is the arbitrary imposition of an *a priori* theory of the relation of God to the universe upon all investigation, and therefore the fatal limitation of the results of the investigation to the bounds of the preconceived theory. Only foregone conclusions can be

reached under such conditions, and, as we start with our conclusion, we may as well save ourselves the labor of the journey by which we pretend to reach it. If it were only these theoretical deniers of the possibility or provableness of miracles that we had to deal with, we might suitably decline the task, therefore, of inquiring whether the extraordinary facts recorded in Scripture and validated as actually occurring, may not be subsumed under the category of natural law. But as Dr. MOZLEY points out\* this question is raised by a very different class of persons also, and in a very different spirit. There are many who have not foreclosed the question of the possibility or of the provableness of "miracles," and who do not approach the study of the Biblical "miracles," therefore, with the foregone conclusion that they must be subsumed under the category of "natural law,"—though they stretch that category beyond the breaking point—who yet in their legitimate efforts to understand the real character of these "miracles" moot the question whether they may not be, and are not to be conceived of as, wrought through the medium of natural forces and, therefore, within the domain of natural law. This is a perfectly legitimate question to raise at this point, and it deserves a candid consideration and a fair solution before it can be affirmed with confidence that any events deserving the name of "miracles," in the strict sense, have ever occurred.

**The Biblical Idea of Miracles High.** In approaching the consideration of the question thus raised, in this candid spirit, the first fact of importance that meets us is that the agents in the performance of the wonderful works recorded for us in the Scriptures, and

\**Lectures on Miracles*, p. 118.

the agents in recording their occurrence for us in the pages of the Scriptures, are unanimous in viewing them, not as extraordinary events performed through the medium of natural forces, but as the immediate products of the energy of God. We have already had occasion to refer to Prof. MÉNÉGOZ's lecture on *The Biblical Idea of Miracle*. To Prof. MÉNÉGOZ's own notion of what a miracle is, we attach very little value: it is a notion which grows naturally out of his peculiar theological position in general. But the very peculiarity of his theological position (which involves, among other things, emancipation from the authority of Scripture) has perhaps conduced to his reading Scripture, on a point in which it is not quite at one with the so-called "modern spirit," with open eyes. At all events he seems to us to have caught and stated the Biblical idea of a miracle with unusual exactness and accuracy, and we shall avail ourselves of his words to state what we believe that idea to be.

"In all these narratives," he says,\* "the miracle is invariably considered a phenomenon contrary to the natural order of things. It is precisely this that gives it its peculiar character, its character of miracle. I have no wish to contend that these facts, so far as they are historically established, really took place contrary to the laws of nature. This is a question we are to discuss later. What I wish to say is that the Biblical writers saw in the miracles which they recount, not facts which are natural, and simply surprising, astonishing, extraordinary, but phenomena which are contrary to the natural course of things, or as we should say, to-day, contrary to the laws of nature."† "I have reached the assurance that the Biblical notion differs in nothing from our current notion, from the popular and historical notion, which sees in miracle a violation of the laws of nature, or, if you prefer it, a suspension of those laws, or a derogation

\**The Biblical Idea of Miracle*, p. 25.

†P. 25.



from those laws. . . . The miracle is always considered a supernatural intervention of God in the natural order of things. This conception of the writers of the Old and New Testaments was also that of Jesus Christ. That is made clear to us by that word of his to his disciples—which was no doubt hyperbolic but very characteristic of Jesus, 'If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you would say to this mountain, 'Remove hence and be cast into the sea,' and it would be cast thither.' It could scarcely be declared more clearly that a miracle is contrary to the natural order. And I add that I am convinced that Jesus and the apostles firmly believed in the reality of all the miracles recounted in the Old Testament,—as the authors of the New Testament did not for a moment doubt the reality of the miracles that they reported in their writings."\* "We see that in reducing the miracle to a natural fact, produced by laws of which we are ignorant to-day but which may be discovered to-morrow, we destroy the Biblical idea of the miracle, and shake instead of strengthening, as we imagine, faith in the miracle itself. This is one of the minor causes of the feebleness of an apologetic which, while asseverating its orthodoxy, nevertheless more or less deserts the doctrines. In contrast with the apostles, who *accentuate* the miraculous character of the working of Jesus, in order to throw the greatness of his person into relief, these apologists in the effort to obtain from our contemporaries the admission of the truth of the evangelical accounts, endeavor to *attenuate* their miraculous character, and even to efface it as far as possible. This tendency will suffice to reveal to us the difference between their conceptions and those of the Biblical writers."†

**Is the  
Biblical Idea  
Authoritative?**

Now, of course, the value we attach to the idea of the nature of a miracle entertained by the Biblical writers and by the workers of the miracles recorded in the Bible, will naturally vary very much. There are some of

us who look upon the authority of these teachers as so high, that the ascertainment of their view of the matter will settle the question for us. Others, no doubt, will, like Prof. MÉNÉGOZ himself, attach no more importance to the ascertainment of their view than they would to the ascertainment of the conception of Plato as to the origin of the world. Surely this is, however, an extreme position. Surely, even on the lowest estimate of their authority as teachers, some significance should be attached to the conception of the nature and mode of a miracle characteristically held by all those through whom these works have been wrought. The notion of a miracle entertained by Jesus and Paul, say, by whom these extraordinary works were certainly wrought, if the historicity of any of the Biblical miracles be granted, is certainly worthy of our highest respect, and should not be set aside except on the most decisive grounds. So much weight as this, in any event, should surely be accorded to the Biblical notion of a miracle.

**Some Biblical  
Marvels  
Undoubtedly  
"Miracles."**

The next thing that strikes us regarding the extraordinary events recorded in the Scriptures is that some of them, at all events, cannot possibly be conceived to have been wrought through the medium of second causes. If they be adjudged historical and to have actually occurred, they must needs be conceived as the immediate product of the divine energy. DESCARTES says crisply: "*Tria mirabilia fecit Dominus; res ex nihilo, liberum arbitrium, et hominem Deum.*" We may for our own purpose be permitted to amend this, by saying there are three of the extraordinary works of God recorded in Scripture which can by no finessing

\**Ibid.*, p. 27.

†*Ibid.*, p. 30.

be subsumed under the category of natural law: Creation, the Incarnation, and the Resurrection of Christ. And the admission of the truly miraculous character of these three, will not only itself suffice to fill the category "miracle," taken in its strictest sense, with an undeniable content, and so to vindicate the main proposition 'that miracles have happened;' but will tend to drag into that category others in their train. Says a solid writer, with much point:

"The history of the Old Testament commences with the first miracle on record,—that of a creation by a Creator. The history of the New Testament begins with the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of man. The former of these two is the distinctive article in the creed of the theist, and denied by none but the atheist. The latter of the two is the distinctive article in the creed of the Christian, and denied by none except those who must forfeit that name. Between, or intimately connected with, these two commencing and crowning miracles of the Bible, so strangely alike and so strangely unlike, are found arranged all the other miracles on record, deriving from these two an explanation and a meaning which nothing else can furnish. It is not enough to say that the man who, on the authority of the Bible, believes in the creation and the incarnation,—that is to say, the man who is not an atheist or an infidel,—is bound in consistency to believe, on the same authority, every other miracle of Scripture. That is true. But much more than this is implied in those two grand manifestations of almighty power, that stand as sentinels at the commencement and the close of the record of God's supernatural acts upon the earth; and much more that is fitted to cast light on the proper nature and evidential character of miracles."\*

**How Large Is  
This Class?**

That the act of Creation was an immediate operation of God's power without all means, is inherent in the very nature of the

\*BANNERMAN, *Inspiration*, p. 58.

case. The matter is scarcely less clear in the case of the Incarnation, which consists in the intrusion of the very person of the Son of God himself into the sphere of law. Nor can there lie more doubt in the instance of the Resurrection of Jesus. If on his death he really "descended into hell,"—that is to say, both the Divine Spirit and the human soul that had hitherto been clothed in the body that hung on the tree, departed into "the other world"—then, his resurrection involved something over which "natural forces" could have no power—namely the return of the departed Spirit and soul to the clay. And if this be true, it would seem to carry with it the truly miraculous character of all resuscitations from the dead, whether recorded in the Old or in the New Testament. It may not be a matter of surprise when Prof. HUXLEY speaks of a resuscitation of a dead man as capable of possible subsumption under a law of nature. But we are confounded when a Christian theologian writes: "With our imperfect knowledge of the conditions of life, we are not justified in saying with confidence that the dead could not be restored to life by some, to us, unknown combination of physical forces."\* Are then life and death questions of merely physical forces? Can physical forces in any conceivable combination be accorded the power to compel the soul to return from Hades and reinhabit its earthly tenement? One would like to know what conception Dr. BERNARD entertains of life—and especially of human life—and of the restoration of life to a dead body. Certainly he never learned from Scripture to treat matter as the Lord of life, or to see in physical forces the source of human vitality. From the resurrection of the dead we may advance to other mi-

\*Dr. J. H. BERNARD of Dublin in *Hastings' Bible Dictionary*, III. p. 868.

acles which have to do with spiritual entities, such as, for example, the cure of demoniacs, which can scarcely be subsumed under the operation of natural forces. And by another line of advance we would proceed to all miracles of a distinctively creative nature, such as the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the turning of water into wine,—in both of which the production of artificial products due ordinarily to manufacture and man's device are in question. But we need not go far into detail. It is enough to call attention here to the certainty that some of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures—however many, however few, makes now no difference—are veritable "miracles," "flashes of the will that can," without possibility of explanation on any other basis; and to the natural tendency that exists to work out from them as a centre to the inclusion in the same category of others more or less like them. Just because some are certainly miracles of this order, a presumption is raised that others also may be of this order; and this presumption may not unnaturally grow upon us until we are inclined to assign to the same group many which in themselves would never have suggested this classification.

**Abstract Explanations versus Concrete Happenings.**

A third important fact now claims our attention. This is that we have no right to apply our abstract categories to the Biblical miracles in a mechanical manner. The question is not, in the case of each of them, whether such an effect as that produced can possibly be produced by natural forces; but rather whether it was on the occasion recorded probably produced by natural forces. The conditions and circumstances must be taken into account; and it is whether the effect recorded

can be believed to have been produced by the natural forces present and active at the place and time of its production that we need to investigate, and not the merely academic question whether a similar effect is capable of being produced by natural forces in other times and circumstances than those that then obtained. Telegraphs, telephones, wireless telegraphy did not exist in Biblical times and cannot be utilized to explain the Biblical marvels: nor can any other appliances not then existent and in use. Men seem often to proceed in their reasoning on the assumption that, if any possible way can be imagined in which natural forces can be made to simulate the effects of miraculous action recorded in Scripture, it is fair to assume that these effects were produced by means of these natural forces operating in this way. Nothing could be more hopelessly academic than such an abstract manner of dealing with concrete facts. At this rate, the tricks of the magicians of Egypt would be made to confound the miracles of Moses. We have no right to call in for the explanation of these marvels any other natural forces than those that can be shown to have been present and operative at the time and place of the performance of the marvel. We have no right to assume that Jesus made use of wireless telegraphy to ascertain that Lazarus was dead: that the secrets of chemistry were utilized by him in the making of the wine at Cana: that a hidden magnet was employed to make the axe-head rise in the water; and the like. The point never is, Whether natural forces may not be made to simulate these effects? The question is, What were the actual forces really employed for their production? It is remarkable how many of the so-called natural explanation of the miracles of

Scripture become absurd when they are confronted with the conditions of time and place.

**The Test of the Pudding Lies in the Eating.**

So true is this, that probably the very best refutation possible of the notion that the Biblical miracles may be the product of natural forces would be supplied by just the attempt to apply it throughout the whole list. Attempts to do this were actually made, as all know, by the Rationalistic interpreters of the end of the eighteenth and opening of the nineteenth century. The classical instance is the explanation of the Gospel miracles which was essayed by Dr. PAULUS. Each miracle was carefully expounded as a natural occurrence: and in the effort to carry this method of exposition through, a mass of improbabilities, of bizarreries, was accumulated which presented a greater impossibility to belief than the supernatural itself. Probably no such series of interpretations invented to-day, could exhibit the gross bad taste and crass absurdities of that of PAULUS. But it is certain that none would succeed any better. The strength of the suggestion that the Biblical miracles may have been the product of natural forces, lies in its vagueness; once attempt to explicate it in detail, and it is sure to break down of its own weight. STRAUSS himself executed justice on PAULUS and pointed out that his stories involved a greater miracle of inaptitude than the miracles themselves could involve of power. Such experiences certainly should teach us at least that either the recorded miracles were veritable miracles, or else the events never occurred as recorded. No middle ground is tenable.

**"Miracles" Only One Class of Supernatural Events.**

But, it may be said, even when full allowance is given to these considerations there yet remain some among the marvels of Scripture which may be believed to have been wrought through the medium of second causes. Indeed, there are some in connection with the working of which second causes are explicitly mentioned as their proximate causes. This is no doubt true. We can have no interest in contending that all the marvels of Scripture are, without exception, miracles in the strict sense. It is enough to show that some of them are such beyond question, and that the presumption is that many more belong to this variety of marvels. Let it be conceded that others may possibly belong to the order of "special providences,"—that is, events brought to pass obviously by God indeed, but through the medium of second causes. And let it be conceded that between these two classes there may stand certain others of the correct classification of which—whether as "miracles" or "special providences"—we may justly cherish some doubt. This is a natural state of affairs with reference to a series of wonderful works, recounted to us in popular rather than in scientific language. Meanwhile it stands firm that "miracles" in the strict sense have happened: that accounts of them are given us in the Scriptural record; and that the class tends to grow ever greater in number as we attend more closely to the details of the accounts as they are set down in the record; to the obvious convictions of their narrators regarding them; and to the limitations of time, place and circumstances of their occurrence.

B. B. W.