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ARTICLE IV.

PLACE AND VALUE OF MIRACLES IN THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

BY REV. JOSEPH HAVEN, D.D., PROFESSOR IN CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

As in all warfare, so in the attack and defence of Christianity, the battle-ground changes, from time to time, as the enemies of the truth change their tactics, or direct their assault now upon this, now upon that point in the line of our defences. At present, it is the *supernatural element* in Christianity that is more directly and fiercely assailed. Around this the battle rages. And, what is not a little remarkable, it is from the professed friends of Christianity, from those who call themselves its disciples, rather than from its open and avowed enemies, that this attack mainly proceeds. It is no longer the Jew, the Mohammedan, the pagan, but the rationalist and sceptic, within the sacred precincts of the Christian temple, and before its very altars, who take it upon themselves to call in question, or utterly to deny, the supernatural element of the Christian religion.

Miracles, we are told, are no longer to be relied upon as evidences of the divine authority of the Christian system. However appropriate they may have been in a remote and less enlightened age, they are now quite out of place. As civilization and science have progressed, they have left this method of thinking and reasoning wholly in the back-ground. It is now understood, by all cultivated and philosophic minds, that in the domain of matter everything moves on by fixed and determined laws, which are never violated, never suspended, and which never change. This invariable operation, this universal order and unity of physical causes, is the first principle of the laws of nature, and whatever is at variance with this principle must be unconditionally and unhesitatingly rejected. The material universe is discovered to be one great system of self-sustaining and self-

evolving laws, a grand whole moving on in harmony, and adequate to itself. Even the idea of original creation is now coming to be rejected as an antiquated notion, in view of the recent developments of science with respect to the origination of species. In a word, any interference with or deviation from the established and eternal order of things, is a physical impossibility, which no amount of evidence can substantiate; and the miracles, so called, of the Christian system, which in a ruder and darker age were considered as its main supports and defences, are, in reality, at the present day the chief hindrances to its acceptance.

Such is the position taken by the modern sceptic and rationalist. It is a position which the advocates of Christianity are called upon to meet. Mere denunciation and reproach of those who thus reason, will not suffice. Ecclesiastical censure will not meet the case. There is a demand for thorough investigation and solid argument. The position is one which overlooks and commands one of the most important defences of the Christian system; and to leave it in possession of the enemy, is to abandon Christianity itself as incapable of defence. Under these circumstances, it becomes necessary for the disciples of the Christian faith to re-examine, with special care, the whole matter of the *supernatural element* in Christianity, and possibly to re-adjust, in some respects, their own position with respect to it.

There are, in any such investigation, three questions to be specially considered: What is a miracle? What *proves* a miracle? What does a miracle *prove*?

I. *What is a miracle?*

It is of the first importance in this controversy that the advocates of the Christian system should understand precisely what it is that they are contending for,— how much and how little is involved in, and essential to, the idea of a miracle. If we mistake not, some uncertainty, perhaps we might say some vagueness, of opinion exists on this point in many minds; some are disposed to include more, and others less, under that term. With some it means one

thing, and with some another. Sometimes it is used to denote whatever is *wonderful*, as prodigies, portents, matters inexplicable, — the *mirabile* of the Latins, the *τέρας* of the Greeks. Others, again, restrict the term within much narrower limits, understanding by it some *contradiction* or *violation* of the laws of nature. By others, it is regarded as a *suspension*, rather than a contradiction, of those laws; while yet others would prefer to call it a *deviation* from, rather than either a contradiction or suspension of, natural laws. A miracle, according to some, is a departure from all law; with others, a departure not from all, but merely from all *known* law.

What, then, is a miracle, and how much shall we include under it? Is it any and every wonderful, apparently inexplicable thing? Is it a direct violation or contradiction of the laws of nature? Is it a suspension of those laws? Is it simply a deviation from them? Is it a thing without and above all law, or has it laws of its own?

If we seek for that which is *essential* to a miracle, in distinction from what is merely *incidental* or *occasional*, we shall find the ultimate idea to be that of divine interposition to accomplish, by special and supernatural agency, a specific end, not otherwise attained. Whether the result be a violation of the laws of nature or not, whether it be a suspension of those laws or not, it must at least be something beyond the power of mere nature to accomplish; something supernatural, requiring for its accomplishment divine interposition and agency. Whether this agency be immediately exerted, or mediately, through human or other instrumentality, the power must be ultimately divine power, and that not according to the ordinary course of divine operations in nature. Where we have this, we have all that is essential to a miracle, — Deity interposing to accomplish, by special agency, an effect not to be reached in the natural course and order of events.

This is accordant with the definitions given by standard authorities. Thus *Webster* — “an event or effect contrary to the established constitution and course of things, or a

deviation from the known laws of nature ; a supernatural event." The term *miraculous* he defines as — "performed supernaturally, or by a power beyond the ordinary agency of natural laws ; effected by the direct agency of almighty power, and not by natural causes."

Johnson gives the following : "*miracle* — 1. a wonder ; something above human power (*Shakspeare*) ; 2. [in theology] an effect above human or natural power, performed in attestation of some truth (*Bentley*) ; *miraculous* — effected by power more than natural (*Herbert*) ; *miraculously* — by power above that of nature (*Dryden*)."

The essential idea, as expressed in these definitions, is that of *divine interposition and agency* — not necessarily involving any contradiction or suspension of natural laws ; but only a power working above and beyond those laws ; *praeter*, but not of necessity *contra*, ordinem naturae. Whether the latter idea is really involved in the true notion of a miracle, we shall presently inquire.

As the subject relates particularly to the miracles recorded in scripture, a brief examination of the terms used in the scriptures to denote miraculous events may cast light on the question before us. The terms most frequently employed in the New Testament to denote miracles, are *δυνάμεις*, *σημεῖα*, and *τέρατα*. When the idea prominent in the mind of the writer or speaker is that of the divine power, or source, from which the miracle emanates, the term *δυνάμεις* — Hebrew *גְּבוּרָה* — *strength, power*, is employed ; plural, *mighty works*. Thus the miracles of Christ are designated in Matt. xi. 20, 21, 23 ; xiii. 58 ; Mark vi. 5, 12 ; Luke x. 13 ; and those of Paul in Acts xix. 11. The term is also used by Paul himself, in his epistles, as 1 Cor. xii. 10 ; Gal. iii. 5.

Where the prominent idea is not that of the power employed in working the miracle, or the source whence it emanates, but rather the object to be accomplished by it, *its evidential force on the mind of the spectator*, the term employed is *σημεῖον* — Hebrew *אֵיָה* — *sign*, by which anything may be known, and specifically, by which the

divine power and presence may be recognized. Miraculous events are, $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\alpha$, inasmuch as they *indicate* or evince the presence and power of the supreme Being. Thus 1 Cor. xiv. 22, the gift of tongues is called "a *sign*, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not;" and, i. 22, the Jews are said to require a *sign*. So Jonah was a *sign* to the Ninevites, Luke xi. 30; and the child Jesus was to be a *sign* spoken against, Luke ii. 34. In all these cases, the miracle is designed as a token by which the unbelieving world may be convinced — and so, is $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$, a *sign*. Accordingly the various miracles wrought by or required of our Lord and his apostles, *in proof* of his divine mission, are termed $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\alpha$. Thus, Matt. xii. 38 and Mark viii. 11, 12, the Pharisees seek a *sign* from him; that is, something miraculous, to prove that he was divine. So Luke xi. 16. So also John ii. 18 and vi. 30: What *sign* showest thou? and ii. 23: Many believed on him, seeing the *signs*, or miracles. The miracle at Cana, John ii. 11, is spoken of as the beginning of miracles (*signs*), on the part of Christ. So also Nicodemus, John iii. 2: No man can do these miracles (*signs*) which thou doest, except, etc. See also John vi. 2, 14, 26; vii. 31; ix. 16; xx. 30. The term is also applied to the miracles wrought by the disciples, in proof of their divine mission, after the ascension of their Lord. Thus Mark xvi. 17, 20: These *signs* shall follow them that believe; The Lord working with them, and confirming the word with *signs* following. In these and the like passages, we have the clue, if we mistake not, to the true significance of the miracles of the New Testament. They are tokens or evidences of the divine commission of the person who performs them. The cases above cited, under the term $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\alpha$ especially, seem to refer to miracles as *evidences producing conviction and belief in the mind*.

Where not so much the *end* or *object* of the miracle is the idea prominent in the mind, but rather the effect of it in *exciting astonishment or fear*, the term $\tau\acute{\epsilon}\rho\alpha\varsigma$ — *wonder, prodigy* — is employed; *always, however, in connection with $\sigma\eta\mu\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$* . Thus, Acts ii. 19: Wonders in the heaven above,

and signs in the earth beneath, — *τέρατα* — *σημεῖα*; vii. 36 : Wonders and signs in Egypt and the Red sea; John iv. 48: Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe; Acts ii. 43: Many wonders and signs, done by the apostles. See, also, iv. 30; v. 12; vi. 8; xiv. 3; xv. 12, where the same expressions are used with reference to the miracles wrought by the apostles. The terms are sometimes employed, also, with reference to the miracles, or pretended miracles, of false prophets, as in Mark xiii. 22, and Matt. xxiv. 24, and 2 Thess. ii. 9.

The use of *τέρας* in connection with *σημείον*, in this manner, is evidently borrowed from Hebrew usage, which in like manner connects the corresponding words — *מוֹפְתִים* and *מוֹתְרוֹת*.

A miracle, then, so far as the scripture use of terms can guide us, is some wonderful event, such as requires divine power to perform, and which may therefore be regarded as a sign or indication of divine presence and agency.

That a miracle is not any and every wonderful or even inexplicable thing, we need hardly pause to affirm. All miracles are wonderful, but not all wonders are miracles. Everything is wonderful on its first occurrence. The first observation of an eclipse, of the eruption of a volcano, of an earthquake, or even a thunder-storm was, doubtless, very wonderful to the observers, and may very well have passed for something miraculous, as such events still do among the savage nations.

It is necessary to the idea of a miracle that the event should be not merely wonderful,¹ but that it occur not in the ordinary course of nature's operations; that the power which produces it should be the special interposition of divine agency. This

¹ We say such as requires *divine* power to perform; for the idea that miracles may be performed by created beings, or even by evil beings, whether men or angels, other than as mere instruments of almighty power, finds, as it seems to us, no countenance in the scriptures.

² The definition by Augustine: "Miraculum voco quidquid arduum aut insolitum supra spem vel facultatem mirantes apparet" (De utilitate cred. c. 16), is certainly faulty in this respect. It is, as Trench has well observed, a definition of the mirabile rather than of the miraculum.

cannot be said of the eclipse, the storm, or the volcanic eruption. Such events, however remarkable, however fearful, and even unusual, they may be, are still within the range of natural events, and to be accounted for on natural principles. But should the order of nature be reversed, or set aside; should some event occur clearly beyond the power of natural causes to produce, and requiring, beyond reasonable doubt, the divine interposition and agency for its accomplishment, we should properly call such an event a miracle.

Now it may be difficult to decide, in many cases, what is, and what is not, a natural event; whether a given result lies within or without the range of natural causes; in other words, to prove a miracle. That is not now the point under discussion. All that we say is, that when it is once clearly settled that the phenomenon under consideration is not merely some wonderful and unusual, but still natural event, but, on the contrary, is really supernatural, and has been brought about by some special divine interposition, working to accomplish this specific result; then, and not till then, are we warranted to call that event a miracle.

On the question whether a miracle involves a suspension or violation of the laws of nature, or is merely something above and beyond nature, there is room for greater difference of opinion. According to the definitions already given, the latter would seem to be all that is essential. On this point, however, theologians are by no means agreed.

Neander, in his chapter on Miracles,¹ says: "Although from their nature they *transcend* the ordinary law of cause and effect, they do not *contradict* it, inasmuch as nature has been so ordered by divine wisdom as to admit higher and creative agencies into her sphere; and it is perfectly *natural* that such powers, once admitted, should produce effects beyond the scope of ordinary causes." Similar is the view of *Olshausen*,² who affirms "that we cannot adopt that idea of a miracle which regards it merely negatively as a suspen-

¹ *Life of Christ*, Book IV. Part ii. ch. 5.

² *Commentary*, Vol. I. p. 335, on Matt. viii. 1-4.

sion of the laws of nature. Starting from the scriptural view of the abiding presence of God in the world, we cannot regard the laws of nature as mechanical arrangements which would have to be altered by interpositions from without: they have the character of being based as a whole in God's nature. All phenomena, therefore, which are not explicable from the known or unknown laws of earthly development, are not, for that reason, necessarily violations of law, and suspensions of the laws of nature; rather they are themselves comprehended under a higher general law; for what is divine is truly according to law."

In like manner *Trench*: "But while the miracle is not thus nature, so neither is it against nature. That language, however commonly in use, is yet wholly unsatisfactory, which speaks of these wonderful works of God as violations of a natural law. *Beyond* nature, *beyond* and *above* the nature which we know, they are, but not *contrary* to it."¹

To the same effect *Augustine* remarks: *Omnia portenta contra naturam dicimus esse, sed non sunt. . . . Portentum ergo fit non contra naturam, sed contra quam est nota natura.* And elsewhere he remarks: "contra naturam non incongrue dicimus aliquid Deum facere, quod facit contra *id quod novimus in natura.*" Augustine does not admit that anything comes to pass contrary to nature, since nature is but the will of God, and he cannot be supposed to act contrary to what he has himself established. "Quomodo est enim contra naturam quod Dei fit voluntate, quum voluntas tanti utique creatoris, conditae rei cujusque natura sit?"²

Aquinas gives a similar view; whatever is wrought by divine power, out of the usual course of nature, *praeter ordinem naturae*, is with him a miracle: "Aliquid dicitur miraculum quod fit praeter ordinem totius naturae creatae, quo sensu solus Deus facit miracula."³ Only it must be *totius naturae*, and not merely *naturae nobis notae*, of nature as known to us.

The following is the view of Knapp: "Properly speaking

¹ Notes on Miracles, p. 20.

² De Civit. Dei. xxi. 8.

³ Summa Theol., Lib. I. 110, art. 4.

these miracles are wrought by God. In performing them he does not alter or disturb the course of things which he himself directs, or counteract the laws which he himself has established ; but he accomplishes by means of nature, which he has thus constituted, and which he governs, something *more* than is common, and in connection with unusual circumstances.”

Prof. Tieftrunk, of Halle, holds the following language, as cited by Hahn :² “ The supernatural cause which works a miracle, neither suspends nor confounds the laws of nature, but it uses the forms and materials of nature to accomplish its work. The miraculous consists not in being *contranatural*, but *extranatural* ; for the producing cause effects its operation in the sensible world according to the laws of sensible nature ; an operation which would not have taken place according to the ordinary course of nature, and could not have been produced by the mere causal powers of nature. The miraculous event may be compared to the unexpected entry of an independent activity into the course of nature, but which does not obstruct nor subvert it ; only we must observe that this entry and its operation do not take place by any mere natural casuality, but by a superior power acting according to the laws of sensible nature.”

On the contrary, Wegscheider³ defines miracles as unusual events, wrought by a cause superior to human power, and *suspending* the ordinary course of nature and its laws ; “ *humanas vires superantes, et rerum naturae cursum consuetum, legesque in efficiendo ejusmodi eventu tollentes.*” Nor is he without authority for this. Among the Lutheran divines, *Quenstedt*⁴ affirms : “ *Miracula vero et proprie dicta sunt, quae contra vim rebus naturalibus a Deo inditam, cursumque naturalem, sive per extraordinariam Dei potentiam efficiuntur.*” So also *Buddeus*⁵ (as cited by Knapp) speaks of miracles as “ *operationes quibus naturae*

¹ Theology, Vol. I. p. 101.

² Institutiones, p. 173.

³ Institutiones Theol. Dogmat., p. 245.

⁴ Jahrbuch des Christ. Glaub.

⁵ Theologia Didactico-Polemica.

leges ad ordinem et conservationem totius hujus universi spectantes, re vera *suspenduntur*.”

Indeed this would seem to have been the view very generally entertained by the earlier theological writers, as it is undoubtedly that of many among the moderns.

We are by no means sure, however, that a miracle involves of necessity any violation or suspension of the laws of nature. That which is *above* nature is not necessarily *contrary* to nature. A work may be wrought by divine power, and that power may be extraordinary in its nature and operation, and so the effect may lie quite without the sphere of nature's laws and the usual course of things, and yet it may involve no contradiction or suspension of any of those laws. A higher power may come in to accomplish a special result on a special occasion, yet leave the ordinary and established laws in full force. It is a law of nature that bodies of a certain specific gravity shall fall to the earth when left unsupported in the air or the water; yet a stone or a ball of iron may be projected with such force as to counteract this tendency; it may ascend instead of descend, and so continue until it passes out of sight. The law, however, still exists, still acts, — acts upon this very projectile, and that with its full force. The gravitating power is neither abolished nor suspended as regards that missile, but only *counteracted* by another and superior force. The usual effect is set aside for the time by the intermission of a higher power. In like manner, when the iron swims, or the water burns; when the flames fail to consume, or the wild beasts to devour; when the raging tempest suddenly becomes a calm, or even death itself gives place to life, there may be in all this no violation or suspension of nature's laws, but only the coming in of a higher power to prevent the ordinary and produce an extraordinary result, — a counteraction rather than a contradiction.¹

¹ It is well remarked by Trench, with respect to the miracle of healing: “that it is sickness which is abnormal, and not health. The healing is the restoration of the primitive order. We should see in the miracle not the infraction of a law, but behold in it the lower law neutralized and, for the time, put out of working by

Who will say that it may not be so? All that is *essential* to the idea of a miracle is the intervention of divine power to accomplish by supernatural means, whether directly or indirectly, a result not to be attained in the ordinary course of nature. But what is above and beyond nature is not necessarily contrary to it. That iron should swim, may be *extra-natural*, *super-natural*, yet not *contra-natural*. Nay, there may possibly be, as some suppose, even within the sphere of nature itself, a power hitherto unknown, sufficient to produce that unusual result; requiring only to be called into exercise by the divine will, when the special occasion demands; and the result would be none the less a miracle, since it is the effect of special divine interposition, and is something beyond the *usual* course of nature. But whether the *means* employed are natural or super-natural, in either case the *efficient cause* is super-natural, and the event miraculous; nor is there, in either case, any necessary violation or suspension of the already existing and established laws. Those laws may remain in full force, notwithstanding the coming in of this higher power.

a higher; and of this abundant analogous examples are evermore going forward before our eyes. Continually we behold in the world around us lower laws held in restraint by higher,—mechanic by dynamic; chemical by vital; physical by moral; yet we say not, when the lower thus gives place in favor of the higher, that there was any violation of law,—that anything contrary to nature came to pass; rather we acknowledge the law of a greater freedom swallowing up the law of a lesser. Thus, when I lift my arm, the law of gravitation is not, as far as my arm is concerned, denied or annihilated; it exists as much as ever, but is held in suspense by the higher law of my will" (Notes on Miracles, p. 4). We should not say that it was even *held in suspense*. It not only exists but *acts* as forcibly as it ever did; and the higher law of the will must *counteract* it.

To the same effect the gifted author of *Nature and the Supernatural* (p. 338). "A miracle is no suspension or violation of the laws of nature. Here is the point where the advocates of miracles have so fatally weakened their cause by too large a statement. The laws of nature are subordinated to miracles, but they are not suspended or discontinued by them. If I raise my arm, I subordinate the law of gravity, and produce a result against the force of gravity, but the law, or the force, is not discontinued. On the contrary, it is acting still, at every moment, as uniformly as if it held the arm to its place. All the vital agencies maintain a chemistry of their own that subordinates the laws of inorganic chemistry. Nothing is more familiar to us than the fact of a subordination of natural laws."

And so of the still more remarkable exertions of divine power; as, for example, the restoration of a dead man to life. It is certainly not according to the usual course of events, and, in this sense, not according to the laws of nature, that a dead body should be restored to life. We know of no power in nature adequate to produce this result. When such an event really occurs, therefore, we are warranted to infer divine interposition, and to pronounce the effect a miracle. But do we know that any of the existing laws of nature *forbid* such a result, and must be first abolished, or set aside, before this event can take place? Want of power is one thing, and opposition is another; inability is not incompatibility. The power to restore life may not be in nature, and yet may not be contrary to nature.¹

A *law*, in the sense in which that term is here used, is simply *an established mode of operation*. A *law of nature* is simply *such a mode of operation as results from the nature or constitution* of things about us in the physical world. Now if an event takes place by some other mode of operation than that now defined, that is, by some mode of operation that does not result from the original constitution of things, the latter is not necessarily a violation of the former, nor a suspension of it. For example: the change of water into wine, by an instantaneous process, certainly is not the result of the original constitution of things in the physical world. It is not the way in which nature produces wine. But is it, on the other hand, a violation of that method? Nature, that is Deity, operating in the accustomed manner, and according to the original constitution of things, produces wine by the processes of growth and fermentation. *Now* he produces it directly, without this mediate process. Is there any contradiction here of the former method? Is there any suspension of it, even? Are not the laws and processes of nature still in force, as before? Are not vines still bearing fruit, and

¹ The distinction made by *Fichte*, between an event as being *from* natural laws, and as being *according* to natural laws, strikes us as well grounded. An effect which comes under the latter designation does not necessarily come under the former.

grapes still yielding wine, just as ever? The truth is, no law is violated, none suspended; only another force is called into requisition, in addition to the usual forces of nature; or rather, the power which usually operates in such or such a prescribed mode, now, for special reasons, and for the moment, acts in another and quite unusual mode. It is simply Deity doing, at one time, in one way, what at other times, and usually, he does in another way. The result is something which we cannot account for by the laws of nature, inasmuch as it was not produced by the operation of those laws; in other words, it is a miracle. But in thus operating by a *new* method to accomplish a special end, Deity no more contradicts or violates his *usual* mode of operation than a man's travelling by steam-car contradicts his usual and slower mode of procedure by stage coach; or than the appearance of a comet contradicts the established order of the solar system, or suspends the laws of planetary motion. The fact that God usually works in a given way, does not prove that he never works in any other. Show any sufficient reason for a departure from the usual method, and such departure becomes not merely possible, but in the highest degree probable. There will be *deviation*, but not *contradiction*.

The view now taken of the nature of a miracle obviates an objection frequently urged against the argument from miracles in favor of Christianity, to wit, that they imply a contradiction or violation of the laws of nature.¹ Those laws, it is said, are universal and invariable; and whatever occurrence professes to be a contradiction of those immutable laws, bears on its face the evidence of its own absurdity and falsity. Now if it can be shown that a miracle does not of necessity imply any such contradiction or violation of natural laws; that, on the contrary, it leaves those laws in full force and play, while it comes in beside them, and

¹ The whole force of *Spinoza's* arguments against the miracles of Christianity, as also the chief strength of the assault by modern scientific rationalism, lies precisely here. The rationalist is careful to define a miracle as something contrary to the laws of nature, — a violation of fixed, established order. Set this definition aside for a truer one, and you set aside at once the main force of his attacks.

reaches beyond them, to bring about results which are not in their sphere, which lie out of their plane, it is certainly a point gained, and a difficulty met.

The case is analogous to the reasoning of the sceptic against the mysteries of the Christian faith, that they are contrary to reason, and therefore incredible. To which we reply : No, not *contrary* to reason, but merely *above* reason. So would we say of miracles ; they are not contrary to nature, but above nature.

But is a miracle a *lawless* thing ? Or may there be, on the other hand, a law of miracles ? Does the divine interposition, which produces a miraculous event, occur at hap-hazard or according to fixed and uniform principles ? May there not be as close a connection between the peculiar circumstances which call for and demand the supernatural and the divine interposition to meet the exigency, as there is between any ordinary result and the law of nature which looks to its accomplishment ? Doubtless there may be such a connection, such a law of miracles. We are not to suppose that the laws of nature comprehend *all* laws. Could we see far enough into the nature of things, we might perhaps discover a fixed and invariable connection between the *occasion for* and the *occurrence of* a miracle ; so that we could say : Given, such and such things ; and given, also, divine interposition to meet the case. This we do not know enough to affirm, perhaps never shall ; neither, on the other hand, does any man know enough to deny it.

Much less are we to conceive of a miracle as an event without *cause*. Whether there be or be not any such thing as a law of miracles, there is and must be a *cause* of them. If natural events require a cause, much more, supernatural. We are not to think of natural causes as comprehending *all* causes. Because a thing is beyond the range of ordinary and natural causes, it does not follow that it is beyond the range of all cause. To suppose that there is no cause except natural causes, is not pantheism merely, it is downright atheism. It is to shut God out of the universe which he has himself created.

To sum up what has been said: we are not to conceive of a miracle as simply any remarkable or extraordinary event; nor yet as, of necessity, a contradiction, or even suspension, of any law of nature; we are not to conceive of it as necessarily a lawless occurrence, much less uncaused; but rather, and simply, as a divine interposition to accomplish by supernatural agency a specific end not otherwise attainable.

With these remarks on the *nature* of miracles, we proceed to the second topic of investigation.

II. *What PROVES a miracle?*

In other words, what kind and degree of evidence is required, in order to prove that divine power is, in any case, interposed to produce a given effect, otherwise than by natural causes? And here we are met, at the outset, by the positive denial that any amount of evidence can prove it; the denial, in a word, that a miracle is a possible thing. Thus, in the article on the Evidences of Christianity, in the "Essays and Reviews," Baden Powell holds the following language: "What is alleged is a case of the supernatural; but no testimony can reach to the supernatural; testimony can apply only to apparent sensible facts; testimony can only prove an extraordinary and perhaps inexplicable occurrence, a phenomenon. That it is due to supernatural causes, is entirely dependent on the previous belief or assumptions of the parties."¹ Again we are told, by the same author, that "In nature, and from nature, by science and by reason, we neither have, nor can possibly have, any evidence of a *Deity working miracles*; for that we must go out of nature and beyond reason. If we could have any such evidence *from nature*, it could only prove extraordinary *natural* effects, which would not be *miracles* in the old theological sense, as isolated, unrelated, and uncaused; whereas no *physical* fact can be conceived as unique, or without analogy and relation to others, and to the whole system of natural causes."²

In the same strain we are complacently informed, by the

¹ Recent Inquiries, &c., p. 121.

² *Ib.*, p. 160.

same authority, that in the present age of physical research, "all highly cultivated minds and duly advanced intellects have imbibed more or less the lessons of inductive philosophy, and have, at least in some measure, learned to appreciate the grand conception of universal law; to recognize the impossibility even of *any two material atoms* subsisting together without a determinate relation; of any action of the one on the other, whether of equilibrium or of motion, without reference to a physical cause; of any modification whatsoever in the existing conditions of material agents, unless through the *invariable operation of a series of eternally impressed consequences* [the italics are ours] following in some necessary chain of orderly connection, however imperfectly known to us." ¹

Any interference with the established order of nature being thus assumed as a physical impossibility, which no amount of evidence can establish, we are not surprised to be told in this connection that "if miracles were in the estimation of a former age among the chief *supports* of Christianity, they are at present among the main *difficulties* and hindrances to its acceptance." ²

As regards the utter impossibility of miracles on the ground of the absolute inviolability of nature's laws, and the invariability and universality of their operation, we fear we must confess ourselves not of that order of "highly cultivated minds and duly advanced intellects" that "have learned to appreciate the grand conception." The real question for a mind thus far advanced, as it seems to us, is this: *Is there a Deity at all?* Or is all power to be resolved into this great system of universal, invariable, eternal law, — this grand machinery of "eternally impressed consequences," that goes grinding and clanking on from eternity to eternity? If the latter, then we grant that miracles are out of the question. But *if there be* a God, as some of us in our simplicity have supposed; if we may crave the indulgence of this highly cultivated age so far as to be permitted to retain the

¹ Recent Inquiries, p. 150.

² *Ib.* p. 158.

antiquated notion of a Deity at the head of affairs; and if we place this Deity where he belongs, behind all those laws, and above them all, as their source and spring, then why may not the power that usually works in and by such and such methods or laws, if occasion require, act in some other way without or above those laws? Nay, why may he not, if necessary to the accomplishment of his purposes, even reverse, or wholly set aside for the time, those usual methods of procedure which we call laws of nature? It would seem reasonable to suppose this. The power that created and established certain laws and operations of nature, so called, can surely, if he pleases, suspend those operations and counteract those laws, by bringing in still higher forces, on special occasions, and for special purposes. The laws are surely not so invariable and inviolable as to be beyond the reach of their maker; the sublime machinery of eternally impressed consequences is not so unvarying and irresistible in its steady revolutions, but that the hand which created and set it agoing can vary or suspend its movements at will. The question now is, not whether Deity *will* do this, or whether he is *likely* to do it, but whether he *can*. If he can, then miracles are not *impossible*.¹

¹ It is maintained by one of our ablest modern naturalists (Dr. Edward Hitchcock, see *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1854, Article, *Special Divine Interpositions in Nature*), that so far from there being in nature any presumption against the miracles of revelation, there is, on the contrary, an actual and strong presumption in their favor, from the fact that, to all appearances, and according to all ordinary laws of reasoning, there have been in nature itself repeated instances of divine miraculous interposition. The first introduction of organic life upon the globe, which had previously existed as an inorganic mass, through long ages and many changes gradually preparing for the future abode of vegetable and animal life, is regarded as such an interposition. The subsequent and repeated disappearance of living species, and the production of new ones in their places, which, after flourishing for long periods, have in turn disappeared, only to give place to some new and independent system, the introduction thus of new races and systems of life adapted to the changed condition of things, until we can trace at least five of these independent economies, is claimed as another evidence of miraculous interposition in nature. The final introduction of man himself upon the globe, at a period long subsequent to the introduction of vegetable and animal life, and the changes already spoken of, his appearance of a sudden, after these vast periods of time, and these successive independent groups of organic

The truth is, no consistent theist can possibly maintain such a position. The real question, when it comes to that pass, as we said before, is simply this: *are we atheists, or have we still a God?* And he who coolly shuts the door in the face of Deity, and shuts him out of his own creation, by assuming that nature's laws are absolutely invariable, universal, and eternal, and therefore any departure from them is impossible, under whatever cloak of science or inductive philosophy he may hide himself, is logically and practically an atheist.

But granting that a miracle is not impossible, still is it not, in the highest degree *improbable*, so much so that no amount of evidence is sufficient to establish the fact of its occurrence? That depends on circumstances, on the end to be accomplished, on the *reason for* the thing. Not under all circumstances and on all occasions is a miracle improbable even. We can suppose cases in which such an occurrence would be highly probable. If the occasion, the end to be accomplished, be something extraordinary and of unusual moment, especially if it be something not likely to be attained by ordinary methods, it is not, in such a case, a *pri-*

beings, had passed away, is another clear case of miraculous interposition in nature.

Should it be objected to this reasoning that the appearance of any new phenomenon, as the introduction of a new species of plants or animals, for which we cannot account by any known laws, or trace its connection with any previously existing circumstances, does not of itself *prove* miraculous interposition, it may be replied that we have as good evidence of divine interposition in the cases referred to, as we have of direct creation in any case. If the first existence of life on a planet does not imply creative power and divine interposition, neither does the first appearance of the planet itself in hitherto empty space imply such agency. The development theory of Lamarek and of the "Vestiges," and also the theory of Crosse on spontaneous generation, and the more recent theory of Darwin on the origination of new species by natural causes, could they be substantiated, would indeed set aside the argument for divine interposition in the cases above cited; but we see not why they would not also set it aside in all other cases, reducing what we have hitherto, in our ignorance, called creation, to mere development, and origination of new species by laws and forces already existing. It remains only, with Powell and other naturalists, to claim for these laws and forces an *universal* and *eternal* existence, and the circuit is complete. This point reached, and we have no further evidence of, nor indeed *occasion for*, a God, whether in or out of nature. Blank atheism is the upshot.

ori improbable that extraordinary means may be employed to effect that end.

Suppose, for example, that it were proposed to make a divine revelation to man of truths not to be learned from nature—a case certainly supposable—how can this be done save in some way beyond and above the ordinary course of nature's operations? Such a revelation will be in itself a miracle, in the highest sense;¹ and therefore there is no improbability that the mode of its communication may be something miraculous. Or suppose—the greatest of all mysteries and miracles—that God himself should see fit to become incarnate; is it improbable that a lesser and subordinate miracle should be wrought to accomplish this incarnation?

But even supposing a miracle were wrought, is it possible to establish the fact by evidence? Is a miracle capable of proof? No, says *Powell*, for it is either *within* nature, and so is really not a miracle at all; or it is *beyond* nature, and so beyond the range of evidence, and within the domain of faith. No, says *Hume*, for it is contrary to human experience, and therefore incredible. No, says *Strauss*, for the case is insupposable; a miracle is an impossibility; the inviolability of the chain of second causes is a self-evident truth, and no amount of evidence is sufficient to set aside such a truth.

This latter position we have already sufficiently considered. It is a position which only the atheist can consistently hold. Nor is it to be admitted as a self-evident truth that the laws of nature *are* inviolable and invariable. We demand proof of this. It is a position assumed by *Strauss*, and those who agree with him, but nowhere proved. So far from being a self-evident truth, it is not a truth at all. The power that makes can unmake, vary, suspend. Nor even if this were so would it render miracles impossible, since, as

¹ As Olshausen has well remarked respecting Christ: "He *himself* was the wonder (*τέρας*); his wonderful works were but the natural acts of his being."—(Com. I. p. 335.)

we have already shown, a miracle does not of necessity imply any contradiction or violation of natural law.

The position of *Hume*, that a miracle is contrary to human experience, and therefore incredible, deserves a more careful consideration than it has, in all cases, received from those who have undertaken to answer it. We do not propose here to discuss the matter in all its bearings; it is sufficient to our present purpose to say, that neither the major nor minor premise of this argument is admissible. It is not true, as the minor premise asserts, that miracles are contrary to *all* human experience. This is assumed, and it is an assumption which begs the whole question in dispute. That miracles are contrary to *general* experience is very true; else they would not be miracles. That they are contrary to *all* human experience, we deny. So far from this, if we may believe anything which does not fall under our own immediate observation, instances of divine interposition have been occurring, from time to time, along a large part of the course of human history. It is beyond all reasonable doubt, that such instances occurred in connection with the promulgation, both of the Jewish, and afterward of the Christian systems. Just where it would be, *a priori*, probable that they would occur; just where they were needed to give authority to a religious system purporting to be of divine origin; just where we should reasonably expect to find them if such things ever do occur, just there we meet with them. The facts are well attested and unquestionable. The statements clear, full, explicit. The instances, though rare, yet in the aggregate, are numerous. The witnesses are many. They were men of honesty and sobriety, of good character and good sense. They testify to plain facts, about which there could well be no mistake. They appeal to their cotemporaries for the truth of their statements; and that testimony goes uncontradicted, nay, is confirmed, by their enemies. There can be no reasonable doubt that the remarkable events to which they testify did really occur; and as little doubt that the occurrences in question were such as come under our definition of a miracle. They are

such as certainly do not occur in the ordinary course of nature; inexplicable by any known laws and forces to be accounted for only by admitting special divine interposition.

Now it is quite too late, in the face of all these facts, for the sceptic to come in with the cool assumption, that miracles are contrary to human experience. They may be contrary to *his* experience, and to ours; but why should we set up our individual experience against that of all past ages, and of so many witnesses. The fact that Mr. Hume, or any number of men, did not see a miracle, does not prove that nobody has ever seen one. Mere negative testimony cannot outweigh positive. At all events, it is a sheer begging of the question for any man to assert that miracles are contrary to human experience, when so many witnesses testify positively to the occurrence under their own observation of events, which, if they really did occur as stated, must be admitted to be miraculous.

Nor is the major premise of Mr. Hume's argument tenable. It is not true, that whatever is contrary to human experience, is, on that account, and of necessity, incredible. An event is not necessarily incredible because not known to have occurred before. Is it quite certain that nothing can take place in the world which has not already taken place? Can nothing occur for the first time? If nothing miraculous had ever occurred, in the whole history of our world previous to the introduction of Christianity, it would not follow that some events of that sort might not then occur; or that they would be altogether incredible if they should occur. Even if it were conceded, then, as it is not, that miracles are contrary to human experience, it by no means follows that they are, on that account, necessarily incredible.

But what shall we say to the position of Baden Powell, that a miracle is incapable of proof, because *in and from* nature there can be no evidence of the supernatural, while that which is beyond and above nature is beyond the domain of reason, and ceases to be capable of investigation, but must be received by faith?

True, we reply, that which is *from* nature, that is, pro-

duced by natural causes, cannot be supernatural; but not true that *in nature*, that is, within the limits and domain of nature, there can be no occurrence of the supernatural; not true that God cannot, if he pleases, work a miracle *in nature*, that is, among material, sensible things.¹ This point we have already sufficiently discussed. Nor is it true, that whatever is beyond the power of natural causes to produce is therefore beyond the domain of reason to investigate, and must be received, if at all, only by a blind and unques-

¹ The progress of natural science in the direction of scepticism, if we may credit recent indications, is one of the most strongly marked features of the present time. To those of us who have been accustomed to entertain the old-fashioned notion of creation and a Creator, it is somewhat startling to be informed, as we are by Mr. Baden Powell, that this idea is now in a fair way to be exploded, in fact, is already rejected by philosophic minds; that, on the high authority of Mr. Owen, *creation is, in fact, only another name for our ignorance of the mode of production*; that, according to the unanswerable argument of another writer, *new species must have originated either by development out of previously organized forms, or by spontaneous generation*; that, while naturalists have been disposed to deny the development theories of Lamarck and the "Vestiges of Creation," and have refused their belief to the experiments of Crosse or of Weekes in regard to spontaneous generation, a work has appeared by a naturalist of the highest authority, — Darwin, on the *Origination of Species*, — which substantiates, on undeniable grounds, the principle of the *origination of new species by natural causes*, — a work, we are assured, "which must soon bring about an entire revolution of opinion in favor of the grand principles of the *self-evolving forces of nature* (Recent Inquiries, p. 156, 157); that the grand law of *conservation*, and the stability of the heavenly movements, a principle now recognized by all sound cosmical philosophers, is only a type of the grand, eternal, self-sustaining, self-evolving powers of nature (p. 151); that so clear and indisputable has the great truth become of the invariable order and necessary connection of nature's operations, moving on by grand, universal, eternal law, that not only all philosophical enquirers are now compelled to admit it as the basis of their investigations, but even "minds of a *less comprehensive capacity*," as, for example, theological and moral reasoners, are constrained to acknowledge its force (ib.).

We might be disposed to raise a question as to the correctness of these sweeping statements, and startling facts and principles of science; but as we belong to that class of minds which is of a "less comprehensive capacity," and as we are distinctly assured that the subject is really quite beyond our comprehension, and that it is "*hazardous ground for any general moral reasoner to take, to discuss subjects of evidence, which essentially involve that higher appreciation of physical truth which can be attained only from an accurate and comprehensive acquaintance with the connected series of the physical and mathematical sciences*" (ib.), we see no way but to make our bow and retire, with the best grace possible, from a vicinity so dangerous.

tioning faith. That is not for a moment to be conceded. That which is extra-natural, is not of necessity incapable of proof. The question whether a dead man was, on a certain occasion, restored to life, is a question to be settled wholly by evidence and the investigation of reason. If the event *did* occur, clearly it was supernatural; the laws and forces of nature are not adequate to produce such a result. But *did* it occur? That is the real question; and it is a question which falls as clearly and fully within the range of rational investigation, and the laws of evidence, as any question in physical science.

Let us take a given case, — the raising of Lazarus from the grave. Two inquiries at once arise: 1. Are the facts as here stated? Did these things actually occur? Was the man dead, and was he subsequently restored to life, according to the statement? 2. If so, was the event miraculous?

As to the latter, there can be no reasonable doubt. If the man Lazarus was actually raised from the dead, it was a supernatural event. It is not in the course of nature's operations for dead men to come out of their graves, and resume the functions of life. Her laws are not to that effect. It is well remarked by Dr. Taylor, that it is as much a law of nature that a dead man shall *stay* dead, as that a living man shall die when pierced through the heart. As to the other point, it is clearly a question which admits of evidence, and must be settled just as all questions concerning matters of fact are settled, to wit, by the testimony of credible witnesses. But hold, says Mr. Powell; no testimony is sufficient to prove what is contrary to the course and order of nature. We take issue with him there. The testimony of competent and credible witnesses is capable of proving *any matter of fact*, any occurrence or event; as also of disproving it. The question being: Did this thing really occur; did this man, after he had lain three days in his grave, actually come out of it, at the word of command, and return to his home a living man? The testimony of witnesses is adequate to decide that point. The question is not now as to the *cause* of the event — how it happened, but

did it happen at all? And this is a question which men of common powers of observation, and common honesty, are capable of answering.

So of the other miracles of scripture. If the facts occurred as there stated, they are, in many cases at least, such as to leave no doubt of their being supernatural occurrences; and they are, moreover, such things as make it easy to decide whether they did, or did not, really occur.

But the so-called miracles, we are told, are, after all, mere myths, fables, illusions. They never, in fact, occurred as narrated. The witnesses are, if not imposing on others, at least themselves imposed upon. So Strauss. This is, of course, supposable; but is it probable? That the witnesses should invent a story utterly without foundation, and palm it off as reality upon those who must have known whether the events in question occurred or not, and who would at once have contradicted the statement had it been untrue, — this, surely, is out of the question. On the other hand, that the witnesses, in common with all who were spectators of the scene, were deceived and imposed upon by mere illusions of the senses, is hardly more credible. For the acts were performed publicly, in open day, and before the most prejudiced eyes. They were of such a nature that nothing would have been easier than to detect the imposition, if there were any. Take, for example, the raising of Lazarus, or the healing of the lame man, at the temple gate, by Peter and John. The observers must have known whether such things really occurred or not; whether they were facts or illusions. They were not predisposed to believe, but on the contrary to reject, the evidence of anything supernatural in the case. They had every motive to do so, but were unable. “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem, and *we cannot deny it,*” said the sorely perplexed rulers. If there had been any reason to suspect imposition, or jugglery, strange that such men should not have made the most of it.¹

¹ The theory of Strauss, it should be remarked, presupposes that the narra-

Evidently two courses, and only two, are open to him who undertakes to discredit or disprove the miracles of scripture. He must show that the events narrated did not take place; or else that they were not miraculous. The first is simply a question of fact — did such and such things happen? Was the man really dead, or really a cripple, and was he really restored in the manner stated? Now we maintain that on any question of fact, of this nature, the testimony of good and reliable witnesses, honest men, possessing ordinary powers of observation, and placed in such circumstances as to be able to observe whatever occurred, is perfectly valid evidence. The question for them to decide is, not whether the thing is a miracle, — that is a matter of judgment which every man must decide for himself, — but did the thing actually happen? This it may not always be easy to determine. But when the acts in question are performed publicly, in the sight of all men, without attempt at secrecy or jugglery; when they are of such a nature, moreover, as renders imposition and deception out of the question, — as in the case of Lazarus, of the widow's son, of the lame man at the temple gate, of the man born blind, and a multitude of other cases, — it is easy for any man on the spot to satisfy himself whether such things were or were not done. And if he be a man of good character for honesty and veracity, his testimony as to the simple matter of fact, — what he saw and heard, what he knew of the previous condition of the person thus restored, and of the change in that condition, and the manner in which that change occurred, — is perfectly valid testimony, and would be so taken in any court of justice in the world.

The case is still stronger when we can summon upon the stand, as witnesses of the fact, men who have the deepest interest in denying the whole transaction, if it were possible

tives are not authentic. If the miracles are myths, fables, the inventions of romance, then the Gospels are the invention of some later period, and not reliable historic narratives. But it is not the Gospels alone which narrate the occurrence of miracles. The Acts of the Apostles are full of them. So are the books of Moses. To make out the myth theory we must, in fact, reject not merely the credibility, but the authenticity, of the greater part of scripture.

for them to do so; but whose reluctant testimony goes to confirm the actual occurrence of the events in question. And this is precisely the case in many instances with regard to the miracles of scripture.

We hear much of the fallibility of human testimony. You cannot rely upon it, says Hume. Men often deceive, are often mistaken and incorrect in their statements. It is more reasonable that something of this sort has happened, in any given case, than that the laws of nature are reversed, or her uniformity disturbed. That, we reply, depends on circumstances. In the cases now under consideration, it is certainly more reasonable to suppose that the facts occurred as stated, than that so many men should testify to their occurrence under their own observation, and that too when, in many cases, they had the strongest motive for denying and contradicting the whole story, and yet all prove to be either false or incorrect in the statements.

Laplace has shown, indeed, that evidence diminishes rapidly in passing through successive hands; so that even supposing each witness to speak the truth nine times out of ten, by the time it has passed through twenty hands, the chances that the last or twentieth witness speaks the truth, are less than one in eight. To this it is sufficient to reply that as regards the cases under consideration,—and the same may be said of the scripture miracles generally,—we have our testimony, not from the twentieth hand, or even at second hand, but from eye-witnesses themselves, who speak what they do know, and testify what they have seen.

And here we cannot but inquire, whether the case would be, on the whole, materially altered, if in place of the testimony of others to the occurrence of a miracle, under circumstances the most favorable to honesty, and also to accuracy on the part of the witness, we had the testimony of *our own senses*. Suppose we ourselves were observers of the whole transaction,—the question being still, as before, not Was the affair a miracle? but only: Did such and such a thing take place?—Was the dead man restored to life? Was the lame man healed?—have we now the means of

deciding this question with any more certainty than before? True, we have now the testimony of our own eyes, instead of those of others. But are we less liable to be mistaken or deceived in regard to a simple matter of observation than are other people under the same circumstances? Are our eyes more reliable than other eyes, our senses than other men's senses, our judgment as to what it is that we see and hear than other people's judgments as to the same thing? Have we never found ourselves mistaken as to what we thought we had observed? Would our testimony that we had ourselves seen and heard such and such things pass for more, in a court of justice, than the same testimony from any other honest and competent witness in the same circumstances?

Indeed, Mr. Powell admits that the evidence of our own senses can no more prove a miracle than the testimony of other witnesses. "The essential question of miracles stands quite apart from any consideration of *testimony*; the question would remain the same if we had the evidence of our own senses to an alleged miracle, that is, to an extraordinary or inexplicable fact. It is not the *mere fact*, but the *cause* or *explanation* of it, which is the point at issue."¹

True, we reply, the cause or explanation of the fact is a point at issue; but so, also, is the *fact itself*,—that first and chiefly; and till that is settled, the other is of no consequence. Did this event really occur, is our first question; once satisfied of that, we may then inquire: Was the thing a miracle? Now it is to the decision of this first question that we call in the testimony of competent and reliable witnesses as a perfectly valid source of evidence; and we maintain that a case may easily be conceived, in which such testimony shall be equally conclusive of the fact with our own personal observation.

It is worthy of remark that the two questions: Did the thing actually occur? and if so, was it a miracle?—stand to each other in a certain fixed relation. The more extraordinary and improbable the event, and therefore the more unlikely to have occurred, the greater the probability that if

¹ Recent Inquiries, p. 159.

it did occur it was miraculous. On the other hand, the less extraordinary and improbable the event in question, so much the less evidence is required to establish the fact of its occurrence; while, at the same time, so much the more difficult is it to show that the thing was a miracle.

The case hitherto supposed — the raising of the dead — is clearly of the former class. Let us now suppose an instance of the latter, — an event not in itself wholly improbable, and to which the testimony is conclusive, but with respect to which the real question is: Was the thing a miracle, or was it the effect of natural causes? The restoration of sight to the blind by a word; the healing of the sick, without the use of natural remedies, by the mere touch of the hand, or even of the hem of a garment, or of the shadow of a person passing by; the walking on the water, without special mechanical appliances of any sort; the calming a tempest by simple word of command; — these, and the like, may fall, perhaps, under that category. There may be cases, doubtless, of this sort, where it will be difficult to decide whether the event in question is really miraculous. Still if, as in the cases supposed, the effect produced be such as is not produced by any known physical law, such as lies not within the sphere of nature's ordinary operations, or even, so far as we know, of her operations at all; if, in addition to this, there be a direct claim of supernatural agency in the case; and, further, if the occasion, the object, or end to be attained, be such as appears to require some supernatural agency, the probability would seem, in view of all the circumstances, to be very strong, that the event in question was brought about by some power above nature. Testimony, it will be observed, is not brought into the case to establish the *miraculous character* of the event, but only to establish the *fact* of its occurrence; to that it is perfectly competent; that once settled, it is for us to decide, by the exercise of our own reason and judgment, whether the occurrence be the result of natural causes, or not.

But here we are met by the objection of *Rousseau*, that it

is impossible to prove a miracle, because miracles are exceptions to the laws of nature, and we do not know enough of nature to decide, in all cases, what her laws are. It is true, we reply, that we do not know *all* the laws of nature. But we know what is the ordinary course and order of her operations; and when an event so far transcends these as to be altogether inexplicable by any natural cause known to us; when it is a thing the like of which was never known to occur, under the like circumstances; when, moreover, the immediate producing cause claims to be supernatural, and the object is one that might well demand such agency, we are warranted in presuming the exertion of a power above and beyond nature. We grant that the mere fact of our inability to account for a phenomenon, does not prove it to be a miracle, for there may be laws of nature of which we are ignorant, and of which this may be the result. But when the unusual and inexplicable event occurs in connection with circumstances that are themselves peculiar, and that would render the exertion of special divine agency not, in itself, an improbable thing, in such cases the conclusion is certainly a just and reasonable one, that the event in question is the result of such interposition, in other words, a miracle.

And here we cannot but remark that the very uniformity of nature, on which so much stress is laid by those who deny the possibility of miracles, itself leads rather to the opposite conclusion in certain cases. Nature's operations are uniform and unvarying. We can calculate upon their occurrence with reasonable certainty. But here comes an effect quite at variance with all our previous notions and experience of those operations. May it not be the result of some power working above and beyond nature? Either this, or else nature is not, as we thought, uniform. Which of the two is the more probable?

It is time to pass to other topics; but we cannot dismiss the question now before us, without adverting to a point which deserves the consideration of writers on miracles. It is this: How far is the character of the *doctrine*, in confir-

mation of which miracles profess to be wrought, to be admitted as evidence of the miracles themselves? Can we appeal to the character of the doctrine in proof of the miracle? This is not unfrequently done. But if the divinity of the system prove the miracle, we cannot, of course, afterward appeal to the miracle to prove, in its turn, the divinity of the system, since this would be to reason in a circle. On the other hand, we cannot, perhaps, satisfactorily establish the reality of a miracle entirely irrespective of the character of the system in favor of which that miracle professes to be wrought. If the system is manifestly false and pernicious, if the doctrine is at variance with the plainest principles of morality and true religion, this, of itself, is sufficient to discredit the reality of the supposed miracle. Reason assures us that God would not work miracles in favor of such a system. On the whole, the argument from the character of the doctrine seems to be negative rather than positive. If the system be such as to make a divine origin not improbable, this removes an objection that would otherwise lie against the supposition of a miracle in its behalf. It does not, of itself, prove that a miracle was wrought.

To sum up what has been said: In reply to the question What *proves* a miracle? we take the following positions:

A miracle is *possible*.

Not under *all* circumstances *improbable* even.

On the contrary, under *certain* circumstances, may be highly probable.

The testimony of witnesses to the occurrence of a miracle, under such circumstances, is valid and reliable proof.

In other words, miracles are neither impossible to occur, nor impossible to be proved. The *reality* of the event is capable of proof by testimony; the *miraculous character* of the event is a matter which reason and the common sense of men, in view of all the circumstances of the case, is competent to decide.

We proceed to the consideration of the remaining question.

III. *What does a miracle PROVE?*

What the value and significance of it? What place shall we assign it in the scale of evidence, and what weight allow it? Does it, in fact, prove anything; if so, what? If it were once of value, at the time of its occurrence, has it not lost its evidential force in the lapse of time, so as to be no longer of service, but rather even to hang, a mere dead weight, on the system that is compelled to carry it? These are questions of much moment, and the present age is called to meet them fully and fearlessly.

There can be no question that there has been, of late, a marked and increasing tendency, on the part of the cultivated, and especially the scientific, mind of the age, to look with less favor than formerly upon the external evidences of Christianity, and particularly to disparage the evidence from miracles. It is contended by many that Christianity carries its own evidence with it, in the simplicity and purity of its doctrine, and in its power to elevate the character and reform the life. This intrinsic and internal is the *real* evidence, we are told,—all that it needs. Thus Coleridge, who even goes so far as emphatically to protest against bringing miracles to prove a religious truth, the belief of which should be voluntary and not compulsory with the understanding. In the same strain, Mr. Newman, in his *Phases of Faith*, maintains that external testimony should not be allowed to overrule the internal convictions of the mind, and that no moral truth ought to be received in mere obedience to a miracle of sense. Of those who would thus discard almost entirely the external evidences of Christianity, and the evidential force of miracles, some are among the zealous supporters of the Christian doctrine, in its purest form, while others belong to an entirely different class. The rationalistic theologians of Germany, as represented by Wegscheider, De Wette, and others of that school, take the same view; while, of the Lutheran school, Döderlein hesitates not to affirm that the truth of the doctrine does not depend on the miracles, but we must be convinced of it on its internal

evidence. Others again, as Paulus and Rosenmüller, while they would allow a certain degree of evidential force to miracles on their first occurrence, deny that they are of any value at the present day.

Of those, on the other hand, who would still assign to the argument from miracles an important place among the evidences of Christianity, there are many who, instead of making this the sole criterion of a divine revelation, would receive it as of force only in connection with the internal evidence derived from the moral character of the doctrine, and of the general system, in confirmation of which the miracles were wrought. This is, in fact, the view now, perhaps, more generally held by orthodox divines. It is the position maintained by Dr. Samuel Clarke, in his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*; and also by Trench, in his *Notes on Miracles*. Similar is the view of Neander, who holds that miracles are not to be considered by themselves, as isolated facts, but only as a part of, and in close connection with, the whole self-revelation of God to man.¹

As regards the general value and use of miracles, it is difficult to see how, in any other way, a revelation of divine truth could, in the first instance, be substantiated. In no other way, so far as we can see, can the *divine authority* of the teachers who proclaim such a revelation, be established.

He who comes with a claim to divine commission and authority, is bound to make good that claim, — to show good and sufficient reason for it, — else we shall not believe him. We have a right to demand such evidence. How, then, shall he show this? What shall be his token or sign, that God speaks in and through him, and that the doctrine which he sets forth is not only truth, but truth divinely uttered? If now miracles are wrought in attestation of that authority; if there is manifestly some divine interposition in the case, and not merely a pretence of such interposition;

¹ So *Gerhard* (as cited by Trench), who even goes so far as to say: "miracula sunt doctrinae tesserae, ac sigilla; quemadmodum igitur sigillum a literis avulsum nihil probat, ita quoque miracula sine doctrinâ nihil valent." — *Loc. Theol.*, loc. 23. c. 11.

once satisfied of that fact, and that there is no deception in the matter, we cannot but admit that the claim is sustained. The man comes before us with a claim to divine authority, and appeals to the divine omnipotence to establish that claim. The appeal is sustained. Works which are beyond the course of nature, and which only divine power can accomplish, are wrought in confirmation of the claim, and of the doctrine. It cannot be that God would interpose in behalf of imposition and a lie. It must be, therefore, that the man and the doctrine are, as they profess to be, from God.

Now this is precisely the case with the first teachers of Christianity. They appeal to their works, as evidence of their divine commission and authority. So did Christ himself. He expressly places his claim on this very ground. "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me," etc. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth." "But I have greater witness than that of John; for the *works* which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me."¹ And again, on another occasion: "If I do not the *works* of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, *though ye believe not me, believe the works*; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him."² Accordingly we find the Jews themselves acknowledging the justness and force of this principle. "Rabbi," says Nicodemus, "we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him."³ "And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, *will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*"⁴ So the man who was restored to sight: "Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners," etc. *If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.*"⁵

¹ John v. 31 - 33, 36.

² John x. 37, 38.

³ John iii. 2.

⁴ John vii. 31.

⁵ John ix. 30, 31, 33.

In like manner the disciples, wherever they proclaim the doctrines of the new religion, are able to appeal to the miraculous powers conferred upon them, as evidences of their divine commission; and that not without success. Great fear, we are told, falls upon all, in view of the signs and wonders wrought by them, and multitudes, in consequence, are added to the number of believers. Now this is precisely what we might expect in such a case; nor is it possible to see how, in any other way, the claims of the new system, and of its teachers, could possibly have been substantiated.

It is objected by those who would place the evidence of the Christian system upon the internal rather than the external ground, that the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles cannot possibly be regarded as substantiating their doctrine, or even their mission, inasmuch as miracles are sometimes wrought by bad men and deceivers, and if we admit the force of the argument in the one case we must also in the other. We fear that too much has been conceded to the enemies of Christianity by some of its best friends and advocates, in respect to this matter. Thus, Ols-hausen¹ affirms "that the scriptures assert not merely holy, but also evil, power to be the cause of miracles," and that in fact "two series of miracles extend throughout scripture history"; and refers us in proof to the works of the Egyptian magicians as opposed to those of Moses, and also to the signs and wonders which false prophets, and which anti-christs are said in scripture to be able to make use of, in order to deceive, if possible, the very elect. And we regret to find that so able and judicious a writer as Trench, whose *Notes on Miracles* blend so happily the true scholarly with the true Christian spirit, has but too closely followed the less reliable German in this view. "This fact," he says, "that the kingdom of lies has its wonders no less than the kingdom of truth, would alone be sufficient to convince us that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and simply, in proof of the doctrine which the worker of them proclaims;

¹ Com. Vol. I. p. 336.

and God's word expressly declares the same (Deut. xii. 1-5). A miracle does not prove the truth of a doctrine, or the divine mission of him that brings it to pass."¹

But *do* the scriptures present two independent lines of miracles running parallel with each other,—those of the kingdom of light, and those of the opposite kingdom,—as Olshausen affirms, and as Trench seems to admit? Do they anywhere assert, or imply, that evil power is ever the efficient producing cause of a miracle; or that the wonders performed by evil men are *real* miracles? These wonders are examples of the *mirabile*; but are they examples of the *miraculum*? They were wrought for the *purpose of convincing*, and hence not improperly are termed *σημεῖα*; but were they real miracles, or only false and deceptive appearances? Now it seems to us they are clearly of the latter sort; and that this is plainly implied in the scripture narratives. The works of the magicians are expressly ascribed to the power of their *enchantments*. They were the tricks of conjurers, hardly more remarkable than many of the wonders performed at this day by the skilful jugglers of Egypt and India. As to the signs wrought by the false prophets, the same may be said; while those of antichrist are expressly termed *false* or *lying* wonders.² There is no evidence that any of these were miracles, save in appearance only; nor is there any evidence from scripture that either bad men or devils have in any instance performed miracles, except as mere instruments of divine power.³

Indeed, Olshausen himself, in his commentary on the passage last referred to (2 Thess. ii. 9), expressly admits that “as satan himself is a created being, although a *mighty* one, the wonders also which he performs through antichrist can be merely *mirabilia*, not true *miracula*.” They are “mere

¹ Notes on Miracles, p. 27.

² 2 Thess. ii. 9.

³ The question whether miracles are ever wrought by any other than divine power, is very ably discussed by Dr Taylor, of New Haven, in opposition to the views of Dr. Chalmers, who takes the ground that it is presumption to affirm that Omnipotence alone can set aside the laws of nature. (See Revealed Theology, Vol. III. p. 396, *et seq.*)

magical monstrosities.”¹ And in the passage first cited, as if by way of furnishing the correction of his own previous remarks, he adds in a foot-note on the very same page,² that “In so far as evil is merely a product of created powers, we may say that the satanic miracles are merely apparent miracles; since miracles can be performed by God’s omnipotence alone.” What then becomes of the assertion that, according to the scriptures “not only holy but also evil power” is “the cause of miracles?” What becomes of the “two series of miracles” extending through scripture history? And what becomes of the objection to the evidential force of the miracles of Christianity? Is a real miracle of no force to confirm a true message, because a sham miracle may be wrought to confirm a false one?³

¹ Com., Vol. V. p. 331.

² Com., Vol. I. p. 336.

³ The position of Olshausen is singularly inconsistent as regards the true force of the Christian miracles. “It cannot possibly,” he thinks, “be the end of miracles to establish the truth of any affirmation. In the sense of scripture, too, this is by no means the intention of miracles. It was only the people that so viewed them, because they allowed themselves to be influenced in their judgment by the impression of power, or the excitement of the senses; for which reasons they attached themselves to false prophets as willingly, and even more so, than to the true. The Saviour, therefore, severely rebukes this eagerness for sensible miracles (John iv. 48). But when our Lord, in other places (e. g. John x. 25; xiv. 10, 11), calls for faith in his works, and connects them with his dignity and his holy office, *this is not done in order to establish the truth of his declarations*; truth, as such rather proclaims itself irresistibly to impressible minds by its inward nature.” For what then, we ask, were the miracles intended? “They were intended rather,” replies Olshausen, “to demonstrate his character as a divine messenger, for those in whom the impression of the truth, conveyed by the spirit and language of the Saviour had wrought its effect.” But in establishing his character as a divine messenger, do they not also establish the truth of his message; and is not this really what they were designed to do? For what purpose is it sought to establish the character of the messenger, but to make good the truth of the message. *To establish the truth of his declarations is the very thing in view.* Even Olshausen himself admits this, in the sentences which almost immediately follow. In the human teacher, he says, though truth may greatly pre-ponderate, error cannot be conceived as wholly excluded. God, therefore, invested particular individuals, as his instruments, with higher powers, in order to distinguish them from merely human teachers, “and to accredit them before mankind as infallible instruments of the Holy Spirit, as teachers of absolute truth.” Hence, he continues, “the gift of miracles is one of the necessary characteristics of true prophets, and serves to witness their superior character,—to prove that they are to be regarded as teachers and guides of the faith, and free from all error.”

More consistent, though we think not more correct, is the position of Trench, who regards these wonders of satan and his false prophets as real miracles, and therefore as weakening, if not destroying, the *prima facie* evidence of the true miracles in favor of the mission or the divine doctrine of him who performs them. Yet in answer to the question, of what use then are the real miracles, he affirms,¹ that when once the doctrine has *proved* itself to be true and good by commending itself to the conscience, the miracles may then come in as "the credentials for the bearer of that good word; signs that he has a special mission for the realization of the purposes of God in regard of humanity."

Even as thus employed do not the true miracles prove both the message and the man to be from God? But is this the whole force of the scripture miracles? Must the doctrine first be proved true before the miracles wrought in connection with it can be admitted as evidence in the case? Is it not enough that there is in the doctrine or system *nothing manifestly untrue*, or *inconsistent* with the supposition that it is from God? This granted, do not the miracles come in with a positive force to substantiate the claim that man and message are divinely sent? We would, by no means, contend that the miracle is to be taken in proof of the doctrine *entirely irrespective* of the character of that doctrine; nor, on the other hand, would we require the doctrine first to prove itself, and then to prove the miracle, which, in turn, once proved, is to come in as collateral security for the very foundation on which itself reposes.

We would by no means disparage or undervalue the internal evidence of Christianity. It is good in its place. To the humble, believing disciple it comes with convincing power. It is to him the best and strongest of all evidences that the system is from God. To one already convinced,

Precisely so. In other words, to *establish the truth of their declarations and doctrines*. The truth is, the object or end of the miracle is twofold, — primarily to attest the divine character and claims of the messenger; ultimately and chiefly, to attest the truth of his doctrine; the *former* with a view to, and for the sake of, the *latter*.

¹ Notes on Miracles, p. 28.

or disposed to be convinced, the purity of the life and of the teachings of Jesus present an irresistible argument. But it is not to such persons solely or chiefly that the evidences of Christianity address themselves. It is not the humble believer that needs to be convinced; he is convinced already. It is the unbeliever,—the man who is disposed to set aside the whole thing as unreasonable or unworthy of his notice, and to regard the teachers of the new faith as either credulous fools or cunning imposters,—that needs to be convinced that this despised faith and these despised men are indeed from God. Now, with him the internal evidence is not so likely to be conclusive. In many cases it will make no impression on him whatever. He will see no force in the argument, because not himself in a moral condition to be affected by such considerations. But let the earth open at his feet, let the prison walls be shaken, and the iron gates touched by no visible hand fly back upon their hinges, let voices from heaven be heard, let sick men be healed by a passing shadow, blind men restored to sight by a touch, dead men to life by a word; let these things, and such as these, be done in his immediate presence, and in direct attestation of the divine authority of the new system, and from such evidence the stoutest sceptic will find it difficult to turn away.

But it will perhaps be replied, the unbelieving scribe and Pharisee *did* turn away from precisely these arguments and evidences in the time of Christ and his disciples, unconvinced even by the signs and wonders. True, they did so. But if they rejected Christianity as thus attested, *how much more* would they have despised and set aside its claims had it come to them with no such manifestation of authority. What impression would the purity of the character and the elevation of the doctrines of Jesus have made upon a prejudiced and unbelieving age, had there been no other evidences of his divine mission?

And here we shall be met by the objection, that miracles are adapted to a rude and primitive age, such as that in which Christianity, for example, made its first entrance into the world; an age of great credulity and of comparative in-

tellecual barbarism; that while they are fitted to impress with awe the minds of men in such an age, they are quite out of place in the argument for Christianity in this nineteenth century. This is the key-note of the essay of Mr. Powell, to which we have so frequently referred. Rosenmüller and Paulus also take the view that miracles were of evidential force only at the time when they were wrought, but have long ceased to be so. Similar is the view of Schliermacher who regards them as, in fact, not miracles at all, except as relatively to the apprehensions of the age.

In opposition to all such views, we maintain that those miraculous manifestations of divine power which accompanied the promulgation of Christianity were adapted not to the age, as such, in distinction from other ages of the world, not to any one age as being more or less enlightened, more or less credulous, more or less barbarous, but rather to any age that is to receive a new dispensation or revelation from God. They are adapted not to one age more than another, save as one, and not another, is to receive that revelation. No increase of intellectual or scientific culture would have obviated the necessity for such divine interpositions, at any time, when a new system of religious truth was to be inaugurated, and its claims to divine authority established. Indeed, if a new revelation were now to be made, miracles would be necessary to establish it; nothing short of this would convince the very men who reject as unnecessary all external evidences of Christianity, that God was in very deed speaking unto them. The distinction now made between the adaptation of miracles to the promulgation of a new system of divine truth, and their adaptation to the particular age in which that system happens to be first promulgated, is a distinction too obvious to require argument, but one which is wholly overlooked by the class of objectors to whom we refer.

But, it will be said, even though miracles may have been useful at the first introduction of a new dispensation, it by no means follows that they are useful now. In one sense this is true. Christianity once established as a system from

God, there is no further need of miracles to establish it. The working of miracles may thenceforth be dispensed with, unless some new occasion shall arise demanding new interpositions of divine power. But it does not follow that the miracles which *have* been wrought, and on which the system depends for confirmation, are no longer of use. They are as much needed now as they ever were. There is no need of new piers to support the dome of St. Peter's. Pier-building, so far as St. Peter's is concerned, may be discontinued when once the dome is up, and securely held in its place. It does not follow, however, that the piers already there are no longer needed, and may as well be taken down. This again is a distinction which certain minds of a "comprehensive capacity" fail to apprehend. Because *miracles* are no longer needed in support of Christianity, they conclude that the *argument* from miracles is no longer of use.

Our argument thus far proceeds on the supposition that the direct and special object of a miracle is to establish the divine commission and authority of him who performs it, and so of the truth or system which he propounds. For this it is needed. This it accomplishes, and was designed to accomplish. But does it prove anything more than this? Does it also prove the inspiration, or divine authorship of the writings that record it? We think not. Miracles are wrought, not to prove the writings infallible, and of divine origin, but to substantiate the claims of the teacher or prophet to be a man sent from God, and clothed with divine authority. They prove the inspiration of the *man*, and not of the *books* or writings, as such. The miracles of Jesus prove his inspiration and authority, and that of his doctrine, but they do not prove the inspiration or divine authority of the Gospel of Matthew, or of the Gospel of Luke. If the problem be to establish the inspiration of the sacred scriptures, the argument from miracles is not in place, unless it can be shown that miracles were wrought with a view to establish that inspiration; but we know of no miracle wrought for this purpose. If, however, the problem be to establish the divine authority of Moses or of Paul, as

speaking by commission from God, and so to confirm their teaching or message, the argument from miracles is in place, and of force; for it does prove that. And such is the use which Christ and his apostles actually make of the miracles which they perform, as shown in the passages cited above. They constantly appeal to them as evidence of their own divine commission: "Though ye believe not me, believe the works."¹ "Go and tell John what things ye have seen," said Christ.² To the same effect is the language of Paul to the Hebrews: "God also *bearing them witness* both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles."³

To the question, then: What does a miracle prove? we answer, it proves the divine commission of him who performs it, and so the divine authority of his doctrine. It proves Christianity to be a system of divine origin, a religion sent from God. It is the broad seal of Heaven stamped upon the system, as its credentials. 'This was the intention; this the accomplished fact.

ARTICLE V.

HUMANENESS OF THE MOSAIC CODE.

BY REV. J. B. SEWALL, LYNN, MASS.

WE have frequently heard the Mosaic laws alluded to as barbarous and bloody, and belonging to an age of like character; adapted, perhaps, to the degree of civilization, or rather uncivilization, which then prevailed, but altogether unfit for the present advanced stage of enlightenment and progress. An instance of this kind within our knowledge led us recently to examine the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, with this point in view. We took note as we went along, both of the features which give

¹ John x. 38.

² Luke vii. 28.

³ Heb ii. 4.