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A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

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ORDINARY MEETING, DECEMBER 3, 1866.

THE REV. WALTER MITCHELL, VICE-PRESIDENT, IN THE CHAIR.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed, after which the following Papers were read by the Honorary Secretary in the absence of the Authors:—

ON MIRACLES; THEIR COMPATIBILITY WITH PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES. *By the* REV. W. W. ENGLISH, M.A., *Mem. Vict. Inst.*

A GREEMENT as to fundamental principles underlying miraculous interpositions of the Almighty is very desirable. We want a philosophy of miracles—a foundation wide enough to admit even the sceptic. Not that I would advocate the abandonment of a single point that is tenable; but, instead of arguing, for example, with a Theistic writer, that “all things are possible with God,” and, upon this foundation, proceed to defend the miracles of the Bible, I would seek rather for some basis that accords with acknowledged principles of philosophy, and take my stand upon that.

In dealing with opponents of revelation it would also tend to the simplification of points at issue, were the various objections urged against miracles classified under appropriate heads. For example, the cloudy array of direct and implied assaults in Mr. Baden Powell’s *Essay in Essays and Reviews*, would appear much smaller if arranged, as they might be, under the three heads of objections drawn from *moral*, *metaphysical*, and *physical* considerations. The question of the historical fact of miracles, and their evidential value, would fall under the first head; the bearing of the nature and attributes of God upon miraculous interposition would fall under the second; and the question of the compatibility of the facts and discoveries in physical science with a belief in miracles, would fall under the third. These questions would, doubtless, be found to interlace in minute discussion; but such a classification would have two advantages,—it would be convenient, and also tend to keep before the mind

facts and principles which we are in danger of undervaluing or forgetting. For example, while Mr. Powell is loud and frequent in praise of what he calls "those grander conceptions of the order of nature, those comprehensive primary elements of all physical knowledge, those ultimate ideas of universal causation, which can only be familiar to those thoroughly versed in cosmical philosophy in its widest sense," he is not above stepping occasionally out of this "grander" position to admit objections from humbler considerations of a *moral* and *metaphysical* kind. Physical science contains in fact but a part, and not the whole, of the scientific principles involved in the acceptance or rejection of miracles.

DEFINITION OF MIRACLES.

It is of primary importance to define what we mean by a miracle. Yet the task is not easy. Like faith, a miracle scarcely admits of strict logical definition. But if we regard miracles as *direct*, *mediate*, and *providential*, a definition may be given that will suit all practical purposes. By a *direct* miracle is meant such as God wrought immediately or without the intervention of second causes; as the act of creation. By a *mediate* miracle is meant such as God wrought through the instrumentality of chosen agents, as Prophets and Apostles; abundant instances of which are to be found in Holy Scripture. By a *providential* miracle is meant such as God wrought by means of second causes, combined in an unusual manner; as the advent of the swarm of flies or cloud of locusts in Egypt,—events that could be explained upon natural principles. Their evidential force as miracles lay in the occasion and circumstances of their production, and particularly in the *foreknowledge* displayed in their prediction and fulfilment at a given time and for a specified purpose. A Bible miracle, then, may be defined—"an event having for its efficient cause the active power of God exercised *directly*, *mediately*, or *providentially*, for the accomplishment of moral ends, among free agents."

All such statements as "violations" of nature, or events "contrary to nature," adopted by Mr. Powell, ought to be discarded. They do not describe a miracle in any sense; for it is neither a "violation" of, nor "contrary" to, nature. The expression "laws of nature" is misleading and ambiguous.

"Nature," for example, is used sometimes to include the active operations of Deity, direct and mediate (*natura naturans*), and in this sense it may include miracles. Bishop Butler used

the term nature in this sense, but not to include miracles. He said,—“The only distinct meaning of the word *natural* is *stated, fixed, or settled*; since what is natural as much requires and presupposes an intelligent agent to render it so, that is, to *effect it continually*, or at *stated times*, as what is *supernatural* or *miraculous* does to effect it for *once*.”* Then, again, “nature” is sometimes used to include simply the works of nature (*natura naturata*). But even here the term is ambiguous and variously modified, for it is sometimes made to include both mind and matter; at other times it is used of matter to the exclusion of mind. “The term nature (said Sir W. Hamilton) is used sometimes in a wider, sometimes in a narrower extension. When employed in its most extensive meaning, it embraces the two worlds of mind and matter. When employed in its more restricted signification, it is a synonym for the latter only, and is then used in contradistinction to the former With us the term nature is more vaguely extensive than the terms *physics, physical, physiology, physiological*, or even the adjective *natural*; whereas, in the philosophy of Germany, *Natur* and its correlatives, whether of Greek or Latin derivation, are, in general, expressive of matter in contrast to the world of intelligence.”†

Then, again, not only is the question of miracles often clouded by this ambiguous term “nature,” but we have another word, “law,” used as vaguely. “All things (said Hooker) that have some operation, not violent or casual,—that which doth assign unto each thing the kind, that which doth moderate the force and power, that which doth appoint the form and measure of working, the same we term a law.”‡ “It is a perversion of language (said Dr. Paley) to assign any law as the efficient operative cause of anything.” § “The rules of navigation (said Dr. Reid) never steered a ship, and the *law of gravity* never moved a planet.” “Those who go about (said Hale) to attribute the origination of mankind (or any other effect) to a bare order or law of nature as the primitive effecter thereof, speak that which is perfectly irrational and unintelligible; for although a law or rule is the method and order by which an intelligent being may act, yet a *law*, or rule, or order, is a dead, unactive, uneffective thing of itself, without an agent that useth it, and exerciseth it as his rule and method of action.” || “In the language of modern

* Anal., ch. i.

† Reid's Works, p. 206, note.

‡ Ecc. Pol., book I.

§ Nat. Theol., ch. i.

|| *Prim. Origin. Hom.*, ch. vii.

science (said Dugald Stewart) the established order in the succession of physical events is commonly referred (by a sort of figure or metaphor) to the general laws of nature. It is a mode of speaking extremely convenient from its conciseness, but it is apt to suggest to the fancy a groundless, and indeed absurd analogy between the material and moral worlds. In those political associations from which the metaphor is borrowed, the laws are addressed to *rational* and *voluntary* agents, who are able to comprehend their meaning, and regulate their conduct accordingly; whereas, in the material universe the subjects of our observation are understood by all men to be unconscious and passive. . . . If the word *law*, therefore, be in such instances literally interpreted, it must mean a uniform operation, prescribed by the Deity to Himself; and it has accordingly been explained in this sense by some of our best philosophical writers, particularly by Dr. Clarke.* “A law (said Dr. Whewell) supposes an agent and a person; for it is the mode according to which the agent proceeds, the order according to which the power acts. Without the presence of such a power, conscious of the relations on which the law depends, producing the effects which the law prescribes, the law can have no efficacy, no existence. Hence we infer that the intelligence by which the law is ordained, the power by which it is put into action must be present at all times and in all places, where the effects of the law occur; that thus the knowledge of the agency of the Divine Being pervades every portion of the universe, producing all action and passion, all permanence and change. The laws of matter are the laws which He, in His wisdom, prescribes to His own acts; His universal presence is the necessary condition of any course of events; His universal agency, the only organ of any efficient force.”†

Taking, then, “law” in this, its true philosophical sense, and the term “nature” as including both mind and matter, it will be difficult to conceive in what sense a miracle can be said to “violate the laws of nature,” or be “contrary to nature.” The laws of nature are not causes, but courses—they are not efficient forces. Yet they are often spoken of in this deceptive sense. They cannot, with strictness or propriety, be confined to the material world. Yet this appears to be the sense in which they are commonly understood when miracles are said to be opposed to them. The mind of man has its “natural” laws, as well as the material world; hence we have a philosophy

* Phil. of the Human Mind, pp. 393-4.

† Astron., p. 361.

of mind as well as of matter. The laws of nature comprise that *mental*, *moral*, and *material* order, according to which all things are carried on. A miracle cannot be "contrary" to mental laws, if free-agency is a fact. It cannot be "contrary" to moral laws, if it is the result of divine energy, put forth for ends that are good. It cannot be "contrary" to material laws, if it is found to have its place in the eternal purposes of God, equally with the succession of day and night, or any of those moral and material laws according to which the world is governed. There may be intersections among the mental, moral, and material laws of nature. There are:—mind acts upon matter and controls it, and the whole nature of man is held subject to moral law. But a miracle breaks no law when it neutralizes or suspends a lower—it falls in rather with the general workings of nature. "We have (says Archbishop Trench) abundant analogous examples 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 [*mental?*]; yet we do not say, where the lower law gives place to the higher, that there was any *violation* of law, or that anything *contrary* to nature came to pass; rather we acknowledge the law of a greater freedom swallowing up the law of the lesser."* This passage was said by Mr. Powell to "evinced a higher view of physical philosophy than we might have expected from the mere promptings of philology and literature." I hope that we are all desirous of entertaining the very highest view of physical philosophy, that is consistent with truth. I was not myself aware that the "mere promptings of philology and literature" were at all adverse to forming a correct estimate of *any* branch of philosophy. On the contrary, I had always thought that precise terms, and accuracy of expression, were essential to *all* branches of philosophy. Mr. Powell was, perhaps, right in saying that "physical by moral" in the passage from Archbishop Trench, is "not very clear," and I would suggest that "physical by mental" might remove the point of the objection. The question of miracles, indeed, is inseparable from the question of the *existence* and *supremacy of mind*. This is the fundamental point, the key to the right understanding of the subject and the clearing up of its difficulties. Admit the existence and supremacy of mind, and we can account for miracles; deny this, and miracles are not only inexplicable but impossible. And I believe we become defenders or doubters of miracles just in proportion as we retain or lose the

* On Miracles, ch. ii.

fact of the mind's existence and supremacy. The exclusive study of physics is calculated to beget materialistic habits of thought. Physiology and physics have to do with organized and unorganized bodies, and this department of study implies *necessity of nature*, rather than *liberty of intelligence*. The natural bias, therefore, which it is liable to beget in the human mind, is one in favour of materialism, and therefore of fatalism. Its natural counteractive is in the study of mind. Mr. Grove, in his address before the British Association, appeared to betray materialistic habits of thought, if not unduly to exalt physical science. He said, "While in ethics, in politics, in poetry, in sculpture, in painting, we have scarcely, if at all, advanced beyond the highest intellects of ancient Greece or Italy, how great are the steps we have made in physical science and its applications." Now it is only since the time of Bacon that physical science has been studied with any degree of success. "When we reflect then (said Dugald Stewart) on the shortness of the period during which natural philosophy has been successfully cultivated, and, at the same time, how open to examination, the laws of matter are, in comparison of those which regulate the phenomena of thought, we shall (1) neither be disposed to wonder that the philosophy of mind should still remain in its infancy, nor (2) be discouraged in our hopes respecting its future progress."

MIND AND MATTER.

If we believe neither in God, Angel, nor Spirit, miracles are plainly impossible. But if we admit the existence of God and of spiritual beings, and the supremacy of MIND, then miracles are, at least, possible. I would not appeal to Divine sovereignty and omnipotence in support of miracles, because the argument from this source may be questioned by doubters. However true the conclusion, the process by which it is arrived at is not satisfactory. It is an instance of the vicious circle in the eyes of those who have thrown off belief in revelation. It is, therefore, better to seek a foundation, as I think we safely may, among facts and principles in the field of philosophical inquiry.

Perhaps I cannot define very satisfactorily to myself what I mean by mind, as distinct from matter; but I know that I *think, feel, hope, desire, and will*, and I feel an irresistible conviction that my thoughts, feelings, hopes, desires, and volitions all belong to one and the same being, viz., *myself*. These phenomena, I believe, exhibit the qualities of mind, and prove its existence as convincingly as *extension, colour, hardness, &c.*, prove the existence of matter. At least, I cannot feel more

certain of the existence of matter than I do of mind. If I am to draw a distinction, I feel the evidence for mind to be stronger than the evidence for matter; for the former rests upon my own consciousness of subjective facts, while the latter rests upon my perceptions of what is, or what is thought to be, objective. I cannot, then, deny the *Ego*, and claim with any share of reason to believe in the *non-ego*. The *non-ego* is the phenomena exhibited to my senses, the subject-matter of physical science. The *ego* is the phenomena presented by my own consciousness, the subject-matter of mental and metaphysical science. "The evidence for the existence of mind (said Lord Brougham) is to the full as complete as that upon which we believe in the existence of matter. Indeed, it is more certain, and more irrefragable."*

Materialists, however, have doubted the separate existence of mind, notwithstanding its greater rapidity of movement, and the phenomena presented by it. But the attempt has been illogical, the very points in dispute being taken for granted, as a basis to argue upon. If we suppose the substance said to have the qualities of thinking, feeling, &c., to be the same as the substance which is said to have extension, hardness, &c., this supposition only proves the impotence of materialism to grapple with its difficulties. Why should not these two substances underlying the two different kinds of phenomena, if they are to be considered as one and not two, be *mind*, after all, and not matter? To quote Lord Brougham again on this point:—"We only know the existence of matter through the operations of mind; and were we to doubt of the existence of either, it would be far more reasonable to doubt that matter exists than that mind exists. The existence of the operations of mind (supposing mind to exist) will account for all the phenomena which matter is supposed to exhibit; but the existence and action of matter, vary it how we may, will never account for *one* of the phenomena of mind."†

However, I am glad to feel myself at liberty to pass over this point, because natural philosophers have given up the question of substance, and confined themselves to the phenomena exhibited, and the laws deducible therefrom; and we may follow their example, and leave out of the question the nature of mind, confining ourselves to the phenomena it exhibits, and the laws deducible therefrom. The two sciences admit of precisely the same inductive principles, and may be prosecuted safely side by side. The law of gravity in the one

* Discourse on Nat. Theol., p. 56.

† *Ibid.* p. 106.

field has its analogy in the laws of association in the other. Neither field has been barren of fruits, and a student in the one need not undervalue the labours of a student in the other.

It is obvious that miracles are impossible upon the principles of materialism. Are they to be considered impossible or unreasonable upon the principles underlying a belief in mind? This appears to me to be the question, for although doubters of miracles have mainly relied upon materialistic arguments, which, if pushed, would go far towards subjecting mind to matter, or excluding it from our books and papers, still I believe most of them would repudiate all sympathy with materialism. We have therefore to meet objectors who will grant the position which we have taken up thus far in reference to mind.

Now the two worlds of mind and matter, with their separate facts and phenomena, *must* be taken into account in the settlement of the question of miracles, because no man ever contended that miracles were possible apart from mind and free agency. It is preposterous to attempt to settle this question, connected as it is with the power and spontaneity of mind or will, by an appeal to the bare order or course of nature in its material aspect. Yet this is neither more nor less than what is attempted mainly to be done by the opponents of miracles in the present day. - Whatever the value of their conclusion may be, it cannot be said to follow from their premisses. Instead of the conclusion that miracles are scientifically impossible, following, as Mr. Powell asserted, from the "higher laws of thought," I venture to affirm that that conclusion, in his own essay, was drawn in contravention of the first principles of legitimate argumentation.

The supremacy of mind is a thing of daily experience. We know that the laws of nature are under the control of our own will to a limited extent. We are able to control the forces of nature so as to produce what results we please. Matter bows in subjection to the human will. Results are brought about, which in the first instance, it is allowed, are traceable to material or second causes; but when these results are traced backwards, we arrive at last at the human will as their *sole efficient cause*, acting upon the human body, and through it upon external nature. Here, then, we have an *αὐτεξούσιον* or *sui potestas*, which supplies us with the foundation of a legitimate argument from the less to the greater, in favour of miracles. The power of the Supreme Will exceeds that of man by an infinite difference, and the freedom of the Divine Will must be commensurate with Divine power. Miracles, then, as effects

having for their *efficient cause* the active power of God, are not only possible, but, *à priori, probable*, from the limited share of freedom and power which we know by experience we have. We cannot conceive of a God of freedom never exercising that freedom. Providence implies the constant exercise of freedom. Without such an exercise there could be nothing for us here below but fate. But this is contrary to the facts of human consciousness and the results of mental study. Physical science might—if taken alone, it would—lead to fatalism; but the higher science of mind supplies the counteractive to this uninviting, one-sided view of nature, and leads the inquirer onwards to the great law of freedom. We know we are free, and we cannot, without an absurdity, suppose man, who was made in the likeness of God, to be free to control the forces of nature, while He who made man is not so. As to material nature, it is, of purpose apparently, endued with a certain *elasticity*. The orbits of the heavenly bodies bulge and flatten within a given sphere; so do the laws of nature, without any general disturbance, bend before the will of man. This elasticity appears to have been necessary for the harmonious working and general stability of the universe. So may the moral requirements of man have necessitated miracles to instruct him in the knowledge of Divine things. Our social and domestic well-being stands in need of the power and play over matter which we know we have; so may our moral and religious well-being stand in need of that freedom which miracles and the providential care of the great God imply and presuppose. And the fact that we are formed with mind and will, and the power to exercise a certain control over nature's forces for our own happiness and good, warrants the inference that our Maker is not only able but willing to succour and defend us where our own freedom and power cannot reach. He knew from all eternity, doubtless, not only the laws which He proposed to give to matter, but also the wants of His intelligent and moral creatures. He had, doubtless, a care both for the world's general working and also man's benefit. What seems to us *irregular*, as miracles, cannot possibly be so to *Him*, with whom there is no past nor future, but simply an Eternal *now*—an Omnipresent *here*. Miracles are the effects of His own free will and power, and they may fall in with higher and wider laws than mere physical science has discovered or can discover. Every separate department of science may have a partial unity, but there must be a universal science which compares together particular sciences, and ascends to the whole of things. "If there were only

a physical substance, then would physics be the first and the only philosophy; but if there be an immaterial and unmoved essence which is the ground of all being, then must there be also an antecedent, and, because antecedent, an unmoved philosophy." We agree in the doctrine that nature does nothing *per saltum*; theology, a term given by Aristotle occasionally to what he called the first philosophy, has no hostile bearing to physical science, it recognizes to the full the statement *natura non operatur per saltum*; but then it does not exclude mind and intelligence when it seeks a basis for the unity of science; on the contrary, it teaches that such unity is to be found solely in mind and intelligence, that is say, in the SUPREME WILL OF GOD.

"Ὁ τε γὰρ Θεὸς δοκεῖ τὸ αἴτιον πᾶσιν εἶναι καὶ ἀρχὴ τις.—
(*Arist. Met.*, lib. i. cap. 2.)

OBJECTIONS DRAWN FROM MORAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Having stated the principles underlying a belief in miracles, it remains that I notice some of the main objections to them, drawn from moral, metaphysical, and physical considerations. In doing this, I must study brevity as much as possible, lest I should exhaust your patience.

Necessity of Miracles.—Lord Bacon said "that a miracle was never yet performed to convert Atheists, because these might always arrive at the knowledge of a Deity by the light of nature." This remark was just. Upon the hypothesis of the fall of man, however, and his consequent need of redemption, miracles were antecedently *probable*. And upon the further hypothesis (I put the case in the least dogmatic form possible) of a revelation having been given, miracles were absolutely *necessary*. Whether Mr. Powell's remark that "Paley took too exclusive a view in asserting that we cannot conceive a revelation *substantiated* in any other way," be true or false, it is self-evident that a revelation could not have been *given* except by miracle. It implies in its very *nature* miracles,—the communication of truth otherwise unattainable. The call of Abram, which I take to be the origin of the visible Church, was supernatural, but not impossible upon the principles of this paper. The communication of sacred truth to be written down and deposited with the Church was supernatural, but not impossible. (I am not here careful to draw any distinction between the supernatural and a miracle.) Revelation began of *necessity* by miracle, was continued and ended by miracle. An outward visible Church, divinely called, and an outward

revelation divinely inspired, are correlates,—the one implies the other, and each implies a miracle;—neither could have been begun otherwise. Whatever, therefore, the value of miracles as mere *evidences* may be, they were at least essential to the *nature* both of a divinely-called Church and a divinely-inspired revelation.

The Evidential Value of Miracles.—The value of miracles as evidences, says Professor Mansel, “is a question which may be differently answered by different believers without prejudice to their common belief. It has pleased the Divine Author of the Christian religion to testify His revelation with evidences of various kinds, appealing with different degrees of force to different minds, and even to the same minds at different times.”* This is a sufficient answer to the objection that Christian writers are not agreed among themselves as to the precise value of miracles as evidences. But as the miracles of the Bible profess to move in the sphere of redemptive work, and are themselves an essential and necessary part of that work, I cannot see how we are to regard them as mere evidences only. There may be a few of the miracles of the Bible less closely connected with the gift and development of revelation than others, but they were all either preparatory to, essential parts, or confirmatory of God’s revelation and will. They cannot, therefore, be viewed apart from the truth itself as mere evidences. The greater part of the hundred or more miracles in the Old Testament, and the most remarkable of them, cluster around the giving of the Law, the Exodus, and the times of the prophets, who were inspired to write parts of the Old Testament.

Present Need of Miracles.—It has been objected that miracles, if needed at all, were never more necessary than at this present time. “When were miracles (it was asked in *Essays and Reviews*) more needed than in the present day to indicate the truth amid manifest error, or to propagate the faith?”† In this question, I think, there are confounded the gift and development of revelation, with a free acceptance of it; the facts of its divine nature and bestowal with its actual propagation. The faith, if it had to be propagated in every age by miracle, would require nothing short of continuous miracles; which is absurd. But it would be very hard to conceive of any miracle which could possibly be of service to those who affirm that “testimony is but a blind guide”—that “the essential question of miracles stands quite apart from any testimony”—that “if we had the testimony of our senses to an alleged miracle, it would not establish it.” The objection,

* Aids to Faith.

† Pp. 125-6.

indeed, is idle in the face of these assertions, for "where Moses and the Prophets" are not heard in faith, we are plainly told "neither would" the objector "be persuaded though one rose from the dead" to convince him. As to the question, "Ought any moral truth to be received in mere obedience to a miracle of sense?"*—I cannot conceive of any antagonism between our moral sentiments and such a display of Divine Power as a miracle implies; but if it is meant to be insinuated that moral perception is completely dissociated from sensitivity, then I can but answer that I know of no theorist in morals who has held such a monstrous and absurd position, either in ancient or modern times. Mr. Powell divorced faith and philosophy, and this last quotation implies apparently a divorce between morality and sense. What the ethical residuum would be, we are not informed. But the spiritual and moral parts of our nature are too much bound up with our material economy to admit of any wild theorizing of this kind. The supernatural is not so far removed as the materialist would have us believe. Though miracles are not now wrought for social and moral ends, we have a constant Providence, and therefore a Supreme Will in constant play and activity—

—καὶ γὰρ τ' ὄναρ ἐκ Διός ἐστιν.

That "even a dream is from God" is old, in *profane* authors, as Homer. The revelation of future events is a thing of rare occurrence; but it happens sometimes, and when it does happen, the law of suggestion can no more account for it than the law of gravitation. We know of no other way of accounting for it, than by assuming that it is Deity communicating the future to our minds. The *mode* of communication is not easily explained, it is hidden from us, like the link which binds together cause and effect in physics; the *fact* of such communications, however, is, as Mr. Morell has said, "an internal phenomenon, perfectly consistent" (no doubt) "with the natural laws of the human mind," though, it should be added, not to be explained by them.

The Morality of Miracles.—Miracles being connected with ends that are moral, must be themselves moral in their nature. In the old dispensation, they partook of the severity of the law as well as of its holiness; in the new, they are almost universally examples of mercy and redemptive power. The death of the firstborn sounds a little harsh, but it was no doubt an act of retributive justice, dealt back as a blow in return

* Essays and Reviews, p. 147.

for the death of the male children when Moses was born. It was but a carrying out of the moral law, which sanctions the "visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the children." I would not be guilty of the impiety of calling in question the goodness of God; but I may be permitted, in reply to an objection sometimes urged against the miracles of the Old Testament, to say, that the loss of life by earthquakes, storms, plague, and lightning at unknown and irregular periods, might be and has been brought against the book of *nature* with far greater force than anything said or done in the Bible can be urged against *revelation*. Yet no one who believes in God doubts that the earthquake and storm are parts of His work.

Reason and Testimony.—Mr. Powell said, "testimony can avail nothing against reason." "The question would remain the same if we had the evidence of our senses to an alleged miracle." "It is not the mere *fact*, but the *cause* or explanation of it, which is the point at issue."

By "reason" I suppose we are here to understand the conclusions arrived at from physical science, against which "testimony" is said to avail nothing. Yet this very science itself is built upon "testimony" and observation. The truth is, that all reasoning whatsoever must rest upon authority or testimony of some kind. The *data* of reason do not rest upon reason, but are of necessity accepted by it, on the authority of what is beyond itself, viz., *faith*. But if it were true that "testimony" can avail nothing against "reason" where there is any antagonism, it must yet be *proved* that such antagonism exists when we accept miracles upon proper evidence. This proof, however, is not yet forthcoming, and we may wait with perfect calmness. In the general or abstract, reason itself depends upon faith and testimony for its data, and the postulate that "testimony is but a blind guide" can hardly be a safe one.

OBJECTIONS DRAWN FROM METAPHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

The objections of a metaphysical kind that have been urged are mostly such as are drawn from particular views of the Divine attributes, as the Wisdom, Power, and Unchangeableness of God. The Divine attributes are conclusions arrived at from natural and revealed religion. The Divine Sovereignty follows as an inference from recognized views of the Divine attributes,—it can scarcely be called an attribute of itself, and I would prefer to speak of it as a *prerogative* contained in or deducible from the Divine attributes. I would never appeal

to it, therefore, in any sense otherwise than is compatible with received views of the Divine attributes.

The Divine *Wisdom* has been said to be opposed to miracles, "on the plea that our ideas of the Divine perfections must directly discredit the notion of occasional interposition; that it is *derogatory* to the idea of infinite wisdom to suppose an order of things so *imperfectly* established that it must be occasionally interrupted and violated when the necessity of the case compelled, as the emergency of a revelation was imagined to do."* Putting aside the "interpositions" implied in the belief in a Divine Providence, I do not know how this objection could be made to square with the views of some eminent professors in physical science, with such a passage, for example, as the following from Professor W. Thomson:—

"(1) There is at present in the natural world a universal tendency to the dissipation of mechanical energy. (2) Any *restoration* of mechanical energy, without more than equivalent dissipation, is impossible in inanimate material processes, and is probably never effected by means of organized matter, either endowed with vegetable life or subjected to the will of an animated creature. (3) Within a finite period of time past, the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come, the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at present constituted, unless operations have been or are to be performed, which are impossible under the laws to which the known operations going on at present in the material world are subject."†

Those who deify the laws of nature might do well to consider this passage. It does not fall in certainly with the spirit of this objection to miracles, in answer to which I would make three remarks. *First*, it is founded upon that misrepresentation which persists in calling a miracle a "violation" of the "established order of things." *Secondly*, it confounds apparently *physical* "imperfections" with the *moral* wants of *man*; a course well suited to create prejudice in the public mind, but one which can have no other tendency than that of concealing the truth. *Thirdly*, this very objection urged against revelation, and miracles in particular, lies open, with whatever force it has, against the book of nature and the creed of the Theist who brings it. The "order of things" is charged with "imperfection," if we suppose it to have stood in need of any revelation or miracle. This supposition, it is said, would be "contrary to our ideas of the Divine perfections," "*derogatory* to the idea of Infinite *Wisdom!*" Divesting ourselves, then, of all ideas of revelation or miracle, let us

* *Essays and Reviews*, p. 136. (The Italics are my own.)

† *Trans. of the Royal Soc. of Edin.*, 1852.

think for one moment upon the fact of *absence* or *defect* in the powers and capacities of ten thousand created beings, even in this age, when *progress* has got so far as to have forward man, according to some, from an ape or monkey beginning, to what he is now. The different grades of animals beneath us are *wanting* in that higher enjoyment which, with a more "perfect" nature, they might have had. All sentient and living beings are "imperfect" and limited in their natures. What follows then? Why we have, according to the Theist's objection to miracles, ground to impeach the "Divine wisdom;" the "established order of things" bears marks of "imperfection," that is to say, *metaphysical* evil; for

There's nothing situate under heaven's eye,
But hath its bounds in earth, in sea, in sky.

But we find, besides "imperfection," also *pain*; here again, therefore, the "Divine perfections" are at variance, according to the objector, with the "established order of things," for it is "clogged" with *physical* evil. There are, it is true, compensating considerations; enjoyment may be heightened by suffering, and even death itself rendered easy by a little preparation on a bed of pain; yet the fact of death and previous *suffering* remains, that is to say, *physical* evil. And, further, the Theist has also *moral* evil to "clog" his own system. He is troubled, not only with *imperfections*, with *suffering*, but also with *sin*. Man came into existence like other organized beings, we believe, under a law suited to him as a moral agent; he was endued with knowledge and understanding, with freedom to obey or disobey. But he did not follow the law of his nature—he does not do so now—he violates that law and falls into sin. "What then shall we say to these things? Shall the thing formed (man with a free-will leading him into sin) say to Him who formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" This charge would be as reasonable as that against "Divine wisdom," against "our ideas of the Divine perfections," on the hypothesis of miracles. "The order of things" is not freed from "imperfections" when miracles are taken out of the way.

As to the *unchangeableness* of God, it has no special bearing upon the question of miracles. The Theist, or the advocate of "continuity," is as much open to its difficulties as the Christian apologist. If God, from all eternity, purposed that the race of man should make progress from an obscure beginning, He may also have purposed that miracles should have their place and use on the great theatre of time. God must have a purpose, and that purpose must be *fixed*; but it may

have conditions which admit of human freedom being played in its own orbit or within prescribed limits. There is, we are sure, freedom even in dependence. The Almighty's omnipotence does not swallow up that limited power which He has assigned to man. His omnipresence does not blot from existence that place which we, His creatures, occupy in space and time; His omniscience does not absorb nor quench that little light which our reason gives us; in short, the infinite does not annihilate the finite; otherwise, dependence would find no place in which to write its name, Divine Sovereignty no creature over which to exercise its just control. The *unchangeableness* of God must, therefore, be viewed in its relation to other things, such as the *Divine purpose*.

There is yet another objection from metaphysics that properly falls to be noticed here. *No testimony, it has been objected, can reach to the supernatural, and therefore no miracle can be proved by the evidence of sense.* This objection was urged for another purpose in a famous atheistical work (*Système de la Nature*) published in 1780. The writer, said Lord Brougham, "began by endeavouring to establish the most rigorous materialism, by trying to show that there is no such thing as mind. The whole fabric is built upon this foundation; and it would be difficult to find in the history of metaphysical controversies, such inconclusive reasoning, and such undisguised assumptions of the matter in dispute, as this fundamental part of his system is composed of. He begins by asserting that man has no means of carrying his mind *beyond the visible world*, that he is necessarily *confined within its limits*. He asserts what is absolutely contrary to every day's experience, and to the first rudiments of science—that we know, and can know, nothing but *what our senses tell us*."* In *Essays and Reviews* the objection against miracles (not mind) stands thus: "No testimony can reach to the supernatural; testimony can only apply to apparent sensible facts; testimony can only prove an extraordinary and perhaps inexplicable occurrence or phenomenon; that it is due to supernatural causes is entirely dependent on the previous belief and assumption of the parties."† The objection, that we "can know nothing but what our senses tell us," appears to me to be the same as saying that "testimony can only apply to apparent sensible facts:" but in the former case it was urged to get rid of *mind*; in the latter, to get rid of *miracles*. But Mr. Powell professed to believe in *mind*; he held that there is a world of intelligence—*νοητόν*, as

* Discourse on Nat. Theol. ; note, p. 235.

† Pp. 127, 128.

well as a world of sense,—*ὁρατόν*. The difficulty which occurs to my mind is, how, upon the principles of this objection to miracles, he could believe in those grand truths of physical science which he parades so ostentatiously. Were we to confine ourselves to bare facts,—“the testimony of sense,”—even physical science itself must stand still; for how could we arrive at the conception of a *general* law? Generalization involves a principle which experience or testimony neither does nor can give. If, then, we cannot get outside “apparent sensible facts,” if evidence is bounded by the region of the sensible, those very conclusions of physical science which are brought against miracles can have no foundation to rest upon. But if, on the contrary, we can rise to the conception of a general law, and so leave behind us the region of the sensible, may we not also rise to the conception of the supernatural, when we see works performed in the name of God which no man ever could of himself perform?

Mr. Morell, a writer of philosophic acuteness, thinks that Divine or religious truth is not received through the medium of the senses or common understanding, but deep down in our intuitive consciousness; and there may be truth in this so far as it relates to the theory of inspiration; no doubt the highest mental faculties, as the reason and conscience, are the media of Divine communications. And in the case of miracles the presence and aid of God, though *unseen*, may yet be *felt*,—it was so when the Apostle said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”* Here the Apostle disclaimed the power to work the miracle himself, and he had “experience,” if not “testimony,” reaching directly to the supernatural. Of course a *spectator* could not have this experience, and the difference between present and past time has, in our case, removed from the region even of the “sensible” to the region of what is only “credible,” the evidence for the miracles of the Bible. But a spectator at the time, or a believer now, in the fact of this lame man’s cure, may ascend by legitimate reasoning to the supernatural as the only adequate efficient cause. The passage translated by Sir W. Hamilton from a German work, and quoted by Professor Mansel, is worthy of being repeated:—“*Nature conceals God*; for, through her whole domain, Nature reveals only fate, only an indissoluble chain of mere efficient causes, without beginning and without end, excluding with equal necessity both Providence and chance. An independent agency, a free original commencement within her sphere, and proceeding from her powers, is

* Acts, iii. 6.

absolutely impossible. . . . *Man reveals God*; for man by his intelligence rises above Nature; and, in virtue of this intelligence, is conscious of himself as a power, not only independent of, but opposed to Nature, and capable of resisting, conquering, and controlling her. As man has a living faith in this power superior to Nature, which dwells in him, so has he a belief in God, a feeling, an *experience* of His existence. As he does not believe in this power, so does he not believe in God; he sees, he experiences nought in existence but Nature—necessity—fate.”

From facts within we rise to thoughts of God. The sensible gives us knowledge of the external world. But the mind, in virtue of its own intuition and energy, rises from effects to causes. When it rises from effects to causes, it does so by reasoning, as strictly and properly so called, as the inductive philosopher in the process of generalization. Distance is not seen; it is inferred in the mind. Anger is not seen; it is inferred from the expression of the countenance. And God, the Author of miracles, is not seen, yet His presence and power are inferred from His works.

OBJECTIONS DRAWN FROM PHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS.

The results of physical science have been represented as hostile to faith in miracles. Mr. Powell repeated again and again, in round, bold statements, without a fragment of argument or proof, that such hostility does exist. I have not, however, myself been able to discover any argument against faith in miracles from this source. “The grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes” is beside the question.

Things which differ.—Mr. J. S. Mill confounds, in his chapter on Induction, (see his *Logic*,) two things essentially different, and Mr. Powell, in his Essay, has done the same; viz. belief in causation with belief in the uniformity of nature. Necessary and contingent truths are not distinguished. That every effect must have a cause is an intuitive truth, self-evident and necessary; that the operations of nature must be uniform, is neither an intuitive truth, self-evident, nor necessary. Belief in causation is a fundamental law of the human mind; uniformity of operation in nature is a thing simply of experience. We could conceive of nature’s operations being different from what they are without any violation of the fundamental laws of human belief. As to miracles, the question is simply one of *fact*: the Bible affirms that miracles have been wrought, and physical science has done nothing to disprove the Bible’s

testimony upon this point. Physical science does not touch the question as to the *historical* fact of miracles, and it has not attempted to *explain* them. It has left them simply where they were a century ago. I believe in the "grand truth," repeated so often and needlessly by Mr. Powell, "of the universal order and constancy of natural causes." It is "fixed, *in my mind*, so firmly that I cannot conceive of the possibility of its failure," *when left to itself*. A miracle has nothing to do with this "constancy," or reverse, of "natural causes"—it is simply the fact, or otherwise, of *personal agency* producing special results. The phenomena produced by "natural causes," that is, viewed as effects proceeding from merely physical causes, are of *necessity* uniform and constant, being subject to the law of necessity as opposed to the law of freedom; but the phenomena of *mind* or *personal agency* are the reverse—they are *not* of necessity uniform, being subject to the law of freedom as opposed to the law of necessity. It matters not what hypothesis is accepted to explain the efficiency or activity of "natural causes." Mr. Stewart enumerated *six*, and the law of natural selection and struggle for existence, perhaps, might be called a *seventh* hypothesis; but whether we accept materialism, or the explanation that the phenomena of nature result from certain powers communicated to matter at its first formation, or that the phenomena proceed from general laws, or that the universe is a sort of machine put in motion, and so constructed that the multiplicity of effects which we see are all to be traced to one original act of sovereign power,—I say it matters not which, nor what hypothesis we accept; they all come under the law of *necessity*; and are, therefore, foreign to the question before us. Physics without mind may *exclude* the question of miracles; but physics alone can do nothing, either to argue or settle such a question.

The real point.—Does the natural exclude the supernatural? Are natural causes and effects so arranged as not to allow the intervention of mind and personal agency? Gravity draws all bodies to the earth, but man puts forth his hand and arrests the falling apple *at will*. Mr. Powell, however, affirmed that "miracles are inconceivable to reason," opposed to "the primary laws of human belief." But by what primary law of belief we are required to reject miracles without looking at their evidence, is not said. The statements in *Essays and Reviews* are naked and bold enough; but when we search for argument, we find appeals to fact where reason fails, and appeals to reason where facts are wanting. Miracles are not "inconceivable to reason;" we have no *intuitive* principles in

the mind which compel us to reject them. On the contrary, when an effect is produced which cannot be accounted for on natural principles, the mind rises naturally from the greatness of the work to a supernatural cause. Neither have we any *experience* to urge in behalf of the objection to miracles. We have discovered uniformity of working among certain agencies, and we have discovered diversity of operations proceeding from the will of man. If it is replied, God does not work except by His laws in the economy of material nature, we demand in vain from Physical Science either reason or proof for such an assertion. God's will is expressed in His material works—whoever said it was not? But when it is asserted that His will is not expressed anywhere else, we again demand of the physical student reason or proof, and find none. His will, as expressed in His *works*, cannot, it is admitted, be contrary to His will as expressed in His *Word*, or revelation; but neither is it so. There is no opposition; physical science has done nothing to prejudice faith in revelation or miracles. Material nature is elastic enough to admit of the play of the human will, and if it can and does admit of the play of the human will, it cannot shut out the Divine will. The chain of antecedents and consequents, the “grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes,” therefore, presents no argument against miracles as effects proceeding from special causes.

Let the science of physics be cultivated in all its bearings to the utmost extent; but do not undervalue the tools of the workman; do not exclude mind and the higher science of mind. There is both room and need for the study of metaphysics and mental philosophy, as well as of physics. “It must be borne in mind (said the President of the British Association) that, even if we are satisfied, from a persevering and impartial inquiry, that organic forms have varied indefinitely in kind, still the *causa causans* of these changes is not explained by our researches; if it be admitted that we find no evidence of amorphous matter suddenly changed into complex structures, still, *why* matter should be endowed with the plasticity by which it slowly acquires modified structures is unexplained. If we assume that natural selection, or the struggle for existence, coupled with the tendency of like to produce like, gives rise to various changes, still our researches are at present uninformative as to *why* like should produce like, *why* acquired characteristics in the parent should be reproduced in the offspring. Reproduction is still itself an enigma.” Without another science, then, the doctrine of continuity is dark—we lengthen out the chain backwards, it snaps asunder, and we

are left gazing upon a gap which nothing but Deity itself can fill up. We agree that philosophy should have no likes or dislikes; and, while a "glow of admiration" will assuredly be permitted "to the physical enquirer when he beholds his orderly development by the necessary inter-relation and inter-action of each element of the Cosmos," we, too, viewing this necessary chain of cause and effect as *concealing* God when considered alone, as exhibiting nothing but a dark and inevitable fatalism—we, I say, may also be permitted a glow of admiration when we find ourselves set free from the darkness which surrounds this chain of endless causation, to behold in the purer light of MIND and INTELLIGENCE the Cause of all causes, even Him "who stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing."

THOUGHTS ON MIRACLES. By EDWARD BURTON
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IT has been said that "*Scientific investigation plainly shows that every department of Nature is under the control of laws the most exact and inexorable,*"*—which may well be conceded; nor does it require any depth of "investigation" to arrive at a fact so patent to all observers. We may, therefore, allow it to be an axiom of science, and an "inexorable law" that no effect can take place, in Nature or out of Nature, without an adequate cause; and we add that one of these "inexorable laws" is that the laws which "control" are necessarily, and *ipso facto*, stronger than the Nature "controlled."

It has been said further, that "*the whole course of Nature is a chain of antecedents and consequents, bound together by a necessary and absolutely certain connection entirely beyond the reach of interruption or alteration; and every event that happens in Nature is the inevitable result of the laws and properties of matter and force, which can neither be violated, modified, nor suspended; and beyond these laws and properties Nature knows no other rule; they are alone and supreme.*"*—But the very reverse of this is manifest in every "event in Nature," every one of which is a breach, interruption, or overruling of one chain of antecedents by another. The laws of *inertia* and *gravitation* are broken through by *vegetation*; the chain of consequents in *vegetation* is broken by the *animal* that feeds upon it; and, above all, the *will of man* disposes according to his need, his pleasure, or his caprice, of all the chains of

* Vide *Journal of Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, vol. I. p. 95.