

MIRACLE

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It is needful that a layman who enters on a subject which might well demand the pen of a professed theologian, should give his reasons for the following pages.

Shortly after I joined the Catholic Church, it so chanced that an essay written by me when I was only feeling my way towards the light, fell into the hands of one who, still a sceptic, was longing to believe. He sent a message to the following effect: "Tell him that if there be a revelation of the Truth at all, I am convinced that it is to be found in the Catholic Church; I shall read with interest whatever more he may write on the subject, but I trust he will never attempt to minimize the miraculous."

To do this was indeed the last thing that would occur to me; the evidence for recent miracles was among the causes which had brought me into the Church, and the existing supernatural order had helped me not a little to accept the record of it through history and as revealed in the Canon of Holy Scripture. Scarce any sentence in Cardinal Newman's writings had ever struck me more than this: "The Catholic Church is hung with miracles," and it had enabled me to grasp

the truth that exceptions to what we call law are potentially present in all law, that miracle is among the evidences that we are not guided and governed by a system of levers, screws, and wheels linked together by an iron and unchanging necessity, but by the hand of a Father ; a hand firm yet pliant, strong yet elastic, behind which is will, swaying circumstances, yet allowing itself to move at times in accordance with them ; no mere force set in motion once for all, careless of what may stand in the way.

But though there was no temptation to deny miracle, the message seemed to call for a statement of its claims. There was in the mind of the speaker a feeling, whether or not founded in fact, that miracle is ignored, slurred over, and kept in the background ; that its existence is to be apologized for, rather than paraded ; is a difficulty in the way of, not a testimony to, the Christian faith. The kind of argument which I might endeavour to place before my kindly adviser, should the occasion offer, gradually took shape, and while I may not doubt that my matter must be a mere commonplace to the clergy, that which has occurred to one lay mind may help other such under like circumstances. It may enable them to see that the Catholic Church, mirror on earth of God's external government, is indeed a realm of order and law, but manifesting constantly the presence of a living Ruler, guiding it through the ages ; no mere jostle of atoms which, that they may move at all, have gradually accommodated themselves to one fixed, unalterable course.

Before entering on the subject it is necessary to define our terms. It is undoubtedly true that the Latin word *miraculum* does not necessarily imply supernatural

agency, but our whole argument is based on the existence of that agency. It is enough for us that *miraculum* may imply the supernatural, and we use the word only in that sense. So far as we can approach a definition by the use of synonymous terms, we seek information from Holy Scripture, and find that the events, which in common speech are called miracles, are therein named wonders or prodigies, signs, powers, and works.

Catholic writers, as well as the late Dr. Trench—whose work on our Lord's miracles is worthy of attention and respect, though it is occasionally disfigured by Protestant prejudice and not always theologically accurate—are careful to note, following Origen, that the word "wonders" is never applied to them but in conjunction with some other name, as though to show us that the mere wonder is not the chief feature in a miracle.

"Not that the miracle, considered simply as a wonder, as an astonishing event which the beholders can reduce to no law with which they are acquainted, is even as such without its meaning and its purpose; that purpose being forcibly to startle men from the dull dream of a sense-bound existence, and however it may not be in itself an appeal to the spiritual in man, yet to act as a summons to him that he now open his eyes to the spiritual appeal which is about to be addressed to him." *

Not all signs are miracles, but all miracles are signs, some to confirm those who deliver a message in God's name, some to reveal the more immediate presence or power of God, some to strengthen or reward individual faith or piety.

They are described also as powers; that is, powers of God, evidences, according to Catholic theologians,

* Trench, *On the Miracles*, popular edit., p. 3.

that new powers have entered into our world, and are working thus for the good of mankind ; and the word "works" is used, "as though the wonderful were only the natural form of working for Him who is dwelt in by all the fulness of God."

Trench's description of a miracle is interesting : "An astonishing event which beholders can reduce to no law with which they are acquainted" ; but it is inadequate, since his description would let in the wonders of hypnotism, clairvoyance, palmistry, etc. ; some of them referable to law partially understood, some apparently diabolic miracles, of which Trench is of course not speaking. The words, however, do not in any case form a definition, nor can we call such any of the modes in which they are spoken of in Holy Scripture. Just as creeds were only needed as doubts grew, and would have been superfluous when all men believed ; so before men had grasped the idea of the general uniformity of nature, before they spoke of laws of nature—by which they do not mean law at all, but only ascertained order—there could be no definition of what is beyond nature, in itself only another name for the ordinary and orderly working of God.

"Laws of God," says Trench, "exist only for us," and he quotes St. Augustine : "The will of God is the nature of each created thing."

"That will," Trench continues, "being the will of highest wisdom and love, excludes all wilfulness ; it is a will upon which we can securely count ; from the past expressions of it we can presume its future, and so we rightly call it a law. But still from moment to moment it is a will ; each law, as we term it, of nature is only that which we have learned concerning this will in that particular region of its activity. To say then

that there is more of the will of God in a miracle than in any other work of His, is insufficient."

St. Augustine, in the fourth century, seems to have been the first writer who found it necessary to define, or lay down a canon of, miracle. He takes the miracle at Cana, and asserts that the change of water into wine is God's ordinary work in the ripening of grapes, and their fermentation in the wine vat. Goethe, though with an ironical and subversive intention, has adopted this view in the words he puts into the mouth of Mephistopheles in *Auerbach's Keller* :

Der Wein ist saftig, Holz die Reben,
Der hölzerne Tisch kann Wein auch geben ;
Ein tiefer Blick in die Natur,
Hier ist ein Wunder ; glaubet nur.¹

Kingsley quotes this again in *Alton Locke*, as well as the words of St. Augustine, and puts the argument in his own phrase, thus : "Allow Jesus to have been the Lord of Creation, and what was He doing then but what He does in the manufacture of every grape, transformed from air and water even as that wine in Cana."

In the same way St. Augustine speaks of the miracle of Aaron's rod that budded, reminding us that it is by the power of God that every tree does the same ; the whole natural order is in absolute dependence upon God.

But take it in his own words in his treatise on the Trinity :

"Who draws up the sap through the root of the vine to the cluster, and makes the wine, save God who, while man plants and waters, gives the increase ?

¹ The wine is sap, and wood the vine,
The wooden table can give us wine ;
Search Nature well with earnest eyes,
Believe, and miracles arise.

But when at the command of the Lord the water was made wine with unwonted quickness, the Divine Power was declared, as even fools allow. Who in their wonted fashion clothes the trees with leaf and flower, save God? Yet when the rod of Aaron the priest budded, the Godhead, as it were, spake with doubting man. . . . When such things happen in, as it were, a kind of river of events which glide and flow from the hidden to the seen, and the seen to the hidden in a beaten track, they are called natural; when, in order to warn men, they are brought about with unwonted change, they are called miracles."

According to this, one form of miracle, though not at all the most surprising, is the direct revelation of that which is ever taking place in what we call time, but as time does not exist for God, rapidity or slowness of His action has no meaning; He is never rapid and is never slow, save to our apprehension; He simply does.

Dr. Trench works out this thought, showing that, *e.g.*, many of the plagues of Egypt were the natural troubles of the land, quickened into far direr than their usual activity. And again:

"It is no absolute miracle that a coin should be found in a fish's mouth, or that a lion should meet a man and slay him, or that a thunderstorm should happen at an unusual period of the year, and yet these circumstances may be so timed for strengthening faith, for punishing disobedience, for awakening repentance; they may serve such high purposes in God's moral government, that we at once range them in the catalogue of miracles."

St. Thomas Aquinas defines a miracle as "an effect which is beyond the order or laws of the whole of

created nature"—*præter ordinem totius naturæ creatæ*,¹ but qualifies this to some extent in the work *Contra Gentiles*: "Those are rightly to be termed miracles which are wrought by Divine power, apart from the order usually observed in nature."²

If now we attempt to classify miracles, we may discover that in these also God acts by rule, and in a manner antecedently probable; that we shall not find any such acts as are ascribed to their gods by men who do not understand who and what God is—that is to say, acts that are puerile, exaggerated, and monstrous. We shall find no stories

Of maids with snaky tresses, or sailors turned to swine,

nor such as those of the Infancy of Jesus in the spurious Gospels, at once trivial and malignant.

But before we affront the question of concrete miracles, there is a region of wonder to be examined, of enormous importance, if less capable of classification.

In the ecclesiastical order there are not only sacraments, capable of strict definition, but also what are called sacramentals, whose nature can less be reduced to rule and classification, as prayer and alms, the confession at Mass and in the Office, the blessing by bishops and abbots, holy water, blessed ashes, palms, candles, and the like.

So there exists, apart from concrete miracles, the miraculous, by which term may be designated such a state of things as we find in the Book of Genesis and other portions of the Sacred Narrative, when God and His angels converse familiarly with man; or such occurrences as those in the giving of the Law to Moses, who with the elders of Israel went up into the Mount:

¹ *Summa*, i. cx. 4.

² *Contra Gentiles*, i. 102.

“and they saw the God of Israel.” Again, at the Birth and Death of Jesus the invisible world became visible, and in closer contact with everyday life. Angels thronged round His cradle and His grave, and the heart of the distant East was moved at the flashing of a new star. Just in the same way, in the later history of the Christian Church there have been periods specially marked by the wondrous; by visions and dreams as distinguished from concrete miracles, though these were not wanting at such crises. At the time that the great monastic orders were founded; in the lives of certain saints, notably St. Dominic, St. Francis, and St. Teresa; in some places, as Florence in the thirteenth century, visions of Christ, our Lady and the angels have revealed the nearness of the spiritual world. In these later days, again, the apparitions at Paray-le-Monial and at Lourdes, apart from the special miracles there vouchsafed, bring the same truth before the mind in an age which seemed in danger of forgetting the very existence of the supernatural.

But when closely considered, the supernatural would seem to underlie and pervade the natural world in some such manner as the nervous system underlies our natural bodies, and can be manifested to and recognized by those who seek it with intelligence at any time and in any place; but it is especially gathered up and knotted together in ganglia, so that in such bundles of nerves it becomes almost impossible not to perceive it. The ganglia of the supernatural, so to speak, are found at certain points of the world's history, and we can understand the reason for some of them, as at the call of Abraham, the Birth of our Lord, the perfecting the organization of the Church, the development of the Regular Orders. Perhaps only when time is swallowed

up of eternity shall we be able to see the whole anatomy, as it were, of the Church, and to understand the place of all the main centres of the supernatural, why and where they came into prominence and vision.

Now the record of these wondrous occurrences is imperfect; we are told that God spoke with Adam, with Noe, with Abraham, but not the manner of the interview; we know not whether He manifested Himself in some visible form or infused into heart and conscience the knowledge of His will. We hear of angels, but the descriptions seem to imply now man, now God Himself, now, and this especially in the New Testament, bright beings, neither God nor man, "with the power of a divine nature, and the compassionate tenderness of a kindly human heart." Still less we know not whether our Lady's alleged delivery of the rosary to St. Dominic, of the scapular to St. Simon Stock, of the habit to the Servite Fathers, were what we call, in modern philosophic language, objective or subjective, or whether it were on the confines of both, the vision being subjective, but tangible objects remaining in the hands of the recipients. We know not, and perhaps we shall never know; yet a few words may be permitted on the subject, which may aid in clearing the difficulty.

We may be content to leave the question of objectiveness and subjectiveness on one side, when the Saint who has given us the most remarkable, if short, detail of his own experiences was unable to resolve the problem. St. Paul tells us that he—for no one has ever doubted that he spoke of himself—was caught up into the third heaven, and heard words which it was not allowed him to utter, also that he had visions and revelations more than others; but he goes on to say

that he knows not whether he was then in the body or out of the body, whether the visions and his transportation to heaven were or were not objective. But that which was objective remained : the thorn in the flesh, however the words be interpreted, some sharp bodily ailment, visible, tangible to himself, and probably also to others. So St. Francis and other saints who have been marked with the stigmata, down to this century, in which Maria Mörl, the ecstasica of the Tirol, bore the same signs of her suffering God, would all have been content to leave unanswered the question whether their visions were of the bodily or mental eye, but there was no doubt at all that the wounds were outward facts, wherewith they were marked as sharers in the Passion of Jesus.

Indeed, we may go further and say that tangibility and visibility, according to the senses, have nothing to do with reality. Our Lord's wounds were as real on His risen Body when Thomas did not see them as when he was graciously permitted to behold and touch ; He was as truly the Christ when He walked with the disciples to Emmaus, and their eyes were holden that they knew Him not, as afterwards when He made Himself known to them in the breaking of bread ; He was as truly existent when invisibly, intangibly He passed the sealed stone and closed doors, as when, in the sight of crowds, He hung upon the Cross.

It will probably have struck all thoughtful persons that the conception of angels as represented in art was of slow growth and late development. But if in our day God were pleased to allow us, as He has from time to time allowed certain of the saints—for instance, St. Philip Neri and St. Frances of Rome—to see our Guardian Angel, it would be almost as great an

astonishment as to see him at all, were we not to see him like the angel of some well-known picture, or at least like some abstraction and combination of many. And this, although we know and believe the Church's doctrine that an angel is pure spirit, bodiless, impalpable, therefore only seeming to be in human form, with those added qualities which denote swiftness and strength and unceasing watchfulness. It stands to reason that if a being always waiting in God's presence to do His will, "glorious, benignant, beautiful," manifest himself to man, it must be under a form in which man has already conceived of him, else he will rather terrify, or make no impression at all. Hence when converse with angels was frequent, and no ideal portraits had been made of those bright spirits, Abraham and the other Patriarchs, Manoah and young Tobias, saw them in the forms of men; and only by after events, or upon some wondrous act of the Angel, did the recipient of these gracious visits recognize what they were.

So with apparitions of Christ and our Lady. It is most natural that Christ should appear either as the Babe of Bethlehem, or as He who treads the wine-press of the Cross; as the thorn-crowned Martyr, or the King of Glory, appearing, according as the needs of those to whom He comes require that He should be seen. Our Lady comes as the Virgin of the Annunciation, the *Mater Dolorosa* and *Maria Assumpta*; the elderly woman bowed with sorrow, who bends over her Son in Francia's *Pietà*, or the Virgin ever fair and young as Murillo imagined her, with the crescent moon beneath her feet; or again, as she showed herself to Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes.

Much more is all this true of God Himself—that Being without body, parts, or passions—if He talk or

live familiarly with man. If on Him be laid no inherent necessity in regard to Himself, there is an inherent necessity in regard to us. We know ourselves as the crown of His creation, hence we can only think of God as one of whom our souls are like, but greater, wiser, nobler than we, and if He talk with man it must be as a man talketh with his friend.

So much it was well to say about the borderland of wonders which are yet not concrete miracles, but it is enough to indicate the explanation which would be given, where any is possible or desirable. The borderland of wonder, though only revealed through chinks, is yet sufficiently disclosed to show how near are the worlds of sight and faith, how interchangeable is one with the other, so that even in this life the mists which hide the supernatural may and do clear away. We cannot always perceive the gulf which exists between the objective and the subjective, between body and spirit, and when we do see it, may understand that only to us is that gulf impassable. Past, present, and future are one and the same to God, the unchangeable everlasting Now.

Concrete and definite miracles arrange themselves, for the most part, in special groups, as may be easily seen by any one who will take the trouble to make lists of those occurring in the Bible, in ecclesiastical history, or in any collection of the Lives of the Saints. We may take, as typical of such groups, unexpected births; healing from sickness, with or without the use of natural means; raising from the dead; the change of substance, as of water into wine; or of property, as when the axe-head rose to the surface of the pool. There are again others which seem to stand alone, only because we are unaware of instances of the same kind,

for it cannot be supposed that all miracles have been recorded, as when the walls of Jericho fell at the blowing of the trumpets; there are others wherein a wondrous gift abides in the matter of the miracle, which is continuous, and not confined to a single manifestation. Such are those wherein Elias and Eliseus caused meal and bread and oil to multiply as long as need required, or that in which the blood of St. Januarius continues to liquefy, so often as the conditions of its first liquefaction are repeated; or that of the oil which still continues to flow from the bones of St. Walburga, who died in the eighth century, and from those of St. Nicholas of Bari, in the fourth. If we classify the instances of miracle in several groups, their repetitions under like circumstances at various periods in the world's history may help us in a degree to understand both the ordinary rule of God, and the rule, so to speak, of the exception; remembering that the ultimate rule of God is always and only His good pleasure and His sovereign will.

But there is one miracle which cannot be classified, and falls into no group: alone in the world's history, it is like the sun which God has set in the firmament for the light of our system. This is, of course, the miracle of the Incarnation, when, by the glad co-operation of Mary, she, the one sinless and stainless creature, became the Mother of her God—she,

Pattern of seraphs, only worthy ark
To bear her God athwart the floods of time.

In speaking of other wonders, whereat men stumble, Cardinal Newman has well said that all is as nothing in comparison with this; "no miracle can be so great as that which took place in the holy house at Nazareth."

And with the same thought Dr. Trench says, "The great miracle is the Incarnation ; all else, so to speak, follows naturally and of course."

But though this be so, there are still certain events recorded in Holy Scripture which have been called "preludings of the Incarnation," some of which, foretold by the Prophets, and having in their days found a first accomplishment, were afterwards regarded as having their complete fulfilment only in the Birth of Christ. In these events God would seem to show His abiding sway over the life, and reproduction, and births of men. It is of Him that one marriage is fruitful and another is not: "Children and the fruit of the womb are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord." And this fact, which we are apt to forget, He from time to time accentuates, as it were, by the births of children when such seem unlikely or impossible. Isaac, for instance, was born when it appeared almost against the course of nature that he should be, and the birth was heralded by the message of an angel ; Samson, not, so far as we hear under the same circumstances of extreme unlikelihood, but still against hope, after a similar angelic word. The High Priest, Heli, foretold the birth of Samuel, Eliseus that of the son of the woman of Sunam. An angel, again, declared that St. John Baptist should be born when Zachary and Elizabeth were well stricken in years, and that event immediately heralded the Nativity which, as has been said, stands alone.

Closely connected with this is that class of miracles which is concerned with restoration to life at the Divine word, whether spoken by the Lord Himself, by His Prophets, or His Saints. Elias restored the widow's son, Eliseus the boy given so strangely to the Sunamite woman. In these there was, as it were, a struggle

between death and life, death retreated unwillingly. Not till the Lord of life came could any speak absolutely, so that the power might work without hindrance. Jesus alone could say, "Damsel, arise," or "Lazarus, come forth," with the same calmness with which He said all else that passed His gracious lips ; Him alone can we address :

Thou madest Life in man and brute ;
Thou madest Death ; and lo, Thy foot
Is on the skull which Thou hast made.

But the gift was afterwards bestowed upon the Saints in much the same manner as it had been on the Prophets. St. Benedict, in the sixth century, did not say to the peasant who implored him to give him again his dead son : "Go thy way, thy son liveth," like his Master, but he prostrated himself on the body of the child in prayer, and the child's soul came back again. And in the fifteenth century, St. Casimir the King raised a girl to life by the touch of his body, and a boy carried to the tomb of St. Peter of Luxembourg was restored, though in his case the skull had been fractured and the brain in part dashed out.

This brings us to those miracles which cause so great perplexity in these later days : those which are wrought by relics—that is, to put it plainly, by the material contact of the body of a dead Saint, or a portion of it, or the touch of some garment from the sacred body. The sanctity of relics is brought out but little in the Old Testament, but coming into strong prominence in the New, it has remained with the Church to this day, and relics are one of the two main channels in which God's power is manifested to man. The instance in the Old Testament is so typical that it may well be quoted at length, especially as it is one of the most wonderful

works wrought by relics : "And Eliseus died and they buried him. And the rovers from Moab came into the land the same year. And some that were burying a man saw the rovers, and cast the body into the sepulchre of Eliseus. And when it had touched the bones of Eliseus, the man came to life, and stood upon his feet."

Of course the central point of all such wonders is the healing touch of the garments worn by our Blessed Lord, whether those spoken of in the Gospels, or, if we may trust imperfect evidence, a coat worn by our Lord, and now preserved at Trèves ; but closely linked with these are the handkerchiefs which had touched the body of St. Paul, and healed the sick to whom they were applied. It must be remembered that the miracles wrought by such relics, the Holy Coat or a thorn from the Crown worn on the Cross, or a fragment of the Cross itself, or the relics of the Saints, are, conversely, testimonies to the authenticity of the relics themselves.

This class of miracles is especially interesting, as it is that to which more than any other the Church has set her seal, not only as happening in times past, but as existing down to and in our own days. She has made miracles the test, or at least one of the tests of sanctity. Every man or woman admitted into her calendar of Saints must have two proved miracles to his or her account, and these are necessarily for the most part connected with relics.

Another class is associated with objects, not relics, into which, under certain conditions, the gift of healing is infused. For Naaman the Syrian healing power was infused into the waters of Jordan only, the rivers of Syria being powerless in his case. The Pool of

Siloam was troubled each day for the first who stepped into it, and in that case our Lord revealed the power of God that underlay the waters, by healing directly without their aid. The works done at certain fountains are attested by many scientific men, who believe their virtue, in spite of preconceived ideas—whether, as at St. Winifred's Well, the powers of the waters have been known and proved through centuries, or have been manifested but recently, as at Lourdes or Oostacker.

Indeed, not to specify every class under which miracles may be grouped, it is not too much to say that there are few such occurrences which have not a prototype in the Old Testament, a fulfilment in the New, a repetition in the Lives of the Saints and the history of the Church ; and if in some cases the exact counterpart is not found in later history, it is only because the Lives of the Saints are so crowded with miracle, that it is not always possible, as it is not necessary, to find among so great a treasure the exact detailed equivalent. But the parallels which present themselves without difficulty will show at once what is meant.

The Prophet Habacuc was carried from Judæa to Babylon by the Angel of the Lord, that he might feed Daniel in the den of lions with the pottage which he was bearing to the reapers at home ; and in like manner Philip the Deacon was transported from Gaza to Azotus. Elias gained abundance of rain ; so did St. Scholastica, the sister of St. Benedict. If Elias and Eliseus multiplied meal and oil, thus anticipating our Lord's miracles of the loaves and fishes ; so after Him did St. John Joseph of the Cross multiply food so lately as the early part of the eighteenth century, and St. Agnes of Montepulciano in the thirteenth.

If the Three Holy Children walked unharmed in the midst of the burning fiery furnace ; so St. Lucy remained unscathed, though resin and oil were poured on the fire into which she was thrown, and St. Cecilia remained a day and a night in an hot-air bath heated seven times beyond its wont ; so too St. Peter Gonzalez lay on hot burning coals uninjured, to save the soul of a woman who tempted him to sin.

The face of Moses beamed with rays of light when he came out from the more immediate presence of God, in prophecy of that Transfiguration of Jesus which the disciples saw upon the mountain ; and so the face of St. Francis Caracciolo, in the seventeenth century, emitted brilliant beams of light before the Blessed Sacrament.

Moses struck the rock in the desert, so that there flowed a rill for the refreshing of Israel ; and St. Isidore of Madrid in time of drought made the sign of the Cross on dry ground, and pierced the soil with his ox goad, so that thence flowed waters which run even till this day and are endowed with healing virtue.

St. Hyacinth, in the thirteenth century, walked the waters of the Dnieper, as our Lord walked the waves of the Galilæan Lake ; but he bare the image of our Lady and the Sacred Host in his hands, so that He who trod the waves before him, and stretched out His hand to St. Peter as he was sinking, was really the power who held him up.

At the outset of this essay words were cited from Cardinal Newman, as introducing the subject. The whole passage may be quoted as summing up the argument :

“The Catholic Church from east to west, from north to south is, according to our conceptions, hung with

miracles. The store of relics is inexhaustible ; they are multiplied through all lands, and each particle of each has in it at least a dormant, perhaps an energetic virtue of supernatural operation. At Rome there is the True Cross, the crib of Bethlehem, and the chair of St. Peter ; portion of the crown of thorns are kept at Paris ; the holy coat is shown at Trèves ; the winding-sheet at Turin ; at Monza, the iron crown is formed out of a nail of the Cross, and another nail is claimed for the Duomo of Milan ; and pieces of our Lady's habit are to be seen in the Escorial. The Agnus Dei, blessed medals, the cord of Francis, are all the medium of divine manifestations and graces. Crucifixes have bowed the head to, and Madonnas have bent their eyes upon, assembled crowds. St. Januarius's blood liquefies periodically at Naples, and St. Winifred's Well is the scene of wonders even in an unbelieving country. Women are marked with the sacred stigmata ; blood has flowed on Fridays from their five wounds, and their heads are crowned with a circle of lacerations. Relics are ever touching the sick, the diseased, the wounded, sometimes with no result at all, at other times with marked and undeniable efficacy. Who has not heard of the abundant favours gained by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and of the marvellous consequences which have attended the invocation of St. Antony of Padua ? These phenomena are sometimes reported of saints in their lifetime, as well as after death especially if they were evangelists or martyrs. The wild beasts crouched before their victims in the Roman amphitheatre ; the axe-man was unable to sever St. Cecilia's head from her body, and St. Peter elicited a spring of water for his jailer's baptism in the Mamertine. St. Francis Xavier turned salt water into fresh for five

hundred travellers ; St. Raymond was transported over the sea on his cloak ; St. Andrew shone brightly in the dark ; St. Scholastica gained by her prayers a pouring rain ; St. Paul was fed by ravens, and St. Frances saw her Guardian Angel."

Cardinal Newman then discusses the reasons for disbelief in miracle since Biblical, or at least since Apostolic days, which we may condense, but using his own words.

"Both they [the opponents] start with the miracles of the Apostles ; and then their first principle or presumption against our miracles is this, 'What God did once, He is *not* likely to do again.' They say, it cannot be supposed He will work *many* miracles ; we, it cannot be supposed He will work *few*."

Again :

"They do not say, 'St. Francis, or St. Antony, or St. Philip Neri did no miracles for the evidence for them is worth nothing,' or, because what *looked* like a miracle was not a miracle': no, but they say, 'It is *impossible* they should have wrought miracles.'"

Again :

"Catholics hold the mystery of the Incarnation, and the Incarnation is the most stupendous event which ever can take place on earth ; and after it, and henceforth I do not see how we can scruple at any miracle on the mere ground of it being unlikely to happen. No miracle can be so great as that which took place in the holy house of Nazareth ; it is infinitely more difficult to believe than all the miracles of the breviary, of the martyrology, of saints' lives, of legends, of local traditions put together ; and there is the grossest inconsistency on the very face of the matter, for any one so to strain out the gnat and swallow the camel as to

profess what is inconceivable, yet to protest against what is surely within the limits of intelligible hypothesis. If, through divine grace we once are able to accept the solemn truth that the Supreme Being was born of a mortal woman, what is there to be imagined which can offend us on the ground of its marvellousness? . . . When we start with assuming that miracles are not unlikely, we are putting forth a position which lies embedded as it were, and involved in the great revealed fact of the Incarnation."

So much is plain at starting ; but more is plain too.

"Miracles are not only not unlikely, they are positively likely ; and for this simple reason, because, for the most part, when God begins He goes on. We conceive that when He first did a miracle, He began a series ; what He commenced, He continued ; what has been, will be. Surely this is good and clear reasoning. . . . Our first principles that miracles are not unlikely now is not at all a strange one in the mouths of those who believe that the Supreme Being came miraculously into this world, miraculously united Himself to man's nature, passed a life of miracles, and then gave His Apostles a greater gift of miracles than He exercised Himself. So far on the principle itself ; and now, in the next place, see what comes of it.

"This comes of it, that there are two systems going on in the world, one of nature, and one above nature ; and two histories, one of common events, and one of miracles ; and each system and each history has its own order."

And as a conclusion of what he has said we find this clear statement :

"For myself, lest I seem in any way to be shrinking from a determinate judgement on the claims of some

miracles and relics . . . and to be hiding particular questions in what is vague and general, I will avow distinctly that, putting out of the question the hypothesis of unknown laws of nature (that is, of the professed miracle being not miraculous), I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, and for the motion of the eyes of the pictures of the Madonna in the Roman States. I see no reason to doubt the material of the Lombard crown at Monza, and I do not see why the holy coat at Trèves may not have been what it professes to be. I firmly believe that portions of the True Cross are at Rome and elsewhere, that the crib of Bethlehem is at Rome and the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul also. I believe that at Rome too lies St. Stephen, that St. Matthew lies at Salerno, and St. Andrew at Amalfi. I firmly believe that the relics of the saints are doing innumerable miracles and graces daily, and that it needs only for a Catholic to show devotion to any saint in order to receive special benefits from his intercession. I firmly believe that saints in their lifetime have before now raised the dead to life, crossed the sea without vessels, multiplied grain and bread, cured incurable diseases, and superseded the operation of the laws of the universe in a multitude of ways."

And here our essay might close, but that we must not press the argument too far, and that we are bound to consider if there be any—and, if any, what—difference between ecclesiastical miracles and those recorded in the Scriptures. We answer that there is no difference in principle; it is of faith, that God who worked hitherto in that manner still continues to work. But there is a difference in detail. The Scriptural miracles,

one and all, rest on divine faith, and each must be accepted without doubt. But although miracles out of Scripture become the object of private faith, no Catholic is bound to believe in any particular miracle of this kind ; but he cannot without unsound doctrine deny that miracles have occurred since the Apostolic age. Every Catholic again "owes respect to the judgement of high ecclesiastical authority ; but within these limits he is left to the freedom and the responsibilities of private judgement."

Enough, however, has surely been said to show that if we reject not one here or there, on which it may be right that we suspend our judgement, but whole classes of miracles, because of their unlikelihood, we cut the ground from under all others of the same class. And if we rest our belief on evidence, it is impossible to have more than exists in the case, especially, of modern miracles, which have been examined for processes of canonization or beatification. No legal tribunal sifts facts in a more thorough manner than does the Congregation of Rites.

It is possible to say consistently : There is no such thing as miracle ; the universe is a mere mechanism, which came into action none knows how, but at any rate acts by changeless law ; it is not possible to say that it once existed, but ceased at this or that precise period, and the reign of changeless law now obtains. What is this but to take the finger and guidance of God away from His creation, and to say that the heart of the universe has ceased to beat ?

If it be true that "every fatherhood is of God," and that all rule, authority, and power are signs of Him ; so, conversely, must it be true that all that we call good government, order, and rule in a family or a state shows

forth the mode in which He directs His creation. And that is the best government in which the ordinary operations of life go on unmarked and evenly, but in which the master or ruler manifests his authority from time to time, whether in the way of change, or evidence of direct governance. That rule is not best which is merely mechanical, but that which shows itself as order tempered by love, regularity varied by change.

We cannot expect that all can actually witness the evidence of God's interference in His world, any more than all the many millions of an earthly sovereign can see his progress and his state. But they know that his pageants and processions take place from time to time, he flashes a message of condolence in calamities, he exercises now and then his prerogative of mercy, he dispenses honours and rewards ; many are gratified by the favours given to one.

And so with God's governance. We believe that our King rules, and does honour to His saints, and to the crowd here and there because of His saints. Round such and such a holy well or image His powers cluster and throng ; here and there, now and then, bright angels who always "stand in order serviceable" flash into sight, or show without vision that they are present. It is a part of His order now and then to break His order, to prove that it rests upon His will. We know Him in the constant succession of light and dark, in the steady sequence of cause and effect, in all the order which He called good ; and we know Him also in miracle and wonder, underlying His law from the beginning ; the visible evidence of eternal power, infinite wisdom, everlasting love.