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CONCERNING MIRACLES.

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"Absolutely speaking, in the strict and philosophical sense, either *nothing* is miraculous, namely, if we have respect to the power of God; or, if we regard our own power and understanding, then almost *everything*—as well what we call natural as what we call supernatural—is in this sense really miraculous; and it is only usualness or unusualness that makes the distinction."—Dr. CLARKE *On the Attributes, &c.*

"God's miraculous interpositions may have been all along, by general laws of wisdom." "There may be beings to whom the whole Christian dispensation may appear as natural as the visible known course of things appears to us."—BUTLER'S *Analogy*.

"Miracles imply no suspension of the laws of nature . . . The interposition of superior power implied in a miracle, too, may be entirely natural."—Dr. PRICE, *Four Dissertations*.

"A miracle may be said to take place when, under certain moral circumstances, a physical consequent follows upon an antecedent which general experience shows to have no natural aptitude for producing such a consequent; or, when a consequent fails to follow upon an antecedent which is always attended by that consequent in the ordinary course of nature."—SMITH'S *Dictionary of the Bible*.

THE recent correspondence on Miracles in the *Spiritual Magazine* is but one of many illustrations which this subject presents of the truth of the statement of the late Professor De Morgan, that the greater part of the controversies of mankind are due either to ambiguity in the use of terms or to the assumption of certain "first principles" adopted as self-evident truths. Indeed, it not infrequently happens, as in the subject of the present inquiry, that these too fruitful sources of misunderstanding and of error run into each other; that the common term is used in different senses by different writers because in truth it does not simply represent an alleged fact, but the philosophy, theory, or belief which those writers severally entertain concerning it. Hence, there are writers who, like Mr. Atkinson,

recommend that we should abandon the term "miracle" altogether. The suggestion, however, apart from all other considerations, is impracticable; the term is too deeply rooted in our thought and language to be voted out of use. It is true that, after all the controversies on this question, no common agreement has been reached as to what constitutes a miracle: it is vain in this matter to appeal to the authority of lexicographers or to begin by defining terms, for the term is the symbol we use to express the outcome of the whole matter as it finally presents itself to our minds; nor, as it seems to me, can we all use the same term in the same sense, and in no other, so long as our conclusions on the subject designated by it are so widely different.

Must then all attempt at agreement be abandoned as hopeless? Must this confusion of tongues ever prevail, so that, like the builders of Babel, we may not understand each other's speech, and when we ask for brick receive a stone? I hope we are not so shut up in this dilemma, but that some way out of it may be found. Suppose that instead of defining our term at the outset, and implying thereby a foregone conclusion, we in the first instance consider whether or no there is reasonable ground for believing that as a matter of fact any such events as have been called miracles have taken place, apart from any theory or inferences, or reference to the question whether they should be called miracles or not;—questions to be reserved for subsequent consideration.

And I suppose it will be generally conceded, and even insisted on by the unbelievers, that we should if possible test the question by reference to facts of the present, rather than those of the past; as the former are more open to investigation: living witnesses can be confronted and cross-examined, their qualifications ascertained, and their evidence compared and sifted. There is also this further advantage, that whatever may have been the case with regard to past ages, the present is certainly not marked by excessive credulity on the subject, but is by comparison scientific and enlightened. How are facts of this class to be determined? How are any facts of which our knowledge depends on the senses to be determined? First, by observation (which may include experiment), and secondly, by testimony. All possible evidence of such facts may be comprised under these two heads; the former is evidence at first hand, and can be had only by those who were present at the time and place where the event took place, or could be witnessed. Their statements on the subject is testimony, and though this second-hand evidence is inferior to the other, it may be so strong as to leave us without reasonable doubt—so strong indeed, that the life or death of men is determined by it.

The evidence of modern "miracles" is of both kinds, and of both in the strongest degree. Take, for example, the recent *Report of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society*. This Committee report that they received evidence from 33 persons who described phenomena which they stated had occurred within their own personal experience. The Committee further received written statements relating to the phenomena from 31 persons. These phenomena include nearly the whole range of what is called "spiritual manifestations," and which need not here be enumerated. No exception can be taken to the witnesses, among whom are persons of high social standing, members of the learned professions, and men who have achieved marked distinction in literature and science; and their testimony is corroborated by the Committee, who state that "a large majority" of their members "have become actual witnesses of several phases of the phenomena without the aid or presence of any professional medium, although the greater part of them commenced their investigations in an avowedly sceptical spirit."

And this evidence is but a small fraction of the entire body of evidence relating to the phenomena which has been pouring in without intermission from every class and every land for the past quarter of a century. In short, as Professor Challis has said, "the testimony has been so abundant and consentaneous that either the facts must be admitted to be such as they are reported, or the possibility of certifying facts by testimony must be given up." So far as concerns the facts in question, the last alternative is indeed adopted by the sturdy, thorough-going sceptic, for he feels truly that it is the only consistent ground left for him to take. Why does he prefer to occupy so extreme and desperate a position, rather than admit the alleged facts, supported as they are by the testimony to like facts of men of every age and creed? The answer is, that to admit them would be to admit the existence of "miracles," and that miracles are impossible. If we ask why impossible, we are told that they are contrary to the Order of Nature, that they are a violation of the laws of Nature, that these laws are proved by the constant and uniform experience of mankind, and that they are never departed from.

Here we approach the heart of the question, the alleged facts are rejected, not because of the insufficiency of the evidence, but because it is thought they conflict with a preconceived theory of the Order of Nature. Let it be shown that miracles, or spiritual manifestations, belong to this established "Order;" that like the winds and tides and seasons they are subject to the operation of natural laws; that, in fine, they are only a branch of natural science, and the philosophy of our time would lay down its

weapons of attack and welcome this wide extension of the domain of science.

In this temper of mind, however, we see only the illustration of that fallacious principle of reasoning pointed out by Professor De Morgan, of testing alleged facts not by their proven evidence, but by their supposed harmony or disagreement with assumed "first principles," or "self-evident truths;" a principle always arrayed against every new and great advancement of human knowledge, for in every age men have regarded the established theory of the universe as the Order of Nature, and as a consequence have held that whatever could not be brought into harmony with such theory must be false. One would have thought that in these days when the inductive philosophy is so extolled, that its practice would not be so widely departed from as it is when the evidence is presented of facts which run counter to existing theories. The sceptical philosophy of our time will not even entertain the discussion of a "psychic force," still less of an invisible intelligence from behind the veil which controls and governs it; in its view Spiritualism is a strange portentous apparition, and our philosophers will not "as a stranger give it welcome," lest they should "entertain an angel unawares." Miracles, angels, spirits, these are terms the sceptical philosophy would banish from its vocabulary. The belief in these, and especially as having any place or part in our midst now, is regarded as a vulgar superstition which science has exploded, and philosophy is in no hurry to confess its mistake in this respect and to read its recantation.

But here, to the wise caution given by an inveterate sceptic to distinguish carefully between facts and inferences, I may add that it is unphilosophical to reject any fact because of the inference to which that fact may lead. The first essential to determine is whether the alleged occurrences are truly facts; and until this point is decided any question as to their cause or as to the name by which they should be designated is premature, and confuses the enquiry.

And if, divesting our minds for the time of all other considerations, we limit our enquiry to this single issue, the point is surely not difficult to determine. The motion of heavy bodies and the production of sounds without muscular contact or mechanical contrivance, and the employment of these as a code of signals by which questions are answered and communications spelt out, facts correctly given wholly unknown at the time to any one present; the elevation of the human body, and its suspension or movement in the air without visible or tangible support; the introduction of fruits, flowers, birds, ice, snow, and other objects into closed rooms previously searched and

locked; the appearance of hands not appertaining to any human being in the flesh, but life-like in appearance and mobility, and which have been grasped by some of those who witnessed them; the application of red-hot coals to the hands and heads of persons without pain or scorching; the elongation and contraction of the human body; the playing airs on musical instruments with no person touching them; the speaking fluently in languages utterly unknown to the speaker; the information of future events, which have taken place at the very hour and even minute that had been foretold; the production of writings and drawings without human intervention, and "in so short a time and under such conditions as to render human agency impossible;" these things and much more of the like kind are none the less matters of observation because they are unusual. It requires no great scientific training to see whether a table is in motion or at rest; whether a man is standing on the ground or in the air; whether in a closed room some object (say for instance a cocoa-nut, as happened to the writer of this article), is at your request placed in your hand, and which you know was not there before; and though we have the testimony of an F.S.A., a barrister-at-law, and other witnesses, that burning coal was placed on their heads and hands without scorching or pain; yet we suppose Hodge the ploughman could as well testify to such a fact if it occurred in his experience as could the President of the Royal Society.

Now, whether these things are true is not a matter of speculation to be settled on *à priori* grounds by a consideration of probabilities; the typical instances enumerated are not hypothetical; they are all affirmed in evidence before the Committee of the Dialectical Society, and as stated by the Committee, "many of the witnesses of the more extraordinary facts are of high character and great intelligence;" and in this respect they are representatives of hundreds of witnesses to facts of the same kind all the world over. Moreover, many of these facts are demonstrable, because reproducible.

In what other way can such facts be proved, nay, what kind of proof can be imagined as applicable to them, save that of observation and testimony? If this kind of evidence be not valid, to what other court can the appeal be made? Am I referred to the "Laws of Nature?" What are these laws but simply observed facts which, as we are told, "a uniform experience has established," and which it is further said "are never departed from?" This, indeed, is the standing philosophical objection to miracles and to Spiritualism. But if observation, the evidence of the senses, and the testimony founded thereon are impugned as delusive and untrustworthy, what reliance can we place on these "Laws of Nature," which

rest on the same foundation? If it be replied that in this case the evidence is so much stronger than the other, the principle of our argument is conceded. It is then a question only of degree; and if there is any insufficiency in the evidence, or any fatal flaw in it, let it be pointed out after careful review (as far as practicable) of all the evidence in the case. Till this is done, I feel justified, both from many years' personal investigation and from careful survey of the evidence, in considering these startling facts of our time as fully proved. At all events in reasoning with Spiritualists (for whom this paper is chiefly written) I may without further reference assume them as the basis of my argument.

The "Laws of Nature"—this phrase, so constantly dinned into our ears,—is again a term used with such difference of meaning, and with such difference in the ideas which underlie it, as to cause much misunderstanding in controversies on this question. What do we mean by Nature? I do not ask what is Nature? that is another question. I remember in my youth to have met with a hymn to Nature in a Socialist hymn-book, which began with the couplet:—

What Nature is no mortal knows,
And, *therefore*, none can tell.

But I suppose even our logical poet would admit that if we employ the term Nature we may tell what we mean by it. "Oh, we all understand well enough what we mean by it," says the simple reader. Don't be too sure of that, my friend. I know of no term more elastic or more variously employed in philosophical discussion. It is the master-word; understand clearly what a writer means by it and you have a clue to his whole system of philosophy; it is the key-stone of the entire edifice. This whole question of miracles, I am convinced, turns upon the conception we entertain of Nature, and all our talk about its laws and order, and about what is possible and impossible, is so much beating the air until we arrive at some common understanding on this point.

In particular there are two widely different conceptions of Nature, with of course corresponding differences of signification in their employment.

There are many, and even some Spiritualists, who by Nature mean not alone the physical universe with all that appertains to it, its solids, fluids, gases and ethers, its minerals and metals, its flora and fauna, its elements, products, forces and phenomena, however widely extended and variously distributed, which is the conception of Nature commonly entertained, but who in their idea of Nature include all existence, all being, all that is or can be; natural law with them means only that all things act according to their own nature and constitution, whatever these

may be. Of course in this view there can be no miracle, nothing supernatural: all is Nature—Nature is the all.

Is there, then, no God? Or is God only a part of Nature? Are the lines of His being (so to speak) parallel and conterminous with it? Is His existence so bound up with Nature that were it not, He, too, would cease to be? Or, while imminent in Nature does He infinitely transcend it; Nature being only the theatre of His operations, the one actuality shaped by Him out of an infinite range of possibilities, and its laws but the methods of His eternal wisdom?* The whole question of Atheism or Theism is involved in the enquiry. The former language is that of Atheism or of Pantheism, and in no other sense can it be intelligently and consistently employed. Those who inconsiderately adopt it should at least understand what it implies and whither it is drifting them. Far from placing Spiritualism on better terms with science and philosophy it is alien to both, no less than to religion, and to the genius of Spiritualism itself.

On the other hand the acknowledgment of God is the admission of the supernatural, the cause and source of Nature,

* This is finely rendered by Mr. Palgrave in his poem, "The Reign of Law," quoted by Dr. Hooker in his Presidential Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. I give the concluding stanzas:—

To matter or to force
 The All is not confined;
 Beside the law of things
 Is set the law of mind;
 One speaks in rock and star,
 And one within the brain,
 In unison at times,
 And then apart again;
 And both in one have brought us hither
 That we may know our whence and whither.

The sequences of law
 We learn through mind alone;
 We see but outward forms,
 The soul the one thing known:—
 If she speak truth at all,
 The voices must be true
 That give these visible things,
 These laws, their honour due,
 But tell of One who brought us hither,
 And holds the keys of whence and whither.

O shrine of God that now
 Must learn itself with awe!
 O heart and soul that move
 Beneath a living law!
 That which seem'd all the rule
 Of Nature, is but part;
 A larger, deeper law
 Claims also soul and heart.
 The force that framed and bore us hither
 Itself at once is whence and whither.

its root and stay. Were Nature eternal and self-sufficient,—a self-existing, self-adjusting machine, evolving its laws and forces from itself as a spider spins its web out of its own bowels, and with nothing superior to itself, a miracle were impossible; but if it be derived and dependent, a divine picture-writing, a manifestation of the Great Creative Spirit, a vesture woven in the loom of Time by which we visibly apprehend Him who is invisible, and if miracle is an outbirth from the supernatural, an action originating from a sphere beyond and above the range of natural law,—then Nature is a perpetual miracle, and in this respect the type of all miracle.

So much will perhaps be generally conceded, but there are some who find the miracle not in the cause, but in the effect; to them miracle is simply a synonyme for marvel; thus Carlyle, in a burst of admiration, speaks of the human hand as “miraculous,” and Mr. Atkinson insists that “all Nature is miraculous,” which it truly is in this sense also as in the other. Indeed (still speaking in this sense), we may add that the common miracles of Nature are more miraculous than any other. Moses saw a bush that burned with fire and was not consumed, but in this glorious summer time *every bush* burns with a divine fire and is not consumed. Jesus fed a multitude with five loaves and a few

We may not hope to read
 Or comprehend the whole
 Or of the law of things
 Or of the law of soul:
 E'en in the eternal stars
 Dim perturbations rise,
 And all the searchers' search
 Does not exhaust the skies:
 He who has framed and brought us hither
 Holds in His hands the whence and whither.

He in His science plans
 What no known laws foretell;
 The wandering fires and fix'd
 Alike are miracle:
 The common death of all,
 The life renew'd above,
 Are both within the scheme
 Of that all-circling love;
 The seeming chance that cast us hither
 Accomplishes His whence and whither.

Then, though the sun go up
 His beaten azure way,
 God may fulfil His thought
 And bless His world to-day;
 Beside the law of things
 The law of mind enthrone,
 And, for the hope of all,
 Reveal Himself in One;
 Himself the way that leads us thither,
 The All-in-all, the Whence and Whither.

small fishes; but what is this to Nature's daily miracle of feeding all the countless multitude of men and the cattle on a thousand hills? The germination of seed, the growth of plants, the building up of the human body from the almost invisible nucleated cell, life and death, birth into the natural world, birth into the spiritual world, we may call these the most miraculous of miracles. Think of it; with every beat of the clock a child is born, a man dies! What is the raising of a dead man in his natural body to the resurrection of the spiritual man out of the natural body, which occurs at the death of every man? Were it not that custom dulls the fresh eye of wonder, every green blade, every leafing tree would be a miracle. Goethe forcibly expresses this when he represents Mephistophiles tapping wine from a table, with the exclamation to Faust:—

Wine is sap, and sap is wood,
The table yieldeth wine as good;
Have faith, and here's a miracle.

In the absence of experience both would seem equally miraculous. To the untutored savage a balloon, a comet, a steam ship, an eclipse, are miracles. Are we, then, to conclude with some that the miracle is simply the extraordinary and unexpected, and of which the cause is to us unknown? If so, the miracle lies not in the outward fact, but in ourselves. It is relative only, a synonyme for ignorant wonder. That which is a miracle to-day may be no miracle to-morrow; as soon as we understand it it ceases to be a miracle; so that beginning with finding miracle everywhere, we may end by finding it nowhere. Or, without pushing our conclusion so far, shall we take the middle course, and say that a miracle is only the marvellous and exceptional—that which so far transcends common-place as to excite astonishment, as when we say that the Apollo Belvidere is a miracle of art, or Shakespeare a miracle of genius? The bolder conclusion seems the more logical and consistent, but neither is satisfactory; both alike empty the miracle of all significance; but we may take the hint which they suggest, and see if we cannot find in human nature a key which may unlock the mystery.

Man stands as the middle term between God and Nature; by his body he is allied to Nature, by his spirit he claims kinship with God, for God is Spirit. In him the two worlds of matter and of spirit meet and blend. Hemmed in by the limitations of his physical nature, subject to the laws of matter and the conditions of time and space, he yet infinitely transcends them. In vain does Nature oppose her barriers of mountain and of wave; in vain hide her secrets in farthest star or deepest mine; he sails the wave, pierces the mountain, and links together islands and continents. Mightier magician than

Prospero, he bids his faithful Ariel fly, and she outdoes the boast to put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. The old earth unrolls for him the record of her history; the sunbeam yields its secret; Orion and the Pleiades are known to him. Higher than wing of bird ever soared, deeper than plummet ever sounded, reaches and pierces the aspiring, penetrating mind of man. He is the divine vice-gerent on earth: Nature's lord and king. Even the grave holds not from him her secrets; he studies the laws of intercourse with the spirit-world and holds converse with the mighty dead. Is he not then essentially above Nature—*supernatural*? In this inquiry he and the laws of his being must be taken into the account. In conquering Nature by his so potent art does he violate her laws, or does he harmoniously co-operate with them? In fine, is not man a free intelligence in Nature, comprehending more and ever more of the elements and forces around him, unharnessing them, yoking them together, varying their combinations, arranging, directing, controlling them; knowing what they can do for him, and making them do it? We do not, however, call this miracle, for he is still operating from within the realm of Nature. But, now, Nature asserts her claim over all of him that belongs to her, but even in this her final victory man gives the crowning proof that he is not her thrall. Liberated from the bondage of Nature and mortality he is now the free citizen of a higher world, a member of that glorious company of immortals whom no man can number. Of the laws of that spirit-country whither he has migrated; of the new powers he is able to wield; of the new possibilities that lie before him, we can know but little; it may not be in our power to realise them, till we, too, enter on our glorious inheritance. But this we know, that he is free from the infirmities and limitations of the body; from the illusions of sense; from subjection to those laws of space and time which had chained him down to earth. Even while a denizen of Nature, his achievements were all of the spirit, the body simply being his instrument and organ of communication with his fellows and with the outer world: the true man, acting from behind the mask of clay, being invisible; the spirit being known to us, as spirit can be alone known, by its manifestations. How puerile, then, the objection that spirit cannot act upon matter, when in every act and movement of the body the contrary is demonstrated. The subtle links between spirit and matter are indeed but imperfectly apprehended, but from daily experience we know that they exist, and many of us have like evidence that such links may be established when the spirit is no longer a tenant of the mortal form.

Everywhere Science finds traces of the reign of law: in the

winds and tides, in the spinning, weaving and building of insects, in the flight of birds, in the path of comets, and of cosmic orbs. She

Looks through natural forms,
And feels the throbbing arteries of LAW
In every pulse of Nature and of Man.

That the laws of Nature are universal and uniform in their operation, that like causes produce like effects, are propositions that need not the elaborate apparatus of argument and illustration sometimes employed to set them forth. No one for example disputes that oxygen and hydrogen always form water when combined in certain proportions, and in none other. What merchant would engage in foreign trade unless assured that his ships would swim? What husbandman would sow were he not certain that every seed brought forth fruit after its kind? If the food of to-day might to-morrow be poison, what an agonising uncertainty would be our daily life! If we are faithful to Nature, Nature is faithful to us. But does this beneficent constancy of Nature preclude the agency of those who have passed beyond Nature—an agency analogous to our own? How is the Order of Nature hereby infringed? What law of hers does this violate? Let us bear in mind that the laws of Nature are not all on one common level, but move on different planes of action, at different elevation, and by gradual ascent—the principle or law which governs these laws being that the lower is ever subordinate to the higher. Thus the law of mechanical cohesion is overcome by the higher law of chemical affinity; and chemical affinity which resolves the human body into its constituent elements is held in check by the law of life, which maintains the physical structure in its integrity; and as we have seen in man, the animal is subordinate to the spiritual. It is this which constitutes him the roof and crown of things, in apprehension so like a God. Our treasure, however is contained in earthen vessels; we here, as in a glass, darkly see only the shows of things, but in its own proper realm, emancipated from the body and from the bondage of sense, the spirit discerns things as they truly are: it is in the world of essences and causes. With larger knowledge, clearer vision, freer movement, Nature lies below it; it deals with the laws and forces of a higher world, and to which all laws of physics are subordinate; so that, working on the secret affinities and hidden springs of Nature, with subtler chemistry, more potent magnetism, with elements and forces at command, beyond our grasp, Nature becomes plastic to the regulating and formative power of spirit; it dominates matter, produces in it changes and transmutations so confounding to previous ideas as to constitute what has been called “The Despair of Science.” Operating on lines

of causation inaccessible to us, and forming new conjunctions of causes, what we find impossible may be easy to the spirit, and effects familiar to the scientists of the inner world, when manifested in the material sphere, be as strange, startling, inexplicable to us, as are the highest exploits of science to the untutored savage.

If I am told that this is contrary to the Order of Nature, or at all events a deviation from the ordinary course of Nature, I shall not contest the point, which may prove only a question of the nature and fitness of terms. A universal and consentaneous testimony might be cited to show that at all events it is not contrary to all human experience, not even in this enlightened nineteenth century, and that therefore it must be accepted as a part of that larger Order of the Divine Economy of which Nature is but a subordinate member, and in which Nature and the Supernatural are included.*

If on the other hand, as some contend, miracles lie within the Order of Nature, then we must so extend our conception of Nature as to comprehend in it at least all ranks and orders of created beings, including the great realm of spirit with all its laws

* The folly of dogmatising on the laws and possibilities of Nature, of which we know so little, and assuming that these laws are a finality, is humorously illustrated by Mr. Kingsley in his *Water Babies*, which I cite for the benefit of those "land babies" for whom this charming fairy tale was written:—

"And Tom?"

"In fact the fairies had turned him into a water baby."

"A water baby? You never heard of a water baby. Perhaps not. That is the very reason why this story was written. There are a great many things in the world which you never heard of; and a great many more nobody ever heard of."

"'But there are no such things as water babies.' How do you know that? Have you been there to see? And if you had been there to see, and had seen none, that would not prove that there were none."

"'But a water baby is contrary to Nature.' Well, but, my dear little man, you must learn to talk about such things, when you grow older, in a very different way. You must not talk about 'ain't' and 'can't' when you speak of this great wonderful world around you, of which the wisest man knows only the very smallest corner, and is, as the great Sir Isaac Newton said, only a child picking up pebbles on the shore of a boundless ocean. You must not say that this cannot be, or that is contrary to Nature. You do not know what Nature is, or what she can do; and nobody knows; not even Sir Roderick Murchison, or Professor Owen, or Professor Sedgwick, or Professor Huxley, or Mr. Darwin, or Professor Faraday, or any other of the great men whom little boys are taught to respect. They are very wise men; and you must listen respectfully to all they say, but even if they should say, which I am sure they never would, 'that cannot exist; that is contrary to Nature.' You must wait a little and see; for perhaps even they may be wrong."

"Wise men are afraid to say that there is anything contrary to Nature, except what is contrary to mathematical truth, but the wiser men are the less they talk about 'cannot.' That is a very rash dangerous word that 'cannot,' and if people use it too often, the Queen of all the Fairies is apt to astonish them suddenly by showing them, that though they say she cannot, yet she can, and what is more will, whether they approve or not."

and forces and modes of existence and operation; a startling innovation, and leading to ambiguity and confusion. But if we conceive of the spiritual world as discrete from Nature, constituting another and a higher Order, then we are justified in applying the term supernatural to that other-world Order, and to miracles as acts proceeding from it; this being not only the more conformable to common usage in thought and speech but also the more correct and philosophical. Bushnell, confirming his definition by reference to the etymology of the terms in question, says "Nature is that created realm of being or substance which has an acting, a going on, or process from within itself, under and by its own laws, . . . or, a scheme of orderly succession, determined from within the scheme itself. . . . That is supernatural, whatever it be, that is either not in the chain of natural cause and effect, or which acts on the chain of cause and effect in Nature from without the chain. Thus if any event transpires in the bosom, or upon the platform of what is called Nature, which is not from Nature itself, or is varied from the process Nature would execute by her own laws, that is supernatural, by whatever power it is wrought."

Our investigation then has conducted us to this point, that a miracle is the intervention by supernatural agency in the ordinary sequences of Nature producing effects which would not otherwise have taken place. It is not, therefore, an effect without adequate cause, but only of a cause operating from beyond and above Nature, possibly by laws and through links of connection with which we are either imperfectly acquainted or wholly ignorant. As remarked by an eminent mathematician: "A miracle is not necessarily a violation of any law of Nature, and it involves no physical absurdity. As Brown well observes, 'the laws of Nature are surely not violated when a new antecedent is followed by a new consequent; they are violated only when the antecedent, being exactly the same, a different consequent is the result;' so that a miracle has nothing in its nature inconsistent with our belief of the uniformity of Nature. All that we see in a miracle is an effect which is new to our observation, and whose cause is concealed. The cause may be beyond the sphere of our observation, and would be thus beyond the familiar sphere of Nature: but this does not make the event a violation of any law of Nature. The limits of man's observation lie within very narrow boundaries, and it would be arrogance to suppose that the reach of man's power is to form the limits of the natural world. The universe offers daily proof of the existence of power of which we know nothing, but whose mighty agency nevertheless manifestly appears in the most familiar works of creation. And shall we deny the existence of

this mighty energy, simply because it manifests itself in delegated and feeble subordination to God's omnipotence? . . . If we define a miracle as an effect of which the cause is unknown to us, then we make our ignorance the source of miracles, and the universe would be a standing miracle." *

From this view some important consequences would seem to follow. It brings the whole question of miracles, past and present, under one general and comprehensive view, and supplies their law on general principle. It enables us to understand how they may be associated with different and even conflicting religious faiths. Able and learned men have thought it necessary to show (often in spite of evidence to the contrary) that Roman Catholic and Pagan Miracles must be spurious, because it has been thought that miracles were evidence of the Divine authority of the worker or visible agent, and of the truth of all his doctrines and teachings, or at least of the general truth of the system in attestation of which the miracle was considered to be wrought. But we may now see that miracles furnish no such evidence. Were Pio Nono suddenly endowed with the power of speaking in unknown tongues—say in the Chinese language—what evidence could that be of Papal infallibility, or of the dogma of transubstantiation? Were a Hindoo philosopher to walk upon the sacred Ganges as upon dry land, what proof could that be of the metempsychosis? What miracle could prove two and two to be more than four, or less than four? Or how could it effect any belief we may entertain as to the duration of the world, or the origin of species, or any theory either of physics or of metaphysics to which it does not stand in immediate relation? What proof or confirmation of ethical or religious truth could we derive from witnessing a miracle except in so far as it proved the reality of spirit existence, or was in some way related to that belief? Could any heathen miracle make it right to offer human sacrifices to appease the anger of the gods? Or could any miracle make the parable of the good Samaritan more true, or endow it with more persuasive efficacy? The Bible itself exemplifies this: it shows that miracles in themselves are no evidence of divinity or of truth, but only of power: that they may be magical, demoniacal, and even diabolical, as well as divine. The first miracle it records—that of the talking serpent—was satanic, and one of the latest visions the New Testament records, is that of unclean spirits working miracles. If Moses and Aaron wrought miracles before Pharaoh, "as the Lord had commanded," "Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers and the magicians of Egypt; and they also did in like manner with their enchantments." Nor does it

* *Passages from the Life of a Philosopher.* By CHARLES BABBAGE.

affect the point that in this trial of strength the wise men, the magicians, and the sorcerers were ultimately vanquished. If "the spirit of the Lord caught away Philip," it was "the Devil" who took up Jesus "into an exceeding high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them."* The Evangelist who records this, represents Jesus as saying, "There shall arise false Christs and false Prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, inasmuch that were it possible, they shall deceive the very elect," and Saint Paul speaks of "Him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders." If, then, miracles are no certain credentials of a divine authority, no infallible test of truth, what purpose do they serve?

The New Testament speaks of miracles as "powers" or "mighty works," "wonders," and "signs." The latter is the more common and characteristic term. Miracles are the sign of a presence and a power that is not of earth, of a world beyond Nature, of a life beyond the present; they evidence that we are indeed—

Moving about in worlds not realised.

Phenomena, otherwise the most trivial, acquire deep significance when we realise them as spirit-manifestations, tokens and greetings from those who have o'erleaped this bank and shoal of Time, and thus—

Shame the doctrine of the Sadducee.

They are voices of the night, messenger-birds that come to us across the deep sea of Time, from the further shore, and tell us of that miracle country—that spirit-world whither we are bound. Miracles may have also other significations which we need not here consider, but this I take to be their main, primary, universal signification; and especially is this their chief value and significance in our day of doubt and denial as to all spiritual things.

Miracles are not the special product of any clime, race, creed, or period; they are not governed by considerations of geography, or of ethnology. We cannot put up a fence anywhere and say, "This sacred enclosure is a magic circle in which miracles were once common, but they have never occurred since, and never have occurred, and never can occur outside it." The spirit-world underlies Nature, and overlaps it; and wherever at any time there are suitable conditions may sensibly manifest its presence. We are now living in the midst of those experiences in which the infant religions of the world were cradled. Trances,

* Whether these narratives are or are not historical does not affect the present question. In any case they illustrate the Bible view of miracles—the only point for which they are here cited.

visions, healings, converse with spirits, communications from the invisible world, and manifestations of supernatural power:—these are familiar and avowed experiences in our time, as in past ages. Their correspondence with those of the primitive Christians is admitted even by those who believe in neither. Renan in his *Life of Jesus*, says:—"For nearly a century the Apostles and their disciples dreamed only of miracles." "The disciples deemed it quite natural that their master should have interviews with Moses and Elias." "The compilers of the Gospels were living in this respect in a world analogous to that of the 'Spiritualists' of our time." Of, course, M. Renan does not believe in any such world. In a later work, *The Apostles*, he tells us, "It is an absolute rule in criticism to deny a place in history to narratives of miraculous circumstances. Such facts have never been really proved. All the pretended miracles near enough to be examined are referable to illusion or imposture. If a single miracle had ever been proved, we could not reject in a mass all those of ancient history, for admitting that many of these last were false, we might still believe that some of them were true." That is just the contention of "the Spiritualists of our time," who from their own experience know that all miracles are *not* "referable to illusion or imposture;" and who find that their experiences in the nineteenth century illustrate those of "the Apostles and their disciples" in the first century, that the present and the past shed light upon each other.

"A miracle in Paris before experienced *savans* would put an end to all doubt," says Renan. I more than doubt it. To say nothing of the Apostolic miracles, even the lesser marvels of Spiritualism in our own day, attested by such *savans* as Alfred Russell Wallace, Professor De Morgan, and half-a-dozen Fellows of the Royal Society, backed by a crowd of witnesses from the learned professions and from all ranks of society, and from every civilized land, does nothing of the kind. Were an indubitable miracle to take place before a company of the most experienced *savans* of Paris, as M. Renan suggests, what would happen? Simply this: that the Members of the Institute, the Fellows of the Royal Society, and other learned bodies, would tell them plainly it was all imposture or delusion. If it were a miracle of vision it would be an hallucination; if one of hearing, they would be told it was probably a disease of the audital nerve, or the miracle would be explained as a nervous epidemic, or automatic cerebration, or past ideas renovated, or possibly as due to hypnotism, or electro-biology. They would be reminded that anyhow it could not be a miracle, because a miracle is impossible, and not to be established by any amount of testimony. Finally, it would be insisted

that if the miracle was to be believed, it must be done over again, and as often as might be required, and under such test conditions as the more experienced *savans* should impose. When M. Renan tells us "miracles never happen," he may be right if he means only that they never happen before some collective body of "experienced *savans*," for they never place themselves in the way of their happening; and if brought before them by one of their number they refuse to even listen to such matters, as did the American Association for the Promotion of Science when invited by Professor Hare and the Spiritualists of Washington, and as the Royal Society has done more recently in refusing even to hear a paper on "Pyschic Force" read before it by Mr. Crookes; but if M. Renan means that no experienced *savans* in our day testify to such facts as were formerly called miracles, then he manifests an ignorance of the subject that would be strange in so learned a man, were it not, alas! so common.

Dr. Littledale, writing in the *Contemporary Review* for August, 1872, on "The Rationale of Prayer," in reply to Professor Tyndall, says on this point:—

"I employed myself some time ago in speculating as to what would be the practical result on modern unbelief of a public revival of miracles. I have put before me the hypothesis of my being myself invested with a supernatural power of healing, and have asked myself what would come of it, assuming that the number and notoriety of the cures forced the physicists to take the matter up and inquire into it, instead of dismissing it with contemptuous incredulity. And I became satisfied that unless the power were universal and persistent in me, that is, that no case failed under any conditions, its evidential value would be superciliously disregarded. The objectors would insist on God's working so as to please them. They would require a variety of specified conditions to be fulfilled in every instance, bargaining for the nature and duration of the disease, the character and number of the witnesses to be present, the uniform repetition of the cure under carefully diversified circumstances, and the like. Then, if God did not choose to submit Himself to such critics, or withdrew after a time the power conferred, they would look to the cessation of the miracle, not to its previous persistence, and reject it accordingly as a mere abnormal phenomenon not deserving of serious attention. While, on the other hand, even if it did continue, they would, I am convinced, ascribe it to the discovery on my part of some hidden pathological law, and would deny the existence of any superhuman causation. The Evangelists are careful to let us know that the miracles they ascribe to Christ were so far from converting His chief opponents

that they merely embittered their hostility. And I consequently do not believe for a moment that even if the proposed experiment (a ward in an hospital to be specially prayed for) were one which is lawful for a Christian to try, if it were carried out to the letter as suggested, and if the tabulated result exhibit an enormous percentage of cures in the favoured ward, that the hyper-dogmatic asserters of the impossibility of miracles would be convinced. They would whisper about that one of the physicians had got a secret specific somehow, and was in league with the parsons to palm off his success as theirs. And they would probably point their remarks by showing how very conceivably that trick might have been played when chloroform was discovered but not yet currently known."

In terms almost identical with those of Renan, Strauss assures us, "There is no right conception of what history is, apart from a conviction that the chain of endless causation can never be broken, and that a miracle is an impossibility." But, now, are we quite sure that miracle is a breach in the continuity of causation? Do we know the whole chain from end to end? or, Do we see only a few of its lower links, the higher, invisible to mortal ken, reaching, it may be, beyond the realm of Nature, and producing effects we term miraculous? Büshner sneeringly asks, "Do not the table-spirits belong to the order of miracles?" and in a very different spirit, Cudworth argues, "Though all miracles, promiscuously, do not immediately prove the existence of God, nor confirm a prophet, or whatsoever doctrine; yet, do all of them evince that there is a rank of invisible, understanding beings, superior to men, which atheists commonly deny." The sneer of the atheist, and the argument of the philosopher might alike suggest to the brilliant Frenchman and the learned German that their objection to miracle is based on an entire and fundamental misapprehension of its nature, that it is not a synonym for a break in the chain of endless causation; and with the rectification of that fatal error their objection to miracle disappears: it has no longer a foothold on the earth.

The supernatural is as much in harmony with law as is the natural. The intervention of spiritual agency in Nature, acting upon forces and in ways unknown to us and thereby producing effects contrary to common experience, as when what we call solid matter is made to pass through solid matter, is no more a violation of law, or a break in the chain of endless causation, than when man intervenes in Nature and employs the electric current to transmit a message to the Antipodes.

That mistrust and doubt, especially when these are of the will, rather than of the understanding, are real powers of

hindrance in all spiritual working; and that such powers are intensified by union and brought to a focus, is certain. Even the Master Miracle-worker, in the midst of a sceptical community, "could do no mighty works because of their unbelief." So far were His miracles from being acts of omnipotence, that He expressly insists on their limitations, and on the conditions—spiritual and physical—necessary to their performance,—faith, prayer, fasting, unity, harmony. No doubt it was to the observance of these divine laws, to His habits of solitude, meditation, and prayer; His perfect trust in God, and His oneness with the Father, that He was able to perform those beneficent mighty works that were indeed a sign to that faithless and perverse generation. Doubtless there was also conjointly in Him what may be called an organic fitness—a harmony of the entire nature, an openness to the highest influx, the natural body itself being pre-eminently a temple for the Divine Spirit; so that both spiritually and physically, and in an especial manner, He was thus constituted the living organ and medium of its communication and power. And if now, as we are told, "such things never happen," let it, among other things, be remembered that such a personality is never found, that such a life is never lived. When our "experienced savans" are thus open to influx from the Heavens, and attain that moral and spiritual union with God which Christ exemplified, and to which His true disciples aspire, they may realise the truth of His words, "The works that I do shall ye do also, and greater than these;" and of His promise to be in the midst of those who were gathered together in His name; and understand how the great Pentecostal outpouring occurred, when "the disciples were all with one accord in one place."

To our "experienced savans," however, I am aware such language is like talking in an unknown tongue. Spiritual insight indeed is rarely found in men profoundly penetrated with a sense of their own learning and wise in their own conceit. It is true now, as of old, that spiritual mysteries are often hidden from these wise and prudent persons and revealed to fishermen, and even unto babes. Scholarship may teach us of the past, and science of the facts of Nature and her methods, but spiritual arcana are beyond their province. Philology and mathematics will not help us to any knowledge of the laws, forces, and relations of the spiritual world, and the most experienced savant may be stone-blind to the simplest facts concerning it; as indeed he is when he seeks to test and gauge those facts by the laws and methods of purely natural science, except in so far as they relate to phenomena and effects of spiritual action within the range of physics.

While we contend that there is no antecedent impossibility in miracles; that, like other facts, they may be established on sufficient evidence; that they violate no law of the Divine Order, when we take a comprehensive view of that Order as including both the natural and the spiritual universe with which they may be coeval and co-extensive; they at the same time become divested of that false and superstitious character which in a scientific age has so impeded their reception.

I trust that the time is not far distant when this whole subject will be reconsidered on larger grounds than those on which it is now generally discussed, and apart from any bearings it may be supposed to have on theories and systems on either side. It may be that our definitions may have to be corrected and our theories revised, and that our systems may be found partial and incomplete; but let us take all facts into the account and resolve to follow Truth whithersoever it may lead us, and I apprehend we shall be on the high road to a better understanding of the *rationale* of miracles, past and present.

NOTE.—I have abstained from direct discussion of the New Testament miracles (to which, in consideration of this subject, our thoughts naturally revert) as their adequate discussion would demand much fuller treatment than is here possible. I would, however, recommend the reader desirous of prosecuting this enquiry to Trench's *Notes on the Miracles*, especially to the Introduction, which gives a historical and critical review of the objections to them. It is a pity this Introduction is not published as a separate essay in a cheap form for more extensive circulation.

In reply to Hume and more recent objectors to miracles, see an able paper by Alfred Russell Wallace, read before the Committee of the London Dialectical Society, and published in *The Spiritual Magazine*, No. 3, Vol. VII., New Series.