
A table of contents for the *Journal of Theological Studies (old series)* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jts-os_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[1st page of article]

THE RELATION OF MIRACLES TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

MY object in the present paper is to ask for a reconsideration of the true force, meaning and use of miracle, in relation to Christian doctrine. The position I wish to maintain is by no means absolutely new, but, although often recognised in various degrees, it has almost always been obscured by its conjunction with secondary and, as it seems to me, inconsistent considerations.

Perhaps the simplest statement of the common use may be found in Paley. We have two grounds for the acceptance of Christianity:

1. The argument of intrinsic reason, drawn from design.

2. The evidence of miracles, the historic validity of which can be demonstrated. Gibbon accepts the same view in his famous fifteenth chapter. He gives as the third reason for the triumph of Christianity that 'The supernatural gifts must have conduced very frequently to the conviction of infidels.' Hume, Mill, Huxley, and indeed all sceptics, similarly assume that miracles form an argument for Christianity which must be met. The very obvious reply that miracles were also alleged on behalf of many false religions involved a modification of the argument which may be seen in Dr. Mozley's Bampton Lectures. He admits that there might be miracles worked on behalf of a false belief, and that the prior credibility of the faith must be therefore a condition of a valid argument from them.

'When we know upon antecedent grounds that the doctrine is false, the miracle admits of a secondary explanation, viz. as a trial of faith; but the first and most natural explanation of it is still as evidence of the doctrine.'

Nor has he any doubt of the practical effect of the evidence:

'Christianity is the religion of the civilized world, and it is believed upon its miraculous evidence.'

The argument which is urged that the intrinsic nature of the doctrines, and their adaptation to the human heart, supplies of itself the proof of their truth, he rejects as an inversion of the proper order and rule of proof. Further on he slightly modifies this position, at least in regard to the great miracles of the creed:

'Not only are miracles *conjoined* with doctrine in Christianity, but miracles are inserted *in* the doctrine and are part of its contents. This insertion of the great miracles of our Lord's life in the Christian Creed itself serves to explain some language in the Fathers. The miraculous Birth of our Lord, His Resurrection and Ascension, were inserted in the Christian creed; which cardinal miracles being accepted, the lesser miracles of our Lord's ministry had naturally a subordinate place as evidence.'

In spite therefore of his assertion that the *nature* of the revelation, and the *evidence* of the revelation cannot be disjoined, I am afraid that it must be admitted that in a very material respect he has disjoined them. The union and identity which he has also admitted has only the effect of producing a feeling of circularity in the argument. It is very difficult to see, after miracles had been accepted, why any further evidence was required, or how if the lesser miracles followed from the cardinal ones they could possibly constitute evidence to them. Dr. Mozley's subsequent explanation, that the doctrine, including the greater miracles, must be first *credible* and then proved, no doubt does away with the defect so far as the strict logic goes, though it still leaves an uncomfortable feeling behind it; but in any case, it only gets rid of the defect by once more disjoining the proof from the doctrine, at least so far as the argumentative process is concerned.

Dr. Bernard, writing on Miracles in Dr. Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible* (iii 388 *a*), takes substantially the same view:

'Miracles are a proof of the Divine origin of a doctrine, provided the doctrine be in itself worthy of a Divine author. No miracle could justify us in acting or teaching contradictory to conscience, or in referring such teaching to God.'

I.

I want now to consider, in the first place, what is the actual effect of miracles in producing belief. Gibbon, it will be observed, does not doubt such effect, provided, as he hints with his grave irony, that they can be really shown. Dr. Mozley goes further by asserting that the effect is self-evidently there, and due to miracles as a cause. Mr. Matthew Arnold with straightforward, if irreverent, wit replies roundly: 'If I could turn my pen into a pen-wiper, it would not prove the truth of what I am writing'; and others have put the same argument more elaborately. However I may differ from the ultimate conclusions, it seems to me that the latter are nearer to the truth; not only on consideration of proper deduction, but on consideration of what is actually effective.

Now as regards this latter point we may consider the effect of miracles in two ways, according to the influence they exert (1) upon unbelievers, (2) upon Christians. So far as unbelievers are concerned, it is admitted by all observers of modern thought that in consequence of the increased intellectual predominance of natural science, the conviction of the uniformity of nature has changed the miracles from an evidence into a standing difficulty. So much is this the case that a very strong school of religious reformers has endeavoured to reconstitute Christianity by ridding it of its supernatural element. It is in answer to this school that Dr. Mozley pointed out that the miraculous element was inserted in the Gospel as an essential part. This is the side of the question which is, I believe, of vital importance; and by treating some of the miracles as merely evidential, or at any rate as capable of being regarded independently as evidence, he has altogether obscured the nature of the essential part which miracles do take in revelation. At the most he might seem to have made it clear in regard to the greater miracles of the Creed, and, although in his fourth lecture on Belief in God he has taken a more consistent line, the obscurity of the effect is not removed.

It may, of course, be replied that unbelievers always will exist, and that they will avail themselves of any excuse the habit of the age supplies. What that will be is a mere accident.

If we want to know real motives we must ask not what is pleaded as the justification of unbelief, but what has been the attraction to those who gave themselves up to understand. This test unfortunately is rather difficult to use. It is as easy to mistake what is really drawing the one class as what is really repelling the other. So far as the positive evidence goes, it seems to me much nearer the truth to say that the average Christian believes because he thinks Christianity to be true on intrinsic grounds, than that he believes it because he thinks he can prove that miracles really happened. Where, however, we have to allow, first for the influence of prior theory as to how the argument ought to run, and, secondly, for a very strong aversion to the intellectual labour of facing proof at all, and the consequent desire to take the easier road—'I know it in myself'—we do not get much help. Nor do I wish to press the argument that miracles are felt as a severe strain even by many who began, and who still consider themselves, as devout believers.

The simplest test is the regard paid by Christians generally to external miracles. The late Madame Blavatsky, in ushering theosophy into the world, claimed to have authenticated her teaching by many such proofs. It is true that in this case the Society for Psychical Research made some havoc in Madame Blavatsky's claim, but that, I venture to say, is a mere detail. The levitation of the medium Holmes rests on evidence which has never been satisfactorily explained. What then? Does any Christian for this reason in the least incline to believe in Mr. Holmes? Dr. Mozley's and Dr. Bernard's reply, that in this case the doctrine was in itself incredible, is scarcely adequate. There are Christian spiritualists who claim that the miracles they work are done on behalf of Christian faith, manifestations of supernatural power for the conviction of an unbelieving age. There are some silly people who believe them, but I am sure I am only expressing the vast mass of sound, healthy feeling when I say that none of these miracles move us in the least degree. We did not wait for the Psychical Society to disbelieve in Madame Blavatsky; nor did we even trouble to ask what her doctrines were. Of course the sceptic and the theosophist have replied together that that is our inconsistency. We claim

serious attention for our own miracles, and we will not even so much as look at theirs. I do not think we can deny that it is inconsistent, and the reply to the taunt is not a very simple one. Part of it I may revert to further on, but the first and simplest answer seems to me quite plain. We were quite mistaken if we spoke of our belief as founded upon miracles in that sense.

The correctness of this may be further tested by a consideration of alleged Christian miracles, and, as I am aware that opinions on this subject differ, it is rather hard to do more than give one's own view, and leave it to others to agree or disagree. I confess myself one of those who, without positively asserting that it is so, would be quite ready to admit that the grace of miracles is still vouchsafed to the Church. I will put a case hypothetically. Suppose a missionary were to tell me of miracles which he believed God had permitted him to perform; if he were a sensible and humble man, I should be quite willing to believe him and to give God the praise. If, however, he began to preach about it, and to say that such power was a clear proof of the Thirty-nine Articles and the validity of Anglican orders, I should certainly begin to suspect the miracle, although in this case I have no quarrel whatever with the Thirty-nine Articles, which I believe to contain a very excellent body of divinity. Suppose the man replied to me that he could produce the affidavits of the Vice-Consul and two Mandarins, brought in to see it happen, so far from thinking this evidential purpose was the 'natural explanation of the miracle,' I can imagine nothing more likely to produce unbelief. I should certainly tell him that I thought his miracle an insult to Anglican orders and the Thirty-nine Articles too. In saying that I do believe in the possibility of the occurrence of miracles at the present day, I can hardly expect every one to agree with me, though I do anticipate at least sympathy; in the rest I, much more confidently, anticipate both sympathy and agreement.

We are told that the Congregation of Rites is extremely strict about its rules of evidence for miracles before issuing a decree of canonisation, and, here also, I feel confident that the vast mass of healthy English instinct will take the trial of the matter

as simple irreverence. Some of us think St. Thomas of Canterbury a saint and martyr, and some do not. For my own part I have a profound reverence, and I think this age and church have great need to learn reverence, for any man who can stand out against sheer force with his back to the wall, and die without flinching; whether St. Thomas also raised a dead man to life, is a matter on which I feel no interest whatever. It is related that when a certain priest began proclaiming how he had been converted through a miracle vouchsafed to him, St. Hugh of Lincoln replied uneasily, 'I wish the man would keep his unbelief to himself.'

Yet what would we have? In a strictly scientific spirit, we ask of the medium, just as we ask of the 'fasting-man,' or the athletic record-breaker, that he shall work his show under test conditions. Yet we do not ask if our Lord was submitted to test conditions. For my own part the irreverence of the idea seems so shocking that I cannot even write the sentence, even to point out the impossibility of it, without pain. As a matter of fact, it is the entire absence of a desire to attract attention or excite wonder, it is their simplicity and naturalness, which make the character of the Gospel miracles so distinctive and so impressive. The very miracles which were asked for under approximately test conditions, and which would therefore have been singularly effective as evidence, and to which moreover a promise of belief was attached, were promptly and peremptorily refused. We all feel that this was right and inevitable; precisely because we all feel in our own consciences, whatever we may say in our arguments, that miracles are not in place when hawked about as evidence.

This principle will, I think, become more, instead of less, plain, if we consider miracles in reference to the earliest ages instead of to modern times. Dr. Bernard lays great stress upon the distinction (*op. cit.* p. 379 *b*):

'It is a remarkable circumstance that the great stumbling-block at the present day to many persons who are anxious to accept the Christian creeds should be the statement of the very fact which was put forward in the apostolic age as the one convincing proof of their truth, viz. the fact of the Resurrection of Christ. The Christian miracles were once an "aid to faith"; they are now regarded by many as a grave hindrance to the acceptance of

Christianity. . . . So it has come to pass that the argument based on the miracles with which Christianity was ushered into the world,' &c.

In the first sentence Dr. Bernard speaks of a specific miracle, the Resurrection, which is at once a doctrine *and* a miracle, and its treatment is in consequence rather complicated. That St. Paul does appeal to the Resurrection as a convincing proof is certainly unquestionable, and that he treats it as a proof by virtue of its miraculous character—as I shall endeavour to show, for a good reason. That, however, is not the present question. Did St. Paul use its miraculous character as evidence of what the doctrine was, or as independent evidence that the doctrine was true? When Dr. Bernard speaks of a convincing proof, he surely implies an *independent* proof. Now if Madame Blavatsky or any one else offers me a miracle as independent proof of any thing, she and they must consider that the whole force of the proof will lie in the verifiable character of the evidence. It is true that St. Paul once or twice lays stress upon the evidence, but the inference from this is ambiguous. Did he offer the evidence for purpose of verification, or in order to emphasise that he was speaking of an objective fact? I assert that St. Paul's whole use of the Resurrection and its evidence proves that the latter, and not the former, was in his mind. If he believed that the fact of a miracle was a convincing proof, the obvious thing to do was to invite the Athenian philosophers to send a commission to examine the evidence.

That he never meant the miraculous character of the event to be an independent proof can, I believe, be shown quite conclusively. In the first place the Resurrection was very ill suited to such a purpose. It has often been observed by Christians, and objected by sceptics, that the evidence for it is of a very peculiar kind. If it was meant in any way as an independent proof, why were our Lord's appearances rigidly confined to believing, i. e. to prejudiced, witnesses. Surely it is a great evidential defect. A single appearance to the Jews generally would have been more 'convincing,' than all the rest put together. If St. Paul wished to produce conviction by such means, the raising of Lazarus would have been more to the point.

But even that is not all. Merely as a proof, the Resurrection was not in any case a very good subject of appeal. For it

St. Paul seldom offered more than his own bare word; yet if he did mean to use testimony of this kind, if he thought it in the least likely to work conviction, he had the best of proofs in his own hands; he had the power of working miracles. Why does he never so use them? Why when he has worked them does he never appeal to them? Bede's History offers an excellent illustration of the process. St. Augustine claimed a true mission which the British bishops refused to admit. St. Augustine challenged them to the test of miracle. This is so clear an instance of the obvious evidential use of a miracle that there must be some reason for the entire absence of anything like it in the New Testament.

What that reason is may be considered from two sides. Partly it might be explained directly from the nature of faith, but this argument, tempting as it is, would involve too much disputable matter, and there is a simpler way of putting it. Miracles have no effective evidential value in this age, because of our prior conviction of the uniformity of nature; they had no effective value as an 'aid to faith' in the Apostolic age for just the opposite reason. That age was as accustomed to magic, and as profoundly credulous of it, as we are incredulous. Everybody believed in magic. To find a new magician would have been to find a new fashionable lion, and St. Paul had no desire to be a nine-days' wonder. The faith that comes of that sort of thing we know too well, and despise. We all of us, as Christians, resent the words magical and thaumaturgical as applied to our Faith; but if so, I venture to think we ought also to drop the magical and thaumaturgical argument.

II.

I have tried, therefore, to point out the argument which cannot effectively, and which ought not, to be drawn from miracles. In order to understand the nature of the appeal which unquestionably is made to them in Scripture we ought to consider the position of religious thought, first in St. Paul's day, and secondly in our own.

The primitive forms of heathenism were essentially human and simple. Man's own life and being, his relations with his neighbours and even with his enemies, his relations with nature,

supplied him with abundant ground for faith in a God, very real and, though magnified, very human, Who cared for him. It is evident that this belief was not merely, as it is often put, an instinctive craving of his heart, assuming hopes for facts; for the object of his belief was never altogether an object of hope, sometimes it was one purely of dread. It was, therefore, a natural inference of his reason, and he had to take the conclusion of his unconscious syllogisms as he found it. With the widening of his experience of life and its complexity his monotheism failed him, and the heathen became a polytheist.

In an age of reflection men began from a different point. If we regard nature as a whole, we find her dominated by the sense of unity. All things begin from one; the deeper we go into them, the more they seem to return to one. The philosophers became monotheists. But, when reached, this unity is a mere abstraction, a *summum genus*, the essence of pure being. So the Neo-Platonist put it; the Absolute and Infinite was the One, the All and the Nothing. Monotheism became Pantheism, and Pantheism is only distinguished from Atheism by the magnificence of its rhetoric. Whether we worship everything or worship nothing, is a difference of language only. Neo-Platonism, therefore, could not dispense with Polytheism, which at least gave reality to religion and worship. Indian thought has necessarily moved along the same paths. The primitive Vedas, like the Greek hymns, are in turn simply polytheistic and simply monotheistic. Philosophic Brahminism is rigidly monotheistic, but unreal; religious worship in India is real, but polytheistic.

No other result is possible to purely natural inference. No deduction can draw out from a premiss more than the premiss contains in it, and God, as true subsistent Being, is not contained in nature. There is a famous story of Sydney Smith rebuking a blatant atheist at dinner by the pointed question, 'Do you doubt the existence of the cook?' For its purpose the question was sound enough, but let us examine its full validity. Strictly speaking, from the dinner we cannot deduce the cook, because the cook is not in the dinner; we deduce the abstract idea of cookery. We may, indeed, by induction from other considerations, infer that there was a cook, but even this is only a probable inference, for, at least in some places, you may get your eggs cooked for

you if you leave them out accidentally. If you want the cook, you must ask your host for an introduction.

This distinction is really very much more than a refinement of logical accuracy. When I was a very young curate, one of my choristers was a greengrocer's boy, and I remember being greatly interested. I had always supposed, as I think most people do, that a greengrocer's boy was a sort of animated basket with a whistle attached, which came up to the side door; and to find that he was a very charming and affectionate little lad, who had a mother, like the rest of us, and wanted to be good and found it rather hard work, also like the rest of us, and was a very good cricketer, was quite a discovery. If some fashionable people would discover that their servants were real human beings, quite as interesting and as worth knowing as many of one's drawing-room 'friends,' that would be a very useful discovery also; but it is a discovery which can never be made so long as we treat our servants as the pure (or perhaps the impure) abstract of cookery and house-cleaning. We must get 'introduced' to them, and learn to understand them as something transcending the functions they perform.

Now what happens here is precisely the same in regard to Christianity. By natural inference from the functions we see performed in nature, we only arrive at the conception of generalised nature, or generalised force, and whether the naturalist chooses to turn Pantheist and to call generalised nature God, or not, makes little difference. Of course Christians also make inference, but neither will this inference lead to the transcendent unless it is met by the transcendent, that is, by revelation.

This question of transcendency is of more vital importance in theology than in sociology, just because man's dealings with man follow upon his faith in God. It is all very well to talk so much about our conquest over the powers of nature, and to write such beautiful books about a century of discovery, and no doubt it makes us enormously pleased with ourselves, but there is a heavy bill to pay for it. Nature smiles at our talk of conquest. She replies, —you have only conquered by obeying me, by acknowledging that you yourself are a part of me, and by submitting yourself to my dominion. Mr. Herbert Spencer as her advocate tells us that we must submit, and that we must be content to take her

laws for our guidance, and her ideals for our aspiration. What are we to reply?

There is one answer which is obvious enough. We know that we have a moral nature, which is not purely natural, and that our ideals in consequence are higher than those of nature, and many Christians are anxious to escape conflict with the tremendous forces of natural science by accepting this division of provinces. I am told that an eminent preacher in Manchester Cathedral not very long ago said that prayer ought to be confined to the moral sphere. A recent theological work speaks quite seriously of God as 'having been driven further and further out of the (physical) world.' It is part of the same tendency that many, who still hold by the greater miracles, are distinctly uneasy over what Dr. Mozley calls 'the lesser': there seems to me to be a note of this in the classification itself.

The reply seems to be as inadequate and ineffective as it is theologically untenable. Mr. Spencer laughs it to scorn. To say we have a moral *nature* is to admit everything. If at best we should escape the anger of the naturalists, we have only incurred the enmity of the psychologists. Both regard us as intruders. I believe even our own conscience goes the same way. We Christians at least feel that walking on water is far more credible than the unprepared conversion of a really bad man. When Saul of Tarsus was converted, we feel there must be some explanation; we say, St. Stephen's death must have had an effect upon him, he must have been himself an honest man; but we cannot conceive of a similar conversion of Caiaphas.

It is, however, the inadequacy of the answer to which I would call special attention, and that on two sides. Practically, nature is an aggressive power, and there is undeniably a great deal even in the moral sphere which belongs to her. So long as those provinces remain hostile, the passive defence of frontiers is a very precarious operation. Secondly, it is inadequate for a much deeper reason. There is in man an intense conviction that he is more than partly independent of nature, that he is the master and lord of nature; and this conviction is more than mere pride and foolish aspiration; it is a real inference. Certainly it commences from the observation that we have ideals which are independent of those of nature; but we observe further that ours

are more than independent, they are inclusive. The naturalist says that we are part of nature, and must fall in with it; but we reply, here at least, nature is a part of us, and we claim it in our ideals. The gardener, the farmer, the engineer, are all engaged in forcing our ideals upon nature; and it is only in harmony with this that in our aspirations we dream of a perfected material nature, as well as a perfected moral nature.

The superiority of man is in the conscious intellect. 'If nature destroy me, yet I am greater than it, because I know that I am destroyed.' Where then does the intellect derive the reality of the ideal by which it has its superiority? Mr. Frederic Harrison says, from man. But I reply, here also, you cannot get from an object what that object has not got in it; and man does not contain any actual ideal. At the most you can only get an eclectic ideal constructed of the parts you approve. The polytheists were really wiser. If they were to work by inference from man, the ideal must represent the whole of its source; it must contain the passions as well as the virtues. But even apart from that, there is a great deal in my ideals which reaches out after things I never see or could see. Here also the polytheist was wiser, for he eked out the human ideal with conceptions borrowed from natural forces, and even from animals. And yet it is all of no avail. Your cook is not an abstract of cookery, and even if you add on the abstract 'of a certain education,' and of 'femininity,' you will not reach the woman, because her personality transcends all the abstractions you can put together. Every one, really, is perfectly conscious that the total actuality of a single soul, by virtue of its actuality, contains infinitely more than can be inferred; and every one is equally conscious also that his ideals are only approximations to an actuality which he has never yet mastered. No doubt the ideal we form from man is much more perfect than that which we form from nature. Anthropomorphic religions are higher than natural just because man is in the likeness of God, but any such ideal remains after all only an ideal, and an abstraction, what Matthew Arnold called 'a magnified Lord Shaftesbury'; it must still lack the transcendency of the actual personality. The natural intellect by itself is therefore, as Mr. Spencer admits, self-stultified. It cannot find in man, any more than in nature, that for which its very con-

figuration is adjusted. To withdraw into the natural ideal is sheer ruin. To be content with the best that is in me is a self-contradiction, when the best that is in me is palpably formed for something that transcends myself. The best that is within me is the intellect, and I can find within my own natural being no intellectual reason why the best is better. Mr. Spencer says the first object of education is self-preservation, and the second, and the third. My intellect looks on the natural world, and can only admit he is right; yet the best within me says he is wholly wrong. What then can this tentacle do, thrust out into the profitless unknown, reaching after something beyond nature and unable to find anything beyond nature, except suffer atrophy by disuse?

III.

This brings me to the question of what a miracle is. The consciousness of the intense resentment felt by natural scientists for any breach of the law of uniformity has produced a certain desire in the minds of apologists to discover some explanation by which they may avoid the idea. Mr. Babbage suggested that the law might very well be so constituted as to provide for a variation at intervals fore-arranged by Divine Providence. The late Duke of Argyll held that the law need not have been broken, but might have been only suspended by other laws of which we know nothing. Dr. Mozley pointed out that law was after all a misnomer, since we are only really acquainted with succession. Dr. Bernard argues that the natural and physical laws are only parts of, or at least subject to, higher laws of a moral purpose. The first two amount to no more than saying that the miracle was only apparent because people did not know enough. The central incident of M. Zola's *Lourdes* turns on a very pathetic use of this error. Dr. Mozley's contention scarcely seems to do justice to scientific results. No doubt if we place two metal plates in certain acids and connect them by wires with points and a spark ensues, the isolated phenomenon is a mere succession. When, however, we can group together a number of similar phenomena as electricity and exchange them with other phenomena, grouped as heat and chemistry, in accurately determined proportions, we have gone a long way beyond

mere succession. Dr. Bernard's argument I should quite accept, but I hardly think he makes his point as clear as it ought to be, because he does not suggest what the common moral purpose is, as opposed to that of the particular miracle.

The whole attempt, and the attitude from which it comes, seems to me confusing and unfortunate. As Christians, or priests, or believers, we are to help the naturalists; to try and evade them is to betray the Gospel we have for them. We do not want to save our faith, we want to save them by our faith, and to do this we must meet them on their own ground. It is just because our natural knowledge is so much greater, so much more powerful, than it has ever been before, that our danger and our need are greater. To this age more than to any is the warning to the Church in Laodicea sent, 'because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art poor and blind and naked; I counsel thee to buy of me gold, refined in the fire, and white garments.'

'All that is best' in man has gone to nature, and has found in it nothing of his own, only the natural, and the abstraction of nature. It has gone to man, and found in him itself and its own abstractions, once more. It can find its fulfilment only in what transcends both man and nature; yet this 'best' is a power of knowledge. How can that knowledge be met except by a transcendent revelation? Now, just as in the homely example I gave, the knowledge of the transcendent personality of the cook can only be had by an introduction to her apart from the mere functions of cookery; so the revelation of God, as other than a natural abstraction, can only be had in ways and forms which are apart from, or beyond, or which transcend, nature. But nature and law are absolutely coextensive and one. Whatever then is to be shown as transcending nature, only can be shown by transcending law. Whatever within the sphere of a law transcends the law is, so far, a violation of that law. Whether we call it a violation, or a suspension, or an adjustment, or an intervention, in a law, or a succession, or anything else, does not matter either to the scientists or to us. Even to debate the question, especially in the form of an acceptable explanation, is to lose its whole point.

The argument that miracles are fatal to natural science because

they destroy the uniformity of nature is rather childish[1]. No lawyer proposes to 'chuck the whole business' because the Crown exercises its extra-legal prerogative of pardon. To contend that the prerogative is not extra-legal because it is contained in constitutional law, is a mere matter of words, and the point of real moment is very different. Uniformity of legal administration is no doubt very important, but it is also very dangerous, especially to lawyers. Experts of all kinds are only too apt to think that man was made for the law, and not the law for man. The dispensing power, even apart from its exercise, is necessary as a manifestation, or revelation, that that law is not a mere machine for grinding out five years for forging a cheque, and twelve months for assaulting a woman, and half-a-crown and costs for forgetting your bicycle lamp; but that it has its source and purpose in an intelligent will which can show itself master. Human law and divine differ in that the imperfections of the former demand frequent intervention as an adjustment; the perfection of the Divine law, taken as a whole, requires it for revelation only.

One side of this is understood by all Christians. God, Who is beyond the human inference, revealed Himself in Man; but He reveals Himself as something beyond man, by showing His power to override, or suspend, or violate (the phrase matters very little), the laws by which human nature is held. His Birth, His Resurrection, His Ascension, are more than human. But, says Dr. Mozley, although this is true of the greater miracles, the lesser remain as evidences purely. I reply—just as in the greater miracles, He showed Himself within the human sphere as more than man; so in the lesser miracles He showed Himself within the natural sphere as more than its law, or than the sum of its law, by His ability to set its law aside.

I would urge therefore that all miracles alike are not only 'inserted in the doctrine,' are not only 'parts of the doctrine,' they are the doctrine, and the essential whole of it. The apostolic doctrine may appear a more elaborate affair, and may even be

[1] To avoid misunderstanding, the reader may be asked carefully to distinguish two subjects: (1) the place of miracle, admitted to be such, in a theory of the world; (2) the question what evidence, if any, is sufficient to show that a given event is miraculous. This paper only deals directly with the former of these two.

so brought together as to suggest a complete and many-sided system; yet this developed doctrine is only formed by drawing out the consequences involved in the primary revelation, and by showing how those consequences correspond with the actual constitution and condition of human nature. Thus in 1 Cor. xv St. Paul does not use the Resurrection of Christ as a marvel which demonstrated that His further teaching on the resurrection of man must be true also, but as the revelation of the universal from which the other must follow as a deduction. Of course I should not deny that the apostolic doctrine as inspired was itself to some extent miraculous, yet the miraculous element is here subsidiary only, and consists in a supernatural intensity of natural power. St. Paul's whole tone shows that he was emphasising by authority results which were open to natural inference from the facts. It is therefore these facts, it is therefore the miracles themselves, which constitute the very teaching and gospel of which students of science stand in more need to-day than they ever did before, if they are to escape from the ultimate moral ruin of nature-worship.

In regard to the greater miracles this is so generally admitted that I cannot understand the sentence last quoted (p. 510) from Dr. Bernard as more than an oversight. If it is not, when he says that miracles, especially the Resurrection, are a stumblingblock to many 'anxious to accept the Christian Creeds,' or, 'a hindrance to the acceptance of Christianity,' what Christian creeds, and what Christianity, does he mean that these people are anxious to accept, or hindered from accepting? Christianity is a revelation of God as transcending nature both human and material, for as the natural is the sphere of inference, so is the transcendent of revelation. Take away miracles and you have ethics, but the ethics are not Christianity, but only a consequence of it. That Christian ethics never have been, nor could be, equalled by unrevealed religion is due solely to the fact that they are the ethics belonging to the transcendent view of human nature, which view can only be reached or maintained by faith in a revelation.

I do not wish to suggest that Dr. Bernard or Dr. Mozley do not believe this, or even that they do not state it; but, as I began by saying, I do believe that they, and most Christian apologists, obscure it. Dr. Mozley's statement that 'the natural explanation

of (the miracle) is as evidence,' seems to me radically misleading. For the sceptic there is one primary question, and one only. 'Do you believe that nature is complete and self-sufficient; or do you recognise that it implies, demands, and leads up to, something beyond itself?' If the former, then it is perfectly useless to offer proofs that miracles really did take place. Even if I admit the evidence to be irrefutable, its relevance remains questionable, and certainly its effect is almost confessedly infinitesimal. The sceptic's criticism of the evidence is as misleading to us, as the argument based on it is to him. It is the whole idea of the transcendent to which he objects.

IV.

Dr. Mozley's repudiation of the argument from 'the intrinsic nature of the doctrines' seems to me, therefore, to lack appreciation. 'Their adaptation to the human heart' means nothing more than that we wish things were so; but their adaptation to the human reason is a very different matter. The first implies no more than that they have the beauty of imaginative poetry; the second implies the acceptance of a positive truth which will stand the test of verification by inductive method, even if by that alone it could not have been reached.

At the same time I gladly admit that there is in this protest one side of very great importance; and in order to do justice to it, I ought to say something more on the place which evidence does fill in regard to Christian miracle. To maintain that the evidence for miracles is entirely useless is something of a paradox. I have already hinted above that the evidence, like the miracle itself, may be used in two ways. When the miracle is used for an independent proof,—that because we can do very remarkable things, therefore what we say must be equally remarkable,—the evidence becomes the real premiss of the conclusion, and the more certain we can be made of it by test conditions the better. It is this use of the argument which seems both absolutely ineffective and opposed to Scripture. To use the Divine power to make these stones bread belongs rather to magic than revelation; and, while I do not like to accuse Dr. Mozley and Dr. Bernard of having positively confused what is proper to the two,

I cannot help thinking that they have involved themselves in the confusion, or at least have not drawn the distinction.

There is, however, another danger than that of magic, I mean that of mythology. From this side, the miracles are assumed to satisfy the natural craving, or aspiration, of the human soul for intercourse with the transcendent. As Christianity has been called magical, so it has been called mythological. Both accusations are untenable. As regards the latter, Dr. Robertson Smith pointed out that in natural religions it is the practice of the rites which is the essential element; the mythology, which gave a certain beauty of meaning to them, was a purely voluntary matter. Many totally disbelieved it; but even the more devout had never made up, or thought it necessary to make up, their minds whether the stories were supposed for the most part to be actual facts or imaginative poetry. Widely different versions might be current of the same story; a few very matter of fact people might occasionally try to reconcile them, but most men took either or both as they came, quite naturally; for the idea of contradiction can only arise where there is believed to be a sufficient basis of fact to make one true and another false, and this was entirely lacking.

Christianity, therefore, cannot on scientific grounds be classified as a mythological religion. In the latter the beliefs, or rather stories, of the supernatural follow upon the essential observances, but in Christianity it is the observances, in common with the ethics and the philosophy, which follow upon the stories of a supernatural kind; and as the latter constituted the essence, so they demand an entire belief which mythology does not demand. The way in which the miracles were worked corresponds to these principles on all three sides. (*a*) They are worked quite as the natural and inevitable manifestation of power under a great variety of circumstances, some in public, some in private. Here therefore is the element of transcendency. (*b*) They are narrated with the utmost matter of fact, and supported by a great deal of incidental testimony. They cannot, therefore, be treated as vague and dubious mythology. (*c*) On the other hand, they are never arranged with a view to convincing unbelievers, and if the circumstances of some, as the raising of Lazarus, might so appear, yet that they were certainly not so meant is evident,

since they are never so used. As, therefore, the existence of evidence disproves the mythological idea, so the use and nature of it disprove the magical. There is a natural use of miracles as the revelation of the transcendent, which belongs to Scripture and requires belief; there is another use of miracles as a proof of something else, which belongs to the argumentations of the eighteenth century, and which provokes the scepticism it was evoked to allay.

V.

So far I have confined myself specially to the miracles of the New Testament, but it may add to the clearness and comprehension of the subject if I attempt to consider the application of these principles to some miracles found elsewhere.

1. I observe that Dr. Bernard in speaking of the Old Testament appears to feel some doubt whether, on the ground of evidence, we ought to admit more than the general miracle of prophecy. I cannot, of course, attempt here to discuss the special questions raised by the methods conveniently described as the 'higher criticism,' but the broad general question is of some importance. My whole argument has been based on the primary distinction between the classes of religions. On the one side, we have those which are based upon inference from material or human nature, and consist in a statement or arrangement of such ideals as may be abstracted therefrom for purposes of worship. On the other, we have a religion which seriously claims to be a revelation of that which transcends nature, and could not be inferred or derived from it. The difference is as marked in their resultant forms as it is in their principles. All natural religions are admittedly relative, elastic and adaptable. It might be improper or undesirable in a Roman, but there was no 'theological' inconsistency in the worshipper of Jupiter joining also in the services of Isis. They only represented different abstractions, ideals, or ways of thinking, of which each had its advantages. The religion, however, which follows from the revelation of actual being is a matter of absolute truth; and although, if incomplete, it may be tolerant of further perfection, it is impossible that any man who has once accepted it can go back to a natural religion without a denial of faith.

It cannot be questioned that all historical evidence of the pre-Christian faith of Israel represents it as belonging to the second class, and not to the first, and the Roman provincial administration recognised, and was reluctantly forced to allow for, this peculiar character. The Bible as it stands presents a continuous history of revelation having four marked stages, each having its own principle, and yet containing the elements which are developed in the next. The first is a preliminary revelation of the reality of a personal Friend and Guardian. The second, to the nation, is much more than a revelation of Monotheism. It is a revelation of God Himself as true Being, transcending all nature, material or human, the only object, therefore, of worship and the foundation of the law of all moral action. The third, which is made to the prophets, is intermediate, and to the revelation of transcendent Personality is added the knowledge of His nature, so that the idea of obedience to law in act is carried forward into the assimilation of moral purpose to what is acceptable to the Personal will of the Author of law. Finally, by the revelation of God Himself in the form of Man, the whole is completed into that perfection of comprehensibility which the doctrine of the Trinity adds to Monotheism.

Summarising, therefore, the first is a revelation of reality; the second, of transcendency of being; the third, of a knowable nature; the last, of God Himself. Each of these is necessarily miraculous: in the first place, simply in itself, since it is of something which transcends natural inference. Throughout this paper, however, I have in general used the word *miracles* only in the sense of those outer actions which are commonly so described, and these are found distributed over the four revelations according to their proper principle. The second and fourth are primary, and here the miracles are the very essence of the revelation. In the Gospel the revelation of God is the Birth, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ; the revelation of His power and relation to nature is the feeding of the multitudes, walking on the water, and healing the sick. In the Mosaic dispensation, we have only the second class; the plagues, the crossing of the Red Sea, the thunders of Sinai. To each is appended its proper sequel. Upon the Gospel follows the inspired deduction of the ethical and other teaching of our

Lord and His Apostles; upon the Mosaic dispensation, the moral and ceremonial law.

The first and third are preliminary. The inspired teaching has in consequence a much larger relative place, and the miracles might appear to be merely attestations; yet they are not necessarily so. Even the scene on Mount Carmel is, like the raising of Lazarus, a solemn revelation of truth in appeal or warning, rather than a convincing proof.

To question the sufficiency of the evidence seems to me, therefore, wholly beside the question. The miracles are given in precisely the same way, with the same tone and purpose, and with the same absence of any eagerness to accumulate evidence, as those in the Gospel itself. If there are fewer contemporary lines of concurrent testimony, that was what we should expect. No doubt if the Old Testament stood alone, the whole revelation would have seemed so pointless that we might have rejected its evidence, though it would have been extremely difficult even then to classify it. The best evidence, however, is that it is not pointless. The final revelation was professedly final. It assumed itself, and was assumed by all, to be complementary to others which had gone before. It is not a question of the interpretation of a casual allusion. Our Lord and His Apostles alike openly admitted and asserted that He was fulfilling what was implied in the revealed law of a transcendent revelation; and if it was all this, then, as I have sought to prove, it must have been given in miracle. Of course it may be said that, even if it be proved that these revelations were given by miracle, the evidence may not be sufficient to demonstrate the particular ones alleged. To which I reply that if we admit the Homeric authorship of the Iliad, it is hardly worth while asking if it might not have been written by another author of the same name. The history before us exactly fits the requirements of the case.

2. I have throughout this paper contrasted Christian miracles, which are themselves revelations, on the one hand with a class of miracles which I called 'magical,' in which the wonder, which it is asserted really occurred, constitutes not the necessary element of the revelation itself, but an accidental or independent proof that some one is in a position to give us a revelation; on

the other hand, with the class of miracles related in mythologies, which are not seriously supposed to be true at all, in the sense of matters of fact.

There are two points here on which I should like to say something further; both partly turn upon a question of wording. Dr. Bernard emphasises very strongly, what Prof. Maurice also used so often to insist upon, that in Scripture the word 'miracles' is very rarely used at all, and never alone; they are spoken of as 'signs.' This in itself is a very strong argument in favour of my thesis that in arguing from the mere ability to work wonders we are following a wrong path, but I have carefully abstained hitherto from pressing it. I was very anxious to set forth the real force of the argument, and, therefore, to keep clear of confusion of mere nomenclature.

The other point is of more importance in its own somewhat narrow sphere. The miracles claimed by Madame Blavatsky and other spiritualists are no doubt often appealed to as proofs, but I am aware that many believers repudiate this view, and insist that they also are proper manifestations of spiritual force. Magic springs from a belief in the existence of non-material forces which can nevertheless be brought, by proper manipulation, to produce material effects. In this way the marvels of the *séance* are nothing more than normal instances of the manifestations of these powers, and they may be regarded therefore simply as phenomena akin to hypnotism, thought-transference and mesmerism, provable or disprovable according to the quality of the evidence. It is only in a secondary and accidental sense that, as in the case of Apollonius of Tyana, the possession of magical powers is quoted as demonstrating that the holder also possesses some superior knowledge of truth which entitles him to credence. Throughout the essay, I have used 'magical' as descriptive of this latter idea. I confess the objections to such employment, but the term is often so used, and I am not aware of any better.

HERBERT KELLY.