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

THOUGHTS ON MIRACLES. By EDWARD BURTON  
PENNY, ESQ., M.V.I.

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

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

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

consequents, in every region or kingdom of Nature, mineral, vegetable, animal, or elementary.

That the "laws which rule Nature" are "alone and supreme" may be conceded, relatively speaking, *i. e.*, in respect to the ruling of Nature; but this is merely moving round the circle of cause and effect, antecedent and consequent; the question is, How these laws work, and how the manifold results in Nature are obtained? And the partisan of "science" who has acknowledged that there is a God,\* does not pretend that, distinct from material Nature, there is no other ruling power or law. Nature's laws, "ruling Nature," are themselves distinct from and above Nature; and, whether Nature "know" it or not, *we* know that the Intelligence which established those laws and ordained them to work out His unchangeable will, and still upholds them in His hands, causing while yet placing bounds to their mutual action and reaction, is necessarily distinct from and above Nature.

The argument continues:—

*"To assert that an event, or a series of events occurred, which are contrary to this uniformity, which are not the result of these laws and properties, but opposed to them, and incompatible with them, is to assert the occurrence of an impossibility, and is simply absurd."* †

But we have seen that nothing is more "uniform," in the sense here intended, in Nature, than the constancy of a mutual crossing or counteraction in its laws, and that it is not "incompatible" with these laws that one should be continually over-riding another, and producing thereby a new order of results or chain of consequents, therefore miracles; and that without such opposition and mutual reaction of her laws, Nature's only law would be speedily to die out and cease to be.

In miracles, commonly so called, Nature's laws are neither violated nor modified in themselves; one law is simply over-ruled by another, a new chain of cause and effect being commenced thereby. The power which directs this over-ruling, whether intelligibly to itself or not, is the worker of the miracle. The vegetable germ, blindly exerting the powers with which it is endowed, assimilates the earthy and gaseous elements to itself, over-rules the mineral and atmospheric laws, and works a miracle. The ox which eats the grass, and converts its elements into its own flesh and bones, over-rules the laws of vegetable life, and works a miracle. And, above all, every act of man may be called a miracle, inasmuch as one law of Nature is thereby, and that "inexorably," over-ruled

\* *Ibid.* p. 96.

† *Ibid.* p. 95.

by another, and a new chain of cause and effect commenced. This, indeed, may be affirmed of every act or movement of animal life generally; the "uniform course" of Nature being altered by every footfall on its surface.

But man's whole mission upon earth seems to be that he should work miracles. He breaks the "uniform course" and overrules the laws of wild Nature, and turns a howling wilderness into a fruitful field or smiling garden, and subdues the whole animal kingdom to serve his convenience, by the simple process of opposing one law of Nature to another, by the superior power of his own intelligence and will.

Neither vegetables nor animals "know" anything of the laws by which they act or are acted upon; they fulfil their parts by a blind faith in the power implanted in their germs and developed by the counteraction of other powers ordained for the purpose by the Supreme Intelligence.

But man is not precluded from knowing the laws and power by which he works, although the vast majority of men concern themselves to know nothing about it; and the nations and peoples do their Creator's behest, and work the miracles they were sent on earth to work, knowing little more of the secret springs of their own life and action than the animals around them.

Man has been called a *MICROCOSM*, because he unites in himself something of the essences of all the kingdoms of Nature, sidereal, as well as earthly. And it is manifest that this must be so; for, since he is capable of receiving the influences of the sun and the skies, of the atmosphere and the earth, and of the animal and vegetable world living and moving in them, there must necessarily be something in him of the nature of all these things; and the power which we see he possesses to act upon Nature is in itself a proof that he must have visible or secret connecting links homogeneous with that Nature, vital and physical.

Some men are not only conscious of their power over Nature, but exercise themselves in it, and strengthen it to a remarkable degree. We may instance the Rareys, and tamers of wild beasts or reptiles in all countries, who, by faith in their power, and by the exercise of their will, tighten or relax the secret sympathetic links at their pleasure, and make the fiercest of such animals tremble at their look, and end by lying down like lambs at their feet.

Of such are mesmerists, who, by the power of their will alone, transmitted through the secret links which connect them with their patients, send them to sleep and make them do many wonderful things.

All power is of God ; and God has apportioned the use of it to all His creatures according to their kind and to the purposes of His goodness and wisdom. The vegetable and the animal have each power after their kind, according to the work given them to perform, while the secret springs of their action are beyond their ken. But man seems to be master of the springs of his own power (*i. e.* the portion with which God endowed him) : he can strengthen them by exercise, and relax or destroy them completely by disuse ; and he can direct them as he will, either in subjection to inward inspirations of a pure conscience (which is God's gift), or to the wild and lawless allurements of his imagination or his passions.

In conformity with this freedom of choice, and indifferently for good or for evil, we find at all times, and in our own day, instances of men who, by their earnestness, enthusiasm, or faith, have more or less powerfully moved the springs of Nature, and done many wonderful works or miracles.

Religious enthusiasm, so called, has been the means of many wonderful results ; and these results are of a nature according to the *direction* of this enthusiasm or faith ; and may be characterized as good, or evil, or neuter. If this faith is exercised in entire submission to the Divine light, its results are in conformity ; and thus we see how a Moses was enabled to overcome the magicians, and bring his people out of Egypt, and separate them as a peculiar people, a light for the Gentiles till Shiloh should come.

The magicians of Egypt and those of other countries, Fetish priests, Fakirs, Medicine-men, and Marabouts of the present day, work many wonders or miracles, by moving the same springs of Nature (for all their performances are not mere jugglery) ; but their works lack the beauty of those of the Divine order, and are rightly named *occult*, or deeds of darkness.

The CHAIRMAN.—I am sure you will all return a cordial vote of thanks to these two gentlemen for their very interesting papers. I think you will also agree that Mr. English's Essay is one of the most valuable papers that we have had yet brought before us, and I hope we shall now have a useful and profitable discussion on the subject.

Rev. ROBINSON THORNTON, D.D.—I will trouble you with a few remarks on the first of the interesting papers we have heard this evening ; and they will not be in opposition, but rather in harmony with the arguments of Mr. English. They have brought out (but not, perhaps, quite with the clearness I could wish) two very important questions, which we have to consider on the subject of miracles. On this subject there are two grand fallacies, in my opinion, which are constantly urged by those who oppose miracles. The

first lies in the words "law of nature." What is a law of nature? Who enacted that law? What Parliament met together, and by a majority of votes decided there should be that law? Why use the term "law"? Because it is something written down? But you must remember, that though "written," it is not enacted. Where is it written? It is written in our own minds. From the observation of a certain set of phenomena, we find underlying them a certain principle; and we write that down on the tables of our mind or on paper, and call it a "law of nature." But you must not argue that it is to be treated as a human law passed amongst men. It is not something to which a punishment is attached for violation;—it is not vindicated by the Lawgiver—we speak of a law of nature indeed; but there is the fallacy. A law of nature is, we must remember, not something by which, as people would seem to say, the Deity is bound, but something belonging to ourselves: it is a part of our own thought and of our own consciousness. We, having analyzed certain phenomena, find a certain principle, as I said, underlying them, and we register it in our minds as a law. But we have no business to impose it on others; it is part of ourselves. Therefore, when a person says, "I do not believe a miracle takes place, because it is a violation of the laws of nature," he means that a miracle is something which is different from his own especial observation; he merely asserts the limited character of his own observations. If a person tells me that no testimony can be sufficient to make him believe that such a thing as a miracle ever happened, he is in fact saying, "I am so convinced of the superiority of my intellect and of my own generalization, that no testimony shall prove to me there is an intellect superior to mine." We know how that was answered in early times, and a hundred years ago, when Hume brought forward his argument against miracles as being "contrary to experience." The answer was plain. What do you mean by contrary to experience? Do you mean that miracles are not what people observe every day? That is what *we* mean,—something not met with in every-day experience;—but if you mean to say they are contrary to experience in this sense, that no person has ever seen one, you are begging the question; you are assuming what you ought to prove; you say these things did not occur, and when asked why, your answer is the not very convincing one, "Because they did not." The next fallacy to which I should like to call attention resides in the word "Causation." What do you mean by causation? The term is used in two senses, which are apt to be confounded. In the first place, causation is taken to mean, and really does mean, the sequences of phenomena which, as far as our limited observation goes, are invariable. When we find that invariably in our experience one phenomenon follows another, we say the first is the cause of the second. That is the first mode in which the term causation is used. There is another sense in which it is used, and a much higher one, which is this—the operation of superior intellect on inferior existence. Now opponents of miracles confound these two together. They say, no superior existence can have exerted itself in a manner to which we are unaccustomed, upon the works of creation. Why? Not because they deny the power of intel-

lect ; but they argue in the other sense, that no phenomenon has power in itself to alter the phenomenon which follows it. It is on a confusion between these two meanings that I think some of the arguments alleged against miracle are founded. I repeat, therefore, that we should guard ourselves carefully against the confusion which exists in the words "law of nature," and the other confusion which exists in the word "causation." I think we can understand what a miracle really is. It is where a superior intellect asserts itself in order to command the respect of an inferior intellect. The inferior has attained to a certain "law," by such generalization as it is capable of, but the superior at certain times steps in and introduces a phenomenon which is not recorded in that generalization, and by displaying that phenomenon shows its superiority. Let those who reject miracles beware ; because in rejecting them, they say their intellect is superior to any other intellect that can exist. They are, in point of fact, raising matter nearly, if not quite, to Deity.

Rev. JOHN MANNERS.—Since I have had the pleasure of joining this Society, this is the first meeting I have been able to attend, and I wish to make a few observations upon the excellent papers we have just heard ; and first to "men of science" just a few words. I think it has been well said that we are surrounded by a continuation of miracles in nature, using that word in the fullest sense. Let us look at some of these mysterious agents for a moment or two. There is what we call the principle of fire,—there is light, and there is electricity, for instance. Now it really seems to be contrary to the principle of light that two rays or waves should produce darkness ; and yet two undulations of light, one following the other by half a length or a multiple of half a length, do produce darkness. And so with heat :—two waves of heat produce cold. And so of sound :—two waves of sound produce silence. Now, this is in accordance with what may be termed the acting of recondite powers, and is in order and harmony with the general principles by which we are surrounded. I recollect when at Cambridge, after reading the Third Book of Newton's *Principia*, there was something seemed wanting. We talk of the law of gravitation ; but what is gravity ? Newton said, "With regard to what it is, I do not pretend to understand, I won't venture to say ; but with regard to the phenomena, I say, such and such things are produced by it." But when we come to ask—What is it ? How came it about ? What is the origin of all these forces of nature ? How is it that fire should burn ? How is it that this electrical force does pass here and there ? How is it all these effects are produced ? We must answer,—Not *per se*. There must be something that pervades, that directs all these wonderful, beautiful, and glorious powers. I would ask men of science to tell us why, if a little bit of sodium is thrown into water, we see the wonderful effect of fire and light brought into action ? How is it these pieces of potassium and sodium accomplish this ? Why this strange affinity for oxygen that it actually seems to set fire to water ? I want men of science to tell me in plain words *how* these things are produced ; and I want to know why are these things so beautifully harmonized : I want to know *how* it is there is



such order and harmony? It is not enough to tell me, *it is*; we can see that. But we want the living presence; and this living presence (the solution to all the questions with regard to miracles) is the Most High, who created all things according to His own will. Can you tell me how light is produced? Or what, on the other hand, is darkness? Why (for a third instance) are all things in nature circular? Whence these wonderful powers? We use the term "nature," it is true, as if we understood what is natural and what supernatural; but all these things can only be understood when connected with one beautiful order and harmony by the Almighty. Now, for one moment again, to look at our individual selves, it is quite true, what was said in one of the papers read, there must be connected with man somewhat of all the principles of the material and spiritual universe, centred in him in one way or another. How is it that words, for instance, declare "my will," and that my thoughts spring up into ideas, and are embodied in the words I now utter in this assembly? Here are beautiful mysteries, proving that my origin is not mere matter, not a merely temporary thing, not merely an advance on a monkey; but rather is it not in this way, that man is "made in the image and likeness of God"? Man feels that nothing is impossible with Him. When I go to the Gospels, I see the manifestation of the Creator on the earth, in the marvellous things done by Christ's word. When He speaks to the fig-tree, and commands it to bear no fruit; there is a power from Himself which goes forth—the thing is done; and so in all His miracles. He is thus a true light to me, and He solves all mysteries in creation by the mysteries of redemption; He brings to light the things of darkness, and leads me and brings me home to that Paradise which I lost in the Fall. So we say, again, that men of science, if asked the cause of electricity, answer they do not enter into causes, and that we must be content with phenomena. But that is no answer, and I know the best men of science will admit that there must be a mysterious power besides, which they cannot reach. That leads us up to the Eternal. In Him we live and move and have our being; and His living Presence alone is the solution of the whole question.

Dr. GLADSTONE.—I should like to express the great admiration with which I listened to the first of the papers read this evening. The second was also interesting; but I think we ought to avoid using the term miracles in the sense in which it was employed in that paper,—a totally different sense to that used in the first, and not miracles in the true sense of the word. Accepting, therefore, miracles in the proper sense in which the term is employed in the paper of Mr. English, I may perhaps be allowed to make one or two remarks. The first is, that the paper scarcely went beyond showing (that, however, it proved most conclusively) the possibility of miracles. It also stated, that supposing God to give a revelation to man, not only were miracles *à priori* possible, but also probable and necessary, because revelation itself was a miracle. But it appears to me that supposing God is about to communicate anything to His creature man, miracles are, *à priori*, probable in another sense besides that which is spoken of in the paper. It is quite clear, considering the power of man's imagination and the large number of false

religions which have come into the world, that if the Supreme Being wishes to give a revelation to man, He must in some way authenticate that revelation ; He must authenticate it to the man to whom He speaks, in order to give him the power of convincing his contemporaries and successors that he is actually speaking from God. Both for the man's own satisfaction and for the satisfaction of those to whom he is sent, there is required some testimony, something which the man cannot of himself produce ; and it appears to me that there is no notice of this in the paper. Now, I cannot conceive of any better credentials of a revelation than miracles—miracles in the sense which includes prophecy, which is only a species of miracle—

The CHAIRMAN.—It is so stated in the paper.

DR. GLADSTONE.—If we look through the Bible, we shall find, I think, that miracles are spoken of almost universally in that way. They are the testimony which God has given to His servants ; and when there has been no revelation there has been no miracle. Trace throughout the whole history of the Bible, and I think you will find this is almost always the case. There may be a few instances in which miracles are wrought, not for testimony, but to preserve the Church, and for certain purposes of goodness towards man ; and it is possible we may extend the use of the word miracle to some of those cases of recent times, wherein God seems to have interposed in the history of the Church, so as to bring about what appears as a miracle, in answer to prayer, or to serve some great purpose for the extension of the Church. I do not know exactly, but it is matter for consideration, how far the great change of heart that is wrought by the operation of God's Spirit should be regarded as a miracle or not. As to what has led to such observations upon miracles as Mr. Powell put forth, I think I can better understand that feeling, perhaps, than the writer of the Essay. There is no doubt in my mind it has arisen from the great attention paid recently to the uniformity of Nature's laws. Now, that has an effect upon the mind, if we consider it too exclusively. We begin to feel that a miracle comes in as something interfering with the grand march of Nature ; that it belongs to something alien, which does not come within our philosophy. We know this can be upset most thoroughly by reasoning such as has been brought forward this evening. And what is the result of this ? It shows us how difficult it is to perform miracles ; and therefore, supposing we have, on the ground of sufficient testimony, proof that miracles have been performed, it proves with increasing force that those miracles are not the action of chance or of evil spirits, but of Him who rules all things.

MR. WARINGTON.—I may say that I think the first paper read this evening deals with the question of miracles more fully and impartially than I ever remember hearing it before treated of. I do not mean, that the subject is exhausted, nor the matter put everywhere in the best point of view, for it strikes me it might be expressed better and clearer ; but that there is no one element necessary for the right understanding of miracles overlooked. The remarks I have to make refer to some expressions of preceding speakers, and a few points in the paper which I think will bear a slight amendment. First,

as to the preceding speakers Dr. Thornton argued, that because we could not assert our generalizations, on which our conceptions of law were founded, to be complete, we had no right to assume there were any laws at all ; and therefore to assert any event to be opposed to natural laws was impossible—

The CHAIRMAN.—I think Dr. Thornton stated nothing of that kind. I do not disagree with your statement, but it is only fair for me to say so, in justice to Dr. Thornton, who has now left the room.

Mr. WARINGTON.—Dr. Thornton stated that our knowledge of phenomena was necessarily imperfect in every case ; and he seemed to think that as that fact made our generalization equally imperfect, therefore we could not regard the generalization as equivalent to law. I ask is that true practically ? Of course, I agree with him theoretically, but not practically ; and the question of miracles is a practical question. We have no absolute demonstration that miracles were performed ; we have merely a certain number of probabilities. We cannot then demand demonstration against miracles if we cannot give it for them—I mean mathematical demonstration. For what does our knowledge depend on ? For instance, I heard Dr. Thornton speak. How did I know what he meant by what he spoke ? Simply from a limited amount of observation as to what certain words signified. I cannot pretend to lay down as a fact that those words never could mean anything else. My generalization is imperfect. I cannot say it is a mathematical law that a certain word means a certain thing. I have only probability to guide me ; I take that and act upon it ; and I am practically right. Theoretically, however, I am not certain of the meaning of the words said to me ; yet, practically, I am right in acting as if I was. Just so with miracles. It is quite sufficient if the objector can show us a certain amount of probability against them without being able to give demonstration, for that is impossible. This is the great fallacy that runs through Mr. Mozley's otherwise able book on miracles. He has assumed that because all laws of science are founded on imperfect generalizations, therefore they cannot be taken as proper reasons for coming to any conclusion. If that is admitted, we have no real reason for coming to any conclusion on any subject ; because in every case our reasons are simply dependent on probability, and not on mathematical demonstration. Then,—to take a point mentioned by a speaker before Dr. Thornton,—Why do not men of science inquire into the reason of things ?—

The CHAIRMAN.—It was not asked “Why do not men of science inquire into the *reason* of things ?” You are imputing an expression never used by Mr. Manners.

Mr. WARINGTON.—I mean the reason why bodies have certain properties—why laws exist. I understood he asked why men of science did not go further, and ask why bodies have certain properties ? If it is the fact, however, that we are unable to go back to this primal cause, is that any reason for our not taking the amount of scientific knowledge we have, as a fair ground and basis of reasoning ? Can we arrive at the primal cause of anything ? No. In any subject, the instant you go back to what is the primal cause why such and such a thing is, you are at sea ; and therefore there is no blame to

physical or natural science, if it also fails in this particular. Thus there is no valid reason why the deductions of science may not be used in considering miracles. I notice this point, because I am loath to see arguments put forward which will not bear scrutiny. There are so many at the present day who are inclined to scrutiuize everything put forward on behalf of miracles, that it behoves the defenders of miracles to be cautious what arguments they use. Then to come back to the paper itself; there was one point which seemed to be a little overdrawn—that which referred to the unchangeableness of God. Mr. English argued, because man was free, God must be free; because man in his freedom did not always do the same things, but his actions were varied, there must be a larger latitude of freedom and of variableness assigned to God. If you look at the two statements, the parallel seems striking; but go lower, and it seems to me the parallel drops out. Why is it, that man having a free will, produces variable results? Because his knowledge is imperfect, and he does not know what is best for himself. If his knowledge of nature was perfect, if he was perfectly aware what was the best thing to be done, his will would be unchangeable; he would do one thing and never swerve from it, and with all his freedom of will there would be absolute uniformity. Is not that the case with God? Has not God not only perfect freedom, but also perfect knowledge, perfect acquaintance with what is best? Does it not therefore arise from the nature of God, that His work is uniform and unchangeable, just as that from the nature of man his work is un-uniform and changeable? It seems to me that this point was overlooked by Mr. English. I am quite aware that he adduced reasons further on in his paper, which account for God's interference with the uniformity of nature, but I submit that this one point of comparison was overdrawn. Then I will make two further remarks; first, on the essence of a miracle. What is the essence of a miracle? It is, that it contradicts the uniformity of nature; for if not, it would be no miracle at all. And further: that it not only contradicts the uniformity of nature as seen in outward phenomena, but as the result of scientific law. For if we can show that miracles thus regarded were not contrary to nature, but were really in harmony with law, they would at once cease, upon this view, to be miracles at all. Therefore, it was essential to the very nature of miracles that they should be contrary to law; and so when advocates of miracles endeavour to reject the idea of a violation of the uniformity of nature, they are really cutting their own throats. One word more, as to the purpose of miracles. I take it that every miracle was performed, not as matter of evidence for another thing, but as matter of evidence in itself. I think that point has been too much overlooked. When you find in the Gospel history one miracle following rapidly after another, you cannot say each was performed as an evidence of something beside itself; but you can say that there was always an object for the miracle *in itself*,—a direct object, which we must hold as the true one, the indirect object merely as a subordinate one. I believe these two points have not been thrown out in the paper itself, nor in the remarks of those who have spoken. I do not say they are original: it struck me however that they

were of sufficient importance to make it worth while to add these remarks.

Captain FISHBOURNE.—It strikes me that Mr. Warington has misunderstood Dr. Thornton. Dr. Thornton said this;—that we observe phenomena and deduce a law from that; but this was a “law,” he said distinctly, with reference only to us, and not binding upon the Creator; that it was, after all, the law merely of our finite faculties and observations, and might not be true theory, but that by further observation we might arrive at the fact that we had not known the law at all, and therefore our arguments would fall to the ground. He specifically said that the tendency to measure the Infinite by our finite conceptions was tending to deify man and lower the Deity. That I think was his view; and surely that is the tendency of such reasoning.

Rev. Dr. IRONS.—I should be sorry that a subject of such importance should come before us without receiving grave consideration, and you will readily believe that it is one which could not but have occupied my mind frequently in the closest way. I feel that much that Mr. Warington said was extremely valuable; but from one part of his speech I must beg to differ, because his view seems to me almost to destroy the very essence of volition in the Deity. I suppose it is quite competent for the All-Perfect Being to make His own creation according to His own choice, and all “very good.” But I cannot conceive of the All-Perfect Being being so fixed in one volition as to be unable to make another creation. That seems to me to be almost an Atheistic conclusion. I must be forgiven for saying that, because I am sure nothing was further from Mr. Warington’s thoughts than any such conclusion; but it seems to annihilate God, if we deprive Him of volition or choice. Passing from this, which was the principal if not the only point from which I differ, in Mr. Warington’s remarks, I would address myself for a few moments to the great question which is before us; because if this Institute is in any degree to affect the general course of thought in the scientific world, or the world of literature, it must deal carefully and closely with such a subject as the present. It appears to me that we overlook the fact that the whole course of discussion and controversy on this subject seems as if intended to place the advocate of Christianity at a disadvantage. It is assumed at the outset that there is one and only one “order of nature.” In the next place, it is taken for granted that the order of nature is linked together by inexorable consequence,—a law of causation absolutely inviolable. Then it is concluded that any revelation that comes forward must put in the foreground a violation of that order of nature as the very guarantee which it produces for itself. And lastly, it seems to be assumed that we are bound to accept the word of any violator of a law of nature, as though the power of his violating that law constituted him a teacher for our consciences. On all these points, I take my stand. I decidedly object to that way of putting the whole question. I do not think that there is only one law or order of nature. We may grant that there is already ascertained by the observation of mankind one general and pervading physical law, as we term it, extending not only throughout

this world, but, according to the remotest observations which we have made, reaching to the most distant objects. But there is another order of nature besides that which regulates the starry system. The order of nature which there prevails is surely entirely distinct from the laws of right and wrong in the human conscience, for example. There is a moral order of nature—an entirely different thing from that material or external order of nature. I do not say they come into collision, but I mention that moral order of nature to show my position, that we are wrong in assuming there is but one order of nature, and that all things are ruled to happen in one way. I point to the laws of right and wrong, of justice, generosity, and truth, between man and man, which cannot be altered or changed by our mere will or caprice ; for what is equity here cannot be *unequity* elsewhere. By the general conscience of mankind these laws are acknowledged ; and therefore, I say, there may be other orders of nature besides that moral order of nature. I entirely dispute the assumption, as unfair to the whole subject, that there is but one order, and that a physical order of nature. But not only do I object to that assumption, but to the assumption, for which we have not yet I think sufficient data, that the physical external order of nature is bound together by such inexorable principles of causation as that it is utterly inconceivable that any natural laws should reverse or change. Now it is perfectly conceivable, I do not say it is probable, that the doctrine of Mr. Hume in the last century may eventually be accepted as truth in philosophy. Mr. Hume affirmed there was no such thing as efficient causation in nature,—that one event lies by the side of another like two stones in a quarry ; and Mr. Mozley, in the book referred to by Mr. Warrington, has actually assumed Mr. Hume's principles ; he has taken the very doctrine of the sceptical philosopher, and has argued for the doctrine of miracles from Mr. Hume's premises. He seems to me, however, thus to destroy the very foundations of theology in his eagerness to construct an argument for miracle. Mr. Mozley says :—“Philosophers now are agreed that there is no efficient connection between one event and another.” That is his argument ; and thus he destroys the whole ground for believing in God Himself, or the Great First cause. Anything more monstrous I could scarcely conceive. Yet the *Quarterly Review* has praised his lectures, which are sceptical, and the University of Oxford, I am sorry to say, has received them with almost unmixed applause. I ask any gentleman present to give himself the trouble of reading the first two of those lectures to test what I have said. I am only referring to this, however, to illustrate the proposition that it is entirely an assumption, an unfair assumption, that efficient causation is beyond all relaxation defended *ex necessitate*, by theologians more than others. If any party in the scientific or theological world has an interest in defending it, I should say it is the scientific men ; but if they repudiate it, that is their affair. They will find it difficult to proceed without it. In the next place, suppose we were to grant these two concessions, then we have to meet a third difficulty. If we grant there is but one order of nature, and yet find morality must be in some way twisted into the physical order of things ; and if we concede that there is efficient causation which

cannot possibly be evaded ; still the third difficulty in our pathway is this, that this invasion of the necessary efficient causation of things is absolutely to be fastened upon us as a condition of revelation. I see not, if it pleases God to give us revelation, why He may not give it us with or without miracles, as He pleases. I am not prepared to bind myself down beforehand to any such philosophy as this, that if it pleases God to reveal Himself to man, He shall and must of necessity work a miracle to convince man. No : the difficulty in my mind at once is this, that if there be such a necessity, then every man who has an interest in revelation can demand a miracle for himself in particular. If the thing *ex necessitate* belongs to revelation, and if it must be guaranteed to man's mind in that way, we might all demand miracle. We shall at once acknowledge there is a difference between seeing a miracle and having a record of it handed down through very distant media, requiring a great deal of testing. I cannot conceive of miracles wrought eighteen hundred years ago, in order to be tests of faith for us in the nineteenth century, as standing on the same footing exactly as miracles wrought before our own eyes. So, if men are determined to put theological argument on such a basis, they may require a miracle for each of us. But, supposing these assumptions and difficulties were got over, we come at last to this. Where is the necessary connection between the working of a miracle and the convincing of man's conscience of right and wrong ? For if we admit our own records, if we admit the Holy Scriptures, we shall see that miracles are very far from being confined to good agents. Pharaoh's magicians are said to have wrought miracles as well as Moses. I do not see how, on purely natural principles, there should be any connection between the working of a miracle and the truth of the doctrine of the man who worked it.—Now, thus far we have been speaking of miracles without at all defining nature, and I have not heard anything like a definition of what we mean by nature. We come here upon a wide subject, which our scientific men seem to me to take a great deal of pains to avoid. I recollect that Cuvier, in the beginning of his *Animal Kingdom*,—I think in the first chapter,—takes pains to describe what he meant by nature. He meant the properties, first of all, distinguishing any individual being ; so that the properties of a man or of a stone are not the same. The nature of one is not confounded with that of any other. We know what this means ; the human being has human nature ; and however difficult the definition may be, I am not prepared myself to find fault with this definition, that the nature of an individual is that which constitutes him with certain properties, so that he is what he is. We are taught in Scripture that God's nature (I speak with reverence) is best defined "I am that I am." But, beyond this, Cuvier says there is a law of relation which prevails, connecting various natures or classes of being. That is the all-pervading law which he calls general nature. This individual and this general law of nature ought to be thoroughly apprehended by us before we can speak of exceptions to the law. Put before any man anything astonishing, and, if ignorant, he will think it a miracle. If he does not know very well the laws of his own being and of general being, he would be likely to err on that subject ; for we cannot

arrive at any clear conception of a miracle unless we have a wide acquaintance with nature—

MR. REDDIE.—May I interrupt the Reverend Doctor? I think we had better assume that we do know something about nature, and discuss miracles; or I do not see when we shall draw our arguments to a close.

THE CHAIRMAN.—I am exceedingly interested in what I am hearing; but perhaps Dr. Irons will be kind enough to bring his argument more to the subject of miracles, for time presses.

REV. DR. IRONS.—I feel there is justice in Mr. Reddie's suggestion, that the course on which my mind was entering, might take further time than is convenient to-night. I will now, therefore, confine my observations to a narrower compass. I was saying we cannot understand a miracle, unless we form to ourselves an idea of what we mean by nature; and here seems to me to be the great difficulty in which this whole discussion is involved. People assume that a miracle is a violation of a law of nature. That is somewhat premature. Why may it not please Almighty God to perform other actions more astonishing and more surprising than anything apparently yet performed by Him? Miracles may or may not be what they seem to us to be, "violations of the law of nature," but I shrink from saying that God violates His own laws; I do not like that way of putting it. He performs, let me rather say, supernatural things; but any being who performed a wonderful thing, if greater, wiser, and mightier than myself, would seem to me to be doing something surprising—in other words, a miracle; and we are not in a position to say how far what is so done is a violation of natural law, or whether, if it be so, it is not also in conformity with some higher law. I will now condense in a sentence or two the practical conclusion to which this argument should lead. A Divine revelation, we may be sure, will speak for itself. We believe God has given two revelations: we acknowledge that God has spoken by Moses and Christ. There are the Jewish and the Christian revelations. Let any man look now at the Jewish people, he there will see what a standing miracle that people is. I defy any one to study their history, without feeling there is something more in that history than is the result of natural causes. It is a miracle. There is a real revelation. It is a miracle quite apart from the miracle of the Red Sea, or others that were wrought, as recorded in the Old Testament. The language itself, the existing Jewish nation and institutions, are absolutely supernatural. You cannot look in the face of the people at this day—they are living like the burning bush, unconsumed from age to age—without feeling that God really did a supernatural thing in taking that family and stamping a character upon it for Himself and for us. They may deny revelation, or own it; there they move, and wherever they exist, they tell that God has done it. So also the Christian revelation. I do not appeal for its proof to any one of the recorded miracles of the New Testament; I appeal to the thing itself. There was (the world said) a young man, a Galilean, put to death in the reign of Tiberius. In the reign of Constantine, that young Jewish peasant was *worshipped*,—worshipped through-



out the Roman world! That is a miracle;—let the infidel make what he can of *the fact*. We point now to the simple words of that same Jesus of Nazareth, that the gates of hell should never prevail against the system He was going to found; and we are quietly confident; we know, come what may come,—*ruat cælum*,—science and human knowledge and power, and “heaven and earth shall pass away,—*but His words shall not pass away.*”

Mr. REDDIE.—I must apologize to Dr. Irons for interrupting him. He will quite understand that it was only because our time was pressing, and I was anxious to bring him back from very wide questions as to general nature to the subject of miracles. Taking his concluding observations, however, I must say that I do not think that even they quite bear upon the precise question we have before us. They are most interesting and important, I admit; and no doubt, in a certain sense, the propagation of the Christian religion and the existence of the Jews among the nations, are what we might call, in common parlance, “standing miracles.” But we are now discussing “miracles” in the ordinary sense, as signified by a precise word, having a definite meaning. The question is not one of the super-naturalism of revelation, or of grace; neither is it a question of the marvels of nature, many of which were referred to by Mr. Manners in very eloquent terms. A stranger present might suppose that nobody here understood what we were talking about, or really knows what a miracle is; and yet every common person in Judea knew what a “notable miracle” was! In order to discuss our subject, we do not require to know all the laws of nature. Nobody ever alleged either that miracles were violations of all the laws of nature, or that they are standing violations of any natural law. Such a statement, if ever put forward, would be inconsistent with simple fact. We have only to deal with miracles as exceptional violations of distinct and simple laws, with which we are perfectly well acquainted. For instance, the very first miracle that our Lord wrought, was to convert water into wine. Now, we know that by the laws of nature, water will remain water, and we cannot even *conceive* any “higher law,” of any kind whatever—I put it to the most fertile imagination of the most imaginative man of science or modern theologian—we cannot, I say, conceive any possible “law” by which water could ever become wine. I must further say, that I think it is a great mistake to attempt to defend miracles upon any such principle as that they may perhaps be the results of other “laws.” The very gist of them, the very object for which they were wrought, (and I think, in saying this, I shall yet gain the assent even of those whom for the moment I oppose,) was to show that they were wrought independent of all law, by means of the direct power of God. Even the very opening sentence of our paper, speaks of them as the “miraculous interpositions of the Almighty;” and that is exactly what a miracle is. I must, however, quarrel somewhat with Mr. English’s more formal definition. He divides miracles into three classes, direct, mediate and providential; but I venture to say that only one of these classes is what we have properly to deal with. As an instance of a “direct miracle,” he takes the act of creation as being the direct act of God. Well; if so, then every marvel of nature, such

as our own existence, is a miracle. Of course our life is marvellous,—all God's works are ; but still this is not what we mean by a miracle—

The CHAIRMAN.—I think that the creation of matter out of nothing is a miracle.

Mr. REDDIE.—As a fact, when we speak of “the miracles of Scripture,” we do *not* include creation. Bishop Butler properly argues that creation is antecedent to law ; but the “miracles” we speak of were wrought after creation, and so they come after law ; and therefore they are not the same as the “miracle of creation,” if you will call creation a miracle—

Rev. Dr. IRONS.—They might belong to another law, although not that law. I pointed out two laws at least.

Mr. REDDIE.—I am prepared to maintain that miracles do not belong to any “law” whatever ; and I shall be glad to hear what can be said in reply, when I have finished my argument. Then we come to what Mr. English calls “providential miracles”—the swarms of flies and of locusts in Egypt. Now, I say that these, but for the intervention of Moses in having put forth his rod and summoned them, as it were, and they having come when called, would not have been miracles at all. A cloud of locusts or a swarm of flies now, however great, would not be considered as miraculous ; and, in fact, such things are not in themselves miracles. Besides, if we take the whole facts of the case, these miracles, as defined by Mr. English himself, simply resolve themselves into what he calls “mediate miracles,” for they “were wrought by God through the instrumentality of a chosen agent,” Moses. Those “mediate miracles,” I contend, are the only “miracles” we have to deal with ; for I know of nothing which is commonly called a miracle, except what has been wrought in that way.—But it is a mistake to suppose that scientific men have invented the statement that miracles are violations of the laws of nature. It is the language of our own orthodox and best theologians. And on that point I must agree with Mr. Warrington, I must differ from Mr. English, and I must defend Mr. Baden Powell. It is not often that I find myself on the same side of an argument with that writer ; but truth is truth ; and I think I shall be able to prove him right, and, in justifying him, I shall give such high authority for the statement that miracles are necessarily violations of the laws of nature, as will not be lightly disputed by any theologian present. That language, in fact, was only adopted by Mr. Powell, and not invented by him ; for, in addition to the passage Mr. English has quoted,—in which Bishop Butler says that “the only distinct meaning of the word natural is stated, fixed or settled,”—there is another passage in the *Analogy* (Part II. chapter 2, § 2,) which defines the word *miracle* in these terms :—“A miracle, in its very notion, is relative to a course of nature, and implies somewhat different from it, considered as being so.” In other words, if it were not contrary to nature, it would not be a miracle. But to turn water into wine is a miracle. You may deny the fact of the miracle ; but if you admit it, its character is unquestionably this, that it is contrary to that stated course of nature by which the water would remain *in statu quo* : it is a violation of this ordinary course, or “law,” of nature ; and

I can find no difficulty about "the expression 'laws of nature,' such as our essayist and some previous speakers seem to have felt. Mr. English gives the instance of the hand, by the human will, arresting the fall of a stone; and he speaks of our being "able to control the forces of nature" by our will; while Mr. Penny says that "every act of man may be called a miracle." Well, I am as much a part of "nature" as the stone is; and though my powers are different from that which presses down the stone, and from any inorganic force in nature; still, to exercise my power to arrest the fall of a stone which is not too heavy for my strength is no miracle. I must protest against this confounding of terms. The use of philosophical disquisition is not to confound and confuse, but to discriminate and analyze. Were I to arrest the fall of a stone a ton in weight, of course that would be considered superhuman; but whether it was truly supernatural or not might be a question, as we know that some men have *naturally* extraordinary strength. If I were to say I could do this, although it was known that previously I could do nothing of the kind, and if I attributed this power to God, people might well believe it to be a miracle. I further think that Mr. English made a mistake in attempting to find a theory of miracles, or an argument in support of them, that would include the sceptic. And I not only think he has failed in this attempt, but that it would have been a pity if he had succeeded. I say so, because in this matter "the sceptic" means the denier of the power of God—not merely a sceptic as to revelation, but rather an atheist,—and it would only be doubly irrational to believe in miracles and not in Deity. I am glad also to find that throughout the paper (the whole tone and main arguments of which I agree with, though obliged thus to criticise,) the real view of the writer crops out in spite of his intention to discuss the question "without reference to the omnipotence of God"; for in one place he speaks of miracles as "God's miracles;" in another, as having for "their *efficient cause* the active power of God;" and, in fact, throughout his paper, as summed up in his concluding words, you will see that his whole argument has really reference to "the Cause of all causes;" and I must say I should not know the use of miracles at all if they did not especially and purposely point in that direction. But I think I now have nearly done with criticism as far as it must appear to be adverse to the paper. There is, however, one incidental passage I must notice before I proceed further to substantiate the general drift of the paper by a new argument not hitherto advanced. The passage I refer to is where the Almighty is described as being "an Eternal Now—with whom there is no past nor future." I am aware that this has become a mode of speaking of Deity which might almost be said to be fashionable; but I must object to it, if meant to be taken literally. At all events, as we cannot be supposed to comprehend Deity, and if we cannot ourselves understand how "past, present and future should be as one"—if to us such a notion is absolutely unintelligible—and if this notion is merely a conception of our own applied to Deity, then I must protest against it; and I will point to a single passage in Scripture which is entirely in opposition to this view. Christ as God is described as "Alpha and Omega, the beginning

and the ending"—“which *is*, and which *was*, and which *is to come*—the *Almighty*.” So there is a Scriptural definition that expressly applies the past, the present and the future to God’s very existence; and surely the very idea of eternal duration implies the past and future *as much as* the present.—Now I come to my new argument, and to what I consider the best way of treating this subject. We have not, as I have said, to deal with the laws of nature generally. Miracles never professed to set them aside; but yet they have never happened without violating some particular and ordinary law. For instance, take the second miracle of our Lord in Cana of Galilee—the healing of the nobleman’s son. I am aware that the fact, that some of our Lord’s miracles were performed by the imposition of hands, has led to some foolish modern speculations that perhaps they were all accomplished by some kind of mesmeric operation. But, in this instance, any such notion is at once refuted; for here Christ only speaks a word, when at a distance from the person healed; He merely says, “Thy son liveth.” There is no medicine, no natural means, not even a touch employed: only a word, and the natural progress of the disease is at the instant arrested. Now, I put it to any man, whether this can be even imagined to be the result of anything but the mere fiat and will of Deity? And then, when we come to consider the great majority of Christ’s miracles, what were they? Did they violate or infringe the laws of nature? Yes; but *what* laws? Not the mere physical laws which are invariable; but those that affect moral agents, and are, I may say, out of gear. There is evil as well as good around us: the moral system, we know, has gone wrong; and, as a consequence, some of the physical laws of nature, especially those that affect moral agents, are also awry. Now, Christ’s miracles were mainly wrought to put these straight;—not to violate or infringe God’s original laws of nature, but to vindicate and restore them to what they were at first. Evil is permitted in this world, but its author is not God. The laws of nature affecting moral agents are *not* “invariable” and congruous. For instance, there is health and disease, beauty and deformity. Let me interrogate any sceptic upon this point. Do you call disease natural? But, if so, is not health also natural? But they are contradictories—health and disease are opposites;—and which of them was God’s original law of nature? When Christ told the man with the withered hand to stretch it forth, and made it whole with a word, was that to violate an original law of nature? No; it was to restore one which was already violated, to set right a law of nature that had gone wrong. Philosophers, whether they choose or not, in some cases, only to recognize the physical laws affecting inanimate things, cannot shut their eyes to the existence of those other laws and operations which affect moral agents. They cannot deny that health and disease, though both in a sense natural, are nevertheless at issue, and contrary and conflicting. They may not ignore the existence of moral evil and of disease. They must go into that question if they will discuss miracles. It is not a matter of choice that they may overlook these things, and only regard such laws as those of light, heat, electricity, or gravitation; about which we are always changing our opinions after all, and are perhaps most profoundly

ignorant, with the greatest professions of knowledge. Besides, the "laws of nature" which miracles have infringed are not reconдите, theoretical "laws," but *obvious* and ordinary laws. And it is a serious mistake to attribute everything in *nature* to God, as if there were no evil or opposition to God's will in the world. But I will give you the express testimony of our Lord Himself to this view of the subject, that His miracles were wrought to interfere not with God's original laws of nature, but rather with Satan's perversion of them, and with the evils arising from the transgression of man and the sin in the world. For what did Christ say when He healed the bowed-down woman? He asked, "Why should not this woman, *whom Satan hath bound*, lo these eighteen years, be loosed from her infirmity?" To set her straight, then, was not to violate God's law, though it was to violate what was then a "law of nature," but of *nature diseased*. No; it was to set aside a law of nature which had its origin in the power of Satan, and to vindicate and re-establish God's original law of health and strength. But surely that is the very drift, the very essence of all the miracles of Christ. What were the disciples of John the Baptist to tell their master? "That the blind receive their sight, the dumb speak, the deaf hear, the lepers are cleansed," &c. Well, whether blindness is natural or not, at all events, when a man is born blind, it is the law or rule of nature that he should remain so; and Christ violated that law of nature. But if you do call blindness natural, surely you will admit that it is nature a little out of gear; or else seeing would not be natural. I am quite sure, if we had a Socrates here, and if some of our sceptical philosophers were bound to answer his interrogations as they used to do of old, and not shirk answering questions, he would soon put them into an untenable position when speaking about the uniformity of nature's laws, if we include those laws which affect moral agents. It is a remarkable fact that there are few miracles in Scripture which deal with physical laws alone, I mean apart from moral agents. The first of our Lord's miracles was, however, one,—that of changing water into wine; and you cannot imagine how such a miracle could be performed except as being the fiat of the Divine Will. But if we consider that it was to give the blind sight, to restore hearing, to heal disease, and generally to help those who were afflicted, that Christ's miracles were done, we must see that it is no objection to miracles that they are violations of what we call nature, but that that is even their merit, and that instead of being violations of the original laws of God, they afford the best proofs of God's power and goodness in vindicating His own laws of nature, which once were all and only "very good." So Christ, as "stronger than" "the strong man armed," cast out devils "with the finger of God," and so infringed the power of evil. These are miracles that, I may say, define themselves by their character as Divine; and they have nothing in common with lying-wonders, or jugglery, or any deeds of darkness. Before I conclude, I should like to quote another passage from Sir Matthew Hale's work on *Man*, in addition to the very brief citation from it in Mr. English's paper. I think you will be interested in hearing it. It contains the very same idea that runs through the paper; and you will see that both

authors know, after all, what are the laws of nature which miracles infringe ; and that it is only a mode of speech when they say that nature is not violated:—

“For although the Divine wisdom hath with great stability settled the laws of His general Providence, so that ordinarily or lightly they are not altered, yet it could never stand with the Divine administration of the world, that He should be eternally mancipated to those laws He hath appointed for the ordinary administration of the world. Neither is this, if it be rightly considered, an infringing of the law of nature, since every created being is most naturally subject to the sovereign will of his Creator ; therefore, though He is sometimes pleased by *extraordinary* interposition, and, *pro imperio voluntatis*, to alter the *ordinary method of natural or voluntary causes and effects to interpose His own immediate power*, He violates no law of nature, since it is the most natural thing in the world that everything should obey the Will of Him that gave it being, whatever that Will be, or however manifested.”—*Prim. Orig. of Mankind*, p. 36, folio ed., 1677.

From the whole tenour of this passage,—“the law of nature” being used in the singular, and explained to mean “the Will of the Creator,” while it is admitted that “the *ordinary method of natural causes and effects*” is altered or infringed,—it would seem that the author did not intend to deny (in the modern or literal sense) that “the ordinary courses (or laws) of nature are violated” by the “extraordinary interposition” of “God’s own *immediate power*.” But, if he did, then another passage in Sir Matthew Hale’s work shows us that he could not stick to his own proposition ; for the truth crops up in him as in Mr. English’s essay, and enables us to see that miracles must refer us to Deity and the Divine Will, and not to mere imagined “higher laws.” He says :—

“In that administration of special Providence which is *miraculous*, God commanded the fire not to burn, stopped the mouths of lions, and *prohibited the natural operation and agency of natural causes*.”—*Ibid.*, p. 41.

If Dr. Thornton had remained here, I would have told him that the Author of nature does vindicate His laws, when not miraculously suspended ; for if Dr. Thornton were to put his finger in the fire, he knows that naturally, and without a miracle, it would burn. I will now only say, in conclusion, that I think Mr. English’s paper a most valuable one, although in some respects I differ from him, and have been obliged to criticise his arguments. But I am glad to think that Mr. English himself is of opinion that fair criticism can never do any harm.

MR. WARINGTON.—May I say one word in explanation of my remarks ? I am quite aware that the expressions I made use of as to the unchangeableness of God, if taken by themselves, would be capable of the construction of Dr. Irons. I made them simply in correction of what I thought was an exaggeration the other way in the paper, saying at the same time that Mr. English had urged reasons quite sufficient to account for a change in the action of God taking place.

MR. REDDIE.—Let me also add one word which I omitted as to the miracles of the loaves and fishes. Christ fed 5,000 people with five loaves,

and 4,000 with seven loaves, and how many baskets of fragments remained ? Twelve and seven. Now, had it been by any "law" that the food was multiplied, the basketfuls over would have borne some proportion to the original quantities of food and the numbers of the people, whereas it was just the reverse ; and our Lord seems to have drawn special attention to this circumstance, as if by anticipation to refute this theory of possible "higher laws."

Rev. Dr. IRONS.—In this order of things, that would be so ; but is there no other order of things ?

The CHAIRMAN.—A very important subject has been brought before us, if not the most important subject that could be brought, because it is one now coming before all the scientific, and all the thoughtful minds in the country. It is the one of all others that thoughtful men now want to hear about. Some men require to have their faith strengthened, and others to be converted to a right faith in the matter. I must say I do think a great deal of the discussion about miracles arises from the infirmity of our human intellect, and the great difficulty we have in defining things ; or, when defined, in reasoning strictly upon our definitions. It may be, and it has been said against the theologian, that he does not give a strict definition of miracle ; but I want to know where we have strict definitions, even in science ? If we are to wait for knowledge on most scientific subjects until we have strict definitions, I maintain we shall find we have but little knowledge left. I would ask physiologists what is their definition of life ? I have heard the best-reputed physiologists of the day confess that they could give no definition of life ; and we may be excused if we can give no very correct or logical definition of miracles. We have to regard certain facts and phenomena which are brought before us in Scripture ; and, if from God, we should conceive they would be such things in their nature as to force themselves, not upon the attention of the philosopher merely, but of every observer. I think a great deal of the argumentation against miracles has arisen from the definitions which men have given of miracles. A miracle in itself, taking the word in its ordinary sense, means something wonderful ; and we can understand, with the author of the second paper, how everything around and about us that is marvellous is to some extent also miraculous—a thing to be admired and wondered at. But on the point under discussion, in what way does Scripture speak of miracles ? They are spoken of in Hebrew, I believe, under three or four distinct words ; in the Greek Scriptures by as many, and we find these terms used co-relatively and synonymously, and translated in our version by the words "miracle," "signs," and "wonders." Miracles are signs, or wonders,—that is, signs or wonders of such a character that the most casual observer sees there is something in them more than man can do. There is no definition in Scripture about nature or violation of laws of nature ; but there is something that strikes the observation, and shows the presence of supernatural power. That is the scriptural character of a miracle. I think it is that character of miracle which the defender of Revelation is called upon to defend. He is not called upon to defend Hale's definition of

miracles, or Butler's, however much we may bow to their great intellects. But then we must remember there is another aspect of miracles in Scripture. Scripture brings before us the important fact that these, what we call in common language supernatural events, which force themselves on the mind of the observer as from something higher than man, emanate not from a good source alone, but many also proceed from an evil one. I think this was distinctly brought forward by Dr. Irons and another gentleman, and it is important for the consideration of the subject. I believe that Satan did take our Saviour by a miracle from the wilderness where He was, and placed Him upon a pinnacle of the Temple. I believe that by as great a miracle he also showed Him on a high mountain, whither he conveyed Him from a pinnacle of the Temple, all the glory of this world in one moment of time, though I may have but a very faint conception what the marvellous deed was. And I know that the same Scriptures have also told me, for my instruction and my warning, that the time will come when signs and wonders—the same terms used precisely in the original, for the good miracles of Christ and His followers—will be used by the Father of Lies for the purpose of deceiving even the elect. But I am afraid I am breaking the law I laid down for others. It is late, and there is a great deal I should like to say on this subject of miracles from the point of view which seems to be the grand stand-point of many natural philosophers. I believe their difficulties arise from a misconception and misuse of the term "law of nature." I may give such a definition of a law of nature that a miracle is no violation of it at all; or I may give you another definition, such as Mr. Reddie has given, in which there is a violation. There are things, which we need not be acute physiologists to know; for though the most advanced could not tell exactly what life is, the merest tyro could distinguish, in most instances, a living from an inanimate, or an organic from an inorganic object. There is a general sense of the term "nature" which may lead us to acquire a definite idea of the expression "law of nature." What is the distinction between a work of nature and a work of art? You might find it hard to define them; but if I brought before you a brick, or any other work of man,—any work of art, a microscope, a telescope, a watch, a chronometer, or anything like that—you would have no difficulty in saying, "That is a work of art, and not a work of nature." What do you mean by a work of art? It is the result of the human mind acting upon the productions of nature—

Dr. IRONS.—That is the definition of Cuvier.

The CHAIRMAN.—We have that definition, and it appeals at once to our intellect. I know, if I wanted to puzzle a man, I might bring a certain thing and say, "Is that animal or vegetable, animate or inanimate, living or dead?" and if you take an extreme case, you might puzzle any one. I might, for instance, bring a model of a crystal, which I might cut out of a certain substance, and it would be a work of art, and contrast it with a work of nature, a real crystal. Let us reflect upon a work of art. It leads us up to something, it teaches us a power in mind, (and I think that is the definition Dr. Thornton wanted to express)—power in man's mind controlling the powers



of nature ; but we use these terms in a subordinate sense. This conception of a "work of art" leads to that of a "work of nature." If I go to the highest conception of nature, I must go to this, that the law of nature ends in the will of Deity, and that is the highest. If the law of nature ends in the will of Deity, no miracle can be contrary to that law, because all the miracles of revelation are wrought in perfect accordance with the will of the Deity. If we grant Him infinite knowledge—His own book says He foresaw these things, that they are done and must be done, because all along determined upon in the counsels of the Almighty—therefore miracles are in accordance with that higher and grander view of the law of nature. But there may be a lower view ; there is something so distinct in miracles from the ordinary transactions that occur in the world, that the one thing differs as much from the other, and infinitely more, than a work of art from a work of nature. All our Saviour's miracles, all those of the Bible, are of this class. But we must remember other miracles which were wrought for evil, and therefore you must import, if you follow the Scripture, moral considerations when you come to questions of miracle. Our Saviour Himself does it. The Jews said of Him, "By Beelzebub he casteth out devils." They did not deny the miraculous effect ; that was admitted by the people. But how did He defend Himself ? "Look at the works I do ; they are not wrought for the power of evil, but for good. I appeal to my works ; did any man ever do the works I have done for evil ? If so, Satan is fighting against himself. But I am fighting against Satan." And here you have the moral responsibility of every man who saw these miracles, of choosing good from evil. There the moral responsibility was forced upon man, whether he would accept or reject revelation. Now let us go back to the consideration of what natural philosophers tell us of the laws of nature, and see how confined are the notions they can give us. A law of gravitation, or any other law of nature, is nothing more than the general expression of the observation of a succession of phenomena in a certain order of sequence. It is nothing more than that. If you can group a certain class of phenomena and their sequence, and express them in mathematical terms, you say you have a law. For instance you say that ponderable matter everywhere and always attracts ponderable matter with a force varying directly as the mass and inversely as the square of the distance of the attracting matter—that you call the law of gravitation. What do we call the law of reflexion in light ? A ray of light, if it strike an object so as to be reflected, will be reflected always in the plane of its incidence, and make the reflected angle equal to the angle of incidence. We talk of the law of refraction—we say that a ray of light, except its incidence is perpendicular, will have its direction changed, though it will remain in the same plane ; but according to what we call the law of sines, the sine of the angle of incidence will be to the sine of the angle of refraction in a certain ratio. We might be disposed to regard this as a universal law, and it was supposed to be so, until it was found that the law was broken, and that there was a class of substances which divided the ray into two parts, and one followed the ordinary law and the other the extraordinary law. Now, all the

philosopher can do is to point out certain phenomena and include them in some general formula, and when he has included a certain amount of phenomena in one hypothesis, he calls it a law. Now it is assumed, and that I maintain shows the fallacy of the argument against miracles from natural philosophy,—it is assumed with regard to any related fact in the world's history, that we can say from what we know of these laws, such and such a thing could not occur. That we can say, for instance, a man could not be raised from the dead—such an event could not occur. Now I am prepared to maintain, upon strictly mathematical and philosophic principles, philosophy cannot say that; that it cannot even tell us that such a law as that of gravitation is universal. It is said, as a grand triumph, that we know it proceeds to the last planet discovered; it is said it proceeds to the binary stars. Are you sure, with regard to the latter, that it is the exact law? Are you sure it is a law not varying directly as the distance? We will now test this assumption by mathematics or mechanics. If I put on the 1st horizontal row of wheels of the calculating machine in Somerset House, the number 41, under that the number 2 on the 2nd row, and again the number 2 on the 3rd row; the machine could then be set to produce a certain series of numbers for thousands of terms, in due sequence, according to a certain mathematical law; each term in succession being calculated and recorded in stereotype by simply turning the handle of the machine. A mathematician ignorant of the numbers originally placed on the machine, and looking only at the recorded results, would find the series 41, 43, 47, 53, 61, &c., printed in succession. Observing every one of these numbers to be primes, that is numbers indivisible by any other number but 1, he might assume the machine to be set so as to record prime numbers only. The correctness of this assumption would increase in probability till the 40 and 41<sup>2</sup> terms were reached, when it would be broken by the appearance of numbers not primes. Again the mathematician regarding the law of sequence of these numbers might find that they could all be included in the general algebraical formula  $x^2+x+41$ , by giving successive integral values to  $x$  from 0, 1, 2, 3, &c., upwards. This would enable the mathematician to predicate the numbers I had placed on the machine. But I will now give you a case in which he could not do so. I might start by putting on the machine, once for all, such a series of numbers that the recorded results should be the squares or cubes of the numbers 1, 2, 3, &c., in due sequence for any number of terms I pleased, but that at some predetermined term, say the 7,345,671st, the law should be broken. The odds that this breach of law should occur, so far as observation could determine, would be estimated mathematically by millions to one against its occurrence. In this case, contrary to the example I gave in the instance of the prime numbers, nothing in the sequence of the numbers, or in any mathematical formulæ which would express that sequence, could give the mathematician the slightest clue as to the possibility of the occurrence of this breach of continuity in the law of sequence. Now when man is observing the laws of nature, he does not know what is put on the original machine of the universe. There is no interposition

of man, who merely reads the results on the machine; and no natural philosopher can say that any event cannot possibly happen. If he tells me it cannot, I have a right to say, "For aught you know, the Maker of the machine determined at that particular period to meet a certain moral exigency, which He foresaw, and supplied by this operation taking place." I say that Babbage has triumphantly proved such violations of the observed laws of nature to be possible; and (we must always bear in mind) that such events may or may not be miraculous. We read that Herodotus was told by the Egyptian priests that the sun rose twice in the twenty-four hours. "Well," the philosopher may say, "it is not true, it is contrary to the law of gravitation." I say there is nothing whatever in the presumed improbability derived from any succession of phenomena, however great, to show that we can absolutely and mathematically assert that such an event, whether miraculous or not, could not have occurred. If I am told that God heard the voice of man, and caused the sun and the moon to stand still, could I say that that was not one of the things God provided for? There is nothing in natural philosophy to compel me to deny it. When attempting to argue against this miracle, Dr. Colenso tells me the earth could not have stood still on its axis—that its motion could not have been arrested without everything on the earth being hurled into space. But I ask how was the earth to be stopped on its axis? It must be by a power which acted upon the motion of the earth. Now, I maintain that that power would equally apply to the trees and everything else on it. Let me take the rough comparison which Dr. Colenso mentions:—You are in a railway carriage, and a collision happens, and you are thrown forward. Why? Because you are independent of the carriage; but if you were tied in the carriage, and made one with the carriage, you would not be hurled forward. I would ask Colenso to explain by his philosophy, why, when we consider the earth's great velocity, every particle of the ocean at the equator is not hurled into space? It is owing to the gravitation of the earth. This same gravitation would so hold the trees and houses to the earth, that anything stopping the motion of the earth would likewise so stop their motion, as to prevent their flight into space. I would only mention that to show that when men deny miracles as contrary to natural philosophy, we can get sufficient demonstration from mathematics to show that miracles are more probable than improbable—that they contradict no laws which the mathematician or observer of nature is bound to believe; and I thoroughly agree with the important consideration brought forward by Dr. Gladstone, that the unhappy state of men's minds is from confining their attention to the inorganic world. As you rise from inorganics to organics, there are phenomena which would show that all the arguments raised against the miraculous are fallacies. It was well put by Mr. Reddie with regard to our Saviour's miracles, that when you rise from inorganics to organics, the philosopher is bound to admit perturbations and interruptions; that disease is an interruption of the law of health, and that you cannot use the word law in the same sense here as you use the word law with regard to inorganic matter; that

you can have no disease of gravitation, though you have disease of life. But there is a higher thing than even life—the soul of man. Reason is still higher, and rises to higher laws; and when you find in the moral world there is disease, and remember that the miracles of God wrought in Scripture were to take away sin and its effects, then I say, the Christian can be a scientific man, and receive all the miracles recorded in Scripture, and yet study, with intense admiration and devotion, the works of his Creator; he need have no fear in investigating them, and he may believe that the works of nature and revelation are in the most perfect harmony the one with the other.

The meeting was then adjourned.

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### REPLY BY THE REV. W. W. ENGLISH.

To make my views clearer, I would wish to add a very few words. The distinction between mind and matter, and the supremacy of the former over the latter, are points that underlie every essential part of the subject. The will of man is a faculty of the human mind, a *sui potestas*, and the arresting of the falling apple *at will*, is an illustration of the supremacy of mind or spirit over matter, though not a *miracle*, because here the human mind controls matter simply within its own prescribed *limits*. Satan or evil spirits controlling matter within their prescribed *limits* are a further illustration of the same fundamental point. To us their acts, when they exceed what falls within *our* limits, appear, and no doubt are, really *miraculous*, in the true sense of the term; a miracle being, as Butler and Mr. Birks contend, “relative” and not absolute. The great Spirit of God controls matter and its laws, within His own *limits*—that is to say, without limits; for He can have none, except such as would be inconsistent with His goodness. To Him there can be no such thing as a miracle—nature, if it includes Deity, (and I see not how it can *exclude* it,) comprises all that is *possible* as well as actual. I am not sure that my short paragraph on what I termed “*the real point*,” bearing upon objections drawn from physical considerations, is of itself sufficiently clear; but I thought it would have appeared so, in the light of what I said in reference to mind and matter. I have sought to find no theory by which to account for miracles apart from God. I have endeavoured simply to show by a chain of reasoning, that we can account for miracles upon principles apart from the Bible, or an appeal *directly* to God’s sovereignty and omnipotence. Bishop Butler does not disagree materially with anything I have said on the subject. Those “higher laws” I referred to, are *moral* and not physical—those principles, in short, according to which all things are wisely governed. Miracles may be real or apparent infractions of material sequence, but they are, nevertheless, fulfillments of “higher laws” of moral government. Much confusion arises from confining the term law too exclusively to what it can only figuratively

be applied,—*matter*, and not allowing it to be really and properly applied to that from which the term itself is borrowed,—*mind* and *moral agency*. Butler says a miracle is something *different* from a settled course of nature ; he does not say it is something *contrary* to it, nor that it does not range under “higher laws” in the scheme of Divine Government. God cannot, it seems to me, act “contrary” to Himself, nor “violate” His own ways or acts ; but, in saying this, I do not mean to confine Him to material sequence. In using the terms an “Eternal *now*,” and saying that with God there can be neither past nor future, I did but use the language of the great Augustine, Toplady, and philosophical writers of the present century. God’s own definition of Himself, “I AM,” is very near to an “Eternal *now* ;” and as our notions of past and future are got from our connection with matter, I can conceive of the disembodied Spirit being unconscious of the lapse of time altogether. With it “a thousand years may be as one day ;” and when we read in Holy Scripture, “which *is*, and which *was*, and which is *to come*, the Almighty”—I would say that God here speaks, as St. Paul elsewhere affirms, “after the manner of men.” It only remains for me to thank the members of the Institute for the kind way in which they listened to my paper.