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JOURNAL OF
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ORDINARY MEETING, MARCH 1, 1886.

REV. A. I. McCAUL, M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Elections were announced :—

MEMBERS :—Professor J. B. de Motté, United States ; Rev. C. E. Sherard, Braintree ; E. F. Wyman, Esq., London.

Also the presentation of the following works for the Library :—

- “Bulletins of the Geological Survey of the United States.” *From the same.*
 “Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Washington.” „
 “Transactions of the Numismatic Society of Philadelphia.” „
 “Report of the Comptroller of the Currency of the United States.” „

The following paper was then read by Mr. H. Cadman Jones, the author being unavoidably absent.

ON MIRACLES : THE FORCE OF TESTIMONY. By
 the Rev. H. C. M. WATSON, St. John's, Christchurch,
 New Zealand.

ANALYSIS OF THE ARGUMENT.

It is objected that testimony cannot prove a miracle : Various definitions of a miracle. Hume's accepted as a fair account of a miraculous occurrence : a violation of the laws of nature.

A. i. Objection. That a miracle is *impossible*.

Two divisions of this objection :—

1. That there is no power adequate to its production.

This postulates on the part of the objector a complete knowledge of the forces of the universe.

2. That a miracle is inconsistent with Divine attributes—a miracle is an afterthought, and impugns the wisdom or the power of God.

The attributes of God are known only or mainly through revelation, which also reveals miraculous operations.

(a) Mr. Babbage's reply to this objection complete, but unsatisfactory.

(b) Contrivance the law of created being. Means to an end is contrivance.

(c) A miracle is in relation to God what an act of will is in relation to Man.

Mill's opinion.

ii. Objection. That a miracle is INCREDIBLE.

Preliminary form of this objection :—

That testimony is reliable only on the assumption that the laws of nature are uniform.

Fallacy of this objection shown. Illustrated by—Mendon says that all Cretans are liars, &c.

1. Hume's first objection :—

That testimony cannot reach to the supernatural.

If the objection only means that testimony cannot reach to the *cause*, it is true.

But testimony can depose to phenomena. That the *cause* of the phenomena is supernatural is an inference which we irresistibly draw.

2. Hume's second objection :—

That the falsehood of testimony is more probable than a miraculous occurrence.

The fallacy pointed out (Whately), and the force of the objection exhibited.

Stated by Paley to be a contest of improbabilities.

Miracles in relation to testimony may be better stated as a case of diverse, but not contradictory, testimony.

The laws of nature known by testimony.

Miracles known by testimony.

Argumentatively, therefore, miracles are shown to fall within the scope of testimony.

B. The difficulty in accepting testimony to miracles arises from our inability to conceive that the laws of nature have ever been unlike what they now are.

It is a fact, however, that they were not always what they now are :

At the beginning of the world (Butler).

At the emergence of man upon the earth, whether by creation or evolution.

Paley's summing up, "If twelve men," &c.

TESTIMONY is a fact whose usual and natural explanation is found in the existence of another fact to which it deposes, and of which it is the appropriate and sufficient proof. It is admitted that testimony cannot prove the existence of facts which are mutually, or self, contradictory. It cannot, for example, prove that two and two make five. That two marbles added to two marbles make five marbles is rightly regarded as impossible; and while our intellectual faculties remain as they are, no testimony, however competent, if such were forthcoming, would induce any person who understood the meaning of the terms, to believe the proposition affirming it. Even if we saw with our own eyes that the addition of two objects to two

objects made five of a similar character, we would not believe the evidence of our senses. We should know, either that we had been deceived by some sleight of hand, or that our senses had deceived us. Testimony, therefore, cannot prove that which is admittedly a contradiction in terms. Thus much must be conceded. But short of such a proposition testimony, competent testimony, can prove the occurrence of any phenomenon. It is asserted that a miraculous occurrence cannot be proved by testimony; and that, therefore, testimony in proof of alleged miraculous occurrences is to be waived aside, or that the explanation of the alleged phenomenon is to be sought in the operation of natural causes. With this objection I purpose to deal.

DEFINITION OF A MIRACLE.

A miracle has been variously defined. It has seemed to many writers that by altering the definition of a miracle they get rid of its miraculous character, or, at least, minimise the force of the objections which are urged against it. I cannot see that, whatever definition be accepted, any verbal change can evade the plain objection which lies against the *thing*. If a man tells me that he saw a dead man raised to life, my difficulty lies, not in defining what he tells me, but in believing that the thing to which he deposes really occurred.

Hume's definition of a miracle is that it is a violation of the order of nature; and although exceptions have been taken to this definition, yet it seems to meet the case of every miracle, except the miracle of prevision. The order of nature may be shortly described as a succession of uniformities. Antecedents are followed by consequents in orderly succession, without break, or, when the succession is broken, the break is due to the action of a higher law, whose existence is recognised, and included in our conception of nature. A miracle suspends some natural consequent, or introduces some supernatural antecedent. It is a violation of the order of nature.

While I accept Hume's definition as sufficient, I should prefer to define a miracle as an instance of the suspension of the laws of nature, or the quickening of the operations of nature; or of the suspension and quickening of those operations, by a supernatural agent. When the action of the agent is coincident with, and in attestation of, certain statements or assertions, it is a sign, and is an authentication of the

character of the agent. The force that attaches to such coincidences or signs must be determined by a consideration of the nature of the claim itself (that is, its compatibility with other truths), and other important circumstances. But, in any case, a miracle is evidence of the exertion of a super-human or supernatural power. It therefore implies the existence of a supernatural Being, both able and willing, on certain occasions, to suspend or quicken the operations of nature.

Another definition of a special class of miracles may be given thus:—

A miracle consists in the arrest of the action of the antecedent in nature by the intervention of an antecedent above nature, so that the first antecedent is followed, not by its own orderly consequent, but by another consequent, whose nature is determined by the supernatural power operating, and follows naturally its own supernatural antecedent. Thus, the natural antecedent *A* is, in the order of nature, followed by its own consequent *a*, but the introduction of *B* before *a* follows, arrests the action of *A*, and changes the character of the consequent, so that *A* is not followed by *a*, but by *b*, which is the consequent of *B*. The introduction of *B* may require to be explained; but however explained, its consequent *b* follows naturally. Thus, Lazarus dies (*A*); the natural consequent of his death is decay (*a*); but Christ (*B*) intervenes before the action of *A* is completed, and the consequent is not decay (*a*), but life (*b*). That is, *A* is followed not by *a*, but by *b*, which is, however, not the consequent of *A*, but of *B*.

But these definitions are definitions which imply a theory, and are thus of the nature of an explanation. The theory, or the explanation, may not be true; nevertheless, a miracle may be a fact. If the testimony vouching for it is trustworthy, a miracle is a phenomenon which calls upon scientific observers for explanation; and if scientific observation cannot account for the undoubted phenomenon, by its present conception of the universe, then so much the worse for that conception. It is insufficient, and must be amended; for a comprehensive conception of the universe must be consistent with all the authenticated facts of the universe. If it fail to embrace any one fact, it is not true or not sufficient.

A. OBJECTIONS TO MIRACLES.

To return to the objection. A miracle, it is said, is impossible. Testimony cannot prove a supernatural event; that is, an event which does not stand in any proportionate relation to the natural antecedent. All the various objections to miracles may be reduced to these two principal objections: *a miracle is impossible; a miracle is incredible.*

THE FIRST PRINCIPAL OBJECTION,—THAT A MIRACLE IS IMPOSSIBLE.

The first principal objection, that a miracle is impossible, amounts to this: either there is no power in nature or above nature adequate to its production, or the exercise of such power would involve some inconsistency.

1. *There is no Power adequate to the Production of a Miracle.*

That there is no power adequate to the production of a miracle is equivalent to the denial of the existence of God. A miracle implies the existence of a Power above nature, directed by a personal will. For it is not a fortuitous or chance occurrence (which would not be a miracle, but a monstrosity), but an act answering an intelligent end. To affirm, therefore, that a miracle is impossible because there exists no power adequate to its production, is to affirm that there is no God. Few intelligent persons would now be found willing to make such an assertion in bald terms. The utmost that any person pretending to scientific accuracy would affirm is that His existence has not been proved, or that there are no proofs of His existence and character sufficient to compel the assent of the judgment to the proposition—There exists a Being whom we call God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

This, as I understand it, is the position of Positivism. The existence of God is not denied, but His existence, or that of supernatural beings, it is affirmed, cannot be, or has not been, proved. In other words, true Positivists are Agnostics. But to affirm that the existence of God has not been proved does not preclude evidence offered in proof of a miracle. Such

evidence, if competent, may convince even a Positivist that God exists, or that a Power adequate to the performance of a miracle exists. If the reasoning of Nicodemus is valid,—We know that Thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him,—it is evident that testimony, which places us in a similar relation to miracles as an eye-witness, can justify the inference that God exists. An argument from miracles is of the nature of the argument from design.

Therefore, the testimony advanced in proof of the occurrence of a miracle must be of some weight, however slight, in the direction of proving the reality of the occurrence. Unless a man's disbelief rests upon a scientific basis, testimony, trustworthy testimony, of the occurrence of a miracle must carry some weight.

2. *That a Miracle is inconsistent with Divine Wisdom and Almighty Power.*

The second branch of the principal objection is that a miracle is impossible, because it is inconsistent with what are presumed to be the attributes of God, viz., His divine wisdom, His almighty power. This form of the objection is quite inconsistent with that which we have already discussed: that assumed that the existence of God could not be a matter of knowledge; this assumes that He exists, and that His attributes, or several of them, are known to us. The objection assumes that His purpose in the government of the universe and His method of achieving that purpose are matters of knowledge; and affirms that they are inconsistent with the existence of miracles. Whatever real knowledge we have of the Divine Being is derived either from inference or from revelation. The latter, for our purpose, may be assumed to dwell in the book called the Bible. The Bible, which thus reveals the existence and attributes of the Divine Being, also tells us that miracles have been wrought. It may, therefore be inferred that their existence presents no inconsistency with the Divine attributes as known to us. I merely note this available reply in passing. I now proceed to deal with the specific form which the objection takes.

A miracle, it is said, is an afterthought, and is of the nature of a contrivance. It implies, therefore, defect

of wisdom or power in the author of nature. An all-wise and all-powerful being does not require, like a bad workman, to correct the faults of his work, by constant interference with it. Divine wisdom and infinite power would be displayed in the construction of an organism that would go on of itself in accordance with the laws impressed upon it when it left the Divine hand. To suppose that he needs to "tinker it up," is to make a supposition entirely unworthy of an Infinite Being. Just as it is impossible for God to lie, so it is impossible for God to work a miracle,—morally impossible. His infinite knowledge and wisdom would protect Him from defective conception; His infinite power from imperfect construction. The objection then is that a miracle is of the nature of contrivance, and so is inconsistent with Divine wisdom and power.

It might be sufficient to reply that the popular conception of the Divine Being may not be true. For the perfecting of His handiwork He may be dependent upon the cheerful concurrence of His intelligent creation. Such an answer would be argumentatively sufficient. Mr. Mill has applied it in relation to the existence of evil; and there are, as the late Professor Birks, in his *Difficulties of Belief*, points out, indications, that the popular conception of God's omnipotence is not consistent with the language of the Scriptures.

(a) *Mr. Babbage's Answer.*

But whatever force there is in the objection that a miracle is an afterthought is completely met by the ingenious argument of the late Mr. Babbage, in his Bridgewater treatise. Mr. Babbage supposes the construction of a calculating-machine which shall proceed according to a given law for a certain number of times, and at a given point shall vary the law, so as to produce a number inconsistent with that law; that it shall then return to the original law and continue to produce numbers in accordance with it *ad infinitum*. The method of the calculating-machine is supposed to illustrate the ordinary operations of nature, and the interruption of the ordinary course by the introduction of a miraculous dispensation.

This supposition obviates any force that the objection referred to may contain. The alterations were all included in the organism when it received its character from the Divine Artificer. A miraculous dispensation is thus regarded as a

part of the course of nature, just as the fall of an aërolite is a part of the course of nature.

Theoretically the argument is sufficient; but, regarded as an explanation of the fact of miracles, it is highly objectionable. If our Lord's miracles, either of word or act, find an illustration in Mr. Babbage's calculating-machine, then the miracles were not His, but nature's. He merely took advantage of the law originally impressed upon nature; that at a given period, after the lapse of thousands of years, nature would produce, under certain conditions, certain phenomena.

The supposition exalts His knowledge at the expense of His power, and casts some reflection, however slight, upon His moral character. His knowledge of the hidden processes of nature would certainly be evidential of His mission, for no man could know either the thoughts of man or the secrets of nature unless God were with him; yet, though evidential of His mission, the miracles were not His, but nature's, achieved in accordance with a law originally impressed upon her by the Divine Hand.

To the particular form of the objection that a miracle is a contrivance, I should reply:—To object to contrivance is to object to the existence of animated creation; it is to demand that all intelligent creatures shall themselves be equal with God,—the Self-existent and Self-contained.

(b) Contrivance a necessary Condition of dependent Life.

The conditions of life are contrivances, nor could dependent life, so far as we know, exist without contrivances. The taking of food is the contrivance by which we maintain our bodily life and strength; speech and writing are contrivances by which we communicate our thoughts. The facts of life are contrivances by which we gain experience and education. Suppose, now, that we were maintained in life without eating, that we held communion with each other without speaking or performing some kindred act; that we obtained our experience of life instinctively; that what we call our habits were impressed upon us without the necessity of our feeling an ache or a pain, or enduring a pang of disappointment and sorrow. Suppose this method to be extended throughout the whole range of our human life; that the clumsy method of "means to an end," or contrivance,

were abolished;—nothing but absolute being would remain—being out of all relation; and what that is we have no means of knowing. The only intelligent conception that we can form of life is that expressed by the word “experience,”—bodily experience, mental experience; and experience is gained by change of bodily or mental states, through the use of means qualified to bring about such changes. That is, life is dependent upon contrivance. The use of contrivance, or means to an end, is thus seen to be not inconsistent with our notion of Infinite wisdom and power; for we could form no intelligent idea of human life apart from the use of means,—that is, of contrivance.

But, while I think this reply might be made with great force to the objection supposed, yet the true answer is that a miracle is an instance of God’s immediate personal action. A miracle thus conceived is in relation to Him what an act of volition is in relation to man.

(c) *A Miracle an Instance of Divine Volition; analogous to the exercise of Human Volition.*

The world, on the supposition of a creator, is God’s handiwork. Its constitution and its order were impressed upon it by Him. It is in relation to Him what a complicated piece of machinery is in relation to its human maker. A miracle is an instance of the exertion of His personal will in relation to the world, analogous to the exertion of man’s will in relation to a piece of machinery.

Let us suppose ourselves to be contemplating a piece of machinery in action,—a turning-lathe, a steam mill, a weaving-machine, for example, which is being worked and directed by an agent invisible to us.

The machine, whose wheels are turned by a crank, driven by a piston, and whose speed is increased by a skilful adjustment of the various wheels, and whose force thus regulated is skilfully applied to the making of elaborate and costly vessels or fabrics, elicits our admiration, as well by its manifestation of power as by its evidence of skill. We contemplate with wonder its power, its methods, its purpose; and admire the wisdom and skill of its invisible director. But while thus engaged the machine is thrown out of gear; some accident befalls it,—a cog flies; the safety of the machine is endangered. At this stage the operator or director, who is invisible to us, introduces *another instrument*, for the purpose

of correcting the fault,—and, without stopping the machine for a second, corrects the fault and repairs the wheel. The machine is repaired skilfully and effectively, and continues to produce vessels or fabrics. Would not such an instance impress us deeply with a sense of the skill and power of the operator? The only reflection we might feel disposed to make would be, why was not the machine made of better material,—material without fault,—and thus the danger arising from its breakage avoided? And this reflection is sufficiently met by the reply that it was made of the best material available.

The application of this illustration to the case of miracles is evident. This world is, in a sense, a machine, whose Builder and Director is the Invisible God. He made it for his own glory; and all its several parts are designed to contribute to that end. Through disobedience, it has failed to fulfil the purpose for which He created it. All the foundations of the earth are out of course. The defection is evident to all. At this stage God, by the introduction of a miraculous dispensation,—the sending of prophets and apostles, the mission of His Son,—seeks to correct the “fault.” The miraculous dispensation is the introduction of *another instrument* for the correction of the fault, and so of restoring the world to obedience. Such a dispensation, which has been improperly described as a contrivance, is no impeachment of Divine wisdom or power. On the contrary, if it achieve the purpose for which it is introduced; if it effectually remove the stain of sin from God’s universe; if it restore His world to Himself and secure its happiness upon an immutable foundation,—and these are the ends ascribed to it in the sacred writings,—it is evidence of wisdom and power which can only be described as Infinite. It is true that such a dispensation suggests an objection, not against itself, but in respect to the condition of things which made a miraculous dispensation necessary. Why, it may be asked, was man made subject to vanity? And to this question, which has pressed for solution from earliest ages, we have no reply. We can only say,—What we know not now we shall know hereafter. But the objection does not emerge for the first time in relation to miracles. It is one that belongs to any conception of life that may be formed, either by Christian or infidel. Evil is in the world (call it by whatever name we will), and the existence of a miraculous dispensation to correct it does not add to the mystery, but is in the direction of explaining it. A miraculous dispensation,

therefore, is no reflection upon the wisdom and power of the Divine Being.

The existence of a Being adequate to the performance of a miracle being assumed, a miracle is in relation to Him what an act of volition, followed by an effect, is in relation to man. Man is, however, a part of nature. He is, therefore, included in our conception and definition of nature.

If he were not included in our conception of nature his action upon nature would be miraculous,—supernatural. Every time he stopped a cricket-ball, every time he lifted a body from the earth, his action would be supernatural. A little child, on such a supposition, could produce results which could not be brought about by the laws of nature (thus limited) without endangering the stability of the world. Suppose, a German philosopher says, that a pebble, instead of lying in its native bed,—the seashore,—lay some few yards, say a quarter of a mile, inland. What tremendous force in the hurricane that carried it thus far! What atmospheric disturbance to occasion such a storm! What terrible consequences involved in this disturbance,—the levelling of forests,—the destruction of cities,—the engulfing of ships! And all this because of the removal of a small pebble from the seashore, in accordance with the laws of nature (on the supposition that man's action is not included in them).

Behold how simple an explanation is given so soon as man is included in our conception of nature. A little child, playing upon the sands, picks up the pebble, carries it thoughtlessly in his hand, and casts it carelessly away! Immediately the mighty hurricane ceases, and all the mischievous consequences following in its train come to an abrupt termination.

Canon Heurtley, in *Replies to 'Essays and Reviews'* (p. 149), writes:—

“The human will is the element, the action of whose disturbing force upon the material system around us comes most frequently or most strikingly under our notice. Man, in the exercise of his ordinary faculties, is perpetually interfering with, or moulding or controlling the operation of these ordinary laws of matter, which are in exercise around him. He does so if he does but disturb one pebble in its state of rest, or stay the fall of another before it reaches the ground. He does so to a vastly greater extent when, by means of the appliances with which art, instructed by science, has furnished him, he projects a ball to the distance of four or five miles, or constrains steam, or light, or electricity to do his bidding.”

So soon as we include man in our conception of nature his

action ceases to be miraculous. That is, so soon as we take account of man, his interference with the course of nature occasions no surprise,—raises no presumption against the occurrence of the thing that he achieves.

In the same way, so soon as we take account of God in relation to His universe, miraculous action (His direct action upon the course of nature) ceases to strike us with the force that is expressed in the word “impossible.” God is not, however, included in our definition and conception of nature. Nature is the sum of all the ordinary phenomena of the universe, which are known to us by observation, experiment, or deduction. It is, on the supposition of a Creator,—His handiwork. He is outside of and above nature—supernatural. Because He is not included in our definition of nature His immediate personal action (answering to the action of man on a lower plane) is miraculous,—a violation of the order of nature. It is the introduction of an unseen antecedent, between the natural antecedent and its natural consequent: the result of which is, not the natural consequent, but another, not in the order of nature. *A* is usually followed by *a*; but God intervenes between *A* and *a* and produces *b*; *b* is not the consequent of *A*, but of God, the unseen antecedent. Were He visible, as man is visible, His miraculous action would seem to be natural enough. Or, what is the same thing, did we take cognisance of Him, supernatural action would fall within our conception of things.

Suppose that I throw an iron ball into the air: it will, in obedience to the law of gravitation, fall to the earth. Suppose, however, that a human being, invisible to me, should catch the ball thus thrown into the air, and should suspend it above the ground: the agent, on the supposition, being invisible, the ball would seem to be suspended by nothing. The case would be an example of a violation of a well-known law of nature,—that of the attraction of gravitation! If the suspension could not be explained by the operation of any natural law (and it could not be so explained, as I have supposed it due to the action of an invisible agent), then it would be a miracle. But let the invisible agent be disclosed, and the suspension ceases to be a miracle. The agent is seen to come within our conception of nature. His action is, therefore, natural, being a part of the order of nature. The event is natural.

Now, instead of the agent being a mere man, let us suppose, if we may reverently suppose, the agent to be the invisible God, whose existence and operations are not usually included in our conception of nature: then the event wrought

by Him is truly, and not merely apparently, a supernatural event, and is readily conceivable.

A man dies, the natural consequent of death is decay. But God intervenes, and death is followed not by decay but by life. The consequent of A is *a*, but after A, B intervenes, and *b*, not *a*, follows. Let A stand for an iron ball thrown into the air, and *a* for its return to earth. Let B stand for human action exerted to suspend the ball in the air, and *b* for its suspension. The condition supposed above is fulfilled. Let A stand for man's death, and *a* for the decay of the dead body; let B stand for Divine action, and *b* for restoration to life. The analogy between human and Divine action is complete.

As there is no difficulty in supposing or imagining the one case, so there should be no difficulty in supposing or imagining the other case.

That which human action is in relation to ordinary occurrences, that is Divine action in relation to extraordinary occurrences. A miracle, therefore, is not impossible; that is, it is not inconsistent with the Divine attributes.

Mill sums up the dispute on this point between Paley and Hume in a lucid and cogent way, and with his words I will dismiss this part of my argument, and proceed to the consideration of the second main objection to miracles.

He says (*Logic*, vol. ii., 167-8, ed. 8):—

“In the case of an alleged miracle it is asserted that the effect was defeated, not in the absence, but in consequence, of a counteracting cause, namely, a direct interposition of an act of will of some Being who has power over nature; and in particular of a Being whose will being assumed to have endowed all the causes with the power by which they produce these effects, may well be supposed able to counteract them.” “A miracle (as was justly remarked by Brown) is no contradiction to the law of cause and effect; it is a new effect, supposed to be produced by the introduction of a new cause; of the adequacy of that cause if present there can be no doubt; the only antecedent improbability which can be ascribed to a miracle is the improbability that any such cause existed. All, therefore, that Hume has made out, and this he must be considered to have made out, is that . . . no evidence can prove a miracle to any one who did not previously believe in the existence of a being or beings with supernatural power; or who believes himself to have full proof that the character of the Being whom he recognises is inconsistent with his having seen fit to interfere on the occasion in question.”

THE SECOND PRINCIPAL OBJECTION,—THAT A MIRACLE IS
INCREDIBLE.

That a miracle is incredible is the second main objection to miracles as subjects of testimony. Granted, it is said, that a miracle is possible, yet it is not credible,—it cannot be proved (testimony cannot reach to the supernatural).

Preliminary Form of this Objection.

The preliminary form of this objection may be thus stated: To affirm the existence of a miraculous dispensation on the authority of testimony is to strike a deadly blow at the authority of testimony itself; for it affirms the violation of the law which assures us of the integrity of testimony; it is to act like the man in the fable, who sawed off the branch of the tree on which he was sitting. We accept and rely upon the testimony of men and women who lived in past ages because we believe them to be men and women like ourselves. We believe them to be so because we believe that nature is uniform in her operations. But if nature is not uniform, as the existence of a miraculous dispensation implies, then, how are we to know that the men and women of past ages, living under a different order of nature, *were* men and women, and not monstrosities, acting from different principles, and influenced by different motives?

“All our historical knowledge depends upon our knowledge of the habits of men, by virtue of which we can infer past facts from written records. A sufficiently great change to make such records generally untrustworthy or incapable of interpretation would destroy the whole of it; but we cannot logically arrive at the conclusion that the laws of nature, which we believe to be unconditionally true, were not true in past time; for if we admit that these laws were not true we have no fixed standard by which to measure anything. . . . Our means of looking back into the past depend upon the assumption that they were the same during the period covered by our investigation as they are now. . . . In other words, in order to infer any fact, past or future, we must assume that there is a course of nature, that we know that course of

nature, and that that course of nature has not been departed from throughout the entire chain of events, forwards or backwards, from the present circumstances on which we formed our inference, to the conclusion. . . . In other words, any argument to prove a past event, expressed in a properly-guarded manner, would run thus:—Assuming there has been no departure from the course of nature, or, in other words, no miracle has intervened, such and such an event took place. I may illustrate this by the simplest case of inference. Suppose I conclude that some event has taken place, because a witness of good character tells me he saw it. I must in that place qualify my conclusion by the assumption that no miracle has taken place; for be my witness ever so trustworthy, be his vision ever so clear, his memory ever so good, his judgment ever so sound, it would but involve a miracle that he should deceive or be deceived.”

“Arguments to prove past events are valid only in the assumption that the course of nature, as known to us, has not been departed from.”

This argument has seemed to some minds to be very powerful and conclusive. The uniformity of nature is our guarantee for the likeness of the men of a past age to the men of the present age. We know the principles, motives, and habits of men now. We assume, nature being uniform in her operations, that men in the past were actuated by like principles, motives, and habits.

The fallacy of the above argument, that a miracle is destructive of the validity of testimony, may be thus exhibited in logical form:—

If testimony is true then a miracle has occurred.

If a miracle has occurred then nature is not uniform.

If nature is not uniform then testimony is not true (cannot be depended upon).

If testimony is not true then a miracle has not occurred.

If a miracle has not occurred then testimony is true.

If testimony is true then a miracle has occurred, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Or, to express the argument symbolically:—

If A is B, C is D.

If C is D, E is not F.

If E is not F, A is not B.

If A is not B, C is not D.

If C is not D, E is F.

If E is F, A is B.

There is a well-known argument of similar construction and force, which runs as follows:—

Mendon says that all Cretans are liars.

But Mendon is a Cretan.

Therefore Mendon is a liar.

Therefore the Cretans are not liars.

Therefore Mendon is not a liar.

Therefore the Cretans are liars, &c.

Thrown into the same form the argument would run thus:—

If Mendon the Cretan's statement is true, the Cretans are liars.

If the Cretans are liars, Mendon the Cretan is a liar.

If Mendon is a liar, the Cretans are not liars.

If the Cretans are not liars, Mendon is not a liar.

If Mendon is not a liar, the Cretans are liars.

If the Cretans are liars, Mendon is a liar, &c.

An argument that can be so exhibited does not deserve serious refutation. It is obviously fallacious.

The fallacy of the original argument consists in the ambiguous use of the term "miracle." A miracle in the argument is assumed to include a change in the habits of the men of the age in which it is alleged to have occurred. "A sufficiently great change," to effect a transformation in men's nature that would remove them from the operation of principles and motives which now obtain, and leave them to the sport of chance, would, indeed, invalidate testimony. Instead of testimony having, as it is, an orderly phenomenon, it would be a portentous event due to we know not what, and would, therefore, be untrustworthy. But a miracle does not imply any such change in the course of nature. Men and women in the past came into the world just as men and women come into the world now; they were educated and trained then very much as they are now; they were actuated then by principles and motives which actuate men and women now, and, therefore, their testimony is trustworthy. When Mendon said that the Cretans were liars, he meant that some Cretans were untruthful; not that all were. When we say that the uniformity of nature has been broken, we mean not that that uniformity in all its range has been violated, but that it has been disturbed within a limited sphere. No change in men's principles and motives of action is implied.

1. *First Objection.—That Testimony cannot reach to the Supernatural. (Baden Powell.)*

Having dealt with this preliminary form of objection, I come now to Baden Powell's objection,—That testimony cannot reach to the supernatural. This form of the objection has reference to the capabilities of man. In consequence of the limitations of our nature, a miraculous event is beyond the scope of our faculties. Now, if by miraculous event is meant the cause,—the unseen cause,—of the event, the proposition is true.

The cause of a supernatural event is hidden from us. It is not revealed to the most careful scrutiny. But the phenomena, which are described as supernatural, come perfectly within the scope of observation. We can therefore see and bear witness to their existence as matters of fact. We see a body lying dead before us; we see the body touched, we hear it addressed, and we see it rise up to life, move, speak. These facts, it is clear, may be seen and heard, and may therefore be deposed to by those who have seen them or heard them. But the witnesses cannot bear witness to the final, though they can to the instrumental, cause. It is, of course, perfectly open to any one seeing or hearing what I have described, to say that the body was not really, only apparently, dead; or (if that supposition is not possible) to say that life was restored by some recondite law hitherto undiscovered and unknown to us. The conclusion to which the facts described above would lead reasonable men would depend upon circumstances. Suppose that a being should appear, announcing himself as a teacher sent from God to instruct and awaken mankind to a sense of their relation to Him; suppose that, in accordance with this claim, He, in burning words, exhorted men to repent and turn to Him; that thousands did so repent and turn to God; suppose that, in prosecution of His claim, and in attestation of it, He wrought miracles.

Suppose, further, that His life was in harmony with His teaching; that, so far as we could learn, He lived a pure, blameless, holy life,—we should instinctively believe that His claim was well founded. Suppose, for example, that such a person, in attestation of his claim to be a teacher sent from God, raised a dead body to life; suppose we

saw Him approach a dead body,—a body that had been recently drawn out of the water in which it had been immersed for some hours,—that we saw him lay his hand upon it and speak to it, and that immediately the person, of whose death we were previously assured, sat up and began to speak, gave indubitable proofs of life,—should we not instinctively and at once conclude that he who had achieved this great work was what he claimed to be,—a teacher sent from God ?

Undoubtedly we should so conclude. So that the reply to this objection of Baden Powell is, That testimony can depose to the external phenomena involved in a miracle ; and that the event is miraculous is an inference which we are constrained, by the very constitution of our minds, to draw ; that such inference would be drawn by the objectors themselves. Testimony can therefore, in the sense explained, reach to the supernatural ; that is, a supernatural event is not beyond the reach of testimony.

2. *Second Objection ; or, That the Falsehood of Testimony is more probable than a Miraculous Occurrence. (Hume.)*

Hume's objection is, that it is more likely that testimony will be false than that a miracle will be true. This proposition contains a fallacy which has been exposed by Archbishop Whately and others, and its removal renders the objection not merely harmless, but absolutely valuable. If the proposition means that it is more likely that *all* testimony will be false than that a miracle will be true, then no person, except one who regards a miracle as absolutely impossible, will accept it.

To put an extreme case, which illustrates the objection, literally accepted. Suppose a miraculous event to be deposed to by some thousands of persons, all intelligent, honest people, who were present when the alleged event occurred, and had used the opportunity of investigating the particulars of the fact in which they were witnesses, according to Hume's objection it is more likely that these thousands of competent witnesses were deceived, and their testimony, therefore, false, than that the fact to which they deposed happened. If the unanimous testimony of a thousand scientific men is to be rejected because it testified to the existence of an event, whose existence was regarded as highly improbable, then nothing

could be proved by testimony. In the interests of mankind, therefore, the principle, as explained above, must be rejected.

But it is possible that Hume did not intend his objection to be so interpreted. Whether he wished to take advantage of the ambiguity pointed out by Whately may be doubtful; but it is probable that he did. For the tone of his essay is highly objectionable,—concluding, as it does, with a sneer. The ambiguity is, of course, in the use of the term “testimony.” If the objection urged cannot mean that *all* testimony is more likely to be false than a miracle to be true, then we must impose upon it the common-sense limitation suggested by Whately, and read it thus:—It is more likely that *some* testimony will be false. Such a proposition would be perfectly correct and exceedingly valuable. It is more likely that some persons will be deceived, or will attempt to deceive, than a miracle will occur. We act upon this principle every day. If a person come with a story bordering on the supernatural, we, unless in very exceptional circumstances, quietly put his story aside, as unlikely to be true. We assume that it is more likely that some mistake has occurred, than the miraculous event. But there may be cases of such tremendous importance, where the witnesses are so exceptional that we cannot do this. In such cases we investigate, take evidence, cautiously weigh its import, and decide *according to the evidence*.

The principle teaches us not to reject all testimony, but to carefully sift and weigh it in cases of importance. Hume describes the case of a miracle in relation to testimony as a contest of improbabilities. It is improbable that a miracle has occurred; it is improbable that ten or twelve intelligent, honest men have been themselves deceived, or have conspired together to deceive others. Which is the more improbable case? A miracle involves the suspension of the ordinary laws of nature. Is this probable? The improbability is exactly measured by Paley in the “Introductory Remarks” to his *Evidences*. Antecedent to all evidence, the degree in which it is probable, or improbable, that the Author of Nature would make a revelation of His will to mankind, is the measure of the probability or the improbability of a miraculous occurrence. Suppose this condition, and that twelve men, capable and honest, testify that they witnessed a suspension of the laws of nature by one who claimed to be a teacher sent from God;—Is it probable they are lying, or are under a delusion?

A Miracle in relation to Testimony—a case of diverse, but not contradictory, Testimony.

But this is by no means the most powerful way of putting the case of miracles in relation to testimony. I should prefer to put it as a case of diverse, but not contradictory, testimony.

The laws of nature, to which miraculous operations are here opposed, are known to us mainly by testimony; and “the grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes,” rests upon the testimony of witnesses long since dead. The operations of nature, coming under our own personal observation, are but a fraction of the whole; nor would our own observation alone convince us of “the grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes.”

Men in past ages observed the operations of nature; they saw the sun rise and set; the water of the ocean ebb and flow; men born and die; and they expressed the facts they observed in general language, and so formulated laws. A law of nature, it must be remembered, is not the expression of a command, but the expression, in general terms, of a series of observations.

Dr. W. B. Carpenter, in his *Principles of Mental Philosophy* (pp. 692–3), says:—

“It must be clearly understood (that) science is nothing else than man’s intellectual representation of the phenomena of nature, and his conception of the order of the universe. That conception is formulated in what we term the laws of nature, which, in their primary sense, are simply the expression of *phenomenal uniformities*, having no coercive power whatever. To speak of such phenomenal laws as governing phenomena is altogether unscientific; such laws being nothing else than comprehensive expressions of aggregates of particular facts.”

Mill says (*Logic*, book iii., chapter iv.):—

“Generalisation is either a law of nature, or a result of laws of nature. The expression ‘laws of nature,’ means nothing else but the uniformities which exist among natural phenomena (or, in other words, the results of induction), when reduced to their simplest expression.”

It is evident, then, that our knowledge of a law of nature which is described as “the grand truth of the universal order and constancy of natural causes,” is mainly the result of past observation, which is known to us by testimony.

Our own personal observation would carry us but a little

way in the knowledge of the world around us, and its laws; and would by no means assure us of the constancy of those laws.

Should any one doubt the soundness of this conclusion, let him follow me carefully in the following supposition:—

Suppose that the sum of the collected labours of all philosophers and thinkers were swept away in a moment, and blotted from our memory, and that we were left without the experiences of the past to guide us in forming our opinions upon the world in which we live: should we then have that conviction of the constancy of natural operation which inspired Baden Powell's words (already quoted)? Should we then regard the supernatural as inconceivable?

Suppose that on our awakening to-morrow morning, we had forgotten all the past history of the world now stored up in historical and scientific treatises; that by some mysterious process it was blotted alike from memory and from book; that we knew nothing of the laws determining the movements of the sun and the other heavenly bodies; that we looked upon the earth with the eyes of Adam when he awoke to life; that we knew nothing of the cemeteries in which slept the bodies of our forefathers and friends; what would be our relation to the laws of nature, which, we further suppose, remained unchanged? We should be in absolute ignorance of them.

When we saw the sun go down for the first time we should fear, as the darkness crept over the earth, that he was bidding us an eternal farewell; when we saw him rise again in the east we should entertain some faint hope that he might remain with us, some fear lest he might again disappear. Much experience would be necessary to correct the one and strengthen the other. But many years of experience would not give us that sense of the stability and regularity of his movements which we now possess. Considerable variation in regard to the time or the place of his rising would be regarded with equanimity; there would be no valid reason, in the then condition of our knowledge, against them. Our sense of the stability of the sun's movements is derived not from our own observation, but from the testimony of others, which is confirmed, in part, by our own experience.

Suppose, again, that under the condition supposed above one of our number died. How should we regard his death? We should regard his condition as being analogous to sleep; we should keep his body with us as long as we conveniently could, and, when impelled to remove it, we should certainly not bury it, but preserve it in a cave or other receptacle and

pay frequent visits to the place of its sepulchre, expecting the time of our friend's revival to life. When corruption and decay had done their worst, and nothing remained of the body of our friend but the mouldering bones, we should reverently and lovingly collect them and put them in some place of safety, in anticipation of our friend's awakening.

The death of another and another of our party would not be sufficient to convince us that every one must die, although it would awaken the suspicion that such might be the fate of all. The result of our own personal observation, enlarging in extent day by day and year by year, would not preclude the hope that our departed friends might one day return to us, their youth renewed as the eagle's. Should such a restoration to life be affirmed our personal experience of the operations of nature would not be sufficient to make the affirmation antecedently improbable.

Our knowledge of the resources of the world around us would be too incomplete to justify disbelief or very pronounced scepticism. This supposition enables us to see that our knowledge of the laws of nature is derived mainly from testimony. I say, mainly; for, of course, the testimony of others is in part confirmed by our own experience, but only in part, so that I repeat, our knowledge of the laws of nature is derived from testimony just as our historical knowledge is derived from testimony. As our knowledge of miraculous facts of past time is also derived from testimony, it is plain that the question of miracles in relation to testimony is a case of diverse, but not contradictory, testimony.

We have a vast mass of testimony, that the operations of nature have been, *in all cases observed by the witnesses*, of a certain kind. We have expressed the facts observed and handed to us by testimony, in what are called general laws,—the laws of nature. We have also a mass of testimony, much smaller in point of numbers, that in certain other cases, *not included in any other observation*, the operations of nature (so to speak) have been diverse. That is, that A was followed not by *a*, but by *b*; that death was followed not by decay, but by life. Now there is no contradiction here, unless the testimony of the first witnesses should include the cases dealt with by the second body of witnesses. If this were the case, the evidence of the many, equal also in other respects, would outweigh and cancel the testimony of the fewer.

But this is not the case of the miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; or of the other miracles of the New Testament. We have no adverse or hostile testimony in relation to them.

The only valid *à priori* objection that can be urged against the case of a miracle is that it is out of the ordinary course of nature; and that there is sufficient ground for presuming that nature will always and everywhere preserve the uniformity of her operations. This would be to assume the impossibility of miraculous action.

The principle which I have laid down as best expressing the case of miracles in relation to testimony,—diverse, but not contradictory testimony,—may be shortly illustrated thus:—

We have good and reliable testimony that in 999 cases A was followed by *a*. We have competent testimony that in one case A was followed not by *a*, but by *b*. The testimony is diverse, but not contradictory; for we have no other testimony dealing with the latter case. The testimony alleged in proof of it is, therefore, to be considered on its merits, remembering that it is weighted by the *à priori* objection referred to above, which suggests that it is antecedently improbable that a miracle has occurred,—that A has been followed by *b*. This improbability compels us to demand that the evidence advanced in proof of the miraculous occurrence shall be clear, complete, decisive. In other words, that it shall *prove* the alleged event. Miracles, therefore, are not incredible; but testimony to prove them must be convincing and conclusive.

B. OUR OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE UNIFORMITY OF NATURE INDISPOSES US TO BELIEVE IN MIRACLES.

Our unwillingness to accept the testimony tendered in proof of a miraculous occurrence arises from our own experience of the invariable character of the operations of nature. We have seen the sun rise in the east and set in the west; the water of the ocean ebb and flow; the moon wax and wane; death followed by decay. We have never known any variation from nature's uniformity. Antecedent and sequence have become welded together in our thoughts, and only the most violent effort can dissever or dissolve them. Testimony assures us that they have preserved the same indissoluble character in the past. We cannot without great effort emancipate ourselves from the conviction that they have always, in every case, obeyed the same law.

Our imaginations invest the operations of nature with the character of invariability. "All things continue as they were from the beginning."

THIS UNIFORMITY DID NOT EXIST

[(a) *at the Beginning of the World.*]

But it is evident by a process of necessary reasoning that the operations of nature have not always been what they are now. "There is no presumption," Butler says (*Analogy*, part ii., chap. ii.), "against some operations which we should now call miraculous, particularly none against a revelation at the beginning of the world. . . . For a miracle in its very nature is relative to a course of nature, and implies somewhat different from it, considered as being so. Now, either there was no course of nature at the time which we are speaking of, or, if there were, we are not acquainted what the course of nature is upon the first peopling of worlds." "When mankind was first placed in this state there was a power exerted totally different from the present course of nature."

Upon this argument Mozley remarks in a note to his third Bampton lecture (note 4):—

"This argument does not appear to be interfered with by anything which science has brought to light since Butler's time. It assumes, indeed, a beginning of the world," and scientific authorities state that there are no evidences *in nature* of a beginning. But supposing this to be the case, science still does not assert that there is no beginning, but only denies that the examination of nature exhibits proof that there is one. Science would, indeed, appear to be in the reason of the case incompetent to pronounce that there was no beginning in nature. (Nature, as Sir C. Lyell expressed it, has written her own autobiography,—and an autobiography cannot go back to *birth*.)

Mozley concludes, "Science, then, is not opposed to the idea of creation, because all that is essential to the integral notion of creation is a beginning, and a beginning is not and cannot be disproved by science. . . . Taking the facts of nature *as they stand*, and abstracted from any hypothesis respecting them, the introductions of *all* new species were generally 'exertions of a power different from the course of nature.'"

Butler's contention, then, is granted,—that "when mankind was first placed in this state there was a power exerted totally different from the present course of nature."

(b) *At the Emergence of Man upon the Earth whether by Creation or Evolution.*

Let us make this a little clearer by illustration. Let us go back in imagination 7,000, 60,000, 200,000 years, until we reach a period when man did not exist upon the earth. At that remote period man did not exist. But man now exists. Whence and how did he come? Either he was created immediately, by the exertion of supernatural power, or he was evolved from some pre-existing organism. There is no other alternative. If man were created immediately, then a miracle was performed; if he were evolved from some pre-existing organism, then the uniformity of nature is not a fact.

Let us, then, assume that man was evolved; let us concede to the evolutionist the principle of life; let us concede further the development of successive and more complex forms, until at last, man's immediate ancestor (the anthropoid ape) is reached. Up to this point man, his moral and intellectual capacities, the splendid purpose in his eyes, has not existed. But now, on the evolutionary hypothesis, the anthropoid ape gives birth to a man-child. The first baby "new to earth and sky" is born into the world; the first infant wail is heard, and is hushed by the brute mother. However numerous the intermediate links, a moment must, on the above hypothesis, have come, when the brute became man, a moment when the line between man and the brute was drawn. There, on one side of that line, stands the brute father and mother; here, on the other, stands the man-child,—the rational being: and this is a miracle. Now, either the process is still going on or it is not. If not, the operations of nature are not uniform.

Should it be replied that such cases of development, from species to species, are exceptional and occur only at rare intervals, and under exceptional circumstances, then I answer that so vast a change as that of an ape into a man, if occurring only once in the history of the world, is a miracle, more difficult to believe than the resurrection of the dead.

Sir Charles Lyell (*Antiquity of Man*, chap. xxiv.) may be quoted here with effect:—"To say that such leaps (as have received the name of atavism) constitute no interruption to the ordinary course of nature, is more than we are warranted in affirming. In the case of the occasional birth of an individual of superior genius, there is certainly no break in the regular genealogical succession. . . .

Still, a mighty mystery remains unexplained, and it is the *order* of the phenomena, and not their *cause*, which we are able to refer to the usual course of nature." That the operations of nature have never varied is a proposition that cannot be maintained. A process of necessary reasoning compels us to believe that they have varied in the past history of our world. The science of geology witnesses to the truth of this position. The history of the material, as of the human world, teaches us that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in" the philosophy of materialism.

CONCLUSION.

No one is in a position to declare that there is no power adequate to the production of miracles; neither can he affirm them to be inconsistent with Divine wisdom and Almighty power. The phenomena usually denominated miraculous fall within the scope of testimony. There is no conflict between the testimony which deposes to the occurrence of a miracle, and that which deposes to the operation of nature. Therefore miracles may be subjects of testimony. Whether miracles have occurred, or whether we can accept their occurrence as a fact, depends upon the character of the testimony produced in proof of the alleged occurrence,—the testimony of eye-witnesses, qualified to observe correctly, and to report faithfully,—*competent* testimony. If such witnesses can be produced, bearing clear unmistakable testimony to miraculous occurrences, miracles are a fact that must be accepted.

But, after all, the case of miracles in relation to testimony will not be decided by the vast majority of men, by abstruse philosophical arguments, but by common-sense tests. Paley states the case in this way, in the "Introductory Remarks" to his *Evidences* :—

"If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of the account, should call these men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess their imposture, or submit to be tied up to a gibbet; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case; if the threat were communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect; if it was at last executed; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting

to be racked, burned, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account,—still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now, I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."

Such is Paley's conclusion, and such, I believe, would be the conclusion drawn by mankind generally.

The principal purpose of this paper is to deal with the objection: that a miracle is incredible,—that it cannot be proved. The paper is, therefore, defensive. Its object is attained if it prove that the objection is invalid. In aiming at this object I have considered every form of the objection presented by unbelievers. The conclusion to which my argument leads is, that miracles may be subjects of testimony,—testimony can reach to the supernatural.

It has not been a part of my object to consider whether they have actually occurred. But it will not be out of place, before concluding this paper, to indicate the kind of testimony which avouches the reality of the Christian miracles. The principal testimony on which we receive the great miracle of the Resurrection of Jesus, is the evidence of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, and Paul. If the evidence which we have in the New Testament is genuine, no one will doubt that the testimony possesses the first qualification demanded of competent testimony,—capacity. The witnesses were eye-witnesses, and possessed of intelligence; still less will any one deny that it possesses the second qualification demanded of competent testimony,—integrity. On the above assumption,—the genuineness of the New Testament writings,—we have testimony competent to prove the principal Fact of Christianity,—the Resurrection of Jesus.

It would be quite impossible, in the space at my command, to indicate the method of proving the genuineness of the writings in question. But there is one strand of the argument which can be shortly indicated, and which is of great force. In St. Paul's universally-accepted letters (Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians I. and II., and Galatians) the Resurrection of Christ is asserted categorically, and the evidence in proof of it marshalled with legal acumen. St. Paul's evidence and belief implicated that of the other witnesses. He was the friend of Peter and John; Luke and Mark were his travelling companions. It may, therefore, be assumed with confidence that they were in accord in regard to the proof of the fundamental articles of their common belief. And, further, St. Paul became a Christian about eight years after the Resurrection. We may safely infer that his Creed in the year

58 was his Creed in the year 40, so far as the Resurrection and its proof are concerned. The evidence presented by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians was substantially the same as that accepted by St. Paul eighteen years before that letter was written. Another inference may be drawn that the Creed of St. Paul in the year 40 was the Creed of the then Christendom,—of Apostles, Evangelists, and believers generally, so that this general conclusion is reached: A large number of persons,—Apostles, Evangelists, and believers generally, including men like Paul, Peter, John, Luke,—believed that they saw Jesus alive subsequent to His crucifixion. They believed that they saw Him, not once or twice, but several times; not in the gloom of evening, but in the open day; that He talked with them, walked with them, ate and drank with them. Such is the nature of the testimony which affirms the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The natural and only adequate explanation of the testimony, is the Fact of the Resurrection: therefore it is reasonable to believe that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

The CHAIRMAN (Rev. A. I. McCAUL, M.A.).—I think all will agree that our thanks are due to the author of this paper, and also to Mr. Cadman Jones for the ability with which he has presented the paper to the meeting. As to the paper itself, although a good deal of what it puts before us exists already in other works upon the same subject: and some critics may think that the matter it contains has already been dealt with in a higher form; yet, to my mind, it is a clear, sensible, and forcible statement of the argument in favour of miracles suited to the general reader. We are met with a denial of miracles in so many different classes of society, and the denial assumes so many different forms at the present day, that I think it highly desirable that the subject should be treated frequently from different standpoints. It appears to me that the argument in the paper is both cogent and philosophical, from first to last. To those who believe in the evidence for miracles, and who feel that that evidence is overwhelmingly strong, the attitude of objectors, who altogether deny that there is any evidence for miracles, is almost unaccountable. It seems to me that the argument for miracles is much the same as the argument from design. To those who appreciate the beauty as well as the dignity of design, and who have read something of the way in which the argument for design has been formulated and presented by men of rare ability and skill, both in ancient and modern times, the attitude involved in the denial of that argument seems absolutely inexplicable. It would appear, in point of fact, to involve an inability to meet them on any common ground, inasmuch as it seems as

impossible to convince them as if the argument employed has no power at all with them. I think we shall all agree that such papers as this, containing so admirable a presentation of the argument on the side of miracles, must be of great value in the case of those who have not made up their minds upon the subject, and, also, of advantage to the cause of calm and philosophical protest against what is inconsistent in argument. It would seem, however, that those against whom the argument itself is specially directed very much resemble that portion of the community who suffer from colour-blindness, or who have not the power of appreciating music. We know that there are persons who, if they had skeins of coloured wool put before them, would confuse blue with green and green with blue, and yet persist that they were right, although the great majority of mankind would take a different view. Such persons undoubtedly suffer from a physical defect. So it is with regard to music. There are some persons who appear to be utterly unconscious of the influence of sweet sounds, owing, also, to a defect in the organs of perception. Those people are to be pitied; but it is quite impossible, humanly speaking, to help them. Some communications have been received, and these the Honorary Secretary will now read.

Captain FRANCIS PETRIE, F.G.S. (Hon. Sec.)—The first communication is one from the Right Honourable the Lord Grimthorpe, until now known as Sir Edmund Beckett, Bart., LL.D., Q.C.

“I am sorry to be unable to come to the reading of Mr. Watson’s paper, but perhaps written remarks on a subject which requires so much care are more likely to be useful than spoken ones. On the paper itself I have nothing particular to say beyond general agreement. The abstract or *à priori* mode of dealing with miracles which the author follows is undoubtedly the popular mode of dealing with that and most other questions at present. In this case it may be called Butler’s mode, as against Paley’s, which is concrete, historical, and *à posteriori*, and has the advantage of not having to assume anything, not even God, or to define anything, an operation which is seldom free from question. The turn of my mind in all matters is in favour of the latter method, though it is doubtless useful to be able to give an answer of the *à priori* kind to arguments which pretend to prove that the miracles of Christianity are incredible because they are impossible; and that because the course of nature is uniform according to the world’s experience in all cases except those which are called miraculous, therefore its experience of those cases is to be thrown aside, and those events treated as if there were no testimony for them. For you must observe that is exactly what is done by all the abstract or *à priori* pretended proofs that the events which are commonly called miraculous are impossible. Moreover, all that kind of proof proceeds on a misuse of the word ‘impossible,’ and forgets that there is not merely a difference of degree, but a mathematically infinite difference, between any degree of improbability founded on experience or reasoning and an absolute impossibility, such as that 2 and 2 should make 5, or the sum of the angles of a *plane* triangle differ from 180 degrees, or the area or circumference

of a circle be expressed in any finite number of parts of its diameter. I will not write over again here what may be read in my small *Review of Hume and Huxley on Miracles*, which may be got for sixpence from the S.P.C.K.; and therefore I will refer to that for a statement of Babbage's mathematical calculation of the balance of probabilities between an event against which the odds are a million millions to one, and the uncontradicted testimony of a very small number of persons who tell the truth only ten times as often as they do not—a very moderate degree of veracity. It follows with mathematical certainty that, if anything like '500 brethren at once' ever declared that they had 'seen the Lord after His resurrection,' especially as they had nothing to gain and a great deal to lose by saying so, the probability in favour of it overbears any conceivable *à priori* demonstration against it in a proportion of which no number of figures that could be written could convey any idea to our minds. It is true that we have not now before us the actual testimony of the 500 brethren; and if 1 Cor. xv. 6 stood as a bare assertion of St. Paul, unconfirmed by results, we should be bound to treat it as we do the assertions of the popish miracles. But though that particular testimony does not survive, its effects do; and if it was once sufficient to convert an unbelieving world, and did so, we require it no more. We are justified in believing that any murderer was justly convicted long afterwards if the evidence convinced a judge and jury at a time, though every bit of it is forgotten—always assuming that there has been no discovery of evidence the other way; and there is no pretence of any such against the Resurrection or the Ascension. Nor against the long course of preceding miracles, which the *à priori* objectors to them make no attempt to deal with or explain away; at any rate, no attempt that would be listened to for five minutes, against any other events which produced such a tremendous and abiding change over the whole world as they did, far beyond any others that have ever happened. The believers in Hume's often-exposed paradox about 'experience' are misled by a mere verbal trick. His 'experience' is only the one-sided experience of all the non-miraculous events in the world, coolly throwing aside all those, at least apparently, miraculous ones which have to be accounted for somehow or explained away somehow, and yet never are. A man who propounded a new scientific theory on the ground that it explains all the known phenomena except one obstinate set of them which he cannot get rid of, would be laughed at—or rather ought to be, and would be, if so-called science had not become so depraved by prejudice and timidity that men are allowed to pass for philosophers and solvers of the great problem of cosmogony by tracing some phenomena up to natural causes, which they call 'an insoluble mystery,' and then assuring us that all phenomena are thus accounted for. (See my paper in these 'Transactions,' vol. xvii., '*How did the World evolve itself?*') This *à posteriori* or historical mode of dealing with the question, you see, supersedes all necessity for framing definitions of miracles, on which also I refer to my aforesaid Review, exposing a quite astonishing

mistake of Professor Huxley, professing to correct Hume, who was right so far. He was also right in saying that undoubtedly it is a miracle if a dead man came to life (though he himself did not believe it, or attempt to account for the general belief in it); and in my opinion it is a waste of time to argue about definitions in such a case as that. The Resurrection is either true or false, and there is no middle way. Moreover, if it is false, no conceivable ingenuity of theologians, who fancy they can make things pleasant all round by inventing clever phrases to reduce miracles to nature, can escape the conclusion that there is no such thing as Christianity, except in the same sense as there is Mahometanism or Mormonism. Christianity is not a 'moral philosophy,' though its moral philosophy is the best the world has had. It is *ipso facto*, if the Founder of it knew His own doctrine, a belief in three events or facts all contrary to the regular course of nature: His birth without a human father, which from the nature of things cannot be directly proved, but is easily credible on the evidence if the others are; and they were amply proved by more abiding evidence of results than the acts of Julius Cæsar, or even of Napoleon Bonaparte within the last 90 years. No rational way of accounting for the present state of the world and its history for 1900 years has ever been invented, except that the miracles are true. And therefore they are true."

The second communication is from the Reverend J. J. Lias, M.A., who, as Professor Lias, has already contributed more than one paper to the Institute:—

"The subject of miracles is one which, in the present changing condition of science, ought to be kept continually in view. I am glad that an able paper has been contributed to the Institute on the subject. In criticising its positions, I do not wish to weaken but to strengthen its general testimony to the truth. Mr. Watson's definition of a miracle is combined with somewhat of an attack on those who have defined the word differently. I myself, in a published work, have ventured to give a different definition. I have defined it as 'an exception to the observed order of nature, brought about by God in order to reveal His will or purpose.' But in giving this definition I have not been actuated by any desire to 'get rid of its miraculous character,' though, I confess, I have been exceedingly desirous, as far as possible, of 'minimising the force of the objections that are raised against it.' For those objections are frequently aimed, not so much at the Divine power itself overruling nature, as at the entirely unnecessary propositions which are introduced into the definition. The fact that miracles have occurred is one which cannot be denied without overthrowing Christianity (at least, as far as I can see). The question *how* they occurred is not a matter of faith at all. And, therefore, I think the defender of miracles should avoid encumbering himself with any theories which may involve him in unnecessary difficulty, such as that miracles are 'violations,' or 'suspensions' of the order of nature. I can hardly agree to Mr. Watson's apparent view that definitions are of no consequence. For, on the one hand, as I

have endeavoured to show, definitions which go too far may involve us in needless difficulties ; and, on the other hand, unless we define of what kind or order the 'thing' is to which we give credence, it seems difficult to understand how we can reason about such things generally at all. It is, moreover, a little inconvenient to have, as on the fourth page, three, or rather four, parallel definitions of the word. Further on the thought appears a little confused on account of the want, so common in our time, of exact definition of the words used. To *what* universe does Mr. Watson refer ? Does nature comprise merely what is usually termed physical phenomena, or does he, with Spinoza, regard the word as embracing an infinity of other things beside ? And does scientific observation pretend to deal—can it possibly deal—with anything beyond the class of facts which it has been able to observe ? Science needs no amending, it seems to me, but some make it to step beyond its province, by declaring that there can be nothing higher than the laws of the visible universe with which it professes to be concerned. In page 205, if I am not mistaken, the objection to miracles on the ground of the improbability of the God of Nature altering His arrangements is a little inadequately put. It does not appear to me that the objectors deny the existence of 'contrivances' in creation, nor that they use the phrase 'after-thought.' They would object to *any* alteration of the ordinary course of nature, fore-ordained or not, on the principle of the absolute perfection of that course of nature, as coming from the Hand of God. The answer, derived from the line of thought which suggested Mr. Babbage's illustration, seems to me complete. We do not know that there is any alteration or suspension of any kind. It may be simply a case of what is constantly occurring in nature itself—the modification of any one law or force when it comes in contact with another. No thoughtful man can contemplate the phenomena of existence without seeing that a higher law than mere physical force exists, and that to it physical force is subject. To that higher law belongs the human mind and will, and, rising still farther in the scale of being, we are entitled to add, the Divine Mind and Will. It is this, and not any mere natural power, in the ordinary sense of the word, to which miracles are owing. And, it may be added, that the force which impels my hand to write these words and the voice of the reader to read them, belong to an order outside the sphere of that which is ordinarily assigned to nature, in the sense of which science investigates it. I have no wish to enter upon this vast subject at present ; but I would earnestly press upon those who reason about nature to define the extent and limits of the word before they do so. Mr. Watson afterwards includes man in nature, and, of course, if it is understood in what sense, there can be no objection to his doing so ; but it should be distinctly remembered that the laws of Mind and Will are outside the range of what is known as physical or natural science, and that a dangerous ambiguity lurks here. If you include them in nature at one moment, and expressly exclude them the next by assigning them to the sphere of metaphysics, you are involving yourself in endless possibilities of

contradiction and confusion. And this confusion is increased by the fact that the laws of matter are to a great extent ascertained; the laws of mind, on the contrary, very slightly ascertained; while the laws of will can hardly be said to have been ascertained at all. With regard to the rest of the paper, its arguments seem just, although I should myself have been inclined to put them in a different form. Thus it seems to me that all nature is kept in being by a play of counteracting forces. If I throw a ball up into the air, the first law of motion tells me that it would, if left alone, go on for ever in a straight line; but the action of gravitation, and the resistance of the atmosphere, soon bring it into a state of relative rest. Spiritual forces are unknown forces; and if spiritual needs involve the necessity of interferences with the ordinary course of this world, spiritual forces will act when required, modifying without destroying the action of the rest. The objection in page 215 seems to refute itself. If we are to accept the general uniformity of law on the ground of testimony, it seems to me that we are bound to admit the occurrence of occasional departures from that uniformity on the same ground. The same principle that excludes miracles on the ground that they are opposed to the general course of things, as witnessed to by mankind, would equally exclude the possibility of all strange or unusual events and all new discoveries. Testimony deals with facts; science with their explanation. But it is impossible for science to lay down *à priori* axioms that there are not, and cannot be, forces which lie outside the ordinary range of man's perceptions. When science leaves dealing with facts, and proceeds to postulate impossibilities, she has destroyed herself. Hume's canon, quoted on p. 216, is a remarkable instance of the ambiguity of language. Taken literally, it is incontrovertible. It is unlikely that a miracle should happen. If it were likely, the occurrence would be no miracle. And, therefore, it is 'likely' that the testimony concerning it is false. But is it more than 'likely'? Has Hume, keen as he is, confounded 'likely' with *certain*? For there is testimony of such a kind that it is sufficient to overthrow the greatest amount of unlikeliness. And the peculiar and varied evidence which sustains the actual occurrence of the miracles of Christ is evidence of this kind. The scope of Mr. Watson's paper does not enable him to enter into this evidence. But, as a matter of fact, a large part of the case for the Christian miracles is the altogether unique character of the evidence by which it is supported, and the immense cumulative force of converging arguments of all kinds. This, however, is a question into which I cannot enter, it being outside the province of the Victoria Institute. But I may be allowed to say that it is a view of the case which is often overlooked by the defenders, and invariably ignored by the opponents, of Christianity."

A third communication is from the Rev. Prebendary Row, M.A., who dissents from the author's mode of putting his arguments, which he does not consider forcible enough.

Having read these communications, may I make one quotation from a communication in reference to miracles sent by Professor Huxley to the *Spectator* (Feb. 10, 1866) :—

“It is, and always has been, a favourite tenet of mine, that atheism is as absurd, logically speaking, as polytheism; and that denying the possibility of miracles seems to me quite as unjustifiable as speculative atheism.”

The AUTHOR.—All those who have kindly undertaken to criticise my paper, agree that discussion on the subject of miracles is highly desirable. The Chairman's remarks about the denial of miracles in various classes of society find confirmation in daily experience. The diffusion of a certain kind of scientific education has taught people the uniformity of nature, and has indisposed them to believe that that uniformity has ever been violated. This fact is one of the present-day difficulties in the way of Christianity. All, again, give a general approval of the paper, and some are good enough to speak of it in high terms of praise. I am grateful for the kind reception that has been accorded to it. In regard to Lord Grimthorpe's remarks about my adoption of the *à priori* method, rather than the Paleyan, I would say, that my argument had not reached that stage which permitted the adoption of the Paleyan method (which I value fully as highly as the noble lord himself). My immediate purpose (the present paper forming one of a series) was merely to get the evidence into court. In order to do so, it was necessary to show that the subject matter came within the jurisdiction of the court. Unbelievers say, “No amount of evidence can prove a miracle; therefore, we will not waste time in hearing evidence.” My chief object in this paper is to show that the three principal objections relied upon to exclude the evidence itself, cannot be sustained. In other words, that the unbeliever's case breaks down; and that the evidence *is* admissible. The *next* step is to produce the evidence, and to illustrate its force. In regard to the remarks of the Rev. J. J. Lias, who is so well qualified to speak on the subject under consideration, I have but little to say, beyond thanking him for the careful way in which he has discussed my paper, and guarding myself against some slight misapprehension. Professor Lias' purpose is so entirely in sympathy with my own, that I accept his criticism as an endeavour to strengthen the positions of my paper. I should be sorry to be understood as undervaluing definitions. This is by no means the case. The definitions I disparage are such only as Lord Grimthorpe so caustically describes in his criticism of this paper,—definitions invented by the “ingenuity of theologians, who fancy they can make things pleasant all round by inventing clever phrases to reduce miracles to nature.” I heartily agree with Professor Lias as to the value of definitions carefully drawn, and have used the term “universe” (p. 202) in such a way as to require no formal definition :—“A comprehensive conception of the universe must be consistent with all the authenticated facts of the universe.” The facts of the universe include—the facts of history, the facts of testimony and mental

experience, as well as what are called physical facts. Any thinker who essays to systematise the facts of the universe—that is, to form a comprehensive conception of the universe—cannot omit these facts—of history, &c.—without coming under the censure of the paper. His theory is either “not true, or not sufficient.” If, for example, every man, woman, and child in the world were, at a certain and regularly-recurring hour, every day, simultaneously to experience a peculiar sensation of joy—that would be a fact of the universe. And such an undoubted phenomenon would demand from scientific observers an explanation. If scientific observation could not account for the phenomenon by its present conception of the universe, then that conception would be manifestly insufficient; and would, if it aimed at the attainment of a complete conception of the universe, have to be “amended.” The term “science,” I would suggest, is usually used in a narrower sense than “scientific observation.” Science is popularly supposed to deal only with physical facts; “scientific observations” may be applied to facts of every kind—all the facts of the universe. The remainder of the Rev. J. J. Lias’ paper may be read as additional to my own, in which my contentions are, I trust, put philosophically, and sustained by forcible arguments. I have only, again, to thank the Institute for the kind reception given to my paper; and to add that, through the indulgence of the Council, I have added a paragraph setting out the character at once of the testimony on which the great miracle of Christ’s Resurrection is received by believers.

The meeting was then adjourned.