

**"The Finger of God is Here"**

S. M. P., '41

Throughout the ages man has been learning gradually more and more about the wonderful operations of the material forces of nature committed by God to him for his benefit. Especially within the past century there have emerged discoveries of nature's secrets which we could scarcely believe were we not witnesses of the results achieved. The introduction of the radio, the aeroplane, the submarine, and the invention of many other intricate devices marking the progress of science rank as outstanding events in human experience. But beyond the range of science, standing out in bold relief upon the checkered page of the world's history, we find other more wonderful events known by the name of miracles. These events, in the words of St. Thomas, are "effects which are produced by God in the world and which are beyond the sphere of action of all created natures". The theme of many a heated controversy and the object of many a bitter attack, miracles are of perennial interest not only to those who defend them but even to those who disclaim belief in the supernatural. Rationalists assert that miracles are impossible; Materialists dismiss them as mere phantoms; Sceptics hold they are incredible; Pseudo-Scientists attempt to explain them away. But unshaken by all opposition remain the incontrovertible facts that such events are not only possible but actually have occurred, and that, to a reasonable person, miracles are not only credible but can be recognized with certainty as marvellous manifestations of the all-ruling Providence and infinite power of Almighty God.

Among those who deny the possibility of miracles there are many whose difficulties arise from a misunderstanding of the exact nature of a miracle. Confusing miracles with prodigies and incomprehensible phenomena they overlook the fact that miracles in the strict sense are confined to sensible effects that are proportionate only to the power of God acting not only as First Cause but as Principal Cause, and therefore, exceeding all the powers of created nature. There are several different ways in which an event may surpass the powers of created nature and from that variation is derived a threefold classification of miracles; first, those which by their very nature exceed the power of created causes, as the simultaneous existence



of two bodies in one place; second, those which occur in a subject in which created nature is unable to produce such an effect, as the resurrection from the dead; and third, those which exceed the capacity of created nature in the manner of their performance, as the sudden cure of one in an advanced stage of tuberculosis—a prominent example of the miracles of Lourdes.

In saying that a miracle transcends the powers of created nature, that is, the powers of all created substances acting under ordinary Divine concurrence, we do not in any way contradict the laws of nature. On the contrary, we assume that there exists such a body of laws ordaining uniform modes of action among the created substances of the universe, and affirm that in a particular instance God intervenes and either prevents created causes from producing their ordinary effects or brings about results which the created cause could not effect without such special intervention.

But can God, Who is Himself the Author of the laws of nature and Who has ordained the orderly and harmonious operations of His creatures, deviate from those laws without contradicting His Divine Perfections? To deny in Him such a power is to make God the slave of the material universe and the creature independent of the Creator. Once we admit the existence of a personal God Who is the First Cause of all things in the universe, we must acknowledge the infinite attributes that belong essentially to such a Cause. He must be an infinitely powerful and all-free Being, and therefore One Who has complete and free control over all creation. As such, He has power to produce effects which exceed the capacities of secondary causes.

Voltaire and others, who reject the possibility of miracles on the assumption that the exercise of such a power indicates a change in God, base their argument on the too narrow concept of order as it is manifested to man in the world, instead of that order as it is designed in the eternal plan of God. Under the first aspect a miracle appears to be a violation of order and a change of mind on the part of God, but under the second aspect it takes its proper place in the general ordinance of Divine Wisdom. From eternity God foresaw that in certain cases an exception to the ordinary course of nature would serve His purpose better than uniformity of action, and therefore He eternally decreed



that at the opportune moment a miracle should occur. Thus the miraculous is in no way contrary to the immutable perfection of God.

Neither can a miracle be relegated to the realm of impossibility on the plea of some scientists that it is contrary to the unchangeable laws of the universe. These scientists err in attributing to the laws of nature a uniformity that is absolutely necessary instead of one that is only hypothetically so; they are actually subject to the control of the Creator and produce their ordinary effects only because and when God decrees that they do so.

It is therefore within God's power to accomplish deeds in the sensible world above and beyond the powers of created nature, that is, to perform miracles, and these extraordinary events, exceptions to the laws of nature, are eminently fitting means to manifest God's supreme control over all creation.

While the power of performing miracles properly belongs to God alone, miraculous events are often attributed to the action of some saint or holy person. In such cases it is by the power of God that the miracle occurs, and the saint or holy person merely acts as an instrument in the Hands of the Omnipotent God.

Some Rationalists admit that God can perform miracles but they claim that we cannot have certain knowledge that any such events have actually taken place, because, as they say, we should believe only those things of which we have experimental knowledge. Such experimental knowledge is by no means impossible for miracles are sensible facts and just like any other sensible fact can be perceived by the senses. It is no more difficult to see a man incurably paralyzed suddenly arise and walk than to see one in full possession of his health go about his ordinary duties. But what of those which are reported to have occurred in the past? Surely it is only a credulous and ignorant person, they say, who would believe in them. When they are reported by reliable witnesses in a position to know the facts, we have every reason to accept such testimony. These Rationalists show themselves to be unreasonable when they refuse to admit trustworthy evidence regarding miraculous events and at the same time accept unquestionably countless other things of which they have no experience. Who among them was personally acquainted with Francis Drake or which of them has seen the Phillipine Islands?



Yet these same Rationalists would consider it absurd to doubt the existence of the one or the other. In other words, they believe those facts of history which they wish to believe, and reject the evidence concerning miracles because such belief is contrary to their prejudiced opinions. If we do not aim at destroying all history, we must admit the fact of miracles on the testimony of others. We have even greater reason for believing miracles on such evidence, because, being extraordinary events, they attract greater attention and induce closer investigation, so that there are few facts of history that are so thoroughly substantiated.

Even when it is acknowledged that such events as the simultaneous existence of two bodies in the same place, the resurrection from the dead, or the instantaneous cure of a serious disease are historically true, there is yet the question whether we can know with certitude that God actually intervened to bring about such effects by His immediate power. The principle objection to the possibility of such knowledge is that of Rousseau who says that in order to discern such works as miracles we would have to know all the laws of nature, many of which remain yet unknown to us: "Celui qui prononce que tel ou tel acte est un miracle, déclare qu'il connaît toutes les lois de la nature, et qu'il sait que cet acte en est une exception" (Rousseau: *Lettres de la Montagne*). This demand is unreasonable and unwarranted, for, while it is true that we do not know all that created nature can do, we know many things that it cannot do, and through this knowledge we can have absolute certitude concerning the miraculous character of many events. It is not necessary to know the measure of a man's strength to be certain that he cannot lift a weight of ten tons.

Neither is it necessary that we know all the forces of nature in order to be sure that certain actions transcend its capacities.

Since God alone can produce beings without any pre-existing subject, He alone has power immediately to modify material substances intrinsically without the intermediary action of accidental alterations. All the forces of nature, known or unknown, even when directed by the greatest human ingenuity could never immediately and instantaneously replace a mass of festered and decayed flesh with sound and healthy tissue, as happens, for example, in the sudden cure of leprosy. When such an event occurs, then,



we can have absolute certainty that God directly intervened and produced an effect exceeding all the powers of created nature. For the same reasons, other events of a similar character, involving the production of material substances, as in the multiplication of loaves, or effecting the immediate modification of such substances, can be indubitably certified as genuine miracles.

To God alone belongs also direct power over the human soul because it too is produced from no pre-existing subject. Without the pre-disposing conditions of the process of human generation it is only by the miraculous interposition of Divine power that a soul can be united to a human body. It is evident then that in the case of resurrection of the dead and other extraordinary events which illustrate God's mastery over life and death there can be no doubt of the miraculous nature of the occurrence.

It is likewise with miracles of the first order, which surpass the powers of created nature in their very essence. For example, it is obvious that it is contrary to the ordinary course of nature for two bodies to exist in one place at the same time, for only a cause having immediate power over the existence and matter of bodies can conserve their existence in circumstances so extraordinary. There can, therefore, be no hesitation in asserting that when Christ entered the Cenacle, "*januis clausis*", He did so only by Divine Power. All other miracles of the first order can be attested with no less hesitation.

Not all miracles, however, can be proved with the same degree of certainty, for sometimes in miracles of the third order, e. g., healing of certain diseases, it is very difficult to distinguish genuine miracles from psychological cures and prodigies performed through evil spirits. More diligent enquiry is necessary, and even when all the circumstances are considered we cannot have absolute certitude that there was a direct intervention of the power of God. But if the effect produced is conducive to good, is performed through the instrumentality of a worthy person, in a manner and in circumstances not in any way unbecoming to the dignity and wisdom of God, then we can be morally certain that the event is really a miracle.

Without disturbing the reign of order in nature's laws and without in the least altering the designs of the Providence of Him Who "*ordereth all things sweetly*", these striking events we call miracles are placed as a special



seal of Divine Wisdom on His masterpiece—creation. It is true that the laws of nature also manifest the power and wisdom of God, but we become so accustomed to the regularity of their action that we are prone to overlook the Maker and Preserver of these laws. Is it more wonderful that five thousand should be fed with five loaves than that millions should be fed from the little grains of wheat that are planted, grow up, bud and mature, and are finally made into bread? In one instance God multiplies the bread; in the other, through the process of nature, He multiplies the wheat. It is the same Power, the same Hand, that controls the laws of nature and effects the miracle. But in the miracle, by an exception to the laws of nature, God arrests our attention, startles us out of our oblivion, and causes us to reflect on the All-wise Providence that directs daily the millions of details of our lives. Beneath the multitudinous perfections and harmonious order of creation God conceals Himself and surrenders to man the mastery of the powers of material nature that he may subdue them and harness them in his service. But lest man grow presumptuous in the use of his dominion over inferior things and become unmindful of the Supreme Master of all nature's laws, God wove into the pattern of creation these irregularities we call miracles, manifesting directly His Omnipotent power and forcing man to exclaim, "The finger of God is here!"



### Greatness

Kenny Mooney, '41

Admire the ones who try and try,  
Ignore the ones who don't,  
Lament for those who don't know how,  
Abhor the ones who won't.

Remember those who failed to reach  
The goals for which they died;  
Forget the ones who could have climbed  
Still higher had they tried.

What really makes our lives worth while,  
What makes us never die,  
Is not that we have gained our ends  
But that our aims were high.