

Miracles.

SO numerous and contradictory are the teachings of the different schools of philosophy each of which claims to be true, that the ordinary man of to-day, who has not been trained to think and reason properly is apt to be mislead. He has common sense enough to know that the various explanations of "Truth" which he has received cannot all be true, but on account of his lack of training he does not see where the explanations given by these schools of philosophy are faulty. In the end he finds it is easier to go along in the world unhampered by religious belief of any kind and consequently abandons it. But there is one fact, however controverted which stands out boldly in religious history; one which cannot be gainsaid, even by those who try to persuade themselves and others, that such a thing is absurd, namely, belief in the supernatural. Were proofs and testimonies of this great fact wanting, there would then be some excuse for those who condemn or doubt it; but such is not the case. On the contrary the writings which bear witness to the truth of this doctrine are many and varied, as, for example, the Bible, ecclesiastical histories, the manuscripts of the doctors of the church, all of which, supported by the firm belief of the whole Christian world, unanimously agree in proclaiming that miracles have been and still continue to be performed.

There are, however, some who do not and will not give their assent to this doctrine and merely ridicule its defenders. The writings of the so-called "Scientists" of today—applying this term to those who are opposed to religious belief of any kind—deny the existence of the supernatural, and in so denying, tell us that all the motions of the world and of the entire universe can be explained by these "forces of Nature" which are as yet unknown to us. They thus cast aside a possible and very probable explanation of all things, namely a Creator, and put in His place the "Unknown." Attention must be drawn to the fact that such men make the "miraculous and marvellous" synonymous terms. All that is miraculous is at the same time marvellous, but

not *vice-versa*. Marvellous as are certain pheonomena such as electricity, wireless telegraphy, radio-activity and the like, they are by no means miraculous. Some Scientists say that, because Science has given a natural explanation to some things which would have been regarded by our forefathers as miraculous, there is no super-natural. It will be our purpose to show wherein lies the falsehood of this and similiar statements and we shall begin by first defining the term "Miracle."

"A Miracle," according to St. Thomas, is a sensible effect produced by God beyond the powers of Nature, or an effect, which is extraordinary, supernatural and produced by Divine power. In every miracle, therefore, there are two things required, namely the effect which cannot be explained by natural means and the certitude with which we are able to say that such an effect has been produced by God. Hence we see that only the Creator can of himself perform miracles. Miracles are divided into three classes, the highest, the lowest and those which occupy a middle place. Miracles of the highest or *quoad substantiam facti* are those in which something is done by God which Nature could in no way produce, for example the simultaneous presence of two bodies in the same place, physically.

Miracles of the second class or *quoad subjectum* are those in which an effect is produced, which Nature could bring about but not in that particular connection, as the resurrection of the dead.

A miracle of the third rank or *quoad modum* is an effect produced by God which could be produced by Nature, but not in the same way as it is produced, as the sudden curing of sickness.

Can it be said then that a miracle is ever contrary to the "laws of Nature?" To answer this question we must first find out what this phrase means. If by the laws of nature we mean any particular law which Nature follows or by which Nature usually acts, then we may say that a miracle is contrary to Nature. But if, on the other hand, by the laws of Nature, we denote the Divine Will, then we cannot say that a miracle is a violation of Nature's laws, for the simple reason that these laws are but an expression of God's will and are

a part of the great plan of Providence, and a violation of them would be contrary to His immutability. So we can easily see that a knowledge of all the laws of Nature is not required before we can know a miracle. As in the civil order, we may not know all the laws of a certain code, but we can know with certainty when a definite law has been broken ; so it is in the order of Nature.

Having thus defined miracles, the question which naturally suggests itself is: Are miracles possible? For a solution of this question we shall base our argument on the *Summa* of St. Thomas. If there were any contradiction to the fact of the possibility of miracles, such contradiction would arise either because the order of Nature is absolutely necessary or the power of this created Nature is infinite, or finally that there exists no cause capable of producing such an effect. As to the first we know that the order of Nature or of the world is not necessary, but contingent, for it is easy to conceive the world with a totally different order or disposition of things. We know also that the faculty or power of created nature is finite, for nothing which is created or contingent, can be infinite. And as to the existence of a cause capable of producing miraculous or supernatural effects we can have no doubts. For He who has freely created all things and has endowed them with a certain nature and activity, can act independently of these things. He who has created them for a certain end can accomplish that end by His own power. Can we hesitate then to accept the fact that He who has made all things from nothing, can also restore life that is lost? Can we deny that He who has constituted man with the powers of perceiving and understanding can instantly restore these faculties when they have been incapacitated? The answer is we cannot, and hence must grant the power and possibility of miracles.

Having thus demonstrated that miracles are possible, we shall proceed to deal with the next question, namely, whether or not miracles can be known. A miracle since it is a sensible fact, can be known in the same way as any other natural occurrence, that is from

personal observation or from the testimony of others. In a miracle, as has been said before, we have the fact itself as an external occurrence and its supernatural character. This latter consists in this, that its nature and accompanying circumstances are such that we must attribute it to the workings of some power beyond nature. The perception of this character is a purely rational act, had by applying the principle of causality, "every effect must be proportionate to its cause." As to the fact, the rules governing the testimony of other historical events are alike applicable to miracles. The evidence of the fact depends on the knowledge and veracity of the narrators, that is, those who are witnesses of the events must know what they tell and tell the truth. And since miracles are extraordinary events, they will move men to more accurate investigation, which tends to increase the authority of those who witness them. A miracle then as an historical fact can be known with certitude, and there is no more reason for rejecting it than for rejecting accounts of any other sensible facts.

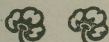
For a solution of the question as to the occurrence of miracles we shall point to the Bible for examples. The Holy Scriptures are full of records of their having been performed. Let us examine a scriptural miracle first, for example the "Feeding of the Five Thousand." As a confirmation of this fact we have the testimony of the four Evangelists whose statements are substantially the same, the same testimony by which all historical facts are established, human testimony. If what they state had never taken place, the falsehood would somehow have been discovered, for surely some of the "Five Thousand" would have denied it. Secondly, the feeding of so many persons is beyond the natural qualities of "five loaves and two fishes." Thus to make the substance of such a small quantity of food satisfy the hunger of so vast a multitude is an act quite outside the power of Nature. Consequently we must admit that such an effect could have only been produced by Divine power. Such is the plain statement of this and every other miracle. The very simplicity of the truth ought to be enough to convince any intelligent being

that miracles have been and are still capable of being wrought.

Now, it may be asked, why have miracles been performed? or what is their value? It would be presumption on the part of any Christian to assign motives of action to the Infinite or pretend to know why He should at any time act in an extraordinary manner. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counsellor?" Why he intervenes in a special manner in human affairs is not for us to question, but we know that when He does intervene it is for the common good of all mankind.

Miracles are valuable as proving the existence of a divine Providence, the All-wise Ruler, who, like every kind father, is ever ready to come to the aid of His children. They prove the existence of an order superior to that of Nature which is rightly termed Supernatural. They prove the divinity of God, as well as the divine character of His revealed truths. They prove lastly that Christ by working miracles has compassion on suffering humanity and is ever ready to extend His all-powerful aid to the relief of those, whom He, in His infinite wisdom, deems worthy of assistance.

P. T. H. '18.



I wasted time and now doth time waste me.—Shakespeare.

Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.—Abraham Lincoln.

Diligence is the mother of Good Fortune.—Cervantes.

The reward of our duty is the power to fulfil another.—George Eliot.