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The Church and modern miracles

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THE CHURCH
and
MODERN MIRACLES

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W. G. GOLGROVE.
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CONTENTS:

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Anticipatory

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Introductory

The antiquity of wonder-working.
The objective possibility of miracles.
Their credibility and evidential value.

Explanatory

The tests and a defined definition.
The miracles of Jesus reviewed.
Their relation to the Apostolic miracles
The miracles of the Apostles reviewed
Their relation to post-Apostolic miracles
The post-Apostolic miracles reviewed
Their relation to modern miracles
The modern miracles reviewed
The cults and cures

Hortatory

The Church's commission
The Church's duty
The Church's equipment
The sublime possibilities

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Anticipatory

In choosing this rather peculiar subject for a thesis we were conscious of the fact that almost nothing had been previously written upon it. We found some encouragement, nevertheless, in the other fact that many attempts have been and are being made to reawaken the long dormant art of physical and psychical healing. This thesis, if it proves worthy of the name, is an attempt to briefly discuss the matter of so-called miraculous healing in both Apostolic and post-Apostolic times, and to show that although there are many unbridgable breaks in the line of Apostolic Succession, there is still the Apostolic power, at least in some degree, to perform various miracles. We feel assured that the day of some kinds of miracles is not passed and that the Evangelical Church is failing in this very work while at the same time she is giving place to parasitic cults and isms which climb like poisonous ivy around this pillar of her edifice and, sapping her life, flourish on her own decay.

The dearth of material on this very important branch of the relation of the work of Christ and the Apostles to the present age ought to be an incentive to competent scholars to compose and compile some weighty and worthy tomes upon it.

Introductory

The mists of antiquity hang over the genesis of thau-
maturgy and magic so that it is impossible to obtain a clear
conception of the primitive practices. It is evident, however,
that all people have had their characteristic medicine-men and
magicians. Babylonia, Egypt and Persia are well represented
and the Hebrews were not without their peculiar and popular
wonder-workers. But when we come to the matter of miracles
as divine attestations and revelations we must immediately
take higher ground for in them we see an exalted moral and
spiritual purpose. When we scan the history of miracles as re-
corded in the Old and the New Testaments we find those of the
Apostles upheld by as clear and credible evidence as any oth-
ers. They have a well-defined place, and when we review the
same class of works in later and modern times we are forced
to admit that many of them possess like sufficient ground for
credibility.

When we consider the objective possibility of mira-
cles we naturally begin with them at their earliest appear-
ance when they were accepted as divinely given signs and ful-
ly believed by so-called credulous people. Then we come to
the critical period of disbelief which arose and continued with
the mistaken notions of some evolutionists regarding a sup-
posed inviolable and immutable reign of law. And in the third
place, significant and natural as it is, we come to our own
time when most clear, capable, unbiased minds are recognizing

the far-reaching and important fact that the natural and supernatural are not two but one, and that thus the extraordinary and miraculous are just as historical and scientific and trustworthy as the ordinary phenomena of life.

The deductions of theistic philosophy confirm our belief in the existence of God as Creator and immanent Preserver of all things; as one who has not shut himself out of his own universe but as one who ever rules, controls and resides in it and thus may, as occasion requires, intervene either directly as in Paul's conversion or indirectly as through that same Apostle for the raising of Eutychus.

"All theists recognize that the operation of spiritual forces is just as real and just as familiar an experience as the operation of material forces. An obvious illustration of the intervention of spiritual force in the phenomenal world is afforded by the consequences which ensue in the visible order every time we exert our free will. Mind is not a mere function of the bodily organism, and thought is something distinct from those movements of the grey matter of the brain which seem to accompany it perpetually in our present experience. But mind, i. e. reason, is a vera causa - a cause which produces effects in the physical order. effects which are often far-reaching and important. The action of man's free will, of which the outward effect is the motion of his limbs, is not a violation of the law of causation: that law is true only of physical causes, and the physical sequence is

perfectly observed, so far as we know. But the originating impulse comes from a region other than physical, even from the domain of spirit, where man lives his highest life and from which he catches his highest inspirations. We shall see presently that there is no complete analogy between such intervention of human will in the physical order, and that intervention of the Divine volition which we shall find to be the characteristic of a miracle!; but although the analogy is incomplete, it is important to recognize that we have experience of an intrusion into the physical by the moral order every time that we exert our wills to move our bodies. There are forces other than physical to be reckoned with.

Thus among the agents which can produce effects in the physical order spiritual agents must be counted; and of these the highest is God. And if we are to explain otherwise anomalous phenomena we must give due place to the direct volition of Deity."

The credibility of miracles is readily and clearly explained from this theistic standpoint. Once admit a God, and the possibility of miracles together with their naturalness are explained. For when we balance possibilities and give due weight to the moral aspect we see that the Author of Creation may very naturally desire to give special manifestations of Himself, of His will and His grace to the creatures He has made.

Their value as evidence of divinity and divine au-

thority may be seen in the fact that Christianity was based in part on the attestation of miracles. The Christian Church is a miracle of vast proportions. The resurrection of its great Founder is still more momentous, and the miracles He performed were not successfully disputed but rather used to establish the claims and extend the boundaries of his Kingdom. As against those who have discredited them on meagre scientific grounds, we ask: Have they secured their own proper attitude and bearing; have they defined their own terms; have they rationalized and demonstrated all their own assumptions? We shall also ask: What is the ground and purpose of Christian miracles? that will decide their validity and worth as evidence, since a true miracle must be more than a mere show of power. It must proceed from a good source, aim at a good end, and accomplish a good result. The miracles of Jesus and the Apostles were such, and as such they support their teaching as divinely authorized. We do not hesitate to accept them when we find that their character and quality are in complete harmony with the teaching. The fact that these miracles are all worthy of divine power is strong proof of their validity. None were wrought to please or satisfy the curious. No ostentation can be found in them. All possessed a high moral tone, and were fruitful in good results. All were evidence of divine mercy, pity and love, and were meant to enhance and strengthen the message of life and immortality brought to light in the Gospel. As were those of the Supreme Master, ^{Himself} so were those of

His Apostles with but this exception: they had not, or at least did not use, the power of performing cosmic miracles. The need of such had passed away.

Explanatory

The miracles of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels were not only wonders but also signs for a definite purpose. Mere marvellousness does not require a supernatural cause but may be the result of hitherto unknown physical combinations that have no moral or spiritual meaning. Supernatural miracles are of a higher order but are worked out through the operation of the same laws. Ordinarily we see and know only a fraction of the working of these laws in the labyrinth of their ramifications in the vast universe, but God sees and knows them in their entirety and at his pleasure can and does reveal some of their higher possibilities and products. Professor Sheldon says, "Among the criteria of genuine miracles, and conditions of their evidential value, are to be named in particular the following: (1) intrinsic and recognizable connection with ends that may be regarded as worthy of divine wisdom and benevolence; (2) demonstrated efficiency to impress men healthfully, or to promote their moral and spiritual development; (3) confirmation by a sufficient amount of honest and intelligent testimony." These are the three tests.

As to the definition we shall not attempt a discussion of the whole list offered by partisan or egotistic philosophers, theologians, scientists and metaphysicians to say nothing of unbelievers. But we may form a true and adequate definition of what Christian miracles are, in nature, scope and value by consulting the generally accredited miracles of the

New Testament. And we may say they are supernatural signs and wonders wrought through natural instrumentalities by divine agency for beneficent and worthy ends. We say supernatural, not meaning that which is apart from natural, but as being native to a realm higher than our ordinary level, but by no means unnatural. It is that in fact, which is more natural and more to be credited since it comes more directly from the fingertips of God. We say signs, not meaning mere shows, but visible and tangible indications of divine attestation. The wonders are not mere marvels of good or fearful import to be gazed upon but rather suitable and valuable means for illiciting human admiration and confidence. The natural instrumentalities are, of course, men and things, creatures and laws, both of which are wholly within God's power, especially when the creature is a willing channel of divine graciousness. The Divine Agency is found in the Trinity one or more of whose names are invoked and whose presence is manifested in the event. The ends aimed at are such as affect the entire nature of the subject for physical, psychical, moral and spiritual betterment, and which bring the divine purpose, power and presence into clearer understanding. With the three tests and with this defined definition before us we need not call for aid from Hume or Mill or Darwin or Spencer for they at once fall flat since they fail to notice some of these necessary characteristics. Drummond, Fairbairn, Sheldon and Bowne are much more to the point. The distinction between the natural and the

supernatural has in late years decreased very materially. Indeed we think we should speak more clearly if we should leave the word supernatural out of the discussion and in its place use natural while for that which is beneath or opposed to the latter we might use the term abnatural just as we do in the case of normal and abnormal. If there ever was a crying need for a systematized and harmonious definition of terms in Theology it is today in the midst of the reconstruction of Biblical history and doctrine. For the purpose of laying broad and sufficient foundation for the high demands we are soon to make let us indulge in a brief survey of the history of the Church and miracles with special reference to those of healing in its various forms.

When we review the miracles of Jesus we see at once their universal scope. A glance at his many mighty works reveals the wide and various fields in which he worked and the forces which he called to testify to his divinity. Heaven and earth and hell were placed in the witness-box. Angels and men and demons each in their turn proclaimed his authority supreme. Life and death were equally in his hands; the sea, the storm, the plague, the crowd bent before his power. Devils shuddered at his glance. Death withdrew at his approach and at his command life burst again the barriers of the grave. In the more than fifty miracles which Jesus performed he always kept the means in strict subordination to the ends. There was no ostentation, no incantation, no slight-of-hand, no hypnotism; and.

no serious question was raised regarding his power which was not turned back upon his enemies with double force. The relation of the Messianic miracles to the Apostolic miracles is seen in the method and the means and the results of each and in the fact that the former was the type of the latter.

An examination of the miracles wrought by the Apostles shows that they were closely related to those of the Master in all respects save that which we have previously pointed out. Here then we may assume a divine restriction of the power in the cosmic range based upon the fact that such miracles were no longer necessary. The difference between Christ and the Apostles was greater than that between his works and theirs. The halo of divinity that encircled him, his marvellous influence with men - even with those who sought his life - and his immaculate character have often seemed to set him entirely apart from his followers. But although they were limited creatures their miracles were noble manifestations of divine reinforcement and hold a very significant place in the transition from divine to ordinary miracles and we think their works appeal more directly to us because of their perfectly human level. Especially do we feel their value when we see such men doing the "greater works" on the day of Pentecost. Well attested miracles of a high order performed through divine power by strictly human agents ought to be readily and easily accepted by us since the Apostles were given the power and their works were the natural result.

The commission to these men was that they should preach the presence of the kingdom and "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils". Preaching and healing in their various forms were the two great pillars on which the Empire of Christ should be founded and sustained, and no word from Jesus has ever withdrawn or annulled the commission nor do we find any authority given to or employed by the Apostles whereby the latter part was abrogated in any sense or degree. The modern Church alone, influenced by the materialism of the age, has practically if not theoretically countermanded it so that the Church, the Bride, has lamely limped for centuries. She has still two limbs but one has become much like a wooden stump so that she is herself in dire need of just such healing as she ought to be dispensing to the world.

A review of the Miracles of the Apostles as found in the Acts will show how fully they entered into and strove to fulfill the behest of Christ both before and after his Ascension. In this record we are told of the healing of the sick, the casting out of demons and the raising of the dead. In 5.16 we have the report of the cures accomplished at Jerusalem by Peter and his shadow; in 19.12 there is the record of similar cures at Ephesus by Paul and the handkerchiefs and aprons laid upon his body; and in 28.8 the healing of the father of Publius in the island of Melita is ascribed to Paul. In 3.7 we have the renewal of impotent ankles by Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate; and in 14.8 a similar case relieved by

Paul at Lystra. In 9.34 Peter is reported to have cured Eneas a paralytic at Lydda. In 5.16 besides the healing of the sick we read of demons being cast out by Peter; and in 16.18 that Paul exorcised a spirit of divination at Philippi. In 9.37 Tabitha (Dorcas) was raised from the dead by Peter at Lydda; and in 20.9 Eutyclus was raised from apparent death by Paul at Troas. In 13.11 Paul called down blindness on Elymas the sorcerer of Cypress; and in 5.5-10 Peter's rebuke caused, or at least was immediately followed by, the death of Ananias and Sapphira. There is also the report of the Seventy who returned to Christ in great joy because they had proved the power of faith in the relief of the sick and demonized. As in the case of the miracles of Jesus so with those of his disciples, the fact their nature and their value are all unquestioned and their relation to post-Apostolic miracles is one of continuance of the divine power and of their position as essential elements in the Christian system.

As to post-Apostolic miracles in the range of healing we have an abundance of evidence from various trustworthy writers: Justin Martyr says, "Many Christians exorcise demons from numberless demoniacs in the city of Rome and throughout the whole world." Irenaeus says, "That some cast out devils is a matter that cannot be called in question." Tertullian, reproaching certain heathens, refers to demons being expelled by Christians without price or reward. Origen and Athanasius corroborate these by similar testimony.

We are aware that many of the reports are padded and in some cases exaggerated beyond all belief but that there was a ground of truth and fact is not to be lightly disputed, and ought to be admitted if the miracles satisfy the tests and the definition. The question as to when miracles ceased in the history of the Church is a vexed one. Some say they ended with the Apostles since their function^{as evidence} was no longer required. Others say the power extended to those disciples upon whom the Apostles conferred it. Still others have thought that they continued down to Constantine when Christianity was protected by civil authority. The Romish Church has always claimed the power, and various sects still seem to possess and utilize it to great profit and advantage. We readily believe in the miracles of Jesus and do not dispute the majority of those performed by his followers, at least down to the fourth century, and there is no good and sufficient reason why we should not accept at least some of those reported by later writers of later times. We are not asked to receive all, but only to agree to the fact of the persistence of the power as a permanent possession within human bounds, and even though it were proved that the power was unused for centuries it would not be proved to be non-existent. The claim that the law of divine economy forbids belief in many so-called miracles has not sufficient weight to shut out all such phenomena, and the fact that so-called modern miracles do not possess the "sign" characteristic is answered by the other fact that thera-

peutic miracles have not needed such significance since Christianity became ~~a~~ ^{the} world-religion. The relation of the post-Apostolic miracles to those of our own day is that of a connecting link between the Apostolic and the modern Church. God has not left himself without witnesses to the truth which must save us from the sins of the soul, nor has he left us without examples of the power which must save us from the ills of the body. The Fathers of the Church and the true followers of Christ in Mediaeval times, in spite of the darkness which overshadowed them, kept the sacred fire of faith ever burning on the altar of devotion and secured to us this heritage of power.

Modern miracles of healing are unquestioned when they fulfill the full definition and satisfy the tests. Why call every such occurrence a mere coincidence? Why not give it its proper name? Of what are we afraid? The cry that spirituality would suffer is puerile and unwarranted since education will maintain our dual duty in proper balance. The cry that there are really no modern miracles because there is no further need of them must be rejected as untrue; (1) because it is a careless generalization which overlooks the necessity of stating what kinds of miracles are uncalled-for to-day; (2) because if it means that miracles of healing are not present-day phenomena there are thousands to take exception to the allegation; and (3) because if it means that there is no pressing need of such it must be the baseless inference of

a deaf, dumb, blind maniac who in spite of his protest is himself an example of that very need. Opposed to these two unfounded cries we present the cry of those who are in dire need of aid. The cries of the whole and the healthy are louder by reason of more strength, while the cries of the forsaken sick are faint by reason of low vitality. The latter, however, demand a hearing. They need the physician and to meet their need various organizations have sprung up.

Faith Healing in all ages has done much to alleviate the pains and sicknesses of men. Some of its devotees and leaders such as Dowle, Sandford, and Schlatter have gone to extremes and received their just rebukes, but there are those like Simpson and his co-laborers who preach the Gospel of Healing, and base their practice on a saner philosophy and a safer theology so that at least some of the results they have achieved are incontrovertible. We must grant that they have done some things of value in this field. If their exegesis is faulty let us confine our criticism to it but admit the facts regarding their practical pathological methods and results. Let us not underrate, in our care not to overrate their worth. If they have discovered and improved a force or power which the Church has lost or failed to utilize, let us not show a jealous spirit, but rather admit it and give them credit while we take immediate steps to retrieve our loss and restore the Church's power. One Church there is which claims no need of such a restoration and to substantiate its atti-

tude points with pride to remarkable cures wrought through the agency of various relics, pictures, pilgrimages and washings, but the innumerable failures and the questionable methods discredit the whole scheme.

The success of Mental Suggestion as a power in healing is fast finding wider adoption. The followers of Swedenborg claim him as father of modern mental healing but their silly psychology regarding the influxes of good and evil into the brain and their excessively mystical theology are revolting. Mental Healing as an art is not new but the readjustment of it on a scientific basis is of late date. At first those who practised it utilized various material aids such as: an amulet about the neck, a potato in the pocket, a strap around the wrist, bread pills, colored water and the like. We do not, however, believe that these things caused the cures, but that the resultant and sustained thought-attitudes were responsible for the remedies. Such healing is not a religious result for it may be accomplished by the atheist as well as by the theist but the latter is surely in the better position to expect and receive and deliver the highest and the most permanent benefits.

The great growth of neurotic and disordered temperaments is ever increasing. Nervous manias which attach to some strenuous lines of conduct, whether good or bad, are often beyond the powers of the ordinary physician or clergyman. Thus the opportunity for various kinds of medicine-men has

arisen. The reestablishment of the Church's authority and power in the above diseases has been taken up by such men as Worcester, McComb, Fallows, Quackenbos, and others and bids fair to become an important interest of the Christian ministry of our time and indeed of all succeeding years. The dual nature of man calls for physicians and psychicans. Let each perform his part in mutual association from the Christian standpoint as colaborers with God. No drug can cure a moral depravity and no suggestion can reach an organic dislocation but with the two-edged sword all diseases may be met and vanquished.

Christian Science has also produced a variety of results in this field. Its claims are enormous, much more so than can be sustained by actual evidence. The claims are more than the cures. This so-called Science has been critically dealt with from many sides by able and distinguished writers: from the standpoint of metaphysics and philosophy by Professors Bowne and Rishell of Boston University; from the theological and therapeutic standpoints by O. W. Hutchinson of Leominster, Mass.; and from the personal and legal points of view by F. W. Peabody of the Boston bar. All have shown the untenable, unscientific, unphilosophical and unchristian character of the cult as well as its contradictory, heterogeneous, quasi-religious and misleading aspects. We must, however, admit three points: (1) that any new cult or religious system is more easily and disastrously attacked at its incep-

tion and during its early development than at any other time; (2) that in spite of the grave and defenseless fallacies found, it possesses a peculiar vitality whether inherent in its leader or in its organization, and bids fair to live a reasonable time; (3) that through its various agencies and instrumentalities it has gained wide prestige and has done some remarkable things for which "coincidence" will not always account. It is quite evident that those who practice this method are closely related to long established mental healers and that most of their cures are wrought through the mind: All true psychologists agree that the mind can successfully assail and drive out such demons as insanity, nervous prostration, melancholia, dyspepsia, fevers, skin diseases, etc., for scientists have shown that the secretions of the body are governed largely by the emotional states of the mind. But the mind cannot fully cure what it has not caused, so we need hygiene and scientific medical treatment to supplement right thinking if we are to succeed in physical maladies. Correct the organic and physical, and nature will do much to restore health while the maintenance of various mental attitudes will greatly aid, augment, and accelerate the work of natural recuperation.

The cures which have taken place while patients have been under Christian Science treatment have been shown to be those which any one capable of inducing hopefulness in despairing minds can readily perform. The true physician and

the optimistic pastor both may be physicians of a high order and effectiveness. My thesis is that it is now time for the Church to recognize these imperative possibilities and begin at once to undertake this neglected phase of her great commission.

In most cases of healing then, we see the importance of the mental attitude. Not that it is indispensable for we know that the physical constitution of infants and idiots and the lower animals responds to drugs and curative agents without any distinct mental aid, but that the psychic powers may and should be utilized in more ways than they are at present. The commission to preach has never been abrogated nor has the power to heal the sick been withdrawn. Indeed the truth is they have always been recognized by at least a few as being the twin bulwarks of Christian service. The stages in the evolution of miracles are unbroken. There is no missing link. The golden cord of divine agency has remained intact throughout the ages. The Great Commission still awaits complete and harmonious representation before the world. The Church ought not to be satisfied with preaching and visiting and keeping itself unspotted from the world but should rise to her whole duty or hear the words, "These ye ought to have done and not to have left the other undone". The fact that so many unreligious and non-religious agencies are coming to man's rescue ought to be a signal to the Church to arise and dispel the darkness and disease that enswathe the victims of sin.

Hortatory.

The age of miracles has not passed away. Wonders never cease. The need is just as imperative as ever. The opportunities are more numerous. The possibilities are more encouraging. The latest findings of philosophy lend more support than ever. The equipment of the Church is more complete than in any previous age. Her demands for purity of life and rectitude of conduct and Christ-likeness of character; her teaching of faith and hope and love; her emphasis on music and beauty and truth; her almost infinite fund of suggestion and contemplation and example; her helpful environment with stress on healthful amusements and occupations, altogether make the Church of Christ the most natural and powerful agency in securing the welfare of the race.

The Church does not hesitate to perform grand moral miracles in the lives of men. Why should she shudder and recoil at the thought of dealing with man's physical nature? If she can and does do the "greater works", why not the lesser? Surely the God that stands back of the moral and spiritual renovation of men at the hands of the Church, will not leave her when she attempts to alleviate the mere physical misfortunes which attach to life.

The charm of the impossible ought to attract us especially when we recognize that the impossibility is only nominal. We have not yet wholly discovered the mighty forces

that lie at our disposal. We have not yet measured the sublime possibilities of a human life fully surrendered to divine control. Let the Church come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty and the help of the Lord will come to her so that she may laugh at the impossibilities of materialism, and cry, "They are being done"!

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