

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_jtvi-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_jtvi-01.php)

JOURNAL OF  
THE TRANSACTIONS

OF

The Victoria Institute,

OR,

Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

---

VOL. LXIX.



LONDON :

Published by the Institute, 1, Central Buildings, Westminster, S.W.1.

---

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

1937

## 812TH ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING.

HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM B, THE CENTRAL HALL,  
WESTMINSTER, S.W.1, ON MONDAY, MAY 24TH, 1937,  
AT 4.30 P.M.

R. DUNCAN, ESQ., M.B.E., I.S.O., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the previous Meeting were read, confirmed and signed, and the HON. SECRETARY announced the election of Major H. B. Clarke, R.E. (ret.), as an Associate.

The CHAIRMAN then called on Mr. W. H. Boulton to read his paper, entitled "Miracle ; a Necessary Adjunct of Revelation" (being the Langhorne Orchard Prize Essay, 1936).

---

### *MIRACLE ; A NECESSARY ADJUNCT OF REVELATION.*

By W. H. BOULTON, ESQ.

Being the Langhorne Orchard Prize Essay, 1936.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

AS the foundation of the Langhorne Orchard essays directly connects them with the general ideas of the Harmony of the Holy Scriptures with Science or Philosophy, the Revelation referred to in the present essay will be taken to apply to the Book which is known as the Bible, otherwise referred to as the Holy Scriptures, and concerning which the Apostle Paul predicated inspiration in his epistle to Timothy.\* Any claims to revelation that might be made for any other religious writings will be ignored.

With regard to the terms Miracle and Revelation the following are the definitions given in a dictionary of repute. "Miracle. A wonder or a wonderful thing, a marvel, specifically an event or effect in the physical world beyond, or out of, the ordinary course of things, deviating from the known laws of nature, or transcending our knowledge of those laws ; an event which cannot be accounted for by any of the known forces of nature, and which is therefore, attributed to a supernatural force." "Revelation. An act of revealing or communicating Divine truth, specifically the disclosure or manifestation of Himself, or of His will, by God to man, as through some wondrous act that

---

\* 2 Tim. iii, 15 and 16.

awes and impresses, through oracular words, signs, laws, etc., or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”\* Both these definitions might be extended, but they are sufficient for the purpose in view, and are a fair expression of what is intended to be conveyed by the words in this essay.

It has been contended that miracles are impossible or incredible. That argument is passed over for the moment ; after all, it is merely a dictum, whereas the question of the occurrence of miracles is a matter of fact and a question of evidence. That evidence does not entirely depend upon the testimony of witnesses. As will be seen later, reason leads to the conclusion that if Revelation ever took place it was desirable that there should have been some indication by which people might be able to know that it was a Revelation and not the mere expression of thoughts which had been passing through a speaker’s or a writer’s mind. An ambassador must possess and present his credentials. If that is so between human governments it must be at least equally so when the speaker or writer professes to be declaring truths from God. Such a one must be prepared to produce his credentials when making known new truths or new aspects of the Divine purpose. The reason for the qualification of the statement by the word “ new ” will appear shortly.

#### AN HISTORICAL REVIEW.

It is a notable fact that in the Scriptural record of Miracles there are three principal periods in which they were of frequent occurrence. They were not confined to those times, but they happened then on a scale never reached at other periods. These three were the days associated with Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and His apostles. This is a fact which invites attention ; there must have been a reason for it. It will be found that the reason will help to make clear the connection that exists between Miracles and Revelation.

#### MOSES AND JOSHUA.

When Moses appeared in Egypt with a message to the Israelites that the God of their fathers was about to deliver them from the bondage under which they groaned, he told them something which must have seemed well-nigh incredible. For many years they had been mere slaves. They longed for deliverance, many

\* *Webster’s International Dictionary.*

doubtless prayed for it, but when Moses came with his message, how were they to know that he had really received it from God? How could they be sure that he was able to lead them to the land that had been promised to their fathers? The record of the Exodus is so familiar to us that we seldom stay to realise the circumstances that attended it. At the time the Egyptians were the most powerful nation in the world, and they held the Israelites as serfs. In such circumstances the claims of Moses to have received a revelation, when Aaron on his behalf "spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto him," were scarcely likely to carry conviction to either Israelites or Egyptians. He needed some credentials to uphold his claim. When he performed the "signs" before the eyes of the leaders of Israel "the people believed." In this case, therefore, Miracles were a necessary adjunct to Revelation. The signs that followed in the plagues that, one after another, fell upon the Egyptians, and the indication of Divine powers in connection with the crossing of the Red Sea, were further signs that gave Moses an assured position among the people, and prepared them to listen when, in after times, he declared to them the things which he said the Lord had spoken to him.

When, after Moses' death, Joshua undertook the leadership of the people, he had the advantage of having been associated with Moses. Some of the prestige of the past still attached to him, yet the lengthened day, or rather night, in response to his adjuration, "Sun, stand thou still (or, be silent) upon Gibeon; And thou, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon,"\* must have been accepted by the people as a further instance of Miracle which served to confirm the words he addressed to them. It must be granted that there was not much of actual Revelation in the things which he is recorded to have said.

#### ELIJAH AND ELISHA.

It was not until the times of Elijah and Elisha that a further series of Miracles occurred in Israel. From the time of the Conquest until then the history of the people pursued a normal course. The essential idea that bound the tribes together was the common worship of Yahweh. There were many failures, apostacies, and, more or less sincere, recoveries, but no definite challenge to the supremacy of Yahweh arose during that period. Even the calves at Bethel and Dan seem to have been regarded

---

\* Joshua x, 12 and 13.

as the representations of Yahweh.\* It was the adoption of new centres and a form of worship, not a new object of worship. When Omri and Ahab reigned over Israel it was altogether different. The alliance with Phœnicia introduced a rival God, and the worship of Baal brought in by Jezebel, spread like a plague through the kingdom. It was a definite crisis and there was a necessity for it to be unmistakably demonstrated that the only true God was Yahweh. That necessity accounted for the scene on Mount Carmel, when "the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offerings, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."† The "sign" thus given was sufficient, and the cry burst forth from the assembled multitudes, "Yahweh He is the God." It was an occasion when Miracle was required, and it inaugurated a period, especially in the life of Elisha, when Miracles were frequent.

In a sense Elijah and Elisha inaugurated a new era in Israel—the era of the prophets. They lived in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries B.C., and before the later century had expired Amos and Hosea commenced the work of the prophets whose writings have been preserved in the Bible. It may be objected that these prophets did not as a rule appeal to miracles or signs.‡ But there was a good reason for this. They were not heralds of a new message, they only emphasised and explained the principles that had been laid down by Moses, and the claims of Yahweh to be the sole object of worship, which Elijah had established by his ordeal by fire and water. The prophets made no claim to change the ordinances, they did not overrule the laws as to sacrifices and oblations. What they did was to show the futility of bringing "vain oblations"; they showed that such sacrifices, carried out with unclean hands and defiled minds, were useless. The greatest of them all, Isaiah, has expressed the message of the prophets in a nutshell. "Wash you and make you clean." "Cease to do evil, learn to do well."§ Such sayings were but the repetition in other words of the injunction through Moses, "Be ye holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." Hence the scarcity of Miracles during the period of the prophets.

\* 1 Kings xii, 26–30. Jeroboam's son's name was Abijah-Yahweh his father.

† 1 Kings xviii.

‡ The backward motion of the shadow on the dial of King Ahaz is an illustration of an exception.

§ Isaiah i. 13–17.

## JESUS OF NAZARETH.

The periods of the Exile and of the Restoration introduced no new principles of religion amongst the people, they rather drove them to a more rigid interpretation and practice of the law and ritual of the past. This tendency finally resulted in the adoption of an almost lifeless formalism until Jesus of Nazareth appeared with an entirely new Revelation of, and from, God, though it must be remembered it was based on the old, for He declared that not one jot or one tittle should pass from the Law till all things should be accomplished.

In the new conception of religion which Jesus announced he went further than any of the prophets had done. With Him religion meant not only the control of deeds and words, but even of thoughts. He added to the old Law when He said, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you, Swear not at all."\* He went still further for He said "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."† "Love your enemies, pray for them that persecute you,"‡ He made statements that cut at the very root of their religious complacency. "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness."§ He claimed to be the Son of God||; who was to lay down His life and take it again¶; and as the last stage of His mission was reached he made the explicit assertion that those to whom He spoke would "deliver Him unto the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify; and the third day He shall be raised up."\*\*\*

His saying involved such a complete revolution in the ideas of those who heard, and accepted, Him, that He Himself recognised that in the absence of any credentials they could not

---

\* Matthew v, 33 and 34.

† *Ibid.* v, 44.

‡ John x, 36.

\*\* Matthew xx, 19.

† *Ibid.* v, 38 and 39.

§ Matthew viii, 11 and 72.

¶ *Ibid.* v, 17 and 18.

be blamed if they rejected Him altogether. Thus He said, "If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin,"\* that is in rejecting Him. The same principle underlies His statements "If I do not the works of My Father, believe Me not. But if I do them, though ye believe Me not, believe the works; that ye may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father,"† for "the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me."‡ One of His most definite statements was, "The witness which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me."§

Sayings such as these must bring all thoughtful readers of the gospels to the crux of the matter. Jesus' claims were so unique that there was a definite necessity for Him to give some indication of His right to make them. Those indications, or signs, were not mere wonders, they were, almost without exception, beneficent acts. The sick were healed, sight was given to the blind, lepers were cleansed, even the dead were raised. It is to be particularly noticed that these signs were not given to make men glorify the doer, but to give Divine attestation to the things that He said. They established His claim to be the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel, though He was a very different Messiah from the one they had been expecting. Looking at Jesus of Nazareth, and bearing in mind the extraordinary character of His claims, it is easy to see that in His case Miracles were a necessary adjunct to the Revelation He made.

One of those Miracles is an excellent illustration of the principle that was involved. It was the cure of the Centurion's servant. It will be recalled that when the Centurion came to Jesus to tell Him that his servant was sick, Jesus replied, "I will come and heal him." The Centurion responded that he was not worthy of so great an honour, but, he said, "only say the word and my servant shall be healed." Then he added, "For I also am a man under authority, having under myself soldiers; and I say to this one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it."|| No saying could better sum up the situation. He recognised Jesus as being in some way in a similar position

\* John xv, 22.

† *Ibid.* v, 25.

‡ John x, 37 and 38.

§ John v, 36.

|| Matthew xiii, 9.



to himself, one under authority and having authority to do certain things because of the authority that had been given Him. The saying is remarkable as showing that a belief in the reality of the works done by Jesus must have been sufficiently widespread to have reached the ears of a Roman centurion, and that in a way that convinced him of its truth.

There is another aspect in which the Miracles of Christ may be viewed. The primary object of His preaching was the salvation of men. His death and subsequent resurrection, itself a Miracle, were the bases on which this was to be effected, and His Miracles were an indication to His contemporaries that such a salvation was possible. When, for example, He said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," a necessary thing in the larger sense if salvation is to be possible, or, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her," he was saying things which could be, and were, challenged, and which, in themselves, he could not prove. But when, in the former case, he added "Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins are forgiven; or to say, Arise and walk," and then, turning to the man said, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and go unto thy house,"\* the mouths of cavillers were stopped, and the Miracle was seen to be a Divine credential, authorising the words that He had spoken. In such a setting Miracles were not mere wonders, they were a part of the Revelation which Jesus had to make concerning Himself and the Father. Having regard to the character of the Revelation that was given through Him, Miracles must be recognised as a necessary means of conveying God's endorsement of the remarkable things He said. His claims were tremendous. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." In the absence of some attestation which would show that God was with Him, such claims could only have met with universal rejection. In the circumstances it will easily be realised why His Miracles were so many and so varied, and why they happened on a scale far greater than in any previous age.

#### THE APOSTOLIC AGE.

After Jesus had finished His mission and had ascended to the Father, His Apostles entered upon the work which He had commissioned them to do. They went forth with a new

---

\* Matthew ix, 2-7.

revelation. Admittedly it had its roots in the old religion of Israel, yet it was essentially new. It is necessary to consider it in two aspects, first, as it appeared to the Jews, and then as it appeared to the Gentiles.

Included in the Apostolic doctrines were two things which, on natural principles, were impossible—the Virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Jesus. These were both miraculous events ; they are also essential elements of the Christian religion. Any form of Christianity which excludes either or both of these doctrines, is not real Christianity at all. A merely casual examination of the New Testament will show that both are included in the essentials of Apostolic doctrine.

It is, of course, possible, that some progress might have been made among the Jews by appeals to the Old Testament in support of these events. There are certain statements which exactly fit in with them. But even that would have been a recognition of Miracle, for such a prevision of events of so startling a nature would have been miracles of foreknowledge. It is very certain, however, that such a course would never have met with so phenomenal a success as attended the early preaching of the Apostles in Jerusalem, when the “ number of the names ” jumped from 120 to 3,000 and then to 5,000. Yet such a success was necessary if a real impression was to be made on the people in those early days. Something more was essential, and that something was Miracle. One aspect existed in the empty tomb in the garden to Joseph of Arimathea (its empty condition being a standing witness to the most remarkable Miracle of all), together with the “ signs and wonders that were wrought by the Apostles. Many of these were performed under circumstances which ensured the widest publicity. They were notorious, and no explanation of them, other than the true one, ever seems to have been suggested. Thus when the High Priest had Peter and John before him, his enquiry was, “ By what power, or in what name have ye done this ? ” His words were a tacit admission that a miracle had been performed. When the proceedings were over they said “ What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle (or sign) hath been wrought through them, is manifest to all that dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it.”\*

---

\* Acts iv, 7 and 16.

It will be observed that, as in the case of Jesus, the signs were almost all of a beneficent character, and they thus took their place in endorsing the otherwise almost incredible proclamation that One who had been publicly executed, had risen from the dead, and was now the Prince of Life, the Saviour of mankind. They constituted the one way in which God could, and did, "confirm the word by signs following." The Apostles themselves recognised this, hence their prayer, "And now, Lord, look upon their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants to speak the word with all boldness, while Thou stretchest forth Thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Thy holy Servant Jesus."\*

When we turn to the Apostolic proclamation to the Gentiles, the fact that Miracles were necessary to make their Revelation likely to be accepted by their hearers is seen in an even clearer light. Some time before the end of the first half-century of the Christian Era three men set out from Antioch for an extended tour in Gentile lands. They were Saul of Tarsus, Barnabas, and Mark. They were going into countries where the name of Jesus, and the prophecies of the Old Testament were unknown, except by the few Jews who dwelt among them, who knew something of the latter. What were the tidings they were to announce? Their message was, that Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew who had been rejected by His own people, and had been ignominiously put to death by the Roman Governor of Judea, had, contrary to all precedent, been raised from the dead, and was alive for ever more; that he had been seen by a number of people for many days, and then, again contrary to all precedents known to the Gentiles, had ascended bodily to heaven. There He was acting as a Mediator between God and men. until the time should come for Him to return to the earth to establish a new kingdom, the Kingdom of God. He was announced as "another king, one Jesus."

Could any proclamation appear more hopeless of being accepted? Yet there was more than that. This Jesus was a Saviour, who was to be for salvation unto the uttermost parts of the earth. This was something quite outside the philosophy of the age, for it applied to all, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, even slaves were invited to participate in it. Still that was not all, there was a element in their teaching that must

---

\* *Ibid.* iv, 29 and 30.

on no account be omitted. As Paul and Barnabas returned (Mark had done so earlier), they called at the various cities where they had preached "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."\* A proclamation such as has been outlined, the acceptance of which involved the prospect of "many tribulations" required something more than the words of two Jews to secure its acceptance. Yet it is recorded that at Iconium, for example, "a great multitude both of Jews and Greeks believed." At Derbe they made many disciples. There is only one explanation which will account for the success that attended their labours, and that is that they were enabled to add the evidence of miraculous deeds to their words. "They tarried . . . speaking boldly in the Lord, which bare witness unto the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands."† Having regard to the nature of the things they proclaimed, and the things that were likely to come upon those who believed them, it must be recognised that something more than mere words were necessary. Miracles were essential to the success of their mission.

It may be urged against the argument of the foregoing paragraph that in modern times missionary efforts have resulted in a wide acceptance of the Christian religion among peoples who knew no more of it than did the inhabitants of Antioch, Iconium, or Derbe. There seems to be some force in this at first, yet it is easily replied to. There is an essential difference between the two cases. Modern missionaries carry a message from the most highly civilised, to the more backward, races of mankind. Their very standing adds to the strength of their message. It was not so in the case of the early Christian missionaries, for many of those to whom they addressed themselves were quite as advanced in the scale of civilisation as they were themselves, indeed, some of them were among the most highly developed peoples of the earth. Then, too, the results were quite different. Long and persistent effort now produces some response, and Christianity gradually finds acceptance among the nations of heathendom. In the case of the Apostles and their helpers they seldom stayed in any place long, they were more like itinerant preachers, going from place to place,

---

\* Acts xiv, 22.

† Acts xiv, 3.

yet great numbers accepted their message, and joined the company of those who believed in the crucified, but risen, Christ. Looking at all the circumstances of the case, only one explanation of such a remarkable success is possible, and that is the one given by the Apostle himself, "And I, brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the mystery of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but *in demonstration of the Spirit and of power*, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."\*

#### THE NECESSITY FOR MIRACLES.

The foregoing brief review of the place of miracles in Bible history has practically shown their necessity in certain circumstances. There can be no question that as age has succeeded age new phases of Revelation have been made known. Moses announced a Divine message. The prophets declared various "burdens of the Lord," Jesus proclaimed an entirely new doctrine. "Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you." The Apostles announced a message that was almost incredible. By what means were people to be led to believe them? In cases where the messages were the direct outcome of previous beliefs the sayings might have been commended to the hearers by appeals to reason, though even in such cases something more must often have been desired. But in many instances the messages did not apparently arise out of past beliefs, they were new aspects altogether. Granting that these messages were new Revelations, how were the hearers to know that they were so? Mere assertion proved nothing. The earnestness of the speakers was no proof that their messages were from God. It is difficult to see any other way in which their words could have been shown to be Revelations from God, other than that which was afforded by Miracles. It has been truly said that "the only possible proof of a Revelation is Miracles, and that nothing else can give sufficiently authoritative testimony."

---

\* 1 Corinthians ii, 1-5.

## CAN MIRACLES HAPPEN ?

Of course, if the saying that miracles cannot happen can be sustained there is an end of the matter, and there can be no proof of a Revelation. But is such a conclusion justified? The statement is based upon the idea that natural laws are unalterable and inexorable. If God, a personal God, were ruled out of the matter, this might be a fact. Assuming the existence of God (and a claim to Revelation makes this assumption), we are bound to allow for what may be described as the free will of God. The highest form of beings of whom we have practical knowledge are ourselves, and one of the things that particularly characterises us as human beings is the possession of a free will. We can do, or refrain from doing, a certain act. If we have a definite object in view we will do things that otherwise we would not do. If we say that God cannot act similarly we reduce Him to something less in the scale than ourselves in that respect, and that is inconceivable. If Revelation is a fact, and the title of the essay assumes that it is, and the Bible is that Revelation, then it follows that God had a purpose with mankind for the fulfilment of which He has been, and is, working. On these premises it may be concluded that He may have caused things to happen quite outside the operation of what are termed natural laws, for the purpose of showing that the things which were being announced, whether by Moses or the prophets, by Jesus or His Apostles, were the things that He had commissioned them to say. The greater the importance of their announcements, the greater the likelihood of miracles.

There is just one other point that should be noticed before coming to a conclusion. It is to be noted that many of the things that are spoken of as miracles, and which are said to be contrary to natural laws, may not necessarily have been so; in certain instances they may have been done by the operation of higher laws of which we, as yet, know nothing. The laws which govern the course of nature have been intensively studied during the last hundred years, and very much is known now which was not so much as thought of in, say, 1800. Imagine any one in that year showing his fellows a case which appeared to speak with a human voice, or to produce sounds like those of a military band. Such a thing would have been as incredible as the Miracles of the Bible, yet to-day such a thing is one of the commonplaces of life. He would be a bold man indeed who ventured to set a

limit to the possible discoveries and inventions of man, or who stated that every possible law which governs natural things has been discovered by him. Some, though by no means all, of the Miracles of Jesus were the hastening of processes which regularly take place. Others were quite outside such processes, yet to take an extreme case of Miracle, the raising of Lazarus, it would be absurd to conclude that He who could truthfully say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" could not raise Lazarus from the dead in attestation of that claim.

#### MIRACLES OF KNOWLEDGE.

A passing allusion has been made to prophecies. To unerringly foretell the future is as impossible for human beings as giving sight to the blind. Yet such a thing has been done by many of those who have taken a part in the production of the Bible. The continued existence of the Jews,\* though dispersed among all nations, the utter end of Nineveh,† and the complete desolation of Ancient Babylon,‡ are in exact accord with the declarations of various prophets. Such predictions were Miracles of knowledge which cannot be accounted for on any known principle of natural foresight. They may be regarded as collateral evidence that Miracles of power also were not only possible, but probable, and that they sometimes marked the ministry of those who proclaimed the fundamental principles that govern the dealings of God with men, and the salvation which he purposed for them. The fruition of that purpose is based upon the great outstanding miracle of the past, the resurrection of Jesus, who was delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification.

#### DISCUSSION.

The CHAIRMAN (Mr. R. DUNCAN) said: Ladies and Gentlemen, Borrowing an illustration from human institutions, it may be said, with all reverence, that the King Eternal, Immortal and Invisible rules His creation constitutionally. He does not, that is to say, govern capriciously, but in accordance with good and stable laws which, in His own wisdom, He has ordained, and which operate universally.

---

\* Jeremiah xxx, 11. Luke xxi, 24.

† Nahum ch. i.

‡ Isaiah xiii. 19-22.

Within His prerogative there are, however, reserved powers, not ordinarily coming into play, but exercised in particular circumstances according to the good counsel of His own will. To the manifestations of these reserved powers we apply the term "Miracle."

It is more than probable, for God is not the author of confusion, that Miracles, when they occur, are also subject to and pervaded by law, but our present powers of vision are too dim and limited clearly to discern its outlines.

The argument of the very helpful paper to which we have just been listening implies, and I think rightly, that the necessity of miracle as an adjunct to Revelation arises from man's slowness of heart to believe the word of the Most High, or to abide steadfast in that belief.

To accept His word implicitly, and without the backing of any apparent proof, that is what the Lord most glorious truly delights in, and when Abram showed faith of this nature we read that it was accounted to him for righteousness. But with the Lord there is compassion, too, for feebleness of faith, and, in the case of Gideon, He gave sign after sign, with the object of quickening to fullness of growth and vigour a faith that at first was but as a grain of mustard seed.

It may, indeed, justly be inferred from the Scriptures generally that the primary aim of the Miracles was to evoke or to confirm belief in God as the ruler of all, and nigh at the same time to all who call upon Him in truth.

Yet has not this gracious intent of the Heavenly Father largely proved fruitless because of the blindness of men's hearts? In the days gone by it was written of Israel that "they soon forgot His works," and of these more modern times is it not true that to boast rather of the greatness of man's works has become the prevailing tendency? And even in Christian pulpits, where there still should be a readiness to dwell on the mighty acts of the Lord, there is seldom any allusion now to His wonders of old. All the more timely, then, is such a paper as the one we have before us this afternoon.

The appeal of the miraculous ordinarily reaches the spirit of man through the avenue of his eyesight. The signs wherewith Moses was commissioned would have been devoid of convincing power to others if performed only in the dark, or before people who could not



see. This truism is briefly expressed in the popular phrase "Seeing is believing." Yet we have, on the other hand, the pregnant saying of the risen Christ, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Blind Bartimæus is possibly a good illustration of this latter and more profound truth. Here was one, dwelling in the dark, who could never have seen any of the miracles of Jesus, and whose knowledge of Him must have come only from popular report. Yet Bartimæus had in his own mind reached the assurance that Jesus was truly the Messiah long expected, the Son of David, while the thronging multitudes who daily saw His works could as yet only think of Him as the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. Yes, there is a deeper quality somehow in faith that cometh by hearing than in that resulting from sight.

Miracle as a subject of study is fascinating in all its aspects. I am particularly attracted by the miracles that reveal God's power over the animal creation. Beasts of the earth, birds of the air and fishes of the sea all have wills and dispositions of their own. Yet they are as wholly at the Lord's command as are the winds and the waves and all the other impersonal forces of nature. Consider for a little the feeding of Elijah by the ravens. The raven is essentially an independent rover, shunning usually the neighbourhood of man. Yet to birds of this indocile nature was committed the task of ministering daily to the prophet's needs. And how punctually they carried it out over an extended period, bringing him bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening! Did they gather this provision here and there in the ordinary course of foraging, or was there, so to speak, some depot to which they were directed, and where they found the food all ready to be carried away? Was there only one pair of ravens engaged, or did relays take up the work? Details such as these are not revealed, but they are implicit in the miracle, and we may legitimately speculate concerning them. One thing is certain. The whole episode must, to Elijah himself, have been a wonderful lesson in faith, preparing him to act forthwith on the succeeding strange command to proceed to Zarephath of Zidon, where, in the midst of the prevailing famine, a widow woman would sustain him.

Nowadays, however, belief in God's manifestation of Himself through miracle has gravely declined. In this respect the position

generally may be said to be one of ebb-tide. The witness of the Christian Church in the matter has grown faltering instead of remaining strong and clear. Those who still glory in the truth that the Christian gospel, both in its foundations and its ultimate hopes, is indissolubly bound up with the miraculous are possibly now a minority. There is good reason, therefore, to welcome Mr. Boulton's paper, which is, in effect, a defence of the Church's earlier and more universal standpoint. The paper seems to me to be marked throughout by clarity, sobriety and strength. It brings home to one's spirit with freshness of conviction the necessity that miracle should have mingled with revelation in the age-long process of God making Himself known to mankind. It gives a glimpse, too, of the Divine wisdom and prudence with which such miraculous workings have always been guided and controlled.

I have pleasure, therefore, in moving a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Boulton.

Dr. J. BARCROFT ANDERSON said : Belief in the 19th and 20th verses of the first chapter of Romans is obviously impossible, if you believe miracle to be a necessary adjunct of revelation. I translate those verses thus : " The acquired-knowledge of the God, a revealed-thing is in men (literally ' them ' ) : for the God to them has revealed it. For the unseen things of Him—even His eternal power and godhead—since the formation of the world, by the made-things, being mentally understood, are clearly-seen."

Mr. SIDNEY COLLETT said : One hesitates to criticise so good a paper. But I suggest that the author's remark in the last paragraph on page 283, where he says : " Jesus proclaimed an entirely new doctrine. Ye have heard . . . but I say unto you," calls for some comment. The reason is that putting it in that way is certainly misleading, since it implies that Christ altered the Law, which He Himself says He did not. Indeed, it is not a little remarkable that almost at the beginning of His Sermon on the Mount our Lord uttered this most solemn warning on that very subject : " Think not that I am come to destroy the Law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." (Matt. v, 17.) Hence it is evident that Christ foreknew that some of His words might some day be misinterpreted. Accordingly, whatever we may think, or however

we may misunderstand His words, we have His own clear declaration—which is in perfect keeping with the prophecy concerning Him : “ He will magnify (not alter) the Law, and make it honourable.” (Isa. xlii, 21.) Here we are on safe ground in dealing with the words of Him Who cannot lie.

But now let us go a little further. If we read the Sermon on the Mount carefully, we shall note that it deals with a variety of subjects, the reason being that the thousands who listened to Christ doubtless formed a very mixed multitude, and our Lord dealt with the subject accordingly. I will select three instances only. Sometimes our Lord was referring to the Law generally. In such cases He *intensified* it. Sometimes He was quoting from instructions given to magistrates for their administration of the Law. In such cases He showed *that* Law was not intended for everybody. Sometimes He was referring not to the Law of God at all, but rather to the false teaching of the Rabbis, and that He condemned.

Here are three instances. The first deals with the Law in general. “Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto you that whoso looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. v, 27). Is that altering the Law ? Is it not rather *intensifying it*, by showing that it is not merely the outward act that is sinful but the inward thought of the heart from whence all evil springs. The second case is one where Christ referred to instructions given to magistrates. “ Ye have heard that is hath been said : an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth (Exodus xxi, 24) ; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil ” (Matt. v, 39). Now these were instructions given to magistrates so that, in their administration of the Law, their judgment should be strictly just. The result was that when, in this case, Christ said, “ but I say unto you,” the stress should be laid not on the “ I ” but on the “ *you*.” This means that the Law given to magistrates is not meant for everybody, as, if Christ were saying, “ You are not magistrates ; hence *you* are not to take the Law into your own hands.” To put it in another way, “ If a man deserves to be hanged, it must be left for the Law officers to deal with, and not for any individual to get a rope and hang the man ! ”

In this case, therefore, Christ was not altering the Law but was merely throwing a clearer light upon it.

The third instance is one when Christ referred to the unscriptural teaching of the Rabbis. "Ye have heard that it hath been said : Thou shall love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." (Matt. v, 43.) But who said that ? Certainly not Moses. Nor is it found anywhere in the Bible. It was the false teaching of the *Rabbis*. That teaching Christ condemned when He said : "but I say unto you *Love your enemies*." Our Lord's teaching here was in strict accord with the Mosaic Law which definitely enjoined love to one's enemy thus : "If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shall surely bring it back to him again." (Ex. xxiii, 4.) Again, "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite (Israel's enemy), Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian (also Israel's enemy)." (Deut. xxiii, 7.)

The consequence is that in the Sermon on the Mount Christ is so far from altering the Law that He rather made its teaching more easily understood, while He condemned the false teaching of the Rabbis.

Mr. R. G. LUNDY, I.S.O., said that he took exception to the questioning by a previous speaker of the word "necessary" in the title of the essay. Miracle he felt bound to regard as an absolutely necessary adjunct of revelation. Consider, for instance, the greatest miracle of all, that miracle of miracles, which bears all other miracles of Holy Scripture, as it were, upon its shoulders. What would be our lot as believers without it ? If the Lord Jesus has not risen, then they who have fallen asleep, trusting in Him, have perished. This is the teaching of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians xv.

Major R. B. WITHERS, D.S.O., wrote : The title of this essay is clear, and for Christians there is only one "revelation," the Sacred Scriptures. Why, then, does the essayist give us a dictionary definition of miracle, instead of a scriptural definition from the Scriptures themselves ?

If he had begun his study at the beginning, he would have made the interesting discovery that in the A.V. "miracle" is the rendering of less than half the occurrences of two different Greek words. A satisfactory translation could therefore have been accomplished without using the word "miracle" once !

The ordinary usage of the word is too vague for an essay on this subject to be of real value unless a scriptural definition is fixed at the outset.

This lack is a fatal flaw throughout. For instance, the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus are both regarded as miraculous events. But where does Scripture speak of them thus? The essayist rightly adds that they are "essential elements" of Christianity; but, if so, they cannot also be only "adjuncts," even if "necessary adjuncts," of revelation!

In point of fact, they are neither "powers," "signs" nor "wonders." They are not miracles in the scriptural sense. Does the essayist appreciate the fact that the miracles of Scripture are intrinsically more, not less, credible than the doctrines of Scripture?

Moreover, he apparently overlooks the fact that miracles are not necessarily divine acts.

Even when he goes outside Scripture to consider the possibility of miracles, he still fails to get down to first principles, and apparently regards miracles as breaches of natural law. This view strikes at the root of all rational belief! A divine miracle entails no breach of universal order. It is simply special action to meet special requirements.

Miracle necessarily remains a primary battle-ground between the Faith and unbelief; and it is regrettable that we have failed to achieve a more adequate treatment of so vital a theme. Some of us believe our only hope lies in a re-examination of Scripture based on full faith and unbiassed by human tradition—that real application of Scientific Method of which "modern criticism," and, unfortunately, much "orthodox" writing as well, is but a counterfeit.

#### AUTHOR'S REPLY.

May I first of all thank Mr. Duncan for his kindly references to my paper. I appreciate his saying that the miraculous workings of the past have been guided and controlled by Divine wisdom; it is this feature that gives them their greatest worth as an adjunct to revelation.

Major Withers asks why I gave a dictionary meaning of the word miracle and not a Scriptural one? I did so for the simple reason that the subject proposed for the essay spoke of "miracle," not one

of the three words he mentions. The word was adopted, I presume, in its ordinary usage. So understood, miracles, whether regarded as "powers," "wonders," or "signs," are a necessary adjunct to revelation, and in treating them in that way I believe I got down to the first principles of the matter. It is often desirable to define the meanings that are to be attached to the principal terms to be used. I certainly do not regard miracles as "necessarily breaches of all natural laws." If Major Withers will read the essay again he will see that I devoted a whole paragraph to this point.

I cannot follow Dr. Bancroft Anderson's reasoning in reference to the Apostle's statements in Romans i, 19, 20. That "the heavens declare the glory of God" is unquestionably true, and the wisest of mankind have accepted their declaration, and have recognised their evidence to God's eternal power and divinity. The evidence of the heavens, however, gave no guarantee to Israel that when Moses told them of God's purpose to deliver them from their bondage in Egypt he was speaking as one who had been sent by the God of their fathers. The miracles, or signs, he performed did give that guarantee, and were, therefore, a "necessary adjunct" to the revelation made through him.

I need not follow Mr. Collett in his remarks, they have to do with a detail of my paper, not with the main theme. The quotation from the Sermon on the Mount can be omitted without interfering with the argument; it was only given because it expressed in a simple way the contrast between the Old and the New; the "but" of the passage clearly implies such a contrast.

Reference has been made to the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection of Christ. I can leave them where the latter is described by Mr. Lundy as the "Miracle of miracles which bears all other miracles of the Holy Scripture upon its shoulders."

I thank all who have taken part in the discussion, and will conclude by repeating the words of Jesus in reference to his "works" — "If I had not done among them the works which none other did, they had not had sin, but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father." Such a saying clearly shows in what way miracles, or "powers, wonders, or signs" are a necessary adjunct to revelation.