

ART. IV.—MIRACLES.

SIR OLIVER LODGE lately delivered at Birmingham an interesting lecture on "Science and Religion, with Especial Reference to the Question of Miracles." The audience was so large that it was necessary to adjourn to the theatre of the Midland Institute. The importance of the occasion, the eminence of the lecturer, and, above all, the greatness of his subject, call for earnest consideration. If in any way I fail to do justice to the lecture, it must be borne in mind that a newspaper report, however careful, of public utterances cannot always be relied upon exactly.

Before going on to what Sir Oliver said on miracles generally it may be observed that his fourfold classification of particular cases of "the so-called miraculous" is rather confusing. "In some cases the argument will turn on the question whether such things are theoretically possible. In other cases . . . whether they have ever actually happened. In a third case . . . whether they happened or not on some particular occasion. In a fourth, under which category any occurrence is to be placed." But it is unscientific to assume impossibility *a priori*, or to base a universal law on an induction necessarily imperfect. The third and fourth questions are what must be answered, if possible, in any case of "the so-called miraculous." Did the thing actually occur? How is it to be understood?

Speaking generally of miracles, the lecturer gives "four possible categories" to one or other of which any alleged miracle is to be assigned: "(1) An orderly and natural though unusual portent; (2) a disturbance due to unknown live (*sic*) or capricious agencies; (3) a utilization by mental or spiritual power of unknown laws; (4) direct interposition of the Deity." If by "capricious agencies" are meant the fairies or wizards of demonology, the second of these hypotheses need not be taken into account seriously. The first and third may be taken together as signifying an extraordinary result produced by laws known to us or unknown, and the fourth as signifying an arbitrary interference of the Deity with the order of the universe. For those, then, who believe that all things move by law, and who believe also in an omniscient, omnipotent Lawgiver, directing all things, the question is simply, Is the alleged miracle, supposing the fact to have been ascertained, a violation of law or in accordance with it? The Supreme Ruler of the world can so control the action of His laws, by adjusting and regulating their

coincidence, as to produce a result, such as human ingenuity cannot, by the concurrence of various forces.

The lecturer speaks of a possible explanation of a miracle as "a utilization of unknown laws by mental or spiritual forces." The word *mental* is hardly needed here, if physical science indicates more and more clearly that mental processes can be resolved into physical, and that in reality the will is the only spiritual energy. Anyhow, the utilization of laws, known or unknown, so as to produce a "portent" seems the true explanation of what is meant by "miracle" or "miraculous." The very term speaks for itself; it is something wonderful, awful, portentous. Instead of ontological guessings, what we have to do is to regard the miraculous in its bearing on those who are affected by it. The relativity of things, as Aristotle taught long ago—the *πρὸς ἡμᾶς*, not the *ἀπλῶς*—is what we are concerned with, unless our philosophy is to lose itself in the clouds. This is within our cognizance; the other is not. The effect of a miracle is obvious. It arrests attention; it startles indifference; it wakens the dormant consciousness, otherwise impervious to the message; it opens the way for truth, which might otherwise fail to win a hearing. "Law in the universe is irrefragable." But by coming to men as abnormal, a miracle quickens and incites. An essential test of the miraculous is the congruity of it or the incongruity with what the general (not universal) consent of mankind deems to be right ethically. Here at least we have sure footing; this at least we can know, even if other things, by their perpetual flux and reflux, baffle and defy our knowledge.

If, then, miracles are to be regarded subjectively rather than objectively, it follows that what is miraculous at one time, in one place, to one set of persons, may be explicable in itself as with time advances experience. Thus, the miracles of one age may be no miracles to another. If at the time when it occurred the incident was awe-striking, because inexplicable to those who were aware of it, it was miraculous, even though a wider, deeper insight can discover that it happened by the operation of natural laws. Fuller knowledge discloses more and more the *modus operandi* in things; and if not in this life, yet beyond it, the incessant permeance of law, and the unsleeping vigilance of the Lawmaker through all the wonders of the universe, will surely manifest themselves completely.

The crucial question is: Whether we are to believe in a stupendous machine, self-working, or in a machine guided and controlled by the Machinist. To this questions of detail are altogether subordinate. "The origin of life," for example,

“on this planet”—whether it was by instantaneous fiat or by slow, patient development—matters little. If the progress of physical science shows that “creation” in its precise sense is a misnomer, this involves no contradiction between science and religion. Rather, the forethought implied by evolution is more consonant with the attributes of Omniscience. The wisdom which can evolve by the interaction of many conflicting laws a result unattainable by the wisdom of man is super-human. The revelation from outside himself which man needs, and which comes to him in proportion to his need, is not of what he can discover for himself by his investigations, but a revelation of God in His power, holiness, love, and of man in his actual limitations, his potential illimitability. And this revelation is found, not in the surmises of natural religion, but in the Person of Christ.

I. GREGORY SMITH.



ART. V.—SCIENCE AND REVELATION.

THE fine thought of Shakespeare, that “reverence is the angel of the world,” whilst it harmonizes with those minds which instinctively look to and rest upon authority in all things, contains a caution and a reminder to others which our present leaders of thought would surely do well to keep before them. Though a great deal of modern criticism of Christian religion is not irreverent, there is an increasing tendency, and a growing temptation, to pass out of the liberty of free inquiry into the license of a destructiveness of criticism and restlessness of speculation which may be truly said to know no bounds. Seekers after truth, from whatever quarter they come, may well stand bewildered at the incessant ferment of thought as one sacred subject after another is cast into the crucible; and that word, “carried about with every wind of doctrine,” may fitly be held up to them in warning and encouragement.

This tendency to excess may be seen in two distinct and almost opposite directions, both perennial, no doubt, but none the less compelling attention in our own time, and requiring at least the same constant watchfulness as in any previous generation, because both are congenial to human nature.

One part of the religious world, denying many of its own fundamental articles of faith, has revived Roman doctrines, which it seeks to defend and establish by the union of Scripture with tradition. Another part, by the admixture of