

MIRACLES.—THE PROBLEM SOLVED.

ST. MATTHEW viii. 8, 9.

(28) Now that the ground has been cleared, as I would fain hope, by a statement of the problem, drawn from the Bible itself, which refutes the mythical theory of Miracles,¹ it may be possible for us to approach our problem with some prospect of arriving at a reasonable and adequate solution of it. Not that the way is quite clear even yet. For our opponents, driven from the mythical theory, fall back behind the battery of Hume, and contend that if not impossible, miracles are so incredible, so opposed to the course of nature and the teachings of experience, as that no evidence can substantiate them, however honest or strong it may be. It is natural that they should betake themselves to this defence, for no other is any longer open to them. The critical argument, the attempt to prove, *e.g.* the late origin of the Gospels, and so to leave room for the mythical theory to work, has quite failed; as indeed they themselves, by the mouth of their most eminent and eloquent representative (M. Renan, in his *Vie de Jésus*), have candidly confessed. Accordingly they fall back, as he falls back, on the assumption which led both Strauss and Baur to weave their exploded critical hypothesis, viz. that "what *could not* happen *did not* happen," and that miracles could not have happened because they are contrary to general experience;² or, to state the objection in their own words: "Miracles,

¹ See *Miracles.—The Problem Stated*, in Vol. iv. (New Series), pp. 241-264.

² This point is wrought out at length, and with masterly ability, by Dr. Wace, in *The Gospel and its Witnesses*, Chapters I. and II.

or the intervention of Deity in human affairs, are, to the scientific thinker, *à priori*, so improbable, that no amount of testimony suffices to make him entertain the hypothesis for an instant."

This is the argument, or assumption, which we now have to meet. And I know not how better to approach it than by considering the words of the Roman Centurion as reported by St. Matthew, and pursuing the line of thought which they suggest; for, approaching it thus, we shall arrive, I trust, at a solution of our problem which is both reasonable and adequate, while we also expose the fallacy of the last assumption of modern scepticism.

(29) "This heathen soldier," says Luther, "turns theologian, and begins to dispute in as fair and Christian-like a manner as would suffice for a man who had been for many years a doctor of divinity." It would not be difficult to go beyond Luther, and say: This heathen soldier reasons more finely than many doctors of divinity—more logically and conclusively even than many philosophers and men of science, to whom doctors of divinity are a very little thing. So admirably does he dispute that Jesus Himself discovers in his arguments the inspirations of faith, and declares with an accent of astonishment, "Verily, I have never found a faith so great as this, no, not even in Israel!"

Not in Israel? No; for the Jews sought a sign, and except they saw signs and wonders they would not believe. But the Centurion, so far from seeking a sign, declines one with gentle humility, and can believe though no wonder be wrought. "Heal my servant," he had cried, or, in his own soldierly phrase, "Heal *my boy*." "I will *come* and heal him," said Christ. "Come!" replied the Centurion. "But there is no need to come. The powers of sickness and of health, all the forces of nature and of human nature, are at thy command, just as my soldiers and servants are at mine. I do not need to run on every errand myself; nor

do you. I am *under* authority, and therefore I am *in* authority. I represent the imperial power I serve; and therefore I can say to my soldiers, Go, and they go, or, Come, and they come; and to my servants, Do this or that, and they do it. You hold a commission from Heaven; and because you are under Divine authority, you have a Divine authority, and can send the forces of nature on your errands and compel them to do your bidding. Speak the word only, and my boy will be healed." Obviously he held that there was an analogy between the ruler of the Roman empire and the Lord and Governor of the universe, between himself and the Son of Man, and believed that Christ had such a delegated authority over the forces and laws of nature and of human life as he himself exercised over the men of his century and the servants of his household. In short, the poor man was guilty of a crime of which in all probability he had never heard,—the crime of anthropomorphism,—a vice in logic, a sin in morals, if at least we are to listen to those who, when they do not claim a monopoly of logic, assume a certain easy supremacy in the court of Reason.

For this ancient and simple view of God, of his power to use the forces and laws of nature in his service and in the service of man, and even to delegate to others such a power of using them, stands at the farthest remove from that which obtains among those who style themselves the representatives of modern science and thought. They pronounce the Centurion and all who hold with him guilty of anthropomorphism in accents which assume anthropomorphism to be the one unpardonable sin. They affirm that we must on no account conceive of God as such an one as ourselves—a very different thing, be it remembered, from conceiving of Him as "*altogether* such an one as ourselves"—or attribute to Him the qualities and affections which we ourselves possess. We can know nothing of Him, they assert, but

that which nature teaches; or, at most, we must believe nothing of Him which is contrary and opposed to the teaching of the natural world. And as in that world we find simply physical forces which work by immutable laws, we may conceive of Him as like a force, or like a law, but must not think of Him as like a man. Miracles, therefore, are incredible, since it is impossible that God should ever interfere with the operation of immutable laws, laws which cannot be broken or set aside. And Prayer is as irrational as miracles are incredible; for if we ask of God only those things which would come to us in the common and established course of nature, why need we ask for them? and if we ask that which He could give only by changing that course, we ask what it is impossible for Him to grant.

So that we have to choose between two theories of God; the ancient theory, that of the Centurion, which represents the forces and laws of nature as the servants of God, who do his pleasure, hearkening to the voice of his words; to whom He can say, Come, and they come, Go, and they go, Do this or that, and they do it: and the modern theory which represents them as so far his masters that He cannot touch or modify them, cannot bend them to his will, or bid them run on his errands, no, not even on the gravest emergencies, not even in order to teach men the truths they most need to know, or to save them from the sins by which they are being destroyed.

(30) Which of the two theories shall we choose? It is natural for us to prefer that of our own time. Many do prefer it; many more are so shaken by it that they can no longer rest in the simpler theory of a bygone age. Yet we shall do well to pause before we adopt this modern theory, although it loudly claims to be the product of pure reason, and denounces its venerable rival as utterly irrational. Not that we for a moment question the right of men unversed in theology to pronounce an opinion on even the most pro-

found and momentous of theological questions. If a soldier of the ancient world might "turn theologian," and is to be admired for it, surely a modern man of science may also do so at least unblamed, and argue "like a doctor of divinity," if he will and can. But when he argues, and before he claims any monopoly, or any superiority, of sound reasoning, he should at least be careful to make his argument both consistent and conclusive. He should not contradict himself, or put it into our power to confute him out of his own mouth. Yet this, and nothing less than this, is precisely what those do who affirm that if we go to nature, and to nature alone, for our conception of God, we shall admit miracles to be impossible or incredible. Their argument must have a certain plausibility, or it would never have obtained so wide a vogue; it would neither be so constantly repeated by as many as reject at least the supernatural element of the Christian revelation, nor would it have so seriously staggered the faith of many who still accept that revelation. But no sooner do we carefully examine it than we discover it to be utterly unsound, and even in direct and flagrant contradiction to the most cherished convictions of the very men who advance it.

For consider what it is they really do. They bid us go to the natural world for our ruling, if not for our sole, conception of God and of the manner in which He stands related to human life and history. They say that we must believe nothing of Him which is inconsistent with the teaching of that world. And they infer that any miraculous intervention in human affairs is incredible because, the laws of nature being immutable, they can never be bent or broken or overruled. What, then, is this natural world to which we are referred? Is it the whole realm of nature, or only a part of it? It is, as we learn to our amazement, only a part of it, and an inferior part. It is the natural world *with man left out*. To base any conception of God on the

nature of man, on his intelligence, conscience, affection, is to be guilty of anthropomorphism. *Matter-morphism*—if, to make my meaning clear, I may use such horrible compounds—is, it would appear, a quite virtuous and reasonable procedure; but *man-morphism* is utterly irrational and vicious. To think of God as like a natural force, or as like the law by which that force is governed, or even as a vague stream of tendency, is legitimate and praiseworthy; but to think of God as like a man, even when man is at his best and highest, is illegitimate to the last degree, and cannot be too severely condemned.

Yet man has always been regarded as the very flower and crown of nature; and we have been taught by science herself to attach a value to the human world, or even to any single man in it, which outweighs that of the whole material universe. Why, then, should it be a sin against reason to frame our conceptions of the Maker and Lord of the universe at least in part from that which is highest in it and most valuable? Should we not expect to get our best conceptions of the Highest from that which is confessedly the highest of his works? If we may take up into our conception the sense of force or power, and the sense of law or order, which we derive from the inanimate elements of nature, may we not also, and much more, take up into it the intelligence, the conscience, the affections which we find in her animate elements? To refer us to the whole sum of the natural world, and then to strike out the chief factor—the human factor—of that world; is not that plainly illogical, unfair, absurd?

(31) It is even more illogical and absurd now than in any previous age. For, not to stoop to the superstition of those who proclaim collective Man to be the only true God, many of our leading philosophers and men of science, while they bid us omit man from the sum of natural things, are teaching their disciples to rejoice in that sweet word *Evo-*

lution as the one key which unlocks all mysteries. We may doubt whether it is more than a name for one natural process out of many. We may ask permission to suspend our verdict until we are quite sure that no larger and higher law can be discovered than a law which does nothing to explain the origin whether of matter or force, life or thought. But those who regard the law of evolution as proved beyond all doubt, and look down with superior scorn on as many of us as hesitate to pronounce it the last best gift of science, should at least remember that, on their own theory, man is more essentially than ever part, and the noblest part, of nature, the consummation and epitome of the universe; that in man nature presents us with the sum and crown evolved by the age-long action of the whole body of her forces and laws; and that therefore, if nature had a Maker, we must expect to find in man a more complete image and reflection of his character than in any or all other of the works of his hands. To say that nature flowers in the reason and will, the justice and love of man, and yet to contend that, while we may and ought to take up into our conception of God the suggestions of power and order conveyed by the lower and inanimate sphere of the universe, but are on no account to take up into it any suggestion derived from its upper and animate sphere, is a contradiction so obvious and absurd that it must be scouted as soon as seen. It is to say, and to say in the name of Reason, that nature does not include her own last and highest product! It is to say, and to say in the name of Reason, that she does not include the last evolution and the highest expression of the whole sum of her forces and laws! Theologians have many unreasonable assertions to answer for, many fallacious arguments; but it would be hard to find in any of their works an assertion more unreasonable or an argument more absurdly illogical than this.

In a word, science, which has so long condemned an-

thropomorphism as a sin, is now compelled to pronounce it a virtue. Instead of banning it as illogical and unsound, she can but bless it as the only sound and rational method open to us. For if we are to go to nature for our conception of God, and if man be "the roof and crown of things," the last evolution and highest expression of nature, where should we go, if not to him, for our truest and best conception of the Being who evolved him? From what *we* are, we can learn most surely what *He* is; from what *we* can do, we may most surely infer what *He* can do. Under pain of branding themselves as illogical and inconsistent those who make their boast in evolution must cease to sneer at anthropomorphism.

(32) But if, as science herself demands, we turn to animate as well as inanimate nature, to man as well as to matter, for our conception of God and of his relation to us, mark how, not only our doctrine of God, but also and mainly the whole question of miracles changes its form; and how the signs and wonders, so often pronounced incredible, grow to be something more than credible to us. To say that God cannot interfere with the action of his own laws, that He cannot so modify and overrule, so hasten and retard their operation, as to produce what seems to us miraculous, *i.e.* strange and wonderful, effects, is to say that He can never do what man does every day:—which, were it true, would perhaps in some measure account for the fact that certain among us worship Man rather than God. For, obviously, man can, and does, both modify and overrule, both hasten and retard, the operation of natural forces and laws, and compel them in a thousand different ways to produce effects different from those which but for his interference they would have produced. Had man never intervened, England would have been part forest and part swamp to this hour, with a very different climate therefore to that which we now suffer or enjoy, and with a very different *flora* and

fauna from that which it now possesses. In short, the physical conditions of the whole country have been modified and changed by the advent and will of man; while in America the face of a whole continent has passed through a similar change almost within the memory of living men.

But when we use such illustrations as these, when we say¹ that "there is not a single square inch in England, probably there is not a single square inch in the whole world, which is to-day what it would have been had it been left to the free play of purely physical forces," we use illustrations too large and manifold to be easily embraced and thought out. If we would grasp the immensity and the infinite variety of the changes wrought in the natural order by the force and wit of man, we must select some more limited example. And, possibly, we could have no more striking and convenient example than this; that in almost every well-to-do house in England we have a long series of proofs, collected from almost every country under heaven, that the face of the whole land, and even the face of the whole earth, has been changed in order to make that house what it is. When we go into and about such a house, what do we find? We find bricks brought from distant clay-fields, stones dug from quarries still more distant, timbers from Norway or Sweden, marbles from Italy or Greece; carpets from Persian, Belgian, or Yorkshire looms; silks from India, China, or Japan; linen woven from Irish flax, and cottons from the Southern States of America; bread made from the wheats of Hungary, Russia, or the great Western States; coffee from the hills of Ceylon; rice from the swamps of Bombay or Italy; wines from France or Germany, Portugal or Spain; with a multitude of other necessary or precious things which it would be tedious to recount.

As we study the structure and contents of that one

¹ See Vol. iv. (New Series), p. 212.

house, we feel that it is barely an exaggeration to say that the whole world has been taxed to build, furnish, and store it, and that the whole face of the earth has been changed in its service. For we must remember that hardly any one of the articles I have named would have been produced at all had the natural forces been left to take their own course, had they never felt the hand of man or submitted to his control. *Nature* does not make bricks, or carve stones, or polish marbles, or weave carpets, silks, linen, cotton, or broadcloth, or make either bread or wine: of herself she cannot even grow a tea or a coffee which we should now deign to drink. All these things are monuments of the power of man, the trophies of his triumph over the forces and laws of the merely physical and inanimate world.

We must remember, too, that these productions imply the existence and activity of an immense array of cultivators, manufacturers, merchants, artists, brokers, tradesmen, and handicraftsmen, each of whom modifies the action of natural laws with every breath he inspires, every step he takes, and whose main function it is to modify the action of natural forces, and compel them in countless forms to serve his will.

And we must also remember that, in the service of this one house, waggons are travelling along every road, trains running on every railway, boats plying on every river, ships crossing every sea, messages flying along every wire.

These, and the like, are the miracles, the signs and wonders, wrought by Man; and their name is Legion. By studying the forces and laws of Nature, he has learned to modify and control them; by serving, he rules them, bending them, unbending and immutable though they be, to the varying purposes of his will. Why, then, should it be thought a thing incredible that God—if there is a God and He is the Maker of men—should exercise a similar and

superior power over the forces and laws of the material world? Why should not He modify and control them far more subtly and more effectively than the creature He has made? He who created those forces, and gave those laws, must not He know them more comprehensively and intimately than we do who are still but stumbling over the very rudiments of knowledge; and, knowing them so much more perfectly, must He not be able to use them with a corresponding perfection? We touch them but from without; He from within. And if, even with our imperfect knowledge of them, and able only to lay a hand upon them from without, we have nevertheless so far bent them to our purpose as to harness them in our service and change the face of the world, what may not He do with them if He will; if, that is, He sees some worthy end, as, for example, the instruction or the salvation of mankind, to be answered by so using them as to disclose his presence, convey his thought, reveal his love? Signs and wonders as far above "the reaches of our thought," as our signs and wonders are beyond the comprehension of a savage or a child, are not and cannot be impossible to Him—if at least we may draw our conceptions of Him, as science herself bids us draw them, from nature as revealed in man, the flower and cream of the natural world. If *we* can say to its forces and laws, Do this, and they do it; if we can bid them come and go on our errands; shall not *He*, who formed both us and them, be able to do as much with them as we, and even more than we?

(33) But many of our Lord's miracles, as also many of the miracles recorded in the Old Testament, were wrought on *men*, wrought to restore health to their bodies and sanity to their minds, to quicken them to the service and love of righteousness. And, therefore, if we would complete our argument, it is necessary that, besides dwelling on the power of man over the physical world, we should at least

glance at the immense power of man on men. To a reflective mind this latter power is far more wonderful, and often far more inexplicable, than the former; and the difficulty of dealing with it lies in part in its subtlety, but still more in the vast range of example and illustration open to us. As a direct and consciously exercised power, it is wonderful enough; but as an indirect and unconscious power, it is still more wonderful. History is full of examples, it is little more than a record, of the strange and marvellous influence on the fortunes of their fellows exerted by men of rare gifts and exceptional capacities. The sceptered dead still rule us from their graves. "Had there been no Luther," for instance, "the English, American, and German peoples would be thinking differently, would be acting differently, would be altogether different men and women from what they are at this moment."¹ Nor is the influence of living men less remarkable. If use did not blunt and stale our minds, it would be nothing short of a perpetual marvel to us that from this little island, with its comparatively few inhabitants, no stronger and not much wiser than their neighbours, one-fourth of the human race, distributed over the whole globe, should be governed and controlled, and the whole human race be deeply influenced for good or evil. It is hardly going too far to say that the entire family of man, in all its branches, through all its millions, listens with attention to every public word that falls from the lips of our Queen; that an order from her sets the whole world in motion: and that no distinguished English statesman can make a speech on any public question but that it awakens echoes in every corner of the globe. But it is still more wonderful, perhaps, that a quiet thoughtful man, as yet unknown to fame, with no army and navy to back him, and no multitudinous array

¹ J. A. Froude, on Luther, in *The Contemporary Review* for July, 1883.

of servants to do his bidding, cannot sit down to write a book with a new thought in it, or that he cannot discover some new law of science or some new application of such a law, but that he too shall set the whole world in commotion, change and elevate the whole tone of civilized thought, or effect a revolution over the whole surface of civilized life. Such words and phrases as Steam, Gas, the Telegraph, the Electric Light, the Penny Post; Reform, Free Trade, Free Press; the Conservation of Energy, the Convertibility of Natural Forces, the Descent of Man, and the Survival of the Fittest, sum up in themselves the history of revolutions in the mind and life of humanity which we owe to men whose names might have been charged with no memories and illustrious with no distinctions but for the several discoveries they have made or advocated. Men less famous than these, or whose names the world has forgotten, have discovered drugs, or sanitary and healing methods and conditions of human life, by which some forms of disease have been extirpated, while other forms have been modified and impaired, and by which the general average of health and length of days has been extended and raised. And, still more strange, there have been, there are, men among us who, simply by the sweet and happy composition of their nature, or by their force of will, or by their power of penetrating to the secret springs of motive and desire, are able to minister to minds diseased, as well as to diseased bodies, and to restore health and harmony to those whose mental or nervous forces are like bells jangled and out of tune.

Again, we have only to remember what a power Righteousness is in human life, insomuch that even the worst of men will rally round a man admitted to be just, and admire in him the purity and integrity which yet they themselves lack; and what a power Love is, quickening even the dullest to a more vivid life, and raising even the

lowest to a higher life, to become aware of the strange forces which are hidden in our nature, of the singular and immense power which man may exert on man.

And if man can thus influence, heal, and elevate his fellows, why may not God influence men in a similar yet superior way? why may not those who are under his authority, and are therefore called to exercise his authority? And, above all, how can we pronounce it impossible that He who, at least on the Christian hypothesis, was at once both man and God, should influence, heal, and raise men far more subtly and more potently than they influence each other? If *we* tell upon each other for good in proportion to our natural and acquired force, in proportion to our wisdom, our righteousness, our love, what must we expect and predicate of Him whose wisdom was without a flaw, whose righteousness was without a stain, and whose love knew no bounds?

The Psalmist demands, "He that planted the ear shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" And surely we may continue the catechism and ask, "He that gave man brain and conscience, will and heart, shall not He think of us and care for us? Shall He not be just? Shall He not love us and all men? He that teaches men to control by serving his laws, shall not He control them? He that gave them power to heal, shall not He heal? He that calls them to teach and help, to serve and save each other, shall not He teach and help, serve and save us all?" If we are to go to nature for our conceptions of God, we must go to man; for man is the sum and crown of nature. And if we go to man for our conception of Him and of his relation to us, who does not see that we must go, for our conception of the Highest, to that which is highest in man, —to his will, his wisdom, his justice, his love? Who will not admit that, since man works a thousand signs and wonders every hour, signs and wonders cannot be impossible

to the Maker of men, that the forces and laws of nature and of human life must be far more perfectly under his control than they are under ours?

(34) In arguing thus, I do not in the least intend to cast any doubt on the fixity, the steadfastness, of natural laws. Nor can I admit the claim of modern men of science to be the first to promulgate and insist on the stability of these laws. In this as in much else, little as they seem to know it, "doctors of divinity" have anticipated them. The judicious Hooker, for example,¹ died long before any one of them was born; but which of them has set forth the immutability of natural law more stately, impressively, and musically than he has done in a passage of his *Ecclesiastical Polity*? "If nature should intermit her course, and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observation of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made, should lose the qualities which now they have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions, and by irregular volubility turn themselves any way as it might happen; if the prince of the lights of heaven, which now as a giant doth run his unwearied course, should as it were through a languishing faintness begin to stand and rest himself; if the moon should wander from her beaten way, the times and seasons of the year blend themselves by disordered and confused mixture, the winds breathe out their last gasp, the clouds yield no rain, the earth be defeated of heavenly influences . . . what would become of man himself whom these things do now all serve? See we not plainly that obedience of creatures unto the law of nature is the stay of the whole world?"

¹ For the following quotation from Hooker I am indebted to my friend Dr. Wace; see his *Gospel and its Witnesses*, Lecture vi., where he makes a very different but noble use of the passage.

No, we throw no doubt on the steadfast and unchangeable action of the forces and laws of nature. We do not assert that in working his miracles our Lord either violated, suspended, or abrogated them. All we affirm is that God may, and that Christ did, use them in ways too subtle and profound for us to grasp, yet in ways not wholly unlike to those in which we ourselves bend them to our service,—using them to heal the sick, and give sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, feet to the lame, and life to the dying or even to the dead. In short, we affirm that He did perfectly and in full what even man may do imperfectly and in part. And we affirm it, we argue for it from premisses which science herself has laid down, not only that the Bible miracles may be credible and reasonable to reasonable men—miracles which, as we have seen,¹ are distributed through its pages with a singular economy, and are prompted by a motive so worthy, so divine; but also in order that we ourselves may believe that God, by secret ways past finding out—but which probably would be no whit more wonderful to us, if we could find them out, than our own control over the world and men—can still help, and heal, and save us; that He is not deaf to any of our prayers, or unable to answer them, but can still bestow wisdom and health, righteousness and love, on all who sincerely seek them at his hands.

(35) For, perhaps, the chief value of the Centurion's words lies in a suggestion which they still have to make to us: viz. that signs and wonders are not necessary or inevitable conditions, or concomitants, of miracles; but that God, and the servants of God, may intervene for our instruction, our recovery to health, our salvation from every form of evil, even though no singular or striking event should call public attention to the work of power or of grace.

If we suffer his words to enter into "the quick forge and working-house of thought," we may behold the scene which

¹ Vol. iv. (Second Series), pp. 241 *et seq.*

with a few rapid but graphic strokes he suggests. It is no unusual, no unique, no miraculous scene to which he points, but a scene of everyday life. In the simple discharge of his duty as master of a household, or as an officer in the Roman army, he issues commands to his men and servants, commands which they in their turn, and as part of their ordinary duty, at once obey. To this soldier he says, Go, and the man goes, and to that, Come, and the man comes: but had we seen his men moving through barrack or street at his command, we should have marked nothing strange in them, nothing to arrest attention, nothing even to denote the kind of errand on which they went, however singular that errand might have been in itself. And, in like manner, when he said to his servants, Do this, or, Do that, and they did it, had we beheld them as they went about house or market, we should have noticed nothing remarkable in their demeanour. Had we thought of them at all, we should simply have concluded that they were discharging the common household duties which fell to the servants of a man of his wealth and position. The level, matter-of-fact, matter-of-course tone which the Centurion maintains throughout his argument assures us that he was speaking only of the ordinary incidents of his life and vocation; and that when he asks Christ to "speak the word only, and my boy will be healed," he was simply asking for what he conceived to be an ordinary incident in *his* life and vocation.

Yet what an amazing leap it seems to us from the one series of facts to which he alludes to the other! Our Authorised Version omits the "also" from St. Matthew's report of the phrase, "I *also* am a man under authority"; and perhaps our Revisers have done us no more notable service than in restoring the word to its true place: for when one thinks of it, the word fairly trembles and staggers under its load of meaning. "I *also*"; "I *as well as you*";

“I like you”: what an audacious feat it appears to us that this heathen soldier should compare himself, should *even* himself, as the Scotch say, to the Lord of glory; how it astonishes us that a man so humble should yet be so bold! For what he really means and implies is nothing less than this: “As I hold a commission from Cæsar, so you hold a commission from God. Because you are under his authority, you wield his authority. All the forces and laws of nature and of human life are at your command, because they are at his command. Even as they go about their ordinary work, they do his will; and they will run on your errands as they run on his. You need not come to my poor house and strike your hand over the palsied and trembling limbs of my poor boy. Speak the word only, give the order, utter the command, and it will be obeyed as surely and as quietly as my soldiers go on my errands and obey my word.”

This was the Centurion’s conception of God and of his relation to the realm of nature; and nothing can be plainer than that he conceived of the natural forces and laws as *always* doing the will of God, however quietly or secretly they went on their several paths, however usual and ordinary their tasks. Nothing can be plainer than that he believed that one who was clothed with God’s authority could also command them, and would be obeyed by them as simply and as promptly as God Himself. Nothing can be plainer than that he thought miracles *natural* in a miraculous personage, the ordinary and inevitable incidents and consequents of a Divine vocation or commission; and even that he held a miracle to be more and not less miraculous if it were wrought without pomp or show, without arresting attention or compelling astonishment.

And what we have specially to mark is, that this is not only the Centurion’s conception of God and of his relation to the universe, but that it is also Christ’s. For Christ

Himself emphatically adopts it. In the face of this narrative it is vain for any man to contend, as some have contended, that though miracles have been freely attributed to the Son of Man, yet He Himself with his sane intellect, his sweet reasonableness and clear veracity, never claimed miraculous power. He claims it here. When Jesus had heard how the centurion conceived of Him and of his authority, He " marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." And we know what *He* meant by " faith." To Him faith was the eye and the hand of the soul, the faculty by which men come to know things as they are in themselves, by which they behold and grasp the eternal facts and verities that underlie the shows of time. He approved, therefore, the Centurion's mode of conceiving God and God's power over the natural world; He adopted it and made it his own. It comes to us clothed with his authority who spake as never man spake, and to whom even those who resent and condemn all faith in miracles defer as at least the wisest and best of men, the greatest teacher of truth the world has ever seen.

So that in choosing between the two theories of which I spoke at the outset, the ancient simple theory and the modern sceptical theory, we really have to decide between the authority of Christ, who was not of an age but for all time, and that of men who claim, although their claim is traversed by scientists as learned and able as themselves, to be the representatives of modern science and thought;¹ that

¹ As from the space they contrive to fill in the public eye, and the confident tone in which they address the public ear, many young and ignorant people are under the impression that the sceptical and materialistic school embraces most of the real leaders or most eminent professors of science, it may be worth while to jot down as they occur to me the names of a few of the eminent men of science who cannot see " the promise and the potency of all things " in matter, but, on the contrary, maintain the spiritual origin of the universe, and worship the God whom their opponents are so eager to dethrone. I must not, I suppose, include in my list Galileo, Kepler, Bacon, Newton, Pascal, lest they

is to say, we have to choose between their authority and that of One whom even they themselves confess to have been far better and wiser than themselves, entitled therefore to speak, at least on all religious questions, with an authority transcending their own. And if we defer to what, in various indirect ways as well as by direct confession, they themselves admit to be the higher authority of the two, is there anything unreasonable in that?

(36) It may still further assist us in our decision if we remember that on this point at least, these representatives of modern and *advanced* thought, really occupy the position held two thousand years ago by the ignorant Jewish bigots

should be objected to as not modern enough; though he must be strangely ignorant who should imagine that they had not weighed and rejected the arguments for materialism which even now carry any real weight. But who will question the attainments and authority of such men as Faraday, De Morgan, Herschell, Clerk-Maxwell, Henry Smith, Balfour Stewart, Tait, Stokes, Rolleston, Sir William Thompson?

Nor for myself can I admit for a moment that the study of science confers any special right to speak with authority on the questions discussed in this essay. For they are religious questions rather than scientific, and religious men of large intellect and wide learning have surely as clear a right to be heard on them as the men who have distinguished themselves as mathematicians or physicists: such men, for example as Bishops Thirlwall and Lightfoot, Archbishop Thomson, Cardinal Newman, Deans Stanley, Plumtre, Church, Canons Mozley, Cook, Westcott, Barry, Drs. Salmon (of Dublin), Wace, Dale, Tulloch, A. B. Davidson, Robertson Smith, Dykes, Maclaren, with Maurice, Robertson, Lynch, and a hundred more who might be named.

If we suspect both men of science and men of religion of bias, conscious or unconscious, fit umpires might be found between them in the great poets, statesmen, judges, artists, who have done most to shape and rule our thoughts; or who by their great natural gifts, wide and varied knowledge of men and affairs, or their trained impartiality, would command our profoundest respect: such men as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, or Gladstone, Lords Selborne, Cairns, Coleridge, or Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, Holman Hunt.

Nothing would be easier than to add largely to all these lists did time and space permit. But the names cited will suffice to call up many more, and to shew the young or credulous how far it is from being true that the set of the best thought of the day, in any province of human activity, is toward the dreary and irrational materialism which a few able men, followed by many who, save for their atheism, would in no way be distinguished from their fellows, are so eager to promulgate. The assumption that all logic and all ability are on the side of unbelief is an old weapon with its advocates. It has been used again and again, but never with less excuse than now.

who rejected Christ and put Him to death, hoping that by quenching the Light of the world they might be left at peace in the darkness which, for a well-known reason, they preferred. For, like the Jewish Pharisees and their scribes, our modern sceptics will not believe unless they themselves see signs and wonders. They reach their end indeed by a different road to that along which the Jewish bigots travelled; but what of that if at last we find them standing side by side? The Jews did not for a moment doubt that God both could and did interfere with the operation of natural forces and laws, or that He could delegate that power to men; but they would not believe that He had delegated that power to Jesus of Nazareth, since Jesus refused to work in their presence the kind of miracle which they demanded. Modern sceptics, on the other hand, refuse to believe either that God ever did exercise this power, or commission men to exercise it. But on what ground do they refuse? Simply on the ground that any such interference is contrary to their own experience and to their reading of the experience of their fellows. Before they will believe, they demand that some miracle should be wrought in their presence, and submitted to their tests. In fine, they too must see signs and wonders or they will not believe. Like the Jews, they must have the very proof they demand before they will yield to the claim of the Son of Man.

How they will like the company into which they are thus brought, it is not for me to say; but I do not see how they can deny that they are fairly brought into it, that they have brought themselves into it, and occupy the very ground on which the ignorant and furious bigots took their stand who rejected the testimony of God against themselves twenty centuries ago.

(37) And why should they maintain a position which its ancient defenders have rendered so suspicious? How can

they reasonably charge us with a sin against reason if we abandon it? Only two hypotheses lie before us. The first is that which assumes that, because we see in nature an impersonal order, there is nothing more in it, an assumption which fails to account even for the origin of matter and force; an assumption which is obviously untrue, since every man finds in nature at least one personality—his own—and is compelled therefore to believe in other personalities than his own. The second hypothesis is that which assumes that, because we are conscious of a living spirit within ourselves, the physical universe must be, if not the body, at least the handiwork and garment of a quickening Spirit, Almighty and Divine. This second hypothesis not only accounts for the origin of matter, energy, life, as well as for the order of the universe, but it also alleges a cause equal to all the effects we discover in the whole round of being. It accounts for the existence of intelligence and will, conscience and heart, as well as for the existence of material atoms and forces, and the laws by which they are controlled. It is the larger and the more natural, it is the only adequate, and therefore the only reasonable, hypothesis; as indeed even sceptical men of science, leaders in the opposing school of thought, have admitted or affirmed. Thus, for example, John Stuart Mill, brushing aside the prepossessions and prejudices of a lifetime, has recorded his final and deliberate judgment,¹ that there is a large balance in favour of the probability of *creation by intelligence*; and Mr. Wallace, who shares with Darwin the honour of what many esteem the most fruitful discovery of modern science, confesses,² “It does not seem improbable that all force may be *will* force, and that the whole universe is not merely dependent upon, but actually *is*, the will of higher intelligences, or of one Supreme Intelligence.”

¹ *Three Essays on Religion*, p. 174.

² *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection*, p. 368.

In the face of these arguments and admissions, it is surely the height of unreason to charge us with unreasonableness if we give the preference to that hypothesis which attributes both the creation and the evolution of the universe to a living and life-giving Spirit rather than to an impersonal order or law which really accounts for nothing, but has itself to be accounted for; if we take our stand by the side of the Centurion, and conceive of the forces and laws of nature as the obsequious servants of an all-seeing Wisdom and an almighty Power.

(38) Nor can those who hold man to be the sum and crown of things, the last and highest product of natural forces and laws, and therefore the glass in which the Maker of all things is most clearly and fully reflected, reasonably condemn the belief in *Miracles* as irrational. There is a modern school of Theology as well as a modern school of Science. It is this modern theology which modern science is bound to meet. To insist on the definitions and refute the arguments of our fathers is no more fair on their part than it would be fair on ours to run riot among, and hold them responsible for, the exploded scientific hypotheses of bygone ages. And we of the modern school do not contend, whatever our fathers may have done, that laws of nature must be suspended, abrogated, or reversed, whenever a miracle is wrought. We say that they must be *used* by an Intelligence infinitely higher than ours, and therefore an Intelligence which may well produce effects most strange and wonderful to us.¹ We point to the use which man has made of them in a thousand different ways—by his use of them changing the face of

¹ I do not, however, claim this as a purely modern discovery. Even Augustine must have had some glimpse of it when he wrote (*Contra Faustum*, xxvi. 3): "God does nothing against nature. When we say that He does so, we mean that He does something against nature *as we know it*—in its familiar and ordinary way; but against the highest laws of nature He no more acts than He acts against Himself."

the whole world; and we argue that God may use them, for worthy ends, still more potently and admirably. In nature herself, we say, there are the materials by which men are fed, healed, taught, served, and forces by which, according at least to the fashionable theory of the time, life is for ever being evolved from lifelessness. Man has learned so to employ these forces and materials as to compel them to minister, in ways beyond the reach of unassisted nature, to his nourishment, his health, his service. Why, then, we ask, should it be deemed impossible for God so to use these forces and laws, so to modify and control, so to hasten and retard their operation, as to feed and heal, to teach and serve men, and even to give life to the dying or the dead in ways beyond the measure of our minds? And is there anything unreasonable in that?

(39) Finally, if God holds all the forces and laws of nature in the hollow of his hand, and can use them for our good in ways unknown and perhaps undiscoverable by us, not only do the miracles of the Bible grow credible to us so soon as we have evidence for them on which we can depend; but we also condemn ourselves as unreasonable if we any longer doubt the efficacy of *Prayer*. And of all the implications of the Centurion's argument, this, to my mind, is the most valuable and delightful, as it is also the most obvious and direct. For what we need most of all, as we stand hesitating and bewildered among the perplexities of life and conduct, is the conviction that we have a living God who is still active, still working in and for us, to whom we can appeal, in whom we can trust, who will listen to us and answer us when we call on Him for teaching, guidance, strength; and who can work miracles of grace for us even though signs and wonders be no longer vouchsafed us. *This* is the conviction which sustained the Centurion when he brought his prayer to

Christ, and which Christ Himself sanctioned and confirmed by his admiration and approval of the Centurion's faith. He might have had a sign, a portent if he would; but, strong in faith, he preferred a simple word, and no more doubted that that word would be obeyed than that his own word of command would be obeyed by those who served under him. Obviously he believed that the forces and laws of nature, animate and inanimate, were always doing the will of God, and that the Servant and Son of God, *without any signal or exceptional exertion of his power*, could heal his "boy," and would heal him if He felt that it was for the good of both servant and master that the "boy" should be healed. And this is the very conviction which we require in order to give depth and devotion, courage and hope, alike to our supplications and our lives. Why should we not cherish it and lean upon it? If God knows the natural forces and laws as we cannot know them, if He can and does use and control them for our good and for the general good; if, as we see, He does feed and heal, teach, guide, and sustain men by his wise use and administration of them, and that in ways past finding out; why should not we ask of Him whatsoever things we need, or think the world needs, in the full assurance that He will listen to us, and either grant what it is really for our good to have, or teach us that his will is wiser and kinder than our own? On this hypothesis, urged in this spirit, Prayer is not unreasonable, but most reasonable; and we may, we ought to lay the *unflattering* but most cordial and invigorating unction to our souls, that, if we commit our way unto the Lord, He will give us the desire of our hearts.

ALMONI PELONI.
