

time of final salvation. He was the Son of God, and He had to bring salvation; but His gospel reached only few, and only individuals realised what was given to them in Jesus! However fully they submitted their own will to God, there were powers of evil outside them. The Kingdom of God is not established so long as its dominion is only recognised by individuals; it wants to be collective, universal. Jesus' victory over Satan, His casting out of devils, was only an anticipation.

And this is the abiding truth in eschatology: it is to be sought not in the particulars of Jesus' coming and similar details, but in the fact that we have to expect and to pray for a state of things in which God's dominion will be fully established, and all obstacles, all evil energies finally destroyed.¹ We have seen in St. John's Gospel—and the later history of Christianity affords plenty of similar examples—that this looking out for some external real change is well combined with the finest and best inwardness. The Christian is a new creature, but he looks for a new heaven and a new earth, and his prayer will be for ever as His Lord taught him: "*Thy kingdom come.*"

E. VON DOBSCHÜTZ.

MIRACLES AND THE MODERN CHRISTIAN MIND.

"It is time," observes a recent writer, "that defenders of the Christian faith gave up apologising for it." The tendency to apologise for religious belief, so justly reprobated, has made itself felt nowhere more markedly than in connexion with miracles. All sorts of ingenious excuses have been offered for their occurrence in Bible times. They were necessary, as it has been put, "to arrest the attention

¹ Cp. Dr. Kölbing (formerly Principal of the Moravian Seminary at Gnadensfeld): *Die bleibende Bedeutung der urchristlichen Eschatologie*, 1907.

of an age whose modes of thought were simpler and less scientific than our own, and to which they would appeal as a perfectly appropriate mode of spiritual address." The idea that once miracle supported faith, but now faith supports miracle, is likewise very familiar, and in certain quarters has come to be regarded virtually as 'common form.' Nor would any wise man dream of denying that modern radical critics have often enough been right, or that the Church ought not ungratefully to overlook the help they have given in relieving faith of responsibility for some of the dead matter which has so far kept its place in the Christian tradition. That is always a service which clear-eyed religion welcomes. Believing too much may prevent a man from believing worthily. His faith, like his brain, may be overtaxed.

But in eliminating what is unfit to survive, in operating for *Aberglaube* or over-belief, we have need to beware of cutting a nerve that is really vital, though a hasty inspection may have pronounced it unessential. That has happened before in Church history. And the present paper is an attempt to show that it is what always happens when miracles are excised from the Christian creed. Able men tell the Church to-day that abandonment of the supernatural is the price of their return to her allegiance, but they know not what they ask. The Church that parts with the supernatural will have parted with the springs of gladness. Quite apart from opinions we may form as to this or that Bible narrative there are elements in living faith at this hour which, if they mean anything, mean what is miraculous to the core. They are intelligible only as implying, and constituting, a supernatural relation between God and man. And to be clear about this cannot but affect our conclusions as to what was or was not likely in the first century. Or to put the issue as directly as

possible : if a man is not a Christian, his experience does not apparently furnish him with the materials for belief in miracle, and, so long as his attitude to Jesus remains what it is, I see no way in which he could be convinced that miracle is real. On the contrary, if a man *is* a Christian, it is possible to show, by a sympathetic analysis of his experience, that by virtue of his attitude to God in Christ he is already committed to faith in the supernatural, not as something merely that came to intermittent manifestation in the first century, but rather as that which, for every Christian, is real now and here.

A certain disposition, it may be noted, has often shown itself within the Church to sanction as Christian the confused idea that miracles may possibly have happened once, but are unknown to-day ; the rider being added, in certain quarters, that since they do not happen now, the question whether they ever happened at all is of no great consequence. The age of miracles is past. It may be that bibliolatry has aided the currency of this notion among Protestants. The Bible, it is rightly held, is the record of God's personal approach to man, supremely in Jesus Christ ; but the erroneous inference is drawn from this that the life of Jesus, and perhaps also the adjacent age, formed a holy island in the sea of history ; a sacred precinct where, it may well be, events took place of a very remarkable kind, but just such events as from the nature of the case had no need to occur again. Clearly this line of argument, to be convincing, must tacitly involve the premise that a change has come about either in the character of God or in the moral situation of man. If God is farther off from the world than in the first century, or if man can now redeem himself, the cessation of miracle is no great wonder. But if we are still captives of sin and death, and if God is still loving and mighty, it is difficult to see why His saving interposition

should be less in place now than previously. And this means that miracle is still a live interest of faith. For a moment conceive the evidence for Bible miracles being a score of times stronger than it is ; conceive it being so strong as to be virtually unassailable : in spite of this, if these miraculous occurrences had nothing in common with our own experience, if they were completely out of line with what we know God's loving care is effectuating in our lives now, religion would simply have no concern with them whatever. Like the pound-notes of a bank that broke fifty years ago, they would be worthless. And conversely, if our experience to-day exhibits no trace of a power of God which neither nature nor humanity, functioning in their normal ways, can explain, that is an argument against the historicity of the New Testament record, so far as it includes miracle, which absolutely nothing can get over. We may assume, therefore, that the experience of the first age and of our own really hangs together. For the Christian Deism that puts miracle into the first century but denies it to the twentieth, there is nothing to be said, either from the philosophic or the religious point of view. Only as deep is felt calling unto deep, only as we trace a transcendent saving power of God in life to-day, have we the courage or the desire to believe the amazing things proclaimed by the apostles. All discussion of miracle, therefore, which does not presuppose the Christian experience of redemption, is labour thrown away.

It is not too much to say, indeed, that faith in miracle is both more difficult to-day, and more vital, than ever previously. Why is this? Just because we perceive the alternatives with a sharpness and decision that no age has ever equalled. The modern mind has taken in the conception of the world as a closed system of physical sequences. And in the main that conception is a modern

novelty. Exaggerated statements have no doubt been made as to the absence from Biblical minds of the idea of natural law. We are invited to suppose that there existed for them no fixed order of any kind, so that the opening of blind eyes and the resurrection of dead men were in no way felt to be astonishing or exceptional events. Why in that case Scripture writers should have formed the idea of miracle at all, it is hard to comprehend; since by hypothesis anything might happen, and there could be no such thing as a startling or significant exception. Clearly this will not do. In New Testament days they were as much aware as we are that a dead man normally remains dead. The sisters in Bethany understood too well the finality of the grave to have any hope that Lazarus would return to life. Nevertheless, true as this is, it ought not to be allowed to obscure what is the differential feature of Bible thinking, namely, the belief that all events, normal and abnormal, stand in an equally direct relation to the power of God. All things are immediately under His control and flow forth from His activity. This being so, it was easier and more natural for men of that time to hold fast the conviction that within the course of the world God is able to manifest His power in exceptional modes of action.

To-day, however, the situation is very different. To-day the Christian believer is faced by the conception—often enunciated as the basal presupposition of all science—that the world is an inviolable system of mechanical causation, a complex unity of rigidly fixed forces, acting and interacting in absolutely pre-determined ways.¹ This conception is ardently engendered in innumerable minds not merely as an assumption justly made by the scientific investigator,

¹ For a classical criticism of this theory see Professor James Ward's *Naturalism and Agnosticism*.

but as the last and highest truth about the world accessible to the human intelligence. Religious thinkers who are in earnest with such a notion must feel as if a rigid world-system had come to stand between God and man; it is (so to speak) a fate for Him no less than for ourselves. The course of history, equally with the course of nature, is only clock-work running down, and to talk about God's love intervening, at any point, or acting directly upon us, becomes merely unintelligent. "We are," as Huxley put it, "but parts of the great series of causes and effects which in an unbroken continuity composes that which is and has been and shall be—the sum of existence." I will not dwell upon the point that if this view of the world bars out miracle, it does so for reasons that bar out many other things beside; as, for example, free moral action and everything that may be described as spontaneity or mental activity in the human past. Man's volition, indeed, counts for nothing in the course of events. It is very possible that the protest we raise, in the name of ethics, against this barely mechanical theory, this iron law of sequences, may open doors into the transcendent that let in much more than moral freedom. But at least it is now clear what is meant by the statement that faith in the supernatural is vital to-day just because it is so difficult. We feel as never before how much we stand to lose by the surrender of this faith. As it has been put: "With the increasing pressure of this notion of iron law, there is an increasing sense of the need of a power above it. Instead of being a drag upon faith, the miraculous, the idea of revelation, or whatever you choose to call it, is once more going to be a pillar of it."¹ If we are not to confess that heredity makes us prisoners to the past, and environment to the present, the belief must be held fast

¹ Figgis, *The Gospel and Human Needs*, p. 21.

that this mesh-work of cosmic forces is the expression of a conscious Will, not confined to, or exhausted in, these forces, but able to use them for His independent aims.

In what follows I wish to put forward the suggestion that the Christian, *quâ* Christian, has no option but to believe in the supernatural, because his own experience as a religious man is full of it. Reserving the question as to whether they can somehow be linked together in a unity, we may say that there are three obvious aspects of the believing attitude to God which are essential to faith and yet implicitly affirm at the same time that Divine freedom of action within the world, that free use on God's part of the natural order, which is equivalent to miracle.

(1) *The faith that prayer is answered.* We are justified, I think, in holding first that Christian faith is unreal apart from prayer, and next that prayer itself implies a belief in some sort of direct communion with God. Is this belief true? Do I have actual communion with the Father, in which He acts freely upon me and I in my own measure act on Him? Is there fellowship between us which is a real fact for His mind no less than for my own? When I pray, am I indulging in a mental exercise that merely stimulates me by its reflex influence, as a boy keeps his courage up by whistling; or am I in truth responding to the direct touch of God on my soul? Of course the purely reflex theory has its advocates, but it is usually only a question of time until they begin to feel that if they are right the word "prayer" is a misnomer. Once prove to men that supplication reaches no ear but their own, and that its influence moves always within the circle of their own mind (the subliminal self included, if there is such a thing), and they will give over praying, as an extremely roundabout mode of attaining what may be attained much more directly. That view of prayer cannot be right, how-

ever, which at once puts an end to prayer when it is clearly grasped.

The man who prays, therefore, instinctively and of necessity holds to the real nature of fellowship with God. He is conscious that the Divine mind and his own are in a real relation of reciprocal activity. Now the point to note is that such fellowship is essentially a supernatural thing. It is something that simply breaks through the mechanical theory according to which the universe is a closed system of necessary causation, admitting of no free intervention from within or without. It means that God is entering into personal converse with man, and that man is answering back again. This, from the point of view of a world completely "given," and so, as Laplace put it, capable of deduction from its formula, is as miraculous a fact as we could wish. No man, then, who holds that prayer is truly heard and answered can with any logical consistency deny the possibility of miracle, nor can any one who utterly denies miracle justifiably contend that prayer is heard. The two things hang together. We have in fact to choose, to say whether or no we shall conceive the world in such wise as to admit of a living fellowship between God and man. And if, being Christians, we cling to the fact of communion with God as the most certain of all certainties, we are implicitly affirming a relation of ethical freedom both on God's side and ours, not a relationship every change in which is mathematically calculable beforehand.

To take at once the test case, can Jesus' life of prayer be regarded as anything more than a delusion, if we adopt the view that the world is a closed system? If it be replied: Yes, but Jesus had a different conception of the universe from ours, the statement indeed is incontestable, but quite irrelevant. Had the faith of Jesus hung upon a certain view of the world, it might have perished—it would

have perished—with the inevitable advance of science and philosophy. But it hung upon a certain view of God, and this we men of to-day may share.

Thus in the supremely Christian act of praying in the assurance to be heard, we implicitly take for granted the reality of the supernatural. It matters not one whit though the blessings we seek are spiritual rather than physical. There is no principle of philosophy, and certainly there is none in Christian faith, to justify that distinction.¹ Moreover, we conciliate no one by renouncing the right to pray for blessings physical; for after all the universe is one, and is orderly throughout, and from the point of view of science the hearing of a prayer for inward grace is just as inexplicable, and no more, than the hearing of prayer for the cure of mortal disease. And it seems to follow from the above that the man who does not pray is scarcely qualified to form an opinion as to whether miracles are real or not. He throws away the best chance open to him of contemplating a miracle (so to speak) on its inner side.

(2) *The faith that the world is providentially governed.* This also is an element that no one will deny to be vital to Christian religion. And vital in the strictest sense of that word; personal Christianity cannot live without it. It is set at the heart of the religious view of the world, and diffuses a particular kind of atmosphere over the whole of our

¹ "The conception of a mechanically determinate system of law claims to dominate the psychical realm quite as much as the physical. We must break with that conception (as anything more than a scientifically useful fiction) in the former realm, if we are to believe in real answers to prayer for spiritual grace; and if we break with it there, it is philosophically inconsistent to admit its complete validity in the physical world. The experimental demonstrations of the existence of particular physical laws can place no difficulty in our path. For such demonstrations prove only that the laws hold good under all the conditions covered by the experiment." From a striking article by Professor A. H. Hogg on "Christianity as Emancipation from this World," in the *Madras Christian College Magazine* for August, 1909.

experience. Apart from a robust and all-pervading conviction that Almighty God is ruling all things, and ruling them in perfect love, our faith is not continuous with the faith of the New Testament; it is no longer the faith that overcomes the world. Now I wish to put the question whether it is possible to hold that God really governs the universe, except by implicitly assuming what is tantamount to miracle. Of course (as in certain philosophies) He might *be* the universe, and in that case the conception of miracle were unmeaning; or again, He might *watch* it, its ills and agonies, from afar off, and on such terms also the religious interest in miracle would have vanished. But can He govern it except as He affects its course of movement, and affects it by way of real initiation? Can He govern it at all unless He interposes creatively, as a *vera causa*? I find it difficult to understand what significance we are to attach to the providence of God, in which every Christian believes, if He is to be regarded simply as contemplating the cosmic processes at every point, and letting them have their own way. There is no answer, as it seems to me, to Lotze's words: "One who regards the world as a system of causes and effects in which there are no free beginnings, has no right to speak of it as being governed at all."¹ Now a miracle is nothing more or less than a free beginning on God's part. I am not saying we can demonstrate the reality of it. Perhaps we do well to distrust all demonstrations, both for and against, on such subjects. But I say that if we exclude the very possibility that such a thing should be, we leave God nothing to do in governing the world. In particular His providence can no longer be given an immediate relation to the life of every individual; whereas it is the first and last certainty of the Christian

¹ *Philosophy of Religion* (Conybeare's translation), p. 113.

mind that God is able to help each one of us, in all places and at all times, that His care for each is as personal and as direct as if there were no other soul in being. The message of Jesus is built on this. But how the care of God is to touch the individual life if for Him "free beginnings" are excluded, is indeed hard to say. So that we have here a point right in the centre of faith at which the reality of the supernatural comes home to us directly.

Of course there is a large group of writers who assure us that faith in Providence is something very different. What faith in Providence means, they say, is this. My assurance that I am God's child so fills me with strength that I am more than equal to the burdens and adversities of life. My soul is so raised above the world as to be independent of its accidents, able to draw nourishment from all that happens, however dark or hostile. Calamity is felt not to be a fate, but an inspiring summons to effort. We believe in Providence, therefore, when we rise to the confession that all things may be viewed as having their place in a vast beneficent Divine plan. Nothing in the causal nexus of the world is altered—there is no modification of the course of events in that sense—but the soul is suffused with power to overcome. What happens is a change within the human personality; faith in Providence arises in him as a spiritual capacity to interpret the processes of nature and history in a certain way. But outside his mind God alters nothing.

There is just one weak spot in this construction. If this is all that Providence means—the production in us of a certain spiritual temper—what shall we say regarding the man who has no faith? Is there a Divine care over his life also? *Ex hypothesi* he is not yet able to construe things in this believing way: no triumphant certainty lifts his soul above dark and disappointing episodes; does

it then follow that Providence is out of all relation to him? So it would appear. We read in Bousset that "God's personal care for us, in which we believe, would be perfectly ineffectual if we individuals did not understand and comprehend it."¹ Surely the Christian mind cannot acquiesce in such a view. Surely a man may look back on long years passed before he knew God as Father, well assured that even then, although as yet he had given not a thought to the Divine care, it was still around and above him, guiding him forward, despite his blindness, to the hour of opened eyes and penitent recognition. But if so, there is more by far in Providence than our interpretation of the course of things; it is something objective, an actual power of God in control of all that is, a power which is in real exercise. And faith will never be content with less than the conviction that the providence of God is not simply a collective religious name for the actings of cosmic forces, but a higher control which these forces serve.

A curious piece of evidence confirming the statement I have just made may be found in Bousset's own argument. After stating, on the next page, that "to pray is to lead our life under God's eyes and to accept our life from His hands," he proceeds in a strain that comes as a surprise to one who has followed his line of thought attentively. "If our life," he writes, "is based on this foundation, this attitude will again and again be concentrated in definite prayers for this and that. We shall again and again think and feel that a definite course of events may be of the utmost importance for our inward, higher life—perhaps, indeed, we may judge, necessary for its successful development. Now—so our faith tells us—we are not forbidden to ask God concerning the shaping of outward events and occurrences, and in such cases there is no absolute and permanent dividing line

¹ *Faith of a Modern Protestant*, p. 62.

between the important and the unimportant, the inward life and outward facts.”¹ These words are true, one feels, to the irrepressible instinct of the man who prays. Such a man knows that with God all things are possible—even, in Bousset’s phrase, ‘the shaping of outward events.’ But just as clearly they are words which it is impossible to reconcile with the uncompromising utterance two pages earlier, bidding us “admit at once, quite frankly, that nothing in the outside material world will be altered through our prayer, that nothing will happen that would not have happened without our prayer.” Bousset himself being witness, therefore, we see that faith is indissociable from the certainty that God does govern the world, that things happen in response to prayer which would not have happened without it. No theory, of history or metaphysics, can stifle that assurance. And the real control of things on God’s part demanded by it is, as we have seen, obviously and unequivocally supernatural in character.

(3) *The faith that sin is forgiven.* Here we come still closer to the heart of personal religious experience. And once more what calls for emphasis is the wholly supernatural character of that experience. For every man who has received the forgiveness of God knows that a change has passed upon him that nothing in nature or in himself can explain.

Few things in the Gospel record are more significant than that scene at Capernaum (Mark ii.) when Jesus healed the sick of the palsy. It is clear that to Jesus the word of healing and the word of pardon were both miraculous. Men, as we know, can neither cure disease nor forgive sin by a word. For them to talk of either thing is easy—and useless. But when the paralytic rose up and carried out his bed, Jesus bade His critics mark the demonstration

¹ *Ibid.* p. 63.

implied in the cure that His pronouncement of pardon was just as effectual. Pardon and cure are the two aspects of salvation for the whole man ; and the power of God alone can explain either. As it has been put : " It is not declarations we have to do with, here or anywhere in the gospels, but achievements. Jesus no more told the man his sins were forgiven than He told him he was not lame. With the same word of redemptive power He lifted the disabling touch of sin from his soul and of paralysis from his limbs, and in doing so revealed what He was."¹ So, to His own question : Whether is easier, to forgive or to heal ? the answer—if we speak in Jesus' sense—is that both are equally impossible with man and equally possible with God.

The result now reached, that pardon is for Jesus a miraculous thing, will be admitted to be of importance. What is nearly as important is the fact that the Christian consciousness yields an estimate of pardon which is in complete harmony with Jesus. In the soul of a pardoned man, all the pardoned feel, there has taken place that which mere psychological forces could never have produced, and which is so ineffably great that it asks for a supernatural cause. For in the forgiveness of sin something is done to us, and upon us, that gives a new start to life. It is not merely that the tendencies of character are reversed ; prior to that, and as conditioning all the rest, the burden of past sin, of sin that cleaves to us with the warning that it is ours for ever, is lifted clean away, and we find ourselves drawn back to the great heart of God the Father. Who, indeed, but God can set before us this open door ? Who but God can knit up the broken threads of trust and fellowship ? Who but God can speak the liberating word of absolution,

¹ Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*. p. 306 f.

or say to the aching heart, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee"? And thus in forgiveness, in the only sense in which a religious man cares to use the word, God does a decisive and supernatural thing, which none but He can do—He separates between sin and the sinner. He abolishes the guilt of the sin; not by declaring that it is not sinful; not by making a pretence about it or forgetting it, but by depriving it of its power to expel the sinner from His presence. One who comes seeking God with this load of conscious guilt upon his spirit may indeed be gravely tempted to doubt the possibility of its removal, more especially if he has felt the influence of that sombre naturalistic pessimism by which the modern mind is so often haunted, and which bids the sinner endure his fate with a dumb, brave stoicism as best he may. But in unnumbered lives all these misgivings have vanished in the presence of Jesus Christ. Fact has proved stronger than determinist logic. For the man to whom forgiveness is real has now learnt that within and above all cosmic law there is a Father; that he is faced by no mere impersonal tendencies, but by the living God, who in Jesus puts forth His hand to meet and grasp ours, and through forgiveness ushers us into a new and blessed world of good.

Now this, I repeat, is in the strict sense miraculous. It is something to which the normal operations of phenomenal reality are simply irrelevant; something which transcends all their relations of inviolable sequence, just because it is God Himself entering a human life in an immediate (yet not unmediated) way, and inaugurating a new relationship in which He and that life shall henceforth stand to each other. The psychologist may have to say much that is of importance as to modes in which the assurance of pardon captures the focus of consciousness, and instals a new

system of ideas as regnant over the inner life. But what interests the believer is not this; rather it is the direct personal action of God in bestowing on him the peace of reconciliation. It is part of the definition of forgiveness that its only source is God. He alone can rescue us from the necessities and fatalities of evil in which science and history seem to involve us, so making free personal life incredible. Forgiveness, imparted to us in His love, is the experience in which we really become persons—not things, nor links in a chain, but free men.

If the analysis given in the foregoing pages be sound, the Christian believer may justly recognise in his own experience the continuous presence of elements, whose reality is not to be denied—at least by him—yet which turn out, when more closely scrutinised, to be intrinsically supernatural in character. Or to put it otherwise, these elements are intelligible only if the theory is false and inadequate which regards the world as a closed system of forces, all the changes in which—a sufficiently powerful mind being assumed—are capable of computation in advance. Three such elements I have endeavoured to define. There is the fact—to the Christian it is a fact—that prayer is heard. There is the fact—to the Christian it is a fact—that God rules the world. There is the fact—to the Christian it is a fact—that sin is forgiven. But if for me prayer is heard, and the world Divinely governed, and sin forgiven, then I know that God is a free spirit, able to bring events to pass that transcend all natural forces acting with mechanical necessity, able to “release into the phenomenal order the pent-up fulness” of His own Divine activity. That is to say, since after all the universe is one, the implications of living faith prove to me that nature, with its apparent iron uniformity, is but a fragment of the whole reality: the whole being richer, more plastic, more full of unimaginable potentialities,

and the regularities of nature but part of the vast resources of God, 'who doeth wondrous things.'

I do not set forth this view as a proof of miracle that might avail to convince one who has not yet taken the Christian attitude to Christ. I do not feel that any such convincing proof is possible. But I suggest that for a believer there exist immediately known facts in his own experience which are to him a clear proof that miracle is real. And this necessarily has a bearing on his conclusions as to alleged supernatural events in the past. If a God of redeeming love is working now and here, in ways that we can test, that is at all events a fact not to be overlooked in our estimate of the amazing things recorded in the New Testament.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

*HISTORICAL COMMENTARY ON THE FIRST
EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY.*

XXV. CHARACTER OF TIMOTHY'S POSITION AND DUTIES.

THE passage iv. 6-16 mentions the chief kinds of duty in the congregation which will have to be performed by Timothy. These are (1) Reading of the Scriptures; (whether in public or in private or both is not stated); (2) Exhortation (together with reproof of faults); (3) Teaching. To these may be added, as primarily personal, but as indirectly affecting the Church, (4) Cultivation of the gift of inspiration. Elsewhere it is in many passages mentioned or implied that he (and so also Titus in Crete) had a leading part to play in the selection and appointment of Church officials, Bishops or Presbyters, Deacons, Deaconesses, Widows.

Reading of the Scriptures of course implies much in the way of explanation and interpretation and comment. Exhortation and reproof are often referred to, e.g. iii. 15,