

PAPER COVER EDITION

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SUPERNATURAL RELIGION

***An Inquiry into the Reality of Divine
Revelation***

WATTS & CO.,

17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.

1905

Alexander Search,

SUPERNATURAL RELIGION

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SUPERNATURAL RELIGION

AN INQUIRY

INTO THE

REALITY OF DIVINE REVELATION

POPULAR EDITION

CAREFULLY REVISED

[ISSUED FOR THE RATIONALIST PRESS ASSOCIATION, LIMITED]

LONDON :

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17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.

1905

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“Credulity is as real, if not so great, a sin as unbelief.”—ARCHBISHOP
TRENCH, *Notes on the Miracles of our Lord*, 8th ed., p. 27.

✓ | “The abnegation of reason is not the evidence of faith, but the confession of
despair.”—DR. LIGHTFOOT, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 4th ed., p. ix.

PREFACE

IN preparing this edition it has been thought desirable to make some changes, both with the view of rendering the book more convenient to the reader, and bringing the argument as much as possible up to date. On the one hand, an entirely new chapter has been introduced dealing with the evidence of "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," an ancient treatise which had not been published when the last edition was issued. Much pertinent matter regarding the martyrdom of Ignatius, which has hitherto only formed part of the preface to the sixth and complete editions, has now been suitably incorporated in the text. In a similar way, considerable additions have been made to the chapter on Tatian, dealing with more recent information on the nature of his *Diatessaron*. A still more important insertion in this edition is a critical examination of the use of the works of Josephus by the author of the third Synoptic and the Acts of the Apostles, by which fresh light has been thrown upon the date at which those writings must have been produced.

On the other hand, the long lists of writers on different subjects treated in the text have been omitted, where direct quotations have not been made from their works, or where such references were not considered specially interesting. The long linguistic analyses of speeches in the Acts of the Apostles, and unnecessary Greek quotations in the notes throughout, have also been omitted as of little interest to general readers. Any student desirous of examining these is referred to the complete or earlier

editions. Nothing has been removed, however, which is of any importance to the main argument, and much that is of interest has been added.

For the rest, whatever improvement could be effected in the style of the book has been carefully carried out, and it is hoped that this edition has considerably gained in clearness and precision. Except in this respect, the Conclusions have not been materially altered, but, on the contrary, after bearing the test of many years of thought and study, they are repeated with unhesitating confidence.

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INTRODUCTION

THEORETICALLY, the duty of adequate inquiry into the truth of any statement of serious importance before believing it is universally admitted. Practically, no duty is more universally neglected. This is more especially the case in regard to Religion, in which our concern is so great, yet whose credentials so few personally examine. The difficulty of such an investigation and the inability of most men to pursue it, whether from want of opportunity or want of knowledge, are, no doubt, the chief reasons for this neglect; but another, and scarcely less potent, obstacle has probably been the odium which has been attached to any doubt regarding the dominant religion, as well as the serious, though covert, discouragement of the Church to all critical examination of the title-deeds of Christianity. The spirit of doubt, if not of intelligent inquiry, however, has, of late years, become too strong for repression, and, at the present day, the pertinency of the question of a German writer, "Are we still Christians?" receives unconscious illustration from many a popular pulpit and many a social discussion.

The prevalent characteristic of popular theology in England at this time may be said to be a tendency to eliminate from Christianity, with thoughtless dexterity, every supernatural element which does not quite accord with current opinion, and yet to ignore the fact that in so doing it has practically been altogether abandoned. This tendency is fostered with illogical zeal by many distinguished men within the Church itself, who endeavour to arrest the pursuing wolves of doubt and unbelief which press upon it by practically throwing to them, scrap by scrap, the very doctrines which constitute the claims of Christianity to be regarded as a Divine Revelation at all. They try to spiritualise or dilute that which remains into a form which does not shock their reason; and yet they cling to the delusion that they still retain the consolation and the hope of truths which, if not divinely

revealed, are mere human speculation regarding matters beyond reason.

Christianity itself distinctly claims to be a direct Divine Revelation of truths beyond the natural attainment of the human intellect. To submit the doctrines thus revealed, therefore, to criticism, and to clip and prune them down to the standard of human reason, whilst, at the same time, their supernatural character is maintained, is an obvious absurdity. Christianity must either be recognised to be a Divine Revelation beyond man's criticism, and, in that case, its doctrines must be received even though Reason cannot be satisfied, or the claims of Christianity to be such a Divine Revelation must be disallowed, in which case it becomes the legitimate subject of criticism like every other human system. One or other of these alternatives must be adopted; but to assert that Christianity is Divine, and yet to deal with it as human, is illogical and wrong.

When we consider the vast importance of the interests involved, therefore, it must be apparent that there can be no more urgent problem for humanity to solve than the question: Is Christianity a supernatural Divine Revelation or not? To this we may demand a clear and decisive answer. The evidence must be of no uncertain character which can warrant our abandoning the guidance of Reason, and blindly accepting doctrines which, if not supernatural truths, must be rejected by the human intellect as monstrous delusions. We propose in this work to seek a conclusive answer to this momentous question.

We must, by careful and impartial investigation, acquire the right to our belief, whatever it may be, and not float like a mere waif into the nearest haven. Even true conclusions which are arrived at either accidentally or by wrong methods are dangerous. The current which by good fortune led to-day to truth may to-morrow waft us to falsehood.

If we look at the singular diversity of views entertained, not only with regard to the doctrines, but also to the evidences, of Christianity, we cannot but be struck by the deplorable position in which Divine Revelation is now placed.

Orthodox Christians may be divided into two broad classes, one of which professes to base the Church upon the Bible, and the other the Bible upon the Church. The one party assert that the Bible is fully and absolutely inspired, that it contains God's

V. Child.

W. Hume.

revelation to man, and that it is the only and sufficient ground for all religious belief; and they maintain that its authenticity is proved by the most ample and irrefragable external as well as internal evidence. On the other hand, men of undoubted piety and learning, as well as unquestioned orthodoxy, admit that the Bible is totally without literary or historical evidence, and cannot for a moment be upheld upon any such grounds as the revealed word of God; that none of the great doctrines of ecclesiastical Christianity can be deduced from the Bible, but that, notwithstanding this absence of external and internal evidence, this Revelation stands upon the sure basis of the inspiration of the Church. Can the unsupported testimony of a Church which in every age has vehemently maintained errors and denounced truths which are now universally recognised, be considered sufficient guarantee of Divine Revelation? Obviously, there is no ground for accepting from a fallible Church and fallacious tradition doctrines which, avowedly, are beyond the criterion of reason, and therefore require miraculous evidence.

With belief based upon such uncertain grounds, and with such vital difference of views regarding evidence, it is not surprising that ecclesiastical Christianity has felt its own weakness, and entrenched itself against the assaults of investigation. Such inquiry, however, cannot be suppressed. Mere scientific questions may be regarded with apathy by those who do not feel their personal bearing. It may possibly seem to some a matter of little practical importance to them to determine whether the earth revolves round the sun, or the sun round the earth; but no earnest mind can fail to perceive the immense personal importance of Truth in regard to Religion—the necessity of investigating, before accepting, dogmas, the right interpretation of which is represented as necessary to salvation—and the clear duty, before abandoning reason for faith, to exercise reason, in order that faith may not be mere credulity.

It was in this conviction that the following inquiry into the reality of Divine Revelation was originally undertaken, and in this spirit others should enter upon it. An able writer, who will not be suspected of exaggeration on this subject, has said: "The majority of mankind, perhaps, owe their belief, rather to the outward influence of custom and education, than to any strong principle of faith within; and it is to be feared that many, if they came to perceive how wonderful what they believed was, would not find

their belief so easy, and so matter-of-course a thing as they appear to find it."² If it is to be more than a mere question of priority of presentation whether we are to accept Buddhism, Mohammedanism, or Christianity, we must strictly and fearlessly examine the evidence upon which they profess to stand. The neglect of examination can never advance truth, as the severest scrutiny can never retard it; but belief without discrimination can only foster ignorance and superstition.

To no earnest mind can such inquiry be otherwise than a serious and often a painful task; but, dismissing preconceived ideas and preferences derived from habit and education, and seeking only the Truth, holding it, whatever it may be, to be the only object worthy of desire or capable of satisfying a rational mind, the quest cannot but end in peace and satisfaction. In such an investigation, however, to quote words of Archbishop Whateley, "It makes all the difference in the world whether we place Truth in the first place or in the second place"; for if Truth acquired do not compensate for every pet illusion dispelled, the path is thorny indeed, although it must still be faithfully trodden.

² J. B. Mozley, B.D., on Miracles; *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, 2nd ed., p. 4

AN INQUIRY INTO THE REALITY OF DIVINE REVELATION

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

MIRACLES IN RELATION TO CHRISTIANITY

AT the very outset of inquiry into the origin and true character of Christianity we are brought face to face with the Supernatural. Christianity professes to be a Divine revelation of truths which the human intellect could not otherwise have discovered. It is not a form of religion developed by the wisdom of man and appealing to his reason, but a system miraculously communicated to the human race, the central doctrines of which are either superhuman or untenable. If the truths said to be revealed were either of an ordinary character or naturally attainable, they would at once discredit the claim to a Divine origin. No one could maintain that a system discoverable by reason would be supernaturally communicated. The whole argument for Christianity turns upon the necessity of such a revelation, and the consequent probability that it would be made.

There is nothing singular, it may be remarked, in the claim of Christianity to be a direct revelation from God. With the exception of the religions of Greece and Rome, which, however, also had their subsidiary supposition of Divine inspiration, there has scarcely been any system of religion which has not been proclaimed to the world as a direct Divine communication. Long before Christianity claimed this character, the religions of India had anticipated the idea. To quote the words of an accomplished scholar: "According to the orthodox views of Indian theologians,

not a single line of the Veda was the work of human authors. The whole Veda is in some way or other the work of the Deity; and even those who received it were not supposed to be ordinary mortals, but beings raised above the level of common humanity, and less liable, therefore, to error in the reception of revealed truth."¹ The same origin is claimed for the religion of Zoroaster, whose doctrines, beyond doubt, exercised great influence at least upon later Jewish theology, and whose Magian followers are appropriately introduced beside the cradle of Jesus, as the first to do honour to the birth of Christianity. In the same way Mohammed announced his religion as directly communicated from heaven.

Christianity, however, as a religion professing to be divinely revealed, is not only supernatural in origin and doctrine, but its claim to acceptance is necessarily based upon supernatural evidence; for it is obvious that truths which require to be miraculously communicated do not come within the range of our intellect, and cannot, therefore, be intelligently received upon internal testimony. "And, certainly," says an able Bampton Lecturer, "if it was the will of God to give a revelation, there are plain and obvious reasons for asserting that miracles are necessary as the guarantee and voucher for that revelation. A revelation is, properly speaking, such only by virtue of telling us something which we could not know without it. But how do we know that that communication of what is undiscoverable by human reason is true? Our reason cannot prove the truth of it, for it is by the very supposition beyond our reason. There must be, then, some note or sign to certify to it and distinguish it as a true communication from God, which note can be nothing else than a miracle."² In another place the same Lecturer stigmatises the belief of the Mohammedan "as in its very principle irrational," because he accepts the account which Mohammed gave of himself, without supernatural evidence.³ The belief of the Christian is contrasted with it as rational, "because the Christian believes in a supernatural dispensation upon the proper evidence of such a dispensation—viz., the miraculous."⁴ Mohammed is reproached with having "an utterly barbarous idea of evidence, and a total miscalculation of the claims of reason," because he did not consider miraculous evidence necessary to attest a supernatural dispensation; "whereas

¹ M. Müller, *Chips from a German Workshop*, 1867, vol. i., p. 18.

² J. B. Mozley, B.D., Bampton Lecturer in 1865, on *Miracles*, 2nd ed., 1867, p. 6 f.

³ *Ib.*, p. 30, cf. Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, pt. ii., chap. vii., § 3; Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, ed. Whately, 1859, p. 324 ff.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 31.

the Gospel is adapted to perpetuity for this cause especially, with others, that it was founded upon a true calculation, and a foresight of the permanent need of evidence; our Lord admitting the inadequacy of His own mere word, and the necessity of a rational guarantee to His revelation of His own nature and commission."¹

The spontaneous offer of miraculous evidence, indeed, has always been advanced as a special characteristic of Christianity, logically entitling it to acceptance in contradistinction to all other religions. "It is an acknowledged historical fact," says Bishop Butler, "that Christianity offered itself to the world, and demanded to be received, upon the allegation—*i.e.*, as unbelievers would speak, upon the pretence—of miracles, publicly wrought to attest the truth of it in such an age;.....and Christianity, including the dispensation of the Old Testament, seems distinguished by this from all other religions."²

? quite Most of the great English divines have clearly recognised and asserted the necessity of supernatural evidence to establish the reality of a supernatural revelation. Bishop Butler affirms miracles and the completion of prophecy to be the "direct and fundamental proofs" of Christianity.³ Elsewhere he says: "The notion of a miracle, considered as a proof of a divine mission, has been stated with great exactness by divines, and is, I think, sufficiently understood by everyone. There are also invisible miracles—the Incarnation of Christ, for instance—which, being secret, cannot be alleged as a proof of such a mission, but require themselves to be proved by visible miracles. Revelation itself, too, is miraculous; and miracles are the proof of it."⁴ Paley states the case with equal clearness: "In what way can a revelation be made but by miracles? In none which we are able to conceive."⁵ His argument, in fact, is founded upon the principle that "nothing but miracles could decide the authority" of Christianity.⁶ In another work he asserts that no man can prove a future retribution but the teacher "who testifies by miracles that his doctrine comes from God."⁷ Bishop Atterbury, again, referring to the principal doctrines of ecclesiastical Christianity, says: "It is this kind of Truth that God is properly said to reveal; Truths, of which, unless revealed, we should have

¹ *Ib.*, p. 32.

² *The Analogy of Religion*, pt. ii., ch. vii., § 3.

³ *Ib.*, pt. ii., ch. vii.

⁴ *Ib.*, pt. ii., ch. ii., § 1.

⁵ *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*. "Preparatory Considerations," p. 12.

⁶ *Ib.*, p. 14.

⁷ *Moral Philosophy*, book v. Speaking of Christianity, in another place, he calls miracles and prophecy "that splendid apparatus with which its mission was introduced and attested" (book iv.).

always continued ignorant; and 'tis in order only to prove these Truths to have been really revealed that we affirm Miracles to be Necessary."¹

Dr. Heurtley, Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford, after pointing out that the doctrines taught as the Christian Revelation are such as could not by any possibility have been attained by the unassisted human reason, and that, consequently, it is reasonable that they should be attested by miracles, continues: "Indeed, it seems inconceivable how without miracles—including prophecy in the notion of a miracle—it could sufficiently have commended itself to men's belief? Who would believe, or would be justified in believing, the great facts which constitute its substance on the *ipse dixit* of an unaccredited teacher? and how, except by miracles, could the first teacher be accredited? Paley, then, was fully warranted in the assertion..... that 'we cannot conceive a revelation'—such a revelation of course as Christianity professes to be, a revelation of truths which transcend man's ability to discover—'to be substantiated without miracles.' Other credentials, it is true, might be exhibited *in addition* to miracles—and such it would be natural to look for—but it seems impossible that miracles could be dispensed with."² Dr. Mansel bears similar testimony: "A teacher who proclaims himself to be specially sent by God, and whose teaching is to be received on the authority of that mission, must, from the nature of the case, establish his claim by proofs of another kind than those which merely evince his human wisdom or goodness. A superhuman authority needs to be substantiated by superhuman evidence; and what is superhuman is miraculous."³

Newman, in discussing the idea and scope of miracles, says: "A revelation—that is, a direct message from God to man—itsself bears in some degree a miraculous character.....And as a revelation itself, so again the evidences of a revelation may all more or less be considered miraculous.....It might even be said that, strictly speaking, no evidence of a revelation is conceivable which does not partake of the character of a miracle; since nothing but a display of power over the existing system of things can attest the immediate presence of Him by whom it was originally established."⁴

Dr. Mozley has stated in still stronger terms the necessity that

¹ *Sermons*, etc. Sermon viii., "Miracles the Most Proper Way of Proving any Religion" (vol. iii., 1766, p. 199).

² *Replies to Essays and Reviews*, 1862, p. 151.

³ *Aids to Faith*, 4th ed., 1863, p. 35.

⁴ *Two Essays on Scripture Miracles and on Ecclesiastical*, by John H. Newman, 2nd ed., 1870, p. 6 f.

Christianity should be authenticated by the evidence of miracles. He supposes the case that a person of evident integrity and loftiness of character had appeared, eighteen centuries ago, announcing himself as pre-existent from all eternity, the Son of God, Maker of the world, who had come down from heaven and assumed the form and nature of man in order to be the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world, and so on, enumerating other doctrines of Christianity. Dr. Mozley then asks: "What would be the inevitable conclusion of sober reason respecting that person? The necessary conclusion of sober reason respecting that person would be that he was disordered in his understanding.....By no rational being could a just and benevolent life be accepted as proof of such astonishing announcements. Miracles are the necessary complement, then, of the truth of such announcements, which, without them, are purposeless and abortive, the unfinished fragments of a design which is nothing unless it is the whole. They are necessary to the justification of such announcements, which indeed, unless they are supernatural truths, are the wildest delusions."¹ He, therefore, concludes that "Christianity cannot be maintained as a revelation undiscoverable by human reason, a revelation of a supernatural scheme for man's salvation, without the evidence of miracles."²

In all points Christianity is emphatically a Supernatural Religion, claiming to be divine in its origin, superhuman in its essence, and miraculous in its evidence. It cannot be accepted without an absolute belief in miracles, and those who profess to hold the religion whilst they discredit its supernatural elements—and they are many at the present day—have widely seceded from ecclesiastical Christianity. Miracles, it is true, are external to Christianity in so far as they are evidential, but inasmuch as it is admitted that miracles alone can attest the reality of Divine revelation they are still inseparable from it; and as the contents of the revelation are, so to say, more miraculous than its attesting miracles, the supernatural enters into the very substance of Christianity, and cannot be eliminated. It is obvious, therefore, that the reality of miracles is the vital point in the investigation which we have undertaken. If the reality of miracles cannot be established, Christianity loses the only evidence by which its truth can be sufficiently attested. If miracles be incredible, the supernatural revelation and its miraculous evidence must together be rejected.

This fact is thoroughly recognised by the ablest Christian divines. Dean Mansel, speaking of the position of miracles in

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 14.

² *Ib.*, p. 23.

regard to Christianity, says: "The question, however, assumes a very different character when it relates, not to the comparative importance of miracles as evidences, but to their reality as facts, and as facts of a supernatural kind. For, if this is denied, the denial does not merely remove one of the supports of a faith which may yet rest securely on other grounds. On the contrary, the whole system of Christian belief with its evidences.....all Christianity, in short, so far as it has any title to that name, so far as it has any special relation to the person or the teaching of Christ, is overthrown at the same time."¹ A little further on he says: "If there be one fact recorded in Scripture which is entitled, in the fullest sense of the word, to the name of a miracle, the RESURRECTION OF CHRIST is that fact. Here, at least, is an instance in which the entire Christian faith must stand or fall with our belief in the supernatural."² He, therefore, properly repudiates the view, "which represents the question of the possibility of miracles as one which merely affects the *external accessories* of Christianity, leaving the *essential doctrines* untouched"³ Dr. Mozley, in a similar manner, argues the inseparable union of miracles with the Christian faith. "Indeed, not only are miracles *conjoined* with doctrine in Christianity, but miracles are inserted *in* the doctrine and are part of its contents. A man cannot state his belief as a Christian in the terms of the Apostles' Creed without asserting them. Can the doctrine of our Lord's Incarnation be disjoined from one physical miracle? Can the doctrine of His justification of us and intercession for us be disjoined from another?.....If a miracle is incorporated as an article in a creed, that article of the creed, the miracle, and the proof of it by a miracle, are all one thing. The great miracles, therefore, upon the evidence of which the Christian scheme rested, being thus inserted in the Christian Creed, the belief in the Creed was of itself the belief in the miraculous evidence of it.....Thus miracles and the supernatural contents of Christianity must stand or fall together."⁴ Dr. Heurtley, referring to the discussion of the reality of miracles, exclaims: "It is not too much to say, therefore, that the question is vital as regards Christianity."⁵ Dr. Westcott not less emphatically makes the same statement. "It is evident," he says, "that if the claim to be a miraculous religion is essentially incredible, apostolic Christianity is simply false.....The essence of Christianity lies in a miracle; and, if it can be shown that a miracle is either impossible or incredible, all further inquiry into the details of its history is superfluous in a

¹ *Aids to Faith*, 1863, p. 3.

² *Ib.*, p. 5.

³ *Ib.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 21 f.

⁵ *Replies to Essays and Reviews*, 1862, p. 143.

religious point of view."¹ Similarly, Dr. Farrar has said: "However skilfully the modern ingenuity of semi-belief may have tampered with supernatural interpositions, it is clear to every honest and unsophisticated mind that, if miracles be incredible, Christianity is false. If Christ wrought no miracles, then the Gospels are untrustworthy.....If the Resurrection be merely a spiritual idea, or a mythicised hallucination, then our religion has been founded on an error....."²

It has been necessary clearly to point out this indissoluble connection between ecclesiastical Christianity and the supernatural, in order that the paramount importance of the question as to the credibility of miracles should be duly appreciated. Our inquiry into the reality of Divine Revelation, then, whether we consider its contents or its evidence, practically reduces itself to the very simple issue: Are miracles antecedently credible? Did they ever really take place? We do not intend to confine ourselves merely to a discussion of the abstract question, but shall also endeavour to form a correct estimate of the value of the specific allegations which are advanced.

Having, then, ascertained that miracles are absolutely necessary to attest the reality of Divine revelation, we may proceed to examine them more closely, and for the present we shall confine ourselves to the representations of these phenomena which are given in the Bible. Throughout the Old Testament the doctrine is inculcated that supernatural communications must have supernatural attestation. God is described as arming his servants with power to perform wonders, in order that they may thus be accredited as his special messengers. The Patriarchs and the people of Israel generally are represented as demanding "a sign" of the reality of communications said to come from God, without which, we are led to suppose, they not only would not have believed, but would have been justified in disbelieving, that the message actually came from him. Thus Gideon³ asks for a sign that the Lord talked with him, and Hezekiah⁴ demands proof of the truth of Isaiah's prophecy that he should be restored to health. It is, however, unnecessary to refer to instances, for it may be affirmed that, upon all occasions, miraculous evidence of an alleged divine mission is stated to have been required and accorded.

The startling information is at the same time given, however,

¹ *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 3rd ed., 1874, p. 34.

² *The Witness of History to Christ*, Hulsean Lectures for 1870, 2nd ed., 1872, p. 25.

³ Judges vi. 17.

⁴ 2 Kings xx. 8 f.

that miracles may be wrought to attest what is false, as well as to accredit what is true. In one place¹ it is declared that, if a prophet actually gives a sign or wonder, and it comes to pass, but teaches the people, on the strength of it, to follow other gods, they are not to hearken to him, and the prophet is to be put to death. The false miracle is, here,² attributed to God himself: "For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul." In the book of the Prophet Ezekiel the case is stated in a still stronger way, and God is represented as directly deceiving the prophet: "And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel."³ God, in fact, is represented as exerting his almighty power to deceive a man, and then as destroying him for being deceived. In the same spirit is the passage⁴ in which Micaiah describes the Lord as putting a lying spirit into the mouths of the prophets who incited Ahab to go to Ramoth-Gilead. Elsewhere,⁵ and notably in the New Testament, we find an ascription of real signs and wonders to another power than God. Jesus himself is represented as warning his disciples against false prophets, who work signs and wonders: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" of whom he should say: "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity."⁶ And again in another place: "For false prophets shall arise, and shall work signs and wonders (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα) to seduce, if it were possible, the elect."⁷ Also, when the Pharisees accuse him of casting out devils by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, Jesus asks: "By whom do your children cast them out?"⁸ a reply which would lose all its point if they were not admitted to be able to cast out devils. In another passage John is described as saying: "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, who followeth not us, and we forbade him."⁹ Without multiplying instances, however, there can be no doubt of the fact that the reality of false miracles and lying wonders is admitted in the Bible.

The obvious deduction from this representation of miracles is

¹ Deut. xiii. 1 ff.

² Deut. xiii. 3.

³ Ezek. xiv. 9. The narrative of God's hardening the heart of Pharaoh in order to bring other plagues upon the land of Egypt is in this vein.

⁴ 1 Kings xxii. 14-23.

⁵ The counter miracles of the Egyptian sorcerers need not be referred to as instances. Ex. vii. 11, 12, 22.

⁶ Matt. vii. 22, 23.

⁷ Mark xiii. 22.

⁸ Matt. xii. 27.

⁹ Mark ix. 38.

that the source and purpose of such supernatural phenomena must always be exceedingly uncertain.¹ Their evidential value is, therefore, profoundly affected, "it being," as Newman has said of ambiguous miracles, "antecedently improbable that the Almighty should rest the credit of His revelation upon events which but obscurely implied His immediate presence."² As it is affirmed that other supernatural beings exist, as well as an assumed Personal God, by whose agency miracles are performed, it is impossible to argue with reason that such phenomena are at any time specially due to the intervention of the Deity. Newman recognises this, but passes over the difficulty with masterly lightness of touch. After advancing the singular argument that our knowledge of spirits is only derived from Scripture, and that their existence cannot be deduced from nature, whilst he asserts that the being of a God—a Personal God be it remembered—can be so discovered, and that, therefore, miracles can only properly be attributed to him, he proceeds: "Still, it may be necessary to show that on our own principles we are not open to inconsistency. That is, it has been questioned whether, in admitting the existence and power of Spirits on the authority of Revelation, we are not in danger of invalidating the evidence upon which that authority rests. For the cogency of the argument for miracles depends on the assumption that interruptions in the course of nature must ultimately proceed from God, which is not true if they may be effected by other beings without His sanction. And it must be conceded that, explicit as Scripture is in considering miracles as signs of Divine agency, it still does seem to give created spirits some power of working them; and even in its most literal sense intimates the possibility of working them in opposition to the true doctrine (Deut. xiii. 1-3; Matt. xxiv. 24; 2 Thess. ii. 9-11)."³ Newman repudiates the attempts of various writers to overcome this difficulty by making a distinction between great miracles and small, many miracles and few, or by referring to the nature of the doctrine attested in order to determine the author of the miracle, or by denying the power of spirits altogether, and explaining away Scripture statements of demoniacal possession and the narrative of the Lord's Temptation. "Without having recourse to any of these dangerous modes of answering the objection," he says, "it

¹ Tertullian saw this difficulty, and in his work against Marcion he argues that miracles alone, without prophecy, could not sufficiently prove Christ to be the Son of God; for he points out that Jesus himself forewarned his disciples that false Christs would come with signs and wonders, like the miracles which he himself had worked, whom he enjoined them beforehand not to believe. *Adv. Mare.*, iii. 3. So also the Author of the *Clementines*, xvii. 14.

² *Two Essays on Miracles*, p. 31.

³ *Ib.*, p. 50 f.

may be sufficient to reply that since, agreeably to the antecedent sentiment of reason, God has adopted miracles as the seal of a divine message, we believe he will never suffer them to be so counterfeited as to deceive the humble inquirer."¹ This is the only reply which even so powerful a reasoner as Newman can give to an objection based on distinct statements of Scripture itself. He cannot deny the validity of the objection; he can only hope or believe in spite of it. Personal belief, independent of evidence, is the most common and the weakest of arguments; at the best, it is prejudice masked in the garb of reason. It is perfectly clear that miracles being thus acknowledged to be common both to God and to other spirits, they cannot be considered a distinctive attestation of divine intervention; and, as Spinoza finely argued, not even the mere existence of God can be inferred from them; for, as a miracle is a limited act, and never expresses more than a certain and limited power, it is certain that we cannot from such an effect conclude even the existence of a cause whose power is infinite.²

This dual character obviously leads to many difficulties in defining the evidential function and force of miracles, and we may best appreciate the dilemma which is involved by continuing to follow the statements and arguments of divines themselves. To the question whether miracles are absolutely to command the obedience of those in whose sight they are performed, and whether, upon their attestation, the doer and his doctrine are to be accepted as of God, Archbishop Trench unhesitatingly replies: "It cannot be so, for side by side with the miracles which serve for the furthering of the kingdom of God runs another line of wonders, the counter-workings of him who is ever the ape of the Most High."³ The deduction is absolutely logical and cannot be denied. "This fact," he says, "that the kingdom of lies has its wonders no less than the kingdom of truth, is itself sufficient evidence that miracles cannot be appealed to absolutely and finally, in proof of the doctrine which the worker of them proclaims." This being the case, it is important to discover how miracles perform their function as the indispensable evidence for a Divine revelation, for with this disability they do not seem to possess much potentiality. Archbishop Trench, then, offers the following definition of the function of miracles: "A miracle does not prove the truth of a doctrine, or the divine mission of him that brings it to pass. That which alone it claims for him at the first is a right to be listened to; it puts him in the alternative

not doing
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has "infinity" in
itself to alter
the order of
nature.

¹ *Two Essays on Scripture Miracles*, p. 51 f.

² *Opera*, ed Tauchnitz, vol iii., cap. vi., 24.

³ *Notes on the Miracles of our Lord*, 8th ed., 1866, p. 22.

of being from heaven or from hell. The doctrine must first commend itself to the conscience as being good, and only then can the miracle seal it as divine. But the first appeal is from the doctrine to the conscience, to the moral nature of man."¹ Under certain circumstances, he maintains, their evidence is utterly to be rejected. "But the purpose of the miracle," he says, "being, as we have seen, to confirm that which is good, so, upon the other hand, where the mind and conscience witness against the doctrine, not all the miracles in the world have a right to demand submission to the word which they seal. On the contrary, the great act of faith is to believe, against, and in despite of them all, in what God has revealed to, and implanted in the soul of the holy and the true; not to believe another Gospel, though an angel from heaven, or one transformed into such, should bring it (Deut. xiii. 3; Gal. i. 8); and instead of compelling assent, miracles are then rather warnings to us that we keep aloof, for they tell us that not merely lies are here, for to that the conscience bore witness already, but that he who utters them is more than a common deceiver, is eminently 'a liar and an Anti-christ,' a false prophet—standing in more immediate connection than other deceived and evil men to the kingdom of darkness, so that Satan has given him his power (Rev. xiii. 2), is using him to be an especial organ of his, and to do a special work for him."² And he lays down the distinct principle that "The miracle must witness for itself, and the doctrine must witness for itself, and then, and then only, the first is capable of witnessing for the second."³

These opinions are not peculiar to the Archbishop of Dublin, but are generally held by divines, although Dr. Trench expresses them with unusual absence of reserve. Dr. Mozley emphatically affirms the same doctrine when he says: "A miracle cannot oblige us to accept any doctrine which is contrary to our moral nature, or to a fundamental principle of religion."⁴ Dr. Mansel speaks

¹ *Notes, etc.*, p. 25. Dr. Trench's views are of considerable eccentricity, and he seems to reproduce in some degree the Platonic theory of Reminiscence. He continues: "For all revelation presupposes in man a power of recognising the truth when it is shown him—that it will find an answer in him—that he will trace in it the lineaments of a friend, though of a friend from whom he has been long estranged, and whom he has well-nigh forgotten. It is the finding of a treasure, but of a treasure which he himself and no other had lost. The denial of this, that there is in man any organ by which truth may be recognised, opens the door to the most boundless scepticism—is, indeed, the denial of all that is god-like in man" (*Ib.*, p. 25). The Archbishop would probably be shocked if we suggested that the god-like organ of which he speaks is Reason.

² *Ib.*, p. 27 f.

³ *Ib.*, p. 33.

⁴ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 25.

to the same effect: "If a teacher claiming to work miracles proclaims doctrines contradictory to previously established truths, whether to the conclusions of natural religion or to the teaching of a former revelation, such a contradiction is allowed, even by the most zealous defenders of the evidential value of miracles, to invalidate the authority of the teacher. But the right conclusion from this admission is not that true miracles are invalid as evidences, but that the supposed miracles in this case are not true miracles at all—*i.e.*, are not the effects of Divine power, but of human deception or of some other agency."¹ A passage from a letter written by Dr. Arnold which is quoted by Dr. Trench in support of his views both illustrates the doctrine and the necessity which has led to its adoption: "You complain," says Dr. Arnold, writing to Dr. Hawkins, "of those persons who judge of a revelation not by its evidence, but by its substance. It has always seemed to me that its substance is a most essential part of its evidence; and that miracles wrought in favour of what was foolish or wicked would only prove Manicheism. We are so perfectly ignorant of the unseen world that the character of any supernatural power can only be judged by the moral character of the statements which it sanctions. Thus only can we tell whether it be a revelation from God or from the Devil."² In another place Dr. Arnold declares: "Miracles must not be allowed to overrule the Gospel; for it is only through our belief in the Gospel that we accord our belief to them."³

¹ *Aids to Faith*, p. 32.

² *Life of Arnold*, ii., p. 226.

³ *Lectures on Modern History*, p. 137. Those who hold such views forget that the greatest miracles of ecclesiastical Christianity are not external to it, but are the essence of its principal dogmas. If the "signs" and "wonders" which form what may be called the collateral miracles of Christianity are only believed in consequence of belief in the Gospel, upon what basis does belief in the miraculous birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, Ascension, and other leading dogmas, rest? These are themselves the Gospel. Newman, the character of whose mind leads him to believe every miracle the evidence against which does not absolutely prohibit his doing so, rather than only those the evidence for which constrains him to belief, supports ecclesiastical miracles somewhat at the expense of those of the Gospels. He points out that only a few of the latter now fulfil the purpose of evidence for a Divine revelation, and the rest are sustained and authenticated by those few; that "The many never have been evidence except to those who saw them, and have but held the place of doctrine ever since; like the truths revealed to us about the unseen world, which are matters of faith, not means of conviction. They have no existence, as it were, out of the record in which they are found." He then proceeds to refer to the criterion of a miracle suggested by Bishop Douglas: "We may suspect miracles to be false the account of which was not published at the time or place of their alleged occurrence, or, if so published, yet without careful attention being called to them." Newman then adds: "Yet St. Mark is said to have written at Rome, St. Luke in Rome or Greece, and St. John

It is obvious that the mutual dependence which is thus established between miracles and the doctrines in connection with which they are wrought destroys the evidential force of miracles, and that the first and the final appeal is made to reason. The doctrine, in fact, proves the miracle instead of the miracle attesting the doctrine. Divines of course attempt to deny this, but no other deduction from their own statements is logically possible. Miracles, according to Scripture itself, are producible by various supernatural beings, and may be Satanic as well as Divine; man, on the other hand, is so ignorant of the unseen world that avowedly he cannot, from the miracle itself, determine the agent by whom it was performed;¹ the miracle, therefore, has no intrinsic evidential value. How, then, according to divines, does it attain any potentiality? Only through a favourable decision on the part of Reason or the "moral nature in man" regarding the character of the doctrine. The result of the appeal to Reason respecting the morality and credibility of the doctrine determines the evidential status of the miracle. The doctrine, therefore, is the real criterion of the miracle which, without it, is necessarily an object of doubt and suspicion.

We have already casually referred to Newman's view of such a relation between miracle and doctrine, but may here more fully quote his suggestive remarks. "Others, by referring to the nature of the doctrine attested," he says, "in order to determine the author of the miracle, have exposed themselves to the plausible charge of adducing, first the miracle to attest the divinity of the doctrine, and then the doctrine to prove the divinity of the miracle."² This argument he characterises as one of the "dangerous modes" of removing a difficulty, although he does not himself point out a safer, and, in a note, he adds: "There is an appearance of doing honour to the Christian doctrines in representing them as *intrinsically* credible, which leads many into supporting opinions which, carried to their full extent, supersede the need of miracles altogether. It must be recollected, too, that they who are allowed to praise have the privilege of finding fault, and may reject, according to their *à priori* notions, as well as receive.

at Ephesus; and the earliest of the Evangelists wrote some years after the events recorded, while the latest did not write for sixty years; and moreover, true though it be that attention was called to Christianity from the first, yet it is true also that it did not succeed at the spot where it arose, but principally at a distance from it" (*Two Essays on Miracles*, etc., 2nd ed., 1870, p. 232 f.). How much these remarks might have been extended and strengthened by one more critical and less ecclesiastical than Newman need not here be stated.

¹ Newman says of a miracle: "Considered by itself, it is at most but the token of a superhuman being" (*Two Essays*, p. 10).

² *Two Essays*, etc., p. 51.

Doubtless the divinity of a clearly immoral doctrine could not be evidenced by miracles; for our belief in the moral attributes of God is much stronger than our conviction of the negative proposition that none but He can interfere with the system of nature.¹ But there is always the danger of extending this admission beyond its proper limits, of supposing ourselves adequate judges of the *tendency* of doctrines; and, because unassisted reason informs us what is moral and immoral in our own case, of attempting to decide on the abstract morality of actions..... These remarks are in nowise inconsistent with using (as was done in a former section) our actual knowledge of God's attributes, obtained from a survey of nature and human affairs, in determining the probability of certain professed miracles having proceeded from Him. It is one thing to infer from the experience of life, another to imagine the character of God from the gratuitous conceptions of our own minds."² Although Newman apparently fails to perceive that he himself thus makes reason the criterion of miracles, and therefore incurs the condemnation with which our quotation opens, the very indecision of his argument illustrates the dilemma in which divines are placed. Dr. Mozley, however, still more directly condemns the principle which we are discussing—that the doctrine must be the criterion of the miracle—although he also, as we have seen, elsewhere substantially affirms it. He says: "The position that the revelation proves the miracles, and not the miracles the revelation, admits of a good qualified meaning; but, taken literally, it is a double offence against the rule that things are properly proved by the proper proof of them; for a supernatural fact *is* the proper proof of a supernatural doctrine; while a supernatural doctrine, on the other hand, is certainly *not* the proper proof of a supernatural fact."³

¹ In another place, however, Newman, contrasting the "Rationalistic" and "Catholic" tempers, and condemning the former, says: "Rationalism is a certain abuse of reason—that is, a use of it for purposes for which it never was intended, and is unfitted. To rationalise in matters of revelation is to make our reason the standard and measure of the doctrines revealed; to stipulate that those doctrines should be such as to carry with them their own justification; to reject them if they come in collision with our existing opinions or habits of thought, or are with difficulty harmonised with our existing stock of knowledge" (*Essays, Crit. and Hist.*, 1872, vol. i., p. 31); and a little further on: "A like desire of judging for one's self is discernible in the original fall of man. Eve did not believe the Tempter any more than God's word, till she perceived 'the fruit was good for food'" (*Ib.*, p. 33). Newman, of course, wishes to limit his principle precisely to suit his own convenience; but in permitting the rejection of a supposed revelation in spite of miracles, on the ground of our disapproval of its morality, it is obvious that the doctrine is substantially made the final criterion of the miracle.

² *Two Essays*, etc., p. 51 f., note (k).

³ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 19.

This statement is obviously true, but it is equally undeniable that, their origin being uncertain, miracles have no distinctive evidential force. How far, then, we may inquire in order thoroughly to understand the position, can doctrines prove the reality of miracles or determine the agency by which they are performed? In the case of moral truths within the limits of reason, it is evident that doctrines which are in accordance with our ideas of what is good and right do not require miraculous evidence at all. They can secure acceptance by their own merits alone. At the same time, it is universally admitted that the truth or goodness of a doctrine is, in itself, no proof that it emanates directly from God, and consequently the most obvious wisdom and beauty in the doctrine could not attest the Divine origin of a miracle. Such truths, however, have no proper connection with revelation at all. "These truths," to quote the words of Bishop Atterbury, "were of themselves sufficiently obvious and plain, and needed not a Divine testimony to make them plainer. But the truths which are necessary in this manner to be attested are those which are of positive institution ; those which, if God had not pleased to reveal them, human reason could not have discovered ; and those which, even now they are revealed, human reason cannot fully account for and perfectly comprehend."¹ How is it possible, then, that reason or "the moral nature in man" can approve as good, or appreciate the fitness of, doctrines which in their very nature are beyond the criterion of reason?² What reply, for instance, can reason give to any appeal to it regarding the doctrine of the Trinity or of the Incarnation? If doctrines the truth and goodness of which are apparent do not afford any evidence of Divine revelation, how can doctrines which reason can neither discover nor comprehend attest the Divine origin of miracles? Dr. Mozley clearly recognises that they cannot do so. "The proof of a revelation," he says—and, we may add, the proof of a miracle, itself a species of revelation—"which is contained in the substance of a revelation, has this inherent check or limit in it : viz., that it cannot reach to what is undiscoverable by reason. Internal evidence is itself an appeal to reason, because at every step the test is our own appreciation of such and such an idea or doctrine, our own perception of its fitness ; but human reason cannot in the nature of the case prove that which, by the very hypothesis, lies beyond human reason."³ It naturally follows that no doctrine which lies beyond reason, and therefore requires

¹ *Sermons*, 8th ed., 1766, vol. iii., p. 198.

² Bishop Butler says : "Christianity is a scheme quite beyond our comprehension" (*Analogy of Religion*, part ii., ch. iv., § 1).

³ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 15.

the attestation of miracles, can possibly afford that indication of the source and reality of miracles which is necessary to endow them with evidential value; and the supernatural doctrine must, therefore, be rejected in the absence of miraculous evidence of a decisive character.

Dr. Mozley labours earnestly, but unsuccessfully, to restore to miracles as evidence some part of that potentiality of which these unfortunate limitations have deprived them. Whilst, on the one hand, he says, "We must admit, indeed, an inherent modification in the function of a miracle as an instrument of proof,"¹ he argues that this is only a limitation, and no disproof of it, and he contends that "The evidence of miracles is not negative, because it has conditions."² His reasoning, however, is purely apologetic, and attempts, by the unreal analogy of supposed limitations of natural principles and evidence, to excuse the disqualifying limitation of the supernatural. He is quite conscious of the serious difficulty of the position. "The question," he says, "may at first sight create a dilemma—If a miracle is nugatory on the side of one doctrine, what cogency has it on the side of another? Is it legitimate to accept its evidence when we please, and reject it when we please?" The only reply he seems able to give to these very pertinent questions is the remark which immediately follows them: "But in truth a miracle is never without an argumentative force, although that force may be counterbalanced."³ In other words, a miracle is always an argument, although it is often a bad one. It is scarcely necessary to go to the supernatural for bad arguments.

It might naturally be expected that the miraculous evidence selected to accredit a Divine revelation should possess certain unique and marked characteristics. It must, at least, be clearly distinctive of Divine power, and exclusively associated with Divine truth. It is inconceivable that the Deity, deigning thus to attest the reality of a communication from himself of truths beyond the criterion of reason, should not make the evidence simple and complete, because, the doctrines proper to such a revelation not being appreciable from internal evidence, it is obvious that the external testimony for them—if it is to be of any use—must be unmistakable and decisive. The evidence which is actually produced, however, so far from satisfying these legitimate anticipations, lacks every one of the qualifications which reason antecedently declares to be necessary. Miracles are not distinctive of Divine power, but are common to Satan, and they are admitted to be performed in support of falsehood as well as in the service of truth. They bear, indeed, so little upon them the impress of their origin and true character that they are dependent for their

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, p. 25.

² *Ib.*, p. 25.

³ *Ib.*, p. 25.

recognition upon our judgment of the very doctrines to attest which they are said to have been designed.

Even taking the representation of miracles, therefore, which divines themselves give, they are utterly incompetent to perform their contemplated functions. If they are superhuman they are not super-Satanic, and there is no sense in which they can be considered miraculously evidential of anything. To argue, as theologians do, that the ambiguity of their testimony is deliberately intended as a trial of our faith is absurd, for, reason being unable to judge of the nature either of supernatural fact or supernatural doctrine, it would be mere folly and injustice to subject to such a test beings avowedly incapable of sustaining it. Whilst it is absolutely necessary, then, that a Divine revelation should be attested by miraculous evidence to justify our believing it, the testimony so-called seems, in all respects, unworthy of the name, and presents anomalies much more suggestive of human invention than Divine originality. We are, in fact, prepared, even by the Scriptural account of miracles, to expect that further examination will supply an explanation of such phenomena which will wholly remove them from the region of the supernatural.

CHAPTER II.

MIRACLES IN RELATION TO THE ORDER OF NATURE

WITHOUT at present touching the question as to their reality, it may be well to ascertain what miracles are considered to be, and how far, and in what sense, it is asserted that they are supernatural. We have, hitherto, almost entirely confined our attention to the arguments of English divines, and we must for the present continue chiefly to deal with them, for it may broadly be said that they alone, at the present day, maintain the reality and supernatural character of such phenomena. No thoughtful mind can fail to see that, considering the function of miracles, this is the only logical and consistent course.¹ The insuperable difficulties in the way of admitting the reality of miracles, however, have driven the great majority of continental, as well as very many English, theologians who still pretend to a certain orthodoxy, either to explain the miracles of the Gospel naturally, or to suppress them altogether. Since Schleiermacher denounced the idea of Divine interruptions of the order of nature, and explained away the supernatural character of miracles, by defining them as merely relative—miracles to us, but in reality mere anticipations of human knowledge and power—his example has been more or less followed throughout Germany, and almost every expedient has been adopted by would-be orthodox writers to reduce, or altogether eliminate, the miraculous elements. The attempts which have been made to do this, and yet to maintain the semblance of unshaken belief in the main points of ecclesiastical Christianity, have lamentably failed, from the hopeless nature of the task and the fundamental error of the conception. The endeavour of Paulus and his school to get rid of the supernatural by a bold naturalistic interpretation of the language of the Gospel narratives, whilst the credibility of the record was represented as intact, was too glaring an outrage upon common sense to be successful; but it was scarcely more illogical than subsequent efforts to suppress the

¹ Newman writes: "Nay, if we only go so far as to realise what Christianity is, when considered merely as a creed, and what stupendous overpowering facts are involved in the doctrine of a Divine Incarnation, we shall feel that no miracle can be great after it, nothing strange or marvellous, nothing beyond expectation" (*Two Essays on Scripture Miracles*, etc., 1870, p. 185).

miraculous, yet retain the creed. The great majority of modern German critics, however, reject the miraculous altogether, and consider the question as no longer worthy of discussion; and most of those who have not distinctly expressed this view either resort to every linguistic device to evade the difficulty, or betray by their hesitation the feebleness of their belief.¹ In dealing with the question of miracles, therefore, it is not to Germany we must turn, but to England, where their reality is still maintained.

Archbishop Trench rejects with disdain the attempts of Schleiermacher and others to get rid of the miraculous elements of miracles, by making them relative, which he rightly considers to be merely "a decently veiled denial of the miracle altogether";² and he will not accept any reconciliation which sacrifices the miracle, "which," he logically affirms, "is, in fact, no miracle, if it lay in nature already, if it was only the evoking of forces latent therein, not a new thing, not the bringing in of the novel powers of a higher world; if the mysterious processes and powers by which those works were brought about had been only undiscovered hitherto, and not undiscoverable, by the efforts of human inquiry."³ When Dr. Trench tries to define what he considers

¹ It may be well to refer more particularly to the views of Ewald, one of the most profound scholars, but, at the same time, arbitrary critics, of this time. In his great work, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, he rejects the supernatural from all the "miracles" of the Old Testament (cf. III. Ausg. 1864, Band i., p. 385 ff., ii., p. 88 f., 101 ff., 353 ff.), and in the fifth volume *Christus u.s. Zeit*, he does not belie his previous opinions. He deliberately repudiates the miraculous birth of Jesus (v. p. 236), rejects the supernatural from the birth of John the Baptist, and denies the relationship (Luke i. 36) between him and Jesus (p. 230 ff.). The miraculous events at the Crucifixion are mere poetical imaginations (p. 581). The Resurrection is the creation of the pious longing and excited feeling of the disciples (Band vi. *Gesch. des Apost. Zeitalters*, 1858, p. 71 f.), and the Ascension, its natural sequel (vi. p. 95 f.). In regard to the miracles of Jesus, his treatment of disease was principally mental and by the exercise of moral influence on the mind of the sick; but he also employed external means, inquired into the symptoms of disease, and his action was subject to the laws of Divine order (v. pp. 291-299). Ewald spiritualises the greater miracles until the physical basis is almost completely lost. In the miracle at the marriage of Cana, "water itself, under the influence of his spirit, becomes the best wine," as it still does wherever his spirit is working in full power (v. p. 329). The miraculous feeding of 5,000 is a narrative based on some tradition of an occasion in which Jesus, "with the smallest external means, but infinitely more through his spirit and word and prayer, satisfied all who came to him"—an allegory, in fact, of the higher satisfying power of the bread of life—which in course of time grew to the consistency of a physical miracle (v. p. 442). The raising of the son of the widow of Nain is represented as a case of suspended animation (v. p. 424). In his latest work, *Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott*, Ewald eliminates all the miraculous elements from Revelation, which he extends to all historical religions (with the exception of Mohammedanism), as well as to the religion of the Bible (i., p. 18, § 8).

² *Notes on Miracles*, p. 74.

³ *Ib.*, p. 75.

the real character of miracles, however, he becomes, as might be expected, voluminous and obscure. He says: "An extraordinary Divine casualty, and not that ordinary which we acknowledge everywhere, and in everything, belongs, then, to the essence of the miracle; powers of God other than those which have always been working; such, indeed, as most seldom or never have been working before. The unresting activity of God, which at other times hides and conceals itself behind the veil of what we term natural laws, does in the miracle unveil itself; it steps out from its concealment, and the hand which works is laid bare. Beside and beyond the ordinary operation of nature, higher powers (higher, not as coming from a higher source, but as bearing upon higher ends) intrude and make themselves felt even at the very springs and sources of her power."¹ "Not, as we shall see the greatest theologians have always earnestly contended, *contra* naturam, but *præter* naturam, and *supra* naturam."² Further on he adds: "*Beyond* nature, *beyond* and *above* the nature which we know, they are, but not *contrary* to it."³ Newman, in a similar strain, though with greater directness, says: "The miracles of Scripture are undeniably beyond nature"; and he explains them as "wrought by persons consciously exercising, under Divine guidance, a power committed to them for definite ends, professing to be immediate messengers from heaven, and to evidencing their mission by their miracles."⁴

Miracles are here described as "beside," and "beyond," and "above" nature; but a moment's consideration must show that, in so far as these terms have any meaning at all, they are simply evasions, not solutions, of a difficulty. Dr. Trench is quite sensible of the danger in which the definition of miracles places them, and how fatal to his argument it would be to admit that they are contrary to the order of nature. "The miracle," he protests, "is not thus *unnatural*; nor could it be such, since the unnatural, the contrary to order, is of itself the ungodly, and can in no way, therefore, be affirmed of a Divine work, such as that with which we have to do."⁵ The Archbishop, in this, however, is clearly arguing from nature to miracles, and not from miracles to nature. He does not, of course, know what miracles really are; but, as he recognises that the order of nature must be maintained, he is forced to assert that miracles are not contrary to nature. He repudiates the idea of their being natural phenomena, and yet attempts to deny that they are unnatural. They must either be the one or the other. Indeed, that his distinction is purely

¹ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 12.

² *Ib.*, p. 12, note 2.

³ *Ib.*, p. 14.

⁴ *Two Essays on Scripture Miracles*, etc., p. 116.

⁵ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 15.

imaginary, and inconsistent with the alleged facts of Scriptural miracles, is apparent from Dr. Trench's own illustrations. The whole argument is a mere quibble of words to evade a palpable dilemma. Newman does not fall into this error, and more boldly faces the difficulty. He admits that the Scripture miracles "innovate upon the impressions which are made upon us by the order and the laws of the natural world";¹ and that "walking on the sea, or the resurrection of the dead, is a plain reversal of its laws."²

Take, for instance, the multiplication of loaves and fishes. Five thousand people are fed upon five barley loaves and two small fishes; "and they took up of the fragments which remained twelve baskets full."³ Dr. Trench is forced to renounce all help in explaining this miracle from natural analogies, and he admits: "We must simply behold in the multiplying of the bread" (and fishes?) "an act of Divine omnipotence on His part who was the Word of God—not, indeed, now as at the first, of absolute creation out of nothing, since there was a substratum to work on in the original loaves and fishes, but an act of creative accretion."⁴ It will scarcely be argued by anyone that such an "act of Divine omnipotence" and "creative accretion" as this multiplication of five baked loaves and two small fishes is not contrary to the order of nature.⁵ For Dr. Trench has himself pointed out that there must be interposition of man's art here, and that "a grain of wheat could never by itself, and according to the laws of natural development, issue in a loaf of bread."⁶

Undaunted by, or rather unconscious of, such contradictions, the Archbishop proceeds with his argument, and with new definitions of the miraculous. So far from being disorder of nature, he continues, with audacious precision: "The true miracle is a higher and a purer nature, coming down out of the world of untroubled harmonies into this world of ours, which so many discords have jarred and disturbed, and bringing this back again, though it be but for one mysterious prophetic moment, into harmony with that higher."⁷ In that "higher and purer nature" can a grain of wheat issue in a loaf of bread? We have only to apply this theory to the miraculous multiplication of loaves and

¹ *Two Essays on Scripture Miracles*, etc., p. 154.

² *Ib.*, p. 158.

³ Matt. xiv. 20.

⁴ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 274 f.

⁵ Newman, referring to this amongst other miracles as "a far greater innovation upon the economy of nature than the miracles of the Church upon the economy of Scripture," says: "There is nothing, for instance, in nature at all to parallel and mitigate the wonderful history of the multiplication of an artificially prepared substance such as bread" (*Two Essays*, p. 157 f.).

⁶ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 274.

⁷ *Ib.*, p. 15.

fishes to perceive how completely it is the creation of Dr. Trench's poetical fancy.

These passages fairly illustrate the purely imaginary and arbitrary nature of the definitions which those who maintain the reality and supernatural character of miracles give of them. The favourite hypothesis is that which ascribes miracles to the action of unknown law. Archbishop Trench naturally adopts it. "We should see in the miracle," he says, "not the infraction of a law, but the neutralising of a lower law, the suspension of it for a time by a higher"; and he asks with indignation whence we dare conclude that, because we know of no powers sufficient to produce miracles, none exist. "They exceed the laws of *our* nature; but it does not therefore follow that they exceed the laws of *all* nature."¹ It is not easy to follow the distinction here between "*our* nature" and "*all* nature," since the order of nature, by which miracles are judged, is, so far as knowledge goes, universal, and we have no grounds for assuming that there is any other.

The same hypothesis is elaborated by Dr. Mozley. Assuming the facts of miracles, he proceeds to discuss the question of their "referribleness to unknown law," in which expression he includes both "*unknown law*, or unknown connection with *known law*."²

Taking first the supposition of *unknown* connection with known law, he argues that, as a law of nature, in the scientific sense, cannot possibly produce single or isolated facts, it follows that no isolated or exceptional event can come under a law of nature *by direct observation*; but, if it comes under it at all, it can only do so by some *explanation*, which takes it out of its isolation and joins it to a class of facts, whose recurrence indeed constitutes the law. Now Dr. Mozley admits that no explanation can be given by which miracles can have an unknown connection with known law.

¹ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 16. Dr. Liddon writes on the evidential purpose of miracles and their nature, as follows: "But how is man enabled to identify the Author of this law within him" (which the highest instincts of the human conscience derive from the Christian Revelation and the life of Christ), "perfectly reflected as it is in the Christ, with the Author of the law of the Universe without him? The answer is, by miracle. Miracle is an innovation upon physical law—or at least a suspension of some lower physical law by the intervention of a higher one—in the interests of moral law. The historical fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead identifies the Lord of physical life and death with the Legislator of the Sermon on the Mount. Miracle is the certificate of identity between the Lord of Nature and the Lord of Conscience—the proof that He is really a moral being who subordinates physical to moral interests. Miracle is the meeting-point between intellect and the moral sense, because it announces the answer to the efforts and yearnings alike of the moral sense and the intellect; because it announces revelation" (*Some Elements of Religion*, Lent Lectures, 1870; H. P. Liddon, D.D., Canon of St. Paul's, 1872, p. 74 f.).

² *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 145.

weak
argt. V.
drummond.

Taking the largest class of miracles, bodily cures, the correspondence between a simple command or prophetic notification and the cure is the chief characteristic of miracles, and distinguishes them from mere marvels. No violation of any law of nature takes place in either the cure or the prophetic announcement taken separately, but the two taken together are the proof of superhuman agency. He concludes that no physical hypothesis can be framed accounting for the superhuman knowledge and power involved in this class of miracles, supposing the miracles to stand as they are recorded in Scripture.¹

The inquiry is then shifted to the other and different question : whether miracles may not be instances of laws which are as yet wholly unknown.² This is generally called a question of "higher law"—that is to say, a law which comprehends under itself two or more lower or less wide laws. And the principle would be applicable to miracles by supposing the existence of an unknown law, hereafter to be discovered, under which miracles would come, and then considering whether this new law of miracles and the old law of common facts might not both be reducible to a still more general law, which comprehended them both; but Dr. Mozley, of course, recognises that the discovery of such a law of miracles would necessarily involve the discovery of fresh miracles, for to talk of a law of miracles without miracles would be an absurdity.³ The supposition of the discovery of such a law of miracles, however, would be tantamount to the supposition of a future new order of nature, from which it immediately follows that the whole supposition is irrelevant and futile as regards the present question.⁴ *Note* For no new order of things could make the present order different, and a miracle, could we suppose it becoming the ordinary fact of another different order of nature, would not be less a violation of the laws of nature in the present one.⁵ This explanation is also rejected.

We pause here to remark that throughout the whole inquiry into the question of miracles we meet with nothing from theologians but mere assumptions. The facts of the narrative of the miracle are first assumed, and so are the theories by which it is explained. Now, with regard to every theory which seeks to explain miracles by assumption, we may quote words applied by one of the ablest defenders of miracles to some conclusion of straw, which he placed in the mouth of an imaginary antagonist in order that he might refute it. "But the question is," said Dr. Mansel, "not whether such a conclusion has been asserted, as many other absurdities have been asserted, by the advocates of a

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, pp. 145-153.

³ *Ib.*, p. 154 f.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 156.

² *Ib.*, pp. 153-159.

⁵ *Ib.*, p. 157.

theory, but whether it has been established on such scientific grounds as to be entitled to the assent of all duly-cultivated minds, whatever their own consciences may say to the contrary."¹

Immediately after his indignant demand for scientific accuracy of demonstration, Dr. Mansel proceeds to argue as follows: In the will of man we have the solitary instance of an efficient cause, in the highest sense of the term, acting among the physical causes of the material world, and producing results which could not have been brought about by any mere sequence of physical causes. If a man of his own will throw a stone into the air, its motion, as soon as it has left his hand, is determined by a combination of purely material laws; but by what *law* came it to be thrown at all? The law of gravitation, no doubt, remains constant and unbroken, whether the stone is lying on the ground or moving through the air; but all the laws of matter could not have brought about the particular result, without the interposition of the free will of the man who throws the stone. Substitute the will of God for the will of man, and the argument becomes applicable to the whole extent of creation and to all the phenomena which it embraces.²

It is evident that this argument merely tends to prove that every effect must have a cause—a proposition too obvious to require any argument at all. If a man had not thrown the stone, the stone would have remained lying on the ground. No one doubts this. We have here, however, this “solitary instance of an efficient cause acting among the physical causes of the material world,” producing results which are wholly determined by natural laws,³ and incapable of producing any opposed to them. If, therefore, we substitute, as Dr. Mansel desires, “the will of God” for “the will of man,” we arrive at no results which are not in harmony with the order of nature. We have no ground whatever for assuming any efficient cause acting in any other way than in accordance with the laws of nature. It is, however, one of the gross fallacies of this argument, as applied to miracles, to pass from the efficient cause producing results which are strictly in accordance with natural laws, and determined by them, to an assumed efficient cause producing effects which are opposed to natural law. The restoration to life of a decomposed human body, and the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fishes, are

not admitting
free-will in
God. (1)

¹ Mansel, *Aids to Faith*, p. 19.

² *Ib.*, p. 20.

³ Throughout this argument we use the term “law” in its popular sense as representing the series of phenomena to which reference is made. We do not think it necessary to discuss the assumption that the will of man is an “efficient cause”; it is sufficient to show that even admitting the premiss, for the sake of argument, the supposed consequences do not follow.

opposed to natural laws, and no assumed efficient cause conceivable, to which they may be referred, can harmonise them.

Dr. Mozley continues his argument in a similar way. He inquires: "Is the suspension of physical and material laws by a spiritual being inconceivable? We reply that, however inconceivable this kind of suspension of physical law is, it is a fact. Physical laws are suspended any time an animate being moves any part of its body; the laws of matter are suspended by the laws of life."¹ He goes on to maintain that, although it is true that his spirit is united with the matter in which it moves in a way in which the Great Spirit who acts on matter in the miracle is not, yet the action of God's Spirit in the miracle of walking on the water is no more inconceivable than the action of his own spirit in holding up his own hand. "Antecedently, one step on the ground and an ascent to heaven are alike incredible. But this appearance of incredibility is answered in one case literally *ambulando*. How can I place any reliance upon it in the other?"² From this illustration, with a haste very unlike his previous careful procedure, he jumps to the following conclusions: "The constitution of nature, then, disproves the incredibility of the Divine suspension of physical law; but, more than this, it creates a presumption for it."³ The laws of life of which we have experience, he argues, are themselves in an ascending scale. First come the laws which regulate unorganised matter; next the laws of vegetation; then the laws of animal life, with its voluntary motion; and, above these, again, the laws of moral being. A supposed intelligent being whose experience was limited to one or more classes in this ascending scale of laws would be totally incapable of conceiving the action of the higher classes. The progressive succession of laws is perfectly conceivable backward, but an absolute mystery forward. "Analogy," therefore, he contends, when in this ascending series we arrive at man, leads us to expect that there is a higher sphere of law as much above *him* as he is above the lower natures in the scale, and "supplies a presumption in favour of such a belief."⁴ And so we arrive at the question whether there is or is not a God, a Personal Head in Nature, whose free will penetrates the universal frame invisibly to us, and is an omnipresent agent. If there be, Dr. Mozley concludes, then every miracle in Scripture is as natural an event in the universe as any chemical experiment in the physical world.⁵

This is precisely the argument of Dr. Mansel regarding the "Efficient Cause," somewhat elaborated; but, however ingeniously devised, it is equally based upon assumption and defective in

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 164.

³ *Ib.*, p. 164.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 165.

² *Ib.*, p. 164.

⁵ *Ib.*, p. 165.

analogy. The "classes of law" to which the Bampton lecturer refers are really in no ascending scale. Unorganised matter, vegetation, and animal life may each have special conditions modifying phenomena, but they are all equally subject to natural laws. Man is as much under the influence of gravitation as a stone is. The special operation of physical laws is not a modification of law, but law acting under different conditions. The law of gravitation suffers no alteration, whether it cause the fall of an apple or shape the orbit of a planet. The reproduction of the plant and of the animal is regulated by the same fundamental principle, acting through different organisms. The mere superiority of man over lower forms of organic and inorganic matter does not lift him above physical laws, and the analogy of every grade in nature forbids the presumption that higher forms may exist which are exempt from their control.

If in animated beings, as is affirmed, we have the solitary instance of an "efficient cause" acting among the forces of nature, and possessing the power of initiation, this "efficient cause" produces no disturbance of physical law. Its action is a recognised part of the infinite variety of form within the order of nature; and although the character of the force exercised by it may not be clearly understood, its effects are regulated by the same laws as govern all other forces in nature. If "the laws of matter are suspended by the laws of life" each time an animated being moves any part of its body, one physical law is counteracted in precisely the same manner, and to an equivalent degree, each time another physical law is called into action. The law of gravitation, for instance, is equally neutralised by the law of magnetism each time a magnet suspends a weight in the air. In each case a law is successfully resisted precisely to the extent of the force employed. The arm that is raised by the animated being falls again, in obedience to law, as soon as the force which raised it is exhausted, quite as certainly as the weight descends when the magnetic current fails. This, however, is not the suspension of law in the sense of a miracle, but, on the contrary, is simply the natural operation upon each other of co-existent laws. It is a recognised part of the order of nature,¹ and instead of rendering

¹ Dr. Mozley says, in the preface to the second edition of his *Bampton Lectures*: "It is quite true that we see laws of nature any day and any hour neutralised and counteracted in particular cases and do not look upon such counteractions as other than the most natural events; but it must be remembered that, when this is the case, the counteracting agency is as ordinary and constant an antecedent in nature as the agency which it counteracts. The agency of the muscles and the agency of the magnet are as ordinary as the agency of gravitation which they both neutralise.....The elevation of a body in the air by the force of an arm is a counteraction indeed of the law of gravitation, but it is a counteraction of it by another law as natural as that of gravity."

credible any supernatural suspension of laws, the analogy of animated beings distinctly excludes it. The introduction of life in no way changes the relation between cause and effect, which constitutes the order of nature. Life favours no presumption for the suspension of law, but, on the contrary, whilst acting in nature, universally exhibits the prevalence and invariability of law.

The supposed "Efficient Cause" is wholly circumscribed by law. It is brought into existence by the operation of physical laws, and from the cradle to the grave it is subject to those laws. The whole process of life is dependent on obedience to natural laws, and so powerless is this efficient cause to resist their jurisdiction that, in spite of its highest efforts, it pines or ceases to exist in consequence of the mere natural operation of law upon the matter with which it is united, and without which it is impotent. It cannot receive an impression from without that is not conveyed in accordance with law, and perceived by an exquisitely ordered organism, in every part of which law reigns supreme; nor can it communicate from within except through channels equally ordered by law. The "laws of life" act amongst the laws of matter, but are not independent of them, and the action of both classes of law is regulated by precisely the same principles.

Dr. Mozley's affirmation, that *antecedently* one step on the ground and an ascent to heaven are alike incredible, does not help him. In that sense it follows that there is nothing that is not antecedently incredible, nothing credible until it has happened. This argument, however, while it limits us to actual experience, prohibits presumptions with regard to that which is beyond experience. To argue that, because a step on the ground and an ascent to heaven are antecedently alike incredible, yet, as we subsequently make that step, therefore the ascent to heaven, which

The fact, therefore, is in conformity with the laws of nature. But if the same body is raised in the air without any application of a known force, it is not a fact in conformity with natural law. In all these cases the question is not whether a law of nature has been counteracted, for that does not constitute a fact contradictory to the laws of nature; but whether it has been counteracted by another natural law. If it has been, the conditions of science are fulfilled. But if a law of nature has been counteracted by a law out of nature, it is of no purpose, with a view to naturalise scientifically that counteraction of a law of nature, to say that the law of nature has been *going on* all the time, and only been neutralised, not suspended or violated. These are mere refinements of language, which do not affect the fact itself, that a new conjunction of antecedent and consequent, wholly unlike the conjunctions in nature, has taken place. The laws of nature have in that instance not worked, and an effect contrary to what would have issued from those laws has been produced. This is ordinarily called a violation or suspension of the laws of nature; and it seems an unnecessary refinement not to call it such. But whatever name we give to it, the fact is the same; and the fact is not according to the laws of nature in the scientific sense" (p. xii. f.).

this is a good argument.

excellent

we cannot make, from incredible becomes credible, is a contradiction in terms. If the ascent be antecedently incredible, it cannot at the same time be antecedently credible. That which is incredible cannot become credible because something else quite different becomes credible. Experience comes with its sober wisdom to check such reasoning. We believe in our power to walk because we habitually exercise it; we disbelieve in bodily ascensions because all experience excludes them, and if we leap into the air on the brink of a precipice, belief in an ascent to heaven is shattered to pieces at the bottom, to which the law of gravitation infallibly drags us.

There is absolutely nothing in the constitution of nature, we may say, reversing Dr. Mozley's assertion, which does not prove the incredibility of a Divine suspension of physical laws, and does not create a presumption against it. A distinction between the laws of nature and the "laws of the universe,"¹ by which he endeavours to make a miracle credible, is one which is purely imaginary. We know of no laws of the universe differing from the laws of nature. So far as human observation can range, these laws alone prevail. The occasional intervention of an unknown "efficient cause," producing the effects called "miracles"—effects which are not referrible to any known law—is totally opposed to experience, and such a hypothesis to explain alleged occurrences of a miraculous character cannot find a legitimate place within the order of nature.

The proposition with which Dr. Mozley commences these Bampton Lectures, and for which he contends to their close, is this: "That miracles, or visible suspensions of the order of nature for a providential purpose, are not in contradiction to reason."² He shows that the purpose of miracles is to attest a supernatural revelation, which, without them, we could not be justified in believing. "Christianity," he distinctly states, "cannot be maintained as a revelation undiscoverable by human reason—a revelation of a supernatural scheme for man's salvation without the evidence of miracles."³ Out of this very admission he attempts to construct an argument in support of miracles. "Hence it follows," he continues, "that, upon the supposition of the Divine design of a revelation, a miracle is not an anomaly or irregularity, but part of the system of the universe; because, though an irregularity and an anomaly in relation to either part, it has a complete adaptation to the whole. There being two worlds, a visible and invisible, and a communication between the

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 163.

² *Ib.*, p. 6.

³ *Ib.*, p. 23.

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two being wanted, a miracle is the instrument of that communication."¹

This argument is based upon mere assumption. The supposition of the Divine design of a revelation, by which a miracle is said to become "part of the system of the universe" and, therefore, neither an "anomaly" nor "irregularity," is the result of a foregone conclusion in its favour, and is not suggested by antecedent probability. It is, in fact, derived solely from the contents of the revelation itself. Divines assume that a communication of this nature is in accordance with reason, and was necessary for the salvation of the human race, simply because they believe that it took place. No attempt is seriously made, independently, to prove the reality of the supposed "Divine design of a revelation." A revelation having, it is supposed, been made, that revelation is consequently supposed to have been contemplated, and to have necessitated and justified suspensions of the order of nature to effect it. The proposition for which the evidence of miracles is demanded is viciously employed as evidence for miracles.

The circumstances upon which the assumption of the necessity and reasonableness of a revelation is based, however, are incredible, and contrary to reason. We are asked to believe that God made man in his own image, pure and sinless, and intended him to continue so, but that scarcely had this, his noblest work, left the hands of the Creator than man was tempted into sin by Satan, an all-powerful and persistent enemy of God, whose existence and antagonism to a Being in whose eyes sin is abomination are not accounted for, and are incredible.² Adam's fall brought a curse upon the earth, and incurred the penalty of death for himself and for the whole of his posterity. The human race, although created perfect and without sin, thus disappointed the expectations of the Creator, and became daily more wicked, the Evil Spirit having succeeded in frustrating the designs of the Almighty, so that God repented that he had made man, and at length destroyed by a deluge all the inhabitants of the earth, with the exception of eight persons who feared him. This sweeping purification, however, was as futile as the original design, and the race of men soon became more wicked than ever. The final and only adequate remedy devised by God for the salvation of his creatures, become so desperately and hopelessly evil, was the incarnation of himself in the person of "the Son," the second

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, p. 23.

² The history of the gradual development of the idea of the existence and personality of the Devil is full of instruction, and throws no small light upon the question of revelation.

where is it
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person in a mysterious Trinity, of which the Godhead is said to be composed (who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary), and his death upon the cross as a vicarious expiation of the sins of the world, without which supposed satisfaction of the justice of God his mercy could not possibly have been extended to the frail and sinful work of his own hands. The crucifixion of the incarnate God was the crowning guilt of a nation whom God himself had selected as his own peculiar people, and whom he had condescended to guide by constant direct revelations of his will, but who, from the first, had displayed the most persistent and remarkable proclivity to sin against him, and, in spite of the wonderful miracles wrought on their behalf, to forsake his service for the worship of other gods. We are asked to believe, therefore, in the frustration of the Divine design of creation, and in the fall of man into a state of wickedness hateful to God, requiring and justifying the Divine design of a revelation, and such a revelation as this, as a preliminary to the further proposition that, on the supposition of such a design, miracles would not be contrary to reason.

The whole theory of this abortive design of creation, with such impotent efforts to amend it, is emphatically contradicted by all that experience has taught us of the order of nature. It is difficult to say whether the details of the scheme or the circumstances which are supposed to have led to its adoption are more shocking to reason or to moral sense. The imperfection ascribed to the Divine work is scarcely more derogatory to the power and wisdom of a Creator than the supposed satisfaction of his justice in the death of himself incarnate, the innocent for the guilty, is degrading to the idea of his moral perfection. The supposed necessity for repeated interference to correct the imperfection of the original creation, the nature of the means employed, and the triumphant opposition of Satan are anthropomorphic conceptions totally incompatible with the idea of an infinitely wise and Almighty Being. The constitution of nature, so far from favouring any hypothesis of original perfection and subsequent deterioration, bears everywhere the record of systematic upward progression. Not only is the assumption that any revelation of the nature of ecclesiastical Christianity was necessary excluded upon philosophical grounds, but it is contradicted by the whole operation of natural laws, which contain in themselves inexorable penalties against retrogression, or even unprogressiveness, and furnish the only requisite stimulus to improvement. The survival only of the fittest is the stern decree of nature. The invariable action of law of itself eliminates the unfit. Progress is necessary to existence; extinction is the doom of retrogression. The highest effect contemplated by the supposed revelation is to bring man

into perfect harmony with law ; but this is ensured by law itself acting upon intelligence. Civilisation is nothing but the knowledge and observance of natural laws. The savage must learn these laws or be extinguished ; the cultivated must observe them or die. The balance of moral and physical development cannot be deranged with impunity. In the spiritual as well as the physical sense, only the fittest eventually can survive in the struggle for existence. There is, in fact, an absolute upward impulse to the whole human race supplied by the invariable operation of the laws of nature, acting upon the common instinct of self-preservation. As, on the one hand, the highest human conception of infinite wisdom and power is derived from the universality and invariability of law ; so that universality and invariability, on the other hand, exclude the idea of interruption or occasional suspension of law for any purpose whatever, and more especially for the correction of supposed original errors of design which cannot have existed, or for the attainment of objects already provided for in the order of nature.

Upon the first groundless assumption of a Divine design of such a revelation follows the hypothetical inference that, for the purpose of making the communication from the unseen world, a miracle or visible suspension of the order of nature is no irregularity, but part of the system of the universe. This, however, is a mere assertion, and no argument. An avowed assumption which is contrary to reason is followed by another which is contrary to experience. It is not permissible to speak of a visible suspension of the order of nature being part of the system of the universe. Such a statement has no meaning whatever within the range of human conception. Moreover, it must be remembered that miracles—or “visible suspensions of the order of nature”—are ascribed indifferently to Divine and to Satanic agency. If miracles are not an anomaly or irregularity on the supposition of the Divine design of a revelation, upon what supposition do Satanic miracles cease to be irregularities ? Is the order of nature, which it is asserted is under the personal control of God, at the same time at the mercy of the Devil ?

Archbishop Trench has, as usual, a singular way of overcoming the difficulty. He says : “So long as we abide in the region of nature, miraculous and improbable, miraculous and incredible, may be admitted as convertible terms. But once lift up the whole discussion into a higher region, once acknowledge something higher than nature, a kingdom of God, and men the intended denizens of it, and the whole argument loses its strength and the force of its conclusions.....He who already counts it likely that God will interfere for the higher welfare of men, who believes that there is a nobler world-order than that in which we live and move, and

*this is
true as
far as it
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that it would be the blessing of blessings for that nobler to intrude into and to make itself felt in the region of this lower, who has found that here in this world we are bound by heavy laws of nature, of sin, of death, which no powers that we now possess can break, yet which must be broken if we are truly to live—he will not find it hard to believe the great miracle, the coming of the Son of God in the flesh, &c.....And as he believes that greatest miracle, so will he believe all other miracles, etc.”¹ In other words, if we already believe the premisses we shall not find it difficult to adopt the conclusions—if we already believe the greatest miracle we shall not hesitate to believe the less—if we already believe the dogmas we shall not find it hard to believe the evidence by which they are supposed to be authenticated. As we necessarily do abide in the region of nature, in which Dr. Trench admits that miraculous and incredible are convertible terms, it would seem rather difficult to lift the discussion into the higher region here described without having already abandoned it altogether.

¹ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 71 f. Archbishop Trench believes that exemption from the control of the law of gravitation, etc., is a “lost prerogative” of our race, which we may one day recover. It would be difficult to produce a parallel to his reasoning in modern times. He says: “It has been already observed that the miracle, according to its true idea, is not a violation nor yet suspension of law, but the incoming of a higher law, as of a spiritual in the midst of natural laws, and the momentary assertion, for that higher law, of the predominance which it was intended to have, and but for man’s fall it would always have had, over the lower; and with this a prophetic anticipation of the abiding prevalence which it shall one day recover. Exactly thus was there here” (in the miracle of the Walking on the Sea) “a sign of the lordship of man’s will, when that will is in absolute harmony with God’s will, over external nature. In regard to this very law of gravitation, a feeble, and for the most part unconsciously possessed, remnant of his power survives to man in the well-attested fact that his body is lighter when he is awake than sleeping; a fact which every nurse who has carried a child can attest. From this we conclude that the human consciousness, as an inner centre, works as an opposing force to the attraction of the earth and the centripetal force of gravity, however unable now to overbear it” (!) *Ib.*, p. 292.

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CHAPTER III.

REASON IN RELATION TO THE ORDER OF NATURE

THE argument of those who assert the possibility and reality of miracles generally takes the shape of an attack, more or less direct, upon our knowledge of the order of nature. To establish an exception they contest the rule. "Whatever difficulty there is in believing in miracles in general," he says, "arises from the circumstance that they are in contradiction to or unlike the order of nature. To estimate the force of this difficulty, then, we must first understand what kind of belief it is which we have in the order of nature; for the weight of the objection to the miraculous must depend on the nature of the belief to which the miraculous is opposed."¹ Dr. Mozley defines the meaning of the phrase, "order of nature," as the *connection* of that part of the order of nature of which we are ignorant with that part of which we know, the former being expected to be such and such, *because* the latter is. But how do we justify this expectation of *likeness*?² We cannot do so, he affirms, and all our arguments are mere statements of the belief itself, and not reasons to account for it. It may be said, *e.g.*, that when a fact of nature has gone on repeating itself a certain time, such repetition shows that there is a permanent cause at work, and that a permanent cause produces permanently recurring effects. But what is there, he inquires, to show the existence of a permanent cause? Nothing. The effects which have taken place show a cause at work to the extent of these effects, but not further. That this cause is of a more permanent nature we have no evidence. Why, then, do we expect the further continuance of these effects?³ We can only say: because we believe the future will be like the past. After a physical phenomenon has even occurred every day for years we have nothing but the past repetition to justify our certain expectation of its future repetition.⁴ Do we think it giving a reason for our confidence in the future to say that, though no man has had experience of what *is* future, every man has had experience of what *was* future? It is true, he admits, that what *is* future becomes at every step of our advance what *was* future, but that

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 33.

³ *Ib.*, p. 36.

² *Ib.*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 37.

which is now *still* future is not the least altered by that circumstance ; it is as invisible, as unknown, and as unexplored as if it were the very beginning and the very starting-point of nature. At this starting-point of nature what would a man know of its future course ? Nothing. At this moment he *knows* no more.¹ What ground of reason, then, can we assign for our expectation that any part of the course of nature will the *next* moment be like what it has been up to *this* moment—*i.e.*, for our belief in the uniformity of nature ? None. It is without a reason. It rests upon no rational ground, and can be traced to no rational principle.² The belief in the order of nature being thus an “unintelligent impulse” of which we cannot give any rational account, Dr. Mozley concludes, the ground is gone upon which it could be maintained that miracles, as opposed to the order of nature, were opposed to reason. A miracle, then, in being opposed to our experience is not only not opposed to necessary reasoning, but to any reasoning.³ We need not further follow the Bampton Lecturer, as, with clearness and ability, he applies this reasoning to the argument of “Experience,” until he pauses triumphantly to exclaim : “Thus, step by step, has philosophy loosened the connection of the order of nature with the ground of reason, befriending in exact proportion, as it has done this, the principle of miracles.”⁴

We need not here enter upon any abstract argument regarding the permanence of cause : it will be sufficient to deal with these objections in a simpler and more direct way. Dr. Mozley, of course, acknowledges that the principle of the argument from experience is that “which makes human life practicable ; which utilises all our knowledge ; which makes the past anything more than an irrelevant picture to us ; for of what use is the experience of the past to us unless we believe the future will be like it ?”⁵ Our knowledge in all things is relative, and there are sharp and narrow limits to human thought. It is, therefore, evident that, in the absence of absolute knowledge, our belief must be accorded to that of which we have more full cognizance, rather than to that which is contradicted by all that we do know. It may be “irrational” to feel entire confidence that the sun will “rise” to-morrow, or that the moon will continue to wax and wane as in the past, but we shall without doubt retain this belief, and reject any assertion, however positive, that the earth will stand still to-morrow, or that it did so some thousands of years ago. Evidence must take its relative place in the finite scale of knowledge and thought, and if we do not absolutely know anything, so long as one thing is more fully established than another, we must hold to that.

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, p. 38.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 49.

² *Ib.*, p. 39.

⁵ *Ib.*, p. 58.

³ *Ib.*, p. 48.

which rests upon the more certain basis. Our belief in the invariability of the order of nature, therefore, being based upon more certain grounds than any other human opinion, we must of necessity refuse credence to a statement supported by infinitely less complete testimony, and contradicted by universal experience, that phenomena subversive of that order occurred many years ago, or we must cease to believe anything at all. If belief based upon unvarying experience be irrational, how much more irrational must belief be which is opposed to that experience. According to Dr. Mozley, it is quite irrational to believe that a stone dropped from the hand, for instance, will fall to the ground. It is true that all the stones we ourselves have ever dropped, or seen dropped, have so fallen, and equally true that all stones so dropped as far back as historic records, and those still more authentic and ancient records of earth's crust itself, go, have done the same; but that, he contends, does not justify our belief, upon any grounds of reason, that the next stone we drop will do so. If we be told, however, that upon one occasion a stone so dropped, instead of falling to the ground, rose up into the air and continued there, we have only two courses open to us: either to disbelieve the fact, and attribute the statement to error of observation, or to reduce the past to a mere irrelevant picture, and the mind to a blank page equally devoid of all belief and of all intelligent reasoning.

Dr. Mozley's argument, however, is fatal to his own cause. It is admitted that miracles, "or visible suspensions of the order of nature,"¹ cannot have any evidential force unless they be supernatural, and out of the natural sequence of ordinary phenomena. Now, unless there be an actual order of nature, how can there be any exception to it? If our belief in it be not based upon any ground of reason—as he maintains, in order to assert that miracles or visible suspensions of that order are not contrary to reason—how can it be asserted that miracles are supernatural? If we have no rational ground for believing that the future will be like the past, what rational ground can we have for thinking that anything which happens is exceptional, and out of the common course of nature? Because it has not happened before? That is no reason whatever; because, according to his contention, the fact that a thing has happened ten millions of times is no rational justification of our expectation that it will happen again. If the reverse of that which had happened previously took place on the ten million and first time, we should, therefore, have no rational ground for surprise, and no reason for affirming that it did not occur in the most natural manner. Because we cannot explain its

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 6.

cause? We cannot explain the cause of anything. Our belief that there is any permanent cause is, according to him, a mere unintelligent impulse; we can only say that there is a cause sufficient to produce an isolated effect, but we do not know the nature of that cause, and it is a mere irrational instinct to suppose that any cause produces continuous effects, or is more than momentary. A miracle, consequently, becomes a mere isolated effect from an unknown cause, in the midst of other merely isolated phenomena from unknown causes, and it is as irrational to wonder at the occurrence of what is new as to expect the recurrence of what is old. In fact, an order of nature is at once necessary, and fatal, to miracles. If there be no order of nature, miracles cannot be considered supernatural occurrences, and have no evidential value; if there be an order of nature, the evidence for its immutability must consequently exceed the evidence for these isolated deviations from it. If we are unable rationally to form expectations of the future from unvarying experience in the past, it is still more irrational to call that supernatural which is merely different from our past experience. Take, for instance, the case of supposed exemption from the action of the law of gravitation, which Archbishop Trench calls "a lost prerogative of our race":¹ we cannot, according to Dr. Mozley, rationally affirm that next week we may not be able to walk on the sea, or ascend bodily into the air. To deny this because we have not hitherto been able to do so is unreasonable; for, he maintains, it is a mere irrational impulse which expects that which has hitherto happened, when we have made such attempts, to happen again next week. If we cannot rationally deny the possibility, however, that we may be able at some future time to walk on the sea or ascend into the air, the statement that these phenomena have already occurred loses all its force, and such occurrences cease to be in any way supernatural. If, on the other hand, it would be irrational to affirm that we may next week become exempt from the operation of the law of gravitation, it can only be so by the admission that unvarying experience forbids the entertainment of such a hypothesis, and in that case it equally forbids belief in the statement that such acts ever actually took place. If we deny the future possibility on any ground of reason, we admit that we have grounds of reason for expecting the future to be like the past, and therefore contradict Dr. Mozley's conclusion; and if we cannot deny it upon any ground of reason, we extinguish the claim of such occurrences in the past to any supernatural character. Any argument which could destroy faith in the order of nature would be equally destructive to miracles. If we have

¹ *Notes on Miracles*, p. 32 f., p. 291 f.

no right to believe in a rule, there can be no right to speak of exceptions. The result in any case is this, that whether the principle of the order of nature be established or refuted, the supernatural pretensions of miracles are disallowed.

Throughout the whole of his argument against the rationality of belief in the order of nature, the rigorous precision which Dr. Mozley unrelentingly demands from his antagonists is remarkable. They are not permitted to deviate by a hair's breadth from the line of strict logic, and the most absolute exactness of demonstration is required. Anything like an assumption or argument from analogy is excluded ; induction is allowed to add no reason to bare and isolated facts ; and the belief that the sun will rise to-morrow morning is, with pitiless severity, written down as mere unintelligent impulse. Belief in the return of day, based upon the unvarying experience of all past time, is declared to be without any ground of reason. We find anything but fault with strictness of argument ; but it is fair that equal precision should be observed by those who assert miracles, and that assumption and inaccuracy should be excluded. Hitherto, as we have frequently pointed out, we have met with very little, or nothing, but assumption in support of miracles ; but, encouraged by the inflexible spirit of Dr. Mozley's attack upon the argument from experience, we may look for similar precision from himself.

Proceeding, however, from his argument against the rationality of belief in the order of nature to his more direct argument for miracles, we are astonished to find a total abandonment of the rigorous exactness imposed upon his antagonists, and a complete relapse into assumptions. Dr. Mozley does not conceal the fact. "The peculiarity of the argument of miracles," he frankly admits, "is that it begins and ends with an assumption ; I mean relatively to that argument."¹ Such an argument is no argument at all ; it is a mere *petitio principii*, incapable of proving anything. The nature of the assumptions obviously does not in the slightest degree affect this conclusion. It is true that the statement of the particular assumptions may constitute an appeal to belief otherwise derived, and evolve feelings which may render the calm exercise of judgment more difficult ; but the fact remains absolute, that an argument which "begins and ends with an assumption" is totally impotent. It remains an assumption, and is not an argument at all.

Notwithstanding this unfortunate and disqualifying "peculiarity," we may examine the argument. It is as follows : "We assume the existence of a Personal Deity prior to the proof of miracles

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 94.

in the religious sense ; but with this assumption the question of miracles is at an end, because such a Being has necessarily the power to suspend those laws of nature which He has Himself enacted."¹ The "question of miracles," which Dr. Mozley here asserts to be at an end on the assumption of a "Personal Deity," is, of course, merely that of the *possibility* of miracles ; but it is obvious that, even with the precise definition of Deity which is assumed, instead of the real "question" being at an end, it only commences. The power to suspend the laws of nature being assumed, the will to suspend them has to be demonstrated as also the actual occurrence of any such assumed suspension, which is contrary to reason. The subject is, moreover, complicated by the occurrence of Satanic as well as Divine suspensions of the order of nature, and by the necessity of assuming a Personal Devil as well as a Personal Deity, and his power to usurp that control over the laws of nature which is assumed as the prerogative of the Deity, and to suspend them in direct opposition to God. Even Newman has recognised this, and, in a passage already quoted, he says : "For the cogency of the argument from miracles depends on the assumption that interruptions in the course of nature must ultimately proceed from God ; which is not true if they may be effected by other beings without His sanction."² The first assumption, in fact, leads to nothing but assumptions connected with the unseen, unknown, and supernatural, which are beyond the limits of reason.

Dr. Mozley is well aware that his assumption of a "Personal" Deity is not susceptible of proof ;³ indeed, this is admitted in the statement that the definition is an "assumption." He quotes the obvious reply which may be made regarding this assumption : "Everybody must collect from the harmony of the physical universe the existence of a God, but in acknowledging a God we do not thereby acknowledge this peculiar doctrinal conception of a God. We see in the structure of nature a mind—a universal mind—but still a mind which only operates and expresses itself by law. Nature only does and only can inform us of mind *in* nature, the partner and correlative of organised matter. Nature, therefore, can speak to the existence of a God in this sense, and can speak to the omnipotence of God in a sense coinciding with the actual

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 94.

² *Two Essays*, etc., p. 50.

³ Dr. Westcott frankly admits this. "Christianity, therefore," he says, "as the absolute religion of man, assumes as its foundation the existence of an Infinite Personal GOD and a finite human will. This antithesis is assumed, and not proved. No arguments can establish it. It is a primary intuition, and not a deduction. It is capable of illustration from what we observe around us ; but if either term is denied no reasoning can establish its truth" (*The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 3rd ed., 1874, p. 19 f.).

this is not a miracle

facts of nature; but in no other sense does nature witness to the existence of an Omnipotent Supreme Being. Of a universal mind out of nature, nature says nothing, and of an Omnipotence which does not possess an inherent limit in nature, she says nothing either. And, therefore, that conception of a Supreme Being which represents him as a Spirit independent of the physical universe, and able from a standing-place external to nature to interrupt its order, is a conception of God for which we must go elsewhere. That conception is obtained from revelation, which is asserted to be proved by miracles. But that being the case, this doctrine of Theism rests itself upon miracles, and, therefore, miracles cannot rest upon this doctrine of Theism."¹ With his usual fairness, Dr. Mozley, while questioning the correctness of the premiss of this argument, admits that, if established, the consequence stated would follow, "and more, for miracles, being thrown back upon the same ground on which Theism is, the whole evidence of revelation becomes a vicious circle, and the fabric is left suspended in space, revelation resting on miracles, and miracles resting on revelation."² He not only recognises, however, that the conception of a "Personal" Deity cannot be proved, but he distinctly confesses that it was obtained from revelation,³ and from nowhere else, and these necessary admissions obviously establish the correctness of the premiss, and involve the consequence pointed out, that the evidence of revelation is a mere vicious circle. Dr. Mozley attempts to argue that, although the idea was first obtained through this channel, "the truth once possessed is seen to rest upon grounds of natural reason."⁴ The argument by which he seeks to show that the conception is seen to rest upon grounds of natural reason is: "We naturally attribute to the design of a Personal Being a contrivance which is directed to the existence of a Personal Being..... From personality at one end I infer personality at the other." Dr. Mozley's own sense of the weakness of his argument, however, and his natural honesty of mind oblige him continually to confess the absence of evidence. A few paragraphs further on he admits: "Not, however, that the existence of a God is so clearly seen by reason as to dispense with faith";⁵ but he endeavours to convince us that faith is reason, only reason acting under peculiar circumstances: when reason draws conclusions which are not backed by experience, reason is then called faith.⁶ The issue of the argument, he contends, is so amazing that if we do not tremble for its safety it must be on account of a practical principle, which makes us confide and trust in reasons,

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 95 f.

² *Ib.*, p. 96.

³ *Ib.*, p. 97 f.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 99.

⁵ *Ib.*, p. 100.

⁶ *Ib.*, p. 101.

and that principle is faith. We are not aware that conviction can be arrived at regarding any matter otherwise than by confidence in the correctness of the reasons, and what Dr. Mozley really means by faith here is confidence and trust in a conclusion for which there are no reasons.

It is almost incredible that the same person who had just been denying grounds of reason to conclusions from unvarying experience, and excluding from them the results of inductive reasoning—who had denounced as unintelligent impulse and irrational instinct the faith that the sun, which has risen without fail every morning since time began, will rise again to-morrow, could thus argue. In fact, from the very commencement of the direct plea for miracles calm logical reasoning is abandoned, and the argument becomes entirely *ad hominem*. Mere feeling is substituted for thought and, in the inability to be precise and logical, the lecturer appeals to the generally prevailing inaccuracy of thought.¹ “Faith, then,” he concludes, “is *unverified* reason; reason which has not yet received the verification of the final test, but is still expectant.” In science this, at the best, would be called mere “hypothesis,” but accuracy can scarcely be expected where the argument continues: “Indeed, does not our heart bear witness to the fact that to believe in a God”—*i.e.*, a Personal God—“is an exercise of faith?” etc.²

The deduction which is drawn from the assumption of a “Personal” Deity is, as we have seen, merely the possibility of miracles. “Paley’s criticism,” said the late Dean of St. Paul’s, “is, after all, the true one—‘once believe that there is a God, and miracles are not incredible.’”³ The assumption, therefore, although of vital importance in the event of its rejection, does not very materially advance the cause of miracles if established. We have already seen that the assumption is avowedly incapable of proof, but it may be well to examine it a little more closely in connection with the inferences supposed to be derivable from it.

In his Bampton Lectures on “The Limit of Religious Thought,” delivered in 1858, Dr. Mansel, the very able editor and disciple of Sir William Hamilton, discussed this subject with great minuteness, and although we cannot pretend here to follow him through the whole of his singular argument—a theological application of Sir William Hamilton’s philosophy—we must sufficiently represent it. Dr. Mansel argues: We are absolutely incapable of conceiving or proving the existence of God as he is; and so far is human reason from being able to construct a theology independent of

¹ Cf. *Bampton Lectures*, 1865, p. 101 ff.

² *Ib.*, p. 104.

³ Mansel, *Aids to Faith*, p. 30.

revelation that it cannot even read the alphabet out of which that theology must be formed.¹ We are compelled by the constitution of our minds to believe in the existence of an Absolute and Infinite Being; but the instant we attempt to analyse we are involved in inextricable confusion. Our moral consciousness demands that we should conceive him as a Personality, but personality, as we conceive it, is essentially a limitation; to speak of an Absolute and Infinite Person is simply to use language to which no mode of human thought can possibly attach itself.² This amounts simply to an admission that our knowledge of God does not satisfy the conditions of speculative philosophy, and is incapable of reduction to an ultimate and absolute truth.³ It is, therefore, reasonable that we should expect to find that the revealed manifestation of the Divine nature and attributes should likewise carry the marks of subordination to some higher truth, of which it indicates the existence, but does not make known the substance; and that our apprehension of the revealed Deity should involve mysteries inscrutable, and doubts insoluble by our present faculties, while at the same time it inculcates the true spirit in which doubt should be dealt with, by warning us that our knowledge of God, though revealed by himself, is revealed in relation to human faculties, and subject to the limitations and imperfections inseparable from the constitution of the human mind.⁴ We need not, of course, point out that the reality of revelation is here assumed. Elsewhere, Dr. Mansel maintains that philosophy, by its own incongruities, has no claim to be accepted as a competent witness; and, on the other hand, human personality cannot be assumed as an exact copy of the Divine, but only as that which is most nearly analogous to it among finite things.⁵ As we are, therefore, incapable on the one hand of a clear conception of the Divine Being, and have only analogy to guide us in conceiving his attributes, we have no criterion of religious truth or falsehood,

¹ Mansel, *Bampton Lectures*, 1858 (Murray, 4th ed., 1859), p. 40.

² *Ib.*, p. 56. Dr. Westcott says upon this point: "But though we appeal to the individual consciousness for the recognition of the truth of the assumptions which have been made, the language in which one term of the antithesis is expressed requires explanation. We speak of God as Infinite and Personal. The epithets involve a contradiction, and yet they are both necessary. In fact, the only approximately adequate conception which we can form of a Divine Being is under the form of a contradiction. For us, personality is only the name for special limitation exerting itself through will; and will itself implies the idea of resistance. But as applied to God, the notions of limitation and resistance are excluded by the antithetic term infinite" (*The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 1874, p. 21).

³ *Ib.*, p. 94 f.

⁴ *Ib.*, p. 95.

⁵ Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned* (Strahan, 1866), p. 143 f.

enabling us to judge of the ways of God, represented by revelation,¹ and have no right to judge of his justice, or mercy, or goodness, by the standard of human morality.

It is impossible to conceive an argument more vicious, or more obviously warped to favour already accepted conclusions of revelation:—As finite beings, we are not only incapable of proving the existence of God, but even of conceiving him as he is; therefore we may conceive him as he is not. To attribute personality to him is a limitation totally incompatible with the idea of an Absolute and Infinite Being, in which “we are compelled by the constitution of our minds to believe”; and to speak of him as a personality is “to use language to which no mode of human thought can possibly attach itself”; but, nevertheless, to satisfy supposed demands of our moral consciousness, we are to conceive him as a personality. Although we must define the Supreme Being as a personality, to satisfy our moral consciousness, we must not, we are told, make the same moral consciousness the criterion of the attributes of that personality. We must not suppose him to be endowed, for instance, with the perfection of morality according to our ideas of it; but, on the contrary, we must hold that his moral perfections are at best only analogous, and often contradictory, to our standard of morality.² As soon as we conceive a Personal Deity to satisfy our moral consciousness, we have to abandon the personality which satisfies that consciousness, in order to accept the characteristics of a supposed revelation, to reconcile certain statements of which we must admit that we have no criterion of truth or falsehood enabling us to judge of the ways of God.

Now, in reference to the assumption of a Personal Deity as a preliminary to the proof of miracles, it must be clearly remembered that the contents of the revelation which miracles are to authenticate cannot have any weight. Antecedently, then, it is admitted that personality is a limitation which is absolutely excluded by the

¹ Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned*, (Strahan, 1866), p. 144 f. In another place Dean Mansel says: “Ideas and images which do not represent God as He is may nevertheless represent Him as it is our duty to regard Him. They are not in themselves true; but we must nevertheless believe and act as if they were true. A finite mind can form no conception of an Infinite Being which shall be *speculatively* true, for it must represent the Infinite under finite forms; nevertheless, a conception which is *speculatively* untrue may be *regulatively* true. A regulative truth is thus designed not to satisfy our reason, but to guide our practice; not to tell us what God is, but how He wills that we should think of Him” (*Man's Conception of Eternity: An examination of Mr. Maurice's Theory of a Fixed State out of Time, in a letter to the Rev. L. T. Bernays, by Rev. H. L. Mansel, B.D., p. 9 f.*).

² *Ib.*, p. 143 f.; *Bampton Lectures*, 1858, pp. 131–175, pp. 94–130.

Note!

ideas of the Deity which, it is asserted, the constitution of our minds compels us to form. It cannot, therefore, be rationally assumed. To admit that such a conception is false, and then to base conclusions upon it as though it were true, is inadmissible. It is child's play to satisfy our feeling and imagination by the conscious sacrifice of our reason. Moreover, Dr. Mansel admits that the conception of a Personal Deity is really derived from the revelation, which has to be rendered credible by miracles; therefore the consequence already pointed out ensues, that the assumption cannot be used to prove miracles. "It must be allowed that it is not through reasoning that men obtain the first intimation of their relation to the Deity; and that, had they been left to the guidance of their intellectual faculties alone, it is possible that no such intimation might have taken place; or, at best, that it would have been but as one guess, out of many equally plausible and equally natural."¹ The vicious circle of the argument is here again apparent, and the singular reasoning by which Dr. Mansel seeks to drive us into acceptance of revelation is really the strongest argument against it. The impossibility of conceiving God as he is,² which is insisted upon, instead of being a reason for assuming his personality, or for accepting Jewish conceptions of him, totally excludes such an assumption.

Note This "great religious assumption" is not suggested by any antecedent considerations, but is required to account for miracles, and is derived from the very revelation which miracles are to attest. "In nature and from nature," to quote words of Professor Baden Powell, "by science and by reason, we neither have, nor can possibly have, any evidence of a *Deity working* miracles; for that we must go out of nature and beyond science. If we could have any such evidence *from nature*, it could only prove extraordinary *natural* effects, which would not be *miracles* in the old theological sense, as isolated, unrelated, and uncaused; whereas no *physical* fact can be conceived as unique, or without analogy and relation to others, and to the whole system of natural causes."³

Dr. Mansel "does not hesitate" to affirm with Sir William Hamilton, "that the class of phenomena which requires that kind

¹ *Bampton Lectures*, 1858, p. 68.

Note! ² Sir William Hamilton says: "True therefore are the declarations of a pious philosophy. 'A God understood would be no God at all.' 'To think that God is as we can think Him to be is blasphemy.' The Divinity, in a certain sense, is revealed; in a certain sense is concealed: He is at once known and unknown. But the last and highest consecration of all true religion must be an altar—'Ἀγνώστῳ Θεῷ—'To the unknown and unknowable God'" (*Discussions on Philosophy*, 3rd ed., Blackwood & Sons, 1866, p. 15, note).

³ "Study of the Evidences of Christianity," *Essays and Reviews*, 9th ed., p. 141 f.

of cause we denominate a Deity is exclusively given in the phenomena of mind; that the phenomena of matter, taken by themselves, do not warrant any inference to the existence of a God."¹ After declaring a Supreme Being, from every point of view, inconceivable by our finite minds, it is singular to find him thrusting upon us, in consequence, a conception of that Being which almost makes us exclaim with Bacon: "It were better to have no opinion of God at all than such an opinion as is unworthy of him; for the one is unbelief, the other is contumely."² Dr. Mansel asks: "Is matter or mind the truer image of God?"³ But both matter and mind unite in repudiating so unworthy a conception of a God, and in rejecting the idea of suspensions of law. In the words of Spinoza: "From miracles we can neither infer the nature, the existence, nor the providence of God, but, on the contrary, these may be much better comprehended from the fixed and immutable order of nature."⁴ Indeed, as he adds, miracles, as contrary to the order of nature, would rather lead us to doubt the existence of God.⁵

Six centuries before our era a noble thinker, Xenophanes of Colophon, whose pure mind soared far above the base anthropomorphic mythologies of Homer and Hesiod, and anticipated some of the highest results of the Platonic philosophy, finely said:—

"There is one God supreme over all gods, diviner than mortals,
Whose form is not like unto man's, and as unlike his nature;

But vain mortals imagine that gods, like themselves, are begotten
With human sensations, and voice, and corporeal members;⁶

So if oxen or lions had hands, and could work in man's fashion,
And trace out with chisel or brush their conception of Godhead,
Then would horses depict gods like horses, and oxen like oxen,
Each kind the Divine with its own form and nature endowing."

He illustrates this profound observation by pointing out that the Ethiopians represent their deities as black, with flat noses, while the Thracians make them blue-eyed, with ruddy complexions; and, similarly, the Medes and the Persians and Egyptians portray their gods like themselves. The Jewish idea of God was equally anthropomorphic; but their highest conception was certainly that which the least resembled themselves, and

¹ *Ib.*, p. 25. Cf. Hamilton, *Lectures on Metaphysics*, vol. i., p. 26.

² Bacon's *Essays*, xvii. ed. Whately, p. 183.

³ *Aids to Faith*, p. 25.

⁴ *Tract, Theolog. Polit.*, c. vi., § 16, ed. Tauchnitz.

⁵ *Ib.*, vi., § 19.

⁶ Clement of Alexandria, who quotes the whole of this passage from Xenophanes, makes a separation here from the succeeding lines, by *καὶ πάλιν*; but the sense is evidently continuous, and the fragments are generally united. Cf. *Clem. Al., Strom.*, v. 14, § 110.

which described the Almighty as "without variableness or shadow of turning," and as giving a law to the universe which shall not be broken.

None of the arguments with which we have yet met have succeeded in making miracles in the least degree antecedently credible. On the contrary, they have been based upon mere assumptions incapable of proof and devoid of probability. On the other hand, there are the strongest reasons for affirming that such phenomena are antecedently incredible. Dr. Mozley's attack, which we discussed in the first part of this chapter, and which, of course, was chiefly based upon Hume's celebrated argument, never seriously grappled with the doctrine at all. The principle which opposes itself to belief in miracles is very simple. Our belief in the invariability of that sequence of phenomena which we call the order of nature is based upon universal experience, and it would, therefore, require an extraordinary amount of evidence to prove the truth of any allegation of miracles, or violations of that order. Where a preponderance of evidence in support of such allegations cannot be produced, reason and experience concur in attributing the ascription of miraculous character to any occurrences said to have been witnessed, to imperfect observation, mistaken inference, or some other of the numerous sources of error. Any allegation of the interference of a new and supernatural agent, upon such an occasion, to account for results in contradiction of the known sequence of cause and effect is excluded by the very same principle, for, invariable experience being as opposed to the assertion that such interference ever takes place as it is to the occurrence of miraculous phenomena, the allegation is necessarily disbelieved.

Apologists find it much more convenient to evade the simple but effective arguments of Hume than to answer them, and where it is possible they dismiss them with a sneer, and hasten on to less dangerous ground. For instance, Dr. Farrar, arguing the antecedent credibility of the miraculous, makes the following remarks: "Now, as regards the inadequacy of testimony to establish a miracle, modern scepticism has not advanced one single step beyond the blank assertion. And it is astonishing that this assertion should still be considered cogent, when its logical consistency has been shattered to pieces by a host of writers, as well sceptical as Christian (Mill's *Logic*, ii., 157-160). For, as the greatest of our living logicians has remarked, the supposed recondite and dangerous formula of Hume—that it is more probable that testimony should be mistaken than that miracles should be true—reduces itself to the very harmless proposition that anything is incredible which is contrary to a complete induction. It is, in

fact, a flagrant *petitio principii*, used to support a wholly unphilosophical assertion."¹ It is much more astonishing that so able a man as Dr. Farrar could so misunderstand Hume's argument, and so misinterpret and misstate Mill's remarks upon it. So far from shattering to pieces the logical consistency of Hume's reasoning, Mill substantially confirms it, and pertinently remarks that "it speaks ill for the state of philosophical speculation on such subjects" that so simple and evident a doctrine should have been accounted a dangerous heresy. It is, in fact, a statement of a truth which should have been universally recognised, and would have been so but for its unwelcome and destructive bearing upon popular theology.

Mill states the evident principle: "If an alleged fact be in contradiction, not to any number of approximate generalisations, but to a completed generalisation grounded on a rigorous induction, it is said to be impossible, and is to be disbelieved totally." Mill continues: "This last principle, simple and evident as it appears, is the doctrine which, on the occasion of an attempt to apply it to the question of the credibility of miracles, excited so violent a controversy. Hume's celebrated doctrine, that nothing is credible which is contradictory to experience or at variance with laws of nature, is merely this very plain and harmless proposition, that whatever is contradictory to a complete induction is incredible."² He then proceeds to meet possible objections: "But does not (it may be asked) the very statement of the proposition imply a contradiction? An alleged fact, according to this theory, is not to be believed if it contradict a complete induction. But it is essential to the completeness of an induction that it should not contradict any known fact. Is it not, then, a *petitio principii* to say that the fact ought to be disbelieved because the induction to it is complete? How can we have a right to declare the induction complete, while facts, supported by credible evidence, present themselves in opposition to it? I answer, we have that right whenever the scientific canons of induction give it to us; that is, whenever the induction can be complete. We have it, for example, in a case of causation in which there has been an *experimentum crucis*." It will be remarked that Dr. Farrar adopts Mill's phraseology in one of the above questions to affirm the reverse of his opinion. Mill decides that the proposition is not a *petitio principii*; Dr Farrar says, in continuation of his reference to Mill, that it is a flagrant

¹ *The Witness of History to Christ*, Hulsean Lectures, 1870, by the Rev. F. W. Farrar, M.A., F.R.S., etc., etc., 2nd ed., 1872, p. 26 f.

² *A System of Logic*, by John Stuart Mill, 8th ed., 1872, ii., p. 165.

petitio principii. Mill proceeds to prove his statement, and he naturally argues that, if observations or experiments have been repeated so often, and by so many persons, as to exclude all supposition of error in the observer, a law of nature is established; and so long as this law is received as such, the assertion that on any particular occasion the cause A took place, and yet the effect B did not follow, *without any counteracting cause*, must be disbelieved. In fact, as he winds up this part of the argument by saying: "We cannot admit a proposition as a law of nature, and yet believe a fact in real contradiction to it. We must disbelieve the alleged fact, or believe that we were mistaken in admitting the supposed law."¹ Mill points out, however, that, in order that any alleged fact should be contradictory to a law of causation, the allegation must be not simply that the cause existed without being followed by the effect, but that this happened in the absence of any adequate counteracting cause. "Now, in the case of an alleged miracle, the assertion is the exact opposite of this. It is, that the effect was defeated, not in the absence, but in consequence of a counteracting cause—namely, a direct interposition of an act of the will of some being who has power over nature; and in particular of a Being whose will, being assumed to have endowed all the causes with the powers by which they produce their effects, may well be supposed able to counteract them."² A miracle, then, is no contradiction to the law of cause and effect; it is merely a new effect supposed to be introduced by the introduction of a new cause; "of the adequacy of that cause, *if present*,³ there can be no doubt; and the only antecedent improbability which can be ascribed to the miracle is the improbability that any such cause existed." Mill then continues, resuming his criticism on Hume's argument: "All, therefore, which Hume has made out, and this he must be considered to have made out, is that (at least in the imperfect state of our knowledge of natural agencies, which leaves it always possible that some of the physical antecedents may have been hidden from us) no evidence can prove a miracle to any one who did not previously believe the existence of a being or beings with supernatural power; or who believes himself to have full proof that the character of the Being whom he recognises is inconsistent with his having seen fit to interfere on the occasion in question." Mill proceeds to enlarge on this conclusion. "If we do not already believe in supernatural agencies, no miracle can prove to us their existence. The miracle itself, considered merely as an extraordinary fact, may be satisfactorily certified by our senses or by testimony; but nothing

¹ Mill, *Logic*, ii., p. 166 f.

² *Ib.*, ii., p. 167.

³ The italics are ours.

can ever prove that it is a miracle. There is still another possible hypothesis, that of its being the result of some unknown natural cause ; and this possibility cannot be so completely shut out as to leave no alternative but that of admitting the existence and intervention of a being superior to nature. Those, however, who already believe in such a being have two hypotheses to choose from, a supernatural and an unknown natural agency ; and they have to judge which of the two is the most probable in the particular case. In forming this judgment, an important element of the question will be the conformity of the result to the laws of the supposed agent ; that is, to the character of the Deity as they conceive it. But, with the knowledge which we now possess of the general uniformity of the course of nature, religion, following in the wake of science, has been compelled to acknowledge the government of the universe as being on the whole carried on by general laws, and not by special interpositions. To whoever holds this belief, there is a general presumption against any supposition of divine agency not operating through general laws, or, in other words, there is an antecedent improbability in every miracle which, in order to outweigh it, requires an extraordinary strength of antecedent probability derived from the special circumstances of the case.”¹ Mill rightly considers that it is not more difficult to estimate this than in the case of other probabilities. “We are seldom, therefore, without the means (when the circumstances of the case are at all known to us) of judging how far it is likely that such a cause should have existed at that time and place without manifesting its presence by some other marks, and (in the case of an unknown cause) without having hitherto manifested its existence in any other instance. According as this circumstance, or the falsity of the testimony, appears more improbable, that is conflicts with an approximate generalisation of a higher order, we believe the testimony, or disbelieve it : with a stronger or weaker degree of conviction, according to the preponderance : at least until we have sifted the matter further.”² This is precisely Hume’s argument weakened by the introduction of reservations which have no cogency.

We have wished to avoid interrupting Mill’s train of reasoning by any remarks of our own, and have, therefore, deferred till now the following observations regarding his criticism on Hume’s argument.

In reducing Hume’s celebrated doctrine to the very plain proposition, that whatever is contradictory to a complete induction is incredible, Mill in no way diminishes its potency against miracles ; and he does not call that proposition “harmless” in reference to

¹ Mill, *Logic*, ii., p. 168 f.

² *Ib.*, ii., p. 169.

its bearing on miracles, as Dr. Farrar evidently supposes, but merely in opposition to the character of a recondite and "dangerous heresy" assigned by dismayed theologians to so obvious and simple a principle. The proposition, however, whilst it reduces Hume's doctrine in the abstract to more technical terms, does not altogether represent his argument. Without asserting that experience is an absolutely infallible guide, Hume maintains that—"A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence. In such conclusions as are founded on an infallible experience, he expects the event with the last degree of assurance, and regards his past experience as a full *proof* of the future existence of that event. In other cases he proceeds with more caution; he weighs the opposite experiments; he considers which side is supported by the greater number of experiments; to that side he inclines with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds not what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned to the superiority."¹ After elaborating this proposition, Hume continues: "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined. Why is it more than probable that all men must die; that lead cannot, of itself, remain suspended in the air; that fire consumes wood, and is extinguished by water; unless it be that these events are found agreeable to the laws of nature, and there is required a violation of these laws, or, in other words, a miracle, to prevent them? Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man seemingly in good health should die on a sudden; because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life, because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be an uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as an uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof which is superior. The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention): 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle

¹ David Hume, *Philosophical Works*; Boston and Edinburgh, 1854, iv., p. 126.

unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior.' When any one tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and, according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion."¹

The ground upon which Mill admits that a miracle may not be contradictory to complete induction is that it is not an assertion that a certain cause was not followed by a certain effect, but an allegation of the interference of an adequate counteracting cause. This does not, however, by his own showing, remove a miracle from the action of Hume's principle, but simply modifies the nature of the antecedent improbability. Mill qualifies his admission regarding the effect of the alleged counteracting cause by the all-important words, "if present"; for, in order to be valid, the reality of the alleged counteracting cause must be established, which is impossible, therefore the allegations fall to the ground.

In admitting that Hume has made out that no evidence can prove a miracle to any one who does not previously believe in a being of supernatural power willing to work miracles, Mill concedes everything to Hume, for his only limitation is based upon a supposition of mere personal belief in something which is not capable of proof, and which belief, therefore, is not more valid than any other purely imaginary hypothesis. The belief may seem substantial to the individual entertaining it, but, not being capable of proof, it cannot have weight with others, or in any way affect the value of evidence in the abstract.

The assumption of a Personal Deity working miracles is excluded by Hume's argument, and, although Mill apparently overlooks the fact, Hume has not only anticipated but refuted the reasoning which is based upon it. In the succeeding chapter on a Particular Providence and a Future State he directly disposes of such an assumption, but he does so with equal effect also in the essay which we are discussing. Taking an imaginary miracle as an illustration, he argues: "Though the Being to whom the miracle is ascribed be in this case Almighty, it does not upon that account

¹ Hume, *Philos. Works*, iv., p. 130 ff.

become a whit more probable; since it is impossible for us to know the attributes or actions of such a Being otherwise than from the experience which we have of his productions in the usual course of nature. This still reduces us to past observation, and obliges us to compare the instances of the violation of truth in the testimony of men with those of the violation of the laws of nature by miracles, in order to judge which of them is most likely and probable. As the violations of truth are more common in the testimony concerning religious miracles than in that concerning any other matter of fact, this must diminish very much the authority of the former testimony, and make us form a general resolution never to lend any attention to it, with whatever specious pretence it may be covered."¹ A person who believes anything contradictory to a complete induction merely on the strength of an assumption which is incapable of proof is simply credulous; but such an assumption cannot affect the real evidence for that thing.

The argument of Paley against Hume is an illustration of the reasoning suggested by Mill. Paley alleges the interposition of a Personal Deity in explanation of miracles, but he protests that he does not assume the attributes of the Deity or the existence of a future state in order to *prove* their reality. "That reality," he admits, "always must be proved by evidence. We assert only that in miracles adduced in support of revelation there is not such antecedent improbability as no testimony can surmount." His argument culminates in the short statement: "In a word, once believe that there is a God [*i.e.*, a Personal God, working miracles], and miracles are not incredible."² We have already quoted Hume's refutation of this reasoning, and we may at once proceed to the final argument by which Paley endeavours to overthrow Hume's doctrine, and upon which he mainly rests his case.

"But the short consideration," he says, "which, independently of every other, convinces me that there is no solid foundation in Mr. Hume's conclusion is the following: When a theorem is proposed to a mathematician, the first thing he does with it is to try it upon a simple case, and if it produces a false result he is sure that there must be some mistake in the demonstration. Now, to proceed in this way with what may be called Mr. Hume's theorem. If twelve men, whose probity and good sense I had long known, should seriously and circumstantially relate to me an account of a miracle wrought before their eyes, and in which it was impossible that they should be deceived; if the governor of the country, hearing a rumour of this account, should call these

¹ Hume, *Philos. Works*, iv., p. 148.

² Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity*, "Preparatory Considerations."

men into his presence, and offer them a short proposal, either to confess the imposture or submit to be tied up to a gibbet ; if they should refuse with one voice to acknowledge that there existed any falsehood or imposture in the case ; if this threat was communicated to them separately, yet with no different effect ; if it was at last executed ; if I myself saw them, one after another, consenting to be racked, burned, or strangled, rather than give up the truth of their account—still, if Mr. Hume's rule be my guide, I am not to believe them. Now, I undertake to say that there exists not a sceptic in the world who would not believe them, or who would defend such incredulity."¹

It is obvious that this reasoning, besides being purely hypothetical, is utterly without cogency against Hume's doctrine. The evidence of the twelve men simply amounts to a statement that they saw, or fancied that they saw, a certain occurrence in contradiction to the law ; but that which they actually saw was an external phenomenon, the real nature of which is a mere inference, and an inference which, from the necessarily isolated position of the miraculous phenomenon, is neither supported by other instances capable of forming a complete counter induction, nor by analogies within the order of nature.² The bare inference from an occurrence supposed to have been witnessed by twelve men is all that is opposed to the law of nature, which is based upon a complete induction, and it is, therefore, incredible.

If we examine Paley's "simple case" a little more closely, however, we find that not only is it utterly inadmissible as a hypothesis, but that as an illustration of the case of Gospel miracles it is completely devoid of relevancy and argumentative force. The only point which gives a momentary value to the supposed instance is the condition attached to the account of the miracle related by the twelve men, that not only was it wrought before their eyes, but that it was one "in which it was impossible that they should be deceived." Now, this qualification of infallibility on the part of the twelve witnesses is as incredible as the miracle which they are supposed to attest. The existence of twelve men incapable of error or mistake is as opposed to experience as the hypothesis of a miracle in which it is impossible for the twelve men to be deceived is contradictory to reason. The exclusion of all error in the observation of the actual occurrence and its antecedents and consequences, whose united sum constitutes the miracle, is an assumption which deprives the argument of all potency. On the other hand, the moment the possibility of error is admitted the reasoning breaks down, for the probability of error on the part of the observers, either as

¹ *Paley*, l. c.

² Cf. *Mill, System of Logic*, ii., p. 166 f.