

CHAPTER I

THE RIVAL THEORIES OF MIRACLE —TRADITIONAL AND MODERNIST

THE history of miracles in the Christian Church has been strangely chequered. At first they were regarded as glories of the Christian faith. Nothing can be clearer from the earliest records than that the first generation of believers regarded them as creative and glorious deeds of the Divine Spirit—fragments of heaven and intimations of immortality. They were expressions on the human side of the very genius of prayer, and verifications of the confidence of the Church that it was the “third race,” the new Humanity. So might an Athenian regard the works of his sculptors and dramatists and historians; the age of Elizabeth, the achievements of its voyagers and the *Faerie Queene*; our own time, the victories of commerce and science.

Nothing too can be clearer than that Christ gloried in the great deeds of blessing that God wrought through Him and His disciples. When His disciples came back and told Him that “even the devils were subject to them,” He “rejoiced in the Spirit and said to them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” These healings of tortured minds and bodies were the opening victories in the

great campaign against sin and sorrow which would end in the total destruction of Satan's kingdom. At the end of His ministry the Fourth Evangelist represents Him as saying of the coming raising of Lazarus, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" Nothing can be more futile than the endeavours made to-day by well-meaning commentators of both the Traditionalist and Modernist schools to show that Jesus disliked working His signs. He refused utterly to work useless and spectacular signs such as were asked of Him, but gloried in healing the bodies of suffering men, and never shrank from this beloved mission, save when it threatened to interfere with His even diviner work of preaching the Gospel.

Jesus, in fact, seems to have felt towards physical and mental disease precisely as every good modern physician feels towards it. I shall have something to say about this later in Chapter II when we have the evidence more fully before us. Meantime it is enough to say that in this respect He does not differ from the ordinary medical standpoint, nor can we understand Him unless we appreciate this. He always assumes that disease is part of the kingdom of evil, and never once does He give the slightest sign to the contrary. Not only does He try to heal all who are brought to Him, but He sends His disciples forth with a general commission to heal indiscriminately. His unvarying assumption, where there are failures, is that there has not been enough faith either on the part of the healers or of the sick or their friends and neigh-

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bours. His underlying idea can only be that God is always on the side of health rather than of disease, and that where the latter triumphs, something is as it ought not to be. There is nothing to be gained by evading or turning down what is the plain meaning of the Synoptic narratives. It is impossible to make coherent sense of them on any other supposition. Surely, also, the discoveries of modern science regarding the true nature of at least the great majority of diseases make this the only rational view. We now know that at least the majority of diseases, if not the whole of them, are due to the existence of minute living creatures who prey upon the human body from within. Man's first great struggle for progress was a fight with wild beasts of prey, wolves, tigers, and lions. His struggle to-day with disease is a struggle with wild beasts also. The only difference is that of the dimensions of the ancient and modern beasts of prey. It would seem to follow inevitably that we can only look rationally upon physical disease as we look upon the devastations of the wild creatures of the jungle. Disease is just as little or as much part of the Divine order in the one case as the other. It is surely as impossible to regard the one as the direct Divine will for man as the other. Indirectly they may both be regarded as part of that objective order which, as we shall see, penalises our ignorance, our apathy and indolence and cowardice, and educates us in better ways. In this sense and in this sense alone are they both together the Divine will for men. But they are evils, none the less, against which all right-thinking men

should wage wise and resolute war, by striking at the real roots of the trouble.

It is not therefore at all surprising that the early Church should have gloried in this particular kind of miracle, and should have set itself to imitate its Master in this, as in deeper respects.

Such "miracles" were regarded as works and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, proofs that God was with the infant Church in its great enterprise. It is impossible to read the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians with an open mind, and not to see that this is the underlying view of the charismata or "gifts" of the Spirit, which mark out the Church as a Divine institution. In a writing of another branch of the Christian Church than the Pauline, the Epistle of James, we have the same underlying ideal practice.

"When any one is sick [note the universality of the expression], let him call for the elders of the church. They shall lay their hands on him, and anoint him. The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and his sins shall be forgiven him." The Jewish colour here is stronger than in the Pauline Epistle, but the drift of it is the same.

Harnack¹ says that this was the ordinary Christian method of healing disease, until well down in the third century, when it was abandoned for what by that time had no doubt proved the more immediately effective method of striking at disease from the physical side of the psycho-physical organism, which method came in from the Greek culture; and he says that it was part of that fusion of Christian faith with Gentile thought and practice

¹ *Medicinisches aus der ältesten kirchengeschichte.*

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which led to the development of Catholicism. The practice of maintaining official exorcists, which persisted in the Church for centuries, was a rudimentary survival of this early practice of healing all diseases by prayer which we find exercised in the New Testament. The beautiful chapters on the subject in Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity* give a moving picture of the hopes and aspirations of the early Church on this whole matter.

It is plain that all this is in full continuity with the Synoptic account of His "miracles," and that the early Church believed itself called to carry on the same mission as Jesus Himself practised, and which He commissioned His first disciples to carry on in His Name.

Not only did the early Church believe itself commissioned so to do, but it had no doubt as to its own powers.² Whatever theory we may have as to the authenticity of the closing section of St Mark's Gospel: "These signs shall follow them that believe: In My Name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 17, 18)—there can be no real question that these words express the belief and practice of the first Christian century.³ Taken in connec-

¹ See Appendix A.

² So Prof. Allan Menzies, *The Earliest Gospel*, commentary *in loco*. The full passage is as follows: "This is the experience of the Early Church, which fully believed itself to possess these powers in Matt. x., Luke ix. 10. In Mark's charge (iii. 15,

tion with the Synoptic narrative generally, with the Pauline Epistles, and with the Epistle of James, and what has been preserved of the earliest literature of the Church, they seem to me to leave no reasonable doubt as to the matter.

How long this period of optimistic and courageous faith lasted, I am unable from my own knowledge to say precisely. Certainly it extended far beyond the period in which the bulk of the New Testament writings took form. Harnack, as we have seen, puts the abandonment of this method in the third century, and traces it to a deviation from primitive Christian orthodoxy and custom.

But gradually these and the other phenomena of the Spirit diminished: "It was in the primitive days of Christianity, during the first sixty years of its course, that their effects were most conspicuous, but they continued all through the second century, though in diminished volume. The Montanist movement certainly gave new life to the "Spirit," which had begun to wane; but after the opening of the third century, the phenomena dwindle rapidly, and instead of being the hallmark of the Church at large, or of every individual community, they become merely the equipment of a few favoured individuals. "The common life of the Church has now its priests, its altar, its sacraments, its holy book and rule of faith. But it no longer possesses 'the Spirit and power.' As the

vi. 7) much less is claimed, and the deficiency is here made good. On Tongues, see Acts ii. and 1 Cor. xiv. On Exorcism, see Acts xiii. 17, 18, 19. On recovery from poison of serpents, Acts xxviii. 3-5; healing the sick, James v. 14."

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proofs of 'the Spirit and of power' subsided after the beginning of the third century, the extraordinary moral tension also became relaxed, paving the way gradually for a morality which was adapted to a worldly life." *

From this time on, miracles of healing became more and more wonderful exceptions, being associated with personalities of outstanding force or reputed sanctity, or with certain places which have acquired, mainly through some saint or apparition, a peculiar reputation for healing power. It was, of course, quite inevitable under these circumstances that they should change in character, and instead of being regarded as part of the normal manifestation of the Father's love, should instead become evidential portents, extraordinary proofs of His Divine favour for certain saints, and evidences of the Divine function of the Catholic Church. We pass by gradual transition into the luxuriant wilderness of mediæval myth and legend.

Into this field it is unnecessary to travel. Up to this point miracles are still regarded as glories of the faith, and, in so far, the uniform view of the New Testament and the early age is maintained. But they are rather glories of God's power than glories of His universal love. They are the normal accompaniment of the lives of the saints, and are miracles both of judgment and of mercy designed to awaken and to increase faith. As yet the critical spirit was asleep, so there was little limit to credulity. To those who believed in the stupendous and constantly repeated miracle of the Mass, it

* Harnack's *Expansion of Christianity*.

was in no way improbable that the most extraordinary things should happen in the lives of the saints, or after their deaths in contact with their relics or at places associated with their presence. The mediæval mind had no difficulty about the credibility of miracles. Like the mind of the earlier ages, it believed, also, in miracles wrought by the powers of evil, as well as by the powers of good.

With the Reformation a change began, and a more critical temper began to show itself regarding ecclesiastical miracles. The Lutheran and Reformed theologians could not look with the same eyes as their opponents upon the immense multitude of miracles which were believed to have manifested Divine power through those who, the Reformers believed, were on the side of Antichrist. Therefore, where these did not ascribe them to monkish invention, so far as they took note of them at all, they tended to ascribe them to demonic agency.

Luther believed profoundly in the power of believing prayer. His own prayers were believed to have recovered Melanchthon from a mortal illness. He says boldly in one of his great treatises that if we had faith enough, there is no disease that we could not cure. Nor had the Reformation theologians any difficulty about the New Testament miracles, nor, so far as I know, about the miracles of the early Church. The modern period only begins with the dawn of Rationalism, the gradual rise of the scientific conception of nature, and the growth of the critical spirit.

This put the religion of the eighteenth century in an acute difficulty on the whole subject of the

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miracles of the New Testament, and has since been the main factor in causing that extraordinary revolution of feeling which has transformed them from being glories of the faith of all, to being burdens on the faith of many modern Christians.

We can best see the whole situation of the time mirrored in the works of its two most powerful writers, Gibbon and Hume. Hume's argument, briefly put, is that the only conceivable way in which miracles can be proved is by human testimony. But the course of nature is proved by all experience to be unvarying, whereas testimony is proved by experience to be very liable to error. Nature is therefore more to be trusted than testimony. Therefore miracles can never be proved. It is clear that the argument would prove a great deal more than what is reasonable. It is enough for our purpose that it would prove out of hand that the Jesus of history never existed, for He is historically just as unique as any of His works.

Gibbon's case, however, shows the very real difficulty in which Protestant orthodoxy was now placed. The official Anglican position was that the miracles of the New Testament age were historical, and were granted as portents evidential of the truths which it taught. They were continued for a time that the young Church might be well founded. Similar but fewer signs were granted to the fourth or fifth century, and were later withdrawn as being no longer necessary. Enough in all were granted to authenticate the Divine approval of the Fathers of the early centuries, the standard of Anglican orthodoxy. By this convenient method the Roman

conceptions were condemned and the Anglican standards maintained. So flagrantly dogmatic a construction of history failed to hold the youthful Gibbon's mind, which was aroused from its dogmatic slumber by Middleton's attack upon the veracity of the ecclesiastical miracles. Unwilling to leave the Christian faith and yet compelled to see that even the Fathers of the fourth or fifth century were sacerdotalist, he was driven to join the Church of Rome. But as his mind expanded and the spirit of his age entered into him, he found the Roman position untenable, and in the counter-recoil abandoned miracles altogether.

Now, apart altogether from the spirit of the age of Rationalism, and apart altogether from the fact that neither Gibbon nor Hume was temperamentally a religious man or had any desire to find God in history, it is clear that a great transformation had come over the whole idea of miracle since the early Christian age. The orthodoxy of the day was generating a view of it which is not really the view of the Synoptic Gospels, nor that of Jesus Himself. The view which Gibbon and Hume were rejecting is one which has only secondary interest for the modern Christian. The mediæval Church had spoiled the conception, but it was centuries before the Protestant Church realised the fact.

We have now in our review of the history reached the present-day situation. To-day we may say broadly that two conceptions struggle for the mastery—the Traditional and Modernist. I shall endeavour to state them both in their clearest form, though there are intermediate positions.

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The Traditional view is in principle substantially the same as that taught by the Scholastic theologians of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The miracles of Jesus are true narratives of historical events. Their purpose was evidential; they were meant to give convincing evidence that God was on the side of Christ. Many traditionalists would put them more simply still, and would say that they are direct expressions of our Lord's Divinity, acts of creative power that could only be wrought by a Divine Being. They are, in any case, meant to authenticate His teaching and mission as Divine. They are not parts of the message, but proofs of its truth. They are seals attached to the document, not parts of the document. They are the crier ringing his bell to call attention to his message. The essential thing here is that they should be signs of Divine Power. Only this can make them unmistakably Divine. So was it with the miracles of Jesus, and above all, with His Resurrection. The crier rang His bell so hard that the contemporaries could not choose but hear. So was it also with the miracles wrought by the disciples. These were, one and all, evidential in character. Standing as the disciples did for Jesus Christ, power was graciously granted them by the Almighty to meet the exceptional circumstances, and to support them as they faced their mighty task of overcoming the world. It is assumed that it was revealed to them at the time the miracle was wrought, that God was willing to endue them with this exceptional power for the moment and the occasion. The whole reasoning turns on the idea

that the miracles were exceptional, and that they were convincing portents. They were thus phenomena quite distinct from Divine providences or ordinary Divine answers to prayer, which were meant to be normal experiences in the life of the Christian. A distinction commonly drawn by the maintainers of this view was that, while in His Providence and in hearing prayer God worked through nature, in working miracles He, as it were, interfered with the course of nature, or "suspended" it.

Did miracles continue into early Christian times, and if so, when did they cease? Here Traditionalists are divided, not so much by reason of historical evidence as by virtue of the general religious view of authority which they hold. The orthodox Roman Catholic holds that these miracles have never ceased, but have been granted all the way down through history, and happen still, as, for example, at Lourdes, and the Holy Houses of Einsiedeln and Loreto. The Anglican position is not so definite or uniform. I have been unable, except in the case of Newman and Ward, to find that the Tractarians dealt much with the Patristic miracles. Many Anglo-Catholics to-day believe in the general continuity of the miraculous. In general, Anglican opinion is coloured on the one hand by respect for the testimony of the Fathers, and on the other by a general distrust of Mediævalism. Protestant Evangelical Christianity in the main would put the terminal period about the close of the New Testament age. In the case of the latter schools of belief, the cessation of miracles is ascribed to the disappearance

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of the need for such exceptional manifestations of the Divine Power. The underlying idea of this, historically, was that such exceptional manifestations were dangerous. The quaint phrase in use among those who first developed the traditional Protestant view, was that God made a "sparing use" of miraculous powers. I have no doubt that, as so often happened in theology, the political ideas in vogue in England during the period coloured the religious thought. The universe was regarded as a kind of British Constitution in which the normal government was carried on by the Reign of Law. When the Constitution got deadlocked, the sovereign intervened. But while this was provided for under the sanction of emergency, it was his wisdom to intervene as briefly and as sparingly as possible, and as soon as possible retire to his normal position as a "limited monarch."

I have endeavoured as fairly as possible, then, to outline the Traditional position. It has its strong points. It seems to conserve a due respect for the formidable uniformity of nature along with a recognition of the reality of miracle, and the possibility of a living Providence and the reality and power of prayer. It seems a safe mediating position, which does not put too great a strain upon belief on the one hand or on scientific necessities on the other, and it has all the advantage of being already in possession of the mind of the Church. Yet I do not think it can really bear close examination in the full light of present-day thought. It is too artificial, too obviously a compromise framed to avoid certain controversial extremes. It does not arise naturally out of the Gospel narratives, or out of the scientific necessities,

but out of the historical situation in the century in which it originated. The weakness of it to-day is that that situation has changed. Science has filled up the many gaps in its own construction of the physical world, and is throwing out saps and parallels into the sphere of the psychical, and historical study of the New Testament period has greatly developed. The ideas which underlie its literature are much more fully understood. The traditional view of our Lord's miracles might, and no doubt did, satisfy the religious consciousness of scientific men of its own time, but that it does not so satisfy many of them to-day the growth of Modernism demonstrates.

But what, it may be asked, are the main difficulties of the Traditional view? (1) The first of these, I think, is that it does not really correspond to the New Testament idea of the miracles at all. It is a meaning imposed upon the New Testament by a supposed apologetic necessity. It is thus read into the Gospels rather than out of them. I shall endeavour to show this in detail in a subsequent chapter. Meantime, it may be enough to point out that the picture of Jesus as one who works Divine wonders for the purpose of calling attention to His message is strangely out of harmony with the Synoptic pictures. Over and over again in these narratives He refuses to work just such signs as the Traditionalist theory declares the miracles to have been, and condemns the spirit which demanded them as that of "an evil and adulterous generation." The latter adjective is taken from the Prophets, and means a generation in its heart alienated from spirituality and God. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned by the child-

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like heart, not forced home upon dazzled senses and stunned minds by the blows of supernatural power. The story of the Temptation turns precisely upon this distinction between portents of power and signs of God's love and mercy, which by their own beauty attract "a free man's worship" as worthy of the Supreme.

The conception of Christ as a heavenly bellman is grotesquely out of keeping with Him of whom it was said, "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall His voice be heard in the streets," a prophecy which is applied to Him by St Matthew. He is no herald with his tabard and trumpet, blaring and declaiming his monarch's commands, but a Son revealing His Father's ideal and heart towards the wandering children of men. "A true poet," it has been truly said, "does not write his poems in order to show that he is a poet. If he does he shows by so much that he is the less of a poet. He writes them because he cannot help it." So Jesus works His miracles because He cannot help working them, out of the sheer creative faith and hope and love within Him, which bring God in His healing power and man in his suffering and sorrow together.

(2) In some respects even more serious is the way in which the Traditional theory blunts the most remarkable feature of the Synoptic narratives, their steady reiteration of the close and vital relation between the works which Christ wrought and "faith." How large a part this plays in the Synoptic narratives will appear in the following chapters. The main object of this volume is to call

attention to this feature of the New Testament stories. That it is even yet so imperfectly recognised is due, I think, largely to the fact that the Traditional theory, in the light of which these stories are read, can get along quite well without laying any emphasis upon faith as the condition of the signs. Indeed, to some extent the view that the miracles are essentially manifestations of power so great that it must be Divine, is uncongenial to this insistence on this simple human condition, the absence of which is able apparently to set bounds to the manifestation of the power of God.

(3) Most of all must this be the case with reference to that form of the Traditional theory which ascribed the miracles of Jesus not to His perfect manhood, which makes it possible for the Spirit of God to work through Him, but to His essential Godhead resuming as it were its Divine power and acting, as is the Divine way, creatively in the world of space and time. Against this form of the Traditional theory we have not only the constant emphasis upon faith of which I have spoken, but the final and fatal fact that He transmitted His unique powers to mere men; and that St Paul had manifestly a totally different conception, which is expressed in his doctrine of the Spirit, and the charismata of the Church; and that finally it is quite without support from the texts themselves.

(4) The moment we begin to think out the Traditional view, and to account for the cessation of the miraculous gift, we come into insuperable difficulties. No matter what date we choose for

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that momentous cessation, whether we put it about the fifth century, or at the close of the New Testament Canon, or within the lifetime of the Apostolic generation, the difficulty is the same.

The root idea is always that miracles are dangerous, a kind of heavenly explosive that may wreck the safe established order! Anything more grotesquely unlike the Apostolic outlook it would be difficult to imagine. It is eighteenth-century English Whig Constitutionalism, not the spirit of the Judean and Galilean dawn!

The explanation given is that the task of the early Church was so momentous and so difficult and perilous as to demand special aid from God. Hence these sporadic outbursts of Divine power were granted, for a comparatively brief period, and then withdrawn. One may fairly say to supporters of the view that miracles ceased with the New Testament age, Was not the Church in the following centuries in even greater extremities in its fight with Gnosticism within and the destroying fury of the Empire without? To others we may say, Why should the third, the fourth, or the fifth century have been the terminus—why, for instance, were there no miracles to prevent the Church from going astray in the critical sixteenth century, when its unity was again broken? One may say to them all, Is not this theory of an unconditional Divine withdrawal of miraculous powers altogether too artificial? Let us remember that no warning of such Divine withdrawal was ever given. Up to this period of privation, of reduction to an order less rich in Divine manifestation, it was regarded as high

virtue and faith to hope for and to attempt such Divine signs. To hope for it after this period was to ask too much, to be out of touch with the new and more straitened reality, and yet no warning was ever given. Men were left to find it out by heartbreaking and faith-shattering failures.

The truth is, that here the Traditional theory will not fit the realities. Surely Harnack has given us a simpler and more satisfying solution in the passage quoted in last chapter. The miracles of the Spirit did not cease because of an unconditional Divine fiat; "The gifts and callings of God are without repentance." The miracles of the Spirit gradually ceased, because by compromise with the world the Church got out of touch with the pure grace of God. It no longer possessed the strong, unconventional faith of the first generation.

(5) Finally, the course of history has shown since these days, that wherever great spiritual personalities endowed with primitive energy of faith have arisen, faith has still been able to move mountains in the world of circumstances as well as in the world of the Spirit. The cumulative force of these considerations seems to me overwhelming.

I submit that the Traditional theory needs reconsideration. I recognise to the full its merits and achievements. It has maintained the essential thing, faith in the historical character of the facts recorded in the Gospels, but it has, it appears to me, done so at too great a cost, and has to-day been felt by very many unsatisfactory, even for the apologetic purpose for which it was framed.

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So, throughout Christendom, there has arisen a new theory, which dates from the nineteenth century, the theory of Modernism.

THE MODERNIST THEORY

What in its outlines does this theory maintain? It originated in dissatisfaction with the Traditionalist theory. What was the ground of its dissatisfaction? It is not possible, within the limits of a brief sketch such as this, to go into all these reasons. To do so would carry us far into its antecedents in the great Rationalist movement of the eighteenth century. But there is no doubt that in our day the Modernist criticism of miracle is mainly due to its apparent conflict with physical science. Science has definitely established itself within the commonwealth of human knowledge. The technique of modern industry and commerce rests upon it, and so do the healing and other practical arts. On the other hand, deeply religious men, as many of the great Modernists have been, know well the vital importance to the soul of humanity of the great Christian ideals and faith. They believe that any conflict between science and religion must needs be a supreme disaster. This attitude to miracles is part of a projected concordat between science and religion. What in its essence is that concordat? The originators of the Modernist concordat believed that science had its true domain in the physical world, the world that was capable of being weighed and measured; and that within this dominion science had one

universal principle of interpretation, the reign of law, or as it was otherwise called, the uniformity of nature. Translated into other terms, this means that the presupposition of all physical science is that nature is one closed system of universal causation. Science is the search for causes and for laws of their operation, the endeavour to show in detail that everything is "governed by law."

Now on this view the miracles of the New Testament must needs be regarded as anomalies. The Traditional theory regarded them as simply acts of God. It was essential to this view that the miracles should be inexplicable in terms of ordinary causation. Inasmuch as the causal system failed to account for them, they must be traceable to the Author and Lord of nature. Here there appeared to be a clean breach between the legitimate demand of science, its fundamental principle that nature was a uniform system, and the indispensable requirement of the Traditional theory that the physical causal system should be overruled, that Jesus should heal the sick, raise the dead, walk on the waves, and still the storm. The conflict between what was believed to be virtually an axiom of science and the very core of the Traditional theory of evidential portent appeared to be definite and absolute, and the framers of the Modernist concordat addressed themselves to the solution of the problem. They asked, first of all, was it really worth while for Christianity to stand by these physical miracles? They accepted, like the Traditionalists, the view that the miracles of Jesus had value only as evidential portents of Divine

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power. But, plainly, if this were so, the growing prestige of science, with its dogma of the uniformity of nature, was continually depriving them of that evidential power. They might still be held as pious opinions by believers, but they were of little use for the convincing of doubters touched by the scientific spirit. The fundamental question was raised as to whether it was really a spiritual and good thing to coerce faith by logical argument. Did not this make religious certainty a thing for the wise and prudent rather than for the childlike spirit? Spiritual truth, it was argued, must be spiritually discerned. Did not Jesus Himself teach this? The sayings which Jesus applied to the kind of signs desired by Scribes and Pharisees were applied to all His miracles, and so the picture of Jesus as one who disliked working "signs and wonders" then came into being, and was forced into the interpretation of the Gospels, in a most dogmatic and unhistoric way. The Traditional theory had already made the too obvious distinction between ordinary answers to petitionary prayer and miracle, and the Modernist theorists continued that unfortunate distinction, and suppressed the obvious fact that Jesus believed that prayer could alter the course of physical nature, and had inserted in His model prayer a petition for daily bread. They abandoned the physical signs wrought by Jesus as unhistorical, and, with these, the idea that prayer could in any way affect the outward course of nature. If such a practice were sanctioned in the New Testament, it could only be with the view of the petitioner gradually praying himself

into submission to that divinely ordered course of nature. In the nature of the case its action could only be reflex action on the mind of the petitioner.⁵

What the Modernist view makes of Christ's conception of the Fatherly providence of God—"Be not anxious for the morrow, your heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things," "the very hairs of your head are all numbered"—I do not know. I have never seen the question fairly faced. I do not see how it can possibly be harmonised with the general position that nature is a closed system, in virtue of which all miraculous happenings in the sphere of nature are excluded, and all prayer for external success is discouraged, or admitted only under impossible psychological conditions.

But while the whole physical environment of the human spirit is thus handed over to science and the unbroken causal laws, the Modernist theory stands firmly by the true autonomy of the inner life of man's spirit, and for the open road to God's personal intervention in the inner experiences of the soul. Eucken, for example, bases his whole philosophy on the new birth, Martineau maintains a real efficiency of the Divine Spirit within the psychical realm, and Harnack does the same.

It is part of the faith of Modernism that while no man has the right to expect God to come to his help in the world of outward circumstances, He can so help him by reinforcing all his inner moral energies as to enable him to triumph over

⁵ For a striking example of this see F. W. Robertson's *Sermon on Prayer*, vol. iv. p. 23.

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his trials and temptations, and so make the very outward ills themselves instruments of a higher good. In all these affirmations the Modernist view shows itself essentially Theistic and Christian; only in the theory of nature, which is involved in its rejection of all physical miracle, does it depart from the New Testament position. In many ways the Modernist school has done conspicuous service to the Christian cause in our modern world. Theism had no more powerful upholder in the difficult mid-Victorian time than Martineau, and to-day not a few of the ardent philosophical defenders of a spiritual view of life come from the Modernist camp. In the political and social life of the age there are no greater and more honoured representatives of the Christian values than some who have found their spiritual home in Liberal Christianity. The Modernist compromise has kept many troubled minds from making shipwreck of their faith, and can never be regarded by any one familiar with the life of our time and concerned with its main spiritual problems and issues, without sincere respect and gratitude. We live in an age of transition when, above all else, it is well to remember our Lord's words, "He that is not against you is for you"; and that on many of the greatest moral and spiritual issues the followers of Liberal Christianity have been in the very van of the fight, and sometimes beyond it, it is happily impossible for any one who knows the facts to deny.

But when one turns from the individuals to the intellectual system and asks whether the delimita-

tion of frontiers which Modernism has supported is really tenable to-day, it is another matter. It is not really a frontier determined by the physical conditions but one which is dictated by the exhaustion of the combatants, and which, as soon as they have recovered their energies, they are bound to abandon. It is really impossible to cut the unity of the world into two clearly divided halves in this way, to assign the world of physical nature to the sway of the causal nexus, and the physical and spiritual world to autonomy and the Divine Spirit. Neither religion nor science can long consent to a truce so hollow, indeed it has long been visibly breaking up before our eyes.

Science has gained greatly in boldness since the Modernist concordat first took form, and has extended its methods into the realm of psychophysics and psychology proper. We are at the moment face to face with the new determinism of modern psychology both in the Behaviourist theories and in Freudian psycho-therapeutics. To warn it off from this territory and repel it to the Victorian limits is impossible. On the other hand, can religion and ethics really rest content with that conception of physical nature as a closed and uniform system which is really at the very heart of the Modernist concordat?

I shall have to examine this question in detail later. Meantime it is enough to say that, if logically carried through, the closed system idea of nature makes an end not only of miracle and the power of prayer to influence the ordinary course of events, but of human freedom, and any real individual

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guidance and providence of God in human affairs.

But holding discussion of this over meantime, I shall confine myself here to the question of whether the Modernist exclusion of physical miracles from the Gospels leaves the real picture of Jesus intact, or vitally modifies it and changes thereby the whole conception of God, and the whole colour of the Christian life.

We have here to face a notable modification which of late years has, almost without notice, taken place in Modernism. The older type rejected all the physical miracles indiscriminately. If we go back to the literature of the Tübingen school of New Testament criticism (and the famous *Leben Jesu* of Strauss), we find the healing miracles grouped with the rest, and wherever a narrative in the Gospels or the Acts contains such narratives, it is at once suspect, and the batteries of criticism are brought to bear upon it, as either mythical or legendary. In this the writers followed faithfully the spirit of the materialistic science of their day, which did not admit of the possibility of anything analogous to the New Testament miracles of healing in current experience. Of course this compelled a much more drastic handling of the text of the Gospels than is to-day necessary.

To-day the position is completely changed. We now know much about the reciprocal relations of mind and body, the singular phenomena of hypnotism, suggestion, faith-healing, and psychotherapeutics, which have brought these healing miracles of Jesus within range of our experience.

The simple truth is, that in spite of the rough distinction between organic and functional maladies which medical science still draws, and which an extension of the powers of the microscope any day may modify, we do not really know the limits of the ideal power of the mind over pathological conditions. Modernism has here partially followed the lead of science, and is now willing to accept many, if not all, of the healing miracles of Jesus. But again, it patiently accepts the limits which our present-day experience still sets. We have no real analogies to the walking on the waters and to the control of the storm, and we have certainly none to our Lord's Resurrection, and so applying the standards of our everyday experience and making them the limits of the credible, these narratives are treated precisely as those of the healing miracles were treated seventy years ago.

One question, however, it may be noted, is completely ignored. Is this undetermined influence of mind over body, which is now conceded, really capable of being harmonised with the closed system idea of physical nature? I fail altogether to see that it can. How can mind have real power over bodily tissue and energy within a closed physical system? We seem to have a direct contradiction in terms. But if the system of physical nature can be deflected by the mind of man, is it really coherent thinking to say that it is unscientific to believe that its course cannot be influenced by the Mind and Will of God?

But passing by this very pertinent point for the moment, and accepting the changed point of view of Modernism, does the clearing out of the nature

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miracles, and above all of the Resurrection of our Lord, from the sphere of the historical, leave the picture of Jesus in essentials just what it was before ?

Let every one read these Synoptic Gospels anew—and let him get the full picture of Jesus as they present it fresh in his mind, in all His glorious war not only with the sins of men, but with the whole tragic element in human experience, suffering, sorrow, and death—His victories over the destroying powers of nature, plague, famine, and storm, culminating in His final victory over the grave—and he will understand the victorious energy of the first great Christian enterprise, the glow of confident optimism and power with which it adventured forth on its mission of carrying the Gospel to every creature, and swept on, overleaping the wellnigh impassable barrier of Jewish nationalism, from Jerusalem to Antioch, and from Antioch to Rome. If we can once overcome the instinctive difficulty about miracles of any kind, the whole story reads like a unity, it makes the impression of being real history, much more than the laborious Modernist reconstructions of it based on the idea that the empty grave was a mistake.

If Jesus actually wrought these victories not only over human sin but human tragedy, we can understand why the Apostles called Him "the Prince of Life," and why the first great real difficulty was not why He should have risen again, but why He ever came to be subject to death at all. For that this was their real problem, the least study of the Acts and the Pauline and Petrine Epistles must make plain. How are the truly astonishing vitality,

hope, and power which Jesus communicated to His disciples explained in the Modernist lives of Jesus? Do they really account for the spirit of the first Christian generation?

We have had quite a number of these attempted biographies of Jesus all written on the assumption that the miracles of Jesus were quite immaterial to the historical figure, and could be omitted without injury to the substance of His message. These range through all the shades of Modernism, from Strauss and Renan on to Oscar Holtzmann, Frenssen, Middleton Murry, and other popular writers. The trouble with one and all of these is that the figure they present is really quite different from the figure in the Synoptic Gospels, as different as the rather feeble Jesus of most modern painters is from the transfigured Christ of Raphael. The figure in the Gospels is full of victorious energy and power over all the dark and tragic elements in life. He is "prince of life" and victor over death. When He submits to the cross and grave, it is out of His own freedom. But in the Modernist lives the tragic element in physical nature is regarded as irresistible and immovable by even the faith, love, and prayer of Jesus. So the death of Jesus becomes a physical fate rather than a freely chosen spiritual destiny. He goes as a victim to death, not as a conqueror giving His rights away. The ideal Christian temper then becomes a noble stoicism towards all outward ills, rather than a conquering optimism. How on this view Jesus is supposed to be able to heal disease, Modernism leaves entirely unexplained.

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Let any one read the Gospels afresh, and see if their whole spirit is not one of conquering optimism. They record the greatest attack in all history on sin and death. It is only in this double context that we can really understand the story, or see the place in it of the miracles and the Resurrection. Not only unbelief, hatred, and despair, but disease, famine, storm, and death itself, go down before the Prince of Life. What though the story remains unfinished? It looks towards the final victory over all sin and all mortal tragedy, which is symbolised in apocalyptic language as the Return of the Lord.

Now, turn from these Gospels and read the same story as it appears under the Modernist necessity of excluding miracle. Such books often give us a moving and noble picture of Jesus of Nazareth, but the whole ethos has been subtly changed. He has broken out of the tyranny of sin, but, just like the rest of us, is subject to the full human entail of disease and death. His crucifixion is not a freely chosen destiny. It is a fate: and the whole story of the Resurrection is due to the fond illusions of the disciples, for which indeed we must hold Him partially responsible, because of the exaggerated estimation of Himself and His powers which He taught and encouraged. Indeed I can never read even the best Modernist accounts of what happened at the resurrection without feeling that the whole story is extraordinarily depressing. There hovers around it a neurotic element of ecstasy, hallucination, and over-belief, which enables us perhaps to acquit Him of full responsibility for the

pathological condition into which His disciples came, but which inevitably suggests that in Jesus we had one who should rather have been taken care of than crucified. Master and disciples alike should have been under medical supervision. "Sacred moments," said Renan, "in which the passion of one possessed gave to the world a resuscitated God!"

In reading the Modernist accounts of the whole Resurrection period, we are moving in the atmosphere of a clinique, a bog of neurosis. This, of course, quite suits the general view of Materialism, but it goes ill with the Christian faith which inspires Modernism. And it suits very ill with the history, with the breadth, sanity, and insight of the Galilean mission and the magnificent vitality and power of the early Church, which, we all alike admit, was recreated by the faith in the Resurrection.

The many ingenuities of Modernist writers at this point betray their uneasiness. It is denied, for instance, that St Paul means anything more by the Resurrection of Jesus than that the Spirit of Jesus ascended to the Father. As if every orthodox Jew of the time did not believe in the survival and escape of the spirit at death; as if St Paul, like every orthodox Jew, did not believe that the death of the body resulted from sin! A mere spiritual escape of the spirit would never have satisfied his demand that the Redeemer should wholly have overcome death. As if, finally, the plain meaning of the whole Resurrection narrative in First Corinthians did not mean that Jesus rose again in the full sense that His body rose in transfigured form! The idea

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of Christophanies inspired by the risen Christ, the telegram theory of Keim, is almost as hopeless. It would mean that while Christ's body was still mouldering in the grave, He suggested to them that it was risen, and so created the historic error which Modernism repudiates.

Finally, we are left with the old difficulty. What became of the body of Jesus? We are told that no doubt somehow it was lost. Is it then so easy for a human body to get lost at any time? How it could get lost in the tempest of love and hate of the Jerusalem of that day, it passes the wit of man to determine. Was there no Antigone among all these women to stand by and remember the place of the body of the Lord? Is it likely that Mary was less loyal to her Son than the Greek maiden to her brother? Was there no Sadducee or Pharisee with sufficient foresight and vigilance to destroy the early faith at its birth by producing the body? Is that like what we know of Caiaphas?

We are told by not a few Modernists that their real difficulty with miracle is not any *a priori* obstacle, but the want of evidence. Surely that is not the case here, at least. The impression which the whole handling of the Resurrection story irresistibly brings home is that here, at least, the *a priori* difficulty is the all-determining inhibition.

I am far from thinking that it is not a legitimate factor in weighing up the sober history of the whole matter. But I submit that that difficulty of believing in the unprecedented should have been taken earlier. It is part of the faith of Modernist Christianity that Jesus is absolutely unprecedented.

The personality of Jesus destroys the *a priori* improbability. In the end it seems to me that the reasoning which demands that we shall reduce the resurrection faith to hallucinations of overstrained men and women, and the resurrection fact to an absolutely ordinary resolution of the body of Jesus to its physical elements, demands the reduction of the uniqueness of Jesus also. Clearly in the background, behind all these confused theories of the resurrection, there is something much more powerful than want of historical evidence at work.

There can surely be little doubt that, if one can believe in the fact of the Resurrection and the empty grave, it makes far better history of the whole story than any form of the vision theory. It makes sense and unity of all the events, it makes the disciples intelligible as human beings all through, instead of resolving them into psychical riddles; above all, it makes a unity of the figure of Jesus Christ and sense of the New Testament. Finally, as I hope to show later, it gives us a profound and illuminating revelation of the innermost nature of the Universe, instead of making the riddle of the painful earth still more difficult, as it unquestionably does, if the earthly story of Jesus ends with the Cross rather than with the Resurrection.*

For all these reasons the Modernist view seems to me even less tenable than the Traditional.

I hope to show later, in more detail than is possible at this stage of our argument, how seamed

* This is powerfully brought out in *The Mind of the Disciples* and *The Rising Tide of Faith*, by the Bishop of Pretoria.

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with inner contradictions is the whole speculative position of Modernism; but enough has meanwhile been said, I trust, of the difficulties of both views to justify us in endeavouring to open some new path.

In seeking to discover this, it is necessary to go back to the Bible itself, and see if its teaching is rightly translated by either Traditionalist or Modernist.

I hope to be able to show that the idea of the miracles of Jesus which both hold in common, *i.e.* that they are primarily evidential portents, seals attached to the Divine message to authenticate it, is mistaken, and that they are instead part of the message itself; and that instead of this adding to their difficulty, it greatly lightens it, and enhances our whole conception of the worth of the Christian revelation. But the starting-point of the whole argument of this book is that it claims to present the Scriptural view. When all is said, the Gospels have a clear and coherent account of our Lord's teaching as regards the nature of His signs, which is neither that of Traditionalism nor Modernism. The next section of the book is thus an exegetical study. The closing section will endeavour to set this conclusion in the general context of modern thought and doctrine.