

Theophilus Stork

Miracles



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Miracles

By Theophilus Stork, D.D.
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Contents

[Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org](#)

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[Preface by Lutheran Librarian](#)

[Miracles by Theophilus Stork](#)

[Introduction.](#)

[I. The Nature Of Miracles.](#)

[II. Miracles As The Credentials Of A Divine Revelation.](#)

[III. The Presumption Against Miracles.](#)

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[How Can You Find Peace With God?](#)

[Benediction](#)

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Preface by Lutheran Librarian

In republishing this book, we seek to introduce this author to a new generation of those seeking authentic spirituality.

DR. THEOPHILUS STORK (1814-1874) graduated from Pennsylvania College and the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, and served pastorates in Winchester, VA and at St. Matthew's Church, Philadelphia. He was influential in the promotion of the East Pennsylvania Synod, and organized St. Mark's Church in Philadelphia. He served as first president of Newberry College, then pastored St. Mark's Church in Baltimore. At the end of the Civil War Dr. Stork organized St. Andrew's Church in Philadelphia which became the Church of the Messiah. "He was a scholar of fine literary taste, an elegant writer, and an eloquent preacher. At various times he was editor of the *Home Journal*, of the *Lutheran Home Monthly*; and joint editor of the *Lutheran Observer*" (source: *McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia*)

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Miracles by Theophilus Stork

Introduction.

MIRACLES occupy a prominent place in every standard system of apologetics. They are associated with our earliest conceptions of revelation, and the two are, in fact, inseparable. We cannot conceive how a revelation could authenticate its heavenly origin and secure the intelligent credence of the world in any other way than by presenting this unquestionable seal of divinity. And yet, the fact that revelation comes to us attested by supernatural agency, (the only conceivable way in which it could be made and certified,) has been, to many minds, a strong presumptive ground against its reception.

It is to this preliminary difficulty, in the admission of revelation, thus certified — this presumption against miracles, that I wish to devote the present discussion.

As introductory to the main topic for consideration, I remark that there is, in man's moral instincts and necessities, adequate ground for the antecedent probability of a divine revelation. If man has a religious nature and an immortal destiny, then our conceptions of the Divine Being, and the analogy of his works, lead us to anticipate an appropriate provision for the development and perfection of that nature, and the felicitous consummation of that destiny.

But without revelation there would be no such provision for man. He would exist as an anomaly in the universe. Whilst every buzzing insect and every songster of the forest revels in the very breath of love, and every cry of the young raven is heard from the lofty pine tossed in the darkening tempest, man would be left without an element or objects corresponding to his nature and destiny; with a heart full of gentle affections and lofty aspirations; with powers that would uplift themselves to some divine and eternal

good, but with no adequate object to love, and no immortality opening to satisfy his infinite longings — like the eagle, with an eye to look undazzled upon the sun, and pinions to bear him upward, but no surrounding element in which to soar to the birth of day.

The a fortiori argument of the Savior for a particular providence applies with peculiar emphasis to this case. If every creature is surrounded with an element suited to its nature, and provided with objects adapted to its wants, shall man be left with no adequate provision for his spiritual wants and immortal nature? “Is he not much better than they?” If man’s religious nature demands, for its appropriate exercise and development, such a beneficent interposal of divine goodness as is secured in revelation, shall we not expect such an interposition? “Shall not a father speak to his own child?”

But there was this antecedent probability that God would make a revelation; there was, anterior to the fact, reason to expect miracles, as the credentials of such a communication, as there is no other conceivable and adequate evidence of revelation but miracles.

Whether it be an intuition or an induction of the reason, we are so constituted that we cannot receive a revelation as divine unless accompanied with miraculous manifestations. We might receive it as containing unexceptionable doctrinal truth, and rejoice in its professed disclosures of the future, just as we may admire much in the transcendent theories of Swedenborg; but we could not receive it with the authority of a divine revelation, unless accompanied with the indubitable confirmation of miracle. This is the “simple, natural, majestic seal which we should expect God would affix to a communication from himself; and when this seal is presented by men whose lives and words correspond with what we might expect from messengers of God, it is felt to be decisive.”

In order to systemize our discussion, we shall consider consecutively *the nature of miracles, their authoritative position, and the presumption against them*, in their connection with revelation.

I. The Nature Of Miracles.

WE MAY FORM some conception of miracles from the several terms by which they are designated in the New Testament.

1. They are called δυνάμεις, when reference is had simply to the manifestation of divine power, (Matt. 11:20). The cause is transferred to the effects. The power was inherent in Jesus, and was displayed in productions indicative of supernatural power.
2. They are styled “signs,” as significant of the ethical meaning of the miracle.¹ This word reveals the true design of the miracle, as the seal of a divine commission. It is to be regretted that has not always been rendered “signs,” in our English version, instead of miracles, which, in some instances, has obscured the meaning as well as impaired the consistency and force of the word in its particular connections, as in John 3:2., 6:26.
3. They are also styled τέρατα, “wonders,” in reference to the feelings of amazement excited by the contemplation of such phenomena. The word, however, does not designate the ethical element in the miracle, nor define the specific purpose of these divine facts; and hence it is never employed by itself to point out the miracles, but always used in connection with some other word, as “signs,” and “wonders,” etc.

But even in this sense, viewed as phenomena exciting wonder, reducible to no known law, they subserved an important purpose, as startling the beholder, arresting his attention, and placing him in a moral attitude favorable to the reception of the divine message.

The whole view of the miracles, as presented by these three terms, is stated in a concise and substantially correct manner by Pelt: “These three terms, δ. σ. τ., differ but little from each other. But Δυναμίς, in the singular number, is the power of performing miracles. They are called σ., inasmuch as they serve to prove the doctrine or divine mission; τέρατα are wonders which excite admiration and surprise.”²

[A] In attempting to give a formal definition of miracles, it is difficult to select such language as will be altogether unexceptionable. The one sanctioned by the most approved authors is sufficiently accurate and distinct to give them their authoritative position, as seals of a divine revelation. They are events or effects that take place, or are produced, in a manner not con-

formed to the common laws of nature, and which cannot be accounted for according to those laws.

To give perspicuity as well as comprehensiveness to this definition of Dr. Woods, I would add, that a miracle is a suspension of the regular and established succession of events, for a *specific* purpose.

Now this view of the miracle obviates the objection that is sometimes made, that the commonest process of nature is as inexplicable as those facts which we individualize and dignify as miracles. Without impairing the force of this definition, we admit that there is wonder and mystery everywhere; the events of every day are a history of miracles, and every familiar step is more than a story in a land of enchantment. And were the marble statue, as we gaze upon it, suddenly to glow with intelligent expression, it would not be intrinsically more wonderful than the familiar friend who greets us with a smile in the common walks of life. The one would startle us, the other, by its familiarity, excites no feeling of wonder.³ But whilst we make this concession, we maintain that the miracle stands out as a peculiar exhibition of divine power, for a specific purpose.

We admit that the unfolding of a flower is as inexplicable as

“Aaron’s rod.
That blossom’d at the sight of God.”

That the waving harvest of summer, from the seed sown by the husbandman, is as marvelous, intrinsically, as the multiplication of the loaves under the creative touch of Jesus; and that the grapes clustering upon the vine is as inexplicable as the miracle at Cana, when, as it has been beautifully said, “the conscious water saw its God and blushed.” And for aught we know, there may be no greater exertion of power in the miracle than in the ordinary processes of nature; but, according to our definition, it is a peculiar manifestation of divine power, for a *specific* purpose.

Whilst nature, in its ever-varying beauty and grandeur, declares the glory of God, it could never be confirmative of a special revelation, for the obvious reason that its voice speaks indiscriminately to all, and has no peculiar and personal significance. But in the miracle, the power concealed under what we call the laws of nature, is unveiled, and the hand that moves the world is made bare to attest the divine commission of those whom God has authorized to communicate his will to man. So that the *distinctive feature* of

a miracle is the manifestation of divine power apart from and above the ordinary operations of nature, with the specific design of authenticating a divine revelation.

[B] But whilst the miracle is a manifestation of power different from that observable in nature, it is not necessarily a violation of the laws of nature. It transcends, but is not contrary to, nature. If we view nature merely as a piece of mechanism, operating by fixed laws, independently of the divine will, then miracles would appear violations of natural law. But, viewed as a constituent part of his universal kingdom, subject to his will, and designed to work out, ultimately, his glory, then what seems a violation of the laws of nature may only be the operation of a higher law, embraced in the regular order of the universe; and to the divine mind, comprehending the entire scope of his kingdom, these anomalous phenomena may be in the most perfect harmony with the ordained operation of all things to the final realization of his will. So that, what appears to us an infringement of the order of things, a miracle, may be in consonance with a higher harmony, transcending our apprehension, and belonging to a higher order of nature.

In the miracle the law of nature is only held in suspense by the introduction of a higher law. Of this we have many familiar instances around us; the mention of one will suggest others: “when I lift my arm, the law of gravitation is not, as far as my arm is concerned, denied or annihilated; it exists as much as ever, but is held in suspense by the higher law of my will.” Thus when Peter, at the bidding of his Lord, walked upon the tossing sea, the law of specific gravity was only held in suspense by the intervention of a higher law — the *will of Christ*; when Peter, by a defective faith, severed himself from this higher law, he was again subject to the natural law, and began to sink. So that in the miracle the inferior law is held in suspense by the higher for the attainment of a higher end. The laws of nature are made subordinate and subservient to the higher laws of God’s moral government.

In this view, the miracle is neither a lawless interruption of nature nor a mere capricious display of power, but the intervention of a higher order, subordinating nature to a higher and nobler end. And he who does not recognize this subordinate relation of the natural to the moral world, is as far from the true system of the divine economy “as he would be from the true system of astronomy who should place the earth in the center.”

II. Miracles As The Credentials Of A Divine Revelation.

[A] IT IS WORTHY of remark, that miracles are almost uniformly found in connection with revelation, and are but seldom associated with any other work of providence. So intimate is this connection, that they are actually made to assume four distinct general forms. Croly has presented them, in these four general aspects:

1. *In the patriarchal ages*, they were comparatively few, emanating exclusively from God himself in attestation of his being and perfections.
2. *In the birth of Judaism*, — when they were intended to subserve a different purpose, they were no longer isolated instances of power proceeding immediately and exclusively from God; but the power was delegated to man, and made co-extensive with the various emergencies connected with the organization of a peculiar people, and the establishment of a peculiar form of government.
3. Under the Christian dispensation they assume a new form, adapted to confirm the mission of Christ. Here the power was inherent on Jesus, and not delegated as before; not confined to extraordinary occasions but extending to innumerable instances of every day life, transcending all the earlier miracles in power and comprehensiveness — displaying its divine control alike over the world of matter and of mind.
4. *In the extension of Christ's kingdom* we discover a new aspect in the miraculous power, adapted to the peculiar necessities of the case. It is no longer, as before, an external agency: as in the smitten rock or the hushed tempest, but is mostly *internal* in its operation. It is now exhibited in supernatural, spiritual endowments; the communication of gifts — the capacity of speaking and interpreting various languages — of spiritual discriminations — of preaching or prophesying with peculiar impressiveness.

In such a revision of miracles, in their connection with revelation, there is seen an agency so plastic and comprehensive, so universal in its opera-

tion, exhibiting its achievements in a period at once of unprecedented intellectual development, and equally prevailing skepticism, that we cannot but exclaim, "This is the finger of God." "If it consist of deviations from the order of nature, it is like the deviations of the planetary system, not less provided for by the laws of nature. It refers to revelation as the order of nature refers to natural religion. The order establishes the existence of a God, the deviation establishes his will. Miracle is the *τα φυσικα* (physical form) of Revelation." When this testimonial is presented by men, whose spirit and character correspond to the dignity and sanctity of their mission, and the doctrines and truths thus sealed are worthy of God, the evidence of a divine revelation is final and incontrovertible.

[B] But it has been asked in this connection, whether the inherent excellency of the truths revealed, is not in itself, apart from miracles, an evidence of their divine origin. I answer, that such truths are accredited as from God, just as every good and perfect gift is from the Father of lights. But they would not designate the teacher as divinely commissioned to make a special revelation of God's will. An awakened sinner, or a disquieted Christian might take up some practical work of Baxter, and feel the truths so happily adapted to impart comfort and peace to their souls, that they might exclaim, Verily these must be the very words of God. And, yet this, though the fact, would not be adequate to prove Baxter a divinely commissioned messenger of God to reveal his will, or justify the reception of his works as a divine revelation. There is an obvious distinction between truth and revealed truth. "A thing may be true, whether it is revealed or not; nay, it must be true independently of that consideration." But we receive Christianity as a special revelation, as an authoritative record expressive of the divine will, and as such it must have some attestation beyond its general consonancy with our intellectual or spiritual nature, else every accredited principle of science or moral philosophy would be a revelation. That additional and confirmative attestation is miracle.

[C] But is not the good tendency of the communication, at least a part of the evidence? This is but a slightly modified form of the preceding question. I answer that, properly speaking, it is not. It is a prerequisite to the admission of proof, but not the proof itself. It is antecedently incredible that God would make a revelation of evil tendency. If the professed revelation, therefore, be obviously of a bad tendency it is inadmissible of proof. Just as a lawyer must make out a credible case, before an intelligent court would

admit the testimony of witnesses; and yet, the credibility would constitute no part of the proof. So, whilst the good tendency and excellent doctrines of revelation are prerequisites to the admission of testimony, they are not, and cannot be, apart from supernatural agency, proof of a special divine revelation. And in this view of the revelation, of the doctrines and the miracles, we cannot see the force in those words of Pascal which some men have attached to them: "We must judge of doctrine by miracles, and we must judge of miracles by doctrine. The doctrine attests the miracle, and the miracles authenticate the doctrine."⁴ A candid examination of the several points suggested under this head, cannot fail to induce the conviction that there is no conceivable means by which God could authenticate a revelation to man but *miracles*, the chosen seal of the Almighty Monarch.

III. The Presumption Against Miracles.

THERE HAS ALWAYS been a secret prejudice against miracles. It has revealed itself under various forms. It appears in the rationalistic theology of Germany. And, as will appear in the discussion of this part of our subject, it has, in some instances, assumed a form directly antagonistic to revelation. But even where it does not reach this formidable aspect of repugnance to miracles, asserting the essential incredibility of such facts, there is still a reluctance in many minds to admit these departures from the order of nature predicated in miracles. And if we mistake not, there is a tendency in this age, and in this country, to depreciate, if not altogether to overlook, these primitive and distinctive evidences of revelation. This objection to Christianity, originating in this presumption against miracles, meets us at the very threshold. And it appears to me, that writers on apologetics have not given sufficient prominence to this preliminary ground of the argument for revelation. If this preliminary difficulty were removed, the evidences of the divine origin of revelation would be not only adequate, but absolutely overwhelm-

ing. "It is not from the weakness of the proof, but from the strength of the presumption against it, that it fails of producing conviction."

We shall devote the remainder of this article to a revision of some of the various forms of this prejudice against miracles.

A modified form of this feeling may be seen in many honest believers in their disposition to overlook the miracles as the wonders of a distant age, answering an important purpose in the first introduction of Christianity, but of little use now as evidences of their religion; and the consequent inclination to resort exclusively to the internal evidence. They are satisfied with the intrinsic excellence of their religion — its adaptation to their spiritual wants, and the secret responses of their own hearts to its teachings — this is all the evidence they desire. They are ready to exclaim with Coleridge, "Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the want of it; rouse him, if you can, to the self-knowledge of his need of it; and you may safely trust it to its own evidence."

But those who unite in this fervid exclamation forget that miracles are fundamental to the very existence of objective Christianity. And although in their spiritual apprehension and experience of its blessed truths, they may not feel the necessity of miracles to confirm their faith in religion, still they are, in fact, the ultimate basis upon which the whole system rests. Just as they may live for years in their well-constructed houses, in quietness and peace, without ever thinking of the foundation upon which they rest; and yet, this very quietness is based on the admission of the foundation upon which the superstructure reposes. So are miracles in the Christian system; they are like the massive subterranean arches and columns of a huge building. Miracles support the edifice, and upon a divine foundation. "They show us, that if the superstructure is fair and beautiful to dwell in, and if its towers and endless flight of steps appear to reach even up to heaven, it is all just what it seems to be; for it rests upon the broad foundation of the Rock of Ages."—Ware.

This illustrates the fallacy of those who wish to dispense with miracles in their evidences of Christianity. Yet their very faith in religion, if it is worth any thing, presupposes a speculative or traditional belief in the Christian system, as resting fundamentally upon this basis. But, besides, we do not, by withdrawing from the outward miraculous attestation of religion, escape the necessity of admitting supernatural agency in revelation; for Christianity is not only confirmed by miracles, but is in itself, in its very essence,

a miraculous religion. The internal evidence is of the nature of miracles. That the fishermen of Galilee should, without supernatural illumination, produce such a book as the New Testament, is as inadmissible as that an untutored savage should have composed the *Principia* of Newton — which would be as incredible as that he could have created the world. The character of Jesus is itself a moral miracle. Miracle, indeed, is a primary and an essential element of this religion. So that we cannot avoid this presumption against revelation, as attested by supernatural agency, by retiring from the external to the internal evidences of Christianity. If the objection on the ground of miracles is valid, it must be fatal to the Christian system.

Whatever may be the origin of this disposition to discredit miracles, we confidently affirm that it is not an essential principle of our mental constitution; and that it is both unphilosophical in its assumptions, and atheistic in its tendencies. This, we think, will appear upon a revision of the various forms of its manifestation.

[A] As the Jews and heathen, in their opposition to the miracles, did not call in question the facts, their assaults upon the miracles are not properly embraced, in the present discussion. We begin with those whose presumption against miraculous agency has amounted to an assertion of the essential incredibility of such facts. This form of opposition may be referred to Spinoza, who denied the possibility of miracles as contrary to the idea of God. Most of the modern forms of opposition are but modified developments of the Spinozistic philosophy. Spinoza's doctrine of eternal necessity precluded alike the possibility of revelation and of miracles.

This theory is scarcely deserving of a serious consideration. The summary disposition of the whole matter by Lisco is, perhaps, the best: "The question, whether God can perform miracles? is one highly absurd, inasmuch as we believe and acknowledge that He is the Almighty, with whom nothing is impossible; this absurd question, however, arises *on the one side*, from that false idea of nature, which regards nature only as a dead mechanism, about which the Creator gives himself no further trouble, and from interfering with whose unchangeable and established laws he entirely abstains and must abstain; *on the other side* it is based upon unbelief in the miracles recorded in Sacred Writ, for where belief in (he miracles as actual occurrences and facts that have once transpired, exists, there the question as to their possibility no longer arises, since it is already answered by the actuality."

[B] Another ground of prejudice against the admission of miracles, is *the uniform order observable in nature*. The phenomena of the universe, so far as they have come under the inspection of man, are seen to be regulated by general and permanent laws, and to proceed upon a preestablished order. And the more the secrets of nature are divulged, the stronger is the conviction of uniformity in her operations. In the progressive developments of science, many phenomena, once considered irregular, are found to be embraced in the general order. The comet, once stared at as some fire-winged, lawless vagrant through the heavens, is now known to observe the same general laws of attraction. And even the vagaries of Uranus, so long perplexing astronomers, by its anomalous motions, have been reconciled to the permanent laws that control and harmonize the solar system. So that there is truth as well as beauty in that poetical effusion of Nichol, after considering the wonderful order and comprehensive harmonies of the government of God: “Within whose august, whose perfect harmonies, the fragile lily issues from its stem, robed as the most beauteous queen, and the feathered songster pours forth those bursts of melody, which are heard even amid the solemn music of the stars.”

This universal order pervading all the works of God — this continuous uniformity in the processes of nature, disposes the mind to look with distrust upon the alleged violations of this order, and originates a presumption against miracles, which, in some instances, is tantamount to a conviction of their essential incredibility. The presumption against miracles originating in this observed uniformity of nature, may be identified with Hume’s celebrated argument. Hume does not assert the abstract impossibility of the miracle, as Spinoza — but assumes that it is incapable of proof.

Whilst we would refer the reader to Campbell’s work for a complete analysis and refutation of Hume’s argument, we can give but a passing notice to those few talismanic words, “no testimony can prove a miracle,” at the mere utterance of which the terrible genii of the gospel mysteries vanish into air. The whole presumption against miracles, according to this famous argument, is founded upon experience; as if human experience were the standard for the admeasurement of divine power; as if this infantile experience of an ephemeral existence were competent to determine all the possible modes of divine operation. “The experience,” says an original American writer, “which makes a man feel as if there could be no more miracles, seems to me narrow, and (if I may say so) provincial; like that which makes

an ignorant and home bred rustic feel as if every thing in the great world must be just like what he had seen in his father's house, and fills him with astonishment amounting to incredulity, at every thing new and extraordinary."

Hume's proposition, that "it is contrary to experience that miracles should be true, but not contrary to experience that testimony should be false," when subjected to a fair analytical investigation, appears as a most glaring instance of paralogism. "It is not contrary to experience that testimony should be false." That common rumor should be false, is not contrary to experience; but that the testimony of individuals of acknowledged virtue and unimpeachable integrity and judgment should be untrue, is at variance with universal experience. There are individuals on whom we would rely as much as on the testimony of our own senses. And as those who have testified to the Christian miracles were men of unimpeachable virtue, with no conceivable motive to falsify in the case, it would be *contrary to all experience* if their testimony should be false; and to discredit their statement of these alleged facts on the principle of Hume's proposition, would be subversive of all the laws of human belief.

Besides, if the strongest testimony is inadequate to substantiate a miracle, because testimony has often deceived me, whilst nature has ever been uniform in its operations, then I could not believe a miracle, though wrought before my eyes, or attested by all my senses; for they have deceived me, whilst nature has proceeded with an unvarying constancy: and, consequently, I must not believe what one or more of my senses, under the most favorable circumstances, declare to be true.

The argument is a "*reductio ad absurdum*;" for, not to believe, in the case supposed, is impossible, and is instinctively pronounced absurd. It is, moreover, suicidal; for, to discredit the testimony of my senses, under favorable circumstances, would be subversive of that very order and uniformity of nature upon which his whole argument rests; for the only possible recognition of this uniformity is through the exercise of my senses and judgment, and if these are not reliable, in unexceptionable circumstances, "then their testimony to nature is of little worth," and nothing is left but a universal skepticism.

So far, then, from admitting the proposition that "it is not contrary to experience that testimony should be false," we assert what we believe will be responded to by the honest conviction of mankind, that when the testimony

is given by persons of unimpeachable character, with no conceivable motive for deception, then it would be contrary to the universal experience of our race if it should be any thing but true. The paralogism of Hume is obvious; he confounds “the *lowest degree* of testimony with the *highest*, and then draws his conclusion as if the lowest alone existed.”

The other proposition is equally fallacious. “It is contrary to experience that miracle should be true.” I cannot suppose that Hume meant contrary to personal experience of a particular fact. And hence Paley and others, who have answered the argument by a misconception of his meaning, seem to me to reason irrelevantly. Hume evidently meant, that it was contrary to the general experience of the order of nature — contrary to the experience of all mankind in all ages. What, then, is the nature of his argument? Why, he undertakes to prove that no man has ever witnessed or experienced a miracle, and his real argument is, that no one *has* ever witnessed or experienced it. “In other words, to *prove* that there has never been a miracle, he *asserts* that there never has been a miracle”—a most glaring and insulting instance of *petitio principii*. The whole argument is a tissue of sophistical reasoning, which, in a mind of such logical acumen and discrimination as Hume’s, is wholly inexplicable, except on the presumption of antecedent hostility to the religion which he sought to invalidate.

Mill, in his admirable system of logic, has placed the argument of Hume in its proper light. He says: “All which Hume has made out (and this he must be considered to have made out) is, that no evidence can be sufficient to prove a miracle to any one who did not previously believe the existence of a being or beings with supernatural power,” (chap. 25: 2.) On the assumption that Hume was an atheist, it must be conceded that he reasons well, and has fully made out his case in accordance with his creed. But to those who acknowledge the being and perfections of God, controlling and subordinating nature to the higher purposes of his moral government, the whole argument is as futile, illogical, and inconsequent as it well could be.

To the devout theist, the wonder is, not that there are miracles, but that the great Author of our being so constantly retires behind the veil of his works, and does not oftener appear in the blazing bush and cloud-capped mountain. “I have wondered that the curtain of mystery that hides the other world were not sometimes lifted up; that the cherubim of mercy and of hope were not sometimes throned on the clouds of the eventide; that the bright and silent stars did not break the deep stillness that reigns among them with

the scarcely fabled music of the spheres; that the rich flood of morning light, as it bathes the earth in love, did not utter voices from its throne of heavenly splendor, to proclaim the goodness of God. No! I wonder not at marvels and miracles. That scene on the mount of transfiguration — Moses and Elias talking with our Savior — seems to me (so far from being strange and incredible) to meet a want of the mind; and I only wonder, if I may venture to say so, that it is not sometimes repeated.”⁵

[C] Another form of this prejudice against miracles appears in the modern interpreters, who consider them only as “seeming miracles — only apparent, not real, interruptions of the order of nature.”⁶ But how, then, could miracles confirm a divine revelation? This view abstracts from the miracle its supernatural element, and is virtually a rejection of the miracle altogether. For, if the alleged miracles were only such in appearance, because anticipations of developments in the kingdom of nature, and may yet become as explainable, if not as familiar, as any of the phenomena of nature, where would be the evidence of a special divine commission? Take a familiar historical illustration: the obscuration of the sun, at the very time previously designated by Columbus, was, to the untutored inhabitants of the New World, a *miracle*, and they recognized in the Genoese sailor a supernatural being. *Suppose Columbus* had founded a claim to be a divinely-commissioned messenger, and established a system of religion upon this apparent miracle? For a time the imposture might remain undetected, and the delusion be kept up. But what would be the inevitable destiny of such a system in after years, when the rude inhabitants, enlightened by civilization, and permitted to look into the sublime revelations of Astronomy, should discover that what was imposed upon them as a *miracle*, was an intelligible and a common phenomenon of the solar system. Would they not disdainfully reject the whole system as an imposture? Would they not say, “We were deceived!” And would not this be the ultimate result in regard to the miracles of Christ, if, in any future developments of science, it should be ascertained that they belonged to the natural order of events? Would not the glory with which miracles invested the Son of God be diminished, with the gradual development of the mysteries of nature, until it would fade into the light of common day, and by its vanishing prove that it was only a delusive meteor? And would not the whole system be revealed to the world as a gross imposition, upon the credulity and superstition of an immature age? Such an explanation is utterly inadmissible.

Schleiermacher, in his *Glaubenslehre*, which he sent forth to wrestle with the cold-hearted rationalism of the age, endeavors to guard this view from the construction of a total denial of the miracle. He says, "Christ had not only a deeper acquaintance with nature than any other that ever lived, but was able to evoke, as from her hidden recesses, her most inward sanctuary, powers which none other could; although, still, powers which lay in her already. These facts, which seem exceptional, were deeply laid in the first constitution of the law; and now, at this turning point of the world's history, by the providence of God, who had arranged all things from the beginning of the world for the glory of his Son, did at his bidding emerge. Yet simple and without analogy as they were, they belonged to the law as truly as when the aloe puts forth its flower, or is said to put it forth, once in its hundred years, it yet does this according to its own innermost nature."⁷

We cannot, for a moment, entertain this attempt to bring the miracles within the province of nature's hidden and undiscovered processes, because it is destructive of the distinctive element of the miracle, which is a fact referred to the omnipotence of God as its ultimate cause, and which must ever remain inexplicable by any law of nature. Whoever believes these divine facts of the Bible as absolute miracles, is grounded in the conviction that "they never can be derived from mere laws of nature, from a natural order, or from the powers of nature."⁸

But *this theory*, even if *admitted*, leaves much that is unexplained, except on the admission of the supernatural. Take for instance, the tempest that was lulled at the words of Jesus! Admitting, according to this theory, the existence of latent powers in the tossing elements, though veiled from the inspection of man, which produced the sudden and wondrous calm upon the belligerent winds and water; still there must be assumed a miraculous knowledge in Him who "discerned either that power or the exact moment of its operation." So in regard to the sick healed or the dead raised, admitting a secret power in the diseased or dead body, suddenly to restore health to the one and life to the other; still, the knowledge of the precise moment when that latent recuperative or resuscitating power would be operative, must have been miraculous. So that every consistent explanation of the internal evidences of Christianity, demands the admission of miracles as the simple and majestic seal of God to revelation.

[D] Omitting other manifestations of this prejudice against miracles, we have time merely to glance at its development in the rationalism of Ger-

many. Shortly after the publication of the Wolfenbüttel manuscripts, in 1774, in which the miracles were assailed, a class of theologians appeared, who denied the miraculousness of many of the supernatural events of the Old Testament, and endeavored to explain them upon natural principles. Among the first and most distinguished of this class was Eichhorn. According to his view, as quoted by Strauss, all the wonders of the Mosaic history were resolvable into natural phenomena. The flame and smoke which ascended from Sinai at the delivery of the law, were merely a fire which Moses kindled, in order to make a deeper impression upon the people, together with an accidental thunderstorm, which arose at the particular moment.⁹ With the same facility he disposes of the other miraculous occurrences of the Bible. His rationalistic system attracted great attention, and acquired an immense popularity. But it soon lost its hold upon the public mind by its obvious contradictions and glaring absurdities.

Strauss, who with a giant's thrust, threatened a total demolition of Eichhorn's system, introduced the mythical theory as applicable to the whole structure of the Evangelical history. According to his explanation of the miracles, they were nothing more than fabulous and fanciful embellishments of the Gospel history. He begins with the assumption that it is incredible that God should authenticate a revelation by supernatural agency. And having antecedently decided, in the spirit of the Spinozistic philosophy, that the miracle is impossible, he proceeds, with this prejudgment of the case, to a critical examination of the miracles in detail. And if in any instance he is baffled in disposing of these supernatural facts, according to his mythical theory, he at once reverts to his philosophic ground and exclaims, "But if we admit that it was thus, then we should have here a miracle, and we have started from the first principle that such is inconceivable."

This summary and unconditional rejection of the miracles, is at variance with the childlike and trustful, the expansive and unprejudiced spirit of true philosophy, and utterly inconsonant with the humility and teachableness that should characterize the successful student of the Bible, as well as of nature. With what philosophic forecast does Bacon portray the spirit of true philosophy when he says, that "The access to the kingdom of man, which is founded on the sciences, resembles that to the kingdom of Heaven, where no admission is conceded except to children." The humbling precept, "become as little children," is as true in philosophy as in religion. This precept Dr. Strauss has not obeyed.

Among the works elicited by Dr. Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, was Neander's *Life of Christ*. This work was not intended as a formal refutation of Strauss's false assumptions, and skeptical philosophy, but simply as a development of Neander's individual views of the great facts in the life of the Redeemer. A critical review of this work is a desideratum in this country, and one competent for the task could not make a more valuable contribution to our Journal than by preparing such a review. Much as we admire this work, there are some things decidedly objectionable, and, as we conceive, of injurious tendency.

In his prefatory address, he assumes positions in relation to the prerogatives of reason in its reception of the Gospel narratives, which appear to us too rationalistic. This assumption of the right to reject statements in the Evangelists, which are conceived to conflict with reason, if followed out to its legitimate results would be subversive of the whole Christian system. There seems to us a serious misconception of the true office of reason, when it is expected to arbitrate "from their mere nature, whether the things recorded in the gospels are a revelation or not. It is as consummate a solecism as it were to ascribe to it the function of omniscience." And it is equally erroneous to make reason the exclusive arbiter of the natural and supernatural facts by which a revelation from God is certified. In some of the miraculous attestations, reason, so far from being the exclusive arbiter, is subordinate in its decisions. Without entering, however, upon the analysis of his position, it is obvious that Neander assigns to the office of reason prerogatives, which, if exercised, would justify the rationalistic speculations, and vindicate the ultra-rationalists in their rejection of all the miraculous facts of the Bible. And this very principle has led Neander to interpretations of some of the gospel facts, which a mind uninfected with rationalism would not tolerate for a moment.

Look at his rationalistic construction of the narrative of the nativity, and its attendant wonders. The process by which he divests a part of the narrative of its supernatural features, would be equally legitimate in its application to the whole history, and result in the rejection of all that is miraculous in the narrative. His theory concerning the star is wholly inadmissible, and in the light of astronomical facts, "fraught with a stupendous impossibility."¹⁰

His views in reference to the Temptation, are equally objectionable. It is, according to his construction, as really a myth as in the interpretation of

Strauss. And he can offer no reason for such a construction, in this case, that Strauss might not apply in vindication of his lawless crusade against all that is miraculous in the gospel narrative — striking them from the sacred record, and supplanting them by some rationalistic creation, or mere dream of the fancy; so that there is, in reality, (says a distinguished reviewer) no great diversity in their fundamental principles. Their difference is chiefly, that whilst Strauss is a rationalistic mythist throughout, Neander is sometimes a rationalist, sometimes, though less frequently, a mythist, and sometimes neither, but follows, as he should, the laws of philosophy.

We hope that some one adequate to the task, will prepare a critical review of this great and, in many respects, admirable work.

We have not entered upon the great questions involved in Apologetics. We have simply considered the preliminary ground of the argument for Christianity. And this we regard as of great importance; for the evidences of a divine revelation are absolutely irresistible, if it were not for this presumption against miraculous attestations.

Let all unreasonable prejudice against the admission of miracles as the accrediting seals of a divine revelation, be removed; let the individual, freed from all prepossessions against miraculous agency, conducted by the miracles to the very feet of the Son of God, behold, with childlike humility and teachableness, the wonderful works of His hands, and the evidence will be absolutely overwhelming; and his heart will respond to the sentiment uttered by Nicodemus: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do *these miracles that thou doest* except God be with him.”

And every subsequent examination of the history, doctrines and tendency of the revelation thus attested, would inspire the conviction, that no religion can be compared “with the pure and humble and beneficent religion of Christ, heralded by prophecy, sealed by miracles, and now, after eighteen hundred years, going forth with all its pristine vigor to bless the nations.”¹¹

1. werden sie genannt mit Riicksicht auf illren Endzweck, oder ihre Bestimmung, dass sie uns zur Erkenntniss von irgend etvvas hinfuehren sollen."— Lisco.↩

2. Parum differunt tria ista δυνάμεις, σημεια, τερατα. Δυναμις numero singulari tamen est vis miraculorum eden dorum; σημεια quatenus comprobandae inserviunt doctrinae sive missioni divinae; τερατα portentata sunt, quae admirationem et stuporem excitant.— *Trench.*↵
3. “Quotidiana Dei miracula ex assiduitate viluerunt.”— *Gregory.*↵
4. Il faut juger de la doctrine par les miracles, il faut juger des miracles par la doctrine. La doctrine discerne les miracles, et les miracles discernent la doctrine .”—Pascal *Pensées sur les miracles.*↵
5. O. Dewey’s *Controversial Disc.*↵
6. “Sie sind zwar nothwendig begriffen im Naturzusamraenhang daher nach diesem überall zu forschen ist, aber sie überschritten weit die Kenntniss und Kraft der Zeitgenossen.”— *Hase.*↵
7. As quoted by *Trench.*↵
8. “Das sie niemals aus blossen Naturgesetzen, Naturordnung, und Naturkräften, werden hergeleitet werden können.”— *Lisco.*↵
9. See Strauss’ *Leben Jesu.*↵
10. Rev. D. N. Lord.↵
11. Pres. Hopkins.↵

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