

Rationalism And Miracle Cures

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Since we have already exposed the irrationalism of Rationalism in logic and history, we shall now examine its attitude towards miracle cures. Here we reach the rationalists' last line of defence. Most of the miracles attributed to Christ and almost all modern miracles are concerned with the cure of various diseases and maladies. The rationalists claim that many of those alleged miracles have been shown to be natural cures. If some "miracle" cures have not yet been explained as natural, it is but reasonable to refer them to unknown laws which science of the future will reveal. At any rate, the Catholic apologist cannot prove that any cure is beyond the power of nature, and for this reason: medical science is continually discovering new laws, and there will ever remain a multitude of unknown laws and forces, which could explain cures which Catholics regard as miraculous.

Even a rudimentary knowledge of the principles of biology and pathology will enable us to meet this objection.

{Catholic medical men of established reputation have answered this difficulty over and over again. They speak with authority on medical matters, and their books contain a detailed technical solution of the difficulty. Of the many books on miracle cures, the following are especially recommended: – Medical Proof of the Miraculous by Doctor le Bec (English translation, P. J. Kennedy & Son.) Twenty Cures at Lourdes by Doctor de Grandmaison (English translation, Sands.) The Facts of Lourdes by Doctor R. Marchand (Washbourne's Shilling Library). The Cure of Pierre de Rudder by Rev. A. Deschamps, S.J., M.D., Sc. D. (English translation, Catholic Truth Society, Scotland). On Miracles; and Other Matters (Second Chapter) by Sir Bertram Windle, M.A., M.D., Sc., D., Ph. D., et cetera, (Washbourne). On the miracle cures of Christ, Christ and the Critics by H. Felder, O.M. Capuchin, (volume 2, part 2, chapter 2). and Jesus Christ by L. de Grandmaison, S.J. (volume 2, book 5, chapter 3).}

But before we lay down those principles and apply them to the present difficulty let us see what truth there is in the objection. It is true that medical science is continually advancing. Our knowledge of disease, its causes and remedies, has increased marvellously within the past hundred years or so. It is impossible to foretell what wonderful triumphs medical science may achieve in the future. It is also true that there are unknown laws in nature by which very extraordinary cures are obtained, and that there are some laws, which we shall never fully understand. Yet, notwithstanding all this, we maintain that there are certain cures which neither nature nor medical science can possibly bring about; and those cures we claim to be miraculous.

MARKS OF MIRACLE-CURE.

In order to appreciate the peculiar characteristics, which place a miraculous cure beyond natural explanation, we must first grasp the essential characteristics of a natural cure. Every cure which is

not supernatural may be called natural; for, whatever means a physician may use to obtain a cure, it is really nature that makes the cure possible. The physician helps nature in various ways – by removing obstacles from her way, by aiding or accelerating her processes and so on – but he cannot dispense with nature's help if she wishes to cure a malady. Now, nature – whether working alone or aided by medical skill – necessarily follows a fixed course in getting rid of malady. Without for the moment offering any biological explanation of the fact, we know from experience that the course of nature in curing a malady is slow in proportion to the seriousness of the malady. We also know from experience that when a patient has recovered from a serious malady he is very weak and needs a period of convalescence. Those are the chief characteristics of a natural cure; there are others less important, which may be grouped under those two heads.

Many miraculous cures have contrary characteristics: first, the cure itself is instantaneous; second, convalescence is unnecessary. When a serious malady is cured instantaneously and so perfectly that no convalescence is needed, ordinary common sense will attribute the cure to God. {Some cures considered miraculous cannot be strictly called instantaneous: a brief space of time elapsed before the cure was complete. But the time occupied was so abnormally short (sometimes a day in the case of a most serious disease the cure of which if at all possible, would have demanded many months of skilled medical attention) that the cure was justly regarded as miraculous. In some cases, also, convalescence may have been needed to build up the organism wasted by disease after the disease itself had been miraculously cured.}

SCIENCE AND MIRACLE-CURES.

Thus far, we have appealed to commonsense experience as proof of the super-naturalness of miraculous cures; we must now consider the matter more closely in order to meet the objection of our opponents. We shall invoke the assistance of science to vindicate the conviction of commonsense. The crux of the matter is this: Can nature cure a malady instantaneously? If we can prove that the instantaneous cure of certain maladies is completely beyond the power of nature, then it is proved that such cures are due to the miraculous intervention of God.

Maladies are of two kinds, organic and functional. An organic malady is caused by the destruction of part of the living tissue from which the human body is built up. Tuberculosis, cancer and leprosy are organic maladies; fractures and wounds, though they cannot be strictly called maladies, may for present purposes be included in this category. A functional malady affects the action of an organ or system of organs but leaves the organ or system of organs structurally intact. A pure functional malady does not destroy any of the vital tissue of which the human organism is constructed. In this, it differs essentially from an organic malady. Disorders of the nervous system are functional maladies: paralysis, hysteria and neurasthenia are examples.

At times, it may be difficult to decide whether a particular malady is really organic or merely functional, but there can be no doubt that certain maladies are organic. At present, we are considering only those maladies which are certainly organic. Our contention is this, that nature cannot cure an organic disorder instantaneously.

SCIENCE AND ORGANIC MALADIES.

The proof of our thesis involves some rudimentary knowledge of the fundamental principles of physiology, but such knowledge is now so widespread that most moderately well-informed persons already possess it. We know that our physical organism is built up of a vast multitude of living cells, and that those cells are supported, renewed and multiplied by means of the nourishment we

assimilate from our food. When a group of cells forming living tissue has been destroyed by an organic disorder, nature, to repair the destruction, must restore the missing cells. This work of restoration demands time, longer or shorter depending as the number of cells to be restored is greater or less. Even when the lesion in the vital tissue is slight, its repair necessarily occupies a certain period of time, since the building material for the cell must first be extracted from the food and then conveyed by the blood to the particular place where it is needed. The actual building of the required cells also takes time, for the healthy cells that surround the lesion must first assimilate the material from the blood and then multiply to span the lesion with new cells. Obviously this process demands time; and if the lesion is extensive – as in advanced consumption or cancer – a long period of time will be necessary for the restoration of the lost cells.

There is another element to be reckoned with in the cure of some organic diseases, such as cancer or other malignant tumours. In those diseases not alone are healthy cells missing but there are present in the affected part certain toxins or poisons which can only gradually be eliminated from the system. If those toxins were suddenly discharged into the blood, they would poison the whole system and bring death to the sufferer.

Another point to be noted in the cure of a diseased or fractured bone is that not only are living cells necessary for its restoration but also a quantity of inorganic matter called phosphate of lime or calcium (or tricalcium) phosphate. This phosphate circulates in small quantities in the blood and is supplied to the diseased or broken bone at a certain rate by the capillaries or minute blood vessels. Owing to the slow process by which the phosphate is supplied, forty or fifty days are required for the complete consolidation of a fractured bone; a much longer period is necessary in the case of a tubercular bone or spine. Moreover, it has been proved that in some miraculous cures the quantity of phosphate supplied to mend the broken or diseased bone exceeds the total amount of phosphate normally present in a free state in any human organism. The question arises, how can the human organism furnish instantaneously a quantity of phosphate, which it does not contain? Certainly, not naturally.

(In the famous miraculous cure of Pierre {or Pieter} de Rudder it has been established that at least five grammes of phosphate of lime were required to unite the broken bone so that there might be no shortening of the leg. Chemists have calculated that there is in the blood about one and a half grammes of this phosphate. De Rudder's cure, therefore, required more than three times the amount of phosphate that is to be found at any one time in a free state in the human organism. The cure (of compound fracture of the left leg) also involved the instantaneous multiplication of living cells – together with the phosphate – to build up the bone, and the sudden elimination of poisonous matter accumulated by eight years' suppuration. Besides, the muscles of de Rudder's leg, which had lain useless and almost atrophied for the space of eight years, were restored instantly to perfect condition so that he could run and dance for joy at his recovery. Those astounding facts place de Rudder's cure beyond the natural events. Consult the books by Deschamps, and Windle, mentioned in our second paragraph.)

UNKNOWN LAW – AN EXPLANATION?

The laws of physiology brought forward to prove the super-naturalness of some miracle cures are no mere medical theories but universally recognised facts about the human organism, which are established beyond the shadow of doubt. Those laws are so closely connected with our organism, so much part and parcel of it, that they must remain true and necessary as long as man remains the

same physical type. It is futile, then, to appeal to some 'hidden process in nature' by which an organic disorder can be cured instantaneously, for no such process is possible or conceivable in our present human organism. As long as man is man, an organic disorder can be cured naturally only by an elaborate and tedious process. Hence, we claim that when an organic malady is cured instantaneously the cure cannot be regarded as natural.

God, by His omnipotent Power, effects miraculous cures in a way we cannot hope to fathom. In an instant, He can multiply living cells, eliminate poisonous elements from the human system, and supply the material necessary for any cure. How He accomplishes all this, we cannot explain. If we could, the cure would cease to be a miracle.

Many refuse to admit miracles because they involve mystery. Mystery is distasteful to the "Modern Mind." But everything in its ultimate analysis leads to mystery. Who can explain the mystery of life, sensation, light or gravity? The last verdict of philosophy and science on anything is, and will ever be, mystery, unfathomable mystery.

When cures of the kind we have described take place – and that they have taken place has been scientifically proved again and again – the only rational course is to attribute them to the omnipotent Power of God, and to bow down in adoration of that Omnipotence we cannot hope to understand. The unbeliever either denies that those cures occurred or attempts to explain them naturally. Both ways out of the difficulty are equally irrational. Miracle cures have occurred; and no natural law, known or unknown, can ever explain them.

THE LAST SUBTERFUGE.

Within the past few decades, many disbelievers in miracles have changed considerably their attitude towards miraculous cures. Unlike the earlier rationalists, they no longer deny that very extraordinary cures take place within the Catholic Church. Those cures are too well established to be denied. Rationalists themselves have investigated them. They also admit that the physical theories advanced by their predecessors and by some contemporaries cannot account for those extraordinary occurrences. Must we, then, return to the Catholic solution and attribute them to God? By no means, answer our opponents, for a natural explanation has been discovered. There is a force in man far surpassing nature, a psychic force, which may be given the comprehensive name of "Suggestion." Suggestion in its various manifestations explains those cures, which Catholics fondly attribute to God. Here is the 'eureka' of modern medical science. (Aristotle, Saint Thomas and many of the Scholastics were well acquainted with the psychic force now called Suggestion. The moderns might learn much about its nature and limitations from the works of those great philosophers.)

This mysterious psychic force, then, whether it assumes the form of Magnetism (Franz Mesmer) or Faith-healing (Jean-Martin Charcot) or Auto-suggestion (Émile Coué) is the explanation of miracle cures. Let us see if it is.

SUGGESTION.

The pioneers of the Suggestion movement, like most pioneers, were thorough-going optimists. "Suggestion can cure every malady," was their slogan. Today the greatest authorities on Suggestion-cure are more moderate in their claims. Pierre Janet, Hippolyte Bernheim and Joseph Babinski (or Babinsky), while defending the immense curative value of Suggestion in most cases of functional disorders, confess that it cannot directly cure disease that is really Organic.

(Doctor Bernheim, the celebrated founder of the psychological school of Nancy, writes: "Suggestion is not able to set right again a dislocated limb, nor to reduce a joint swollen by rheumatism, nor to replace brain-tissues which are destroyed. Let us not exaggerate. The direct influence of psycho-therapy on organic wounds is limited. One cannot remove an inflammation by means of it or check the development of a tumour, or a sclerosis of the veins. Suggestion cannot destroy microbes, or cure a wound in the stomach, or remove tubercles." *Hypnotisme? Suggestion, Psychotherapie*, 2nd edition, pages 321-325.)

The reason for this admission is not difficult to understand. A functional or nervous disorder does not arise from the lesion of any organ or system of organs but from the suspension of nervous energy and consequent helplessness of the parts affected. When the patient can be persuaded to release his nervous energy into the required channel a cure is effected. The cure of an organic disorder is quite different. Here the organ or system is no longer intact, a part of its vital tissue has been destroyed by the disease, and this must be restored by the multiplication of living cells in the ordinary tedious way described. No amount of Suggestion, be it ever so intense and varied, can restore those cells instantaneously.

Suggestion, of course, can hasten the cure of an organic disorder. This it does by improving the general condition of the patient, restoring his vital functions to the normal activity, improving his appetite and digestion, aiding his blood-circulation and so on. The beneficial influence of mind and will on the body both in health and sickness was too obvious to be overlooked by thinkers during the long age that preceded the "discovery" of suggestion.

The essential point is this. Suggestion only indirectly promotes the cure of an organic disease by removing obstacles from the way, and by aiding the vital processes that actually affect the cure. Only by the multiplication of living cells can an organic disorder be removed; and that process demands time.

We can conclude, then, that Suggestion cannot cure an organic disorder instantaneously.

SUGGESTION AND MIRACLE CURES.

Our opponents return to the attack: But all the cures regarded by Catholics as miraculous are merely cures of nervous disorders. Suggestion can explain those cures.

Those who speak in this way can escape the charge of deliberate misrepresentation only by, admitting a gross ignorance of Catholic miracles, and of the severe criticism to which the Church subjects them. As far back as 1747, Pope Benedict XIV in his classical work on the Beatification of the Servants of God insists that cures, which could in any way be associated with the nervous system, are not to be relied on in the process of Canonisation. Thus, ecclesiastical procedure long before anticipated the objection raised by the discoverers of Suggestion.

Again, to take the annals of Lourdes: It has been proved that less than ten per cent of the maladies cured at this famous shrine could possibly have been of nervous origin. (Consult, Bertrin, *Historie Critique de Lourdes*, page 444 and following.)

Will the champions of Suggestion rank as nervous disorders the remaining ninety per cent, those thousands of cases of tuberculosis, cancer, rheumatism, fracture, caries of the spine, et cetera; and will they undertake to cure those ailments instantaneously by means of Suggestion? No, we will not set the Suggestionists so utterly impossible a task, but we ask them candidly, how many of the nervous disorders cured at Lourdes could Suggestion have cured instantaneously? Possibly a few.

The more serious nervous disorders cured at Lourdes (and only those are duly certified as miraculous) are almost as far beyond the reach of Suggestion-cure as organic maladies.

SUGGESTION AND NERVOUS DISORDERS.

Suggestion-cure has its limitations even in cases of nervous disorders. Firstly, instantaneous cures by means of Suggestion are very rare. The Suggestionists submit the patient to a course of treatment; and they themselves admit that cures obtained after a short course of three or four experiments are usually unsatisfactory and unreliable. Instantaneousness and permanency are essential characteristics of a Lourdes cure; no cure is recorded as a miracle until a year has elapsed to guarantee its Stability.

Again, experts in the science and art of Suggestion confess that certain kinds of nervous disorders cannot be cured by Suggestion. Of those, hereditary and chronic disorders are most unyielding. Now, both hereditary and chronic disorders have been cured at Lourdes; and it is precisely because they were such that their cure is regarded as miraculous.

Lastly, Suggestion – whatever form it may assume – consists in a fixed persuasion, or conviction, that cure is certain; only when Suggestion reaches this pitch of obsession is it efficacious.

No one who is incapable of a fixed idea can benefit by Suggestion. A young child, for instance, cannot convince himself or be convinced by others that his cure is inevitable; he is, therefore, beyond the reach of Suggestion. Yet, in the records of Lourdes we find that young children – some mere infants, many less than three years of age – have been cured of various disorders. (Consult Bertrin, *Historie Critique de Lourdes*, page 205 and following.)

Frequently, too, in the case of adults the entire absence of a fixed persuasion rules out the possibility of attributing their recovery to the powers of Suggestion. Not a few sufferers have gone to Lourdes thoroughly sceptical of miracles in general and of the miracles of Lourdes in particular; they have gone there in obedience to superiors or just to please those dear to them, firmly convinced of the futility of their pilgrimage, and without faith or hope. And such sceptics have been cured at Lourdes! (Bertrin, *Historie Critique de Lourdes*, pages 206 and following, and 276 and following.)

Attribute their recovery to what we will, we cannot attribute it to Faith-Healing or any other sort of Suggestion. Invalids in every frame of mind have gone to Lourdes; and invalids in every frame of mind have been cured there. Those are facts, which the Suggestion theory cannot explain.

RELIGIOUS SUGGESTION.

Even when an invalid firmly believes in the miracles of Lourdes, and hopes to be cured there, we cannot say that he has reached that pitch of persuasion, which would suffice for a Suggestion-cure. We completely disagree with the Suggestionists who maintain that religious conviction is the most powerful form of Suggestion, and that, consequently, the extraordinary cures at Lourdes, though they baffle medical Suggestion, can be attributed to the religious Suggestion of Catholics.

Certainly, every Catholic is fully convinced that God can cure any malady, but no properly-instructed Catholic is persuaded that God will infallibly cure his particular malady. He knows that health, like every other gift of the Almighty, depends entirely upon God's good pleasure. On some, God bestows that gift; to others for His own good reasons, He denies it. To be fully persuaded that God will infallibly restore one's health is sheer presumption. No Catholic, worthy of the name, will be guilty of such presumption, but will place himself entirely in the hands of Divine Providence,

and ask for health if that gift be the Will of God and conducive to his own eternal welfare. Those are the sentiments impressed on the Catholic pilgrim who goes to Lourdes; and those sentiments, we repeat, do not make for Suggestion. Moreover, the Catholic invalid knows that hundreds of thousands have gone to Lourdes and have come away uncured. Since those thoughts and sentiments possess the mind of the Catholic at Lourdes, we deny that he is a fit subject for Suggestion: because the essence of Suggestion is the fixed persuasion that cure is inevitable.

MIRACLE-CURES – A SUMMARY.

To sum up our conclusions regarding miraculous cures: We hold it as proved that there are many cures which cannot possibly be attributed to any natural cause (instantaneous cures of organic disease); other cures (of functional disorders), which might possibly admit of a natural explanation, can frequently be shown from an examination of their circumstances to be due to neither the physical nor psychic forces of nature but to the power of God.

Did space permit we might apply to miracle cures the argument already used to prove the supernaturalness of Christ's other miracles. If any natural power enabled Christ to cure all sorts of maladies by a mere touch or command, and even when the patient was far removed from Him, {Our Lord cured the Centurion's servant from a distance (Matthew, chapter 8, verses 5 and following); also the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman, (Mark, chapter 7, verses 26 and following), and the Ruler's son (John, chapter 4, verses 46 and following)} why cannot our greatest psychic experts do likewise? No expert has ever obtained cures thus. We are forced, therefore, to confess that the power by which Christ cured the sick was not natural but supernatural.

If psychic or any natural force works miracle cures at Lourdes and other Catholic shrines, why cannot those cures be repeated elsewhere? No clinic, whatever be its scientific advantages over Lourdes, can boast of cures so instantaneous, so varied and so unchallengeable. The natural circumstances found at Lourdes can be reproduced at any great clinic, but like results have never been obtained. Hence, we may conclude that the cures at Lourdes are not wrought by any natural power but by the supernatural Power of God.

RECOGNITION OF MIRACLES – CONCLUSION.

The foregoing critical examination of various classes of miracles proves beyond doubt that we can recognise certain occurrences as miracles. Nature, however wonderful and hidden be her powers, cannot account for those occurrences. This claim is based not on our ignorance of nature and her forces, as our opponents allege, but on our knowledge of nature and of nature's limitations. As it progresses, scientific investigation shows with ever increasing clearness the super-naturalness of miracles and vindicates ever more strongly the conviction of commonsense that certain things surpass the power of nature and must be attributed to the Omnipotence of God.

The only reason for denying this obvious truth is, we repeat, the fixed but unfounded conviction that miracles do not happen, because they cannot happen. We have proved that that conviction is opposed to the dictates of common sense and to the teaching of sound philosophy.

A DIFFICULTY.

It must not be inferred from what has been said that it is always possible to recognise a miracle with certainty. There are occurrences, which are certainly natural, others no less certainly miraculous, but outside those two fixed categories, there are a number of doubtful occurrences, which it is difficult to classify. A like difficulty is met with in other branches of investigation; in biology, for example.

Biology proves the existence of an animal and a vegetable kingdom; but there are some living creatures, such as certain bacteria, which baffle the biologists' attempt to find them a definite place in their category. Similarly, there are extraordinary occurrences, which cannot be traced to known natural causes, and yet cannot be shown to be supernatural. When this difficulty arises, we turn from our examination of the physical aspect of the occurrence to a consideration of its moral circumstances in order to discover its origin.

A MORAL CRITERION.

In determining the super-naturalness of miracles we have until now insisted on their physical aspect. But besides being a physical fact, a miracle has also a moral significance. This is clear from what has been said on the purpose of miracles.

Since a miracle is a special work of God, it must be in every way worthy of its author. Hence, if a strange event is evil, or if it occurs in circumstances of which God could not approve, it cannot be attributed to God and regarded as a miracle. We have, therefore, besides a physical criterion (the peculiarity of the occurrence), a moral criterion by which to judge whether an unusual occurrence be a miracle or not.

Those two criteria form one adequate criterion by which we judge miracles, and should never be divorced in their application. No occurrence, however surprising it may be, can be attributed to God if in any way it is opposed to God's Wisdom, Truth or Holiness.

PSEUDO-MIRACLES.

We are now in a position to pass judgment on the many marvels we read of in the history of Paganism, Buddhism, Fakirism, Magic, Spiritism, 'Christian Science' and other false religions. Undoubtedly, most of those marvels are fictions or myths, which cannot be given a place in serious history, but there remains, nevertheless, a residue of extraordinary occurrences the truth of which cannot be denied. When we examine the moral circumstances of those strange occurrences we find that it would be sheer blasphemy to attribute them to the all-holy and all-wise Creator of the universe. Many of those marvels are futile and ludicrous in the extreme; some are obscene or otherwise Unmoral.

Moreover, it is clear that God works miracles only for a holy and noble purpose. That God should work a miracle to pander to the idle curiosity of the crowd is inconceivable. Many pseudo-miracles have no higher purpose. It would be still more absurd that God should work miracles to propagate gross errors concerning His divine Nature, the sacred Person of His Son, Jesus Christ, the human soul and the Christian moral code. To attribute to God the pseudo-miracles we read of in the history of false religions would be to make Him the instrument of falsehood and vice, and to put him in flat contradiction with His own divine Revelation.

(At first sight, this argument may seem to involve a vicious circle: We prove the truth of divine Revelation by means of miracles; and now we use Revelation to prove miracles. We answer that we do not use Revelation to prove the existence of miracles, but to disprove the claim that certain occurrences are miracles. If a strange, inexplicable occurrence is in any way opposed to divine Revelation it cannot be a miracle; because the divine truth of Revelation is proved by miracles, which are, beyond shadow of doubt, God's handiwork.

Hence, the facts by which we prove divine Revelation are quite distinct from the facts that Revelation proves to be pseudo-miracles.

Moreover, many pseudo-miracles are opposed not only to revealed truth but also to the natural truths of reason. Independently of Revelation, we know that Brahminism and 'Christian Science' teach gross error concerning the nature of God. Consequently, the marvels claimed by those false religions cannot be the Work of God. Established truths, whether supernatural or natural, can therefore be used as a criterion by which to judge the source of certain doubtful phenomena.)

An examination of those pseudo-miracles in their moral setting will convince us that they are opposed to divine Truth, Wisdom or Holiness; and cannot, consequently, be attributed to God. We do not say that all those strange happenings have a diabolical origin; many, doubtlessly, are impostures or natural phenomena as yet explained. Some pseudo-miracles, however, seem so utterly to transcend the forces of visible creation that it is justifiable to trace them to the high intelligence and preternatural power of the devil. Several well-authenticated facts of Black Magic and Spiritism almost force us to conclude that the devil had some part in their performance.

CATHOLICS AND MIRACLES.

It is fitting to conclude with a brief review of the Catholic attitude towards miracles. Firstly, our Catholic Faith teaches us that miracles are possible and that some facts can be recognised as miracles. (Consult the Vatican Council of 1870, session 3, chapter 3 and canon 4; Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, Numbers 1790 and 1813.) It is no hardship to hold both those propositions; commonsense itself assures us of their truth. We accept those propositions, however, not merely on the guarantee of commonsense but on the unimpeachable authority of God, Whose teaching is proposed to us by the infallible voice of His Church. We hold, then, by divine Faith (1) that miracles are possible, (2) that some miracles can with certainty be known as such.

Secondly, Catholics believe that Sacred Scripture is the written Word of God, and that, consequently, the miracles recorded there are infallibly true. Of those, the outstanding miracles of Christ's life are embodied in the Creed, in which we profess our belief in Christ's Virgin-Birth, His glorious Resurrection and Ascent to Heaven.

MIRACLES OUTSIDE THE BIBLE.

Besides scriptural miracles there are many miracles recorded in Church History, in the lives of the saints and in the annals of miraculous shrines. Does the Church oblige Catholics to believe those miracles? No; the Church does not propose any of those miracles for our belief.

In the process of Canonisation, the Church approves a saint's miracles, but even then, she does not regard her approval as infallible or oblige us to accept it by Faith. No Catholic, of course, would be so indocile or irreverent as to question a miracle accepted by the Church. The Catholic knows, moreover, that it would be very foolish in this difficult matter of miracles to pit his weak and faulty judgment against the wisdom and experience of the Church.

It is the duty of the Sacred Congregation of Rites to examine the miracles of those proposed for Canonisation. This Congregation is composed of learned and experienced theologians who, with the aid of experts, submit all miracles to a most thorough and scientific examination until every doubt about their truth and super-naturalness has been removed.

An anecdote related by Daubenton in his *Life of Saint John-Francis Regis* illustrates the extraordinary caution of the Church in approving miracles. Once a distinguished Anglican lawyer was being shown over the offices of the Sacred Congregation of Rites by a Cardinal friend. The Cardinal asked the lawyer to examine some documents containing the proofs of certain miracles

submitted to the Congregation. The lawyer did so and expressed his admiration for the thoroughness and incontestability of the proofs offered. "There is no gainsaying those proofs," he confessed, "and if Protestants were aware that the Church exercised even half that care in approving miracles, they would have no difficulty in accepting her verdict." "Well," replied the Cardinal, "I must inform you that those miracles which you regard as incontestable have been rejected by our Congregation as insufficiently proven."

The Church is silent regarding the many other miracles recorded in history and in the annals of miraculous shrines. We are free, then, so far as the Church's teaching is concerned, to accept or reject them. Though our freedom of thought in these matters is not restricted by Catholic teaching – a fact rarely grasped by non-Catholics – yet common sense may not leave us free but oblige us to accept certain occurrences as true and supernatural. We have vindicated the judgment of commonsense against many attacks, and reached the conclusion that miracles happen. A more detailed historical and philosophical defence of some notable miracles is reserved for another treatise.

CONCLUSION.

Those who grant that miracles are possible and yet reject Christian or Catholic miracles as bogus without having judged them on their historical and philosophical merits do not act reasonably – however they may pride themselves on their superior intelligence – but according to that blind prejudice which is the hall-mark of the bigot.

To us it seems incredible that anyone who admits the possibility of miracles – or, in other words, the existence of God – should examine impartially the great Christian and Catholic miracles of the past or the actual miracles of today and not be convinced of their truth and super-naturalness.
