

A
DISCOURSE ON MIRACLES,

PRELIMINARY TO THE ARGUMENT

FOR

A REVELATION.

BEING THE

DUDLEIAN LECTURE

DELIVERED BEFORE HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

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DUDLEIAN LECTURE.

THE power of Jesus on the occasion here referred to, was undoubtedly miraculous. Without dwelling on the circumstances, — which are familiar to you, — I wish to call your attention to two points in the narrative, as fairly presenting the subject of my present discourse. One is the natural astonishment of the disciples, amounting almost to a reluctance to believe what their eyes beheld. “What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” The other point, to which I wish to draw your attention, is the language of rebuke with which our Saviour addresses this feeling of incredulity. “How is it that ye have no faith?” And I may add that he frequently reproaches, in similar terms, the want of faith in his miraculous powers.

Now it is this presumption against miracles, — in other words it is the preliminary ground of the argument for Christianity, that I propose in this discourse to examine. And of such importance do I hold this preliminary view of the subject, that I think it will make all the difference, with many minds, between believing in Christianity, and not believing. That is to say, the evidences of revelation are strong enough to produce belief, if it were not for this presumption against them. Let there be no prejudice against miracles; let it appear, in any man's account, perfectly reasonable and philosophical to admit them; let him regard it as extremely probable that the Supreme Being would interpose for our spiritual relief; and then I say, that he must feel the evidence, actually offered, to be ample and overwhelming. It is not from the weakness of the

proof, but from the strength of the presumption against it, that it fails of producing conviction.

That there is this presumption against miracles, I hardly need say. It appears in many forms. There has always been a prejudice of this nature lurking in the bosom of science. The doctrine of philosophical necessity seems to me to proceed from the same source, though I am aware that its advocates do not deny the Christian attestation to those facts which we denominate miraculous. The modern system of German Rationalism is a standing and recorded proof of the same presumption against miracles. Nay, with some writers it has amounted to an assertion of the essential incredibility of such facts.* And where it falls short of this, it is still a

* The essential incredibility of miracles, the impossibility indeed of such occurrences, has lately been argued by an English writer, the author of "Essays on the Pursuit of Truth," in the Third Essay. It is the old argument of Mr. Hume; but it is presented with great clearness, in a manner at once very calm and imposing, and without any of those terms that would indicate its purpose, or any consideration of the answers that have been, and may be, given to it.

The course of the author's argument is as follows. In the first place, he maintains that all reasoning, belief, and knowledge depend on the uniformity of causation; in other words, upon the regular succession of antecedents and consequents. That most of them do, is doubtless true. We could not anticipate the future nor interpret the past, but upon the supposition that the same principles have been, and will be in operation, that are now. But whether there is no other basis or source of belief, is the question. Most philosophers have persuaded themselves that the world had a beginning, — an event which quite breaks in upon their order of sequences.

In the next place, the author maintains that our belief in the uniformity of causation is instinctive, original, ultimate, and irresistible in the mind. That a general sense of preference of order is so, I believe; and that experience working upon this, or without it, must create a very strong conviction of the regularity of nature, is obvious; but whether any thing more than this is true, I must doubt.

But I am willing to give the argument the benefit, on both points, of any doubts that do not involve a begging of the question, and come at once to the conclusion. The question, then, of miracles is brought to the point of conflicting testimonies. Nature, on the one hand, testifies, it is said, to undeviating regularity. Change, then, is impossible. Man's testimony, too, is valuable, and has its regularity as truly as nature; but it is more liable to be mistaken, or we are more liable to mistake its marks, and therefore it can never counterbalance the testimony of nature. Therefore a miracle is impossible; and the belief in it, absurd.

This argument proves too much. For suppose now that I acquiesce in the conclusion, and quietly take my seat in this pinfold of philos-

secret reluctance to receive them. And I think this reluctance has some unusual developement among many reflecting persons in this country, at the present moment. It is seen in the disposition of many to turn from the miracles to what they call the internal evidence. It is not uncommon in society to hear the miracles spoken of slightly. There is in every age, a

ophy, what does this argument suppose me to say? Or what does the skeptic say, who strives to lift his head high enough (but cannot) above the machinery of causes, to declare their laws, and processes, and bounds?

In the first place, he says that God Almighty either *cannot* change the course of things, though he should please to do it, or else that He *will not* please to do it. For the reader will observe, that such a change is pronounced, without qualification, impossible! To know so much of the Omniscient purpose, — to know so little of the Omnipotent power, — presents a solecism in which it is difficult to tell whether the ignorance or the presumption is the most extraordinary.

In the second place, this argument would prove that the world and the universe are eternal. They could never have begun, they can never cease to exist; for either fact would be a deviation from the uniformity of causation. In the one case, there would be a consequent without any regular antecedent. In the other, an antecedent without any regular consequent. Nay, since the author holds that there is the same unchangeable order of sequences in the intellectual as in the physical world, the race of men can have, in his theory, neither beginning nor end. In short, this assumption seems to me to be compatible with nothing but Atheism. If there be no Power superior to nature, none that can interfere with its processes, then perhaps it is fair to infer that its processes must go on unchanged and unchangeable. But if there is a God, the *possibility* of change is equal to his *power*; it is unbounded and unquestionable.

In the third place, the argument proves too much, because it goes beyond all reasonable and known bounds of skepticism. The author who says to his fellow-men, "You cannot justly believe in a miracle; the thing is impossible, and faith is impossible," transcends the bounds of all human experience, if not of all human patience. Because almost all men, who have ever lived, *have* believed in miracles. And is not the very question before us, in fact, a question about experience? Could all men have believed in miracles, if, as our author contends, an original and fundamental law of the mind forbade their believing in them? Is it not as unphilosophical, as it is intolerable, to say that all mankind have been found believing in a thing which is plainly impossible? What is meant by its being impossible? That God cannot perform it? I will not impute to any one the intentional blasphemy of such an averment. Is it meant, then, that it is impossible that we should believe it? But we do believe it. We can believe it. All men do and can; all but the few, the very few who agree with our author. Is there *any remaining* idea, then, that can be attached to the word *impossible*? I know of none.

fashion of thinking ; and the fashion of thinking at the present day, I conceive, is growing more and more adverse to these primitive, peculiar, and hitherto received evidences of revelation. It seems to be thought by some, that the day has gone by for talking about miracles ; that they answered a purpose indeed in the primitive age, but have no longer any use. Not a few are saying, " Our feelings convince us, that Christianity is true ; the Book convinces us that it is true ; and we want no other evidence." It was in this feeling, obviously, that Coleridge exclaimed, " 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." *

That this way of thinking is unphilosophical, that it does not properly perceive the very ground on which it professes to stand, that the reluctance to receive miracles, though natural and reasonable, to a certain extent, is unphilosophical when it amounts to a strong prejudice or presumption against them ; nay more, that on a whole view of the case, the presumption ought, in fact, to be *the other way*, is what I shall now attempt to show.

But as this way of thinking arises in part, I believe, from a misconception of the place which miracles properly hold in the Christian system, let me employ a word or two of explanation on this point. A man says, that he cannot regard miracles as the great things in Christianity, since he assigns that place to its doctrines, and precepts, and spirit. Neither do we ask him to regard miracles as the great things. It has been well said of the miracles, that " they are like the massive subterranean arches and columns of a huge building. It is not on their account that we prize the building, but the building for its own sake. We do not think of the foundation nor care about it, other than to know that it has one. We dwell above in the upper and fairer halls. The crowds go in and out, and rejoice in their comforts and splendors, without ever casting a thought on that upon which the whole so peacefully and securely reposes. Such are the miracles to the gospel. They 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 flights of steps *appear* to reach

* *Aids to Reflection*, p. 245. Amer. ed.

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." *

This observation will apply, perhaps, to the case of those who say, that they do not feel the miracles to be necessary to their faith in Christianity. When they say this, they must mean by faith, that moral apprehension of the spirit and power of Christianity, that sense of the spiritual relief and comfort that it brings, which does not, it is true, depend on miracles; in other words, that view of the superstructure which does not, it is true, immediately depend on any view of a foundation. But this view presupposes a speculative or traditional belief in the Christian Religion; or, if it does not, then it is just like a faith in any other good writings; that is, simply a belief that they are good, and wise, and therefore true; and if true, accordant with the will of God. In this sense, we have faith in all the dictates of reason. But Christianity we receive as a special revelation, an authoritative record of God's will; and in this character it must have some attestation beyond its general consonance with our rational or moral nature; else every demonstration in the mathematics, and every undisputed principle in moral philosophy, would be a revelation. That attestation, I say, is miracle.

The state of opinion on this subject makes it necessary, perhaps, before proceeding farther, that I should define the word *miracle*. All Christians of whom I know any thing, in this country, hold to miracles in some sense. I wish distinctly to say this; because if the sense which I affix to this word, as the only one satisfactory to myself, is not received by others, I would by no means leave it to be inferred, that there is any professed difference of opinion between us as to the miraculous origin of Christianity. There is only a friendly question between us about the meaning which ought to be assigned to this word.

What then is a miracle? I answer, It is an interruption or ceasing of the regular and established succession of events, taking place in connexion with the mission of a person professing to be sent from God, and designed to give that proof of his mission. I say, an interruption or ceasing of the regular and established succession of events, and that for a specific purpose. A miracle is a fact, like to which nothing ever has occurred, or ever will occur but for the same purpose. I lay

* The Rev. William Ware.

stress upon its being a simple fact. In regard to the succession of events, I say nothing of causation or necessity, of which we know nothing. I do not conceive that one event compels another, as the cogs of one wheel push on another wheel. I take the bare facts. Since the world began it was not known that a blind man received sight at a word, or that a man with a broken limb, or that a dead body, already in the first stages of putrefaction, instantly and at a word, recovered vigor and activity. Such events, we say, on certain occasions, and for certain purposes, without precedent, without parallel, have taken place. They are the miracles.

Now the question is, What is the fair and philosophical description of these events? On this point there is a strong reluctance in many minds to admit that there was any thing, in these cases, out of the course of nature or contrary to it; any interruption of the order of nature or suspension of its processes, or departure from its regularity. They say, that there may have been causes in nature or in the mind, which, though unknown to us, are sufficient to account for the results in question. I object to the word "causes," as implying an efficient power in one event to produce another, of which we know nothing. And therefore I consider the word "interposition," though proper enough to be used in popular discourse, to be strictly speaking unphilosophical, since it implies that one event *has* an inherent power to produce another, and conveys the impression of a hand thrust in to stay the event that would otherwise take place. This may be true, but we do not know it. We come then to the bare facts. And, if we deal with facts alone, I see not how it can be denied that a miracle is something out of the course of nature, and contrary to it; an interruption of its order, a suspension of its processes. On this point, a distinction is sometimes made between a real interruption and an apparent interruption; and it is contended that the interruption is only apparent. But in speaking of facts, submitted to the observation of our senses, it appears to me, that we must conceive of real and apparent as the same thing. That is to say, if such a fact or such an event, as one of the Christian miracles, never appeared before, and never shall appear again but at the intervention of some divinely commissioned agent, then it is a real departure from the order of nature,—that is, from the universally received and known order of events, which is all that we know of the

order of nature. In other words, the whole thing is a peculiarity, — a special conjunction of events for a particular purpose. And, for myself, I certainly feel none of this strong repugnance to the idea of an interrupted succession of events. I have no respect for the mechanical order of nature, that makes me feel as if it could not be changed. I do not see that the moral purpose of that order is at all impaired by occasional departures from it. Surely, the Almighty Will is not bound in the chains of fate, or of nature, or by the powers of nature. I am unable to see, why the Infinite Parent may not change the course of his providence for the benefit of his children, as well as a human parent may change the course of his administration for a similar purpose. Not, indeed, that it would be an unforeseen expedient with the Omniscient Ruler; but I cannot see that its being foreseen alters at all the state of the facts.

But now let us grant for the sake of the argument, that the miracles are, as the modern interpreter proposes to consider them, only seeming miracles, — only apparent, not real interruptions of the order of nature. Would they then be valid evidence of revelation? When Jesus says, "Peace, be still," the winds and waves sink to an instant calm. It was wonderful; it appeared miraculous; but it was miraculous, say some, only to the ignorance or misapprehension of the observers. There was a sudden lulling of the winds and waves, which, to the disciples, seemed miraculous. Or there were causes in the bosom of those turbulent elements, however hidden from us, which produced that sudden calm; and such occurrences may yet come to be as well known, if not as familiar, as any of the phenomena of nature. But then, I ask, would there be any evidence of a special divine commission? To illustrate the case, let us make a supposition; or let us take a piece of real history. Soon after the arrival of Columbus on the shore of the New World, there was an eclipse of the sun. The rude inhabitants had never, perhaps, remarked such an event before. Columbus, for a certain purpose, informs them that the sun will be darkened, and he predicts the precise day, and hour, and moment, when it will happen. The people hold their minds in suspense till the hour arrives, and then, witnessing the results, they come to the conclusion that Columbus is a supernatural being, and they reverence him as such. It was to them a miracle. But, in after times, suppose that this

people, or their descendants, should study astronomy. What *then* would be their conclusion? Would they not say, "We were deceived"? And what other than this could be the conclusion, if it should at length be discovered, that the miracles of Jesus belonged to the natural, though at that time unknown, order of events.

But let us see now, if miracles, in the sense which I contend for, do not inevitably belong to the Christian system. Is it possible that those who originally witnessed them, could have received them in any other light. "We never saw it on this wise; since the world began, such things were never seen," — is their language. If all this belonged to the order of nature, must they not have been grossly deceived; and deceived too, with the knowledge, if not intention, of the first teachers of Christianity.

But further; is there any one branch of the Christian evidences that does not involve miracles of the character contended for? Does not the argument from prophecy, and does not the argument from the early spread of Christianity, clearly proceed on this ground? In the one case, more than the natural prescience of any human mind is supposed; in the other, more than any known powers of persuasion. Nay, do not the very attempts to explain away miracles still leave unexplained miracles, — unexplained departures from the order of nature? It is said for instance, in regard to the cases of the sick healed, and the dead raised to life, that we cannot aver that the powers of nature were suspended or modified, because we are not acquainted with all the powers of nature; because there may have been a secret power in the sick or the dead body suddenly to restore it to health or life. But, granting this, still the knowledge of the exact *time* when that event was to happen must have been miraculous. Let us take, for example, the miracle recorded in our text. Our Saviour arose and rebuked the wind and the sea, and there was a great calm. Will it be pretended by any *honest* believer in Christianity, that Jesus acted upon a very sagacious judgment with regard to the signs of the weather? Surely not. The only tolerable supposition of him who receives Christianity, but rejects the miracles, is that there were powers in nature, though beyond human penetration, which produced that sudden calm. But then, it is necessary, I repeat, to suppose a *miraculous knowledge* in him, who discerned either

that power, or the moment of its operation. Or, if any one should say that there are powers in the *mind* with which we are unacquainted, and if he should maintain a natural, moral connexion between the mind of him who spake and that sinking of the winds and waves, then, I should say, — granting a connexion so entirely gratuitous and so utterly inconceivable, — that such instances occurring once, and never afterwards, were themselves miracles. If that were not a miraculous effect of mind on matter, we ought to see something of it still.

Miracle, then, holds its place in every honest explanation of the external evidences of Christianity: and I think the same is true of the internal evidence.

With regard to this branch of the argument, various and vague impressions are prevailing which seem to me to possess no weight whatever, as furnishing substantive proof. They may be useful preliminaries or auxiliaries to conviction, but they are not its foundations. Such are the ideas that are entertained of the moral charm and beauty of the Scriptures, or of their adaptation to human wants, — not to mention those enthusiasts, who profess to have a secret and intuitive perception of the divinity of those writings. But, granting the singular moral beauty and charm of the Scriptures, I see not how it constitutes proof. Suppose that a person had never heard of a revelation, and, seeking light and rest for his mind, were to take up some of the writings of Fenelon. Would he not feel the same kind of impression? Would he not be charmed with their beauty, and their adaptation to his necessities, and say, “This is just what I wanted; this must be the truth of God.” And would he not very justly say this? What, then, would be the distinction between the writings of Fenelon and the records of inspiration? There is a difference 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, Is it revealed to be true? is the question; and that question is overlooked in this view of the internal evidences. So in the writings of the “divine Plato” the reader will be amazed and charmed with the elevation, the exquisite moral discrimination and beauty of some of his thoughts; but will this prove that they are inspired? Indeed, it must be confessed, I think, that there is not one moral precept of the New Testament, but it may be found in the old heathen philosophers.

The only valid internal evidence which the New Testament contains of being a revelation, is found in the proposition, that these writings possess altogether a character, for which nothing but special divine illumination can account. If some rustic youth should come to you with Newton's Principia in his hand, and satisfy you that he was its author, the fact would not be more astonishing, than it is that the fishermen of Galilee should have produced such a book as the New Testament. The character of Jesus is itself a moral miracle. This is evidence: and it will be more and more convincing, as we more and more clearly understand the nature of moral phenomena, the power of moral prejudice, and the difficulty of moral progress.

Still, then, I find miracle in every species of satisfactory and substantive proof. And now I would ask, if there is any conceivable and sufficient evidence of revelation, but miracles? Suppose a man to stand before you and to say, "I am the bearer of a special communication from God." What would you — what must you ask of him, as the credentials of his mission? His air might be noble, his doctrine excellent, his speech divine. His communication might thrill you with awe, or with rapture. Would that satisfy you? If you were an enthusiast, it might; but if you were a philosopher, I am sure it would not. He might tell you things which above all things you wished to know. He might tell you, as Swedenborg has professed to do, of the very state of the blest who have departed from you, and of your own future state, — how you were to live in that unknown world, — and you might wish to believe it. What could make you believe it? I can conceive of but one thing, — *a miracle*. If he came from an earthly monarch, you would demand his credentials, — the signet ring, or the sign manual. The chosen seal of the Almighty Monarch is *miracle*!

But I hear it said, "Could you receive a communication as from heaven, if it were evidently of bad tendency? And if not, then is not the excellence of the communication a part of the evidence?" I answer, No; it is only something presupposed in the case; not the proof that makes out the case. If a man undertakes to prove any thing to me, he must undertake to prove something that is credible. I cannot listen to him but upon that condition. It would be incredible, — a case not to be supposed nor argued upon, that the Almighty had

sent to me a communication of evil tendency. I demand this condition then, that the message be good, but the condition is not the proof. That a thing is credible is necessary to its being credited; but the credibility of a thing is not to be confounded with the belief of it. The former is one of the postulates; the latter is the conclusion. They are completely distinct. Thus the lawyer, who argues in behalf of his client to a jury, must make a case that is credible; but the credibility is no part of the argument. And the juror who should say, "I was convinced by the internal likelihood of the case, and not by the witnesses nor by the arguments," would be thought a very bad reasoner, however well-disposed a man.

I have dwelt longer on this point than I wished; but it seemed to me important to show, if it be true, that Christianity is really founded on miracles, and that all attempts to escape from them in the matter of revelation are vain, and are especially proved to be vain by the very efforts to explain them away, to which their rejectors are driven.

But now let us examine, in as few words as may suffice, that presumption against miracles from which these efforts have apparently arisen, and see whether the presumption ought not in fact to be the other way.

And, first of all, I must beseech the inquirer to approach this subject in the purest spirit of philosophy. It is the constant suggestion of unbelief, that, to support the argument for a revelation, prejudice is necessary. Now I say, that is precisely the aid that we do not want. Nay more, I say that prejudice is the very obstacle, and the main obstacle, to true faith. I ask the skeptic to lay aside *his* prejudices. I ask him to be a philosopher; and yet more distinctively I say,—a philosopher of the inductive school. Let him reason upon facts. Let him take nothing for granted. Let him assert nothing which he does not know; and deny nothing which, for all that he knows, may be true.

Now let us see how much is cut off from the ground of this inquiry by these discriminations. You are not to deny the possibility of miracles. Evidently, he who made and who controls all things, can modify and change them if it be his pleasure. The act of creation is but the grandest of miracles.*

* "The act of creation is but the grandest of miracles." This idea occurs in some of the French writers. I have met with it, I think, in Necker's "*Morale Religieuse*," and in the French preachers. But it

Again, you are not to say or suppose, that there is any difficulty in the performance of miracles, or that it requires any extraordinary, or any new exertion of divine power to produce the changes in question. You do not know but that every event in the universe springs from an immediate exertion of divine power, and, therefore, that one result is as naturally and easily produced, as another. In other words, you are not at liberty

seems to be used by them, rather as a figure of speech than otherwise. I do not introduce it as such. I hold it to be a philosophical truth. The act of the creation is the producing of new forms of being, out of the usual course of production. It is an event without any antecedent in the processes of nature. It is "a deviation from the uniformity of causation." And that is the definition of a miracle. That it is the commencement of a series of events does not affect this conclusion. The point of departure from the ordinary modes of production is none the less deviation, — none the less miracle, — for the regularity that follows. If the earth were suddenly arrested in its course, and made to take a retrograde movement through its orbit, for thousands of years, the point of change would be miracle, and none the less miracle for the regularity that followed. And surely it would be no less a miracle, if a world were suddenly created, — if solid matter instantly, at a word, filled the void space, and were launched forth upon its mighty career. All the difference in the cases, with reference to the point in hand, is made by an unphilosophical idea of causes; as if there were a tendency in antecedents to produce their consequents, — a pushing on of one event by another, — of which we know nothing. And yet even then we might say, that there were causes in that void space to keep it void, and that those causes were arrested by the creative act which filled that space with matter.

When life is communicated to a dead body, what is that but the creation of life? Suppose that a human being were instantly created before our eyes, in full size and strength, would not that be just as great a deviation from the usual and natural course of production, as it is to raise a dead body to life?

I have supposed, in another part of the Discourse, a world to be created in our sight. But, to present a more palpable case, and one directly beneath our eyes, suppose that, as we were looking upon a barren and blasted heath, it were suddenly covered with a crop of grain, ripe for the harvest. That would be creation, and that would be a miracle. And if we and many more saw that miracle, and knew moreover that it was wrought in attestation of a divine commission; — nay more, if we harvested the grain, and ground and ate it, it would not only be philosophical to believe, but impossible to doubt. Thus, if I may speak so, did the Christian witnesses handle the evidence of the miracles they record.

But I am not now to pursue this argument beyond the point which is immediately before me, — to wit, the credibility of miracles. And for this credibility, on the strictest grounds of philosophy, I say that the fact of creation is a sufficient warrant.

in the spirit of true philosophy, to regard nature as a piece of mechanism, — as a clock for instance, which is wound up and has a natural or necessary tendency to run down. And you are not to say, that the need of a miracle to answer the purposes of the Author of nature implies some imperfection in the machinery of nature. The idea of machinery is a pure assumption. Des Cartes might as well have argued from those vortices, or whirlpools of ether, by which he supposed the heavenly bodies were moved, as we may argue from the notion of any other mechanism. Once more; all ideas of miraculous interference, as if it were derogatory to the Infinite Being, all presumptions on this point, drawn from the infinity of the universe, and the comparative insignificance of the earth and of man, are to be laid out of the question as entirely unphilosophical.

With these reasonable disclamations then, we come to the simple and unprejudiced experience of facts. We see an order in nature, not mechanical, not necessary, but appointed. *Can* that order be changed? Doubtless it can. To assert the impossibility of change, is to go far beyond our province. The power that ordained the succession of events, can modify them. *Has* the order of nature been in any instance interrupted? That is the great question. I am not now to discuss it. I have only to ask, if that question may not be fairly entertained; if it is not open to argument; if witnesses may not be called to testify; and if we are not bound to listen to them without setting up any bar of presumption against their testimony. Certainly, if there is no intrinsic and ascertained impossibility in the events alleged to have taken place, we *are* bound to listen.

But in what spirit shall we listen? With an extreme and almost insurmountable prejudice against miracles? This is the assumption of unbelief. And on what is this assumption founded? "On experience," is the answer. And what now is this boasted experience? Is human experience the measure of divine power? Can a limited experience set bounds to possibility? What is this life's experience, but a childhood amidst the ages of eternity? Suppose that we were hereafter to be placed, for the correction of some mental errors, in a scene of being where *all* should be miracle, *all* change; where every thing should reveal the immediate action of Almighty Power. Where would be experience then? Or, to illustrate

the same point, let us revert to the truly philosophical, the primitive, experience. Suppose that the first man had been created before the heavens were spread forth, or the earth hung in the empty space, and that he had beheld those awful effects of Omnipotence. Would he, at the close of the first day of his existence, find it difficult to believe in miracles? Why then, should the experience of forty years, amidst regular successions of events, make him forget that miracles might again be a part of the course of nature? The experience that 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.

What is the spirit of a real and studious philosophy, in cases which, so far as the facts are considered, are precisely analogous to miracles. An extraordinary, unheard-of, and before unknown fact is presented in nature. Water, for instance, is produced by the intense combustion of two invisible gases. There are many men in the world who would say on the first proposition of such a marvel, that they would not believe it. But does the philosopher say so? Or does he wait, before he will believe, till he can resolve that fact into some order of nature? By no means. The fact has been submitted to the test of experiment, and he is satisfied. And he believes it, let me add, not because it belongs to any *order* of things, but because it has been proved by satisfactory experiments. The King of Siam would not believe, that the liquid and flowing water could become a solid body under his feet. He took the very ground of the skeptic about miracles. He had never seen water frozen; nobody in his country had ever seen it; and he would not believe it. Was that the ground of philosophy, or of prejudice? A man says, that he cannot and will not believe in miracles. And yet every object in the universe around him, had its origin in a miracle. And suppose that it were given us again to witness such displays of power. Suppose that another sun were created and placed in the heavens before our very eyes. Should we not believe the fact till we perceived that it was produced by some preëxisting, world-making machinery of causes? And yet I verily believe that that wonderful creation would not be more extraordinary, than

to the discriminating moral eye is that great Light which burst upon the darkness of the world, eighteen centuries ago!

If, then, the strong and almost insuperable presumption against the doctrine of miracles, which many feel, is not justified by a strict philosophy, let us now proceed a step farther.

I am willing to concede something to this presumption; I wish to give it all the weight that it deserves; but I do not conceive that it possesses the broadest characters of philosophy. It appears to me instinctive rather than rational, hasty rather than deliberate, and narrow rather than comprehensive. And I believe that the rational, deliberate, and comprehensive view of things is more than sufficient fairly to rebut the narrow, the hasty, and the instinctive view.

It is said, that nature and experience are against miracles. That a part of nature and experience is so, I admit; but I desire special attention to the remark that it is only a part. That the whole is so, I deny. Nay, I would invite your still more particular attention to the observation, that the parts of nature and experience which are against miracles are the lowest and humblest. It is the mechanical order of nature which is opposed to miracles, and not its grand, comprehensive meaning and principle. And it is a less cultivated experience, which, — feeling less the need of those truths that revelation discloses, — is less disposed to admit of such a revelation, than the mind in its highest developement.

Let us then, go into the broad field of nature and experience, — into that very field, where skepticism has found its strong-hold, — and see what it teaches us.

The particular course of things in nature is order; the great principle is beneficence, — the adaptation of all things to the happiness of sensitive beings, the supply of all wants, the relief of all sufferings. Nay, order itself has its chief value in its uses; it is designed for the improvement of rational beings; and it has been well argued, on a former occasion in this place, that, “if the great purposes of the universe can best be accomplished by departing from its established laws, those laws will undoubtedly be suspended, and, though broken in the letter, they will be observed in the spirit;” and hence that “miracles, instead of warring against nature, would concur with it.” *

* Channing's Dudleian Lecture.

But let us cast a glance, first, not at human experience, but at the condition of irrational natures. The most striking feature in that condition is the adaptation of means to beneficent ends, — of supplies to wants, of reliefs to unavoidable sufferings. Among all the tribes of animate life, there is not a creature so small, but contains within it a world of wonders; and wonders not of skill only, but of beneficence. The anatomy of a fly, the instinct of a spider, the economy of a hive of bees, the structure of an ant-hill, are each of them subjects which fill many ample pages in the books of philosophy; and fill them constructively with this one theme, — the goodness of the Creator, his gracious regard to the humblest thing that lives. If you rise higher in the scale of the creation, you find everywhere, multiplying and crowding upon you, the proofs of unspeakable goodness. In heaven, on earth, and abroad upon all the pathless seas, are innumerable creatures, possessing frames filled with the most exquisite adaptations of part to part, guided by kindly instincts, supplied with bountiful provisions, arrayed, as Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed, and provided with habitations, more perfect for their purposes, than palaces of cedar or marble.

To illustrate the argument which I design to draw from this appeal to nature, let me make a supposition entirely *at variance* with the facts to which we have now adverted. Suppose, then, that you had found any one tribe of the animal creation unprovided for. Suppose, that it had no appropriate food, or that it had no instinct to guide it to that food, that it knew not where to seek its sustenance, whether in the water, or the air, or the earth. If we had seen any species of beings in this situation, if, for example, every summer should bring into existence a certain kind of bird, for which there was no suitable provision, or no guiding instinct, if we should see them flying about us, as if uncertain, destitute, and suffering, with wild screams testifying their anxiety and distress, apparently ignorant whether the night or the day was appointed for them, now rising into the air, now plunging into the water, and then madly dashing against the earth, — if, I say, we had thus seen them holding a precarious and painful existence for a few weeks, and then miserably perishing; we should feel as if such a phenomenon was most extraordinary and astonishing, — at war with the whole system of nature, and with all the proofs of divine benevolence. We do unhesitatingly pronounce the

facts embraced in such a supposition impossible. If we were to study nature for ever, we should never expect to meet with any thing like this.

Now I apply this to the case of human nature. And I desire you to suspend your judgment of the comparison for one moment till I can fully lay it before you. Consider, in the first place, the dignity of the being, to illustrate whose condition this comparison is brought. Consider all the difference between animal sense, and a being so "infinite in faculties" as man. Suppose, in the next place, that this being, acting according to an unquestionable law of his nature, should improve his faculties to the highest degree conceivable, without the knowledge of a future life. And finally, suppose him, with all the craving wants, the soaring aspirations, and the exquisite, varied, and multiplied sorrows of refined thought and feeling, to stand upon the earth, as it rolled in silence through the mighty void of heaven, — with death all around him, and without one voice from beyond the realms of visible life to assure him, that he should live hereafter, — and then say, whether this would not be a condition more mournful, more disastrous, more at war with the order of divine beneficence, than any catastrophe that ever could befall animal natures.

If any one distrusts this comparison, I must beg leave to doubt whether he fairly comprehends it. The truth is, that all the world has held to revelations in one form or another. By communications direct or traditional, by the voice of augurs or of prophets, by open miracle or inward light, all mankind have deemed themselves to have special guidance from above.

It is an important inference from this fact, that no one can very well estimate the case of supposed utter destitution; and, therefore, that it is extremely difficult for any individual to feel the whole and legitimate force of this argument. Every man has been trained up from childhood by a system of communications; and now, upon the very strength of these communications, or of the convictions they have inevitably inspired, he deems himself able to stand without them. But difficult as the task is made by the unfair position of the objector, I shall offer two or three observations, in close, tending to show the need, and therefore the likelihood, instead of the often alleged improbability, of an extraordinary revelation.

Leaving other communications out of the account, then, we, as Christians, say that about eighteen centuries ago, at a period

at once of unprecedented intellectual developement and equally prevailing skepticism, there appeared an extraordinary teacher from heaven. I am not now to offer any of the arguments for his divine mission, that seem to me so abundant and overwhelming; but I think I am fully entitled by the circumstances to say, that there ought to be no presumption against it. For it is undeniable, that, amidst all the lights of Grecian and Roman civilization, the most important truths, — the unity and paternity of God, and the immortality of man, — were obscured; and it is but a reasonable inference, that without a revelation, they would have been overshadowed with doubt till now. And even the belief that prevailed in the minds of a few philosophers, seems to me singularly to have wanted vitality. There is more reasoning than conviction apparent in their discourses; and certainly their faith had but little influence on their lives. Cicero, we know, and others, amidst all their hopes, had strong doubts. And I maintain, not only from these examples, but from the experience of every powerful mind since, that no reasonings can relieve that great question from painful, from distressing uncertainty.

My argument, then, is from human experience, and from cultivated human experience. It is easy to see, that a rude age might less need the relief which a revelation on this point would give; and for this reason, as I hold, to rude ages it was not given. My argument, then, is from cultivated human experience. And this is the form into which it resolves itself. God is the author of life, and the former of the mind. It is fair to presume, that he, who has provided for the wants of the humblest animal life, would not doom the noblest creature he has made on earth, to overwhelming despondency and misery. Now I say, that, without a revelation, this result is inevitable. I maintain, that no scheme of a virtuous, improving, and happy life can be made out, which leaves the doctrines of God's paternal and forgiving mercy, and of human immortality, in great and serious doubt.

My friends, I bring home the case to myself, and to you. I know what it is to doubt, and I say that no man should judge of the effect of that doubt, till he knows by experience what it is; till, crushed by its weight, he has laid himself down to his nightly rest, too miserable and desperate to care whether he ever raised his head from that pillow of repose and oblivion; till every morning has waked him to sadness and despond-

ency darker than the gloomiest night that ever clouded the path of earthly sorrow. It is not calamity, it is no worldly disappointment, it is not affliction, it is not grief, that I speak of; nor is it any of these that gives the greatest intensity to this doubt; it is a developement of our own nature; it is the soul's own struggling with the mighty powers with which it is made to grapple; it is the longed-for and almost felt immortality, struck from our eager grasp, — the light gone out, — the heaven of our hope all overshadowed and dark. Yes, it is the consciousness of infinite desires and capacities, all blighted and broken down; it is the aspiring which suns and stars cannot bound, all shrunk and buried in a coffin and a grave! In short, it is the proper and legitimate state of a mind following the premises of the case to their just result; and not that worldly condition of the mind, which is no more fit to judge of this subject than childhood is to judge of the interests of an empire. And now I say, Is it hard to believe that God would interpose for humanity, so circumstanced? Is it incredible that he should send a voice into that deep and dark struggle for spiritual life and hope?

I appeal to *you*, my brethren. I appeal to the youth who are before me. It is thought that this age is witnessing an unusual developement of infidel principles. One whole nation, indeed, has fallen a victim to them. And what is new and striking, it is said has a kind of fascination for youth. But I hold that this is an age, too, which is witnessing an extraordinary developement of sensibility in the young. This arises from an earlier, I had almost said, a premature education; from an exciting literature; and from the character of enterprise and expectation which now invests all the interests and prospects of society. But I ask, Is this an age, when you can safely break the great bond of faith and hope? If you were a dull and sluggish youth, or a youth amidst rude and barbarous times, it might not yield me the argument which I now seek. But I know that in this age, ay, and in this assembly, there is many a youthful heart, whose daily experience is the strongest possible proof of the need, and therefore of the likelihood, of a divinely sanctioned religion. Ay, I know, and many a sorrowing parent in this land knows, that the period of youth cannot be safely passed without it. Those thronging passions, those swaying sympathies of social life, the deeper musings of solitary hours, the imaginations, the affections, the thoughts,

unuttered and unutterable, — all the sweeping currents that bear the youthful heart it scarcely knows whither, — all show that it cannot be thrown without infinite peril, to drift upon a sea of doubt.

Humanity, in fine, and especially in its growing cultivation, has too hard a lot, it appears to me, if God has not opened for it the fountains of revelation. Without that great disclosure from above, human nature stands, in my contemplation of it, as an anomaly amidst the whole creation. The noblest existence on earth is not provided with a resource even so poor as instinct. On the heart that is made to bear the weight of infinite interests, sinks the crushing burthen of doubt and despondency, of fear and sorrow, of pain and death, without resource or relief, or comfort, or hope. The cry of the young ravens, the buzzing of insect life in every hedge, is heard; but the call, that comes up from the deep and dark conflict of the overshadowed soul, dies upon the vacant air; and there is no ear to hear, nor eye to pity. Oh! were it so, what could sustain the human heart sinking under the burthen of its noblest aspirations? “The still, sad music of humanity,” sounding on through all time, would lose every soothing tone, and would become a wail, in which the heart of the world would die!

And why must any man think that the world is left to that darkness and misery? Because he cannot believe, that a communication has been made from heaven in the only conceivable way in which it *can* be made and *proved*; by miracles. For I affirm, that, if that great preliminary difficulty were over, all difficulties would vanish before the stupendous proofs of a revelation. He that thinks, then, that the world is left to nature’s darkness, thinks thus, I repeat, because he cannot believe in miracles; because he cannot admit that the order of nature which is itself not an end, but a means to an end, may be interrupted for the greatest of all ends; — because he will not admit, that the infinite Power is superior to the laws itself has made; because he will not allow, in his philosophy, that liberty to the Infinite Parent, in changing and adapting his provisions to the wants of his children, that he allows to every earthly parent. Is this the childlike and trustful, the deep-searching and discerning, the expansive and unprejudiced spirit of true philosophy, or is it the shallow and skeptical spirit of bondage to the mere outward forms and

processes of things, regardless of their higher meanings and ends?

Here for the present I leave the subject. I have not undertaken in this discourse to prove the truth of Christianity; but, if I have succeeded in removing the great obstacle, — in opening the door to the argument, the conclusion, I think, will easily follow. I have not undertaken to prove that there have been miracles; but I do hold myself entitled to say, as the close and inference of this discourse, that I should wonder if there had not been miracles. The philosophical presumption is for, rather than against them. Nature is for, more than it is against them, — its mechanical order only being against them, while its whole spirit is in their favor. Man's necessity, God's mercy, is for them; and against them is — what? What is against all legitimate wisdom and conviction? Why, only a doubt, — which is mostly vague and irresponsible, — which, because it is a doubt, holds itself scarcely bound to give a reason, — and which, though it is a doubt, sits immovable, as if it held the very seat of knowledge, and throne of reason. To allow it to sit there undisturbed, is to yield more deference to a shadow, than to the very substance of reason and truth.

