

MIRACLES AND THE LAWS OF NATURE.



IT is often said that earth and sky are the best of books, and that it is given to all to read this wonderful book. Its pages are ever open, no matter where we turn our eyes or direct our footsteps. We are fond of admiring nature and the effects of certain causes in the world, and we want to know the reason why things are so. Among other discoveries, made from time to time though rarely, none are more fitted to arouse curiosity than certain wondrous effects popularly known as miracles. Nature is seen to associate with a loftier power; a higher world lends some beats of its life and vigor, and miracles are the result.

Philosophers and those who profess a claim to extensive knowledge, find the miracle a favorite theme. As usually happens, they separate in endless discussions. The other classes of society, including the uncultivated, are not subject to this inconvenience. They form their notions of miraculous events with the greatest ease and correctness. To fancy indeed that miracles do not lie within the grasp of the most ordinary mind, is a great mistake. Vivid impressions pave the way for rapid thought, and if sufficient common sense is present it does the rest. Notions formed in these cases may lack art and polish, but they preserve the charm of freshness and originality. Slow and overstrained reflection tends more to obscure than to enhance any natural splendor.

Besides, the same conception is not lost under different forms. An unskilled laborer wishes to bargain for a watch. The watchmaker is not slow to produce the article, showing that he had the idea of the same thing as his customer in his head. Yet what a difference is noticeable. In the laborer's eyes, the watch is small, round, flat object, supplied internally with a curious mechanism, and externally completed by a dial and hands to mark the time. The watchmaker has the same idea

and a vast deal more. He further knows what is required for the composition of the time-piece, is acquainted with the secret of its parts and workings. In the first instance, there is a clear notion. It answers common purposes, anybody can understand it. In the second, the notion is said to be distinct, not only putting forward the whole object clearly, but even marking out its inner details. The first embodies the popular mode of knowing things, the second belongs to the more confined limits of art and science.

To realize that miracles are not made solely for the learned, it suffices to follow the uneducated in the appreciation they form of these strange occurrences. Suppose them guided by the usual common sense and place them in presence of a miraculous event. Nothing can describe their intense astonishment and admiration. They feel at once that they gaze on something more than earthly, something extraordinary, nay extraordinarily great. As if to realize better, the magnitude of what seems a divine manifestation, the beholders turn their eyes toward heaven. God seems present, a hush of awe prevails. Each one is ready to exclaim "God is here," see His power." Undoubtedly mistakes can and do occur when the impressions are not well founded. Facts appear more extraordinary than they really are. As far, however, as it concerns the beholders, they would think the same whether what they believed to be extraordinary were really so or not. For them a miracle is but one thing, namely an extraordinary work manifesting the divinity.

Scripture, reproducing word for word the language of its times, alludes to miracles as signs, that is marks and authentic testimonies of God. Thus, the man born blind, cross-questioned about his cure, bursts out with "can a sinner do these signs (signa)." The princes of the synagogue commenting on the miracles of the Savior, remark that "this man does many signs" and the Evangelist himself makes use of the same term "And many other signs also did Jesus." The whole question in these instances referred to