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"LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND TO GOOD WORKS."—HEBREWS x. 24.

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DIVINITY.

THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST.

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WHAT IS A MIRACLE?

It is not every extraordinary event which occurs in nature, although figuratively and popularly so denominated. There may be extraordinary floods, droughts, earthquakes, atmospherical appearances, meteors, changes in the animal economy, and unlooked-for coincidences of events; and yet all may be resolved into the laws of the natural world, operating under peculiar circumstances, and none of them may necessarily suppose any special or immediate interposition of Deity, at least in order to authenticate any revelation of his will. Hence, not every portent which a people uninstructed in natural philosophy might be disposed to call miraculous, is to be clothed with that character; nor every occasional remarkable effect, which the wisest of men shall not be able to resolve into some known natural law, as the force of imagination in curing certain kinds of diseases and infirmities. The effect may be shown from various circumstances to be natural only, although the law under which it is produced is yet unknown, and may, in all future time, elude the keenest investigation, and the most splendid course of philosophical discovery. But a miracle is an effect produced by the immediate interposition of God, contrary to, or above the ordinary laws of nature, and that for the confirmation of some doctrine or message as from himself, and having his sanction, though it should be delivered to us by the ministry of men like ourselves.

In the miracles of Christ there are,

1. MIRACLES which were made SUBORDINATE TO AN EXPLICIT DECLARATION OF HIS DIVINITY.

The divine character of our Lord was indeed indicated by the very manner in which he performed his "mighty works." He wrought them not in the name of another, but in his own name; nor does he ever adopt the style of a servant. His attitude, his language, are always authoritative, never ministerial. "Isay unto thee, Arise." "I command thee to depart out of him." "He rebuked the fever, and it left her." This very manner distinguishes him from the prophets of the old and the apostles of the new dispensation. But we also see several of the miracles themselves employed as occasions to assert the loftiest claims of divinity. Thus, in the case of a paralytic, Christ associates a miracle of healing with his authority as God to forgive sins. When the man was first brought, he does not heal him, but declares his sins forgiven. And when this startles the Pharisees, he performs the miracle in support of a prerogative which, as none can forgive sins but God, unveils at once his real character: "Whether is easier to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house." Again: when, by a miraculous influence exerted upon them, he drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, he not only, by a super-human majesty of aspect, terrified the crowd of guilty profaners, but claimed as his own that temple in which he often appeared as a common worshipper: "My house shall be called a house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." And when he cast out devils, they are sometimes constrained to confess him as the Son of God before all the people; and when they ask, on one

occasion, "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" they tremblingly acknowledge him to be the supreme and universal Judge, vested with the high and divine prerogative of awarding the rewards and punishments of a future life.

The same great truth shines forth, also, in a second class, which we may call,

2. MIRACLES OF IMPRESSIVE MAJESTY.

This, indeed, is a deeply-interesting class of those "signs which Jesus did." He was to appear among men with great humility, and to sojourn with them in the utmost lowliness of condition. He was to be "despised and rejected of men;" to submit to every indignity with patient resignation; and, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb," so was he not "to open his mouth." He was thus to live, and thus to die; and yet, even in these his days of humiliation, he was to gather a people to himself, who were to receive him as "the Son of God, the King of Israel," and so to believe in him as to commit their eternal all into his hands. Such a task had been too difficult for the strongest faith, much more for the hesitating and flitting belief of his disciples, had there not been among his works not merely the common miracles which authenticated the prophetic mission, but "signs" which should manifest his superior character and personal glory. The cloud which enveloped him during his humbled state on earth was dark; but it was the cloud of the Shekinah; it was the Lord who "dwelt in the thick darkness;" and the shrouded Divinity occasionally beamed forth. Long continued was his humiliation; and these bursts of a superior nature, though transient, gave new impulses to a failing faith, or at least held unbelief in suspense until the final demonstration was given, that "he who emptied himself," and "made himself of no reputation," was "in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God."

Under his benediction bread multiplies, and thousands are fed in a wilderness; he walks upon the sea, and the yielding element sinks not beneath his footsteps; amidst the uproar of a storm, he utters his simple command, "Peace, be still," and the winds hear and die away:—"The waters saw thee, O God, and the waters saw thee, and were afraid." At the mouth of the sepulchre he cries, "Lazarus, come forth!" and the dead, aroused by his voice, and loosed from his grave-clothes, falls at the feet of Him who is "the Resurrection and the life;" and the whole series of these acts of majesty is crowned by the miracle of his own resurrection in the moment when the last spark of faith in the hearts of his followers quivered on the point of extinction. Then He, the Conqueror of death in his own dominion, appears in the midst of them, and says, "Peace be unto you." Ah! who that considers such "signs" as these, such manifestations of a divine Majesty, but, with Thomas, must fall at his feet, and exclaim, "My Lord and my God!"

3. MIRACLES OF TENDERNESS.

The works of our Lord were uniformly benevolent; and his fame, as uniting equal benignity and power, spread so wide, and inspired such confidence, that wondering multitudes brought the sick, the lame, the possessed, and the blind, out of whole regions of country, "and he healed them all." But some of these works were characterized by, or accompanied with circumstances of peculiar tenderness, and are recorded with the manifest design to encourage, in all future times, an unlimited confidence in his compassion and condescension.

The people, attracted by his teaching, follow him into the wilderness. As they had continued with him three days, and had consumed their pro-

visions, he would not send them home hungry, "lest they should faint by the way;" and he multiplies the bread by miracle, and feeds them all. "He went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and disease among the people;" and as he was thus showing his compassion to their bodies, by diffusing health and life wherever he came, the sight of so great a multitude, a whole people without faithful and instructed ministers, causes a deeper flow of commiserating tenderness for their religious destitution and dangers: "and when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send labourers into his harvest."

But to the griefs and sorrows produced in families by sickness and death, our Lord was particularly and affectingly sensible; and to relieve those cases where human nature is pierced most deeply through its most amiable sensibilities, he was specially prompt. A nobleman brings the case of his sick son, and the anxious feeling of the parent is met by the instant declaration, "Go thy way, thy son liveth." Another still more agonized father comes "kneeling to him, saying, Lord have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and sore vexed." The attitude of the suppliant, and his amplification of the miseries of the child, show the intensity of the father's feelings. Nay, more, he had been painfully disappointed; he had brought his child to the disciples, and they could not cure him for want of faith. But shall he depart from the Master unhelped? No. "Bring him to me," said Jesus; and he rebuked the evil spirit, and the child was restored from that hour. In going into the city of Nain, Jesus and his disciples meet a funeral; and the evangelist seems to have recorded certain affecting circumstances on purpose to show us how they wrought upon the sympathetic mind of our Lord. The deceased was a son, the only son of his mother, and that mother was a widow. The bereaved mother herself was following weeping, and many people of the city with her. Such a scene our Lord could not pass by; and when he saw her, "he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not;" and having stopped the bier, he raised the youth to life, and with his own hand "he delivered him to his mother." The story of the raising of Lazarus is equally familiar to you, and I need not dwell upon it. Jesus "groaned in spirit," "Jesus wept;" and the majesty of his triumph over death was equalled by the triumph of his compassion. He healed the breach made by death in a family of disciples, and wiped away then, as he will at last, all tears from the eyes of those who love him. They are loved by him.

Why all these instances, and many others, so affecting a tenderness and so deep a sympathy with human woe? Why, but as proofs of that great fact so strongly expressed by St. Paul, and which the splendour of the accompanying miracles was designed to render the more impressive, that he is a High Priest who can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and who, having been tempted in all points like ourselves, knows how to succour them that are tempted?

4. Another class of miracles was obviously PRACTIC, or designed to impress upon our minds some important point of doctrine.

When our Lord wrought a miracle to obtain a sum sufficient to pay the tribute-money demanded of him and Peter, he intended to teach his disciples subjection to the fiscal laws, of the power of