

MIRACLES.

A SERMON

BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

"Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." ACTS II. 22-24.

THESE words come from what is well-nigh the earliest specimen of apostolic preaching. Saint Peter, the then leading apostle, stands forth to preach Christ to the multitude which had come together, attracted by the report of what had happened on the first Whit-Sunday. If you look at the passage you will see he refers first to prophecy as having foretold the outpouring of the Spirit (v. 16). "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Joel ii. 23, 32). He forthwith passes to the acknowledged evidence of the miracles which Christ had wrought while he lived amongst them—"Approved among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know." Then, in v. 24, he turns to the crowning miracle of the Resurrection—"Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it." And then he returns to the prophecy, urging that everywhere in incidental and scarcely-to-be-guessed allusions, as well as in plain predictions, the great victory of Christ over death was foreshadowed by the prophets. And with this evidence of the Divine power of Jesus he joins the searching statement of their sin in rejecting and murdering Him whom their consciences could not now deny that God had thus shown to be their promised deliverer. Thus St. Peter preached with power (v. 37)—"When they heard this they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Thus he preached: thus all the apostles preached. Thus Christ has been preached in every age, manifested to be the Son of God with power, the worker of great miracles, as well as the teacher of heavenly doctrines, the desire of all nations through many centuries, given at last to the longing hearts of the faithful, not that He might live and teach amongst them for a year or two and then perish by death, but that His death might be the preparer of His most glorious miracle, which showed Him powerful to rescue man from death's dominion. Such it was to all the apostles, as every book of the New Testament witnesseth, telling how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him (Acts x. 37, 38). Such was the Gospel first spoken by the Lord Himself, and then handed down to a later age by those that heard him. "God also bearing witness with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost," (Hebrews ii. 4) Such is Christianity, unchanging in its essence. Such was Christianity to St. Peter, a system attested by miracles—*itself a miracle*—speaking of the life of a Redeemer whose whole work of redemption had its roots in miracle, and was miraculous.

Now the exigency of ever-fluctuating opinion seems to make it right that we should once more in this day reconsider the very old subject of miracles, though we can have little to advance respecting it but very old arguments.

But, first, is it a difficulty that the religion God has given us is thus miraculous? Do we crave rather for what looks more like a human system, more accordant with the ordinary experience of what we see and hear around us—attested rather by such common internal arguments of reasoning for the self-evident or easily-proved truth of its doctrines, as a system of philosophy would usually assent to? We shall not, indeed, find any lack of such proofs of the religion of Christ, when we look for them—truer and higher views of the nature of God and of man's soul than the world had before guessed at, a purer morality based on holier motives—all these approving themselves to the conscience through the reason, the understanding, and the feelings, proclaim the system in which they meet to be indeed God's truth.

So that if there be any man whose mind is thus formed that he is better able to approach the proof of Christianity through this avenue, let us never think of closing the gate against him; let us bid him welcome. If the miracles are at first a stumbling-block to any one, let us invite him to come to us in his own way. We feel a rooted conviction that how-

ever he embraces Christ's system—if he does in truth embrace it—he must at last see and acknowledge that it is full of miracle. But let him come in his own way. Only for ourselves we will maintain at the outset, and for the great mass of men, and in fairness even to him whom as yet the miracles thus unwarrantably displease, that men neither do nor ought to crave for a system which is not miraculous.

That, speaking generally, they do *not* crave for it, will I suppose be granted. Witness, may I not say, *all* the systems of religion which man has ever known. As they all, I suppose, speak of the world unseen, and its unseen inhabitants, are they not all full of things alleged to have happened beyond the limits of experience, and do they not all teem with their traditions of the miraculous? This is, of course, granted. What the objector urges is, not that man in his ordinary ignorant state of feeling and of knowledge desires a non-miraculous system, but that he does so more and more the wiser he grows and the more he outlives, as they say, the fancies of the world's childhood.

Now this is exactly what we deny. We maintain, on the contrary, that to man, as man, in whatever stage of his progress, if he have still a man's feelings and a man's wants, and if there lies before him a man's destiny, every religion which is worthy of the name, if it is to perform for him the part of a religion, must speak to him of things beyond the range of common experience, wonderful, supernatural, miraculous, and he will not be, and he ought not to be, satisfied with anything less.

We are here, my friends, not, I suppose, more ignorant and superstitious than other men who dwell around us. When in our more sober and solemn moments, looking back each on a life stained with many sins—and onward to unknown, it may be overwhelming, trials—nay, when we endeavour adequately to realise even the present—our relations in our present duties to the human souls around us and to God in heaven; what is the sort of aid we expect to gain from our religion? We do not ask of it to show us how to prosper in the world. Domestic and political economy, rules of good government, plans for the social and intellectual amelioration of the condition of our race, all these may be set at work by our religion through appeals of Christian motives to the will, but they are not in themselves religion, any more than physical or mathematical science is. Nay, the best men, who are the most energetic in such matters, do they not most feel the need of something which pierces down deeper and rises up higher than any human science can, something which shall speak to them of truths beyond the range of man's common knowledge? Do they not long for some stream of light pouring down upon their common life and their common knowledge straight from the throne of God? Do not their hearts yearn for a stability amid life's changes, such as they only know who feel that they rest on God? What good man and what wise man in the midst of the distractions of life does not long for communion with something beyond this life and above it, and does not welcome messages which come to him from the land unseen? I appeal not only to thee, thou busy worldly trader, whose judgments as to fine limits between right and wrong are being warped by the intense pressure of thy business, and thine eagerness to grow rich. What is needful for thee to save thy heart from being all in thy shop, to prevent all finer feelings from withering and dying within thee? God has indeed given thee family affections, which, rightly used, might soften thee, but thou art growing dead and selfish, and thy very family is becoming dear to thee only as a sort of reproduction of thyself. Thou art fast coming to this, that thou canst not realise a world of which thou art not thyself the centre. Thou wilt say thou art a careful church or chapel-goer. Yes, but still I doubt whether many thoughts of God are with thee even in His house. What thou needest is to be roused by Christ's voice, as Matthew was, sitting at the receipt of custom; Christ's voice, a voice from the unseen land, to speak to thee of other things than those which are continually around thee—to tell thee to stand up from the midst of the dust and hurry of thine incessant occupations, and strain thine eye for a far look-out. It would be well for thee if thou couldst pierce through the mist and cloud of thy dingy dwelling-place and gaze upward to the bright throne of God. Didst thou not lose a dear child long ago in the fresh days of thy early wedded life, and as thou didst lay it in its little grave didst thou not shed tears then from those eyes now for so long a time unused to any sign of softness? How long is it now since thou hast visited that grave, or even thought of it? Where is thy child? Hast thou no desire