

Thirty or forty years ago there appeared in Tyrol, near Trent, two girls, one of whom had the *stigmata*, the other the gift of ecstasy. They were the subject of a sharp controversy at the time, and Lord Shrewsbury, the leading Catholic layman in England, published a pamphlet to prove the authenticity of the miracles. We happened ourselves to hear a person, then a member of the Church of England, and one who in any ordinary case would have been a most credible witness, declare that he, in company with other persons equally credible, had seen the stigmatization with his own eyes. Nevertheless we believe we are justified in saying, that the supposed miracles were ultimately proved to the satisfaction of all to have been impostures, or rather mixtures of imposture with morbid self-delusion. It was reported that the Archbishop of Trent, a religious man, but also a man of sense, after long declining, had at last been reluctantly induced to visit the *Estatica* and the *Addolorata*, and that he had come away saying to the monks — "Gentlemen, religion is not disease, neither is disease religion."

These miracles are, so to speak, the trail of the Middle Ages. With the Middle Ages the great body of miracles passed away; but instances still occasionally occur in places where the medieval spirit lingers, and in times like the present, when that spirit is excited and alarmed by some particularly formidable inroad of the modern spirit, its mortal antagonist. At the commencement of the Reformation in England, when the monasteries were menaced by Henry VIII., the cell of Elizabeth Barton, the nun of Kent, became the scene of miraculous trances and clairvoyances in the interest of the threatened orders and religion. The interference of Russia and Prussia in favour of the Protestant Dissidents against dominant and persecuting Catholicism in Poland in like manner evoked Catholic miracles, among them a weeping image of the Virgin. The miracle of St. Januarius, of which

an account was given in a former number of this Magazine, has remained in existence from another cause: it is periodical, and being annually demanded by the populace of Naples, it is unable to escape into the womb of its mother Night. We venture to assume that it is an illusion, though Dr. Newman solemnly professes his belief in it, as well as in the Holy Coat of Treves.

The analysis of medieval miracles is a curious psychological study, and one not without practical importance in its bearing on some of the burning questions of the present day. It has perhaps been most systematically handled by M. Maury,\* on whose stores we will take the liberty of freely drawing, as M. Maury has done to some extent on those of Henke and other German predecessors, though without adopting all his solutions or agreeing with all the conclusions which he is inclined to draw.

It is in the legendary lives of the saints that the records of medieval miracles are principally found; and a careful study of those lives reveals three laws of the medieval imagination, by the action of which the miraculous element of the legends has been mainly generated. The three laws are: a tendency to assimilate the life of the saint actually to that of Christ; a tendency to confuse the literal with the figurative sense of language, the metaphorical being taken as real; and a tendency to forget the meaning of symbols and to supply its place with fabulous explanations. By illustrating, under the guidance of M. Maury, the operation of these laws, we shall perhaps somewhat diminish the reputed sum of human fraud, and if we add proportionally to the sum of human credulity, an age which believes that the spirit world holds converse with the denizens of earth through the legs of tables, may be charitable to the fancies of an elder and less educated time.

The sum of Christianity is the moral and spiritual imitation of Christ. But the monas-

\* Essai sur les Legendes Pieuses du Moyen Age.