

of all the gains which the war will bring the greatest is to be a better knowledge of God—a greater regard for His greatness, a finer appreciation of His gentleness.

But the most manifest sign that the creation is not complete is man himself. What physical powers man may develop we can barely guess. In strength as in stature he has already increased even within the record of written history. In length of days he has increased almost within the experience of a single generation. But Dr. Newman SMYTH is more concerned with the spiritual than the physical. He believes that man will become more spiritually receptive. This is true, he says, 'of the individual; his mind may gain more capacity of spiritual discernment; as his heart becomes more pure he may more clearly see God. To believe as immortals we must live as immortals. What is thus true of the increase of the individual's know-

ledge of God holds good likewise of the social growth in spiritual wisdom. There may be new social knowledge of God; there *will* be, as Christianity purifies and enlarges the social consciousness. Through such higher Christian development humanity shall gain happier sense of divinity and ampler understanding of the breadth and the height of the love of God for the world.'

Last of all there will be a new approach to God through the raising up again of the Prophet. This has always been God's way of working. He works still, as He has ever worked, by election. Dr. Newman SMYTH firmly believes that when the Son came and ended the old order of the prophets, He came with no purpose of changing the method of God's revelation to the world. The time is coming when the prophet, chosen of God from among men for no merit of his or of the society to which he belongs, will be looked for and made welcome.

## The Attitude of the Historical Student towards Miraculous Records.

BY THE REV. R. L. MARSHALL, M.A., LL.D., MAGHERA, CO. DERRY.

HISTORICAL facts are, generally speaking, facts established by the use of documents. In some way or other their occurrence was recorded, and the record either in its original shape or in some derivative form has survived. Now all results depending on such documents are inevitably open to considerable criticism. For apart altogether from the possibility of fraud or delusion they are often few in number. And yet, the individual differences in our faculties and senses entail the consequence that none of us sees the same thing or perceives it exactly as another observer. Consequently it is only from many accounts that one can confidently reconstruct reality. Then again, the events happen only once. They are so complex, so interwoven with antecedent and concurrent circumstances, that one observer sees only a tiny piece of the whole. And the results and consequences left behind them are often difficult of disentanglement, and frequently very obscure.

Because of these considerations, all historical facts can only be established as probable. And this probability of their having occurred as recorded, ranges from little more than bare possibility to approximate certainty.

Now in the case of the physical sciences 'we can eliminate and control human differences by repeated experiment, by observing the same process or object, time and again, and through the eyes of different observers.' And thus we may attain more often to what is warrantably assumed to be certain knowledge. Compared with this, historical investigation, with probability the ultimate goal of its closest research, is often compelled to speak less confidently.

What, then, is to be our position when some of these historically established facts appear to clash with certain results claimed to be established by the methods of physical science? For this is the form which the question usually takes. Langlois

and Seignobos, in their excellent *Introduction aux études historiques*, put the problem thus: 'It happens sometimes that a fact obtained as an historical conclusion is in contradiction with . . . a scientific law established by the regular method of an established science: the fact is contrary to the results of science: there is disagreement between the direct observations of men of science and the indirect testimony of the documents.' And impressed by the essential 'probability' of historical facts, as distinguished from the comparative certainty of many results of physical science; impressed too by the impossibility of checking historical deductions, or re-creating by experiment long past conditions, these eminent teachers decide the conflict by excluding from the purview of historical science the entire class of occurrences ordinarily labelled 'miraculous.' And 'miraculous occurrences' for them are 'those which seem improbable to a scientific mind.'

Their conclusion is one that commends itself to the vast majority of modern students of historical method, trained as most are in the schools of Germany and France. But the question is not so easily disposed of; because the number of recorded events commonly grouped under the heading 'miraculous,' whose happening would inevitably involve a direct breach of well-established law, such as is contemplated above, is on close examination very small. Accordingly the principle laid down by Langlois and Seignobos does not furnish a sufficient reason for universal exclusion. And furthermore, it is at least debatable whether any science can possibly have the right of veto over the entire class of occurrences with which we are concerned. For it must always be remembered in this connexion, that a vast amount of knowledge is required in order to enable one to declare what is or is not possible in spheres as yet imperfectly investigated. Yet with regard to whole classes of facts, Sir Oliver Lodge has justly remarked that 'science has been too often the friend of systematic negation.'

After all, rendering unto the Cæsar of physical science all the reverence that is his undoubted due, what general authority is invested in him which warrants him in categorically dictating the facts to be admitted or rejected by the historical student? For in reality, the paths of these two investigators lie very far apart, and the right of trespass is strictly limited in the case of each. The unit of the

physicist is the Electron; the unit of the historical student is Man. And while the properties of the electron may be to some extent well established, the properties of man are still very largely shrouded in mystery. To lay down dogmatically then, what is or is not possible in his case, is in many instances to go beyond the legitimate sphere of physical science. For there is at present no sure prophet in the realm of human action, nor can we yet enthrone an infallible pope amongst the students of psychology or sociology. In short, scientists as a class have not devoted themselves to the study of the immaterial, and outside the purely physical sphere are as a result not unerring judges. Consequently they have often too readily laid down false limits to the possible, and they have flatly excluded from its realm certain occurrences, merely because of the absence from their personal experience of any analogous phenomena. Indeed, the remark of the late Professor W. James has a very considerable foundation in the history of science, that very often 'facts are denied until a welcome interpretation is offered, then they are admitted readily enough.'

Now the plea put forward here on behalf of the historical student is that the absence of a welcome interpretation is not a sufficient basis for the exclusion from history of a fact established by historical methods. A mistaken idea that it is, has been responsible for the wholesale mutilation of historical documents.

A concrete example may be cited. Hosts of witnesses in the Middle Ages saw the stigmata on the body of a monk. The chronicler, convinced of the existence of the marks, recorded the fact. But in comparatively modern times reputable scientists denied its possibility, partly because they had not seen it, partly because it was 'improbable to a scientific mind.' And historians, disregarding the very criteria by which they claimed to establish all other facts, excised the account of the chronicler. Then in still more recent times, cases of stigmata were scientifically observed. The phenomenon is admitted. And the old-time chronicler is rehabilitated with the garment of veracity. Now how, in the case of a fact which is determined purely and simply by vision and touch, is the well-established evidence of the eyes of common witnesses less reliable than the opinion of Herr Doctor Wissenschaft? Granted that the trained mind is required for explanation, for valid deduction from observed

facts; nevertheless the eye of a country-bred Hodge is, for purposes of observing open evident occurrences, not necessarily less sharp than that of a laboratory-bred chemist, and in its own sphere his evidence ought to be equally admissible.

Again, the authenticity of certain recorded phenomena observed in the case of the nuns of Loudun was until comparatively recent times denied by scientists, because it was recorded under the head of 'possession.' But analogous phenomena were observed again, and scientifically; so the facts are now admitted, and the phenomena placed under the heading 'nervous anæsthesia.' The explanation, or rather descriptive label, is changed, but the phenomena were always similar. Now the sole duty of the historical student as such is with what occurred. Explanations are not legitimately in his sphere. Why, then, did historians follow the scientific lead and deny the phenomena place, simply because the facts in question were delivered with a label which was alleged to be inaccurate? But if we examine carefully this whole question of miracle we shall discover that, with monotonous regularity a so-called miraculous event is excluded from an historical narrative, either because the simple *non potest* of a scientist is preferred to the evidence of eyes and ears, or because of the absence of a suitable scientific heading under which the event in question may be indexed. Yet neither ground is sufficient. For the duty of the historical student in all cases is to deal, not with labels or with laws, but with testimony.

Further illustrations are not far to seek. In the Gospel narrative the demoniac was mad. That was evident to the eyes and ears of the people. The demoniac was restored to sanity. That too was evident to eyes and ears. And the observation of ordinary people gifted with normal eyes and ears is of as much value as the opinion of the scientist, in a case like this where no scientific mental training is involved. The real reason for his madness and the permanency of the cure are entirely different questions, and are not within the strict sphere of the historian. Again, Lazarus was dead, to all human appearances: Lazarus became alive again. In so far as the record simply states these facts, its right to do so should be questioned only on purely evidential grounds. The waves ran high on the lake of Galilee: the sea became hushed. Now, why not simply accept

these facts on evidence which is deemed sufficient to establish any other class of facts? And then, having recorded them, the task of the historian as such is over and done. Let others explain them as they will. It can be maintained that Lazarus lay in a cataleptic trance, though the historical evidence available in support may be small. And it may be asserted that coincident with Christ's words of command to the tempest, the boat rounded a jutting headland which broke all the fury of the winds, so that it rocked at rest in a sheltered bay. All this is perfectly legitimate, either as imaginative exercise or speculative effort. And though criticism or appraisal of such theories may be based on the fact that they satisfy, exclude, or deny certain historical facts inherent in the narrative, yet such criticism does not properly lie within the province of the historian's primary work. That work is concerned not with explanations, but with events.

For the historical student then, the conclusion arrived at is that the absence of an explanation satisfactory to any scientist is not sufficient ground for absolute negation with regard to a recorded fact. It is not maintained for a moment that credulity should be substituted for criticism, but it is maintained that all facts carefully established by ordinary historical criteria have the right to remain in an historical document; and that, having after due examination recorded these events, the task of the historian ends.

And because these principles seem to be applicable to the case of all historical documents which are regarded on the whole as trustworthy, one cannot but feel that by rigidly excluding from history on *a priori* grounds all post-apostolic miracles Christian apologists have greatly erred. For in so doing they have created an absolute breach between the canons of historical criticism applicable to the New Testament and those applied to all subsequent and preceding historical documents. The whole trend of modern research, by sheer force of logic and common sense, is in the direction of vigorously applying to all documents that claim to be historical precisely similar canons of criticism. Nor can we as students complain. Neither as Christians have we need to fear the results.

Accordingly, then, the real problem in many cases of recorded miraculous events is no longer, Did they happen? But, admitting (as it must be admitted) that an observer of proven competency

and reliability in other spheres believed firmly that they did happen, and failing to find any essential flaw in the evidence produced in support of their happening, is it necessary to postulate for them a cause differing in kind from those known causes already at work in the world? And in the careful examination of all analogous incidents, in the very restricted field of experiment, and in various other ways, an answer to this question must be sought.

Now it is quite possible that as the field of knowledge widens, miracles may be explained without reference to any cataclysmic irruption of forces beyond those manifested by God in His stable methods of ordering and governing all that is. Or it may be that in the case of some of Christ's own miraculous doings, His unique spiritual and

moral Personality was an essential cause, and that these doings will consequently remain for ever in a class by themselves. But, however this may be, one feels most strongly in connexion with the whole subject, that it is along the lines of explanation rather than along the lines of wholesale excision that advance is most probable.

Apply, then, to all documents the strict canons of pure historical criticism. Establish the probability of all facts by precisely similar criteria. And then let physical science or any other branch of knowledge deal with these facts by way of explanation. We shall be often mistaken, sometimes deceived. But it is better to gain one item of positive knowledge than to entirely shut out the possibility of doing so by categorical exclusion on wholly insufficient grounds.

## The Church after the War.

BY THE REV. JOHN DOUGLAS, M.A., C.F.

To one who has returned from considerable periods of service among the troops in France, first as a worker in the Y.M.C.A. and subsequently as a chaplain, and returned in such a way as to give much leisure, in hospital and during convalescence, for reading and some thought, it has been of special interest to notice the discussion of the question, What is the Church to do, to meet worthily the men who come back from the war?

That such a question should be widely canvassed throughout the Church is in itself some sign of the needed awakening, and is good if, as seems the case, it betokens a sense of penitence and a desire for reform, a sense of the new time demanding readjustments in the Church's life and work.

It is felt, too, and not unnaturally, that from what is termed 'religion at the front' guidance is to be looked for by the leaders of the Churches who are to meet and win, if they may, the returning armies. It is not the purpose of the present writer to describe or analyze the religious situation among our men overseas, but to gather together one or two suggestions for that guidance of the Churches which they need, and which seem to arise from his experience as a minister of the Church and the gospel among those men.

In religious journals and elsewhere this problem of the Church after the War has presented itself often as a question of what the men who come back will want of the Church, to satisfy their requirements of what the Church, if they are to serve her, should be. And it is right that this side of the matter should not be left unconsidered. That great capacity for splendid loyalty, devoted service, moving self-sacrifice, and glorious comradeship, displayed by our men, the Church longs, and is in her place in the nation, to win. What, then, is the Church to be and to do which will attract to herself those men and all that loyalty, sacrifice, fellowship, service? Obviously we must not turn a deaf ear to the criticism and the demand which they may express.

But this is not by any means the main aspect of the problem, which lies rather in the question, What is it that the men, and all men, need of the Church in what we call the new time? not merely, What is it they want or ask for? For they may well ask sometimes, and others are asking on their behalf, for things which it is no part of the Church's essential business to provide.

Where and whence, then, is the needed movement of change to come? In what directions must it issue, to effect the ends desired?