

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

SPECIAL PROVIDENCE. THE AGE OF MIRACLES.

BY S. T. RAND.

"And He that sat upon the throne said. Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write; for these words are true and faithful." Rev. xxi: 6.

In this paper I wish to say a few words about miracles. All believers in the plenary inspiration of the Bible, believe in miracles. Different Divines may explain those phenomena by different terms. But all are agreed that a miracle is something out of the usual course of events, and that they are very proper and suitable attestations of divine authority in those who work them. Thus says the apostle Paul: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." This was in exact accordance with the promise and prediction of our blessed Lord before he ascended to the Father, "to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God." "And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: They shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." All this was done. These signs and wonders the apostles wrought, and so did others in numberless instances. And it is pretty generally believed and acknowledged that so long as primitive faith, and primitive devotion, and primitive holiness, lasted, these wonders continued to be to some extent at least performed. The cessation of the age of miracles, and the cessation of the age of great faith, were co-incident—always in time—always in place.

This was nothing new, nothing strange. How long was the age of miracles? Can any one answer this question? When did it commence? In what year of our Lord, or about what year, did the fiat go forth that there should never be any more miracles on earth? That the age of miracles should cease? That hitherto they should come but no further? I again enquire for the proofs on this subject. I ask the Theologian who makes the assertion that the age of miracles has closed,—closed forever, to tell me what chapter and verse distinctly enunciate or clearly imply the doctrine? I make the same demand on the philosopher—the student—I ask any man who maintains the doctrine, just to prove it! Guess work won't do.

I can tell when that age—that wondrous age of miracles began. I know nothing of its close. The first verse of the Bible announces its beginning. The last verse of Revelation speaks of its continuance, not its close. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so come Lord Jesus." The advent of our Lord will be a miracle.

But in a subordinate sense there have been many ages of miracles, and they have closed a great many times, according to statements and intimations scattered throughout the Bible. From the time that the flaming sword flashed out at the east of Eden, and guarded the tree of life until the flood, there is scanty proof—very scanty indeed,—of miracles. "Enoch was not, for God took him," and we learn from the records of a later age that "he was translated." We have no proof that this translation was public—none that any saw it. The antediluvians could doubtless reason, as men now reason, notwithstanding that event, that the age of miracles was past and gone.—It is altogether probable that when the earth had become one vast Sodom with only one righteous man in it—that there were no miracles—no special answers to prayer, no special providences except in Noah's case. These, it would be argued, if they ever had existed, were events of the past. We see none of these wonderful things now a days, people would say, "none of those holy men" tradition speaks of. We would like much to see them if there are any. We would go some distance to visit them, if any one can tell us where they are to be found. Out upon such nonsense! Such, there is no God! or if there is, he has left the great machinery of creation to go on alone—without his superintendence or control. Things now take their own course, and a pretty crooked course it is. But we mean to enjoy ourselves.

So poor foolish men in the days before the flood, may have reasoned, and so foolish men in

the days since the flood have often reasoned, and will continue to do so. But there came a sudden and awful miracle to destroy those ancient speculations, and there will assuredly burst ere long upon the world a stupendous miracle, which will destroy all modern scepticism, about the existence and government of God. Alas! for the antediluvians! the proof though sufficient came too late for their benefit. Let us beware, for though "scoffers" of these last times may stoutly argue that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," yet "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we according to his promise look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness." That is a miracle still to come!

But the age of Moses was emphatically an age of miracles. They were scarce in the days of Eli. In Samuel's youth "the word of the Lord was precious—rare—there was no open vision." We have no proof that there was any truly and divinely inspired prophet in Israel from the days of Malachi until the days of John the Baptist. And there were other long periods before that in the days of Israel and Judah, when good men were so rare, and faith was so low, and ungodliness so high, that to the multitude the proofs of miracles, and of special providences, and of special answers to prayer, must have been as rare and as difficult to be believed as they are now.

And indeed, though it would be improper to say that the age of miracles ever ceased during the abode of Christ and his apostles on the earth, yet we have pretty plain intimations that the miracles themselves sometimes ceased or nearly so. Of our Lord it is written: "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Mat. xiii. 58. "And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And he marvelled at their unbelief." Mark. vi. 56.

It seems plain that in order to work miracles great faith is requisite, not only in those who perform them, but also in those for whose benefit they are to be performed. Thus the father of the lunatic whose case had baffled the apostle says to Jesus "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion upon us and help us." What was our blessed Lord's answer? "If thou canst believe! All things are possible to him that believeth." And when the disciples enquired why they "could not cast him out," he said, "Because of your unbelief." Mark ix. 22, 23. Matt. xvii. 20. And so Paul looking upon the lame man at Lystra "perceived that he had faith to be healed; and said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet! And he leaped and walked." Acts xiv. 9, 10.

In speaking of the various spiritual gifts enjoyed by the church at Corinth, the Apostle clearly states the fact that some were able to perform one kind of wonders, and others were able to perform another kind, and that all could not always perform all kinds of miracles. In fact he makes a distinction between the working of miracles, and the gift of prophecy, "the discerning of spirits," "divers kinds of tongues," and "the gifts of healing" &c., which is not only very singular, but deeply significant and instructive. Should a person in our day profess to be able to do some of these things, and should actually do them, our unbelief would not be satisfied unless he could do them all. "All very fine," he would be told, "you can prophesy," you can "heal the sick" you can "obtain rain and shut up heaven. Come on! let us hear you speak off fluently in a language which you have never learned, and here, 'just raise this dead man to life.' Do all or don't pretend to do any." But Paul says, "God hath set some in the church; first Apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that, miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues do all interpret?" No indeed! for such is the emphatic answer implied in the way in which the questions are put.

But the age of miracles is past. They were common enough two thousand years ago, but there have been none for ages since, and there never will be any more." So it is said; but so it is not, and cannot be proved. "But I never saw a miracle, nor did you ever see one, and you cannot prove that there have been any since the early days of christianity." I reply that I am not prepared to admit all this. And if I were prepared to admit it, to what would it amount? "You never saw an inhabitant of Jupiter or Saturn; you have no positive proof

—none that amounts to demonstration, that these planets are inhabited; and therefore it is certain that they are not inhabited,"—this is the amount of the argument. How very small is the amount of knowledge which we possess of the history of God's people since the days of the apostles. Let the man who is in possession of all the facts connected with the history of each individual of the "saints" in all ages, decide whether there have been any miracles wrought among them or not since apostolic times. Or what will be equally satisfactory, let him show from Scripture that miracles have ceased. He cannot do either.

The age of miracles has not ceased! THE AGE of miracles, is yet future! That golden age "that millenium of glory" to which prophets, apostles, and holy men have ever looked forward, is yet to come; and come it will! By what wonders, by what physical changes, by what demonstrations of divine power, is that age to be ushered in? and continued, and closed? And then after that there is to be the wonderful winding up of all things, accompanied with demonstrations of God's power, and presence and majesty, such as will throw into the shade all former demonstrations of the kind. And, Reader, remember you and I are to not a part in all those future events! On your person and on mine will some of these miracles be performed! O may almighty grace prepare us for those momentous scenes! For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not go before those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the trump of God, and the DEAD IN CHRIST shall rise first; then we [who are alive in Christ] and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thes. iv. 15-17. "And whosoever was not found written in the Book of Life, was cast into the LAKE OF FIRE." THIS IS THE SECOND DEATH." Rev. xx. 14, 15.

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SPECIAL PROVIDENCES.

Mr. Editor,—

The discussion which has lately taken place under the above caption, is, I think, to the readers of your journal, both interesting and profitable.

"Thinker," as his effusion on this subject plainly shows, is a young man, of an inquiring mind. Early manhood is a period of momentous interest, and needs a steady guiding hand, lest

"Reasoning high
Of providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
"We find no end, in wandering mazes lost.

"Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me,
Father, thou art the guide of my youth." I am happy in knowing that he is receiving the guidance of such hands, as those of "Believer" and "Edward Manning."

One point more claims our attention. But first, it might not be improper to present one wary word, that may serve as a check, and is ever appropriate in such discussions as the present. The caveat is this: "To attack with severity the opinions or errors of others, serves but to engrave them more deeply on their minds and hearts."

I am interested in Thinker's communication for the thought it contains. Have not frequently made excursions, in this same boundless field. A little experience teaches us the need of a compass, of "The Lamp and the Lantern," lest our devagations become serious and irremediable. There occurs to my mind a passage in the works of the old heathen orator, which contains theology superior to that of our young christian friend. It presents a point which the christian especially loves, it is that of *Specialty*. He says; Mundus administratur providentia deorum, idemque consulunt rebus humanis, nec solum universis, sed etiam singulis.

My apology for leaving this fine sentiment in its antique dress, is, that we specially present it for one who is sitting in "Academia's sacred shade," and drinking from the "Pierian spring."

But now to the immediate subject before us. In the language of Neander. "The first condition in order to combat with success, errors which have long had possession of the mind, is, to recognize and to appropriate to oneself, the element of truth, which serves as a base to the error." The reason is, that error is a parasite that cannot stand alone, whilst truth is self supporting. Ascertain the truth around which the error clings; remove the former, and the latter falls. The truth in the theme of Thinker is, that Jehovah is a God of "goodness and equity, of impartial and everlasting (better, eternal) justice."

The error is, that these attributes are incompatible with "Special providences."

The truth is a grand one; the error is a grave one.

Here is the course of thought, as evolved from the mind of the writer.

Special providences are incompatible with the administration of a God of goodness and equity.

The affairs of this world are administered with goodness and equity.

Therefore, there can be no special providences in the divine administration.

In this is found a double illusion. The one lies in the misapprehension of a term; the other, in the non-apprehension of a fact. The term *special*, may and it may not, designate the *miraculous*. Miracles have already been, and may again be, facts, in the divine administration. Or has indeed the Supreme Ruler, wound up the great machinery of the universe, set it in operation, and retired in quietude and repose; or giving at most only a remote and general, but no near and Special superintendence. Such is indeed the cold and cheerless view presented by many ancient Philosophers, and by more modern freethinkers, et hoc omne genus.

In contrast with this!

"Happy is the man who sees a God employed
"In all the good and ill that checker life."

"Forth steps the spruce philosopher, and tells
"Of homogenous and discordant springs,
"And principles; of causes, how they work
"By necessary laws their sure effects.
"Thou fool!"

Has not God

"Still wrought by means, since first he made the
"world?"

"And did he not employ of old his means to
"drown it?"

What is his creation less

"Than a capacious reservoir of means
"Formed for his use, and ready at his will."

In using language on this, as on all subjects, we should use it as our servant, not as our Master. We should remember that in all things done by the Creator, there is a *specialty*, to the apprehension of which the Creature can make but the remotest approximation, and of which he has but the feeblest conception. There is a completeness in his plans, however diverse, and a perfection in their performance, however manifold, belonging to the Infinite alone.

From the limitation of our faculties, we have to parcel out, and place in different categories, things that are but a unit, and illy admit of description.

We have but to prolong this line of thought, and what we had lost from view in the misty vacuity of the *general*, comes clearly within the disk of vision, in the *special*.

As a natural result of the limitation of our powers, we are wont to lose sight of the fact, that the eye which sweeps the whole field of immensity of Him, "whose centre is everywhere, and his circumference, no where," fixes its specific regard on each specific portion and point thereof, as though that portion and point secured his entire attention. Whilst the seraph near His throne receives his notice, the reptile beneath our feet, cannot be overlooked. How reassuring to us, to know that he who garnished the heavens, and marshalled every star, makes every blade of grass to grow, gives its blush and beauty to every flower, gives its expression to every countenance, its brilliancy to every eye. The vanishing of a pleiad, from the field of vision in the celestial spaces, and the removal of a man, from his terrestrial abode, is alike by the fiat of Him who "Sees the end from the beginning."

"The breeze that flies o'er the meadow, the cloud that imbibes the setting sun's effulgence, the strain from the tenant of the warbling shade," the falling of a leaf, as the overthrow of a kingdom, has each its specific mission.

But we are glad to turn from an authority which may be disputed, to one from which there is no appeal: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground, without your Father."

"But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." And apropos to the especial case before us are the words of the Seer, "When thy judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." Here we have a key, by which to enter the mysterious purview, here a clue by which to wind our way through the meandering labyrinth.

In face of such authority, would any one stand up and say, that the storm which lately swept over our country, causing so much destruction of property and such loss of life, would they say that it was not *special*? Whilst not miraculous, it was special, in a twofold sense; in its *origin* and in its *results*. It originated with him who is "wonderful in counsel," and does nothing at random. And to treat of its