

POSSIBILITY AND PURPOSES OF MIRACLES

By C. L. Howland

Our age is beset by materialism on the one hand and fanaticism on the other. Avoiding the assumptions of the boasting evolutionist, one need not worship "relics" or pursue modern wonder workers. Because one must believe something, one is not obligated to believe everything. There is a middle path.

Not every mysterious happening is a miracle, but a miracle may be defined as a mighty work which could not be performed according to any law of nature or any trick of man and is, therefore, manifestly of supernatural origin and is always attended by a moral purpose.

The very possibility of a miracle is denied by materialists and most evolutionists, who say that the universe is governed "by law" and that any interference is unthinkable. That the universe is governed "according to law" all intelligent persons must admit, but to argue that because law is here, a miracle cannot be is to commit the fallacy known in logic as *non sequitur*—it does not follow. A sincere and thoughtful person, and even one who is "educated," can believe in both law and miracles. To illustrate:

A one-pound stone falls from the table to the floor. Gravitation pulled it down and holds it there. But I wish it back on the table and in ten seconds I put it back, the law of gravitation notwithstanding. When such a law is in operation have been "ignorant" to think that the stone can be lifted? No. Have I "broken" the law or "disordered" the universe? Hardly. Well, what have I done? I have exercised the life that is in me overcoming the law of gravitation at this particular point with respect to the stone. But suppose I want the stone on the moon. Can I put it there? No. Why? Because I am not tall enough or great enough to put it there. If there is any one as much greater than I as putting the stone from the earth to the moon is greater than putting it from the floor to the table that person could put the stone on the moon, and if he is great enough he can do it in less time than it took me to put it on the table. The possibility, then, of doing things in the material universe which obviously an unaided man can not do, depends altogether on whether there is any one big enough to do such things.

If the materialist is right in teaching that man is the biggest thing in the universe, then certainly he is right in his position that all things that ever have been done were accomplished by natural laws or man, and there is no miracle. But if there is One who is the author of this material cosmos, with all its blazing and beneficent glory and measureless immensity and infinite accuracy, that One is great. And if His creatures can do a work according to their size, overcoming certain natural laws while they do it, so this great One can do a work according to His size, overcoming natural laws while He does it.

Then belief in the possibility of the miracle at Aijalon, Jonah and the "whale," the virgin birth, and any others recorded in the Word is proper even for "educated" people who believe that there is a God big enough to do these things. To one who believes in no such God, they appear impossible.

Assuming an infinite God, then, no miracles would be too great. But allowing their possibility, it is asked, "Would He perform them?" Are they likely? Certainly it is enough to say that He would do such works for reasons that would appear to Him sufficient.

What would appear to Him sufficient? Let us

see. This God has marvelously provided for man's needs. The celestial bodies, the inner parts of the earth, the depths of the sea, the rivers, the soil, the atmosphere, the physical and chemical laws, the plant and animal life, are ministers to provide food, warmth, and safety to man. He has been given a physical nature, an intellectual nature and a moral nature, with objects, conditions and possibilities for his highest development and good.

Bearing this in mind, every intelligent reader knows that the Bible teaches that the spiritual or soul welfare is infinitely more important than all man's other interests. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" It seems obvious, then, that since miracles are possible, since God would perform them for sufficient reason, since His love for man has provided for every need to this point, since spiritual welfare is infinitely greater than all the rest, certainly God would give miracles if they would help man to find and to know God. That this is their great object and accomplishment will be noted in the further discussion.

Superficial thinking has led some to believe that a given miracle was performed in order that the physical thing might be done which the miracle accomplished. Surely, if this were the object, God would, by His providences or by some secret interferences (in both of which we must believe) not have allowed the sea to rage, the man to be born blind or Lazarus to die. Probably no one would want to suggest that things in nature got such a start of God that He had to perform a miracle to bring them back where He wanted them! No, the miracles were not performed for physical welfare but for moral and spiritual good. If physical welfare attended, it was incidental. Miracles serve spiritual welfare in three ways: They serve as credentials; they "show forth" God; they bring spiritual lessons. —*The Free Methodist.*

THE MOVING PICTURE SHOWS

Much is being said and written in these days in favor of picture shows. While it is true that moving pictures of a proper character may be used to advantage in some cases, the fact remains that the devil has captured the business and is using it to extend his kingdom and destroy souls. The church is foolishly giving a place to this invention and is using it to furnish amusement for its attendants. This encroachment upon the house of God must be fearlessly met and opposed by God's people everywhere.

The Arkansas Methodist of a recent date had the following upon the subject:

We believe in the possibilities of the moving picture for educational purposes, and yet we recognize the dangers to public morals, if improper pictures are used. Therefore, our people are asked carefully to consider the following statement from Dr. C. G. Twombly, an Episcopal clergyman of New York, who has made a close study of the moving picture show for the last five years. He says:

"A subtle but thoroughly rotten strain runs through the moving picture business. And the rottenness is in the films deliberately and intentionally on the part of the manufacturers, for the sake of the money there is in it! It is often hidden under pretty figures and fine clothes and wonderful photography, but it is all the more dangerous on that account, and scarcely any public moving picture show today, even at the most respectable theatre, is free from it, for it is constantly and designedly present in some one or more of the pictures. The subtle but intentional

appeal of the films, this suggestiveness which constantly borders on the salacious (and suggestion is one of the most potent influences for good or evil in the world), this popularization of 'high living' and of loose morals so that such things come to be regarded more or less as the worm in society and even as the desirable, constitutes one of the gravest menaces to the purity of our American life and home that threatens this nation today, for it reaches probably eighty to ninety per cent. of all our children throughout our country, and forms their standards and ideals of society in an alarming measure. This statement is made not from any narrow or fanatical or Puritanic point of view. It is simply the result of a careful and thorough five-year investigation of facts. And it is easily verifiable by any one who will take the trouble to look into the matter, and who will examine the almost incredible number of eliminations of lustful and immoral and indecent and hurtful scenes and titles which are made by the Pennsylvania State Board of Censors, for example, each week, such eliminations sometimes amounting to one or two hundred or even more in a single week! The moving picture men attempt to justify their policy of producing and showing such films by saying that the pictures won't draw unless they have 'pep' in them, or that the popular demand is for something 'broad,' or that the moral ending (which is often tacked on at the end to cover up the real motive of such pictures) makes the whole film moral. But the fact that virtue may triumph (?) over vice at last, is no excuse for showing all the foul passageway to it. The truth is that the moving picture producers and managers have been willing to prostitute their business for temporary gain, a business which might contribute so magnificently to the physical and moral welfare of our people, if only it were clean! * * * The large daily papers in various cities have over and over again refused to publish such matter as this, the moving picture business has grown so powerful and its advertising space is so great."

SUGGESTIONS

There are dormant forces in the church, which if put in operation would greatly benefit it. There are those who stand with a book in hand, but do not open their mouth in song. Others who lean over a seat in a lazy posture and do not engage in prayer nor join in the prayers that are being made by others. It is a rare thing for them to inspire a meeting with a word of testimony. Their contributions to the church are haphazard, and going to prayer meeting or class meeting is a matter of convenience. The church is weak on account of its load of dormant forces. The church may move while these forces are inactive, but will resemble a "Ford" trying to make a hill on three cylinders. I asked a brother how he was getting along religiously. "Well," said he, "I'm still hanging on." A man driving a horse with a heavily loaded wagon, upon coming to a bridge, and realizing that he could not make the ascent, asked some young men if they would be so kind as to go to the rear of the wagon and push. With their assistance, the load went up with ease. What would have happened if they had been hanging on? The same thing that is happening to the church, a failure to surmount the difficulties and conquer. If all such become pushers the work will go on.—*Rev. F. F. Shoup in Free Methodist.*

Mr. Spurgeon has said that far too many preachers treat the Gospel as a penny whistle instead of the blast of a trumpet.—*From the "Life of Faith."*