

Ancient and Modern Miracles.

REV. W. E. COPELAND.

Some three or more weeks ago the papers reported that a miracle had been performed during revival meetings held at Kalama, Wash. The Oregonian contained a full account of the wonder and also reports of interviews with many of the prominent clergymen of Portland. The story, confirmed by the testimony of trustworthy citizens in Kalama, was that during a revival then in progress an ignorant woman who had never learned to read was enabled by the power of the Holy Ghost to read understandingly a whole chapter in the Bible. The woman had never read before, and she did read a chapter of the Bible, so credible witnesses reported, in a manner that enabled the hearers to understand her. This was called a miracle, and the evangelist claimed that it proved the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his meetings, the Holy Spirit and a seal set on the divine origin of his evangelistic work. No one after this can dispute that he is a special favorite of God. If the ignorant can read, then surely God must have changed his laws to prove the genuineness of the revival. Who can doubt that God is with his people and especially with the man conducting the revival in Kalama?

We should naturally expect that the Portland clergy would rejoice at so signal a display of divine goodness and the renewal of those miracles, which it had been supposed had gone, never to return. But with almost one accord, they refused to accept the wonder as a miracle. Some thought there was not evidence enough, others that the age of miracles was over and that page in the history of religions closed. God worked miracles through Jesus and the apostles, never since and never again.

Yet the evidence of the Kalama miracle is ten-fold greater than any possible evidence for the New Testament miracles. The gospels were written long after the event had taken place, when it was impossible to obtain evidence at first hand. We do not know the writers of the gospels; they do not agree with one another; their evidence is very unsatisfactory and according to the story itself, but few were convinced; while the witnesses for the Kalama miracle are, as it were, in our midst, and we can easily ascertain all the particulars. If there is not evidence enough for the Kalama miracle, surely there is not enough for the miracles of the New Testament. Indeed these wonders, once supposed to evidence the divine mission of Jesus, now tend to throw discredit on the whole narrative, especially when one reads the miracles recorded in the apocryphal

New Testament, which were once believed by all the faithful. Few Christians read the apocryphal New Testament; this is profitable reading, as giving a plain illustration of the mental condition prevailing at the time when the gospels were written. A condition of mind which accepted any wonder, no matter how great and how absurd, as true and as proving the supernatural character of the one reported to have done the wonder. So Mary, the mother of Jesus, became the Lady Mary herself, miraculously born and immaculately conceived.

What was the ostensible purpose of the New Testament miracles? To prove the divine mission of Jesus, to prove that there was something superior to matter and more important than material interests. The people, part of them denied the spiritual side of the universe, and another part wasted their time in superstitious rites and ceremonies. Jesus came to convince a materialistic age of the reality of spirit, to prove to a selfish people the value of selflessness and love.

So the Kalama wonder-worker is battling against materialism and trying to replace selfishness with love. The work is identical and the need for the work as great now as in the time of Jesus. Nor can it be urged as a valid objection against the Kalama wonder that it will affect only a few, God is interested in the humblest; not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Heavenly Father's knowledge. Moreover, the miracles of Jesus were known to but a very few ignorant fishermen.

So there seems no good reason why evangelical ministers should deny the Kalama miracle, except, that if they admit its genuineness, it will be hard to make headway against the miracles of Christian science and spiritualism, well attested, right in our midst, and witnessed by hundreds if not thousands; while we have no evidence that one of the miracles recorded in the New Testament was ever performed. When orthodox clergymen deny the genuineness of the Kalama miracle, they are denying what they have been continually teaching, namely, that the spirit of God is with men today and will work upon hardened hearts until they are softened, which Jesus declared was a greater wonder than to heal the sick.

It should be remembered that all these miracles are worked to convince man of the reality of the spirit. This age is fully as materialistic as the age in which Jesus lived, and we need every possible means to arouse the people from a materialism not only in theory but in practice, the practical material living being far worse than any possible materialistic theory. And if God thought it necessary to do

miracles in the first century to awaken the world to a knowledge of its lost condition and to turn men's attention to things of the spirit, why should he not do the same in this age which so greatly resembles the last days of the Roman empire? If miracles were needed then to convince the world of the reality of the spirit so are they needed in this day for the same purpose.

To the man who looks at these things from a common-sense standpoint, there can be but one conclusion, a miracle or reversal of the laws of nature is simply impossible. The wonder of Kalama, the wonders of the Christian scientists and spiritualists, the wonders of New Testament times and of the ancient religions may be facts; but they are not supernatural. They may evidence the existence of spirit, but in a natural way. Law reigns everywhere and there can be no exceptions. All these wonders found in every age and used by every religion to confirm its control over man must have a natural cause, are all under the control of the law, which everywhere and in every age apportions results to causes, and which in this age is accepted by more than in any other age.

I am quite willing to admit that the ignorant woman read the Bible under the influence of religious excitement, and the same thing might have occurred under the excitement produced by a Christian Scientist or a Spiritualist or a Secularist; any great emotion aroused by any one could produce the result. Apparently supernatural works can be done under the influence of any great excitement whether that excitement be what we call good or what we call evil.

There are several possible explanations. The doctrine of reincarnation held by so many, which teaches that we have been on the earth before, and that the woman then might have been educated, and under the great excitement of the revival her memory of the past was aroused, entirely explains this and many other phenomena which seem at first sight contra-natural, and this doctrine has been believed by many of the wisest men who have ever lived on the earth.

Under the excitement prevailing, a process, which usually takes months, may have been condensed into hours. As in the physical world under unusual circumstance natural processes are made to advance with incredible speed, and we cry miracle. A seed which ordinarily takes days to germinate and weeks to flower may be made to go through the whole process from germination to florescence in a few hours. So under unusual stimulus a sluggish brain may be made to act with great rapidity. In the case under consideration the wom-

an had been spelling and in a fashion reading for several years, the brain had been working at the problem of reading; under the stimulus of the revival the work was done rapidly and the woman read; which proves that there was excitement but nothing more. Under a similar stimulus men and women slow of speech have become eloquent, both at political and prayer meetings.

The evangelist or the people may have known the desire of the woman to be able to read the Bible and by hypnotism have conferred on her the ability. What is possible by the use of hypnotism, when first told, seems miraculous, and some years ago evidenced the presence of a supernatural agent; an angel, a spirit or a devil; now it is simply an effect of a cause, about which we are learning more all the time. Hypnotic suggestion entirely accounts for the wonder, and this suggestion might find its way to the woman's brain with no conscious effort on the part of any one. In the evangelistic meetings now being held in Salem hypnotism plays an important part. Very many will be induced to join the church simply by hypnotic suggestion consciously or unconsciously employed. How great and how commonly this power is used we have only a slight idea; but it is quite another influence from what has been called the power of the Holy Ghost.

To reject the wonders of modern or ancient times, whether worked by heathen or Christian, by Jesus or Apollonius of Toyana, by Christian minister, spiritualist medium or Christian science teacher, is just as absurd as to attribute them all to some supernatural agency.

"There are more things in heaven and on earth than we in our philosophy, Horatio, have dreamed of," says Hamlet, and of this we are more convinced with every year.

There may be a narrow-mindedness of science, as well as of religion, of materialist as well as of spiritualist. I am unwilling to deny anything. I may deny the conclusion which is drawn from the fact and yet admit the fact, and wait for further knowledge to explain the occurrence. I deny the conclusion drawn from the Kalama miracle, but am willing to admit its occurrence.

Of this one thing I am sure; a miracle in the sense of a reversal of Natural law cannot occur, and no wonder then can prove any special action on the part of God. A so called miracle simply proclaims the action of Natural law in any way to which we are unaccustomed, it is unnatural but not super or contra-natural and must be studied just as we would study any other fact in nature, and its occurrence proves nothing more than the