

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Cessation of the Charismata

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When our Lord came down to earth He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven, which is His home. The number of the miracles which He wrought may easily be underrated. It has been said that in effect He banished disease and death from Palestine for the three years of His ministry. If this is exaggeration it is pardonable exaggeration. Wherever He went, He brought a blessing:

One hem but of the garment that He wore
Could medicine whole countries of their pain;
One touch of that pale hand could life restore.

We ordinarily greatly underestimate His beneficent activity as He went about, as Luke says, doing good.¹

His own divine power by which He began to found His church He continued in the Apostles whom He had chosen to complete this great work. They transmitted it in turn, as part of their own miracle-working and the crowning sign of their divine commission, to others, in the form of what the New Testament calls spiritual gifts² in the sense of extraordinary capacities produced in the early Christian communities by direct gift of the Holy Spirit.

The number and variety of these spiritual gifts were considerable. Even Paul's enumerations, the fullest of which occurs in the twelfth chapter of I Corinthians, can hardly be read as exhaustive scientific catalogues. The name which is commonly applied to them³ is broad enough to embrace what may be called both the ordinary and the specifically extraordinary gifts of the Spirit; both those, that is, which were distinctively

¹ W. Yorke Fausset, for example, unduly restricts the number of our Lord's miracles, speaking of the "severe economy with which He exercised such supernatural, or extranatural, powers." (*Medicine and the Modern Church*, edited by Geoffrey Rhodes, 1910, pp. 175 ff.)

² Χαρίσματα, or more rarely πνευματικά, 1 Cor. 12:1, or δόματα, Eph. 4:8.

³ Charismata: it is a distinctively Pauline term, occurring elsewhere than in Paul's writings only once in Philo (*De Alleg. Leg.*, 2:75) and once in the First Epistle of Peter (4:10), an epistle which, both in doctrine and language, is of quite Pauline character.

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gracious, and those which were distinctly miraculous. In fact, in the classical passage which treats of them (1 Cor. 12–14) both classes are brought together under this name. The non-miraculous, gracious gifts are, indeed, in this passage given the preference and called “the greatest gifts”; and the search after them is represented as “the more excellent way”; the longing for the highest of them—faith, hope, and love—being the most excellent way of all. Among the miraculous gifts themselves, a like distinction is made in favor of “prophecy” (that is, the gift of exhortation and teaching), and, in general, in favor of those by which the body of Christ is edified.

The diffusion of these miraculous gifts is, perhaps, quite generally underestimated. One of the valuable features of the passage, 1 Cor. 12–14, consists in the picture given in it of Christian worship in the Apostolic age (14:26 ff.).⁴ “What is it, then, brethren?” the Apostle asks. “When ye come together, each one hath a psalm, hath a teaching, hath a revelation, hath a tongue, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying. If any man speaketh in a tongue, let it be by two or at the most three, and that in turn; and let one interpret: but if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. And let the prophets speak by two or three, and let the others discern. But if a revelation be made to another sitting by, let the first keep silence. For ye all can prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted; and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace.” This, it is to be observed, was the ordinary church worship at Corinth in the Apostles’ day. It is analogous in form to the freedom of our modern prayer-meeting services. What chiefly distinguishes it from them is that those who took part in it might often have a miraculous gift to exercise, “a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation,” as well as “a psalm or a teaching.” There is no reason to believe that the infant congregation

⁴ Cf. C. F. G. Heinrici, *Das erste Sendschreiben des Apostel Paulus an die Korinther*, 1880, p. 452: “Mosheim says that Paul sketches in this section a kind of Church Directory. That goes too far: but it at least contains the outlines of a Directory of Worship in his community, for which it was at once made clear that in all matters which concern the value and effect of the worshipping assemblages, caprice and confusion are excluded.” W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 1913, p. 106, describes very vividly, though on the naturalistic hypothesis explained in note 6 below, what their assemblies were for the Christians of the Apostolic times. “Here in the assemblies of the fellowship,” he writes, “there arose for the believers in Christ the consciousness of their unity and peculiar sociological individuality. Scattered during the day in pursuit of their daily callings, subject in an alien world to derision and scorn, they came together in the evening (no doubt as often as possible) for the common sacred meal. They then experienced the miracle of fellowship, the glow of the enthusiasm of a common faith and a common hope, when the Spirit flamed up and encompassed them with a miracle-filled world: prophets and tongues, visionaries and ecstasies began to speak, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs soared through the room, the forces of brotherly charity awoke in an unsuspected fashion, an unheard of new life pulsed through the crowd of Christians. And over this whole surging enthusiasm the Lord Jesus reigned as the head of His community, immediately present in His power with a tangibility and a certainty which takes the breath away.”

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at Corinth was singular in this. The Apostle does not write as if he were describing a marvellous state of affairs peculiar to that church. He even makes the transition to the next item of his advice in the significant words, “as in all the churches of the saints.” And the hints in the rest of his letters and in the Book of Acts require us, accordingly, to look upon this beautiful picture of Christian worship as one which would be true to life for any of the numerous congregations planted by the Apostles in the length and breadth of the world visited and preached to by them.

The argument may be extended to those items of the fuller list, given in 1 Cor. 12, which found less occasion for their exhibition in the formal meetings for worship, but belonged more to life outside the meeting-room. That enumeration includes among the extraordinary items, you will remember, gifts of healings, workings of miracles, prophecy, discernings of spirits, kinds of tongues, the interpretation of tongues—all of which, appropriate to the worshipping assembly, are repeated in 1 Cor. 14:26 ff. We are justified in considering it characteristic of the Apostolic churches that such miraculous gifts should be displayed in them. The exception would be, not a church with, but a church without, such gifts. Everywhere, the Apostolic Church was marked out as itself a gift from God, by showing forth the possession of the Spirit in appropriate works of the Spirit—miracles of healing and miracles of power, miracles of knowledge, whether in the form of prophecy or of the discerning of spirits, miracles of speech, whether of the gift of tongues or of their interpretation. The Apostolic Church was characteristically a miracle-working church.⁵

How long did this state of things continue? It was the characterizing peculiarity of specifically the Apostolic Church, and it belonged therefore exclusively to the Apostolic age—although no doubt this designation may be taken with some latitude. These gifts were not the possession of the primitive Christian as such;⁶ nor for that matter of the

⁵ J. H. Bernard, in an essay on “The Miraculous in Early Christian Literature,” published in the volume called *The Literature of the Second Century*, by F. R. Wynne, J. H. Bernard, and S. Hemphill (New York, James Pott & Co., 1892), p. 145, gives a useful but incomplete exhibit of the references to the exercise of these gifts in the Acts and Epistles: (1) *Tongues*: Pentecost (Acts 2) and frequently alluded to by Paul in his epistles; (2) *Prophecy*: frequently called a “sign” of an Apostle, and also alluded to in the cases of Agabus (Acts 11:28, 21:10), the twelve Ephesian disciples on whom Paul laid his hands (Acts 19:6), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9); (3) *Poison*: Paul’s viper (Acts 28:3); (4) *Exorcism*: by Paul (Acts 16:18); (5) *Healing*: by Paul in the case of Publius (Acts 28:8), by Peter in that of Æneas (Acts 9:33), by Peter’s shadow (Acts 5:15), by Paul’s clothing (Acts 19:12), by Peter and John (Acts 3:7); (6) *Raising the dead*: by Paul, in the case of Eutychus (Acts 20:9), by Peter, in the case of Dorcas (Acts 9:36); (7) *Punitive*: in the cases of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5), and Elymas (Acts 13:8); (8) *General references to signs and wonders*: attesting Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:3), Stephen (Acts 6:8) and Philip (Acts 8:6).

⁶ Theologians of the “Liberal” school, of course, deny the miraculous character of the charisms on principle, and are prone to represent them as the natural manifestations of primitive enthusiasm. “We, for our part,” says P. W. Schmiedel (*Encyclopedia Biblica*, col. 4776), “are constrained to” “deny the miraculous

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Apostolic Church or the Apostolic age for themselves; they were distinctively the authentication of the Apostles. They were part of the credentials of the Apostles as the authoritative agents of God in founding the church. Their function thus confined them to

character of the charisms," "and to account for everything in the phenomena to which a miraculous character has been attributed by the known psychological laws which can be observed in crises of great mental exaltation, whether in persons who deem themselves inspired, or in persons who simply require medical treatment." From this point of view the charismata belong to the primitive church as such, to the church not merely of the Apostolic age, but of the first two centuries. This church is spoken of in contrast to the staid, organized church which succeeded it, as a Charismatic Church, that is to say, in the old sense of the word, as an Enthusiastic Church, a church swept along by an exalted state of mind and feeling which we should look upon to-day as mere fanaticism. "It is easily intelligible," says Schmiedel (col. 4775), "that the joy of enthusiasm over the possession of a new redeeming religion should have expressed itself in an exuberant way, which, according to the ideas of the time, could only be regarded as the miraculous operation of the Holy Spirit." Or, as Adolf Harnack (*The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, E. T. I., pp. 250 ff.), puts it, Christianity came into being as "the religion of Spirit and power," and only lost this character and became the religion of form and order toward the end of the second century. A rather sharp expression of this view is given in an (inaugural) address delivered in 1893 by A. C. McGiffert, on *Primitive and Catholic Christianity*. "The spirit of primitive Christianity," he says (p. 19), "is the spirit of individualism, based on the felt presence of the Holy Ghost. It was the universal conviction of the primitive church that every Christian believer enjoys the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit, through whom he communes with God, and receives illumination, inspiration and strength for his daily needs. The presence of the Spirit was realized by these primitive Christians in a most vivid way. It meant the power to work miracles, to speak with tongues, to utter prophecies (cf. Mark 16:17-18, and Acts 2:16 ff.)." McGiffert is not describing here some Christians, but all Christians; and all Christians not of the Apostolic age, but of the first two centuries: "By the opening of the third century all these conceptions had practically disappeared." An attempt to give this general view a less naturalistic expression may be read at the close of R. Martin Pope's article, "Gifts," in Hastings's *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*. "To sum up," he writes (vol. I, p. 451), "an examination of the passages in apostolic literature which treat of spiritual gifts inevitably brings us to the conclusion that the life of the early church was characterized by glowing enthusiasm, simple faith, and intensity of joy and wonder, all resulting from the consciousness of the power of the Holy Spirit; also that this phase of Spirit-effected ministries and service was temporary, as such 'tides of the Spirit' have since often proved, and gave way to a more rigid and disciplined Church Order, in which the official tended more and more to supersede the charismatic ministries."

It has always been the characteristic mark of a Christian that he is "led by the Spirit of God": "if any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His." It has never been the mark of a Christian that because he is "led by the Spirit of God" he is a law to himself and free from the ordinances of God's house. It is very clear from the record of the New Testament that the extraordinary charismata were not (after the very first days of the church) the possession of all Christians, but special supernatural gifts to the few; and it is equally clear from the records of the sub-Apostolic church that they did not continue in it, but only a shadow of them lingered in doubtful manifestations of which we must say, Do not even the heathen so? How little this whole representation accords with the facts the progress of the present discussion will show. for an examination of McGiffert's position, see *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, April, 1895, pp. 185-194. For a vivid popular description of conditions in the early church as reconstructed from the "Liberal" view-point, and brought into relation to the "enthusiasm" of later centuries, see *The Edinburgh Review* for January, 1903, pp. 148 ff.

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distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it.⁷ Of this we may make sure on the ground both of principle and of fact; that is to say both under the guidance of the New Testament teaching as to their origin and nature, and on the credit of the testimony of later ages as to their cessation. But I shall not stop at this point to adduce the proof of this. It will be sufficiently intimated in the criticism which I purpose to make of certain opposing opinions which have been current among students of the subject. My design is to state and examine the chief views which have been held favorable to the continuance of the charismata beyond the Apostolic age. In the process of this examination occasion will offer for noting whatever is needful to convince us that the possession of the charismata was confined to the Apostolic age.

The theologians of the post-Reformation era, a very clear-headed body of men, taught with great distinctness that the charismata ceased with the Apostolic age. But this teaching gradually gave way, pretty generally throughout the Protestant churches, but especially in England, to the view that they continued for a while in the post-Apostolic period, and only slowly died out like a light fading by increasing distance from its source.⁸ The period most commonly set for their continuance is three centuries; the date of their cessation is ordinarily said to have been about the time of Constantine. This, as early as the opening of the eighteenth century, had become the leading opinion, at least

⁷ R. Martin Pope, as cited, p. 450, speaks of modes of ministry, “in addition to the more stable and authorized modes” mentioned in 1 Cor. 1:4–12, 28, which were of “a special order, perhaps peculiar to the Corinthian Church, with its exuberant manifestations of spiritual energy, and certainly, as the evidence of later Church History shows, of a temporary character, and exhausting themselves (cf. H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the N. T.*, London, 1909, p. 320) in the Apostolic or sub-Apostolic age.” In contrast with these special modes of ministry, he speaks of “the charisms of miracle-working as lasting down to the second century, if we may trust the evidence of Justin Martyr (*Apol.*, 2:6).” In the passage of Justin appealed to, as also in section 8, and in *Dial.*, 30, 76, 85, it is said only that demoniacs are exorcised by Christians; cf. G. T. Purves, *The Testimony of Justin Martyr to Early Christianity*, 1889, p. 159. We shall see that the evidence of the second and subsequent centuries is not such as naturally to base Pope’s conclusion. When he adds of these “charisms of miracle-working” that “they never were intended, as the extreme faith-healer of to-day contends, to supersede the efforts of the skilled physician,” he is of course right, since they were confined to the Apostolic age, and to a very narrow circle then. But when he goes on to say, “they represent the creative gift, the power of initiating new departures in the normal world of phenomena, which is rooted in faith (see A. G. Hogg, *Christ’s Message of the Kingdom*, Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 62–70); and as such reveal a principle which holds good for all time” —he is speaking wholly without book, and relatively to the charisms of the New Testament equally wholly without meaning.

⁸ A. Tholuck’s figure (“Ueber die Wunder der katholischen Kirche,” in *Vermischte Schriften*, I, 1839, p. 28) is this: “Christ did not appear like the sun in tropical lands, which rises without a dawn and sets without a twilight, but, as millenniums of prophecy preceded Him, so miracles followed Him, and the forces which He first awoke were active in a greater or less measure for a subsequent period. Down into the third century we have credible testimonies of the persistence of the miraculous forces which were active in the first century.” A mechanical conception of the miracle-working of both Christ and His followers lurks behind such figures; Christ let loose forces which naturally required some time to exhaust their energies.

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among theologians of the Anglican school, as Conyers Middleton, writing in the middle of that century, advises us. "The most prevailing opinion," he says in his *Introductory Discourse* to a famous book to be more fully described by and by, "is that they subsisted through the first three centuries, and then ceased in the beginning of the fourth, or as soon as Christianity came to be established by the civil power. This, I say, seems to be the most prevailing notion at this day among the generality of the Protestants, who think it reasonable to imagine that miracles should then cease, when the end of them was obtained and the church no longer in want of them; being now delivered from all danger, and secure of success, under the protection of the greatest power on earth."⁹

Middleton supports this statement with instances which bring out so clearly the essential elements of the opinion that they may profitably be quoted here. Archbishop John Tillotson represents "that on the first planting of the Christian religion in the world, God was pleased to accompany it with a miraculous power; but after it was planted, that power ceased, and God left it to be maintained by ordinary ways." So, Nathaniel Marshall wrote, "that there are successive evidences of them, which speak full and home to this point, from the beginning down to the age of Constantine, in whose time, when Christianity had acquired the support of human powers, those extraordinary assistances were discontinued." Others, sharing the same general point of view, would postpone a little the date of entire cessation. Thus the elder Henry Dodwell supposes true miracles to have generally ceased with the conversion of the Roman Empire, yet admits some special miracles, which seem to him to be exceptionally well attested, up to the close of the fourth century. Daniel Waterland, in the body of his treatise on the *Trinity*, speaks of miracles as continuing through the first three centuries at least, and in the Addenda extends this through the fourth. John Chapman's mode of statement is "that though the establishment of Christianity by the civil power abated the necessity of miracles, and occasioned a visible decrease of them, yet, after that revolution, there were instances of them still, as public, as clear, as well-attested as any in the earlier ages." He extends these instances not only through the fourth century but also through the fifth—which, he says, "had also its portion, though smaller than the fourth." William Whiston, looking upon the charismata less as the divine means of extending the church than as the signs of the divine favor on the church in its pure beginnings, sets the date of their cessation at A. D. 381, which marks the triumph of Athanasianism; that being to him, as an Arian, the final victory of error in the church—which naturally put a stop to such manifestations of God's favor. It is a similar idea from his own point of view which is given expression by John Wesley in one of his not always consistent declarations on the subject. He supposes that miracles stopped when the empire became Christian, because then, "a general corruption both of faith and morals infected the church—which by that revolution, as St. Jerome

⁹ *Miscellaneous Works*, London, 1755, vol. I, p. xli.

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says, lost as much of its virtue as it had gained of wealth and power.”¹⁰ These slight extensions of the time during which the miracles are supposed to persist, do not essentially alter the general view, though they have their significance—a very important significance which Middleton was not slow to perceive, and to which we shall revert later.

The general view itself has lost none of its popularity with the lapse of time. It became more, rather than less, wide-spread with the passage of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, and it remains very usual still. I need not occupy your time with the citation of numerous more recent expressions of it. It may suffice to adduce so popular a historian as Gerhard Uhlhorn who, in his useful book on *The Conflict of Christianity with Heathenism*,¹¹ declares explicitly that “witnesses who are above suspicion leave no room for doubt that the miraculous powers of the Apostolic age continued to operate at least into the third century.” A somewhat special turn is given to the same general idea by another historian of the highest standing—Bishop Mandel Creighton. “The Apostles,” he tells us,¹² “were endowed with extraordinary powers, necessary for the establishment of the church, but not necessary for its permanent maintenance. These powers were exercised for healing the sick and for conveying special gifts of the Holy Spirit; sometimes, but rarely, they were used for punishment.... These special powers were committed to the church as a means of teaching it the abiding presence of God. They were withdrawn when they had served their purpose of indicating the duties to be permanently performed. To ‘gifts of tongues’ succeeded orderly human teaching; to ‘gifts of healing’ succeeded healing by educated human skill; to supernatural punishment succeeded discipline by orderly human agency.”

This, then, is the theory: that, miracles having been given for the purpose of founding the church, they continued so long as they were needed for that purpose; growing gradually fewer as they were less needed, and ceasing altogether when the church having, so to speak, been firmly put upon its feet, was able to stand on its own legs. There is much that is attractive in this theory and much that is plausible: so much that is both attractive and plausible that it has won the suffrages of these historians and scholars though it contradicts the whole drift of the evidence of the facts, and the entire weight of probability as well. For it is only simple truth to say that both the ascertained facts and the precedent presumptions array themselves in opposition to this construction of the history of the charismata in the church.

¹⁰ *Works*, New York, 1856, vol. V, p. 706.

¹¹ E. T., p. 169.

¹² *Persecution and Tolerance*, pp. 55–56.

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The facts are not in accordance with it. The view requires us to believe that the rich manifestations of spiritual gifts present in the Apostolic Church, gradually grew less through the succeeding centuries until they finally dwindled away by the end of the third century or a little later. Whereas the direct evidence for miracle-working in the church is actually of precisely the contrary tenor. There is little or no evidence at all for miracle-working during the first fifty years of the post-Apostolic church; it is slight and unimportant for the next fifty years; it grows more abundant during the next century (the third); and it becomes abundant and precise only in the fourth century, to increase still further in the fifth and beyond. Thus, if the evidence is worth anything at all, instead of a regularly progressing decrease, there was a steadily growing increase of miracle-working from the beginning on. This is doubtless the meaning of the inability of certain of the scholars whom we have quoted, after having allowed that the Apostolic miracles continued through the first three centuries, to stop there; there is a much greater abundance and precision of evidence, such as it is, for miracles in the fourth and the succeeding centuries, than for the preceding ones.

The matter is of sufficient interest to warrant the statement of the facts as to the evidence somewhat more in detail. The writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers contain no clear and certain allusions to miracle-working or to the exercise of the charismatic gifts, contemporaneously with themselves.¹³ These writers inculcate the elements of Christian living in a spirit so simple and sober as to be worthy of their place as the immediate followers of the Apostles. Their anxiety with reference to themselves seems to be lest they should be esteemed overmuch and confounded in their pretensions with the Apostles, rather than to press claims to station, dignity, or powers similar to theirs.¹⁴ So characteristic is this sobriety of attitude of their age, that the occurrence of accounts of miracles in the letter of the church of Smyrna narrating the story of the martyrdom of Polycarp is a recognized difficulty in the way of admitting the genuineness of that letter.¹⁵

¹³ On the literary form of Hermas, see Kerr Duncan Macmillan in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, by the Faculty of Princeton Seminary, 1912, pp. 494–543. The Didaché tells of “prophets” who spoke “in the Spirit,” as apparently a well-known phenomenon in the churches for which it speaks, and thus implies the persistence of the charism—or rather of the shadow of the charism—of “prophecy.” Papias is reported by Philip of Side as having stated on the authority of the daughters of Philip that Barsabas (or Justus) drank serpent’s poison inadvertently, and that the mother of Manaim was raised from the dead, as well as that those raised from the dead by Christ lived until the time of Hadrian (*cf.* Eusebius, *H. E.*, III, 39, 9; below, note 25); these events belong, in any event, to the Apostolic age.

¹⁴ *Cf.* H. M. Scott, “The Apostolic Fathers and the New Testament Revelation,” in *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, July, 1892, vol. III, pp. 479–488.

¹⁵ J. B. Lightfoot discusses these miraculous features of the letter in *The Apostolic Fathers, Part II, S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp*, vol. I, pp. 598 ff.; *cf.* Bernard’s exhibition of their natural character *op. cit.*, p. 168. H. Günter, *Legenden-Studien*, 1906, pp. 10 ff., remarks: “thus, out of the entire series of authentic Passiones there

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Polycarp was martyred in 155 A. D. Already by that date, we meet with the beginnings of general assertions of the presence of miraculous powers in the church. These occur in some passages of the writings of Justin Martyr. The exact nature of Justin's testimony is summed up by Bishop John Kaye as follows:¹⁶ "Living so nearly as Justin did to the Apostolic age, it will naturally be asked whether, among other causes of the diffusion of Christianity, he specifies the exercise of miraculous powers by the Christians. He says in general terms that such powers subsisted in the church (*Dial.*, pp. 254 ff.)—that Christians were endowed with the gift of prophecy (*Dial.*, p. 308 B, see also p. 315 B)—and in an enumeration of supernatural gifts conferred on Christians, he mentions that of healing (*Dial.*, p. 258 A). We have seen also, in a former chapter, that he ascribes to Christians the power of exorcising demons (chap. 8). But he produces no particular instance of an exercise of miraculous power, and therefore affords us no opportunity of applying those tests by which the credibility of miracles must be tried." And then the bishop adds, by way of quickening our sense of the meaning of these facts: "Had it only been generally stated by the Evangelists that Christ performed miracles, and had no particular miracle been recorded, how much less satisfactory would the Gospel narratives have appeared! how greatly their evidence in support of our Saviour's divine mission been diminished!"

This beginning of testimony is followed up to precisely the same effect by Irenæus, except that Irenæus speaks somewhat more explicitly, and adds a mention of two new classes of miracles—those of speaking with tongues and of raising the dead, to both of which varieties he is the sole witness during these centuries, and of the latter of which at least he manages so to speak as to suggest that he is not testifying to anything he had himself witnessed.¹⁷ Irenæus's contemporary, indeed, Theophilus of Antioch, while, like Irenæus, speaking of the exorcism of demons as a standing Christian miracle, when challenged by Autolycus to produce but one dead man who had been raised to life, discovers by his reply that there was none to produce; and "no instance of this miracle was ever produced in the first three centuries."¹⁸ For the rest, we say, Irenæus's witness is wholly similar to Justin's. He speaks altogether generally, adducing no specific cases, but ascribing miracle-working to "all who were truly disciples of Jesus," each according to the gift he had received, and enumerating especially gifts of exorcism, prediction, healing, raising the dead, speaking with tongues, insight into secrets, and expounding the Scriptures (*Cont. Hær.*, II, lvi, lvii; V, vi).¹⁹ Tertullian in like manner speaks of exorcisms, and adduces

remains as an outspoken miracle-martyrdom only the Acts of Polycarp: and even they are not unquestionably such."

¹⁶ *Justin Martyr*, by the Bishop of Lincoln, ed. 3, 1853, p. 121.

¹⁷ Cf. Blunt, *On the Early Fathers*, p. 387.

¹⁸ Doctor Hey, in *Tertullian*, by the Bishop of Lincoln, ed. 2, 1826, p. 168.

¹⁹ Cf. what is said of Justin's and Irenæus's testimony by Gilles P:son Wetter, *Charis, Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums*, 1913, p. 185: "We can still hear of $\chi\alpha\rho\acute{\iota}\sigma\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ in the church, in Justin

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one case of a prophetically gifted woman (*Apol.*, xxviii; *De Anima*, ix); and Minucius Felix speaks of exorcism (*Oct.*, xxvi).²⁰ Origen professes to have been an eye-witness of many instances of exorcism, healing, and prophecy, although he refuses to record the details lest he should rouse the laughter of the unbeliever (*Cont. Cels.*, I, ii; III, xxiv; VII, iv, lxvii). Cyprian speaks of gifts of visions and exorcisms. And so we pass on to the fourth century in an ever-increasing stream, but without a single writer having claimed himself to have wrought a miracle of any kind or having ascribed miracle-working to any known name in the church, and without a single instance having been recorded in detail. The contrast of this with the testimony of the fourth century is very great. There we have the greatest writers recording instances witnessed by themselves with the greatest circumstantiality. The miracles of the first three centuries, however, if accepted at all, must be accepted on the general assertion that such things occurred—a general assertion which itself is wholly lacking until the middle of the second century and which, when it does appear, concerns chiefly prophecy and healings, including especially exorcisms,²¹ which we can scarcely

and Irenæus.... Justin and Irenæus are probably the latest witnesses of a prophetic gift of grace in the church.... It is generally wholly uncertain whether we can still really find ‘gifts of grace’ in the church in great amount in the time of Justin and Irenæus. A declaration like that in Justin, *Dial.*, 82, 1, *παρὰ γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ μέχρι νῦν προφητικὰ χαρισματὰ ἐστίν*, testifies rather to the contrary. If both steadily speak of ‘we’ or of the ‘church’ or the like, yet it is possible that they refer by this to the great spiritual operations in the earliest period of Christianity, of which we read in the Gospels, in Acts, and perhaps in some of the Apocrypha. These were to them certainly valuable ‘proofs’ of the truth of the divine origin of Christianity (*cf.* for this *e. g.*, Justin, *Apol.*, I, 58; Theophilus, *ad Aut.*, III, 16 and 26; Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 20 and 23).”

²⁰ Bernard, as cited, p. 147, remarks that “with a few notable exceptions,” “there is no trace up to the end of the second century”—and the same, we may add, is true of the third—“of any miraculous gifts still existing in the primitive church, save those of *prophecy* and *healing*, including *exorcism*, both of which are frequently mentioned.” With reference to *prophecy* he adduces the warning against false prophets in Hermas (*Com.* 11) and the Didaché, together with Justin’s assertion that prophetic gifts continued even—the “even” is perhaps significant—to his day (*Dial.*, 315 B). As to *healing*, he adduces the general assertions of Justin (*Dial.*, 258 A) and Origen (*Cont. Cels.*, III, 24). With respect to *exorcisms*, he appeals to repeated references by Justin (*Apol.*, 45 A; *Dial.*, 247 C, 302 A, 311 B, 350 B, 361 C) and Tertullian (*Apol.*, 23, 37, 43; *De Spect.*, 2; *De Test. Anim.*, 3; *Ad Scap.*, 2; *De Corona*, 11; *De Idol.*, 11). He remarks that these Fathers all believed in magic and betray a feeling that the miracles of their day were not quite the same kind of thing which happened in the New Testament times (Tertullian, *De Rud.*, c. 21; Origen, *Cont. Cels.*, I, 2).

²¹ The prominence of exorcisms in the notices of marvellous occurrences in these Fathers belongs to the circumstances of the times, and would call for no special notice except for the use which has been made of it in recent discussions (*cf.* S. McComb in *Religion and Medicine*, by Elwood Worcester, Samuel McComb, and Isador H. Coriat, 1908, pp. 295–299). In point of fact, Christianity came into a world that was demon-ridden, and, as Harnack remarks (*The Expansion of Christianity*, E. T., 1904, vol. I, p. 158), “no flight of the imagination can form any idea of what would have come over the ancient world or the Roman Empire during the third century had it not been for the church.” In conflict with this gigantic evil which dominated the whole life of the people, it is not to be wondered at that the Christians of the second and subsequent centuries, who were men of their time, were not always able to hold the poise which Paul gave them in the great words: “We know that no idol is anything in the world, and that there is no God

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be wrong in supposing precisely the classes of marvels with respect to which excitement most easily blinds the judgment and insufficiently grounded rumors most readily grow up.²²

We are no doubt startled to find Irenæus, in the midst of delivering what is apparently merely a conventional testimony to the occurrence of these minor things, suddenly adding his witness to the occurrence also of the tremendous miracle of raising the dead.

but one." Accordingly, as Harnack points out, "from Justin downwards, Christian literature is crowded with allusions to exorcisms, and every large church, at any rate, had exorcists" (p. 162). But this is no proof that miracles were wrought, except this great miracle, that, in its struggle against the deeply rooted and absolutely pervasive superstition—"the whole world and the circumambient atmosphere," says Harnack (p. 161), "were filled with devils; not merely idolatry, but every phase and form of life was ruled by them: they sat on thrones; they hovered over cradles; the earth was literally a hell"—Christianity won, and expelled the demons not only from the tortured individuals whose imagination was held captive by them, but from the life of the people, and from the world. The most accessible discussion of the subject (written, of course, from his own point of view) may be found in Harnack, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 152–180. An article really on the Christian doctrine of angels has somehow strayed into the bounds of the comprehensive article, "Demons and Spirits," in Hastings's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, and thus deprived the reader of the description which he would naturally look for in that place of the ideas of demons and spirits which have been prevalent among Christians.

²² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, ed. 1884, vol. II, 117 ff., sums up the testimony of this period as follows: "It is remarkable that the genuine writings of the ante-Nicene church are more free from miraculous and superstitious elements than the annals of the Nicene age and the Middle Ages.... Most of the statements of the apologists are couched in general terms, and refer to the extraordinary cures from demoniacal possession ... and other diseases.... Justin Martyr speaks of such occurrences as frequent ... and Origen appeals to his own personal observation, but speaks in another place of the growing scarcity of miracles.... Tertullian attributes many if not most of the conversions of his day to supernatural dreams and visions, as does also Origen, although with more caution. But in such psychological phenomena it is exceedingly difficult to draw the line of demarcation between natural and supernatural causes, and between providential interpositions and miracles proper. The strongest passage on this subject is found in Irenæus, who, in contending against the heretics, mentions, besides the prophecies and miraculous cures of demoniacs, even the raising of the dead among contemporary events taking place in the Catholic Church; but he specifies no particular case or name; and it should be remembered also, that his youth still bordered almost on the Johannean age."

When Schaff cites Origen as speaking of a "growing scarcity of miracles," his language is not exact. What Origen says, is: "But there were signs from the Holy Spirit at the beginning of Christ's teaching, and after His ascension He exhibited more, but subsequently fewer. Nevertheless, even now still there are traces of them with a few who have had their souls purified by the gospel." Here, there is a recognition of the facts that miracles were relatively few after the Apostolic age, and that in Origen's day there were very few indeed to be found. But there is no assertion that they had *gradually* ceased; only an assertion that they had practically ceased. "The age of miracles, therefore," comments Harnack justly, "lay for Origen in earlier days." "Eusebius is not the first (in the third book of his *History*) to look back upon the age of the Spirit and of power as the bygone heroic age of the church, for Origen had already pronounced this judgment on the past from an impoverished present." (*The Expansion of Christianity*, as cited, p. 257, and note 2.)

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The importance of this phenomenon may be thought to require that we should give a little closer scrutiny to it, and this the more because of the mocking comment which Gibbon has founded on it. "But the miraculous cure of diseases of the most inveterate or even preternatural kind," says he,²³ "can no longer occasion any surprise when we recollect that in the days of Irenæus, about the end of the second century, the resurrection of the dead was very far from being esteemed an uncommon event; that the miracle was frequently performed on necessary occasions, by great fasting and the joint supplication of the church of the place; and that the persons thus restored by their prayers had lived afterward among them many years. At such a period, when faith could boast of so many wonderful victories over death, it seems difficult to account for the scepticism of those philosophers who still rejected and derided the doctrine of the resurrection. A noble Grecian had rested on this important ground the whole controversy, and promised Theophilus, bishop of Antioch, that, if he could be gratified by the sight of a single person who had been actually raised from the dead, he would immediately embrace the Christian religion. It is somewhat remarkable that the prelate of the first Eastern church, however anxious for the conversion of his friend, thought proper to decline this fair and reasonable challenge."

The true character of Gibbon's satirical remarks is already apparent from the circumstances to which we have already alluded, that Irenæus alone of all the writers of this period speaks of raisings of the dead at all, and that he speaks of them after a fashion which suggests that he has in mind not contemporary but past instances—doubtless those recorded in the narratives of the New Testament.²⁴ Eusebius does no doubt narrate what he calls "a wonderful story," told by Papias on the authority of the daughters of Philip, whom Papias knew. "For," says Eusebius, "he relates that in his time," that is to say in Philip's time, "one rose from the dead."²⁵ This resuscitation, however, it will be observed, belongs to the Apostolic, not the post-Apostolic times, and it is so spoken of as to suggest that it was thought very wonderful both by Eusebius and by Papias. It is very clear that Eusebius was not familiar with raisings from the dead in his own day, and also that Papias was not familiar with them in his day;²⁶ and it is equally clear that Eusebius did not know of numerous instances of such a transaction having been recorded as occurring in the course of the early history of the church, which history he was in the act

²³ *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. xv, § 111, ed. Smith, 1887, vol. II, pp. 178 ff.

²⁴ These points are accordingly duly intimated by Milman in his note on Gibbon's passage. For the former of them he appeals to Middleton (*Works*, I, p. 59) as sponsor; for the latter to Douglas (*Criterion*, p. 389).

²⁵ *H. E.*, III, 39, 9.

²⁶ Bernard, *op. cit.*, p. 159, remarks justly that Papias "virtually implies that he himself never saw any such occurrence, his only knowledge of 'miracles' of this kind being derived from hearsay."

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of transcribing.²⁷ One would think that this would carry with it the implication that Eusebius did not understand Irenæus to assert their frequent, or even occasional, or even singular, occurrence in his time. Nevertheless when he comes to cite Irenæus's witness to the continuance "to his time in some of the churches"—so he cautiously expresses himself—"of manifestations of divine and miraculous power," he quotes his words here after a fashion which seems to imply that he understood him to testify to the occurrence in his own time of raisings from the dead.²⁸

It is an understatement to say that Irenæus's contemporaries were unaware that the dead were being raised in their day. What they say amounts to testimony that they were not being raised. This is true not only of the manner in which Theophilus of Antioch parries the demands of Autolycus,²⁹ but equally of the manner in which Tertullian reverts to the matter. He is engaged specifically in contrasting the Apostles with their "companions," that is, their immediate successors in the church, with a view to rebuking the deference which was being paid to the *Shepherd* of Hermas. Among the contrasts which obtained between them, he says that the Apostles possessed spiritual powers peculiar to themselves, that is to say, not shared by their successors. He illustrates this, among other things, by declaring, "For they raised the dead."³⁰ It would be strange indeed if Irenæus has nevertheless represented raisings from the dead to have been a common occurrence precisely in the church of Theophilus and Tertullian.

²⁷ Cf. Bernard, as cited: "If they were frequent, if he had ever seen one himself, he would have told us of it, or to speak more accurately, Eusebius would not have selected for quotation a second-hand story, if the direct evidence of an eye-witness was on record." How did Eusebius, then, understand Irenæus? As testifying to a common occurrence in his time? Or, even to a single instance within his own knowledge? This seems unlikely.

²⁸ *H. E.*, V, 7, 1 f.

²⁹ I: 13: "Then, as to your denying that the dead are raised—for you say, 'Show me one who has been raised from the dead, that seeing I may believe'—first, what great thing is it if you believe when you have seen the thing done? Then, again, you believe that Hercules, who burned himself, lives; and that Æsculapius, who was struck with lightning, was raised; and do you disbelieve the things that are told you by God? But, suppose I should show you a dead man raised and alive, even this you would disbelieve. God indeed exhibits to you many proofs that you may believe Him. For, consider, if you please, the dying of seasons, and days, and nights, how these also die and rise again," etc.

³⁰ *De Pudicitia*, 21: "And so, if it were agreed that even the blessed Apostles had granted any such indulgence, the pardon of which comes from God, not from man, it would have been competent for them to have done so, not in the exercise of discipline, but of power. For they both raised the dead, which God alone can do; and restored the debilitated to their integrity, which none but Christ can do; nay they inflicted plagues, too, which Christ would not do, for it did not beseem Him to be severe who had come to suffer. Smitten were both Ananias and Elymas—Ananias with death, Elymas with blindness—in order that by this very fact it might be proven that Christ had had the power of doing even such (miracles)."

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A scrutiny of his language makes it plain enough that he has not done so. In the passages cited³¹ Irenæus is contrasting the miracles performed by Christians with the poor magical wonders to which alone the heretics he is engaged in refuting can appeal. In doing this he has in mind the whole miraculous attestation of Christianity, and not merely the particular miracles which could be witnessed in his own day. If we will read him carefully we shall observe that, as he runs along in his enumeration of the Christian marvels, “there is a sudden and unexpected change of tense when he begins to speak of this greatest of miracles” — raising from the dead. “Healing, exorcism, and prophecy — these he asserts are matters of present experience; but he never says that of resurrection from the dead. ‘It often happened,’ *i.e.*, in the past; ‘they were raised up,’ *i. e.*, again at some time gone by. The use of the past tense here, and here alone, implies, we may say, that Irenæus had not witnessed an example with his own eyes, or at least that such occurrences were not usual when he was writing. So, when he states, ‘Even the dead were raised and abode with us many years’ — it does not appear that he means anything more than this — that

³¹ *Adv. Haer.*, II, 31:2: Speaking of the followers of one Simon, and their inability to work miracles, Irenæus proceeds (Bernard’s translation): “They can neither give sight to the blind, nor hearing to the deaf, nor put to flight all demons, except those which are sent into others by themselves, if they can, indeed, even do this. Nor can they cure the weak, or the lame, or the paralytic, or those that are troubled in any other part of the body, as often happens to be done in respect of bodily infirmity. Nor can they furnish effective remedies for those external accidents which may occur. And so far are they from raising the dead as the Lord raised them, and the Apostles did by means of prayer, and as when frequently in the brotherhood, the whole church in the locality, having made petition with much fasting and prayer, the spirit of the dead one has returned (ἐπεστρέψε), and the man has been given back (ἐχαρίσθη) to the prayers of the saints — (so far are they from doing this) that they do not believe that it can possibly be done, and they think that resurrection from the dead means a rejection of the truth of their tenets.” *Adv. Haer.*, II, 32:4: “Those who are in truth the Lord’s disciples, having received grace from Him, do in His name perform (miracles) for the benefit of other men, according to the gift which each one has received from Him. For some certainly and truly drive out demons, so that those who have been cleansed from the evil spirits frequently believe and are in the church. Others have foreknowledge of things to come, and visions, and prophetic warnings. Others heal the sick by imposition of their hands, and they are restored to health. Yea, moreover, as we said, even the dead were raised and abode with us many years (ἠγέρθησαν καὶ παρέμειναν σὺν ἡμῖν ἱκανοῖς ἔτεσι). What more shall I say? It is not possible to tell the number of the gifts which the church throughout the world has received from God in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and which she exerts day by day for the welfare of the nations, neither deceiving any, nor taking any reward for such. For as freely as she hath received from God, so freely doth she minister.” It is quite clear that in II, 32:4 Irenæus throws the raisings from the dead well into the past. This is made evident not only from the past tenses employed, which are markedly contrasted with the present tenses used in the rest of the passage, but also from the statement that those who were thus raised had lived after their resuscitation a considerable number of years, which shows that recent resuscitations are not in view. The passage in II, 31:2, ambiguous in itself, is explained by II, 32:4, which Irenæus himself represents as a repetition of it (“as we said”). It appears, then, that in neither passage has Irenæus recent instances in view — and there is no reason why the cases he has in mind may not have occurred during the lifetime of the Apostles or of Apostolic men.

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such events happened within living memory." In these last remarks we have been quoting J. H. Bernard, and we find ourselves fully in accord with his conclusion.³² "The inference from the whole passage," says he, "is, we believe, that these major miracles no longer happened—an inference which is corroborated by all the testimony we have got."

When we come to think of it, it is rather surprising that the Christians had no raisings from the dead to point to through all these years. The fact is striking testimony to the marked sobriety of their spirit. The heathen had them in plenty.³³ In an age so innocent of real medical knowledge, and filled to the brim and overflowing with superstition, apparent death and resuscitation were frequent, and they played a rôle of importance in the Greek prophet and philosopher legends of the time.³⁴ A famous instance occurs in Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, which, from a certain resemblance between it and the narrative of the raising of the widow of Nain's son, used to be thought an imitation of that passage.³⁵ Things are better understood now, and it is universally recognized that we have in this beautiful story neither an imitation of the New Testament nor a polemic against it, but a simple product of the aretology of the day. Otto Weinreich has brought together the cases of raising from the dead which occur in this literature, in the first excursus to his treatise on *Ancient Miracles of Healing*.³⁶ He thus enables us to observe at a glance the large place they take in it. It is noticeable that they were not esteemed a very great thing. In the instance just alluded to, the introduction of a resuscitation into Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius* is accompanied by an intimation that it may possibly be susceptible of a natural explanation. Philostratus does not desire to make the glory of his hero depend on a thing which even a common magician could do, but rather rests it on those greater miracles which intimate the divine nature of the man.³⁷

³² As cited, p. 164. Cf. Douglas, as cited in note 24.

³³ Th. Trede, *Wunderglaube im Heidentum und in der alten Kirche*, 1901, pp. 83–88, brings together the instances from the literature. No doubt the heathen did not really believe in these resuscitations, at least when they were instructed men. It did not require a Lucian to scoff at them: Minucius Felix (*Octavius*, chap. 11 *ad fin.*) makes his Cæcilius remark that despite the long time that has passed away, the innumerable ages that have flowed by, no single individual has returned from the dead, either by the fate of Protesilaus, with permission to sojourn even a few hours, or to serve as an example to men. The Christians, he asserts, in teaching a resurrection from the dead, have but revamped the figments of an unwholesome belief with which deceiving poets have trifled in sweet verses.

³⁴ Cf. Erwin Rohde, *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer*, 1900, p. 287, note 1. Also Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 2:16, 48–58. The famous physician Asclepiades is said to have met a funeral procession and detected that the corpse was still living (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, 7:124; cf. Weinreich, p. 173). Apuleius, *Flor.*, 19, relates this as an actual resuscitation. The texts may be conveniently consulted in Paul Fiebig, *Antike Wundergeschichten*, etc., 1911.

³⁵ Cf. F. C. Baur, *Apollonius von Tyana und Christus*, p. 140.

³⁶ *Antike Heilungswunder*, 1909, pp. 171–174.

³⁷ Weinreich, as cited, p. 171, note 1; R. Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, 1906, p. 41, note 3.

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You probably would like to have the account which Philostratus gives of this miracle before you. "Here too," he writes,³⁸ "is a miracle which Apollonius worked: A girl had died just in the hour of her marriage, and the bridegroom was following her bier lamenting, as was natural, his marriage left unfulfilled; and the whole of Rome was mourning with him, for the maiden belonged to a consular family. Apollonius, then, witnessing their grief, said: 'Put down the bier, for I will stay the tears that you are shedding for this maiden.' And withal he asked what was her name. The crowd accordingly thought he was about to deliver such an oration as is commonly delivered as much to grace the funeral as to stir up lamentation; but he did nothing of the kind, but merely touching her and whispering in secret some spell over her, at once woke up the maiden from her seeming death; and the girl spoke out loud and returned to her father's house; just as Alkestis did when she was brought back to life by Herakles. And the relations of the maiden wanted to present him with one hundred and fifty thousand sesterces, but he said that he would freely present the money to the young lady by way of a dowry. Now, whether he detected some spark of life in her, which those who were nursing her had not discovered—for it is said that, although it was raining at the time, a vapor went up from her face—or whether life was really extinct, and he restored it by the warmth of his touch, is a mysterious problem which neither I myself nor those who were present could decide."

We are naturally led at this point to introduce a further remark which has its importance for the understanding of the facts of the testimony. All that has been heretofore said concerns the church writers, properly so-called, the literary remains of the church considered as the body of right-believing Christians. Alongside of this literature, however, there existed a flourishing growth of apocryphal writings—Acts of Apostles and the like—springing up in the fertile soil of Ebionitish and Gnostic heresy, the most respectable example of which is furnished by the Clementina. In these anonymous, or more usually pseudonymous, writings, there is no dearth of miraculous story, from whatever age they come. Later, these wild and miracle-laden documents were taken over into the Catholic church, usually after a certain amount of reworking by which they were cleansed to a greater or less—usually less—extent of their heresies, but not in the least bit of their apocryphal miracle-stories. Indeed, by the relative elimination of their heresies in the Catholic reworking, their *teratology*—as the pedants call their miracle-mongering—was made even more the prominent feature of these documents, and more exclusively the sole purpose of their narrative.³⁹ It is from these apocryphal miracle-stories and not

³⁸ Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, etc., with an English translation by F. C. Conybeare (The Loeb Classical Library), vol. I, 1912, pp. 457 ff.

³⁹ Cf. E. von Dobschütz, "Der Roman in der Altchristlichen Literatur," in the *Deutsche Rundschau*, vol. CXI, April, 1902, p. 105. He remarks: "To that we owe it that so many of these legends have been preserved."

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from the miracles of the New Testament, that the luxuriant growth of the miraculous stories of later ecclesiastical writings draw their descent. And this is as much as to say that their ultimate parentage must be traced to those heathen wonder-tales to which we have just had occasion to allude.

For the literary form exemplified in the *Wanderings of the Apostles* was not an innovation of the Christian heretics, but had already enjoyed a vast popularity in the heathen romances which swarmed under the empire, and the best known names of which are Antonius Diogenes's *Incredible Tales of Beyond Thule*, Jamblicus's *Babylonian Tales*, the *Ephesian Stories* of the later Xenophon, the *Ethiopians* of Heliodorus, the romances of Achilles Tatius and of Chariton, not to mention the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius.⁴⁰ R. Reitzenstein no doubt insists that we shall draw into a somewhat narrower category and no longer speak of these wonder-tales with which we have here especially to do, broadly, as romances. He wishes to retain that term to describe a highly artistic literary form which, developing out of the historical monograph, was strictly governed by technical laws of composition derived ultimately from the drama. With the romance in this narrow sense, the collections of marvellous stories loosely strung together in the wonder-tales have but a distant relationship. We must not confuse, Reitzenstein counsels us, two kinds of fiction, which were sharply distinguished in ancient æsthetics, *πλάσμα* and *ψεῦδος*,⁴¹ or mix up two literary forms which were quite distinct in their whole technic and style—merely because they were born together and grew up side by side. The romance plays on every string of human emotion; the wonder-tale—*aretalogy* is the name which Reitzenstein gives to this literary form—strikes but one note, and has as its single end to arouse astonishment.⁴² It represented in the ancient world, though in an immensely more serious vein, our modern *Gulliver's Travels* or *Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, which in fact are parodies of it, like their inimitable forerunners with which Lucian has delighted the centuries. It will be readily understood that the wonder-tale—the motives of the travelling prophet or philosopher having been fairly worked out—should eagerly seize on the new material offered it by Christianity. But as Von Dobschütz remarks,⁴³ the matter did not end by its seizing on Christianity. Christianity turned the tables on it and seized

⁴⁰ Von Dobschütz, as cited, p. 88. "I think that I may venture to say," says Reitzenstein, *op. cit.*, p. 55, "that the literary model of the Christian Acts of the Apostles was supplied by the Aretalogies of prophets and philosophers. We should not think merely of the few which accident has preserved for us—and that exclusively in literary reworkings or parodies; a certain importance attaches to the connection of one of these essentially anonymous miracle-stories already with Athenodorus, the Stoic teacher of Augustus."

⁴¹ Perhaps we may roughly represent these two things by "romance" and "fable."

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

⁴³ As cited, p. 100.

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on it, and produced out of it the mission aretology which we know in general as the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.

With its passage thus into Christian hands this literary form lost none of its marvel-mongery—to have lost which would have been to have lost its soul. “ ‘Teratology,’ ‘marvellousness,’ ” explains Von Dobschütz,⁴⁴ “is the fundamental element of these Christian romances also. This is made very clear,” he goes on to say, “by the circumstance that it is regularly magic of which the Apostles are represented as being accused. Of course they do not admit that the accusation is just. Magical arts are demonic arts, and it was precisely every kind of demonic power against which they set themselves in the almighty name of Jesus Christ. It is most impressively shown that to this name every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth is to bow. We cannot help seeing, however, that only another form of magic, a Christian magic, steps here into the place of the heathen. The name of Jesus serves as the all-powerful spell, the cross as the irresistible charm, by which bolts can be sprung, doors opened, idols overturned, poison rendered harmless, the sick healed, the dead raised. The demonic flight of the magician is confounded by the prayer of the Apostles; they are none the less themselves carried home on the clouds, through the air.” Something new entered Christianity in these wonder-tales; something unknown to the Christianity of the Apostles, unknown to the Apostolic churches, and unknown to their sober successors; and it entered Christianity from without, not through the door, but climbing up some other way. It brought an abundance of miracle-working with it; and, unfortunately, it brought it to stay. But from a contemplation of the swelling flood of marvels thus introduced into Christianity, obviously, the theory of the gradual cessation of miracle-working in the church through three centuries, which we are now examining, can derive no support.⁴⁵

It may be justly asked, how it can be accounted for that so large a body of students of history can have committed themselves to a view which so clearly runs in the face of the plainest facts of the very history they are setting themselves to explain. The answer is

⁴⁴ As cited, pp. 100 ff.

⁴⁵ On Greek and Latin fiction, the short article by Louis H. Gray in Hastings's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VI, pp. 6–8, may be consulted, and the work on which Gray chiefly depends, F. M. Warren, *History of the Novel Previous to the Seventeenth Century*, 1890, pp. 21 ff. A good brief account of Greek and early Christian novels is given by T. R. Glover, in the last chapter of his *Life and Letters in the Fourth Century*, 1901, pp. 357–386. The German replica of this is Von Dobschütz's essay already mentioned. The great work on the Greek romances is Erwin Rohde's, already mentioned, by the side of which should be placed E. Schwartz, *Fünf Vorträge über den Griechen Roman*, 1896, and A. Chassang, *Histoire du Roman dans l' Antiquité Grecque et Latine*, 1862. Reitzenstein, in the book already mentioned, seeks to introduce more precision into the treatment of literary forms. See also the concluding chapter on *Die Bekenner-vitæ* in E. Günter's *Legenden-Studien*, 1906 (cf. also his *Die christliche Legende des Abendlandes*, 1910), and cf. G. H. Gerould, *Saints' Legends*, 1916, pp. 33 f.

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doubtless to be found in the curious power which preconceived theory has to blind men to facts. The theory which these scholars had been led to adopt as to the cessation of miraculous powers in the church required the course of events which they assume to have happened. They recognized the abundant development of miraculous gifts in the Apostolic Church, and they argued that this wide-spread endowment could scarcely fail suddenly, but must have died out gradually. In estimating the length of time through which the miracle-working might justly be supposed to subsist, and at the end of which it might naturally be expected to have died out, they were unfortunately determined by a theory of the function of these miracles in the Apostolic Church which was plausible indeed, and because plausible attractive, but which was not founded on an accurate ascertainment of the teaching of the New Testament on the subject, and therefore so missed the truth that, in its application to the history of the early church, it exactly reversed it. This theory is in brief, I may remind you, that the miraculous powers present in the early church had for their end supernatural assistance in founding the church; that they were therefore needed throughout the period of the church's weak infancy, being in brief, as Fuller calls them, "the swaddling-clothes of the infant churches"; and that naturally they were withdrawn when their end had been accomplished and Christianity had ascended the throne of the empire. When the protection of the strongest power on earth was secured, the idea seems to be, the power of God was no longer needed.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The use to which this opinion, become traditional, is put, may be illustrated by its employment by Charles Herman Lea, *A Plea ... for Christian Science*, 1915, p. 58, and its similar employment by Samuel McComb, *Religion and Medicine*, 1908, pp. 295 ff. The former writes: "In the early years of the Christian Church, this command to heal the sick appears to have been fulfilled to a considerable degree, and history records that Christian healing was practiced until the end of the third century. Then it appears to have been gradually discontinued, as the spiritual life of the church declined, until the power was entirely lost sight of in the gross materialism that culminated in the union of Church and State. That the power to heal is not generally possessed by the 'Christian' Church to-day is certain; nor could anything be more misleading than the idea, sometimes propounded from the pulpits, that the ability to heal was withdrawn because it became no longer necessary for the church to give such evidence of God's power, and of their understanding of Him. For this very power was the evidence that Jesus Christ himself gave as proof of the truth of his teaching. Hence, one of the questions that the churches of Christendom need to face to-day is, 'Why are we unable to fulfil our Lord's clear and express command?' Is it because they do not correctly understand his teaching, or because they do not consider obedience to him, in this respect, necessary? Or has the church not yet risen above the materialism that marked its decadence in the early centuries of its history?" "Perhaps nowhere in history," writes McComb, "can we find the power of faith to heal disorders of a semi-moral and semi-nervous character so strikingly illustrated as in the early centuries of the church's existence. The literature of the ante-Nicene period is permeated with a sense of conquest over sickness, disease, and moral ills of every kind.... Gibbon, in his famous fifteenth chapter, mentions as the third cause of the spread of Christianity, 'the miraculous powers of the primitive church,' among which he names the expulsion of demons, but he dismisses the whole matter with a scoff as a product of superstition. Wider knowledge now shows that the historian's skepticism was quite unjustified. There is abundant testimony that one of the most important factors of the early propaganda

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But whence can we learn this to have been the end the miracles of the Apostolic age were intended to serve? Certainly not from the New Testament. In it not one word is ever dropped to this effect. Certain of the gifts (as, for example, the gift of tongues) are no doubt spoken of as “signs to those that are without.” It is required of all of them that they be exercised for the edification of the church; and a distinction is drawn between them in value, in proportion as they were for edification. But the immediate end for which they were given is not left doubtful, and that proves to be not directly the extension of the church, but the authentication of the Apostles as messengers from God. This does not mean, of course, that only the Apostles appear in the New Testament as working miracles, or that they alone are represented as recipients of the charismata. But it does mean that the charismata belonged, in a true sense, to the Apostles, and constituted one of the signs of an Apostle. Only in the two great initial instances of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost and the reception of Cornelius are charismata recorded as conferred without the laying on of the hands of Apostles.⁴⁷ There is no instance on record of their conference by the laying on of the hands of any one else than an Apostle.⁴⁸ The case of the Samaritans, recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts, is not only a very instructive one in itself, but may even be looked upon as the cardinal instance. The church had been propagated hitherto by the immediately evangelistic work of the Apostles themselves, and it had been accordingly the Apostles themselves who had received the converts into the church. Apparently they had all received the power of working signs by the laying on of the Apostles’ hands at their baptism. The Samaritans were the first converts to be gathered into the church by men who were not Apostles; and the signs of the Apostles were accordingly lacking to them until Peter and John were sent down to them that they might “receive the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:14–17). The effect on Simon Magus of the sight of these gifts springing up on the laying on of the Apostles’ hands, we will all remember. The salient statements are very explicit. “Then laid they their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost.” “Now when Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles’ hands the Holy Ghost was given.” “Give me also this power, that, on whomsoever I lay my hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” It could not be more

of the Christian faith was an especial power which Christians seemed to have over various psychical disturbances.... Even so late as the time of Augustine, we find a belief in the healing power of faith still existent. In his *City of God* he describes various healing-wonders of which he was an eye-witness, and which were done in the name of Christ.” The entire angle of vision here is unhistorical.

⁴⁷ John Lightfoot (*Works*, Pittman’s 8 vol. ed., vol. III, p. 204) suggests as the reason for these two exceptions: “The Holy Ghost at this its first bestowing upon the Gentiles is given in the like manner as it was at its first bestowing on the Jewish nation, —namely, by immediate infusion; at all other times you find mention of it, you find mention of imposition of hands used for it.”

⁴⁸ Acts 9:12–17 is no exception, as is sometimes said; Ananias worked a miracle on Paul but did not confer miracle-working powers. Paul’s own power of miracle-working was original with him as an Apostle, and not conferred by any one.

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emphatically stated that the Holy Ghost was conferred by the laying on of the hands, specifically of the Apostles, and of the Apostles alone; what Simon is said to have seen is precisely that it was through the laying on of the hands of just the Apostles that the Holy Ghost was given. And there can be no question that it was specifically the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit that were in discussion; no doubt is thrown upon the genuineness of the conversion of the Samaritans; on the contrary, this is taken as a matter of course, and its assumption underlies the whole narrative; it constitutes in fact the very point of the narrative.

This case of the Samaritans was of great importance in the primitive church, to enable men to distinguish between the gifts of grace and the gifts of power. Without it there would have been danger that only those would be accredited as Christians who possessed extraordinary gifts. It is of equal importance to us, to teach us the source of the gifts of power, in the Apostles, apart from whom they were not conferred: as also their function, to authenticate the Apostles as the authoritative founders of the church. It is in accordance with this reading of the significance of this incident, that Paul, who had all the signs of an Apostle, had also the power of conferring the charismata, and that in the entire New Testament we meet with no instance of the gifts showing themselves—after the initial instances of Pentecost and Cornelius—where an Apostle had not conveyed them. Hermann Cremer is accordingly quite right when he says⁴⁹ that “the Apostolic charismata bear the same relation to those of the ministry that the Apostolic office does to the pastoral office”; the extraordinary gifts belonged to the extraordinary office and showed themselves only in connection with its activities.⁵⁰

The connection of the supernatural gifts with the Apostles is so obvious that one wonders that so many students have missed it, and have sought an account of them in some other quarter. The true account has always been recognized, however, by some of the more careful students of the subject. It has been clearly set forth, for example, by Bishop Kaye. “I may be allowed to state the conclusion,” he writes,⁵¹ “to which I have myself been led by a comparison of the statements in the Book of Acts with the writings of the Fathers of

⁴⁹ Schaff-Herzog, *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1st edition, vol. II, p. 873.

⁵⁰ The connection of the “signs and wonders and manifold powers of the Holy Ghost” in some particular fashion with the first generation of Christians—“them that heard” the Lord, that is to say, at least the Apostolic generation, possibly specifically the Apostles—seems to be implied in Heb. 2:4. That Paul regards the charismata as “credentials of the Apostolic mission” (possibly even Rom. 1:11 may be cited here) is clear even to J. A. MacCulloch (Hastings’s *E R E.*, VIII, p. 683 b), although he himself doubts the soundness of this view. A. Schlatter (Hastings’s *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, I, 577 a) says with great distinctness: “The Gospels, the Book of Acts, and the utterances of St. Paul regarding his ‘signs’ (2 Cor. 12:12), all show distinctly that miracles were intimately related to the Apostolic function.”

⁵¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries, Illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian*, 1825; 2d ed., 1826; 3d ed., 1845, pp. 98 ff.

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the second century. My conclusion then is, that the power of working miracles was not extended beyond the disciples upon whom the Apostles conferred it by the imposition of their hands. As the number of these disciples gradually diminished, the instances of the exercise of miraculous powers became continually less frequent, and ceased entirely at the death of the last individual on whom the hands of the Apostles had been laid. That event would, in the natural course of things, take place before the middle of the second century—at a time when Christianity, having obtained a footing in all the provinces of the Roman Empire, the miraculous gifts conferred upon the first teachers had performed their appropriate office—that of proving to the world that a new revelation had been given from heaven. What, then, would be the effect produced upon the minds of the great body of Christians by their gradual cessation? Many would not observe, none would be willing to observe, it.... They who remarked the cessation of miracles would probably succeed in persuading themselves that it was only temporary and designed by an all-wise Providence to be the prelude to a more abundant effusion of the supernatural powers upon the church. Or if doubts and misgivings crossed their minds, they would still be unwilling to state a fact which might shake the steadfastness of their friends, and would certainly be urged by the enemies of the gospel as an argument against its divine origin. They would pursue the plan which has been pursued by Justin Martyr, Theophilus, Irenæus, etc.; they would have recourse to general assertions of the existence of supernatural powers, without attempting to produce a specific instance of their exercise....” The bishop then proceeds to recapitulate the main points and grounds of this theory.⁵²

⁵² Bernard, as cited, p. 130, gives his acceptance to Kaye’s view, speaking of “that power which in the days of the Apostles was confined to them and those on whom they had laid their hands.” B. F. Manire, in an article on the “Work of the Holy Spirit,” in *The New Christian Quarterly*, IV, 2, p. 38 (April, 1895), gives exceptionally clear expression to the facts: “The matter of imparting the Holy Ghost through the laying on of their hands, belonged exclusively, as it appears to me, to the Apostles, and therefore passed away with them.... Others besides the Apostles could preach the Gospel ‘with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven,’ and could work miracles in confirmation of their testimony; but only the Apostles by the imposition of their own hands could impart the Holy Spirit to others in its wonder-working power. To me it appears that the bestowal of this power on the Apostles was the highest testimonial of their official character and authority.” Paton J. Gloag comments on Acts 8:15–16 thus: “By the Holy Ghost here is not to be understood the ordinary or sanctifying influences of the Spirit. The Samaritans, in the act of believing the gospel, received the Holy Ghost in this sense.... The miraculous influences of the Spirit, which are manifested by speaking with tongues and prophesyings, are here meant. As Calvin remarks, ‘He speaks not in this place of the common grace of the Spirit, whereby God regenerates us that we may be His children, but of those singular gifts whereby God would have certain endowed, at the beginning of the Gospel, to beautify the Kingdom of Christ.’ But the question arises, Why could not Philip bestow the Holy Ghost?... The common opinion appears to be the correct one—namely, that Philip could not bestow the Holy Ghost because he was not an Apostle. This, though not expressly stated, yet seems implied in the narrative. So Chrysostom and Epiphanius among the fathers, and Grotius, Lightfoot,

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Whatever we may think of the specific explanation which Bishop Kaye presents of the language of the second-century Fathers, we can scarcely fail to perceive that the confinement of the supernatural gifts by the Scriptures to those who had them conferred upon them by the Apostles, affords a ready explanation of all the historical facts. It explains the unobserved dying out of these gifts. It even explains—what might at first sight seem inconsistent with it—the failure of allusion to them in the first half of the second century. The great missionary Apostles, Paul and Peter, had passed away by A. D. 68, and apparently only John was left in extreme old age until the last decade of the first century. The number of those upon whom the hands of Apostles had been laid, living still in the second century, cannot have been very large. We know of course of John's pupil Polycarp; we may add perhaps an Ignatius, a Papias, a Clement, possibly a Hermas, or even a Leucius; but at the most there are few of whom we know with any definiteness. That Justin and Irenæus and their contemporaries allude to miracle-working as a thing which had to their knowledge existed in their day, and yet with which they seem to have little exact personal acquaintance, is also explained. Irenæus's youth was spent in the company of pupils of the Apostles; Justin may easily have known of, if not even witnessed, miracles wrought by Apostolically trained men. The fault of these writers need have been no more than a failure to observe, or to acknowledge, the cessation of these miracles during their own time; so that it is not so much the trustworthiness of their testimony as their understanding of the changing times which falls under criticism. If we once lay firm hold upon the biblical principle which governed the distribution of the miraculous gifts, in a word, we find that we have in our hands a key which unlocks all the historical puzzles connected with them.

There is, of course, a deeper principle recognizable here, of which the actual attachment of the charismata of the Apostolic Church to the mission of the Apostles is but an illustration. This deeper principle may be reached by us through the perception, more broadly, of the inseparable connection of miracles with revelation, as its mark and credential; or, more narrowly, of the summing up of all revelation, finally, in Jesus Christ. Miracles do not appear on the page of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the

DeWette, Baumgarten, Meyer, Olshausen, and Wordsworth among the moderns." John Lightfoot holds that the charismata were not conferred indiscriminately on all but only on a select few, to endow them (a plurality in each church) for the office of "minister." But that these gifts were conferred only by laying on the Apostles' hands he is clear. Cf. *Works*, ed. Pittman, vol. III, p. 30: "To give the Holy Ghost was a peculiar prerogative of the Apostles"; vol. III, p. 194, commenting on Acts 8: "Philip baptized Samaritans and did great wonders among them, but could not bestow the Holy Ghost upon them: that power belonged only to the Apostles; therefore Peter and John are sent thither for that purpose."

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richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also, as a mere matter of course. It might, indeed, be *a priori* conceivable that God should deal with men atomistically, and reveal Himself and His will to each individual, throughout the whole course of history, in the penetralium of his own consciousness. This is the mystic's dream. It has not, however, been God's way. He has chosen rather to deal with the race in its entirety, and to give to this race His complete revelation of Himself in an organic whole. And when this historic process of organic revelation had reached its completeness, and when the whole knowledge of God designed for the saving health of the world had been incorporated into the living body of the world's thought—there remained, of course, no further revelation to be made, and there has been accordingly no further revelation made. God the Holy Spirit has made it His subsequent work, not to introduce new and unneeded revelations into the world, but to diffuse this one complete revelation through the world and to bring mankind into the saving knowledge of it.

As Abraham Kuyper figuratively expresses it,⁵³ it has not been God's way to communicate to each and every man a separate store of divine knowledge of his own, to meet his separate needs; but He rather has spread a common board for all, and invites all to come and partake of the richness of the great feast. He has given to the world one organically complete revelation, adapted to all, sufficient for all, provided for all, and from this one completed revelation He requires each to draw his whole spiritual sustenance. Therefore it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God's revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed. It is unreasonable to ask miracles, says John Calvin—or to find them-where there is no new gospel.⁵⁴ By as much as the one gospel suffices for all lands and all peoples and all times, by so much does the miraculous attestation of that one single gospel suffice for all lands and all times, and no further miracles are to be expected in connection with it. "According to the Scriptures," Herman Bavinck explains,⁵⁵ "special revelation has been delivered in the form of a historical process, which reaches its endpoint in the person and work of Christ. When Christ had appeared and returned again to heaven, special revelation did not, indeed, come at once to an end. There was yet to follow the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, and the extraordinary working of the powers and gifts through and under the guidance of the Apostolate. The Scriptures undoubtedly reckon all this to the sphere of special revelation, and the continuance of this revelation was necessary to give abiding

⁵³ *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, E. T., 1898, p. 368; cf. pp. 355 ff.

⁵⁴ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, E. T., by John Allen; ed. Philadelphia, 1909, vol. I, pp. 26 ff.: "Their requiring miracles of us is altogether unreasonable; for we forge no new Gospel, but retain the very same whose truth was confirmed by all the miracles ever wrought by Christ and the Apostles"—and so forth.

⁵⁵ *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*², I, pp. 363 f.

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existence in the world to the special revelation which reached its climax in Christ—abiding existence both in the word of Scripture and in the life of the church. Truth and life, prophecy and miracle, word and deed, inspiration and regeneration go hand in hand in the completion of special revelation. But when the revelation of God in Christ had taken place, and had become in Scripture and church a constituent part of the cosmos, then another era began. As before everything was a preparation for Christ, so afterward everything is to be a consequence of Christ. Then Christ was being framed into the Head of His people, now His people are being framed into the Body of Christ. Then the Scriptures were being produced, now they are being applied. New constituent elements of special revelation can no longer be added; for Christ has come, His work has been done, and His word is complete.” Had any miracles perchance occurred beyond the Apostolic age they would be without significance; mere occurrences with no universal meaning. What is important is that “the Holy Scriptures teach clearly that the complete revelation of God is given in Christ, and that the Holy Spirit who is poured out on the people of God has come solely in order to glorify Christ and to take of the things of Christ.” Because Christ is all in all, and all revelation and redemption alike are summed up in Him, it would be inconceivable that either revelation or its accompanying signs should continue after the completion of that great revelation with its accrediting works, by which Christ has been established in His rightful place as the culmination and climax and all-inclusive summary of the saving revelation of God, the sole and sufficient redeemer of His people.

At this point we might fairly rest. But I cannot deny myself the pleasure of giving you some account in this connection of a famous book on the subject we have been discussing—to which indeed incidental allusion has been made. I refer to Conyers Middleton’s *A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian church from the earliest ages through several successive centuries. By which it is shown that we have no sufficient reason to believe, upon the authority of the primitive fathers, that any such powers were continued to the church, after the days of the Apostles.* Middleton was a doughty controversialist, no less admired for his English style, which was reckoned by his contemporaries as second in purity to that of no writer of his day except Addison (though John Wesley more justly found it stiff and pedantic), than feared for the sharpness and persistency of his polemics. He was of a somewhat sceptical temper and perhaps cannot be acquitted of a certain amount of insincerity. We could wish at least that it were clearer that John Wesley’s description of him were undeserved, as “aiming every blow, though he seems to look another way, at the fanatics who wrote the Bible.”⁵⁶ In this, his chief theological work, however, Middleton had a subject where scepticism found a proper mark, and he performs his congenial task with distinct ability. His

⁵⁶ On Wesley’s relations with Middleton, see F. J. Snell, *Wesley and Methodism*, 1900, pp. 151 ff.

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controversial spirit and a certain harshness of tone, while they may detract from the pleasure with which the book is read, do not destroy its value as a solid piece of investigation.

Conscious of the boldness of the views he was about to advocate and foreseeing their unpopularity, Middleton sent forth in 1747 as a sort of preparation for what was to come an *Introductory discourse to a larger work designed hereafter to be published, concerning the miraculous powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian church from the earliest ages through several successive centuries; tending to show that we have no sufficient reason to believe upon the authority of the primitive fathers, that any such powers were continued to the church after the days of the Apostles. With a postscript ...* (London, 1747). In this *Discourse* he points out the helplessness of the Anglican position in the face of Romish claims. There is no reason for allowing miracles for the first three centuries which is not as good or better for allowing them for the succeeding centuries: and yet the greater portion of the miracles of these later centuries were wrought in support of distinctively Romish teaching, which, it would seem, must be accepted, if their attesting miracles are allowed. Next year (1748) he published *Remarks on two Pamphlets ...*, which had appeared in reply to his *Introductory Discourse*; and at length in December, 1748, he permitted the *Free Inquiry* itself to see the light, fitted with a preface in which an account is given of the origin of the book, and the position taken up in the *Introductory Discourse* is pressed more sharply still—that the genuineness of the ecclesiastical miracles being once allowed, no stopping-place can be found until the whole series of alleged miracles down to our own day be admitted. At the end of this preface Middleton's own view as to the cause of the cessation of the spiritual gifts is intimated, and this proves to be only a modification of the current Anglican opinion—that miracles subsisted until the church had been founded in all the chief cities of the empire, which, he held, had been accomplished in the Apostolic times. It is interesting to observe thus that Middleton reached his correct conclusion as to the time of the cessation of these gifts without the help of a right understanding of the true reason of their cessation with the Apostolic age; purely, that is to say, on empirical grounds.

The *Free Inquiry* itself is a scholarly piece of work for its time, and a competent argument. It is disposed in five parts. The first of these simply draws out from the sources and presents in full the testimony to miraculous working found in the Fathers of the first three centuries. The meagreness and indefiniteness of their witness are left to speak for themselves, with only the help of two closing remarks. The one of these presses the impossibility of believing that the gifts were first withdrawn during the first fifty years of the second century and then restored. The other contrasts the patristic miracles with those of the New Testament, with respect both to their nature and the mode of their working. The second section discusses the persons who worked the ecclesiastical

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miracles. It is pointed out that no known writer claims to have himself wrought miracles, or names any of his predecessors as having done so. The honor is left to unknown and obscure men, and afterward to the “rotten bones” of saints who while living did no such works. The third section subjects the character of the early Fathers as men of wisdom and trustworthiness to a severe and not always perfectly fair criticism, with a view to lessening the credit that should be given to their testimony in such a matter as the occurrence of miraculous workings in their day. The fourth section then takes up the several kinds of miracles which, it is pretended, were wrought, and seeks to determine from the nature of each, in each instance of its mention, whether its credibility may be reasonably suspected. Finally, in the fifth section, the principal objections which had been raised, or which seemed likely to be raised, to the tenor of the argument are cited and refuted.

The book was received with a storm of criticism, reprobation, even abuse. It was not refuted. Many published careful and searching examinations of its facts and arguments, among others Doctor William Dodwell⁵⁷ (the younger) and Doctor Thomas Church,⁵⁸ to whom Middleton replied in a *Vindication*, published posthumously (1751). After a century and a half the book remains unrefuted, and, indeed, despite the faults arising from the writer's spirit and the limitations inseparable from the state of scholarship in his day, its main contention seems to be put beyond dispute.^{59 60}

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⁵⁷ *Free Answer to Dr. Middleton's Free Inquiry, etc.*, 1749.

⁵⁸ *A Vindication of the Miraculous Powers which Subsisted in the Three First Centuries of the Christian Church*, 1750. Chapman's *Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church*, 1752 (following up his *Discovery of the Miraculous Powers of the Primitive Church*, 1747) came too late to be included in Middleton's *Vindication*.

⁵⁹ The literature of the subject has been intimated in the course of the lecture. By the side of Middleton's *Free Inquiry* may be placed J. Douglas, *The Criterion; or rules by which the True Miracles recorded in the New Testament are distinguished from the Spurious miracles of Pagans and Papists*, 1752, new edd. 1857, etc., 1867; and Isaac Taylor, *Ancient Christianity*, 1839; ed. 4, 1844, vol. II, pp. 233–365. Cf. also Lecture VIII in J. B. Mozley, *Eight Lectures on Miracles*, 1865. Of J. H. Newman's *Two Essays on Scripture Miracles and on Ecclesiastical*, some account will be given in the next lecture. By its side should be placed Horace Bushnell's eloquent argument for the continuation of miracles in the church in the fourteenth chapter of his *Nature and the Supernatural* (1858; ed. 4, 1859, pp. 446–492).

⁶⁰ Warfield, B. B. (1918). *Counterfeit miracles*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 3-31. Public Domain.