

The Cessation of the Charismata

by Benjamin B. Warfield

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.' 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 gifts 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 them 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 gracious, and those which were distinctly miraculous. In fact, in the classical passage which treats of them (I 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, I Cor. 12--14, consists in the picture given in it of Christian worship in the Apostolic age (14:26ff.) "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 at Corinth was singular in this. The Apostle does not write as if he were describing a marvelous 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 I 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 worshiping assembly, are repeated in I Cor. 14:26ff. 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. 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; nor for that matter of the 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 distinctively the Apostolic Church, and they necessarily passed away with it. 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. 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 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." 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 says, lost as much of its virtue as it had gained of wealth and power." 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* 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, "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.

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. 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. 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. 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: "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 exorcizing 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 Savior's divine mission been diminished!"

This beginning of testimony is followed up to precisely the same effect by Irenaeus, except that Irenaeus 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. Irenaeus's contemporary, indeed, Theophilus of Antioch, while, like Irenaeus, 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." For the rest, we say, Irenaeus'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 (Cent. Haer., II, lvi, lvii; V, vi). Tertullian in like manner speaks of exorcisms, and adduces one case of a prophetically gifted woman (Apol., xxviii; De Anima, ix); and Minucius Felix speaks of exorcism (Oct., XXvi). 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 (Cent. Cels., I, ii; III, xxiv; VII, iv, lxxvii).

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, which we can scarcely 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.

We are no doubt startled to find Irenaeus, 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. 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, "can no longer occasion any surprise when we recollect that in the days of Irenaeus, 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 Irenaeus 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. 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." 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; 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 of transcribing. One would think that this would carry with it the implication that Eusebius did not understand Irenaeus to assert their frequent, or even occasional, or even singular, occurrence in his time. Never- the-less when he comes to cite Irenaeus'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.

It is an understatement to say that Irenaeus'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 Autolytus, 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." It would be strange indeed if Irenaeus has nevertheless represented raisings from the dead to have been a common occurrence precisely in the church of Theophilus and Tertullian.

A scrutiny of his language makes it plain enough that he has not done so. In the passages cited Irenaeus 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 Irenaeus 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 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. "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. 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 role of importance in the Greek prophet and philosopher legends of the time. 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. 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*. 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.

You probably would like to have the account which Philostratus gives of this miracle before you. "Here too," he writes, "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 what ever 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 teratologia-- 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. It is from these apocryphal miracle-stories and not 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. 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 marvelous 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 aesthetics, *plasma* and *pseudos*. 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. 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-- motives of the traveling prophet or philosopher having been fairly worked out--should eagerly seize on the new material offered it by Christianity. But as ton Dobschiitz remarks, the matter did not end by its seizing on Christianity. Christianity turned the tables on it and seized on it, and produced out of it the mission aretalogy 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,' 'marvelousness,'" explains Von Dobschutz, (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.

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 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.

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. There is no instance on record of their conference by the laying on of the hands of any one else than an Apostle. 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 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 says 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.

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, "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 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, Irenaeus, 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.

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 Irenaeus 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. Irenaeus'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 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, 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 end them--where there is no new gospel. 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, "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 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.

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