

CURES AT LOURDES

OPINIONS OF MODERN SCIENTISTS

No person interested in the question of modern miracles (writes J. C. McWalter, M.A., M.D., D.P.H., Barrister-at-Law, in the *Catholic Times*) can afford to overlook the very remarkable series of articles which appears in the current number of the *British Medical Journal*. The most eminent men of the medical profession have been picked out to deal with the question, and although they treat it from a strictly rationalistic standpoint, they are abundantly impressed with the good faith of those who have testified to miracles at Lourdes and elsewhere. On the other hand, the pretensions of the Christian Scientists get little sympathy. While not gentle in his handling of Lourdes, Sir Henry Morris reserves the sharpest arrows of his criticism for Christian Science. After referring to the total want of trustworthy and independent evidence in Mrs. Eddy's own cases of reputed cures, he says that, compared with the Lourdes craze, Christian Science is as a snare and a pitfall to a refuge and a haven of security. 'No deprivation of medical treatment, or of physical aids to comfort or relief, is required by the former; no excuse of failure is sought in extraneous trifles to pacify or impose upon the pilgrims to the grotto.' Though speaking from the rationalist standpoint throughout, Sir Henry Morris believes in

The Power of Faith,

which, he says, is much—'perhaps it is really everything to man.' But he takes care to add that happily it was given to him ages before Christian Science was dreamed of.

Sir Henry Morris is an ex-president of the Royal College of Surgeons in England, and is one of the first surgeons, not only in England, but in the world. Though he does not agree with the interpretation of Dr. Boissarie on the cures at Lourdes, he is constrained to say: 'It is useless to discuss the character of the cases cured at Lourdes, or to dispute the opinions entertained in favor of the view that these cures are of a miraculous and supernatural order. The polemics of the subject will never cease. And certainly it would be foolish to deny the occurrence of extraordinary events at Lourdes, and unwarrantable to question the sincerity and bona fides of Dr. Boissarie and his colleague in charge of the "Bureau des Constatations," from whose notes and records we derive much information.'

Commenting on the general account of the cures at Lourdes, Sir Henry states: 'Indeed, it seems only necessary for some individuals merely to touch the soil of Lourdes to be instantaneously restored to health. Suggestion, Dr. Boissarie tells us, whether religious or hypnotic, is as a curative agency at best very limited, being confined to patients affected with simple functional troubles, or broken down in health from overwork, whilst serious cases of hysteria may even suffer harm instead of being benefited by it. But at Lourdes there are but few functional troubles, whereas, on the other hand, persons with all sorts of different organic diseases are made well either during their sojourn in the place or after they have returned home therefrom, quite independently of any influence of suggestion.'

Sir Henry seems to assume that the Lourdes miracles are an article of faith with Catholics. This of course is not so. None of the writers mention the interesting fact that an X-Ray skiagram was taken of the leg of a man who was

Cured After Having Been Lame for Twenty Years.

This was shown at University College, Dublin, by a Jesuit who had recently been in Lourdes, and he invited several doctors to inspect it and give their candid opinions on it. I was one of those invited, and our unanimous conclusion was that the appearance shown of the healing of the bones was such as may occur in the ordinary course of nature, but it would have taken several months to complete, whereas it was instantaneous. Another of the experts writing of Lourdes is Mr. H. D. Butlin, now president of the Royal College of Surgeons—a man of world-wide fame. He says: 'When such cures take place in the presence of vast masses of people, although it may be possible to explain all the steps through which the emotion has produced the "cure," how can we be surprised that the people fall on their knees before God and bless His holy name for the miracle which He has wrought? I defy anyone to read Zola's story of the cure of Marie le Guersaint, written by a sceptic (Zola's *Lourdes*), without being moved by it and without feeling convinced that all the true Catholics who were present, priests and people, with the unhappy exception of the Abbé Pierre Froment, truly believed that Almighty God had been moved by

The Intercession of Our Lady

of the Immaculate Conception to display His divine power by instantaneously restoring the health of the poor girl who had lain paralysed upon a couch for seven years. In the eyes of all who witnessed it, it was a miracle, for every medical man who had seen her had, with one exception, believed her to be suffering from a damaged spinal cord. There is therefore no excuse, in such a case as this or in ninety-nine out of one hundred cases which are cured by faith, to impute dishonesty and deliberate deception to the priests and people who proclaim such cures to be the work of God. From the little I have seen of the priests actively

engaged in the grotto at Lourdes, I can feel no doubt that the most of them honestly believe that the cures which they have seen are genuine. I would no more think of accusing them of deliberate deception than I would accuse my own relative of it.'

Professor Osler says: 'Nothing in life is more wonderful than faith—the one great moving force which we can neither weigh in the balance nor test in the crucible. Intangible as the ether, ineluctable as gravitation, the radium of the moral and mental spheres, mysterious, indefinable, known only by its effects, faith pours out an unending stream of energy while abating nor jot nor tittle of its potency.' And again: 'The Christian Church began with a mission to the whole man—body as well as soul—and the apostolic ministry of health has never been wholly abandoned. Through the Middle Ages the priests had care of the sick. Many of the most distinguished physicians were in Holy Orders, and even after the Reformation in this country much of the ordinary medical practice was in the hands of the clergy.'

St. Teresa.

Macaulay spoke of St. Teresa as the 'mad nun of Avila.' Very different is the opinion of Sir Clifford Allbutt, F.N.S., of Cambridge, who regards her as the 'incarnation of common sense.' 'It is in those lapses, melancholies, or ecstasies in which hysteria often begins, whims which Teresa regarded as the chief perils of the conventual life, that the domination of a stronger will—a "magnetic personality"—often prevails. Teresa declared that all this "letting oneself go" came of "sick brains"; and physiologically we know that in functional disease, in order to force open torpid functions, we often have to shut down certain lower issues through which energy is running to waste; so that love is only complete in a certain austerity. She warned the religious that "if the body be neglected it takes a terrible revenge upon the soul." She gently taunted a certain prioress with the words, "If I were with you you would not have so many of these extraordinary phenomena." "Suspect," she said, "everything which weakens the use of our reason; for by such a way we shall never attain to the liberty of the spirit." And her curative measures were as vigorous as her preventive; she began by assuring the visionaries that their brilliant humiliations were not in the least interesting, while the ardent worker or ascetic she would warn more gently that not till the harm is done will the strain of the endurance make itself felt. Very wise medicine, in all such ministrations to be remembered. Now as Teresa thus recognised hysteria in all its guises, she disdained to assail it with prayer and ritual. She affirmed that to turn prayer and religious ceremony to impose upon these fantastic folk was to degrade it. It was by mundane methods that she brought them to their senses, quelled their fits, and dissipated their palsies.'

It is impossible to quote more than a few passages from the articles in question. Suffice to say that they constitute the most complete and up-to-date treatment of the question of latter-day miracles from a purely rational and medical standpoint. The reference is *British Medical Journal*, 1910, pages 1453 to 1501.

Reaction Against Materialism.

Scarcely less notable is the editorial comment of the *Journal* itself on the series of articles: 'For a considerable time there has been a growing reaction against the dogmatic materialism which held sway over the minds of scientific men thirty or forty years ago. To Huxley, Tyndall, or Herbert Spencer the expression of a belief in the possibility of supernatural agency would have branded a man as a fool or an impostor. Hell was, it may be remembered, dismissed with costs by a high judicial authority; to the man of science Heaven and miracles, and life and death, were explained by that blessed word "molecules." Now science is less cocksure about a great many things, and men are not so ready as they were, when the generation now fading into the sere, the yellow leaf was, in Byron's phrase, juvenile and curly, to declare that what they do not know is not knowledge.'

WHAT I SAW IN IRELAND

I crossed the Irish Sea late in March in the midst of a strong gale from the west that tossed our boat like a cork and sent the angry waves to dash up on the English coast (says a writer in *America*). Every one went below and was consequently seasick except an American priest, who stood on deck, hanging on to a railing during the three hours' trip. By staying in the fresh air he escaped the common fate of the passengers. In Dublin my first visit was to the Hill of Howth, from which a splendid view of the neighboring scenery, south to the Wicklow Mountains, was obtained, and I had a chance to hear every wild singing bird in Ireland in solo and in chorus.

An eight-mile walk partly across and partly around the hill brought out firstly the best of all the singers, the Irish thrush. He is a tenor with a voice sweet and clear as a bugle. Perched on the branch of an elm tree with his face turned to the east, his tones sounded like a challenge. He seemed to say, 'I defy, I defy, I defy,' and then turning his face to the west he began to warble 'come back, come back to the land that you left, but that loves you still.' Anyone who has ever heard this grandest

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