

## MIRACLES AND MARVELS

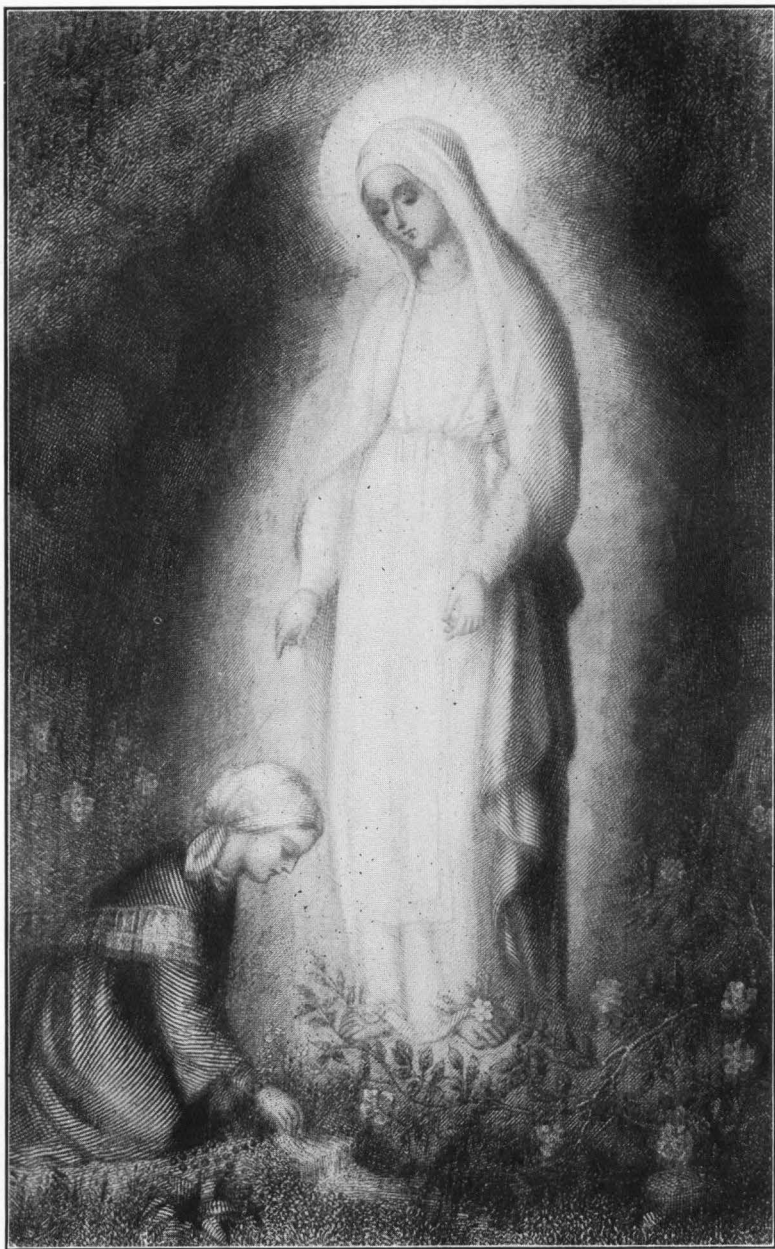
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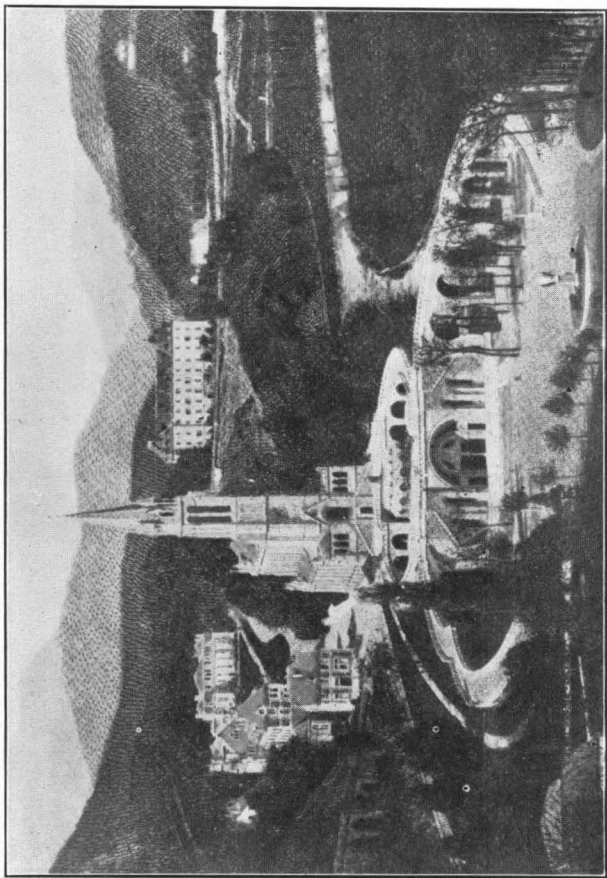
**O**F course you will be cured," encouraged the doctor. "This treatment has never been known to fail in cases like yours." Thus assured, the patient who had entered the hospital to be treated for paralysis of the legs, took hold of the two metal tubes which were connected by wires to an electrical instrument on a nearby table. The doctor touched a button, and the man felt a slight shock. That was all. And yet, the patient who had been powerless to take a step, immediately stood up at the doctor's urging and walked unaided out the room.

Here is a typical example of the many remarkable cures which have been wrought in recent years by the aid of "suggestion." They parallel the miraculous so closely that, today, some men think what has heretofore been termed "miracles" are merely demonstrations of the power of the "sub-conscious mind." This attitude of certain scientists is easy to understand. They have become so accustomed to find a natural explanation for every fact observed, that they cannot grasp the possibility of some supernatural power manifesting itself in a visible manner. It is no wonder then, that they attempt to attribute a miraculous cure, due to the application of a relic, not to any divine intervention but to the operation of the patient's mind—the intense belief that he will be cured. Hence, in the opinion of these men, to hold that miracles have a supernatural origin, is to cling to exploded superstitions.

Such a theory, however, will not explain the great divergence between the effects secured by "suggestion" and those which follow the working of a miracle. The efficacy of suggestion depends exclusively on the fact that a man's mental attitude exerts a wonderful influence on his physical health. As every doctor knows, the imagination runs disease a close race in the production of chronic invalids. Like the pseudo-paralytic above, such people begin by thinking themselves to be ill, and before



**Bernadette Scratched the Earth and a Fountain Gushed Forth**



General View of Lourdes

long, they actually become ill. Usually, the only natural remedy for cases like these, is to minister to their diseased minds by "suggestions" of recovery. Thus, the mental impediment to health is removed and, sometimes, in an instant they are well again. In a word, the imagination is forced to undo the harm it has caused. Outside this limited field, "suggestion" is powerless. All reputable physicians admit that it has little or no effect on serious organic disorders. A man afflicted with a bad heart may religiously repeat his "Day by day" until he becomes almost unconscious that his heart action is not up to normal. All goes well until one day he makes a sprint for a passing car, only to awake in a hospital with the realization that his heart is as unreliable as ever. Experience has taught him that the efficacy of suggestion in cases like his, is only passing and superficial.

The efficacy of miracles, on the contrary, extends to every ill to which the flesh is heir. It brings not merely passing relief, but permanent and often instantaneous cure. This fact is strikingly exemplified in the cure of Gabriel Gargan, one of the most famous and best authenticated of those which have occurred at Lourdes. In 1899, Gargan, a French post-office clerk, was injured in a collision on the railroad between Paris and Bordeaux. He received some injury to his spine which left him paralyzed from the waist down. His feet became infected with gangrene, and soon he reached such a state that it was necessary to feed him through a tube. He brought suit against the railroad for heavy damages. During the trial, eminent doctors examined him in behalf of the railroad company. All testified that he was an invalid for life—and they did not think that he would live very long. He won his case and received a large indemnity.

Then he came to Lourdes. He made the journey only to please his mother, for he himself had lost his faith long before. He was placed in the miraculous waters, but he fell into a swoon and appeared to be dead. On the way back from the Grotto, the little group of his friends had to halt to allow a procession of the Blessed Sacrament to pass. The priest who carried the Sacred Host, saw the party, pronounced a benediction over them and passed on. To the amazement of the bystanders, Gargan sat up, perfectly cured. All France was stirred by the miracle, for the trial had given wide publicity to the man's pitiable condition. He underwent another rigid examination. Even the most sceptical of the doctors had to admit themselves baffled.

They could offer no natural explanation for the cure. Time proved that the cure was as permanent as it was complete.

If this sudden cure had been the result of any natural agency, it would indeed merit the designation "marvelous," but it is more than that. It is miraculous, for a little consideration will show why it is impossible to attribute this cure to any natural cause. No known force of nature can work such wonders. Certainly not suggestion. Gargan, before his cure, was completely sceptical in regard to the miracles at Lourdes; yet confidence in the healing agent, is the primary condition of "suggestion." Besides, even infants have been healed at Lourdes; yet a babe in arms is not an apt subject for suggestion.

It is likewise impossible that Gargan's cure and those of similar cases at Lourdes can be due to the action of some yet undiscovered natural force. All the powers of nature have this much in common—they produce the same effects under the same circumstances. For example, any one who has used a camera knows that he can always secure a good picture if his lens is focused properly and the light is right. If either of these conditions is wanting, the result will be a failure. The photographer also knows that the ordinary camera will not take a moving picture, or in other words, the means employed are not adapted to the end which is sought. Yet miracles transcend this fundamental law of nature—that the same means will always produce the same effects, and that the same means cannot produce diverse effects. At Lourdes, the same means, a plunge in the miraculous water, will one time heal all kinds of external and internal ills, while another time it will have no effect on similar cases. On the other hand, invalids like Gargan, on whom the waters had no beneficial effect, are suddenly restored to health during the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, or even after they have returned home from their pilgrimage.

Since miracles, then, cannot be the manifestation of any natural force, there remains only one other hypothesis. They must have the same origin as the laws of nature themselves. They are the direct handiwork of the Creator alone, for no other power could modify the laws which He established. Every one who reads the history of Lourdes with unbiased mind cannot but admit that there are such things as miracles and that the Church is right in calling them "sense-perceptible facts produced



by God, outside the ordinary course of nature, which surpass all the powers of created beings."

Since some miracles bear such a close resemblance to the more extraordinary operations of nature, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish one from the other. To determine the boundary line belongs by right to the Church, for all miracles fall into the supernatural order in which she alone is a competent guide. However, the Church does not disregard the findings of human science. Only when the physicians can say with their colleague who passed on the cure of Marguerite Verzier, "the conclusion to be drawn from the study of this case is definitely in favor of some influence outside the natural order," does she give the cure official consideration. Neither are these doctors too credulous. If there is any possibility for a natural explanation of the cure, they are not slow to say so. There is an instance of this in the cure of a paralytic at Lourdes. When he suddenly recovered the power of walking, he was told by the doctors: "You have received the use of your limbs. You have every reason to thank God; but do not say you have been miraculously cured. It may be perfectly natural."

Before a case can be officially declared a miracle it must satisfy certain rigid conditions established by the Sacred Congregation of Rites. These requirements are: 1) that the ill be grave and inveterate, 2) that it be not at a stage when amendment might be expected, 3) that it be not medically treated—or, it might be added, that it has failed to respond to treatment, 4) that convalescence be sudden or speedy, 5) that recovery must not follow on some physical crisis, 6) that the cure must be complete and permanent.

The thoroughness of the examination required by the Sacred Congregation of Rites before officially declaring that some cure is in reality a miracle, enables the spurious to be detected; for people seeking notoriety, as has frequently happened at Lourdes, who have pretended that they were miraculously cured have been speedily exposed.

There are also marvels of diabolical origin which at first glance may be confused with genuine miracles. These works appear wonderful to men, but they are due to purely natural causes manipulated by the superior intelligence of the evil spirits. Some notable examples of these diabolical caricatures of miracles occurred during the eighteenth century at the tomb of

one of the leaders of Jansenism, a heresy which was then devastating France. The prodigies which took place there were extraordinary, but they were of such a character and accompanied by such revolting circumstances that their diabolical origin was unmistakable. Spiritism also, has produced some remarkable things which are neither of heaven nor of earth. Much which takes place at seances is due to fraud and to natural psychic forces of which little is known, but there still remain some things so extraordinary and at the same time so evil that it seems impossible to exclude the intervention of the devil. A close inspection, however, always reveals that the resemblance between these wonders and true miracles is purely superficial, for God does not permit His "seal" to be counterfeited so well that the fraud cannot be perceived.

By considering the nature of the result, the circumstances which attend its production, and the effects which follow, as well as the personal character of the wonderworker, it is not difficult to distinguish true miracles from mere prodigies. God's work must be good and beneficial, such, for example, as healing the sick. His holiness would not permit immoral or harmful circumstances to accompany His intervention. Neither, as a rule does God entrust the gift of miracles to any but holy men. However, the general effects which follow any marvel is one of the chief criterions of its origin, for "By their fruits ye shall know them." Every true miracle will bring about the spread of faith and morality. If on the contrary, heresy, immorality and other evils follows, the miracle is spurious.

The reason for miracles is quite evident. God does not interfere with the natural order, like a bungling artisan, to correct some defect, for being most wise, He makes no mistakes. Neither is a miracle a sign of divine caprice, for the one eternal decree which established the natural order, ordained those exceptions which men call miracles. His motive is to manifest His power and goodness and to help men reach eternal life in heaven. To win this reward, man must love and serve God; but error and vice have so darkened the human intellect, that unaided it could hardly perceive the divine truth and the divine law. Man's sad condition awakened the pity of God, and He sent His prophets, and finally His own Son, Jesus Christ, to teach man what he must believe and do to be saved. Then, that every

one might recognize His messengers, God stamped their works with His own peculiar "seal"—the gift of miracles. Since God alone can work a miracle, men would know that whenever this power was displayed in confirmation of any doctrine, it must be divine, for God could never approve error. That this power has ever continued with the Catholic Church alone, is striking proof of her divine origin. Another purpose of miracles is to attest true sanctity. Hence, no saint can be canonized unless a certain number of miracles have been worked through his intercession. In a word, the final end of all miracles is that which St. John ascribed to his Gospel; "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." (xx, 31).

