

Summary of Miracles, Chapters 11-13

Chapter 11 – Christianity and “Religion”

- Christians say that God has done miracles. The modern world does not. It thinks God wouldn't do that sort of thing ... and certainly the sort of God conceived by the popular “religion” of our day wouldn't.
- Speak about a God who is the indwelling of beauty, truth and goodness, and people are OK with that.
- Speak about a God who has purposes, and acts, and chooses, (and makes miracles happen), and people become angry. They see the idea as crude, primitive, and even irreverent.
- Many modern people practice a sort of Pantheism. They believe the history of religion moves from belief in spirits who are like humans. Then, as we become more enlightened, we drop the “human-like” qualities and substitute something that is “pure mind” and “pure spirituality.” And this something is everywhere.
- But ... this telling of the history of religion is not true. In fact, Pantheism may be the most primitive of all religions, and it's what people fall back to when left to their own devices.
- Plato and Aristotle rose above it. Modern Europe escaped it only while it was predominantly Christian. It's the permanent, natural bent of the human mind.
- Humanity's unaided efforts never raise us above it for very long. Platonism and Judaism, and Christianity (which has incorporated both), are the only things that raise us above it.
- The old atomic theory in physics (little hard pellets smaller than grains of sand) is like Pantheism in religion – our instinctive belief about how things are. These ideas aren't entirely wrong, but they need correction.
- Christian theology and quantum physics are, at first glance, harder, more complex, drier and more repellent than old atomic theory and Pantheism.
- Pantheists and Christians agree that God is everywhere. Pantheists see God as diffused or concealed ... as a universal medium, not a concrete entity. Christian says God is totally present at every point in space in time, and locally present in none.
- The Christian defines our relation with God as Maker and made; the Pantheist says we are parts of Him or are contained in Him.
- Pantheism sees God as equally present in good and evil, and indifferent to both. Christianity says that's far too simple. God is not present in matter as He is in humans, not present in all men as in some, not present in any other man as in Jesus.
- Our real religion, and our Trinity, are troublesome to a Pantheist, just as a real historian is to someone who just wants to reminisce about the good old days. Reality is always, at first, a nuisance to our natural fantasies.
- The Pantheist's God does nothing, demands nothing, and is impersonal. Well and good. A personal God, alive, pulling at the other end of the cord, can be frightening. If you get involved with that God (or He gets involved with you), you could be in for anything. Even miracles.

Chapter 12 – The Propriety of Miracles

- The living God might work miracles. But would He? Many well-meaning people think not.
- Their line of reasoning is this: Only an incompetent workman will produce work that needs to be interfered with, and miracles interrupt the steady development of Nature according to her own character. (If God made it right, then why would He have to circle back around and adjust it with miracles?)
- But, an artist might break commonly accepted rules, just as Shakespeare broke them, and their works are the better for it. Why? Because there are rules behind the rules, and a unity that is deeper than uniformity. If miracles do occur, then we may be sure that *not* to have wrought them would be the real inconsistency.
- Miracles are not gimmicks to get out of a jam. The Resurrection was not a desperate, last-minute, expedient act to save the Hero from a situation that had spun out of the Author's control.
- Instead, Death and Resurrection are what life is all about; they're what the story is all about. The very fact of Resurrection, certainly a miracle, tells us there's a deeper reality beyond what we see every day. There's something stronger at work than the fact that we live, and then we die. And what's really important is that this deeper reality is there for us.

Chapter 13 – On Probability

- Most stories of miracles are probably false; in fact, most stories about natural events are false. Lies, exaggerations, misunderstandings and hearsay make up perhaps more than half of all that is said and written in the world. So how do we judge any particular story of the miraculous?
- It is obviously improbable that a miracle will occur at any given place and time. But that doesn't mean they don't happen, just as people win the lottery and pebbles drop from space.
- No study of probabilities inside a given frame can ever tell us how probable it is that the frame itself will be violated.
- Why do people believe in the uniformity of nature? Three reasons. First, we expect new situations to resemble old ones. Second, when we plan, we don't take into account that Nature might act differently tomorrow; we can do nothing about it. Third, we cherish uniformity.
- If we admit God, must we admit miracle? Yes. Theology says, "Admit God and with Him the risk of a few miracles, and I in return will ratify your faith in uniformity in the overwhelming majority of events."
- So how do we judge any particular story of the miraculous? By "our innate sense of the fitness of things." No one really thinks the Resurrection is on the same level with some pious tittle-tattle about how Mother Egaree Louise miraculously found her second best thimble by the aid of St. Anthony.
- The next three chapters try to demonstrate the central miracles of Christianity in a way that demonstrates their "fitness."