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By

Rev. Francis Woodlock, S.J.



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LOURDES AND MODERN MIRACLES

By REV. FRANCIS WOODLOCK, S.J.

THE "modern mind" of the mid-nineteenth century definitely decided against supernatural Christianity when it laid down the dogma, principle and axiom that "the supernatural is impossible." It was at work rewriting the Gospels with the miraculous elements eliminated, when God sent His mother to speak to a peasant child in Southern France and began to confound the "modern mind" and its conclusions by a repetition of the wonderful cures which had been recorded by the Evangelists, the record of which had been regarded by rationalists as sufficient proof of the unreliability of the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ. These cures have continued for over sixty years and have been submitted to the scrutiny of modern science. They emerge with their supernatural character established, and the facts of Lourdes have given proof of miracles to an age that rejected traditional Christianity solely because it rests on miracles.

We do not believe that rationalists of the type of Huxley, Anatole France and countless others who deny the existence and even the possibility of the supernatural, could be convinced by any argument and we do not write for such. When Renan declared that "The supernatural is impossible" he put himself outside the range of serious argument by his dogmatic assertion of an assumption that was neither proved nor evident, and, as a matter of fact, was false.

Dr. W. Inge, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, is probably correct when he says, speaking of his fellow Protestants:

"There are few among our ecclesiastics and theologians who would spend five minutes in investigating alleged supernatural occurrence in our own time. It would be assumed that if true it must be ascribed to some obscure natural cause."¹ He adds, however, that "there is still enough superstition left to win a certain vogue for miraculous cures at Lourdes."²

The Catholic who believes the miracles of healing to have occurred at Lourdes is not "superstitious." He is the real "rationalist"—taking the word in its etymological sense for the man who holds to conclusions, which have been demonstrated by reliable processes of reason.

No Catholic is obliged to accept any particular miraculous occurrence at Lourdes as a doctrine of faith. He is free to examine each case and accept or reject it as beyond nature's powers according to the scientific evidence on which it is attested. Though we may not know all that nature CAN perform, we do know that there are certain things she CANNOT do.

Lourdes may be and indeed is ignored. It cannot be explained away by those who study the evidence and nature of the facts which occur there.

THE ORIGIN OF THE SHRINE

What are those facts? First let us briefly describe the events which led to the world-wide pilgrimages to the Pyrenean Valley and the Rock of Massabielle.

Three peasant children were walking along the

¹*Outspoken Essays*, p. 169.

²*Ibid.*, p. 185.

banks of the river Gave on a bitterly cold day, the 11th of February, in the year 1858. One of them, Bernadette Soubirous, alleged that she saw a lady "young and beautiful, the like of whom I had never seen," standing in a niche in the rock, across a streamlet which flowed into the Gave. "She beckoned to me to advance, as if she had been my mother. All fear left me. I rubbed my eyes, I shut and opened them but the Lady was still there." The child felt that she was in the presence of holiness and began to say her rosary. She found that her arm was unable to make the sign of the cross, till she saw the heavenly visitor do so. She imitated her gesture and from that day till the day of her death there was something of unearthly grace and quasi-sacramental power in the child's oft repeated sign of the cross. The sight of it converted hardened sinners. The Lady listened to the child's prayer. The "Paters" and the "Aves" she counted on her beads, her lips recited the Glorias with Bernadette. The "Glorias" are fitly said in Heaven, while the "Paters" with their petition for daily bread and help against temptation are prayers for us who are still on earth, and the "Aves" were really addressed to the Lady who stood in front of the child, though she did not yet know who she was, whom she was watching with such delight. "The Lady" sent the child to carry a message to the Curé of the village. She wished people to come. She begged for a chapel. She asked the child to come to the spot daily for a fortnight and daily she appeared to her, except on two occasions when the child, eagerly expecting to see her visitor and coming by her invitation to their *rendezvous*, waited and watched yet saw no vision. Those two days of disappointed expectation were one of the facts which psychologically disproved any theory of hallucination

as an explanation of the visions. No one who knew the child could suspect her of conscious deception. She was cross-examined by the skilled police officials again and again and her transparent honesty and the coherence of her story remained unshaken.

The child was delicate, but not with the nervous instability of an *hallucinée*. She was from her birth till her death a constant invalid from asthma. Only those who had not examined her gave the explanation of hysteria. They did so *a priori* and on general grounds because they assumed that the vision could not be true.

THE MIRACULOUS WATER

On the second Friday of Lent, the Gospel read at Mass throughout the Church describes the Pool of Probatica, whose water became an instrument of healing when an Angel had stirred it. That day at the command of her heavenly visitor, now seen for the ninth time, the child was bidden to scrape on the dry ground and at once a thin trickle of water flowed around her obedient fingers. The trickle grew in volume and swelled to a steady flow till it poured out a perennial stream, giving a thousand gallons an hour. That water has been again and again analyzed. It is common spring water, devoid of any radio-active or natural healing properties. Yet within a few days of the appearance of the spring a dying baby was plunged in its icy waters by its despairing mother and was taken out in perfect health. A man whose vision was affected by a grievous, organic lesion, bathed the affected eye in the water of Lourdes and instantly received perfect sight. These first wonders drew the people in ever increasing crowds. Since those days, there are few bodily ills that have not

been suddenly cured at the touch of this water. The cures have been scrutinized by medical science and declared to be complete and certified to be the effect of a power beyond that of nature.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

The child had been told to ask the Lady her name. The Lady graciously replied. "I am the Immaculate Conception,"—abstract words, unintelligible to the child who repeated the message to herself all along the way to the Curé's house, fearful of forgetting them. She asked afterwards: "What does the name mean?" Yet those abstract words, better than any concrete term, expressed the unique privilege of Mary, Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, who thus revealed herself,—deigning to visit the earth and converse with a peasant child.

The Blessed Virgin promised no miracles, but expressed the wish "that people should come." Yet she has given the miracles, thus to strengthen and amplify the child's voice carrying her message till it has reached to the very ends of the earth.³

The day after the Blessed Virgin asked for "people," there came 100 to that out of the way spot; the next day 500. A few days later there were between 3,000 and 5,000 in the crowd as the child prayed. On March 4, the last day of the fortnight, during which she came by special invitation from her heavenly visitor, some 30,000 people were gathered about the child as she knelt at her rosary. Since then as many as 100,000 people have been there to-

³The writer of these words met Catholic Chinese coolies at Lourdes during the Great War. When at home in China they knew of France only as the place in Europe where the Blessed Virgin had appeared and they eagerly seized the opportunity of "army leave" to make their pilgrimage.

gether on occasions. Nor was it merely women who came. In one year there was a pilgrimage of men numbering 30,000; the following year 50,000 and the next 55,000 men were present at the shrine in a compact body on one day. There have been years when the total number of pilgrims surpassed a million. Is it not evident that there was divine power in the message borne on the lips of the poor child? Our Lady asked for people and people have come at her bidding.

That deserted rock became the focus of immense spiritual activities. In one year more than a million Communion were received there and over ninety thousand Masses celebrated at the shrine.

Our Lady asked for "a chapel." Through the generosity of her clients in all parts of the world, first the Basilica was built, and then the vast circular Church of the Rosary below it, as year by year the crowds grew in numbers and the need of more accommodation for the devotional exercises of the pilgrims was felt to be necessary.

AGNOSTIC ERRORS

Thomas Huxley, the agnostic, illustrates (in the account of Lourdes contained in his autobiography) the careless mentality of the scientist when confronted with the supernatural. The inaccuracies of detail in describing the origin of the shrine are paralleled by the typical inaccuracies of later unbelieving writers in dealing with the cures. He tells us:⁴

"It was a case of two peasant children, sent in the hottest month of the year into a hot valley to collect sticks, when one of them, after stooping

⁴*Life*, I., p. 391.

down opposite a heat reverberating rock, was, in rising, attacked with a transient vertigo, under which she saw a figure in white against the rock. This mere fact being reported to the Curé of the village, all the rest followed."

Practically every detail, except the fact that the children were collecting sticks and that Bernadette saw a white figure, are the result of Mr. Huxley's constructive imagination and in contradiction to the actual facts as established by incontrovertible evidence!

"Dormitat Homerus" applies to the scientist when he studies the supernatural. The insinuation that the Curé was responsible for the exploitation of a peasant child's deception or hallucination is equally at variance with the well authenticated facts of history. The Church stood aloof: the clergy were forbidden to frequent the spot and it was only after miracles had occurred and four years of critical investigation that the Bishop promulgated his decision that the Queen of Heaven had appeared to Bernadette Soubirous and that the child's story, authenticated by the miraculous sequel, bore on it the marks of truth.

Bernadette lived for eight years in Lourdes after the last and eighteenth vision. She and her family were poor and remained in their poverty, refusing all gifts that were offered them by pilgrims who came to talk to the child in her cottage home. Then she was admitted to the Order of the Sisters of Nevers, where she lived for fourteen years as a nun. Her life was ever one of great suffering and sanctity, and marked by that simplicity which characterizes great saints like St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Our Lady, who was to heal so many sufferers at her shrine, had told her favored child, "I do not promise to make you

happy in this world." She had said: "Penance, Penance, Penance;" "Pray for sinners!" and Bernadette was a glad victim-soul, sanctified by the Cross of suffering till the year 1879, when she died at Nevers.

BEATIFICATION OF BERNADETTE

Thirty years later, when the process of her beatification was begun, the coffin which contained her earthly remains was opened in the presence of the Bishop, some doctors and other witnesses. The body was found incorrupt. The eyes that had, in life, seen the beauty of Heaven's Queen had not been allowed by God to suffer the natural decay of death in the grave. It was a final sign given from heaven of the truth of the child's message to the world. The peasant child so favored by Heaven's Queen was beatified by Pope Pius XI, himself a devout client of Our Lady of Lourdes and a pilgrim to her shrine.

In the above brief account we have confined ourselves to the narration of the few essential details connected with the origin of the shrine of miraculous healing at Lourdes. The life of Blessed Bernadette has been written many times and those of our readers who are interested will have no difficulty in studying the biographies. The *Personal Souvenirs of an Eyewitness*, by J. B. Estrade, give the diary of one who studied at first hand and recorded the events as they occurred day by day. He was at first, like many, incredulous, but like all who honestly and without prejudice examined the facts on the spot, Estrade was finally convinced that the Queen of Heaven had eighteen times visited the rock of Massabielle and had spoken to Bernadette, the simple peasant child, and given her a message for mankind.

THE MIRACULOUS CURES

Lourdes is also a center of moral miracles worked on the souls of pilgrims who visit the shrine and on the multitudes who are unable to journey to Massabielle, but who are devout clients of Mary Immaculate who appeared at Lourdes. Thousands of sick who visited the holy spot full of hope for a cure of their bodily ills, returned without the cure, yet happy in heart and even glad, to bear the cross of suffering which God and His Mother had left upon their shoulders. Seldom does one meet a despairing or even depressed invalid on the trains returning home from a pilgrimage—surely a moral miracle of grace. The “Health of the Sick” is also wonderful as “Consoler of the Afflicted,” and she consoles the mind and heart when she does not remove the bodily afflictions of the sick. This moral miracle shows the folly of the unbelieving doctor who said: “Those who go to Lourdes and return without cure are proof that heaven is empty.”

Lourdes stands apart from all other religious shrines of healing in that it has a Medical Bureau where science examines and passes judgment on the nature of the alleged cures. Unlike Christian Science, which on principle keeps doctors at a distance, Lourdes welcomes the testimony of medical men and gives them every faculty for examining cases of cure. The religious authorities await their judgment before allowing the public “Magnificat” of thanksgiving to be sung by the pilgrims for a healing favor.

The crowd is naturally over credulous. If any patient rises from his stretcher it is prone to cry “Miracle,” and it is often mistaken in invoking a supernatural cause for a natural cure. A restoration to health in a case of some nervous, functional disease which may be the natural result of strong religious

suggestion, satisfies its appetite for miracle as well as does an instantaneous organic cure involving divine creative power.

The Medical Bureau des Constatations, established in the year 1882 to test the nature of the individual cases of cure, is a unique scientific clinic of the miraculous. Any doctor of any nationality, of any or of no religious belief, is welcomed within its doors and is at once invited to share in the examinations of the patients who report themselves as cured. Sometimes as many as sixty doctors have sat in judgment on a single case.

In the six years preceding the Great War, 3,310 doctors visited the office. During the period 1923 to 1925, more than 1,800 doctors took part in the work of the Bureau. A number of doctors have written on the cures, testifying to their being outside and beyond the natural processes of healing known to their science. Georges Bertrin, in his scholarly work on Lourdes, testified that there were recorded cures of over one hundred and fifty different kinds of diseases in the dossiers at Lourdes. The most famous chronicler of Our Lady's work, Dr. Boissarie, President of the Bureau for a quarter of a century, published at intervals detailed accounts of a number of cases which occurred during his presidency. He was succeeded by Dr. Le Bec, formerly senior surgeon of a Paris hospital, and his record of ten selected cures, published under the title, *Preuves Médicales du Miracle*, has been translated and is within reach of American readers who would wish to study for themselves some of the evidence on which the case for miracles at Lourdes rests.⁵ We recommend *Medical Proof of the Miraculous* to our readers as a book to lend to doctors, whether Catholics, Prot-

estants or unbelievers. It is unanswered and unanswerable.

AN AUTHENTICATED MIRACLE

Let me give a résumé of a case which Dr. Le Bec himself examined both before and after cure. The nature of the malady takes it outside the range of healing by psychotherapy, or any natural form of mind influence. No medical man can suggest any explanation of such a cure. If he is confronted with the case, he may obstinately declare that it never happened, a statement which involves an accusation of lying against eminent and respected surgeons. The nature of the case makes a mistake in diagnosis inconceivable and any natural explanation would wreck the whole fabric of medical science.

Dr. Le Bec had the patient under observation just before his pilgrimage and examined him and testified to his cure immediately on his return.

A French priest began to suffer from varicose veins at the age of thirty-five. The disease developed steadily, and at the age of forty-two had reached the stage of ulceration. Dr. Roesch of Marlotte observed seven characteristic ulcers on the right, and eight on the left leg. From forty-two to fifty years of age suppuration was persistent, in spite of treatment, and the pain was such that the patient had to abandon all work. Complete rest produced so little change that Dr. Roesch held out no hopes of a cure. At fifty-one the patient was persuaded against his will to undertake a pilgrimage to Lourdes, his disease having progressed during sixteen years; and it was only three days before this journey that Dr. Le Bec examined him. The doctor describes at length the condition of the limbs. Let a summary of his judgment suffice here, *viz.*, that the limbs had old-standing

enormous varicose veins in an ulcerated condition, and that the ulcers had supplicated for over seven years. When the patient returned from Lourdes, Dr. Le Bec declares that the legs were those of a normal healthy man; the varicosities had disappeared; seven pink spots on one leg and eight on the other marked the places where he had observed the ulcers a few days before. The patient's account was that, after a moment of acute burning pain, as he bathed his legs in Lourdes water, the varicose veins and ulcers disappeared. In a case of this sort no explanation of the facts by religious suggestion can be accepted. The *time factor* for a natural cure was absent. We may quote here the admission of Dr. Jules Besançon, editor of the *Journal de Médecine Interne*:

"The suggestive methods employed by doctors have never gone so far as to replace in a few hours the loss of extended substance or to cicatrise in a moment old ulcers. *Yet it is certain that such visible changes take place at Lourdes.*" The cure of these varicose veins is a case in point. Bernheim tells us: "Suggestion is a remedy which is almost exclusively functional. It may succeed in establishing again disturbed functions, but it cannot cure diseased organs. This last statement is true at least with regard to sudden cure."

The priest was examined again by Dr. Le Bec just before the *Preuves Médicales* was published. Seven years had passed since the instantaneous cure and there had been no relapse.

Dr. Le Bec, in the introduction to his book, develops the scientific reason why *instantaneous* organic cures cannot be explained by any natural cause. The "time factor" is essential to natural cure of organic disease, for this is of its own nature a *process*, a building up of tissue. There is a limit to

the speed with which this process can *naturally* be completed. For example, among other factors limiting the speed of organic cure is the fact that the human heart-beats cannot be indefinitely accelerated without death resulting. The *natural* processes of healing have some relation to the circulation of the blood and therefore to the mechanism of the "blood-pump"—the heart. It cannot work at turbine speed without bursting! Le Bec then takes a number of organic cases of cure and shows that they are either instantaneous or at least *miraculously* rapid. A diseased or fractured limb may not be incurable—given time and suitable treatment. In the cases which he discusses in his book the cures took place in a few moments where weeks would naturally be needed; and they took place, after medical treatment had been tried and failed, on the application, with prayer, of a little spring water or on the passing of the Blessed Sacrament in the hands of a priest during the procession, or sometimes even *without* these accompanying circumstances. The miraculously speedy cure without medical or surgical treatment of extended organic lesions is a fact to which he and hundreds of other doctors testify as having occurred at Lourdes.

LOURDES AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Hardly ever is Lourdes mentioned in the press without the false statement that the cures wrought there have not exceeded the limits of functional disorders. The cure of such diseases is frequently arrived at by skilfully applied "suggestion" or psycho-analytic methods. The Medical Bureau rejects in a few moments the claims of all such cases as readily accounted for by the activity of natural causes.

It is sad to think that the majority of cultured

non-Catholics only know of Lourdes through the scandalously dishonest novel by Zola, which deals with the shrine and its sick pilgrims. Zola wrote the history of some actual cases and introduced them as characters in his story. He was a historian up to the point of the miraculous cure of "La Grivotte," one of the chief characters in his story. From that point he ceases to write history and becomes a writer of fiction. Let us look at the details of this case of consumption which, when at its last stage, was suddenly cured by Our Lady. Many medical men have written at length of this wonderful case which became of special interest because of the notoriety given it through Zola's novel. The summary of the case of Mlle. Lebranchu sets forth how both parents had died of tuberculosis. She herself lay dying in a hospital when she was removed on a stretcher to Lourdes. There was a profusion of tuberculosis bacilli in the sputum and copious night sweats, and a temperature in the evenings between 102° and 105°. Daily blood spitting occurred and many lung cavities had been observed. These facts are medically attested. The girl's condition is elaborately described by Zola, who traveled to Lourdes with her. She is "La Grivotte" of his novel. In describing her illness and journey to Lourdes, Zola narrates *facts*.

ZOLA FALSIFIES THE FACTS

She was restored to perfect health after the first bath and her restoration was attested by the declaration of about thirty doctors in the medical bureau. Zola saw her restored to health; later, though he was aware that there had never been any relapse, he deliberately falsifies the facts and in his book on Lourdes, makes her relapse and die. Marie Lebranchu lived for twenty-eight years after she had

been "killed" by Zola, and Dr. Boissarie, President of the Medical Bureau, covered the novelist with shame by producing her and other characters whose cases Zola had falsified in his book, at a public conference in a theater in Paris shortly after Zola's lying romance had appeared as a "best seller."

Another case of similar interest is that of Marie Lemarchand. Zola describes her as he saw her when on her way to Lourdes. He says: "It was a case of lupus, which had preyed upon the unhappy woman's nose and mouth. Ulceration had spread and was hourly spreading and devouring the membrane in its progress. The cartilage of the nose was almost eaten away, the mouth was drawn all on one side by the swollen condition of the upper lip. The whole was a frightfully distorted mass of matter and oozing blood." All this is true as far as it goes, but the account given by Zola was incomplete. She had been coughing and spitting blood and every evening there was a high temperature. The apices of both lungs were affected and she had sores on her leg and other parts of her body.

Dr. d'Hombres saw the patient *immediately* before and *immediately* after her bath. He says: "I saw her waiting her turn to go into the piscina. I could not help being struck by her aspect, which was particularly revolting; both her cheeks, the lower part of her nose, and her upper lip was covered with a tuberculous ulcer and secreted matter abundantly. On her return from the baths I immediately followed her to the hospital. I recognized her quite well, although her face was entirely changed. Instead of the horrible sore I had so lately seen, the surface was red, it is true, but dry and covered with a new skin. The other sores had also dried up in the piscina." Dr. d'Hombres at once took Marie Lemarchand to the

medical office, which was full of doctors, literary men and reporters. The doctors could find nothing the matter with her lungs and they testified to the presence of the new skin on the face. Zola was there. He had said before, "I only want to see a cut finger dipped in water and come out healed." "Behold the case of your dreams, M. Zola!" said the President, Dr. Boissarie, presenting the girl, whose hideous disease had evidently made such an impression on the novelist before the cure: "A visible sore, suddenly healed." "Ah no!" said Zola, "I do not want to look at her. She is still too ugly"—alluding to the red color of the new skin. Before he left Lourdes Zola had hardened his soul. "Were I to see all the sick at Lourdes cured, I would not believe in a miracle," he said to Dr. Boissarie.

BLINDNESS CURED

There have been many cases of blindness cured, two which I record because of their specially interesting details. The first contains an unusual feature—if indeed any one miracle can be said to be more "unusual" than another. Mme. Biré arrived at Lourdes completely blind from atrophy of the optic nerves, due to some cerebral cause. The blindness had lasted six months. This was certified by her doctor, Dr. Hibert of Lucon. She received back her sight suddenly at Lourdes as the Blessed Sacrament was being carried by after the procession. She was at once taken to the Medical Bureau and was found able to read easily the smallest print. As the examination was proceeding, Dr. Lainey, a Rouen specialist in eye disease, entered the Bureau and was at once asked to examine her eyes. He did so and on returning from the inspection declared that the

case was quite straightforward, that the woman evidently had atrophy of the optic nerves and was stone blind, the fundus in each case being pearly white and the blood-vessels filiform and hardly traceable. "But she can read!" said the President; and she read easily as before Dr. Lainey's entrance. It was true! The function had been given back before the organ had returned to its normal condition. It was nearly a month before the appearance of the optic nerve was certified as normal. "It seems," said Dr. Cox, who gave the writer these details, "as though the Almighty were having a little joke with us medical men." The full account of the case with the certificates of Dr. Hibert and Dr. Lainey is given in Dr. Boissarie's *Guérisons*. Professor Bertrin gives details of a case of blindness, that of Mr. Vion-Dury, due to double detachment of the retina, which was cured in a moment at the third application of Lourdes water. This cure occurred after the disease had lasted for seven years and a half. The patient felt a violent pain in the eyes and then—to use his own words—"suddenly, like a pistol-shot, I could see!" This case was described by Dr. Dor at a meeting of the French Ophthalmic Society at Paris. The doctor asserted that the case had been certified by a number of specialists, the fact that the patient was a soldier regularly drawing a pension on account of his infirmity probably involved these periodic examinations.

CANCER CURES

A young surgeon once said at the end of a lecture on Lourdes cures delivered by the writer to a meeting of Army Doctors, "If I were cured of cancer, did I believe in God I should thank Him I had never suffered from cancer!" It was his way of saying that

true cancer was incurable and that mistakes are sometimes made in diagnosing as malignant, growths which turn out to be non-malignant. So I do not lay undue stress on two cases of cancer fully dealt with by Dr. Le Bec in his book. One was a cancer of the tongue, and one of the cheek. Both were relapses after the first operation wound had healed, and both were cured completely and permanently during the course of a novena, or nine days' prayer, with no surgical or medical treatment.

In the case of the epithelioma of the cheek Dr. Moynac saw the patient two days before the cure, and had no doubt of the presence of the returned cancer, which was then a projecting tumor, almost the size of a hen's egg. The patient's doctor, Dr. Gentilhe, who had taken the case to the surgeon, Dr. Moynac, saw the patient the day after the cure, which took place during sleep. It was not a benign tumor, such as lipoma, for it had recurred *in situ*; nor a mere gumma, or it would have recurred before the healing of the first operation wound and not two years later. Dr. Moynac is a surgeon of repute in Southwest France and a mistake in his diagnosis is hardly credible in such a case. Cancer *does* at times get gradually reabsorbed in the system of an old man—Mr. Butlin describes such a case in the *British Medical Journal*: but the "time factor" required in his case was absent in the case quoted by Dr. Le Bec. Two days is manifestly insufficient time for such reabsorption—still less a single night's rest as in this case.

In the case of the cancer of the tongue, the cancer recurred *in situ* three months after the first operation, the glands became enlarged and there was much pain in the ear. The characteristic wax tint of the patient's complexion and cachexia showed that the blood was infected by the cancerous toxins. This was

the state when the patient began her novena. Perfect cure occurred on the ninth day, and had lasted for eight years without relapse when Dr. Le Bec wrote his book.

NON-CATHOLIC TESTIMONY

We have given above a few samples of the type of diseases whose cures have been accepted by the doctors sitting in judgment upon them in the name of modern science. Only the most ignorant could put forward psychotherapy as the cause of such cures. Only the most bigoted could suggest that the doctors who testified to them lacked *bona fides* as witnesses. The late Sir William Barrett, a non-Catholic, well-known as a doctor and as President of the Society for Psychical Research, closed the discussion after a lecture on Lourdes cures, given a few years ago by the writer to a Protestant audience which included many medical men. His final words before resuming his seat were: "If evidence counts for anything, and I am not without experience in weighing the value of evidence, I affirm that supernatural, miraculous cures have taken place at the Roman Catholic Shrine of the Virgin at Lourdes."

A doctor, writing in the Anglican *Church Times* a report of the lecture and of the discussion which followed it, included in his article the following wise reflection:

"It would seem to the writer that if the evidence for Lourdes be true, if what is said to have happened there really has happened (and it is hard to doubt the validity of much of that evidence), then we must on the face of it acknowledge the fact of its miracles. Can we do so? Is it not for each one a personal question? If the answer be 'I cannot,' may it not be well to look within, as well as without? Wherein lies the

cause of my inability? Miracles rest on moral evidence, make a moral appeal and are the divine response to a moral quality in man. Have I that moral quality?"

Zola, confronted with evidence which convinced others, was goaded into the skeptical declaration, "Were I to see all the sick at Lourdes cured, I would not believe in a miracle." Professor Vergez of Montpellier, after spending, like Dr. Boissarie, twenty-five years, in studying the cures of Lourdes, testified solemnly on his deathbed: "At Lourdes I have seen and touched the miraculous." Vergez was not a foolish fanatic, but a scientist. He was also a good Christian. And Zola? Well, one would not wish to compare the moral perception of the two men.

Lourdes is a "talent" which Catholics should not "wrap in a napkin." They should carry clearly in their memory and be able to impart to others certain established facts with regard to Lourdes. They owe this to the honor of Our Lady and their prayer, oft repeated, should be, "*Dignare me, laudare te Virgo Sacrata, da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.*" "Grant O Holy Virgin that I may be made fit to praise thee and give me strength against thy enemies."

Part of that "strength" will be the definite knowledge of, and power to prove to others, the truth that Mary's divine Son, Who at her request worked His first miracle at Cana though His "hour was not yet come," has deigned, even in these later days of unbelief, once again to exert His divine power of healing at her prayer. In this He gives a proof of His pleasure at the development of her *cultus* in His Church, under the guidance of her Spouse the Holy Spirit, and gives us confidence that our hearts are more Christ-like in proportion to the love they bear to "our" mother—His and ours.

FACTS ABOUT LOURDES

Here are some facts to be remembered:

(1) The visions given to Bernadette were free from every one of those classical signs by which hallucination is diagnosed. Even if no miracles had followed, her story is credible. The psychology of the child, subjected to long and deep study by experts, is seen to be incompatible with either delusion or deception.

(2) The cures that take place at Lourdes are of two classes. There are cures of nervous and purely functional diseases which are capable of being explained by a "suggestive" theory. There are also quite sudden cures of organic lesions. Only these latter kind are put forward as supernatural, and a very large number of cases of such organic diseases have been medically examined and authentically certified to by reputable doctors as having taken place at the shrine in answer to prayer to Our Lady.

(3) Small children and babies, who are incapable of receiving "mental" treatment, are among those who have been cured of organic diseases. "Faith cures" in such cases are not naturally possible.

(4) The "faith" at Lourdes, which has been so often rewarded with a cure, is not the "faith cure" of mental healers such as the auto-suggestion conviction on which M. Coué relies to preserve, develop and restore health in his patients. It is not a subjective conviction that God *will* cure, but that God *can* cure; and it is accompanied by a limiting condition resigning oneself to God's will. "If it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; yet, not My Will but Thine be done," is the model of the sick man's prayer. God can cure, but He may not will to cure, is the faith at Lourdes. They hope for, but are not sure of a cure.

Thus the "faith" at Lourdes is no self-hypnotism into a certainty that health will be restored.

(5) Only a very small percentage of the sick are cured, and that percentage does not allow of any statistical analysis which could point to some hidden natural law at work. Those who seem to have most faith have been passed over and some who have had no personal faith have been cured at the prayer of the believing bystanders. Some big pilgrimages have no cures to record; at least one small pilgrimage had all its sick cured. Men, women and children have all been selected. Though more women than men have been cured and very many more women than men have gone in hopes of a cure, yet nothing can be predicted of the prospects of any single sick person who visits Lourdes in pilgrimage.

(6) Though Lourdes has attracted the attention of the world mainly by its miracles, the most wonderful thing about it is its atmosphere of devotion and the almost visible power of prayer pervading the pilgrimages.

(7) Lastly, "*per Mariam ad Jesum*," is once more verified at Lourdes. Men kneel at the grotto and drink of the water and then pass on to the great procession of the Blessed Sacrament as the chief and central devotion of the day. When Pope Pius X. stirred the heart of the Catholic world to the renewed practice of frequent and daily Communion and invited little children to receive Our Lord in their innocence, before temptation and sin should soil their souls or the love of pleasure hypnotize their hearts, God from His Heaven showed His satisfaction. Up to that time the baths of Lourdes water in which the sick are bathed had been the usual place where the favored sick received their healing. From that date onwards the vast majority of the miraculous cures

have been granted in the big open space where the sick were being blessed individually by Our Lord in the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament.

Jesus of Nazareth passes by and He sees the sick at Lourdes lying before Him in their thousands—as He did in the bygone days of His earthly life. The faithful crowds throng around Him as of yore. The very words, recorded in the Gospel, with which the blind and halt and lepers prayed to Him are now on the lips of thousands who cry to Him: “Lord, heal our sick!” and then thunder out the Gospel invocations. What wonder that the graces are given! The Heart of Jesus today is what it was when “it was moved with pity for the multitudes.” If He does not heal all, He loves and pities all, and the greater graces of patience and courage, yea even a love of the cross of pain, may well be a sign of a more tender predilection towards those to whom these graces are given, than would be some great miracle of healing which would obtain from the doctors their verdict of a supernatural cure.

(8) Lastly, let Catholics remember that Our Lady of Lourdes is today worldwide in her empire and that her benefactions have reached all corners of the earth where she is known and loved. A little shrine in a Catholic home brings Our Lady, Health of the Sick, to the bedside of many who are unable to journey to Europe. Our Lady of Lourdes is not French—she is *Catholic*, and her dwelling place is Heaven, where she reigns as Queen. No radio carries to its hearers its message over the earth as surely or as speedily as the cry of human sorrow and pain is borne from earthly sufferers to the ever attentive ear and pitiful heart of her who is the “Consoler of the Afflicted.” Our Lady of Lourdes, pray for us!

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