

# THE MIRACLES AT LOURDES

An Outline of the Medical Evidence for Some Selected Cures

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

By Rev. F. Woodlock S. J.

This pamphlet gives the substance of a paper read, shortly after the War, on the invitation of the Vicar of All Saints' Church, Margaret Street, London, to an audience which included a number of prominent clergymen and doctors. The present edition omits portions of and includes matter not printed in the pamphlet as originally published by the C.T.S. in 1922.

The cases chosen for discussion are selected because they are "historic" cases, accounts of which appear in the books written by a number of doctors who have studied the events of Lourdes and criticized the cures. A list of such books is appended at the end of the pamphlet. Dr. Marchand, who succeeded Dr. Le Bec as President of the Bureau des Constatations, has given us an account of some cures wrought during his presidency, and I refer such readers as wish for these more recent cases to *'Les Faits de Lourdes,'* Series I and II.

For a fuller discussion of the philosophy of miracle and defence of the supernatural character of the Gospel miracles, I may refer to my book of lectures: *Modernism and the Christian Church* (Longmans, 2s. 6d.). See also: *The Question of Miracles*, by G. H. Joyce, S.J. (Herder).

There are a vast multitude of people today who 'a priori' reject the supernatural and such minds can seldom be got to take the advice of Professor Thomas Huxley to 'sit down before facts.' The Senior Physician of the London Hospital, in a Symposium before the Hunterian Society of Doctors in the Apothecaries' Hall, on November 21st, 1932, in which the author of this pamphlet had advanced evidence of the supernatural at work in some Lourdes cures, summed up the position of those who reject the miracles in the surprising words: "There are some things that have no right to be true, even if it is said that they are." (See *'The Medical Forum'*: Jan., Feb., 1933, p. 141).

Francis Woodlock, S.J.  
*Ascension Day, 1933.*

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 re-writing 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.

Dean Inge 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 one alleged supernatural occurrence in our own time. It would be assumed that if true it must be ascribed to some obscure natural cause." He adds, however, that "there is still enough superstition left to win a certain vogue for miraculous cures at Lourdes.

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 have occurred there.

Right reason stands between the extremes of irrational scepticism and over-credulity. Professor T. Huxley, true to the principles of the now discredited Victorian Materialism, once wrote:

“If a dead man *did* come to life, the fact would not be evidence that any law of nature had been violated, but that these laws, even when they express a very long and uniform experience, are necessarily based on incomplete knowledge and are to be held only as grounds of more or less reasonable expectation.”

He here lays down a principle that leads to the bankruptcy of all science.

Anatole France, in *'Le Jardin d' Epicure,'* is no less irrational when he says that, supposing an amputated limb were instantly restored at some sacred shrine, one should not look to miracle as an explanation. He offers a scientific substitute.

“An observer of a truly scientific spirit would not say, ‘There is a miracle!’ He would say: ‘An observation, hitherto unique, leads to the belief that in certain circumstances, up to the present undetermined, the tissues of the human limbs have the power to grow another limb like the claws, of a crab—but *much more rapidly*. it is a natural occurrence.

Most Modernists to-day accept the Gospel miracles of healing as historic facts, but give them a natural explanation. The things happened, but they were not miracles. Christ, they say, performed His cures by the exercise of natural human powers which are latent in all of us and which we can develop in ourselves.

Thus, an American Modernist, Dr. Leighton Parks, says hopefully: “It may be that the day will come when it shall seem as natural to walk on the waters or to multiply loaves and fishes, as it now seems to heal the sick in the way the Gospel declares that they were healed by Jesus. But that will be to eliminate miracles, not by denying them but by understanding them.”

The transition from healing miracles to nature miracles and the suggestion that psychotherapy is limitless in its effectiveness is, it would seem, quite irrational and unscientific. If there is an excess of the sceptical spirit, blinding men to the true explanation of the facts, an uncritical credulity may also account for error in the other direction.

The crowd is prone to cry “Miracle” and it is often mistaken. It is hasty, ill-informed and unbalanced in its judgement, so that a restoration to health in a case of functional disease satisfies its appetite as well as an organic cure. If any patient leaps up from a stretcher, the crowd will sing its ‘Magnificat.’”

The medical Bureau des Constatations, established in 1882 to test the alleged miraculous cures, put Lourdes on a different footing to any other place where “faith healing” occurs, and most particularly contrasts the cures of Lourdes with those of Christian Science which notoriously are unfriendly to medical scrutiny. Lourdes welcomes medical inspection: and for six months of the year, during the pilgrimage season, the Bureau is open and doctors are in daily attendance.

Any doctor of any nationality, of any or no religious belief, is welcomed and is asked to share in the examination of the cures; sometimes as many as sixty doctors have been present at the same time. In the six years preceding the late war no less than 3,310 doctors thus visited the office—a yearly average of over 500. From its foundation, it has been a sound principle of its criticism that no case should be described as miraculous if science can suggest any possible *natural* explanation of the cure. Nor are the Lourdes doctors without knowledge of the wonderful results that suggestion can produce in a moment in functional disease or gradually even in organic cases. Psychotherapeutic remedies, consciously or unconsciously applied, are not forgotten by the doctors of the Bureau and they send many a patient away who believes himself cured by miracle and who finds the doctors quite uninterested in his case.

The record office at the Bureau keeps the “Dossier,” or case-sheet, of those whose cures it has studied and approved as supernatural, and the certificates brought by patients from their own doctors are deposited with the reports of the examining doctors of Lourdes. The subsequent history of the permanence of the cure is, as far as possible, kept

up for a number of years. Bertrin, in his scholarly treatise on Lourdes, tells us that there is record of cases of over 150 different kinds of disease in the pigeon-holes of the Bureau.

Dr. Le Bec, the senior surgeon of a Paris hospital, was the President of the Bureau des Constatations, having succeeded Dr. Boissarie, who held the office for 25 years and died towards the end of the late war. In a recent publication, *Preuves Médicales du Miracle*, a translation of which appeared recently, Dr. Le Bec develops scientifically the thesis that 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-beat 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 he discusses 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.

Varicose Veins.—The first case selected by Dr. Le Bec was one in which he 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 35. The disease developed steadily, and at the age of 42 had reached the stage of ulceration. Dr. Roesch of Marlotte observed seven characteristic ulcers on the right, and eight on the left leg. From 42 to 50 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 51 the patient was persuaded against his will to undertake a pilgrimage to Lourdes, his disease having progressed during 16 years; and it was 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 judgement 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 varices 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 had had no treatment and little rest. His 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 Besancon, editor of the *Journal de Médecine Intense*:

“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 cicatrize 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.

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

Charcot had boldly written, “All manifestations of the supernatural in the past, all miracles of the present day, all are but the influence of the nerves (‘nervose’). Nerves do not heal varicose veins in a moment!

Dr. Berihion—a former President of the Hypnotological Society and editor of the *Revue de l’Hypnotisme*—has admitted: “We must own that the sick at Lourdes are often in the last stages of their disease and then only a miracle can save them. Lourdes performs such miracles.” Hypnotism and all forms of suggestion have their limited effect. As Bernheim has said truly: “Suggestion cannot reset a dislocated joint, bring down a rheumatic swelling or restore destroyed cerebral matter. It cannot stop the growth of a tumour: it does not kill microbes or heal a gastric ulcer.” Nor can it bear upon the following cure.

Joachine Dehant.—Joachine Dehant's case is one that aroused and still holds the interest of all students of the Lourdes cures, and Dr. Le Bec gives a résumé of it in his proof of their supernatural character.

Dr. Froidebise supplies very precise details as to the patient's condition when she left for Lourdes, but hers is a case where the evidence of her fellow travellers and of the nurses who bathed her is of equal value with her doctor's certificate. An independent investigation of the cure was made by Dr. Eischen and Dr. Royer, Professor Deploige, who occupied the chair of Civil Law at the University of Louvain, together with M. Legrand and M. Poncelet, two lawyers.

Dr. Froidebise's certificate clearly defined three ailments:

- (1) Right hip-joint dislocated.
- (2) Contraction of the lateral tibial muscles so as to produce the effect of a club foot.
- (3) And—principally—an ulcer covering two-thirds of the external surface of the right calf.

The evidence proves that the ulcer was 14 inches long by 6 inches broad. It has lasted for **12** years and had eaten deep into the flesh partly destroying the muscles. Suppuration was free and the pus extremely foul. The bone itself was necrosed. The foot, lacking support, was inverted and the knee long ankylosed in flexion. Joachine's ulcer was perfectly cured at the second bath; the foot, the hip-joint and the knee were cured on the following day. On the evening of her cure she led the thanksgiving procession without fatigue or stiffness in the long disused limb. The hideous ulcer had been seen by a number of her fellow travellers, as she dressed it during the journey at Paray and Agen stations, and by those who helped her at Lourdes. Dr. Froidebise saw her the day of her return and gave another certificate testifying to the cures of all the lesions enumerated in the certificate which he wrote just before her departure to the Shrine. Joachine had wasted away so much in her twelve years of sickness that she weighed only 59 lbs. (4 stone 3 lbs.) on arriving at Lourdes. A few years after the cure she wrote:

"To-day I weigh 164 lbs.—11 stone 10 lbs. and I have never ceased, since my cure, to enjoy perfect health." Professor Vergez of Montpellier says, apropos of this case: "The sudden cure of a sore, or rather a spreading chronic ulcer, in a very decayed constitution and the spontaneous reduction of dislocation of the hip are facts quite outside natural explanation."

I shall only recount briefly two other cases of the cure of extended organic skin complaints, referring my readers to Dr. Le Bec's or Bertrin's book for detailed evidence of the facts.

Marie Lemarchand.—An interesting case of advanced lupus was 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 were 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 her 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, presenting the girl, whose hideous disease had evidently made such an impression on the novelist before the cure: "the 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 colour 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, the President of the

Bureau.

Mlle Lebranchu.—Turning now to another class of patient, let me give a short account of a cure of consumption in its final stage. The summary of the case of Mlle Lebranchu sets forth how both parents had died of tuberculosis. She herself lay dying in hospital when she was removed on a stretcher to Lourdes. There was a profusion of tuberculosis bacilli in the sputum and copious night sweat, and a temperature in the evenings between 1020 and 1050. 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 travelled to Lourdes with her. She is "La Grivotte" of his novel.

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. Evidently the ethics of the French pornographer in the matter of truth-telling are on a level with his views about other moral matters!

There are records of over three hundred cures of consumption in the medical office; and in these days of bacteriology and X-rays science can assure itself of the internal ravages of a disease which the unscientific laymen used only to describe as "being in a decline." Dr. Le Bec quotes in full an example of such a case, and no one who reads it can doubt of the condition of Mme Hébert, the patient; a large cavity existed in the right lung; the sputum was abundant, 250 grammes a day, and it contained a profusion of bacilli. There was frequent blood-spitting; several times during the journey to Lourdes this distressing symptom was repeated. The patient was cured at the first touch of Lourdes water; the cough and spitting of blood ceased immediately, and she had the feeling of being perfectly well. The doctor who saw her starting for Lourdes examined her on her return and testified to her cure. The bronchial secretions had completely dried up. It was six weeks before any sputum could be examined and then it was found to be completely free from bacilli. The patient never has had a relapse and is strong and healthy. Dr. La Néelle put the final test to her cure by the injection of one centigramme of tuberculin and two days later by an injection of over two centigrammes. There was no local reaction or rise of temperature.

Mlle Durand.—One other case which came under Dr. Le Bec's observation may be summarized in a short table. It is that of Gabrielle Durand.

1907 January Pott's disease appears and progresses steadily.

1907 March Abscess punctured and 1/2 litre of pus removed.

October Tuberculous coxalgia.

December Tuberculous peritonitis.

1908 June Symptoms of tubercular meningitis.

August Sudden cure at Lourdes which has lasted without relapse.

This is an extraordinary case—one that means more to a medical man than to a layman—which cannot reasonably be explained without recourse to the supernatural.

There have been quite a number of cases of Pott's tubercular spine disease, some of them as recently as last August (1921), though naturally the final decision about these latter cases will be left till time has proved the permanence of the cures. The official organ of the Medical Bureau, the *Journal de la Grotte*, published the interim report on the cases shortly after the pilgrimages at which occurred.

Mme Biré.—There have been many instances of the cure of blindness, but I shall only briefly recount two. 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 Luéon. 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 diseases, entered the Bureau and at once was 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*.

Bertrin gives details of a case of blindness—that of M. Vion-Dury, due to double detachment of the retinas—which was cured in a moment at the third application of Lourdes water. This cure occurred after the disease had lasted 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.

Marie Boreal.—I pass now to a remarkable cure of terribly distressing disease. The full details are given in Boissarie's *Guérisons*, Grandmaison's *Twenty Cures at Lourdes*, and Le Bec's *Preuves Médicales du Miracle*. It appeared in the Faith-Healing number of the *British Medical Journal* in 1910, in an article by Rev. H. Thurston, S.J.; but no attempt was made by the medical readers to explain away the extraordinary fact or to deny the truth of the detailed account given by the doctors.

Marie Boreal arrived at Lourdes, after being confined to bed for thirty months with ankylosed vertebral column, purulent cystitis of the bladder and six pyostercoral fistulae. For five months the entire waste products of the body escaped through these fistulae nor had there been any natural movement through the bowel. In the course of a day at Lourdes these six fistulae were perfectly closed and their orifices cicatrized and the bowels began at once to act normally. The next day the ankylosis disappeared completely and from that moment perfect cure was dated. The medical evidence (the condition before and after the 21st August), is compelling and it is supplemented by the evidence of the nurses who did the dressings before the cure. Though this cure was not instantaneous, I believe, it should be classed as miraculous—that six fistulae through which all the faeces had passed daily for five months should spontaneously close up with no treatment beyond the application, with prayer, of a little spring water, in the space of 24 hours, is not natural cure. The purulent cystitis of the bladder which complicated the case was cured at the same time as the fistulae.

Cancers.—A young surgeon once said at the end of a lecture on Lourdes cures delivered 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 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 tumour, almost the size of 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 tumour, such as lipoina, 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 S.W. France and a mistake in his diagnosis is hardly credible in such a case. Cancer *does* at times get gradually re-absorbed in the system of an old man—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

De Rudder.—There is probably no medical writer on Lourdes who has not treated fully or at least alluded to the

famous De Rudder case. The most recent book by Dr. Le Bec—*Preuves Médicales du Miracle*—selects it as one of his test cases of the supernatural. This cure did not take place at Lourdes itself, but at a replica of the shrine erected at Oosaka, near Ghent—a place of pilgrimage for many Belgians who are unable to journey to the south of France. I may say in passing that many remarkable cures of which accounts are deposited in the pigeon-holes of the Medical Office at Lourdes took place at a distance from the shrine, and the invalid's pilgrimage to it was only made "in spirit." In many of these cases the cure was connected with Lourdes because water was used "quasi-sacramentally" with prayer—water which came from the fount which sprung from the dry soil and rock under the fingers of the peasant child in the presence of hundreds of witnesses during one of her visions. In the De Rudder case there is no mention of Lourdes water being applied.

I did not originally intend to include an account of the De Rudder case in this paper, but on re-reading the *British Medical Journal* "Faith-Healing" number which appeared in 1910, I feel that to omit discussion of this wonderful case might be interpreted as a surrender of its miraculous character. The discussion is forced on me by the criticism of an eminent medical authority who dealt with it in that number in an appendix to an article on "Spiritual Reading."

The Catholic Truth Society, five years before the article which I am criticizing was written, had published in a pamphlet a well documented summary of the case. A detailed history of it signed by three medical men had appeared in the *Revue des Questions Scientifiques*, and it had also been dealt with in the *Journal des Sciences Médicales*.<sup>2</sup> The doctor who had most to do with the case was a religious sceptic previously to the cure: he is now, dating from the cure, a devout Catholic: when Zola made his famous visit to the shrine to collect material for his book on Lourdes, Dr. Van Hoestenberghé wrote to Dr. Boissarie, the President of the Medical Bureau, and asked him to convey the following message to the novelist: "Sir, I was an unbeliever as you are: De Rudder's miracle opened my eyes, hitherto closed to the light: with relief I have found happiness and an interior peace never known before."

Here then is the presentment of the case by the writer in the *British Medical Journal*.

"Pierre De Rudder suffered from inability to rest his weight upon his leg and from necrosis and discharging sinuses following upon a compound fracture sustained in the year 1867. He was treated by various medical men during the next eight years, but the sinuses remained still unhealed, and he was not able to use his leg to much purpose. In the year 1875 he went, not to Lourdes itself, but to the Sanctuary of Notre Dame de Lourdes at Oostaker-lesGrand where he bathed. Suppuration is said to have ceased at once, the wounds suddenly closed, two cicatrices formed, bony consolidation was performed without the formation of a callus and without shortening or vertical deviation. Even if this case were accepted it is but a poor exhibition compared with what might have been expected. One cannot but ask whether this is the best which so powerful an intercessor as Notre Dame de Lourdes can show in the course of half a century would almost desire to believe the miracle myself but there are certainly two grave defects in the evidence. *There is no evidence* to show whether the bones united in the first months of the accident; all that is said is that Pierre could not bear upon the leg, and the last medical examination was made nearly three months before the cure took place. Had there been clear evidence of non-union by an impartial medical witness within two or three days of the cure, the case would bear a very different aspect." (H. T. Butlin, in *British Medical Journal*, June, 1910.)

The fact of the fracture just below the knee of both bones of Pierre De Rudder's left leg has never been denied. Did consolidation take place in the first few months after the accident?

We have the sworn testimony of Dr. Affener of Oudenbourg that he failed to secure reunion after many months, the fracture soon becoming compound by a purulent ulcer at the point of fracture which quickly tracked down and broke out in the foot as well. These sores persisted in full activity for eight years. During that time six doctors dealt with the case and all testify to the permanence of the fracture. Bits of diseased bone came away, and at the end of eight years the condition of the limb was unchanged. The fractured ends of the bones were easily visible and palpable in their bath of pus, separated from each other, necrosed and deprived of their periosteum. Amputation was declared to be the only remedy, but the peasant refused to permit this. Modern antiseptic methods might, no doubt, have secured a cure, but this was in the 'seventies, and the modern methods were not yet understood. In January, 1874, Dr. Van Hoestenberghé once more carefully examined the limb and he has stated on oath what he did and saw. He twisted the foot till the heel came round in more than a semi-circle; he bent the shin bone till the four broken bone ends protruded from the purulent wound. He felt the distance between these bone ends *in situ* and estimated the pairs as separated

from each other by an inch. The bone ends were necrosed. There was not the least sign of progress towards a cure. Dr. Verriest, a Bruges surgeon specialist, testified, after careful examination to the same condition. Both advised amputation, and as this was refused, Verriest prescribed a starch bandage and the washing of the wound with a decoction of oak bark. The patient soon threw off the bandage, and for the rest of the year and till the April of the following, the only treatment was the washing of the wound and renewing of the pus-soaked bandage two or three times a day by the patient himself. Dr. Van Hoestenberghe examined the limb again in December 1874, and renewing the same tests by manipulating the limb as before, declared it in the same condition and just as far as ever from a cure. From that time the patient was left without antiseptics, without splints, or extension, and he was a well-known figure in the town, limping around on his crutches with the broken leg swinging at the seat of fracture like a farmer's flail. When all natural means failed him, De Rudder decided to seek a cure at the Oostaker shrine early in April 1875.

Dr. Van Hoestenberghe gives his testimony in the following solemn words.

"I declare on my conscience and on my soul

1. I have examined De Rudder a dozen times and my last visit was two or three months before the cure;
2. Each time I was able to make the ends of the bones come out of the wound: they were deprived of their periosteum, there was necrosis, the suppuration was fetid and abundant and had passed along the tendons...
3. At each examination I introduced two fingers to the bottom of the wound and always felt a separation of 4 or 5 centimetres between the broken parts and this right across their breadth. I was able to turn them about easily.
4. A large sequestrum had come away at the beginning and little bits of bone often came away during these years.

(*cf.* Appendix xxxiv, Bertrin's French edition, p. 501.)

There are those who would captiously reject the evidence of the witnesses who describe the condition of De Rudder's leg, in the days immediately preceding his pilgrimage and cure, on the ground that they were not doctors. While willingly admitting that for most matters of bodily sickness and health the evidence of a doctor is the only *scientific* evidence, I contend, in the name of common sense, that in the case of a fracture such as this anyone with honesty and eyesight is a capable witness.

The day before the pilgrimage De Rudder was noticed by a large number of parishioners in church, with the limb swinging flail-like at the seat of the fracture. Five days before the cure, a neighbour saw the limb dressed; and the hardy peasant, perhaps a little proud of his interesting limb, put it through its contortions, twisting the toes backward and bending the shin to bring out the diseased bones. Two days later another neighbour had the performance repeated for his benefit, and the night before the pilgrimage three persons were with him for a couple of hours and watched the whole process gone through again as he dressed his wound. The sworn testimony of the gate-keeper of the station and of the four men who helped to put De Rudder into the train to the evident broken condition of the limb is all part of the evidence; as is that of the cheery unbeliever who lifted the patient into his omnibus at Ghent, joking about the leg as if it were going to drop off, but who, on arrival at the shrine, lost his good temper and swore angrily because blood and pus from the saturated bandage had soiled his omnibus.

There are those, I say, who would rule out the evidence of all these people on the grounds that they are not medical men. But must one be a qualified medical man to judge of such facts as these? As a French writer put it: "must one be a tailor to notice a hole in one's garments or an astronomer to see that the moon is up? Without being able to talk learnedly of periosteum and compound fracture of fibula and tibia, one can observe a foul looking, evil smelling, purulent ulcer and one can notice that a foot is twisted till the toes are at the back."

One day the writer was walking with a friend in a London street when there crashed down on the pavement- a yard in front of him a poor man who had fallen **70** feet from a fifth-floor window. Instinctively, as a priest, he raised his hand in blessing and absolution over the poor man who still breathed. Then he bent to raise him when a crossing-sweeper stopped him. "Better not move him," he said, "his legs are broken"; and he pointed to the feet which lay pointing backwards while the heels were facing as the knees faced. Sometimes curiously calm reflections occur in a moment of shock, and I found myself thinking **of** the folly of the critics who reject *en masse* the multiplied testimony of the witnesses to De Rudder's broken limb on the eve of its cure-because they were not doctors!

In the name of reason, I ask, could all these people be deceived?



The fact that De Rudder returned home perfectly cured, walking and running without crutches, with no trace of limp or stiffness in the leg that had been out of action for eight years, without any shortening of the limb that had lost substantial pieces of bone and had *been without* splints or extensory appliances—the perfect cure, in a word, was attested by a whole township that celebrated a nine days' thanksgiving in the village church, fifteen hundred out of a population of two thousand being present daily. It is attested by the doctors who had treated De Rudder. Van Hoestenberghé was converted to Christianity by the event; and a document describing what had happened was drawn up and signed by the principal inhabitants and deposited in the municipal record office.

De Rudder lived 23 years after his cure and died at the age of 75 of pneumonia. His bones were exhumed and they fully bear out the above history of the case.

While De Rudder lived, no disfigurement was visible save a scar below the knee and a slight depression at the place of fracture. But the back view of the exhumed one reveals a rough prominence due to the upper portions of the fractured limb being retracted by the muscles during the eight years, and when the cure took place the intervening space was filled up so as to leave the vertical axis perfect. The bone looks like an unskilful bit of surgery as seen from the back without its covering of the calf which hid it during life. A young doctor to whom I showed it, sneered at the Divine surgery and said he would be ashamed to leave a patient with such a bone. Had no trace been left, he would probably have said that there had never been a fracture.

Suffice it to say that De Rudder's limb left the Divine Surgeon perfect for all practical purposes of running, jumping, and walking; there was no slow functional recovery helped out by massage but the moment of cure brought the perfect use of a sound limb. Of this there is multiple evidence.

One word in conclusion about this case. The latest theory propounded is that De Rudder, though unconscious of his powers, was an extraordinary spiritistic medium: that his longing for his cure summoned spirits who quickly collected from somewhere outside his body the amount of lime salts required for their bone-building; they hastened on in some wonderful way the building process like pre-war bricklayers working overtime and so restored the limb without recourse to Divine aid or the ordinary biological process.

I prefer to believe God worked a miracle!

Dr. Julien Marcuse, a sceptic, writing in a Berlin paper as late as 1902, summed up the whole case thus:

"The case of Pierre De Rudder *cannot* be true, because it would be a slap in the face to all the laws of biology and pathology." What if God Himself made those laws and is master of them, and decided to cause by His direct intervention an exception to them? 'The King can break no law.'

"Were I to see all the sick at Lourdes cured I would, not believe in a miracle," said Zola. Professor Vergez, chief of the medical faculty of Montpellier, after twenty years' study of the facts of Lourdes, wrote: "At Lourdes I have seen, heard, and touched the Supernatural."

Which of the two was the better rationalist and free-thinker?

What conclusion then is it reasonable to draw with regard to the facts of Lourdes? What is their *Cause*?

Is the Lourdes water some wonderful drug? It has been analysed and is ordinary spring water without any radio-activity. Many cures occur without its intervention, *e.g.*, the cure of De Rudder just considered.

Is it the marvellous psychic powers of a crowd of devotees? But cures occur far from the crowds and away from the shrine.

Is it suggestion—religious suggestion, auto-suggestion or some other form of "faith-healing" in the sense used by Charcot? Suggestion works slowly in the case of organic cures. Suggestion cannot apply to the case of infants and young children, and the Lourdes cures include these; *e.g.*, the cure of double club-foot in a two-year-old child, the miracle occurring as the father, Dr. Aumaitre, held his child's feet in the water.

Men have been cured when lying unconscious, *e.g.*, Gargan; or asleep, *e.g.*, the patient who suffered from the cancer in the cheek, which Dr. Le Bec deals with. The most intense prayers have been unavailing, the strongest faith and hope disappointed: and people who have been disappointed and have given up hope have been unexpectedly cured on their way home. There is no possibility of formulating a law for the Lourdes cures; there is an arbitrary nature in them which is absolutely inconsistent with any determinist solution. Each happens because God chooses. When God chooses to stop working these wonders at Lourdes, their cessation will be the final proof of the Supernatural character

of the cures that occurred.

Is it some “unknown force,” that further study will reveal to be a *natural* force? But no discovery can ever upset the well established biological laws of growth and healing. Science commits suicide if it appeals to unknown laws that upset its firmly established facts.

Is the whole thing a gigantic fraud? Well, it has gone on for sixty years and the fraud has never been unmasked by one who studied the facts. Bertrin’s book is in its 212th thousand and yet has never been refuted.

Either these things have happened or they have not. If they *have* happened, they can only be explained reasonably by recourse to the Supernatural. If they have not happened, the inexplicable psychological miracle of the hallucination of numberless capable and otherwise trustworthy witnesses is a greater mystery and more incredible than the miraculous cures themselves. Let an unbeliever try to reconstruct, *e.g.*, the De Rudder case, in such a way as to give a purely natural explanation to the whole event and he will realize that he is attempting the *impossible*.. In the name of reason he must admit modern miracles or commit intellectual suicide.

### 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 judgement 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 the lecture on Lourdes cures, given 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 sceptical 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 death-bed: “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.

### FACTS ABOUT LOURDES

Here are some facts to be remembered:

(1) 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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-suggested 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.

(4) 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.

(5) 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.

(6) 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 favoured 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.

(7) 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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