

## Hobbes's letter on miracles\*

SIR,

THE young woman at Over-Haddon hath been visited by divers persons of this house. My Lord himself hunting the hare one day at the Town's end, with other gentlemen and some of his servants, went to see her on purpose: and they all agree with the relation you say was made to yourself. They further say on their own knowledge, that part of her Belly touches her Back-bone. She began (as her Mother says) to loose her appetite in December last, and had lost it quite in March following: insomuch as that since that time she has not eaten nor drunk any thing at all, but only wets her lips with a feather dipt in water. They were told also that her gutts (she alwayes keeps her bed) lye out by her at her fundament shrunken. Some of the neighbouring ministers visit her often: others that see her for curiosity give her mony, sixpence or a shilling, which she refuseth, and her mother taketh. But it does not appear they gain by it so much as to breed a suspicion of a cheat. The woman is manifestly sick, and 'tis thought she cannot last much longer. Her talk (as the gentlewoman that went from this house told me) is most heavenly. To know the certainty, there bee many things necessary which cannot honestly be pryed into by a man. First, whether her gutts (as 'tis said) lye out. Secondly, whether any excrement pass that way, or none at all. For if it pass, though in small quantity, yet it argues food proportionable, which may, being little, bee given her secretly and pass through the shrunken intestine, which may easily be kept clean. Thirdly, whether no urine at all pass: for liquors also nourish as they go. I think it were somewhat inhumane to examin these things too nearly, when it so little concerneth the commonwealth: nor do I know of any law that authoriseth a Justice of peace, or other subject, to restrain the liberty of a sick person so farr as were needful for a discovery of this nature. I cannot therefore deliver any judgment in the case. The examining whether such a thing as this bee a miracle, belongs I think to the Church. Besides, I myself in a sickness have been without all manner of sustenance for more than six weeks together: which is enough to make mee think that six months would not have made it a miracle. Nor do I much wonder that a young woman of clear memory, hourelly expecting death, should bee more devout then at other times. 'Twas my own case. That which I wonder at most, is how her piety without instruction should bee so eloquent as 'tis reported.

THO. HOBBS.

Chatsworth, Oct. 20. [16]68.

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\*Thomas Hobbes, "Letter to Mr. Beale" in *Works*, edited by William Molesworth, vol. 7, p. 463.