
POSSESSION AND EXPERIENCE.

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I.

It is well indeed that we have the Word of God to refer to as our never failing guide and standard, and to read simply and dependently, not with our minds working upon it, but the Word acting upon us in all simplicity and reality. We can thus always prove, through grace, whether teaching set before us is right or not, and as Scripture is our guide and standard, so we are responsible to bring all there, and, if the teaching be according to it, we are bound to accept it as of God; if, on the other hand, it is found to be not according to the written Word, our responsibility is to refuse it wholly, though it may at first sight have the appearance of being correct. Our Lord's injunction was, 'Take heed what ye hear,' and 'Take heed how ye hear,' while Romans xvi., 18, gives us a special warning as to 'good words and fair speeches.'

The two subjects at the head of this paper, Scripture keeps ever distinct; the confounding, or mixing of them up is what has led to well-nigh endless confusion, and indeed ever tends to cast a doubt in the soul as to the truths that are the portion of every believer in Christ Jesus—the youngest as well as the oldest. I am aware that Joshua i., especially verse 3, and Deuteronomy i., 8, are used in support of a doctrine of progress, even so far as to assert that nothing is possessed unless there be an accompanying experience. Now there is no question that truth is held in power only when it is held by the soul individually with God, but truth does not hang upon our experience of it, nor does our lack of experience affect it. Surely one would desire to give all room for exercise of soul and of conscience—would,

indeed, that there were more of it! But we must not reduce the realities of Divine truths to our poor experience of them—on the contrary, these truths subsist in all their reality and power, whatever our experience or thoughts regarding them may be; rather therefore let us seek to press upon souls the reality of those truths, if they are true believers, and we can then count upon their laying hold of the soul and producing fruit for God. If I say to a soul ‘You must experience such and such a truth before it is true of you,’ or if I say, ‘you must enjoy it before it is yours,’ I am turning the soul in upon itself, and the maze of its feelings, doubts and fears, instead of seeking to lead it by faith to what is outside of itself. I am, in short, putting experience in the place of faith—my own feelings and experiences in the place of Christ and His glories. Enjoyment is the result of possession, not possession the result of enjoyment.

I am prepared to be told by this school of progress so called: ‘This is not what we mean, or hold.’ But such expressions as ‘we have to substantiate by faith what is true of us,’ are sufficient answer, for it is mere unbelief to talk of substantiating by faith what is true. We either believe or we do not believe. Faith is always absolutely certain—it is a simple thing—a simple believing God and His testimony, not a morbid turning in upon ourselves to ask how far, or if one does at all, one substantiates what is true by drinking into it. This school of so-called progress would turn us in upon ourselves, and make a party of those who have so far advanced as to substantiate the truth instead of simply believing it, and who speak of all others as not being ‘in it,’ and ‘not going on.’ May the Lord indeed keep us from party spirit, party making or party seeking in every form! Nothing, surely, is more hateful to Him than ‘party,’ and the worst of all is the party that arrogates to itself a position (call it by what name you will, ‘fathers’ or

those 'lured on by heavenly light,' or any other term) that is based upon such a ground as the substantiation of the truth by faith. When, how, and where, I ask; did Peter and John substantiate the truth by faith, when they healed the impotent man at the Beautiful gate of the Temple? 'Such as I have give I thee,' said Peter, and he acts in simple faith, not turning it over in himself to see if it were true or not, but acting and speaking in the power of the Name, by simple faith in that Name. And in verse 12, he repudiates wholly all idea of power and holiness in himself having anything whatever to do with it. Take again Acts xvi, where and how was the truth substantiated when Paul and Silas sang praises to God, at midnight in the prison? Are we to be told they were then and thus substantiating the truth by faith? Or were they in the simple enjoyment of the truth, and giving back to Him in praise what they had received, being thankful that they were 'counted worthy to suffer for His Name?' It may be said these are isolated and special instances that it is not fair to judge from; but they are instances that upset this theory of progress and substantiation. Had they been occupied with, or even thought of their own 'drinking in,' neither Peter nor John would have spoken as they did to the impotent man, nor would Paul or Silas ever have sung as they did. When will saints ever learn that occupation with self, save to judge and condemn it, is *never* of God—that it *always* comes from the enemy, and the pride of our own hearts, its most insidious form being our own growth or fancied growth in truth, experimental, substantiated, or any other? 'Faith is the substance' (substantiating, or assurance, firm conviction) 'of things hoped for, the evidence' (conviction) 'of things not seen.' We do not 'substantiate by faith,' but faith is, in itself, the substantiating or assurance of 'things hoped for,' &c. It is not what we do, but what we have. Thus, as

I have said, we either believe or we do not believe. To make out that I substantiate by faith, is to set the 'I' to work, and, I ask, what 'I' is it that is spoken of—the old or the new? It certainly is not the old—for the dead can substantiate nothing. Surely we are not to be told it is the new; for it is wellnigh blasphemous to speak of the new 'I' substantiating by faith what is of God. To it all that is of Him is simply, solidly, and abidingly true and real, for faith sees everything as God sees it. The truth is, the notion of substantiating by faith what is true of us, is merely the ground for turning us in upon ourselves with the query, How far is what is true of us, true to us? In other words, to put it baldly, do we really believe or not? And we are called upon to search our own hearts for a solution! One would have thought, with all the blessed truth as to the end of the first man, and the glory of the Second, that has been so long and so richly before us, and so generally professedly held, that the heart would have been the last place that we should be thus turned to; even Solomon could say the man is a fool who trusts it, how much more those who have the blessed Lord's words, in Matthew xv., before them?

It is ever the effort of the enemy to occupy the Christian with himself in some way other than that in which God does, for God, as I have said, never occupies him with himself save to judge himself for that which he allows that is contrary to Him. At one time, not very long since, it took the form of 'Death to Nature,' as it was then called—now it takes the form of our own progress, our own advancement in truth, our 'drinkings in,' our 'growth.' This is but a different phase of the same school of teaching! Such expressions as 'having it' but not being 'in it,' 'not going on' are found in both, and, if comparison were our object, many other similarities might be traced.

The recent teaching regarding Eternal Life has manifested pretty clearly this school or system of

progress. If it were merely isolated and individual utterances, we might pass them by, leaving the teachers to know themselves better, and for the truth to have more power over them individually, and thus to escape from the snare of false teaching they were entangled in. But, when a system of teaching is evolved from it, nothing but full enquiry and exposure will suffice. I refer to the articles on Eternal Life, in the *Voice to the Faithful* for July and August last.

In the first article we are told, 'That the babe in Christ has an assured title to every blessing which is bestowed upon us in Him cannot be too strongly maintained.' We are then told that, 'It becomes His servants to so minister to the saints what their blessings are, that young men, or even babes in Christ, may be led into the conscious possession, as present heavenly light; of what that portion is which so soon will be enjoyed in its own proper sphere with the Lord.' A verse of a hymn follows, as giving a sanction to this. But we must be careful not to be caught by words, however fair and good they may be. The use made of this hymn is unjust, for the hymn speaks of Love supreme and bright giving us *now*, as heavenly light, what shall soon be our part—not of 'babes and young men' being led into the conscious possession of it. The thought in the hymn is the sovereignty and sweetness of that love which gives to the feeblest—a truly blessed and scriptural thought. The use made in quoting it is to support the notion that such giving is of no avail unless there is a conscious being led into possession. In short, the thought in the hymn is the giving—the object of the giver, is the effect produced. He says 'The love supreme and bright is good to the feeblest heart, however small our progress hitherto; while nothing will prove a greater hindrance than assuming, because all things are ours, that I am in the possession of that which I have not apprehended, and of which I have not the conscious enjoyment.' The reader can judge for

himself how far this is in accordance with Scripture. I have referred to it as it is a sample of the system of employment of the words of others, and even of texts of Scripture itself, to support a theory which has no foundation in what is thus quoted. I leave it, however, merely remarking that all enjoyment is 'conscious, and that there is, in the very nature of things, no enjoyment that is not so.

But to return to the subject of the article. The writer evidently considers that all the Lord's servants are 'fathers' according to I. John ii, and that 'fathers' only are servants, for he says it is their work to lead on the 'babes and young men.' I am aware he does not boldly call them 'fathers,' but that is evidently what his teaching is, for 'babes and young men' not yet being 'in it,' they cannot help each other; besides, it is said they alone need the leading on, the fathers only being in conscious possession. It is important to bear this in mind, for it is the basis of what is developed later on.

The babe in Christ then is admitted to have a title to every blessing bestowed on us in Him. This is true—but it is equally true of the 'fathers,' and no more true of them than it is of the 'babe.' Why then commence the discussion of Eternal Life with this assertion, save to commit us to the acceptance of the thing as true that it is all that babes have or, at any rate, that they must make good their title in order to get possession? We are then told, 'But the journey from the place of shelter under the sprinkled blood in Egypt, through the Red Sea and Jordan, *has to be taken*' (the italics are the author's) 'by the soul in order to its entering upon its possessions in Canaan.' Now this, again, is true in itself, but it is not true in the sense in which it is used here, for the object here is to show that babes are in Egypt, young men in the wilderness, and fathers in the land. So what follows is of a piece with this, and it is said, 'it may take us forty years, instead of

eleven days, before we sit down, and taste the old corn of the land.' Apply this to the figure used before in this article, and we have it taught that it may take forty years instead of eleven days for a child to become a father, though some may accomplish it in eleven days! I may be accused of misinterpreting the author, but this paragraph concludes with 'Stumbling blocks, also have to be exposed and taken out of the way, which would hinder the soul advancing from the position of babe to that of father.'

I have dwelt rather on this part of the article, because it discloses the system of this school of teaching, which interprets the first Epistle of John by Old Testament wilderness history, and which confounds Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, making three sorts of Christians in a progressive way, *i.e.*, Romans Christians (babes), Colossians Christians (young men) and Ephesians Christians (fathers). There is no more fatal error than bringing Old Testament history, and figures into the New Testament, and seeking to interpret the New by the Old. Our privilege and blessing is, to study the Old by the light of the New—knowing the Substance, to go back and look at the shadow, not to study the Substance from the shadow which it cast. I would ask, are 'fathers' not in the wilderness? Are they always and only in the land? Have they no wilderness, experiences or joys? Because 'the manna ceased on the morrow after they had eaten of the old corn of the land,' are fathers to be denied feeding upon the humiliated Man here in this world—our true Manna? Manna is for the wilderness and not for the land. This system of teaching, while professing to give more, would take away one of our most precious and blessed privileges. Again, is it the truth that babes are in Egypt? Is the Father only known in the land? All this teaching arises from systematizing truth to meet a preconceived view, based upon Old Testament history and figures, and thus, because

John is abstract and not conditional, the truth there taught is, in reality, swept aside to make way for the introduction and maintenance of this Old Testament figurative teaching. In this way it is that the subject of Eternal Life is taken up in this article.

We are then told that there is no greater hindrance than assuming that we are in possession of that which we have not yet apprehended, and of which we have not the 'conscious enjoyment.' I admit fully the writer's desire to elevate the practical condition of those he addresses, and to bring about a better state and a higher walk among Christians generally, but reducing all truth, all that is given us of God, to our apprehension of it, and to 'conscious enjoyment' of it on our part, otherwise the possession of it is a mere assumption and hindrance, is the very way to weaken everything, to sap the power of the truth, and to substitute for what is ours, because God has given it to us, a morbid state of self-contemplation which becomes more and more engrossing, and of occupation with our own progress and advancement, instead of with the blessed Lord and His present glory, and His interests here on earth. If anything but misery result from this, it is a feeding of pride, and is deadly—if only misery, there can be no advance. It is not only wholly opposed to Scripture and sound teaching, but it is assuming as true the very reverse of what is taught in 1 John. There it says, 'I write unto you, children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake.' This is the Holy Spirit's statement of the normal state of a child in Christ. Every such child knows its sins are forgiven it, but the 'conscious enjoyment' or 'apprehension' of this forgiveness did not make it a child. It is the first knowledge of the child, and is true of all such children, or they are not children at all. So with 'young men,' 'because ye have overcome the wicked one,' 'because ye are strong, and the word of God abides in you'—the state

produced continues—being strong, and the word of God abiding in them did not make them young men, any more than the ‘conscious enjoyment’ of their own victory over the wicked one did. These were evidences that they were young men. So with ‘fathers.’ The knowledge of Him that is from the beginning did not make them ‘fathers.’ It is, again, the Holy Spirit’s statement that there is nothing more to know. ‘Him that is from the beginning’ is all and everything there is to know.

But this system tells us, ‘The babe can say, Abba! Father. He has the Anointing which teaches all things. He has the eternal spring of life within—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.’ Now this last is a quotation from Romans viii, 2, and is, so far as I am aware, used nowhere else in Scripture, and it is in connection with deliverance, not with being born again. I quote the entire passage which shows the loose and unwarrantable use made of it in the article before us: ‘For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath set me free from the law of sin and death.’ We are now told ‘the babe’ has, in himself, this ‘Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ (an utterly unscriptural thought) but yet he has not arrived at the state of Colossians iii., 11, when he would know Him not only as the Deliverer from Egypt, but as the One who had brought him into the knowledge of Himself as sent of the Father, so that he could say, ‘In Him I know the Father.’ Such an one is a father and not a babe.’ We may note that the only contrast here is between ‘babe’ and ‘father.’ The young men are left out here—they are out of Egypt, but not yet in the land, wandering in the desert after having ‘overcome the wicked one, and being strong, and the word of God abiding in them.’ Why they are to be confined to the desert and in what part of it they are, may well indeed be left undefined. But I turn to the passage quoted that we may judge for ourselves as to the use made of it: ‘Do not lie to one

another, having put off the old man with his deeds; and having put on the new, renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that has created him; wherein there is not Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondsman, free-man; but Christ is everything, and in all.' Here again is utter looseness of application. The true meaning of the passage has its application to all—it does not make the babe a young man, nor the young man a father, nor is it applied to fathers as such, nor indeed has it anything to do with them distinctively, nor has it anything in the world to do with the knowledge of the Father in Him. Moreover the teaching of the passage is one of contrast, and has an abiding application as incumbent on us all.

But further, we are now told that the one who can say '*In Him* I know the Father' is a father. Let me ask, how else does anyone know the Father? It is only in Him, *i. e.*, in Christ that any one knows the Father. We turn to scripture, and we find what is here attributed to the fathers as their distinctive mark, is attributed there to babes in Christ. 'I write unto you, little children, because you *have known* the Father.' (It is the perfect tense.) Yet this system would teach us 'The youngest believer in Christ knows that God is his Father; the babe can say, 'Abba! Father' . . . the one who can say '*In Him*, I know the Father' is a father and not a babe.' Scripture tell us a babe is one who not only knows God is his Father, but who '*has known* the Father.' Our author no doubt does not intend this, but this is what he has done—by making the knowledge of the Father the distinctive portion of fathers he has reduced them to babes, for the one he calls a father is one Scripture distinctly speaks of as a babe.

Again it is mere assumption to say that 'Him that is from the beginning' in 1 John ii., 13, 14, is the Father, or the Father known in Christ. It is Christ Himself personally, our Lord, our Saviour, the Blessed, the Holy

One of God, not merely the 'Sent One of the Father,' but Himself, "Christ in the world, His person manifested in flesh. That is where all experience ends ; not in a knowledge of self merely as occupied with it, but in such a knowledge of it as empties us of self; and gives us Christ. When a person is a young Christian he is occupied with his feelings ; it is all fresh and new to him, and it is right enough. He feels such wonderful joy at being forgiven. But, as you grow up, you get more and more emptied of self and occupied with Christ. We learn our own foolishness and weakness, and so are cast upon Christ, and learn more of the depths of His grace, the perfectness of His Person. All right experience ends in forgetting self and thinking of Christ.' I quote this from the writings of the beloved author of the hymn so mistakenly used.

The writer then turns to John xvi., 28—30, to prove 'how easily we may think we know.' The paragraph concludes with, 'The revelation of the Father they did not yet understand.' Here again there is the greatest looseness of application. The simple truth taught there is the condition of the disciples at that moment, in comparison with their state when the Holy Spirit should be come: But I will quote the whole passage : 'I came out from the Father, and have come into the world ; again I leave the world and go to the Father. His disciples say to Him, Lo, now Thou speakest openly, and utterest no allegory. Now we know that Thou knowest all things, and hast not need that any one should demand of Thee. By this we believe that Thou art come from God.' To this the writer adds, 'The revelation of the Father they did not yet understand.' It has really nothing whatever to do with the subject before them, which was His coming from the Father, and His going to the Father. And yet the writer cites this passage as a proof how easily, like the disciples of that time who had not the Spirit, we who have the Spirit may think we know !

But before leaving this part of the subject, I would call attention to the assertion that the babe 'has the eternal spring of life within'—within himself I presume, it could hardly mean in Christ—the embryo that is to be cultivated and developed until the state of father is reached by his being able to say, '*in Him* I know the Father.' But note this embryo thing is *in* the babe—'in himself.' What, I ask, is it the embryo of? 'Eternal Life?' Then Eternal Life is *in* the believer—in embryo in the babe, in full development in the father! This is distinctly opposed to Scripture, for there it is never said that Eternal Life is in the believer, but ever in the Son. It is all confusion between the new nature in the believer and Eternal Life in the Son. I quote here but one passage: 'And this is the witness, that God has given to us Eternal Life; and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son, hath life; he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life.' We have Eternal Life—every believer has it—but it is in the Son and therefore safe.

Again the same loose application, and assumption of the meaning of Scripture is found in the following, 'Eternal Life is more than an eternal spring begun in my soul. The spring cannot be disconnected from its eternal source, and to that source it ever rises up, as the Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "springing up to everlasting life."' We turn to the passage, and we find, 'Jesus answered, and said to her, every one who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whosoever drinks of the water which I shall give him shall never thirst for ever, but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into eternal life.' The teaching before us would have us believe that what the Lord speaks of as giving, was Eternal Life, as an eternal spring in the soul which would spring up to everlasting life! The looseness and confusion of all this is only equalled by the following, 'It has its own sphere in the glory of God. It belongs

to that place where Jesus is now glorified by the Father, so that *from thence*' (the italics are the author's) 'He might give eternal life to as many as were given Him of the Father.' There can be no mistake about the writer's meaning here. Eternal Life is something in us, received from Jesus glorified—'in the glory of God.' Had no one Eternal Life then until Jesus was glorified? Again we turn to the Word, 'Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee; as Thou hast given Him authority over all flesh, that as to all that Thou hast given to Him, He should give them eternal life.' The Lord is here speaking on earth, and He does not say, 'Thou hast given Him glory that *'from thence'* He should give Eternal Life to as many as Thou hast given to Him,' but 'Thou hast given Him authority,' *i.e.* power—right. I quote the next verse also, 'And this is the life eternal, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.' This is His own simple and blessed statement, that the Eternal Life is the knowledge of the Father, the only true God, and Himself the Sent One. But we are now told 'To have it in conscious possession is more than being able to say that God is my Father, as a delivered soul; it is understood when we are brought to sit at the feet of Him that is from the beginning, and hindrances are removed which prevented our allowing Him to make the Father known to us as He knows Him, and the things of the Father as He can shew them to us.' No one, surely, who has ever tasted the blessedness of being at His feet, and hearing His Word, can or would desire to deny the holy calmness and joy, the ineffable sweetness and privilege of it, but the use here made of all this is that we may have Eternal Life in conscious possession, and understand what it is—this eternal spring in us that flows back to the source it comes from, not out in blessing to others. All-absorbing self-occupation! We must not be led astray, dear reader, by words and expressions that seem so good and

fair, and that sound so well. The purport of all this teaching is that we are to be occupied with the life in us, its development and growth, in 'conscious enjoyment' of it, for 'there is no greater hindrance than assuming we are in possession of it' otherwise. Thank God we have His Word, and His Spirit, and they never fail; and what different teaching we have from them! 'I am the good Shepherd, and I know those that are mine, and am known of those that are mine, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.' 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of My hand. 'These things have I written unto you that ye may know' (have the consciousness of) 'that ye have eternal life, who believe on the name of the Son of God.'

In the August number of the same periodical, we have a few more words from the same writer, on the ground that his previous article on 'Eternal Life' had been misunderstood by many. If what he adds had been a withdrawal, or in any way an explanation of his previous article, we might have accepted it, or, at any rate, have waited for something further, if it had been felt to be not sufficient. But it neither explains nor withdraws—on the contrary, it maintains all that had before been said, and shifts the point at issue to another which is not in question. No one has ever questioned the fathers' having eternal life, the point at issue is the writer's assertion that babes have only the spring of it, and that in themselves. We are now told that the writer 'holds, unequivocally, that the life which *every* believer now has is the life of Christ—eternal life.' But he returns to the old loose and erroneous quotation from Romans viii., 2, and says, 'How could I speak of the "eternal spring of life within, the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," if it were not so?' Now this is not the question at issue at all, *i.e.*, the character

of the life. The point is, as given in his first article, and repeated in a side way here, that the babes have life only in embryo and ignorantly, and that fathers, alone have it in 'conscious enjoyment.' Now it is nowhere said in Scripture that 'the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' is in any Christian, be he babe, young man, or father. I have spoken of this before, in noticing the first article, but I refer to it again here, because the statement is repeated as explanatory of the previous assertion that babes and young men need to be led into 'conscious enjoyment' of life, otherwise their possession of it is mere assumption.

What follows is a sort of attempt to define Eternal Life, which to all but the initiated will be hopeless confusion. He says, Eternal life 'is "the river of Thy pleasures" from eternity to eternity, for "with thee is the fountain of life."' Thus it is written "The Father hath life in Himself." And when 'the eternal life that was with the Father was manifested here, and the voice of the Father proclaimed the eternal pleasure in Him who had become flesh,' "This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight." Why 'eternal' should be added to 'pleasure,' the writer does not tell us—there is no warrant for it in Scripture. Was the Father's pleasure in the Son ever other than eternal? 'To Him as Son and yet a man upon earth, the Father gave to have life in Himself. To everyone that believeth in Him the Son communicates this life?' We turn to Scripture and find 'For even as the Father hath life in Himself, so He has given to the Son also to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute the judgment also, because He is the Son of Man.' Not a word here about communication of the life to the believer, It treats, instead, of authority and judgment, and is specially characteristic of John's Gospel, where the blessed Lord is spoken of as one with the Father

and yet as Son of Man *receiving* everything. Again 'My sheep hear My voice, and I know them and they follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no man shall seize them out of My hand. My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all, and no one can seize them out of the hand of My Father.' 'As Thou has given Him authority over all flesh, that as to all that Thou hast given Him, He should give them eternal life.' But we are now told that 'believing in Him' must precede the communication of this life. What is it that believes? Is there life there before this life is communicated? Scripture tells us of and insists upon the purpose of God the Father, and the authority and power imparted by Him to the Son. This teaching turns us from that to ourselves, and asks us 'where this life can be satisfied, but at the fountain?' Is the life in the babe an unsatisfied life, albeit that he has known the Father? Has a father alone a satisfied life?

But the interpretation of John iv. 14, is now changed, and we are told it is 'the Spirit in the believer, which 'springs up to eternal life.' He adds to support this 'As another has said, "We drink the blessedness which is in His Nature, in a nature which, being spiritually the same, must and can enjoy it, according to that Nature itself, in its own perfectness."' Here again all is confusion, and an assumption that the new nature we possess as children of God, and which is distinctly in us, is the same thing as Eternal Life which we also possess, but which is in the Son, and which is never, in Scripture, spoken of as being in us. The passage quoted speaks of the nature every child of God possesses—the capacity in us to know and enjoy God Himself, and all that is of Him. This article however entirely confounds this nature with Eternal Life. The fallacy of its use of it will be seen at once if we refer it to God, for it would make out that His Nature is Eternal Life, which all would rightly

refuse at once. But it is upon the assumption he makes of it, that the writer bases the question to all his brethren, indeed to himself included, 'Do we drink there?' This we are told is 'the responsibility of grace.' Not one letter of Scripture is given, nor indeed can be found for such a query, nor for such a thought. Indeed Scripture never so speaks either to or of the Christian. We turn to the Word, and find, 'See that ye walk circumspectly, redeeming the time' &c.—'Walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing'—'I endure all things for the elect's sake'—'As therefore ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him, and assured in the faith, even as ye have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving,' and the like, but never the breath of such an enquiry as 'Are you drinking there?'

The article then defines what is meant by 'conscious possession,' and we are told it means 'entering into *that* sphere' (the 'sphere of eternal delights where Christ is who is our life') 'as I said, "the soul entering upon its possessions in Canaan." But it is conscious possession of Eternal Life he is speaking of, and that too in us, for he says it is communicated to every believer by the Son. Thus the believer is to be turned in upon himself, in occupation with the development of Eternal Life in himself in conscious possession, to know whether he is 'drinking there' or not! Can self-occupation go farther? Is there any occupation with self more unscriptural than this?'

But to proceed, 'In the history of our souls, we have to substantiate, by faith, what is certainly true of us.' This is in reference to 'every saint being seated in the heavenlies in Christ.' I have already spoken of the term 'substantiate by faith,' but I add a word, as all is error and confusion in the use here made of it. 'Faith is the substantiating'—the firm conviction, or assurance. We do not substantiate anything by faith; substantiate means 'to make to exist, so the dictionaries tell us.

Either we believe or we do not believe. But the use here made of 'substantiating by faith' is to put our faith in the place of the Spirit of God, and to make our faith do the work the Holy Ghost alone can do, and blessed be God, always does where He is ungrieved and unhindered, and when we are subject to Him. He alone brings to the soul the realization of all that His presence brings with it. It is by faith that He does so, but it is He that does it and not we. The exhortation to 'substantiate by faith' is really unbelief, but it is more, for it leaves out the whole point and force, indeed the whole truth of the teaching regarding the Holy Spirit's present office in the believer. Nothing can be more serious than this. The 'responsibility of grace,' too, a term used by this school, but not to be found in the Word, is certainly not to substantiate by faith what, for faith, needs no substantiating at all (for faith itself is the substantiating, or assurance of all that is of God) in order to 'answer to what is bestowed' and to 'drink there.' Christian responsibility, on the contrary, is to be subject to the new power in us, the Holy Spirit, and so to walk and live that He may, ungrieved and unhindered, realize to our souls all that He, and He alone, can do, and that thus Christ may be manifested and honoured in our lives. He will never occupy us with our own enjoyment, our own 'drinking' though He alone can enable us to enjoy, and here our condition and walk come in practically. The moment we are occupied with our own enjoyment or 'drinking' we cease from both, and become occupied with ourselves, and pride and self-satisfaction have their way.

It is said by some that the difference is only one of expression, and that, after all, the right thing is meant, though expressed in other terms. Scripture bids us, however, 'hold fast the form of sound words.' And from what has been said the difference, if fairly looked at, will be seen to be radical, and what is aimed at is a system built up upon occupation with self. It may

however be said it is not fair to take two short articles by one person as constituting a system or school of teaching. I refer therefore to the September number of the same periodical, where in an article entitled 'Growth' we have precisely the same principles laid down. Here we are told that 'As we have faith, we realize our new being with its joys and privileges.' Now while it is quite true that it is only by faith that we realize anything that the eye cannot actually see, Scripture never speaks of our own new being as the object of our realization or occupation at all. Moreover, as we have seen, it is the Holy Spirit's power and work alone that realizes to our souls what is ours in Christ; and His work depends upon His being ungrieved and unhindered in us. Not all the faith in the world would avail in the smallest degree for realization, if the Holy Spirit were grieved.

We are then told, 'The moment we have faith in the blood of Christ, from that moment God's purpose is true to us, namely, that we, who were chosen in Christ, have now entered on the reality of God's purpose. The purpose has begun; it is now in operation in each of us individually.' Now this is not true either scripturally or practically, for Scripture tells us 'after that ye believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.' It does not say how long after, but it is clearly subsequently to believing, many things coming in between believing and sealing, owing to what we are as children of Adam. And practically too it is not true, for the soul comes to God in its sins, and is occupied with and delighted with forgiveness, and may take years to arrive at any thought of God's purpose. Nothing can be said to be true to us until we are at least aware of it, though it may be true of us. But I refuse absolutely such a thought as God's purpose beginning, Scripture never so speaks, but tells us of His purpose being fulfilled, not of its being in operation in us now. But we are here told 'The finish will be when we have *fully* put

off the old man, and have put on the new. We turn to Scripture, and we find 'But *ye* have not so learned the Christ, if ye have heard Him, and been instructed in Him according as the truth is in Jesus; namely, your *having put off* according to the former conversation the old man corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.' Admitting this is purpose, it is not, at any rate, 'purpose in operation,' but fulfilled. Again 'in whom (Christ) 'also *ye have been* circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of the Christ.' 'If *ye have died* with Christ from the elements of the world, why as if alive in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances?' This article tells us 'The finish will be when we have *fully* put off the old man, and have put on the new' so that what Scripture speaks of as a thing done, is here denied, and spoken of as a thing doing, and doing, mark, by *us*, not done by God, and this we are told is God's purpose accomplishing—our 'growth which is in proportion to our faith'! Thus the fulfilment of God's purpose depends upon us! Well, indeed, may this article say this 'Growth refers to something new,' for new it is in every sense, when we turn to Scripture. 'Ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory.' 'Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our body; for we which live are always delivered unto death on account of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.' The application of this truth to us is either welcome, blessedly welcome to the soul, or it is eminently distasteful and sought to be avoided. Where in Scripture are we ever called upon to be occupied with life in ourselves, its growth, development and power? Is self-cultivation ever taught in Scripture? But we read the next sentence. We must bear in mind, that if we were apart from the old

man, and apart from the place where the old man is, we should find that old things "had passed away; behold, all things are become new, and all things are of God." We turn to Scripture, and read, 'So if anyone be in Christ, there is a new creation: the old things *have* passed away; behold, all things *have* become new: and all things are of the God, who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ.' We are not in Scripture called upon to bear in mind that we shall find this to be so after death, but that it is true now to faith, as true, indeed, as it will be when we are with our Lord in glory, and no more true then than it is now. The writer makes our finding this to be so, conditional upon our being 'apart from the old man and from the place where the old man is,' *i.e.*, actually dead and passed away from the scene here below. God, on the contrary, has given us this positive truth, real and blessed to faith, *now*, that we may know it as a present living reality to the soul. And this teaching we are told is for 'faith that produces growth.'

We are then told that 'The babe has the same life and nature as the full grown man; but his joy and his power, as well as his testimony, depend on the measure of his growth.' The similarity between this and the previous article on Eternal Life will at once be noticed. If what is here said is true, we may reverse the proposition, and it will then stand, 'The full grown man has the same life and nature as the babe; but his joy and his power, as well as his testimony, has depended on the measure of his growth.' Thus joy, power and testimony depend upon our growth, our growth depends upon our faith, our faith depends upon our laying hold, and so all depends upon us! We turn to Scripture, and find growth is always connected with what is outside us, not with our faith. 'Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 'But holding the truth in love, may grow up to Him in all things, who is the Head, the Christ.' No where, that I

am aware of, does Scripture ever occupy the child of God with his faith, or with his growth. On the contrary it always points to the Object of our faith, and of our growth, and growth depends upon the apprehension of the truth by the power of an unrieved Spirit—the truth as to the Person and glory of the blessed Lord, His graces and perfections, His mind and His will, not the poor and feeble reflection of it in us.

But, in the next paragraph, in support of his views of growth, the writer refers to Saul of Tarsus, as saying, ‘about thirty years after his conversion, that he was not perfected, but that he desired to take possession of that for which he was taken possession of by Christ Jesus.’ We turn to the passage in Philippians and read ‘But surely I count also all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, on account of whom I have suffered the loss of all and count them to be filth, that I may gain Christ; and that I may be found in Him, not having my righteousness, which would be the principle of law, but that which is by faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith, to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if any way I arrive at the resurrection from among the dead. Not that I have already obtained the prize, or am already perfected; but I pursue, if also I may get possession of it, seeing that also I have been taken possession of by Christ Jesus.’ I will add the next verse, ‘Brethren, I do not count to have got possession myself; but one thing—forgetting the things behind, and stretching out to the things before, I pursue, looking towards the goal, for the prize of the calling on high of God in Christ Jesus.’ Here indeed is what produces progress, viz : the Object before the soul, but there is not a breath of such a thing as growth in himself, nor was there the least looking in upon himself to see how far he had attained. It is the Object, the all-

absorbing Object before his soul, the excellency of the knowledge of His Lord that he speaks of; and well, indeed, may he thus say 'I have not already obtained the prize, or am already perfected!' The Object before him precluded all thought of his own growth, all occupation with it, and he can but say he is not already perfected, his desire as to himself being that he might be conformed to Christ's death. This article uses this statement of the apostle in support of the notion of growth in us, as much as to say that Paul was then seeking by faith his own growth. Thus it adds: 'Growth is an increase in me of the new being which I am, by divine grace; and the measure of my faith is the measure of my growth.' It is all 'me' and 'my.' And I ask, Who and What is to feed our faith in order that we may grow? Are we to be always occupied with feeding our faith? What is our faith that is to be so fed as to produce growth? Faith is simple belief and confidence in God. All this is unscriptural and folly, mystic folly—a system of syllogistic reasoning that is wholly unscriptural and empty. Scripture never says that the increase or growth of our faith is *our* growth. I turn to 2 Thessalonians i., 3, and read 'We ought to thank God always for you, brethren, even as it is meet, because your faith increases exceedingly, and the love of you all towards one another abounds.' The increase of their faith shewed itself in love, and endurance, not in their own growth.

The article then adds 'Faith in Christ Jesus' is laying hold of Him.' Again we turn to Scripture and find 'Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which ye have towards all the saints,' 'Rejoicing and seeing your order and the firmness of your faith in Christ Jesus.' No thought, here of growth, but simply the reality of faith manifesting itself in love to those that are Christ's, and in subjection to and firmness for Him. No 'laying hold of Him.' Again we turn to the Word, and find injunctions

to 'lay hold on eternal life,' and to 'lay hold on the hope set before us,' but no such thing as 'laying hold of Him.' Again we must repeat, faith is not what we do, but what we have. It is futile to add 'I am not looking in,' for it is all looking in from beginning to end in this article, for if 'growth' is not something in us, what is it? Besides it is added, 'To every advance in growth, there is, as I have said, an advance, consciously of joy and power and testimony. These cannot be increased but by increase of growth.' Here again we may note the expression 'conscious joy,' as if there were any joy which is not conscious. But I deny the statement here made as to joy, power, and testimony resulting from growth—growth results from them. Joy, power and testimony result from an ungrieved Spirit that can occupy us with the blessed Lord and His glories, and perfections, and His interests here below. The Holy Spirit never occupies us with our growth, though it be only through Him that we grow. It is all false and unscriptural to ascribe this to faith. When the disciples said 'Lord, increase our faith,' His reply was that they had none, not even 'as a grain of mustard seed.' Faith is believing, and we cannot speak of more or less believing, for we either believe or we do not believe. Faith is always absolutely certain, and is simple confidence in God. In the Word it is only in two places spoken of as increasing, one we have already referred to, and the other is where the Apostle speaks of his being enlarged among them to announce the gospel beyond. In neither instance has it anything whatever to do with their growth.

But we are next told that 'In the New Testament, except in the Gospels and Acts (which are the state of transition) you do not find any one regarded as a Christian who has not received the Spirit.' It is difficult to discover the writer's meaning here, for in the Gospels no one is considered a Christian at all, in the proper sense of the word, while in the Acts those

who believed through the preaching of the Apostles, and were converted were Christians in all truth and reality, and had the Holy Spirit, see Acts ii. 4, 38, iv. 31, 'all filled with the Holy Spirit,' vi., vii., viii., 17, x. 44, &c., &c., all through the Book indeed. But why speak of the Gospels and Acts as the state of transition? If any wish to study the Person of the Lord, and His marvellous ways of grace and power and love, where should he turn to but to the Gospels? Are we then to pass them over as transitional? The disciples of that day were not in a transitional state, but were Jews who, through grace, received the Messiah, and who, by the way, were therefore authorised to take the place of children of God in this world, being born of God. At the end they are in precisely the same state as those will be to whom the Lord comes, when He comes the second time; see Acts i. There is no transition about it, for the Christian, distinctively Christian position on earth began in Acts ii., when the Holy Spirit descended and took His place here on earth in answer to the glory of the glorified Christ. I ask what, from Acts ii. onward, is the state of transition? And from what to what? Alas! dear reader, do we not look, well nigh in vain, for the simple faith, the dependence and power of those early days, so real and so blessed that it is ever a joy and comfort to go back and dwell upon them? There was no such talk, in those days, as 'faith produces growth,' 'growth increases through faith,' or of 'babes having the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' and of only 'fathers knowing the Father in Christ,' of '*growing* to the love of God shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given to me, by accepting, in faith, the work of Christ for me.' No, indeed! In those days of an ungrieved and unhindered Spirit, when simple faith and dependence characterized all, we read 'Fear was upon every soul, and many signs and wonders took place,' 'All that believed were together, and had all

things common,' 'Great fear came upon all the assembly, and upon all that heard,' 'Many signs and wonders were done among the people,' 'Of the rest durst no man join them,' 'And believers were more than ever added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.' What saps all power in the present day is such teaching as turns the believer in upon himself and tells him that 'his growth is as he, by faith, through the power of the Holy Ghost, manifests the life of Christ.' It is the entire reversal of the truth as given us in Scripture. It is never said that *we* grow by manifesting the life of Christ, but that He is glorified, and honoured, and manifested by our bearing about in our bodies His dying. It is not our growth that manifests His life, but our death, at least so Scripture speaks. And if there is any growth here, it is in simplicity and dependence, and in more childlike confidence in Him

I pass over much more that is unscriptural in this article, merely quoting one or two passages as showing the self-occupying tendency of this teaching, thus we read, 'The measure of growth in each is the measure in which the believer walks apart from things here as Christ walked. Christ is written on the heart of every believer, but his growth is as he, by faith, through the power of the Holy Ghost, manifests the life of Christ,' &c. 'The purpose to carry about the dying is followed by actual death.' 'It is now as ever, "Not I, but Christ liveth in me," and the measure of growth is the measure in which Christ reigns in me, and displaces everything that is not of God,' 'The more I grow in Christ, the more am I *markedly* detached from the first man, and from the things that suit that man,' 'advance in surrender and sanctification there ever is, as Christ has a larger place in my heart,' &c. There is a measure of truth in all this, but it is truth perverted to turn the believer in upon himself, to seek to find Christ in his own heart, to

determine to carry about the dying of the Lord Jesus, to find Christ reigning in his heart, to be occupied with his own growth, measuring it indeed by his marked detachment from the first man, and the things that suit the first man.

It is then said 'assured, by faith, that there is nothing between God and me, I am brought to God. I am justified by faith, and I have peace with God; and the love of God is shed abroad in my heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given to me. I have grown to this by accepting, in faith, the work of Christ *for me*.' Again we may ask, 'What 'I' is it that is here spoken of as growing to peace with God? Is the love of God, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost, ever the result of growth? Is it ever said, however remotely, that justification by faith results from, or is attained by growth? Is peace with God a thing we grow to? We may grow to familiarity with it as mere doctrine, but the thing is truth, Divinely given truth, and it is written, 'Being justified on the principle of' (not 'by') faith, we have peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have' (have obtained and possess) 'access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God.' Not a word of 'growth' here. If 'growth' be introduced into the passage, the whole purport, and force, and indeed certainty of the truth is lost, and what is Divinely and sovereignly given, and therefore sure, is what we grow to by accepting a Divine work for us, and thus depends upon us. How opposed is all this to the simple, unfailing, and blessed Word! 'Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.' 'God rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us (we too being dead in offences) has quickened us with Christ (ye are saved by grace) and has made us sit down together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.' Note here that even the being seated in the heavenlies in

Christ, is not a truth we grow to, but is sovereignly given in His grace. 'Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' 'Desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby.' 'But holding the truth in love, we may grow up to Him in all things, who is the Head, the Christ.'

The article concludes with, 'That we may rejoice at the fracture of the pitcher, that the light which is in us may shine out.' This school of teaching, dear reader, is, as I have said, unscriptural and false. It takes the eye off Christ and fixes it upon the poor reflection in us, in order to produce growth. If any soul found itself 'markedly detached from the first man,' and connected this in any way with its own growth, it would minister to nothing but pride; on the other hand, failure to perceive this detachment and growth would tend to despair. In either way the fruit is evil. Such teaching comes not from the Spirit and the Word, but from a desire to obtain deliverance in some other than God's way. It is not the ministry of Christ to the soul.

Our only hope and strength is, not in so-called 'conscious enjoyment and growth,' but in conscious weakness and dependence, to be subject to Him, and to hear His Word, and to walk in obedience to it. May He give us to discern what is not of Himself, and to refuse all teaching that is not the ministry of Christ to the soul.

I cannot do better than give here two quotations from the ministry of our beloved brother now with Christ, whose writings have been before referred to.

'That which characterizes fathers in Christ is that they have known Him who is from the beginning, that is, Christ. This is all he has to say about them. All had resulted in that. He only repeats the same thing again, when changing his form of expression, he begins anew with these three classes. The fathers have known Christ. This is the result of all Christian experience.'

The flesh is judged, discerned, wherever it has mixed itself with Christ in our feelings : it is recognized experimentally, as having no value ; and, as the result of experience, Christ stands alone, free from all alloy. They have learnt to distinguish that which has only the appearance of good. They are not occupied with experience—that would be being occupied with self, with one's own heart. All that has passed away ; and Christ alone remains as our portion, unmingled with aught beside, even as He gave Himself to us. Moreover He is much better known ; they have experienced what He is in so many details, whether of joy in communion with Him, or, in the consciousness of weakness, or in the realization of His faithfulness, of the riches of His grace, of His adaptation to our need, of His love, and in the revelation of His own fulness ; so that they are able now to say, “ I *know* whom I have believed ” Attachment to Himself characterizes them. Such is the character of “ fathers ” in Christ.

‘ The possession of the nature is necessary to the understanding of what that nature is, and for the knowledge of Him who is its perfection. But, if I seek to know it and have or give the proof of it, it is not to the existence of the nature in us that the Spirit of God directs the thoughts of the believers as their object. God, he has said, is Love ; and this love has been manifested towards us in that He has given His only Son, that we might live through Him. The proof is not the life in us, but that God has given His Son in order that we might live, and, further, to make propitiation for our sins. God be praised ! We know this love, not by the poor results of its action in ourselves, but in its perfection in God, and that even in a manifestation of it towards us, which is wholly outside ourselves. It is a fact outside ourselves which is the manifestation of this perfect love. We enjoy it by participating in the divine nature, we know it by the infinite gift of God's Son. The exercise and proof of it are there. The full scope

of this principle and all the force of its truth are stated and demonstrated in that which follows. It is striking to see how the Holy Spirit, in an epistle which is essentially occupied with the life of Christ and its fruits; gives the proof and full character of love in that which is wholly without ourselves.'

May we, indeed, through grace, hold fast the simple truth as it is in Jesus, and resolutely refuse all byepaths, let them be never so speciously put before us !

P. A. H.