

**Modern Mystical .
Teachings and the
Word of God. . .**

By F. B. HOLE.

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MODERN MYSTICAL TEACHINGS AND THE WORD OF GOD.

1.

The Features that Characterize all Mystical Teachings.

FIRST of all it may be well to define the term we use. What is mysticism?

Most of us are aware that it largely deals with ourselves and our own state and apprehension of truth; that it is occupied not with divine realities themselves, but with how we become conscious of those realities, and of the way they work out certain results in us.

The Word of God deals with the state of His saints. It throws light, which we do well to welcome and cherish, upon the progressive work of the Spirit in our souls. All this truth, which we speak of commonly as *subjective* is of great importance, and we do well to maintain it, firmly holding it in its true connection with the great *objective* realities themselves, since every action of the Spirit within us subjectively is in strict accord with the objective reality by which He works.

Mysticism, however, does not preserve the Scriptural order and balance as between these two sides of truth. In its eyes the subjective side appears so great that the objective realities are largely obscured. We say *largely* because it does not for one moment deny God's revelation in Christ. It does not deny all that Christ is, nor the reality of the work He accomplished for us, nor that which He will yet accomplish for us at His coming again. It admits all these things theologically, and then by a dexterous twist relegates

them into the far background of the picture in order that the foreground may be the more effectually occupied with the Spirit's work within us,—moulding us in the character of Christ, and giving us the consciousness and enjoyment of truth. Consequently to the mystic this subjective side of things becomes the only thing worth consideration. The consciousness of the thing becomes in his thoughts virtually the thing itself. He talks therefore continually about his consciousness, his apprehension, his experiences; which is only another way of saying he is wrapped up in himself. He speaks of Christ, but views Him as the One who produces these impressions in himself,—as the Servant of his subjective state. Christ, as the Object of all God's thoughts and ours—excellent and worthy beyond compare, apart from any thought of ourselves and our consciousness—becomes very largely unknown.

Nor is this all. If people could be found marked only by these characteristics it is doubtful if the term "mystics" could be properly applied to them. The essence of mysticism lies in this, that the seat of authority is transferred in the mind of the mystic from the external Word of God to the spiritual consciousness—the "spiritual man"—internal to themselves. This may be done consciously and deliberately; it may be explicitly maintained that Scripture is virtually superseded and rendered obsolete by reason of the inner light of their own consciousness. On the other hand it may be an almost insensible process. Homage of quite an orthodox kind may still be verbally rendered to the Scriptures, and yet they may be largely displaced. The spiritual conception of the mystic, who flatters himself that he is indeed a spiritual man, are all important to him. He soars above and beyond Scripture. Its letter he disdains, even if he does not speak against it. It has little or no restraining effect upon the flights of his imagination. He quotes it of course, but only as

supporting or illustrating or adorning his own conceptions of truth. His conceptions become the primary thing on which the main emphasis must be laid. Scripture must be interpreted in the light of those conceptions, and its words become of secondary importance.

At the opposite pole to mysticism lies a cold orthodoxy devoid of power. It is sadly possible to insist correctly on all the great objective verities of the faith without much exercise of conscience as to a positive entrance upon these realities in the power of the Spirit of God. Truth may thus be stated and Scripture correctly expounded without the warmth of the love of the truth. In this frame of mind people seem to fear what is subjective and experimental in ministry as though it in some way robbed them of truth itself, instead of it being only calculated to rob them of an easy-going mental acceptance of truth and of the self-complacency which goes with that, and plunge them into genuine exercise of heart before God. In all this tendency there is something poor and shallow, and earnest souls are by it repelled.

Mysticism has at least about it an apparent profundity of thought and utterance. It at least promises a far greater depth of understanding which is alluring, and especially so to minds of a certain contemplative type fundamentally disposed towards introspection and self-occupation. Though the present age is one of turmoil and shallow reasoning, mysticism still makes its voice heard and by its very contrast offers certain attractions. Hence we believe a few words of warning may be profitable, especially as its ultimate tendencies always appear in the past to have been towards not only indefiniteness of doctrine and a general haziness of statement, which has made it very difficult to pin down its exponents on any given point, but to the maintenance of teachings quite foreign to and astray from the Word of God. In its bygone manifestations it has always led to grave

errors, and there are signs, alas! that its modern manifestations are ending in the same way.

During the past few years books and magazines, wherein a certain form of modern mysticism is expounded, have come into our hands. Some of these are enumerated below, and any quotations from them in the text will be referred to under the respective letter allotted to each, so that space may be saved.

- A. The Body; Holding the Head, and Union.
- B. How the Truth of the Assembly appeared in the Development of God's Ways, etc.
- C. Notes of Meetings in Chicago, January 1919.
- D. The Believers' Friend, July 1920.
- E. Mutual Comfort, 1920 volume.

There are in several of these books many initials indicating various speakers. As, however, all are agreed, and what is of importance and interest in connection with all the books is not the speakers but the truth or falsity of the views expressed, we have omitted all initials in the extracts quoted from them. We now proceed to deal with some of their salient features.

2.

The Eclipse of the Objective Realities by the Subjective Impressions that correspond therewith.

This feature is very strongly emphasized in the books under review. The great idea running through all of them is the *ALL*-importance of the subjective as contrasted with the objective. The point is elaborated and reiterated in many ways and with great expenditure of words, consequently the only difficulty is to find it expressed in sufficiently compact form for quotation.

The following is an example:—

“Many have the Spirit, and are in the body from the divine side, but practical obligations

here are not met, and therefore the thing is null and void to such." (A p. 4).

This is a pretty clear example of the teaching. The fact of believers having the Spirit and thus being baptized into the one body according to 1 Cor. xii. 13 is admitted. Yet it is admitted only to be dismissed as "null and void" to all such as do not meet their practical obligations here. We are enlightened as to what is meant by this phrase as to our "obligations" on a previous page:—

"God commends Himself to us, that is His side; now what can you be for God? So you take up the covenant, the righteous requirements of the law are fulfilled in you; you begin at the bottom." (A. p. 2 & 3).

Here the allusion is to Romans viii. 4, where God's triumph in Christ is contrasted with the weakness of the law. The law could neither produce that which it demanded, nor condemn the root principle of sin which was unrestrained by its demands. It could only condemn the open acts of transgression and curse the transgressor. God, by the sacrifice of His own Son for sin, has both condemned sin in the flesh and secured the fulfilling of the law's righteous demand in those walking not according to flesh, not even according to law, but according to Spirit. It must be confessed with sorrow that many saints, who possess the Spirit, but little walk according to Him, and are but little troubled as to their failure: still this verse states normal Christianity. It must also be confessed that none of us, not even the most spiritual, walks *altogether* according to Spirit, and thus *altogether* fulfils what the law righteously required.

The extract we have quoted gives us no quarter, inasmuch as the statements are made dogmatically, and without qualification. Have we met these practical obligations? Do we walk according to Spirit, thus fulfilling the righteousness of the law? What can we say? Have we happy experience of the

delivering power of the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus"? Yes, thank God! Yet alas! in many things we all offend, and we cannot flatter ourselves that we have "met our obligations," though, presumably, the author of these words *can*.

What then? Why, to us the thing, i.e., the being incorporated in the one body—is "null and void." Notice, he speaks not of the *consciousness* of the thing which may indeed be lacking: it is the *thing*, the reality itself which is said to be "null and void" to us. And it is *null and void*,—not obscured merely. The reality does all too often become obscured; its power and meaning lost upon us. Our author, however, wishes us to believe that if we are not subjectively in thorough-going accord with the objective reality, then to us the objective reality is "null and void," i.e., nothing and empty, of neither force nor meaning. Truly, as we have said, the objective reality disappears, quite eclipsed by the overpowering importance of the subjective impression.

A little further on the author says:—

"I think we ought to be very simple about righteousness. The Spirit enables us to fulfil every moral obligation. There is no progress made in our souls unless these obligations are fulfilled." (A. p. 11).

"The great point in Romans is the fulfilling of the responsibilities of the creature—man—towards the Creator." (A. p. 14).

These words emphasize the author's standpoint. Until we reach subjectively the state he has in view, we are doomed to no progress, i.e., as the context shows, to no entrance into "assembly truth" as unfolded in other epistles. It is as if the subjective knowledge of truth is divided into disconnected spheres, which must be completely passed through in a certain order, and we are left with the impression that however we may be ourselves conscious of failure, the speaker himself, at least, can lay claim to the requisite subjective condition.

The second quotation shows that to him, the subjective effect produced by the Gospel is *the great point*. On the contrary, we venture to affirm that the great point in Romans is the "Gospel of God" which brings God in, acting both in righteousness and love for the deliverance of men from the grip of evil, to be for His pleasure both now, in the midst of a groaning creation, and ultimately in a redeemed creation. What the delivered saint has now subjectively in the Spirit comes in incidentally to this.

Yet again he says:—

"It is of the utmost importance that, if you take things subjectively, we have nothing but what we have grown into, and that is by the work of the Spirit. On the gift side you have everything."

It is indeed by the work of the Spirit that we grow up into the truth and possess it in power, but it is also true that no one is a Christian at all, nor possesses the Spirit, unless the subject of a mighty work of the same Spirit. Of the Spirit we are born (John iii. 6-8). There is consequently about us an "inward man" (Rom. vii. 22, 2 Cor. iv. 16). Through the Spirit there is soul-purification "unto unfeigned love of the brethren" (1 Pet. i. 22). Indeed, "we live in the Spirit" (Gal. v. 25) and upon this fact the exhortation to walk in the Spirit is based. It is quite true therefore to say that we have nothing apart from the work of the Spirit. It is *not* true that we have nothing "but what we have grown into," for we have all that which is the fruit of the Spirit's initial work before we begin to grow at all. One might feel somewhat comforted by the admission that on the gift side we have everything, save that one remembers that we have just heard that apart from the proper subjective response the objective reality becomes "null and void." This last extract would lead us to suppose in addition that the great initial work of the Spirit in the soul is really nothing! The "inward

man" is something we *have*, remember, not exactly something we *are*,—and our author says "we *HAVE NOTHING* but what we have grown into.

Judging from previous experiences with this line of teaching, we quite expect that our remarks would be met by some disclaimers, and we suspect the author does not *quite* mean all he says. We can only, however, deal with what he does say, and leave aside all questions as to possible modifications in his mind yet unexpressed.

"Formative" with its variations is a much used word in connection with the Spirit's work. For instance:—

"In John's epistles the saints are viewed as formed in the divine nature." (A. p. 17).

"Having the Spirit is the very necessary equipment for the formation of Christ, but it does not say [Rom. viii.] that you have been formed in Christ. Could persons have the Spirit and not have Christ in them? They could; the Corinthians had not Christ in them." (A. p. 18).

"In Romans viii. . . . Paul says, 'If Christ be in you,' and I think if the Spirit of Christ is there you can say Christ is there, but then it is of great importance for Christ to be formed." (A. p. 107).

Here the "formation" of Christ is treated as a work of the Spirit of an advanced character. You may have the Spirit, and even Christ may be in you, since you have the Spirit of Christ, without Christ being "formed" in you. As a sample case the Corinthians are cited. They had not even Christ in them according to this teaching, let alone Christ being formed in them.

In all this we have travelled away from Scripture although on page 107 a little lower down we read:—

"The only way to arrive at the truth is from the way in which the Scripture presents it."

How does Scripture present it? We turn in the

first instance to the case of the Corinthians selected by our author to illustrate his point, and we read "Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) So Christ was in the Corinthians after all, and He is in every *true* child of God; since the only exception according to the verse is the reprobate.

We turn to John's first epistle. There the saints are truly "viewed as formed in the divine nature" but it is as "born of God" so that "the babe" possesses the nature as much as "the father." Here again this teaching ignores the great foundation work of the Spirit in order to attribute all its effects to the subsequent operations of the Spirit in our hearts.

But what about Christ being formed in us? This expression occurs but once in Scripture as follows:—"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you," (Gal. iv. 19). The Apostle's language here makes it certain that to his mind,—and therefore in the mind of the Spirit—"Christ formed in you" is an elementary thing. He stood in doubt as to these Galatian saints, as he tells them in verse 20, and hence he was passing again through birth pangs of soul-exercise over them—"until Christ be formed in you." That accomplished his birth pangs would end in deliverance. The Scriptural presentation of this truth is such as to place it amongst the elementary things that lie at the start. If Christ be not formed in those who take the place of Christians, an Apostle doubts if they are Christians at all! There is of course the subjective work of the Spirit. He is the Source of all spiritual growth. He produces the character of Christ in the saints since His fruit is "love, joy, peace" and all the graces mentioned in Gal. v. 22, 23, but this is a work continuing all through a Christian's life. The way this phrase as to Christ being formed in us, is wrested from its scriptural setting in these extracts is very mischievous.

The tendency to deflect the plainest statements of objective truth and extract from them a subjective meaning is everywhere noticeable in these publications. Here are a few statements on the Epistle to the Colossians:—

“The Colossians were reconciled in their state. He would not have said it [‘you now hath He reconciled’] of the Colossians if it had not been true He could not have said that of the Corinthians for example.” (C. p. 106).

“‘If ye then be risen’—Yes, risen ‘with’ not ‘in’ If it were ‘risen in Christ’ it would be objective.” (C. p. 37).

“It does not read ‘If ye have died in Christ’ ‘If ye have been raised *in* the Christ.’ That is the whole point of the epistle, viz., that they had arrived *subjectively* at the teaching of the death of Christ. ‘If ye have died *with* Christ’ ” (C. p. 120).

“Although Christ is prominent in Colossians, the work of the Spirit is the main point.” (C. p. 130).

When the Apostle wrote “you hath He reconciled” to the Colossians he was stating what is true of Christians as such; and not something only true because they were conscious of it, having arrived at it in their state. What proves this is that the succeeding verses show reconciliation to be in view of presentation—“If . . .” Why that “if”? Simply because the Apostle viewed them as in common Christian blessing—such as reconciliation is—and on common Christian ground, but still had an element of doubt as to some of them. Had the Apostle meant “and you Colossians, having been brought by the Spirit *subjectively* into the truth of reconciliation, *are* reconciled,” he could never have added that “if.” Further, if souls are not “*subjectively*” in reconciliation they are not in the simple truth of the gospel. So “joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Rom. v. 11) is just proper Christian state lying at the beginning of things.

As to the distinction attempted between "with" and "in," a cursory glance at the passages involved shows that it does not stand. For instance, Rom. vi. 6 and 8, clearly refers to what was accomplished objectively at the cross. According to the theory propounded it should read "Our old man is crucified 'in' Him"—"If we be dead 'in' Him." Yet in both cases "with" is used. Indeed, we need not go outside Colossians to see the falsity of the distinction. "If ye then be risen with Christ seek those things which are above" etc. i.e., since you are risen with Him let there be the subjective power of resurrection in practice. "Risen *with* Him" instead of being the statement of subjective truth is the reality on the strength of which the subjective realization is urged.

The statement as to the Spirit being the *main point* in Colossians is a characteristic example of the way the letter of Scripture is violated under plea of extracting its spirit. The Spirit of God indites an epistle in which He extols the glory and sufficiency of Christ the Head of the body, and mentions Himself but once, and that incidentally. We, however, are told that we are to understand that His main point is not what He speaks of, but what he barely mentions. We refuse to believe that the speaker wishes us to understand that the Spirit of God is marked by a singular inability to say what He means. No! he wishes to convey to us that the Spirit loves to hide His meaning, and that the speaker feels himself possessed of that mystic inner light which gives sight and penetration into its recesses.

We, too, desire to dig beneath the surface of Scripture and reach the spirit of it. But then the spirit of the Holy Writings is not some sublimated essence altogether distinct from the actual words, but rather its spiritual drift and purpose as gathered or distilled from the actual words. We can only find

the spirit of *what is there in the letter*, and not the spirit of *what is NOT there*.

This treatment of Scripture which we repudiate is all too reminiscent of the light and airy way in which the "higher critics" profess to discover two or more "Isaiahs" in Isaiah. They have no real proof. They just assume they have the critical insight which enables them to discover it, and then trumpet abroad their imagined discovery. The difference lies between the assumption of critical insight by these unconverted men and of subjective or mystical insight by men who are true believers.

3.

The Belittling of Scripture in Favour of the Conceptions and Impressions of "Spiritual Men."

Here lies, as we judge, the gravest part of the teaching under review. This feature was visible in the extracts we have just considered. It comes out more plainly in those we now proceed to give.

"I would not be lawless as to the statements of Scripture but I am not exactly governed by statements of Scripture. For instance, I do not come to the Supper just because it is Scriptural What I said was, that I would not be lawless as to the statements of Scripture, but the unfolding of Scripture is in the hands of spiritual men The point I am pressing is this, that the Scripture can only be opened out by the Spirit of God, and the spiritual man." (C pp. 10, 11, 12).

"The mind of God is coming to us through spiritual men, not exactly through Scripture. Everybody has the Scriptures, but the mind of God is coming through spiritual men—men sowing to the Spirit." (C. p. 31).

We have before now cast about in our mind for a sentence which would aptly sum up in a few words the attitude of this modern mysticism to the Word of God. Here we have found it. The Word of God is not denied. Its inspiration is held. Something from

within its pages forms the text of every address, or is the starting point of every reading, but here you have in a nutshell the attitude which marks the exponents of this teaching, though not all make so honest a confession as this:—

“I am not exactly governed by statements of Scripture.”

The speaker, indeed the speakers, in the book we are now quoting from are marked by rather more definiteness and vigour of expression. What is vaguely presented elsewhere is in a crisper form in these pages. Not only is the attitude clearly defined, but the reason for it is stated; the “spiritual man” is we learn the great thing, for the unfolding of Scripture, so that it may be of real use, must be “in the hands of spiritual men.” Everybody has the Scriptures, but what we want is the mind of God, and that comes to us “not exactly through Scripture” but “through spiritual men.” Consequently, a little further on we read:—

“I have sometimes said it is better to have one testimony in actual *life* than a whole city full of bibles.” (C. pp. 41, 42).

There are, of course, elements of truth in all this. It is the “spiritual” man who in contrast with the “natural” man, receives the things of God, and the carnal believer is, in God’s things, but a babe (1 Cor. ii. and iii). It is quite true, therefore, that only one who is spiritual is likely to minister the Word and open up God’s mind with power. Yet plainly enough, the speaker here is carrying out his own theory and we are getting from his lips not Scripture, but a peculiar and warped presentation of it. Not being just exactly governed by statements of Scripture he feels free to give us his own subjective impressions of Scripture and we are left to accept them as coming from one who is presumably a “spiritual man.”

But what does Scripture itself say? It reveals to us our Lord Jesus Christ absolutely governed by state-

ments of Scripture (e.g. see Luke iv. 1-13, Jno. xix. 28), and Paul likewise (Acts xxiii. 5). It shows us a Scripture statement being accepted as final in the great apostolic council at Jerusalem (Acts xv. 15-19), and thus governing, not merely a believer (even allowing that he is a "spiritual man"!) in the 20th century, but the whole Church of God in the first century.

But does Scripture say that the unfolding of Scripture is in the hands of spiritual men? No. It speaks of gifts given from the ascended Christ "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry" (Eph. iv. 11, 12). It indicates also that elders who were, perhaps, not exactly "teachers" might "labour in the word and doctrine" (1 Tim. v. 17). There is one Scripture which speaks of teaching amongst the saints in a more general way, viz. Col. iii. 16. But there it is "teaching and admonishing one another." It is evidently teaching of a homely and everyday sort in which all may take some part. If we could speak of the unfolding of Scripture being in anyone's hands it would be in those of teachers and elders raised up of the Lord, and there are many spiritual men who have no part in that. We do not care, however, for the phrase at all. It is too suggestive of the mental attitude towards Scripture which we are condemning. It infers that Scripture is in our hands. We manipulate it. Whereas really it towers above the greatest of teachers and is supreme.

The theory that we are examining, however, is that the spiritual man is one who "arrives at" truth by the action of the Spirit within him. There is the "formative work" of which they speak, by which he reaches "certain ground" in his soul. When coming to Scripture, he finds there what he has reached by "spiritual formation" and is confirmed and enabled to put his conceptions and impressions into words. The following extracts give the theory :—

"It is a good thing to have the form of doctrine, to have the manner by which you arrive at things. I think that in the history of our souls, we are sometimes on certain ground, and yet we do not know the way we arrived there. Now doctrine gives you that He describes the state and how they got there You get there, and the teaching of the Epistle to the Colossians establishes you They needed a spiritual man to lead the way, to define the situation they had got to." (C. pp. 121, 122).

"John expects there is life in you and that you will understand what this thing means. John does not write to the uninitiated—none of the Scriptures are written to such, John, far less so" (C. p. 99).

According to this, Scripture plays but a very secondary part. It is quite subservient to this inward spiritual formation, this "inner light" as we may call it, being mainly of use as furnishing a suitable expression for it. The remarks on the Epistle to the Colossians are supplemented by a reference to John's gospel, which is quite remarkable in view of John's own statement as to his writing and the reason of it, which runs: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, ye might have life through His name." (xx. 31).

Our author tells us that John takes for granted that there is life in you. John himself informs us that he writes in order that his readers "might have life." Our author says that none of the Scriptures are written to the uninitiated; John far less so than others. John himself states that he writes that his readers *may* believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, not *because* they so believed. The fact really is, that though the great mass of the New Testament Scripture was truly written to and for believers, John's gospel is the one book that avows as its object a purpose of world-wide dimensions.

To an ordinary reader, uninitiated into the ways of

the advocates of mysticism, these quoted statements sound pretty startling. Such would probably enquire if our author wishes us to understand that he knows the object of John's writing better than John himself; or whether, on the other hand he is so liberated from bondage to the letter of Scripture that he can ignore its statements in favour of his own impressions and theories.

The latter is nearer the mark. He feels free to give that verse a rendering to harmonize with what he considers its "spirit." That free rendering, in the words of another of these instructors, is as follows:—

"The immediate occasion of this gospel [John's] was that the saints might be believers in the Son" (B. p. 62).

To their minds there is nothing incongruous in the saints not being believers in the Son—believing in the Son being to them a spiritual attainment, which only some saints reach; nor anything incongruous in saints not as yet having life through His name; nor in this terribly incomplete belief and state of death marking saints generally wherever saints were found:—for John's gospel is clearly not of local application like some of the epistles, but universal. But even so, why, we ask, omit the two important words "the Christ"?

John did not write that his readers might believe that "Jesus Christ is the Son of God" as though they were yet defective in their faith as to His essential glory, as though while recognizing in Jesus the Messiah they had not risen to the faith of His Deity. No, but that "Jesus IS the Christ, the Son of God." So that if John really were addressing only "saints," these "saints" did not even believe that Jesus was the Christ!! A truly preposterous proposition. Too preposterous, apparently, even for the author of this remark, for he discreetly omits the words from his quotation of the passage.

A sad example this of how these modern mystics treat the Word of God.

Nor is this an isolated example, an exception to the rule. It is, alas! the rule. The whole attitude of these teachers to the Scriptures is well summed up as follows:—

“Does the strict interpretation of the passage [Col. i. 12] refer to the saints on earth, or in heaven? . . . I am not prepared for too strict an interpretation.” (C. p. 69).

That is just it. In that case their thinking would have to be subject to God's Word. As it is, their minds are left free to move at the dictation of the inner light, and Scripture can be used (sometimes quoted, and sometimes even misquoted), to adorn their thinkings and wrap them round with an authority they would not otherwise possess.

4.

The Consequent Glorifying of a Priestly Caste who come between an ordinary saint and the Lord.

Any thoughtful Christian who has followed us thus far will by now have concluded that the drift of this teaching, and this treatment of Scripture must be in the direction of greatly magnifying the importance and authority of the exponents of the teaching themselves. The “inner light” becomes the great authority, which involves, of course, that the real authority is vested in those in whom the “inner light” is most largely developed.

We now proceed to show that not only is this the case—and it runs in a kind of sub-conscious strain, yet most clearly, through all the utterances of this school,—but that it leads to a special priesthood being assumed for the “spiritual man” of whom so much is said. We read:—

“Where there are spiritual men in a meeting, there will be sure to be some priest break

the bread who will put the saints in touch with Christ? That is what the Supper is for in the mind of the Lord. . . ." (C. p. 16).

"When what was intended in the Supper has not been availed of, the priest can bring in recovery and the Father be reached just the same." (C. p. 17).

"Undoubtedly there is touch with Christ that the priest gets that every Christian does not. The priest has His mind because the priest has His life." (C. p. 20).

"You would discourage certain brothers taking part in the morning meeting, then? . . . Not a simple soul, but one that habitually goes on with a thing. They are not subject nor watching the priests. . . . They are just believers." (C. p. 51).

"A great deal depends on the man that gives it [a hymn] out, whether it is a simple brother or a priest." (C. p. 55).

"All the saints will get great refreshment if you allow the priests to take the lead." (C. p. 59).

The above extracts speak for themselves. The contrast drawn between the "simple brother" or those that are "just believers" or "the saints" and a "priest" is unmistakable. It is again a carrying out of what we have previously noticed, viz., the subjective consciousness so magnified that it quite eclipses the reality itself.

Yet amidst many such remarks as the foregoing, one or two words are found which give us a ray of hope that the reality of what God has effected is not totally lost. We read for instance:—

"In the run of meetings, how many priests are there (that is in priestly condition)?" (C p. 16).

We welcome that little bracketed addition though it is ambiguous; it may simply mean that the speaker's definition of "a priest" is "one in priestly condition," a meaning abundantly clear in all these extracts. On the other hand it may indicate that he qualifies his usage of the word "priest" by restricting

its meaning in that way, and so that he does recognise the possibility of using the term in a larger sense. Our hope that this second sense may be his meaning is slightly increased by the following:—

“Would it be possible to be a son and not a priest? Yes, and No. Every man who has the Spirit has title to sonship, and in the thought of God he is a son—‘Because ye are sons’ . . . but to be consciously in sonship is a different thing.” (C. p. 85).

So it may be that he also admits that in the thought of God every man who has the Spirit is a *priest*. Albeit, any satisfaction we attempt to derive from this thought is largely discounted by our remembrance of the first extract we gave, wherein an authoritative exponent of this school assured us that we may have the Spirit and be in certain things “from the divine side,” but that if we do not subjectively meet our obligations these things become “null and void.” So that if these admissions were far clearer than they are and greatly multiplied in number, they would not really amount to much.

Further, it is quite clear that these “spiritual men,” these “priests” hold in the minds of the speakers a kind of mediatorial position; they act as mediums between the simple or ordinary believer and Christ.

“What would mark a priest? A priest puts you into touch with Christ?” (C. p. 4).

“Young souls who want to walk with me They might not be able to explain things, possibly, but they get their eye on that man [i.e., a priest]” (C. p. 20).

“I think if there is a divinely given form you had better follow it. But as there is none, the next best thing we have is spiritual men. You may think I am giving spiritual men too much place, but I am not. . . . The best thing for me then is when a brother, a priest, who knows what he is doing, gets up to pray or give thanks, to follow him closely. I want to know how he addresses Divine Persons, because he is in the life of Divine Persons, and has the intelli-

gence of what suits these Persons." (C. p. 31).

"Why does not that soul grow? . . . They are not paying attention to and learning from the priests." (C. p. 50).

"What you said about the brother giving thanks for the loaf is encouraging. It is an honour to open the door for the Lord to come in. . . . To join the saints, yes. . . . But if the Lord is brought in the Supper, you have what follows on that. Before He knows about it, the affection He finds there carries His spirit right away, and He joins Himself to them. . . . We do not want doctrine, but if I were to break the loaf, do you know what I would say before I arose? 'Lord help me to open the door for Thee!' . . . To open the door to let Him in as Head." (C. pp. 89, 90, 91).

We may summarize all these sad wanderings in fields of thought and speculation totally foreign to Scripture, by saying that in the speaker's view, a "priest" is one who "puts you in touch with Christ" and consequently you "get your eye on" him: failing a divinely given form as to approach to God in prayer or worship you "follow him closely" and observe "how he addresses Divine Persons." You should be "paying attention to, and learning from the priests" for when a priest ministers at the actual breaking of the loaf in the Lord's Supper he "opens the door for the Lord to come in." It is held apparently that the Lord does not and cannot "come in" as Head except there be a priest to open the door for Him, and except He "come in" we do not partake of "the Supper" though it is freely conceded that we may "break bread."

How immensely all this magnifies "the priest" in question! What a wonderful person he must be! The speakers are acutely conscious of it, for one of them remarks:—

"Somebody said to me 'I do not see much glory.' I see a lot of glory about a priest in the morning meeting, and that is what is coming out,—just that." (C. p. 129).

Painful as it is, we beg our readers to pause and realize the point to which we have travelled. Here is a brother in Christ offering to instruct us as to the partaking of the Lord's Supper. He warns us how we may miss it altogether, and be reduced to the mere "breaking of bread." We shall have missed it indeed if the Lord does not "come in as Head," hence the imperative necessity of there being at least one priest in our midst to let Him in. And then, when, according to him, the door is opened with priestly efficiency, what happens? Well, he himself anyway has opened eyes,—more open than some of his friends apparently,—and he sees a *lot of glory* about the priest who has so effectually officiated in the morning meeting.

The same sad story! The supreme glory of the great Head,—a living bright objective reality,—eclipsed by a "lot of glory" about a man!

Yet all is perfectly consistent. No fault can be found with the logical sequence of the theory once the premises are admitted. Thus the supreme Priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the saints are denied, and a special and limited class of "priests" by whom ordinary believers can get into touch with the Lord is mentally created. The extracts we have cited are bold and outspoken. What is latent in most utterances of this school of opinion is quite patent in them.

5.

As a Further Consequence a Vein of Self-Occupation runs through all their Utterances.

It may not take the glaring form so visible in what we have just considered. It may take the form of magnifying their own particular company, or the yet far more plausible form of magnifying the assembly as a subjective formation, in an idealistic way. For instance:—

"We ought not to be content that we are an intelligent company of Christians; there are a good many absent, and we ought to miss them." (A. p. 108).

Here the speaker's own particular company is in question. But further:—

"As sons they [i.e., those in the body] are formed in the divine nature, and are intelligent; and they are associated with Christ as wisdom in working out of every problem in the universe, and they display Him, for they act exactly as He would. It is not only that they *do* right things, but they do them *as He would* and so they are His body." (A. p. 109).

"It is Christ's assembly, and competent to express intelligently His mind for the universe. . . . A company capable of intelligently giving the mind of God on any question that may arise in the universe. It will be the highest court of appeal in the coming age." (A. p. 109, 110).

"The prayer in chap. i. [Eph.] is that we may know the will of God and see the greatness of His power, but that in chapter iii. is that we may be great ourselves." (A. p. 110).

"I look upon the assembly as being composed of spiritually intelligent persons. What is the idea of an assembly if it is not for counsel? You see He is Head over all things to it, not to the body but to the assembly. But then the assembly is His body. It has intelligence." (A. p. 110, 111).

According to Scripture the saints who compose the assembly will have positions of authority and administration in the age to come. (1 Cor. vi. 2, 3). In them Christ is to be glorified and admired, (2 Thess. i. 10) and as the heavenly City of Revelation xxi. the assembly will be the light-bearer in that day, and hence "the nations . . . shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." Yet it is not the light itself, "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."

Yet the speaker in these extracts does not hesitate

to go much further and tells us things of which Scripture knows nothing. The "sons" will unquestionably be publicly associated with Christ in that day, but these details as to that association extending to "the working out of every problem in the universe," or that assembly "intelligently giving the mind of God on any question that may arise in the universe" and being "the highest court of appeal in the coming age" we must accept (if indeed we do so at all) upon the speaker's *ipse dixit* alone. Can the speaker have really given a minute's quiet consideration to his own words? How could the assembly be *capable* of giving *God's mind* on any question that may arise in the *universe* except it has a mind as big as God's? How can it be the *highest* court of appeal in the coming age so long as God exists?—Or does He abdicate His judicial position in its favour? We have indeed "come unto . . . the church of the firstborn which are written in heaven" but not to the church of the firstborn, as judge of all, as these teachings infer. "But ye are come unto . . . GOD, *the Judge of all*" (Heb. xii. 22, 23), and here we leave the self-centred thoughts of mysticism for the solid rock of Holy Scripture.

Again we read:—

"It is not exactly that you are dependent on the Head, nor are you independent of Him, but you are dependent on that living organism of which He is the Head, and in that you get the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. . . . And you feel it is a living organism, you feel the living truth coming out, you are in touch with the temple where the light is. The light is there, the body is there, and the truth is coming out from the Head through that living organism. The men through whom the light is coming are in direct connection with the Head . . . and you feel the gain of being put in touch with the spirits of *men* that have been moving in touch with the Head." (C. p. 112).

Previously it had been remarked:—

"Mary [John xx.] was qualified for the greatest company on earth. It goes without saying that the Christian company is the greatest company in heaven, but it is the greatest on earth." (C p. 69).

"You feel how perfectly you act as under the influence of Christ. . . . There is moral dignity. There is nothing like it on earth." (C. p. 92).

Comment is hardly needed. The self-occupied, self-conscious, and one must indeed add, self-complacent strain is not even hidden beneath the surface. The vein reaches an outcrop, if we may borrow the language of the mining engineer, and is plainly visible. The speakers *feel* these things; they *feel* how perfectly they act, and they are glad to tell us so.

6.

Speaking According to the Light derived from the work within them, rather than from the Light of Scripture without, a Crop of Fanciful, and Extravagant and Erroneous Ideas is produced.

A number of these have come to light in the extracts already quoted. We append a few more examples with brief comments.

"The point in Romans viii. is not only having the Spirit but having a new state in the Spirit. I think from this point of view the affections developed by the Spirit are covenant affections. We have to distinguish between covenant affections and family affections. I think covenant relationships involve that we are equal to the obligations of the contract entered into." (A. p. 4 & 5).

This alludes to Romans viii. 4. The believer walking in the Spirit fulfils those things the law righteously required of man. This is spoken of as "a covenant" and these righteous requirements are alluded to as "the obligations of the contract entered

into." This far-fetched idea is derived from an attempt to make the giving of the law in Exodus a type of the believer taking up certain obligations before God as a fruit of being redeemed; and of this "type" Roman viii. 4 is supposed to be the "antitype." This once accepted, you advance to the transference of the word "covenant" from the "type" to the "antitype"; you transmute the word "covenant" into a "contract" and further you proceed to contemplate "covenant affections" and "family affections" and to differentiate between them; and in result instead of a pyramid of truth broad-based on the Scriptures of Truth, you have a broad-based pyramid of fancy, precariously poised upon a very slender apex. But not only have you thus travelled into regions of fanciful and extravagant ideas, but of very serious error. What is this *contract* as to which the New Testament is silent? A covenant involves two parties as Galatians iii. tells us. A contract involves penalties for its breach. 2 Corinthians iii. 6-18 sweeps away all these unsteady theories. Obligations there are, resting upon the believer as the result of grace bestowed, yet even so they do not stand upon a legal or covenant basis. Christianity is not a system of obligation ending in death and condemnation, but the positive ministration of the Spirit and of righteousness.

Elsewhere these ideas are applied as follows:—

"I believe in making resolutions. The Lord holds you to them He calls you to your vow. You make a vow, and that vow is valued according to Moses' valuation, according to the currency of the sanctuary. In the book of Leviticus chapter xxvii. God puts a distinct value on your vow; . . . He will discipline you if you depart from the resolution, The Lord loves you to go forward and make your resolution; you owe it to Him to do that. He did that on our behalf." (B. pp. 64, 65).

We most heartily believe in purpose of heart in

the things of God. We welcome all that stirs up our souls to the diligence of which Peter speaks in his second epistle (ch. i. 5), but we are not going back to the Galatian error of "holiness by law" even by so specious a route as that opened up to us here.

Another idea that frequently appears is that truth could not be ministered by the apostles except that the state which the truth involves was already present in those to whom they ministered. For instance :—

"There was a company formed there [Ephesus] in which Christ was expressed. 'I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.' There were conditions at Ephesus which enabled the Apostle to do that: to open up the counsels of God. He could not do that at Corinth. There was not the state. Having that state is necessary for the revelation of the truth. (B. p. 10).

We have long recognized that the servant of Christ cannot really minister truth from mere head knowledge. He must himself possess it in power. Here, however, we are told that he cannot minister truth if his hearers do not already possess it in power.

Carry this idea a little further and you reach this :—

"'I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.' A Man speaks from heaven, owning the saints on earth as Himself; and He could do it truthfully, because Stephen was like the Lord in that sense; he acted entirely in the spirit of Christ, when he was put to death . . . James himself testifies 'Ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you.' So that the Lord can truthfully own such people as Himself." (B. pp. 25, 26).

If this be true, then it would be untruthful if the Lord owned as Himself those who fail to display the traits that characterize Himself; which is only another way of saying that our place in relation to the Lord is determined by what we are for Him; and this is

of course the exact principle of *law*, and not grace at all.

Two alternatives face those who come under the influence of this teaching. Either they will be a prey to legality, earnestly endeavouring to reach the state necessary if the truth is to be ministered to them,—a state which is really only produced by the Spirit *through the very truth which is thus denied them*; or they will relieve their oppressed minds by dropping into the habit of assuming they are in the state because they are able to analyze matters, and speak about it with a certain easy familiarity, and thus they will reduce all these mystical teachings to the merest theories, quite unrelated to what is their own real state before God. Either alternative is bad. The second is the worse of the two.

These publications are full of minor extravagances of statement which have no Scripture support, and are sometimes in opposition to it. For instance, alluding to John xx. we read :—

“ Well, the testimony of resurrection has not gone out yet. . . . Do you mean it is not expounded? . . . It may have gone out in gospel testimony but not to the world. . . . Publicly? . . . It is known and enjoyed in the Supper. . . . It is only known to affection.”
(C. p. 34).

What can one say to statements such as these? Simply this; They are *NOT TRUE*. The resurrection of Christ was the great theme of Apostolic testimony to the world as recorded in Acts.

“ Quickening is the climax of the work of God.” (C. p. 39).

Is it? Read Ephesians ii. 4-7 and see. According to these verses God's work lifts us from death in sins to a seat in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus, and quickening, far from being the climax, is the first step up from the bottom. Again :—

"Is your thought that we do not need to wait for the rapture? . . . My thought was this, that what will be enjoyed on the morning of the rapture is ours to enjoy in the night of the Lord's rejection. . . . I once heard a brother say we could have the rapture every Lord's Day morning. . . . Is there not just this difference between the morning meeting and the rapture? The rapture is like a military call, whereas Eutyclus, who was recovered by an embrace, suggests the state for the Supper?" (C. pp. 43-46).

We fear that some of our readers who have not followed this kind of teaching may be puzzled as to what all this really means. We have not the space for the necessary explanations. We cite it as an example of that kind of fantastic application of Scripture which may ultimately lead one almost anywhere. Again:—

"The Supper is the most real thing in the universe to-day." (C. p. 57).

If this brother had contented himself with telling us that it was the *most* real thing in *the world*, we fear we should have demurred and suggested that the Holy Spirit and the Scriptures were at least as real. When, however, he quits the world and soars forth into the spacious universe with his sweeping assertion, we simply do not believe him, and deplore the intemperate character of an utterance like this, though we recognize it is quite consistent with his theory. Conscious of the movings of the "inner light" and untrammelled by any exact interpretations of Scripture, not exactly governed indeed by *ITS statements*, such statements as these are easily accounted for.

We may remark here that as far as we noticed in this book from which we are now quoting, the Lord's Supper is uniformly printed with a capital 'S,' and Scripture with a small 's.' Is this intentional? If so, it is significant.

One more specimen from this book.

“Influence is more than gift. . . . Oh, a great deal, though sometimes gift is made much of; but you are not so much taught by gift as by influence, and that gives the sisters a place. The sisters can teach—they can influence. . . . They can teach by influence without using words at all, or taking any place of authority over men. How is the church going to be identified with Christ in the coming day? How is *she* going to teach?” (C. p. 86).

Talk of this kind almost tempts one to think that the speaker finds delight in small contradictions of Scripture language. We prefer to believe, however, that it is not that he consciously *wants* to lower Scripture in the minds of his hearers and so weaken the authority of its words over their souls, but that he does it *insensibly*,—it is of the essence of the mystical bent of his mind.

Scripture speaks of “gift” in connection with teaching. “Gift,” however, is objective in its bearing, and does not exactly involve subjective state. “Influence” is more connected with the subjective state which is everything to him,—so he prefers “influence.”

Scripture says, “I *suffer not* a woman to *teach*,” but obviously sisters can influence,—indeed if influence be in question, the man is, by general consent, not to be compared with the woman—and since influence is the great teaching power, he undertakes to assure us that “the sisters *CAN teach*.”

He further supports these contradictions of Scripture by the question as to how the *church* is going to *teach* in the coming day. He asks it as if it were an assured fact that she is going to teach. But is she? Her privileges in the coming age are indeed immense, but teaching is not enumerated amongst them. If it were, would there not be ground for reasoning backwards, and contending that she should teach *now*—thus reaching Rome’s position? It is a significant fact that teaching is attributed to “that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess.” (Rev.

ii. 20). She represents a system—the papal system, no doubt,—but it is the only place in Scripture where even in figure teaching is connected with a system as contrasted with individuals.

We now cull an extract from a different direction ; the chapter under discussion is 1 Cor. xv. :—

“The burial of Christ clears the ground entirely of the man who was offensive to God in view of a new beginning for God ; He having in grace taken the place of man according to the flesh. It reminds you in that way of 2 Samuel xxi. where all the bodies of the offenders had to be buried. . . . Christ has died vicariously, and was buried—has submerged the offending man—‘ But now is Christ risen from the dead.’ It suggests Genesis vi., ‘The end of all flesh is come before Me.’ All flesh was submerged. If He was buried, all flesh was removed from before the sight of God—nothing left of man according to the flesh. . . . There is no revival of that kind of man, so ‘ God giveth it a body as it hath *pleased Him.*’ It is a question now of resurrection. . . . Resurrection involves that what comes up pleases God. The going down refers to what displeases, hence His burial is part of His vicarious work, and the coming up is on account of what He is.” (D. pp. 193, 194).

Truth of a very important character is here being dealt with so that the introduction of details based upon the writer's own thoughts and not stated in Scripture is the more to be regretted.

We have only to turn to the Scripture which forms the basis of these remarks to see that when the death of Christ is mentioned, its vicarious character is made evident. He died “for our sins,” (v. 3.) He took them up in His death as our Vicar or Substitute, but no such thought is attached to His burial. It is simply “and that He was buried.” Nor is such a thought anywhere in Scripture connected with His burial. Nowhere is His burial presented as “part of His vicarious work.”

But we are said to be “buried with Him” in two

passages (Rom. vi. 4 and Col. ii. 12). Yet notice carefully how it is put. "Buried with Him *by baptism* unto death." "Buried with Him *in baptism*." In neither case, nor anywhere else, does it say "Buried with Him in His burial," as it would if He were buried vicariously as is taught here. We do reckon ourselves dead unto sin insomuch as He *died* to sin. His death was our death for God and for faith; but then His death *was* vicarious. His burial was *not* vicarious.

We further remark that when Scripture speaks of His death which was vicarious and in which "sin in the flesh" has been "condemned" (Rom. viii. 3) there is a certain definiteness about its utterances very unlike the mystical vagueness of the passage under review.

For instance :—

It is "*our* old man" that is crucified with Him. (Rom. vi. 6).

In dying "He died unto sin once." (Rom. vi. 10).

It is "ye" (i.e. *believers*) who have become "dead to the law by the body of Christ." (Rom. vii. 4).

"I am crucified with Christ." (Gal. ii. 20).

"The world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." (Gal. vi. 14).

"Ye [i.e. *believers*] are circumcised . . . in the circumcision of Christ." (Col. ii. 11).

It is quite clear that Christ's vicarious work on the cross extended not only to the bearing of our sins, but also to the taking up of all that we were, and that consequently our old man has been crucified with Him,—the evil nature from which sins proceed,—the "man" being thus not only condemned but executed. But note that these statements are restricted to believers. It does not say "*the* old man," but "*our* old man" has been crucified. If it had said "*the* old man," then it might be maintained that everybody is "dead to the law," "crucified with Christ," and "crucified to the world." It would be introducing into this matter the confusion of thought so frequently

found in other circles between propitiation and substitution when sins are in question. It does say that "sin in the flesh" has been "condemned." "Sin" being "lawlessness," the root principle of mischief which has invaded the world, the flesh being the particular vehicle in which it works. That has been, not crucified, but *condemned*. This condemnation of the root principle of evil which has penetrated man in the flesh, (i.e. in his fallen condition) and which indelibly stains him, involves of course, the condemnation of man in the flesh himself,—the condemnation of the Adamic race. There, however, Scripture stops. To say that man in the flesh is condemned in the cross of Christ is to state important truth. To say as we read here, that Christ has "taken the place of man according to the flesh," is to say what Scripture does not say, and to open the door to consequences not intended by the speaker. We believers rejoice that Christ has taken our place, for as a consequence we escape the judgment that belongs to our place and get His place. The logical consequence of Christ taking the place of man after the flesh would be, that man after the flesh would escape the judgment that belongs to his place, which is exactly what he does not do. The truth is that he is condemned, inasmuch as sin is condemned, in the Cross.

One more thing we have to remark on this extract. It completely ignores the *facts* on which the doctrine is based, a characteristic error of mysticism. The doctrines of the gospel are not mere theorizings, not the building of ideas which have no foundation in fact. All those great Scriptural doctrines we have just quoted are securely based upon the great FACT of Christ's death. The doctrine springs out of the fact, and must be tested by it. If a doctrine is advanced which purports to be based upon Christ's death but which involves a falsification of His death, or denial of any of its details, then the doctrine stands condemned *ipso facto* as false.

Now here is advanced the doctrine that the burial of Christ was the putting out of sight from before God of what was offensive to Him. The speaker makes it clear that in his mind Christ only thus became—or perhaps we should say, His sacred body that was buried became—offensive to God in a vicarious sense. This is well, but even so, it is a statement serious enough.

On the cross Christ *was* “made sin for us, who knew no sin.” (2 Cor. v. 21). Here the doctrine fits the fact, for He *was*, though Himself perfect, treated as sin when He vicariously stood in our place, and hence He was forsaken of God. In His burial He was *not* buried vicariously for us as an offensive thing even though perfectly holy Himself. This doctrine does *not* appear in Scripture for the very simple reason that it has no basis in *FACT*. The fact of His burial was that His sacred body never saw corruption. This important *fact* is foretold in Psalm xvi., and quoted and enforced in Acts ii. 25-31 and xiii. 35-37. Hence in keeping with this, though men appointed His grave with the wicked and would have laid His body with those of the two malefactors, God ordered otherwise, and “He was with the rich in His death.” Every circumstance connected with His burial suggests that which is the very opposite of corruption.

Had corruption touched His body then there would have been a *fact* upon which to rest the doctrine that in His burial what was *offensive* was submerged, or that the “going down refers to what *displeases*.” The speaker makes his meaning clear by referring to the burial by David of the putrid remains of Saul’s sons as recorded in 2 Samuel xxi. He treats this as an illustration of his subject, which “reminds” him of it. Well, it may remind him “in that way” of the fanciful doctrine he is enunciating, but it is as far removed from any resemblance to the *facts* of Christ’s burial as can possibly be.

The whole quotation is a sad illustration of how

mysticism can imperil the most important truth by dealing in imaginative details which only mix error with it. There is then a double danger. First that the error will be imbibed by those who unthinkingly accept all that the teacher in question **says, and hence, even if still holding in the main to what is true, they have to rest it upon an altogether insecure and imaginary foundation.** Secondly, it may lead others who do enquire and test what they read and hear to reject, not only these untenable ideas, but also important truth which they are used to support.

The fact that man in the flesh is judicially condemned in the cross of Christ; that consequently he now has no status before God; and that the last Adam, the second Man, does abide before God in His risen glory, and that we believers stand in the risen Christ:—all this is truth of the last importance. How necessary then to let it stand on its own proper Scriptural foundation, and not imperil it by these mystical imaginings.

Finally, we give a few extracts which show that this modern mysticism deals in unscriptural fashion not only with the work, but also with the Person of Christ.

“Our Lord Jesus, though really Man, begotten of the Holy Ghost, born of the divinely-over-shadowed vessel, was uncreate, though He entered His own creation, and His holy humanity had no link with that of fallen man. As to His spirit, it was Himself—the Son.”
(E. p. 172).

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. The omission of ‘in spirit’ in verse 40 is important as confirming that His spirit was Himself personally and could not be spoken of as in our case.”
(E. p. 199).

With these words our author launches us into deep waters. It was during the fourth century that one Apollinaris, in opposing the Arians, who emphasized Christ's Manhood and denied His Deity, formed the

theory that in Christ the "Logos" took the place of the rational element in man; or in other words that He assumed only a human body, and that the Divine nature in Him took the place of the rational human soul or mind. By this he hoped to meet the Arian heretics on their own ground, and give a rational explanation of the otherwise inexplicable mystery of His Person.

Here we have a twentieth-century attempt to solve this great and precious mystery, and in result it is hardly distinguishable from the speculations of Apollinaris of the fourth century.

Some of the readers of these words detected the speculative element, and raised questions as to it; whereupon further explanation is given, as follows:—

"Every soul that loves Him and bows to scripture would surely admit that while in becoming flesh He changed His estate He could not and did not change in any way His personality, and still more would reject any suggestion that henceforth there became embodied in Him two personalities. The thought is abhorrent! Nor would any reverent soul assert that He received, as we, a created spirit. Yet, HE HIMSELF, THE SON, became and abides for ever really, actually Man, in all that holy manhood involves. Having become Man how could His spirit be other than human though never ceasing to be divine? for He brought into manhood all that was perfect in manhood according to God. It was surely as was said, Himself, for passing into death, in Luke, He commends His spirit to His Father His death was a reality, as His burial attests." (E p. 279).

On the same page there is added a footnote, which says:—

"At the same time, to speak of Him having a human spirit savours of dividing up what scripture does not, and might seem to imply something added to Him."

At first sight these explanations appear to approximate more closely to Scripture than the writer's original words. We are thankful to read that "the

Son became and abides for ever really, actually Man, in all that holy manhood involves," since 1 Thess. v. 23 makes it quite certain that holy manhood involves the "whole spirit and soul and body." The sentence that follows, though couched in the form of a question, also has a pleasing sound about it if read in a casual way. If, however, we read it with greater care we soon become conscious that it is strangely ambiguous.

The whole point turns, we must remember, upon a differentiation between what is Divine and what is human, and no question as to any other kind of spirit has been imported into the discussion. Had the writer been engaged in meeting some such evil theory as that our Lord possessed an angel's spirit we could assign some intelligible meaning to his words. As it is, on the surface they merely involve us in a verbal contradiction. The writer asks us how could Christ's spirit "be other than human though never ceasing to be divine"—i.e., how could it be anything but human while never ceasing to be what is not human! This, however, is but a triviality, for how easily do we all slip into verbal errors; what strikes us as being *really* serious is the evident effort by these semi-meaningless or ambiguous words to pacify minds that are alarmed, or at least enquiring, by assuring them that in some obscure or mystical sense, humanity can be connected with the spirit of our blessed Lord, while at the same time stoutly maintaining his theory as to the point in question, viz., that Christ's spirit was "Himself—the Son" as shown by the still later sentence, and also the footnote, as quoted.

What then is the point at issue in these articles? Just this, did our Lord in becoming Man assume a full and proper humanity, or only in a modified and imperfect form? Proper humanity involves spirit and soul and body as we have seen, and of these the spirit comes first both in importance and in Scriptural order. If He did not assume spirit as well as soul

and body He clearly was not man in a full and perfect sense.

Our author *reasons* somewhat as to this matter. He attempts to render his own theory attractive by setting up, as a repulsive background, other theories which may be even worse. We too do not believe that our Lord "changed" His essential personality, nor that in any sense His incarnation involved the embodiment of two personalities in Him: still our rejection of those profane ideas does not in any way dispose us to accept his alternative. Nor do we feel inclined to follow his example and mainly support our assertions by reasonings.

The whole matter is emphatically one which demands not reasoning but absolute subjection to what is revealed in Scripture, and the humble confession of ignorance where Scripture is silent.

Does Scripture afford us any light as to the way in which our blessed Lord was pleased to assume humanity? It certainly does. Our author has quoted one passage, and drawn a deduction in favour of his own thoughts from the fact that the words "in spirit" in Luke ii. 40 have very little authority behind them, and should probably be omitted. As to this we have only to remark that verse 52 of the same chapter affirms that "Jesus increased in wisdom" and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to understand these words if He did not assume a human spirit in becoming man, since wisdom is an attribute of spirit rather than of soul or body. He was indeed Wisdom incarnate, and if, as our author affirms, "His spirit was Himself" in what sense could He *grow* in wisdom?

His deduction, however, such as it is, is based upon what is not, or should not be, in Scripture. Shall we turn for a moment to what is in Scripture. Our Lord Jesus uses these words, "My spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46). "My soul" (Matt. xxvi. 38). "My body" (Matt xxvi. 12), so that there can be no question that

He possessed all three. When however it is said that though we may understand the third and even the second in an ordinary sense, we must import an altogether different meaning into the first, we must search a little further into the Word of God.

We will cite but three passages. The first occurs in Hebrews ii., in a passage dealing directly and explicitly with the incarnation of the Lord. The "children" given to Him of God being "partakers of flesh and blood He also Himself likewise took part of the same." (Ver. 14.) Two words are used here, the first being of stronger force than the second. We partake of flesh and blood, i.e., we have it in common, for it is our original condition. He "took part" of the same, for originally He was otherwise and He assumed it, with a view, as the context shows, to the accomplishment of death and the taking up of the High Priestly place. Now it is just here that the Spirit of God has granted us a little light as to what this taking part of flesh and blood involved, and we have inspired words which would seem to have been written in view of such speculations as those we are considering.

"Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren." (Ver. 17).

The words we emphasize are these:—IN ALL THINGS. With this before us how can we accept our author's statements? They may be plausible, and they may offer an explanation of what is really beyond all explanation, but judged by this Scripture,—THEY ARE NOT TRUE. If He was made like to His brethren *in all things*,—sin apart, as chapter iv. shows—then clearly He was so not only in body or in soul but in spirit too.

Hebrews iv. 15, corroborates and strengthens the testimony of the above Scripture. In connection with His qualifications, on the human side, for the High Priestly office, we read that He "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Here there

is one great exception to the general statement. He was altogether apart from sin. This one exception made, however, the statement is all-comprehensive. He was tempted IN ALL POINTS. Historically the Gospels confirm this. Take for example Luke's account of the temptation in the wilderness. There the temptations are presented in ascending order: the first being addressed especially to the body, the second to the soul, and the third to the spirit. Indeed we are safe in saying that by far the fiercest temptations are those which assail the spirit in man. Our blessed Lord met them all, and triumphed in them all, *in perfect manhood*. This blessed truth also is largely robbed of its glory by these sad speculations.

We have one more passage to quote, 1 Corinthians vi. 17). "He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit." The previous verse shows that it is not exactly the Holy Spirit that is alluded to here. for the term "one spirit" is in contrast to "one body," though it is of course by the Holy Spirit that we are one spirit with the Lord. Adopt the idea advocated in these extracts and how near one comes to deifying the saints!

We may be asked of course how we explain the great wonder of the incarnation if we do not accept these explanations which have been offered? Our answer is very brief and simple. We do not explain it at all. We thankfully accept what is revealed, and desire to prayerfully weigh these revelations that we may arrive at their meaning and discern what is involved in them, but we dare not go one step beyond them. To do so is to trespass on forbidden ground. Nor would the writer we have been examining have thus trespassed, we fully believe, had he not been of this mystical school. Being of it, however, he feels himself inwardly competent to travel into regions of which Scripture is silent.

We refrain from making further quotations, though they might be greatly multiplied. We have given ample to show the tendencies and errors of this

school of opinion. Their whole treatment of Scripture shows that they scan it through glasses set at a peculiar focus of their own. Anyone who has aimed at adjusting his own thoughts by the Scriptures and thus, thinking God's thoughts after Him, to have his own focal point set by the Word of God, may well be puzzled at first by many of the things we have quoted. This is because all their utterances are based upon a reading of Scripture through glasses set at the "subjective" focus, which makes all indefinite and hazy and somewhat mysterious, and many details positively wrong.

After all the Word of God did not come out from us. It came unto us only. Hence the really spiritual man neither *originates* nor *authenticates* anything. He *acknowledges* that the Scriptures are of binding importance as the commandments of the Lord. (See 1 Cor. xiv. 36, 37).

This we repeat is the real spiritual man according to Scripture. He absolutely bows to Scripture. How different to the "spiritual man" of modern mysticism as revealed in these writings.

7.

A Brief Survey of the Teaching as a Whole, and of the Positive Testimony of the Word of God.

Before closing we invite the reader to take a broad and general survey of the field we have been traversing, so that we may end with some definite impression of what is at stake, and of what is truth as contrasted with mere imagination.

We observe that this teaching is nothing if not systematic. It is in fact a highly elaborated system, which true to the very nature of mysticism, keeps the thoughts of its votaries continually revolving around themselves. At first sight all seems very novel and

original, but on closer inspection we find that the element of novelty mainly lies in the language and that the underlying thoughts have very little originality about them. It is equally true to say that the spirit which breathes through both thoughts and language is that which is always found when systems or schools of opinion are founded. Alas! that men who have had as their birth-right so choice a setting forth of the full-orbed truth of God should have descended to this unbalanced and sectarian setting forth of one segment of the whole.

We do not write thus without some reason. As showing this, we append some extracts all of which were written years ago before this particular school sprang into being. Each extract is from the pen of one whose words are of great weight—the late J. N. Darby.

“The mystic never has rest, because he vainly seeks in man what he ought to seek in God, who had accomplished all before he ever thought about it. . . . This is why the imagination plays so great a part in mysticism, and Satan can so often deceive by it, because the imagination and the heart of man are called into play. I do not say that spiritual affections are never there: . . . but you will find him after all, occupied with the affections and not with God Himself. It is the chief defect of mysticism. In a word, I see it in an effort of the human heart, trying to produce in itself something strong enough in the way of affection to satisfy a heart awakened by the excellence of its object . . .”

Again in writing of a very definite perversion of truth which in his day he had to encounter, he says:—

“This is one of the sad circumstances, as it strikes me, . . . important truths deal with in so rash and daring a manner and the authority of the teacher leant upon for them, and his wildest notions put upon the level of certainty with justification by faith; so that were his authority once shaken there would be danger

that no one would know what was certain. It would be scepticism as to everything. So I have seen it with Roman Catholics. . . . I may add from my own experience that most decided legalism took the place of Christ and grace. . . . As to the teaching I heard . . . the one un-deviating object seemed to be to teach differently from what brethren had taught. . . . As at—— they treated what wonderfully blessed new light they had got as to their church position, so here it was taught that, as the brethren had first learnt brotherly unity and fellowship now they had been, as fresh instruction, led to church order. This church order was the authority of the teachers. . . . This came to such a pitch in these quarters that one brother, on these points being mooted, having urged that after all the Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica, because they searched the Scriptures whether these things were so, he was answered by a young, and, as far as I know, very nice-hearted young man who was associated in the ministry there, that it was Jews searching Jewish Scriptures, but that, now that God had raised up teachers and given gifts, all that was changed, and they must listen to the teachers. . . .”

At different times and in different connections, he also penned the following:—

“There are things which we enjoy by experience which are not acquired by experience; every sealed believer is in Christ before God, and his place is to know it (John xiv.), but there are those who do not through imperfect teaching. . . . We take the place by faith (beyond Jordan), but when taken we realize being in it by the Holy Ghost; and this is experience. It is not based on experience or progress in it. We are in it if in Christ.”

“Christianity depends in its work on what it brings, not on what it finds; our side and relationship to God by it, wholly on what we find, not on what we bring. In a word it is grace, not man, though he be formed and led by it. Thank God it is.”

“Universal consent is another form of the substitution of man's authority for the Word

of God, and the teaching of the Spirit of God in and by the word, and the responsibility of each saint to receive that word by such teaching; which alone constitutes faith. . . . It is the judgment of men, be they ever so many, and not the direct responsibility of the soul to God in receiving the word; nor the direct operation of the Spirit of God on the soul in respect of the word, which alone produces divine faith. It is faith in men. . . . For the mass of saints it must result in faith in the statements of the teacher, which is not faith in God at all. It will always be connected with receiving from teachers what they teach because God has raised them up. . . ."

"If ministry is real it brings God directly to the conscience through the Word, whereas that which is false stands between God and the conscience."

We started these quotations with the intention of italicizing sentences which seemed particularly apposite, but on second thoughts it seemed needful to italicize almost every word, and we have therefore ended by italicizing nothing. They bear as directly upon the points at issue as though they had been written to-day, and we ask the reader to thoughtfully consider them.

We believe that one of the worst features of the system of teaching we have been reviewing is its tendency to bring in man whether as a teacher or a "priest" between the conscience of the "ordinary believer" and the Lord, instead of bringing God directly to the conscience. It does indeed put man and ministry between God and the conscience. In a word, the whole system is, we judge, a highly elaborate, though perhaps unconscious effort, to divert saints from "holding the Head." (Col. ii. 18).

We now turn aside from the consideration of these teachings, for at best the review of what is unscriptural is somewhat negative, and in conclusion we

briefly summarize the positive testimony of the Word of God.

Take, for instance, the Epistle to the Romans. The order is first the objective setting forth of what God is, and has done for us in Christ; then second that which is to be wrought in us experimentally by the Spirit by way of response. Later in the Epistle, (chapter, xii.) we find exhortation, to the end that the saints may be stirred and moved towards the fulfilment, in their own cases, of all that which God purposes for them subjectively. To what does the Apostle appeal? What is the lever which will produce such mighty results? "I beseech you therefore, brethren," he says, "by the mercies of God." All that which God is objectively towards us is the lever, not what we may be subjectively towards Him.

Do we therefore belittle the work of the Spirit of God carried on progressively in the saints? By no means. We confess it as a very important part of truth, and as one of the great objects of all true ministry, but at the same time we recognise that it clearly stands second as the complement to truth that is objective.

In 1 Corinthians ii. we find that there are the things of God which no man knows "but the Spirit of God" yet "the things that are freely given to us of God" are not given to us by the Spirit, but rather the Spirit Himself is given to us "that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God." These wondrous things are given. They are ours, blessed be God! And we are to know them, not intellectually merely, but in spiritual power and enjoyment by the Spirit of God.

The same presentation of truth meets us in Galatians iv. 6, 7. "Ye are sons," said the Apostle, thus setting forth the great objective fact, and he

added, for that very reason "God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." The Spirit gives not the relationship, but the conscious response to the relationship. The Galatians had made but little progress subjectively. Indeed they had as a whole slipped back into legalism, and were "fallen from grace." Still the Apostle does not hesitate to apply to their hearts objective truth, and that twice over, saying not only, "ye are sons," but also, "Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

We pass from Galatians to Ephesians, and though a far more exalted presentation of truth meets us here, yet we find the same order; it is *first*, the calling of God, a thing wholly above and before and outside of us; *second*, we find that we are to have the eyes of our understanding enlightened that we may know what the hope of His calling is.

Many other Scriptures might be adduced, but we forbear. What is really needed is to avoid making one's subjective impressions any kind of a standard, to cease imputing to them any kind of authority. If we have impressions well and good; let us be thankful. Let us remember, however, that Scripture alone is the infallible standard, and consequently that it alone will enable us to test our impressions and determine whether they really proceed from the Spirit of God, or whether they are but the fruit of an over-active mentality.

May the Lord be pleased to own this small effort to contend for the simplicity of the faith. We could not better summarize what we have contended for than in the following words:—

"Occupation with our state will never bring us one whit nearer the Lord; it will only distress, enfeeble and enslave our souls.

Occupation with Christ will produce every moment increasing conformity to His image. The true remedy therefore for a bad state is Christ so completely filling our vision, Christ in what He is and in what He has done, that self cannot be seen in the light of His glory. State is not everything, but CHRIST IS EVERYTHING: and in proportion as we learn this lesson will our state meet His mind."