

On Christian Experience

J.G. Bellett.

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I believe that there should be much more of simple Divine experience in our souls than there is. Some have been rather turned from this by certain abused methods of speaking on Christian experience, arising, I judge, from misapprehension on the subject. "Come, ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul." I might take that passage as expressive of what I understand by *experience* - it is what God has done for our souls.

Experiences are the sensible fruits of the Spirit's presence in us, leading us into communion. But conflicts have been confounded with experience. This has obscured the subject, I believe. Conflicts are the results of the renewed mind meeting the old lusts — meeting them in any form, whether as occurring to bring in bondage and fear, or as tempting to stir up sin, and thus to blot the conscience. Romans 7 may be read as a place of conflict, but *experiences* are not *conflicts*. Experiences are the results of the blessed operation and grace of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed mind: awakening its hopes — strengthening its *faith* — enlarging its *understanding*, or helping its *intercessions*. Romans 8 may be read as a place of experience. This is the difference, I judge, between these two chapters; and, accordingly, the Holy Ghost is not named as in action in the 7th of Romans, but the parties there are, as I have observed, the *renewed conscience* (of course, I know the fruit of the Spirit) and *the lusts*. The one meeting the other, conflict as the result is raised between them.

But when we meditate on the character of that Spirit who dwells in us, the forms in which He is revealed as acting in our souls, we may then see how much more rich our experiences should be than they are. He is the blessed living power within, giving efficacy to what we have in Christ, if not hindered. God is said to have *sealed* us with the Holy Ghost. He has in that way, and by that gift, appropriated us individually to Himself. But this seal has a large and a glorious character on it, the impressions of which we should know, *and that is our experience*. This *Seal* or Spirit thus given to us is an *unction* (1 John 2.) As such, He is the power and light of all knowledge in us in the mystery of Christ (Col. 2.) But the Spirit as the *unction* is in us, to give those materials their *real* and *due* power, that they may not lie as cold inert masses in the *mere understanding*, but affect us as they should, being so Divine and glorious. This Spirit is also a *witness* (1 John 5.) As such He is the assurance, and rest, and liberty of faith in us. We have the grounds or materials of the *full assurance of faith* in the person and work of Christ (Heb. 10); but the Holy Ghost is in us as the *witness*, to give those materials their power, so that our souls may indeed enjoy the *rest* and *liberty*, and the *blessed stability of heart* with which such strong ground of confidence in God should fill us. This Spirit is also an *earnest* (Eph. 1.) As such He is in us *the joy of hope*.

We have in our Jesus all that can animate hope and draw forth the *longings* and *boundings* of the soul towards the future glories — promise and *revelation* largely furnishing this. But the Holy Ghost is in us as an earnest, to give these promises and revelations their due attractions, so that they may not merely be looked at, or *understood*, but may lead the heart to gladness, or other affections worthy of the hope of *such inheritance*. Now, if the Holy Ghost be *in us* in such characters as these, what rich experiences in our souls might we not reckon upon — what strength of faith when the witness is in us! — what joy of hope when the earnest is in us! — what light and *largeness of knowledge* when the unction is in us! No doubt there is *another kingdom*, the power of which sadly hinders and defiles; but still this kingdom

of God, and the presence of the Spirit in such form of life and power is ALSO A REALITY, and we may count on great things; but it is but little that we either *know in ourselves* or generally *see in others*. We want the more due culture of this new kingdom, which is "*righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost*." We want the power to *watch and pray* — the power to let the fire kindle by meditation — the power of *simply believing* all the rich and glorious things that are spoken, and the power to refuse the risings of that *rival and other kingdom* in us, which is ever watchful of its own interests.

I have observed before on the difference between conflict and experience. It is, I judge, well to note this: Conflict arises from the *renewed mind* dealing with, or getting into collision with the lusts of the *old nature*, and the power of the enemy. Experience arises from the renewed mind dwelling in its proper element, and dealing with the truth or the *precious things of Christ* in the power of the Holy Ghost who dwells there. Conflict comes from this mind being dragged downward, and out of its due place. Experience comes from its being drawn upwards, towards its own proper place; and these two chapters to which I referred — Rom. 7, 8 — give us the Divine, though different provision for these two conditions. "O wretched man that I am," cries out the renewed or quickened soul under pressure of conflict, "who shall deliver me from the body of this death." The relief comes through Jesus: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

In its communion, or experiences, the same renewed or quickened soul is conscious of "Infirmities" — it knows not how or what to pray for as it ought. The relief comes through the Spirit: "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings that cannot be uttered, and He that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints, according to the will of God." This is Divine teaching of the greatest comfort. Jesus *ends* the conflict — The Holy Ghost perfects the communion of the poor saint; and in this 8th of Romans I must suggest one other thing: it shows us the Holy Spirit's presence and grace with the saint in two respects. First, When the saint is strong, being in that communion which the dispensation calls us to, and is crying, "Abba Father," then the Spirit joins in this, and by His testimony. Second, When the saint is weak, unable to conduct the communion in full intelligence or power, not knowing what to pray for as he ought, then the Spirit helps the infirmity, and puts His perfect communication with the mind of God in the place of our imperfect communion. (See Rom. 5: 16, 26.) This is the twofold office of the gracious Spirit noticed here, so that whether we be *strong* or *weak*, He is for the saint, warranting our confidence — helping our weakness.

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