

*EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER,
ETC.*

Through the columns of the *Messenger and Visitor* several of the Baptist preachers have been giving their views of John iii. 5. One affirms—that by the term water in the expression “Except a man be born of water,” the Saviour meant “word.” Another—that the Saviour refers to the fleshly or natural birth.

The Rev. G. D. MacDonald, (formerly of P. E. I.) but now of Newton Centre, Mass., takes exception to the above views, and in a well written article, from which we take the following extracts set forth in the main, what we believe to be the Saviour's meaning. We have, here and there throughout the extracts, placed in LARGE TYPE (for the sake of arresting the attention of our readers), certain expressions, some of which are in conflict with views recently presented by the *M. & V.*, when discussing the doctrine of faith alone:

“I read with interest the views of Bros. Hughes and “Novus” on John iii. 5; but cannot accept either. The tendency to spiritualize and allegorize the simple, yet profound utterances of the blessed Word is too common, and always dangerous where it is possible to avoid it. I do not think that Christ himself speaking to Nicodemus on a matter so vital and so practical, would speak so obscurely as the views of these brethren would compel. If he meant to have taught the view expressed by Bro. Hughes would it not have been as easy for him to have said “word” as “water?” When in the passage before us, he said “spirit” he meant spirit; when he said “any man” he meant any man; when he said “enter into,” he meant enter into; when he said “born of the Spirit” he meant it, and when he said “born of water” he meant that. Bro. H. says in his last article: “All I have to say on that idea is that if it can be made out by any fair or reasonable exegesis that our Lord meant by the phrase ‘Kingdom of God,’ the Christian church, then I submit that he meant to say that a man must be born of the Spirit and baptized in water before he can properly enter into the Christian church. But I think there are few who will take this view of his language.” I happen to be one of this few, if few they be. The term “Kingdom of God.” So far as it has any reference, to this life, in my opinion, means the rule of God in the heart of the regenerate, having its visible, and to human eye, its only manifestation in the organizations brought into existence by the King himself, and by him denominated his church or churches.

John the Baptist introduced himself to the Jews of Palestine by declaring that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and by preaching the NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE AND BAPTISM IN WATER TO ENJOY its privileges and blessings. Jesus Himself soon followed saying, “The kingdom of God is at hand, repent ye and believe the Gospel.”

To say the term “Kingdom of God” meant the rule of God in the heart apart from a visible manifestation of it in church organization and church life, would be, according to Luke xvi. 16, to deny that God ever ruled in human hearts until the days of John the Baptist, for this passage states “the law and the prophets were until John, since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every man passeth into it.” If the Kingdom of God is the rule of God in the heart, merely, it existed on earth in the days of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and many others in their day; but the setting up of the Kingdom of God has been SINCE THE DAYS OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, hence, it must mean more than the rule of God in the hearts of His elect.

In this passage the King of the Kingdom Himself teaches Nicodemus that it is a visible as well as a spiritual organization, which cannot indeed be seen in its spiritual character, and for which

there can be no fitness without the birth from above. Such instruction from Jesus to a “ruler of the Jews” was most natural and necessary to teach him the essential difference between “the kingdom” which he came to establish and that to which Nicodemus belonged, which was but its type. He further teaches him that even if the birth from above takes place, enabling the soul to “see the kingdom,” and fitting it to be one of its subjects, entrance cannot be obtained without the birth in water, or in other words, baptism. “Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom. . . . Except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom.” Note well that the seeing is connected with the birth of the spirit, and the entering in connected with the birth of water as well as of the spirit.”

CONFESSIONS OF FAITH—CONFESSIONS OF OPINION.

After all that has been said on this subject, there is not a sect in this country, of which we have heard, that has a confession of faith, properly so called. They have books and pamphlets, which they call by this name, and by which they impose upon themselves and upon one another. If it be not too late, we would give them a true and proper name, a name which we are assured every man of good sense and of common education must approve, as well as agree to discard the common name as a misnomer, as incorrect, and as absurd. The proper name of those instruments is, doubtless, according to the English language, a confession of opinion, or, confessions of opinions. If there be any difference between faith and opinion, (and that there is, all languages and dictionaries declare), then the name we have given them is perfectly *apropos*, and their common name perfectly incongruous.

All writers on faith, properly so-called, define it to be “The belief of testimony, either human or divine.” And opinion is, “the notions, judgment, or view which the mind forms of anything.” For example, I believe the testimony which God has given to Jesus of Nazareth, or I believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This is a well-attested fact, in proof of which the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit have given, or agree in one testimony. Concerning this person, His mission and character, various opinions may be formed. All things testified of Him are articles or items of belief; and all views, judgments, or notions formed of the things testified, are matters of opinion. Now all the abstract views of God and man, of things present and future, with which these confessions are replete, are matters of opinion; and as the general character of these books should fix upon them their name, they should be styled Confessions of Opinions. To speak philosophically, I believe what is testified, I know what I have observed or experienced, and I am of opinion in all things speculative. It is true, in one sense, I may be said to know what I have believed, when my faith has been proved by observation and experience. But the terms faith, knowledge and opinion, should never be confounded. I believe that Jesus Christ died for our sins, I know that the sun gives us light, and I am of opinion that all infants dying shall be saved.

A person's faith is always bounded by testimony; his knowledge by observation and experience; and his opinions commence where both these terminate, and may be boundless as God's creation or as human invention. Perfect freedom and liberty should be granted to all opinions. The faith of Christians should be guarded and circumscribed by the revelation of God, and every man's knowledge admitted to be co-extensive with his observation and experience. In matters of this world, these distinctions are realized and acted upon every day. A killed B, C believes it, D knows it, and E is of opinion that A killed B. C believes it to be true, because three

creditable persons have sworn that they saw him do it. D, one of the three witnesses, knows it to be true, because he saw it done. And E, who neither heard the testimony or saw the deed, but from some circumstances detailed to him, is of opinion that it is true. These distinctions are, we presume, evidently correct. A superficial reader may object that Thomas is said to have believed what he saw. But those who attend to all the circumstances will see that he believed the testimony which he had before heard, when certain evidences were presented to his eyes. In this sense the term may, by even correct speakers, be often used. But enough is said to suggest a train of reflections which must issue in the conviction that our confessions of faith are confessions of opinions, and as such ought to have nothing to do with the union, communion, and harmony of Christians. “There is one faith,” says the apostle, but nowhere in the volume is it said, there is one opinion. Every new religious establishment, founded upon one opinion will come to ruin, as all the past have done, and as all the present are doing. But the gates of hades shall not prevail against those who build on the one faith, which is beautifully and properly called “The Rock.”

A. CAMPBELL.

The Family.

BUT DON'T YOU TELL.

Dear Mrs. Jones, I'm glad you called!

I hoped you'd come to-day,
Now have you heard what awful things
They tell of Elder Gray?
You haven't? Why I heard last night
That some one heard in town
He went to see the Black Crook show,
Along with Deacon Brown.
But don't you tell, I'm sure you won't—
Perhaps it isn't so;
But, really, that is what they say—
I don't pretend to know.

Now, Mrs. Jones, do you suppose
That Mr. Smith would cheat?
I'm told by those who ought to know,
He swindles on his meat.
Two ounces short a pound, they say,
And just the same on tea;
And he, a member of the church,
Along with you and me!
But don't you tell, I'm sure you won't—
Perhaps it isn't so;
But, really, that is what they say—
I don't pretend to know.

They say that Thompson and his wife
Just quarrel night and day.
He's jealous. Well perhaps there's cause—
That's not for me to say.
The way that woman puts on airs—
New hat and diamond ring,
And gad, gad, gadding all the time,
With beaux upon her string.
But don't you tell, I'm sure you won't—
Perhaps it isn't so;
But, really, that is what they say—
I don't pretend to know.

They say that Mrs. Johnson's got
A new silk dress, and she
Don't pay her washing bill, I'm told—
It came quite straight to me.
It's hinted that her husband drinks
And gambles on the sly;
But then folks gossip so, you know,
But thank my stars, not I!
Now don't you tell, I'm sure you won't—
These things may not be so;
But, really, that is what they say—
I don't pretend to know.

—Uno Who.