

THE HIGHER RATIONALISM.

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“And he said unto them: ‘Oh foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! behoved it not the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into his glory?’ ”. Luke 24:25.

Dr. Alexander MacLaren has characterized the two disciples conversing together respecting the crucifixion on the way to Emmaus as “the thinkers” of the New Testament. Often as we have read Luke’s account of their converse we have not been able to get away from Dr. MacLaren’s characterization. These disciples were contemplating the strange events connected with the crucifixion of their great teacher, and as they pondered they began to exchange thoughts with each other. They philosophized respecting the phenomena of the previous days; they speculated about them, turning them over in the realm of their confused understanding. They “communed” indeed with each other “of all these things which had happened,” for their perplexities were mutually shared and they sympathetically tried to help each other to some understanding of the outcome of their discipleship to the crucified. They made not, however, the least progress towards a solution of the mysteries which perplexed them. At best they reasoned only with their own hearts and with each other. They had not yet reached the point to which God, In Isaiah 1:18, invites, when he says: “Come now and let us *reason together*, saith the Lord of hosts.” It is through reasoning *together with God* only that light falls upon the contemplation of things supra-mundane and heavenly. As it was, these two, commune together as best they might, could only question and debate; they could not solve.

All the time "their eyes were holden"—the eyes of mere intellection—"that they should not know him," the risen One. In their thought, their questioning together, they could only get so far, and there they paused. They found themselves in a blind alley; they could not even discern a "great iron gate" to their mental prison house. They confronted a dead wall, beyond which they could not pass. When Jesus, their unsuspected revealer, appeared and queried: "What communications are these that ye have one with another as ye walk?" we read: "And they stood still"—they came to a stand—"looking sad." This was not the pause of mere wonder at the question; there was in it also the dead halt which is always found in mere processes of rationalizing concerning the paradoxes of Christ's person and work. Men can get only so far and there they must come to a stand of human limitation so far as thought is concerned. The brain refuses to carry one further, and were this all that were in store for discipleship, it would be a pessimistic outcome indeed. Sadness of heart and darkness of countenance only would ensue. Such is the outcome of mere thinking, even so-called religious thinking, at its best. The brain mechanism cannot reach to God and Christ, to hope and salvation. "Canst thou by searching find out God?"

But these thinkers have yet other marks reminding us of the agnostic weakness of mere intellectualism. When their strange visitor seems so undisturbed by what was so confusing to the disciples, as if nothing unexpected had happened, they replied with amazement: "Dost thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days." They chided him with his belated state of mind. These active, bereaved, debating minds, up-to-date respecting every phenomenon current, had been taking note of the times—they had pondered *zeitgeist*. Behind time, indeed, was the traveler who had come their way and was not informed and begloomed as they were by the phenomena

which had so staggered their understanding. These thinkers were "up to the times," while their companion in travel seemed hopelessly out of sympathy with the hour and its burden.

But observe again, these alert, troubled thinkers were also hopeless respecting the deepest problem of their theoretic life. "But we hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel." "It is all over now: he is dead and buried. Israel must toil on in hopeless thralldom to the hated Roman yoke, and all our prospects are engulfed in discouragement." It is ever so, if there be no light but that of reason on our path and destiny. The Jesus that these thinkers knew was indeed "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." Philosophy has always room for one more teacher if he has a theory for its contemplation, and will pay tribute to man's patronizing intellectual estimate of his message. A philosophy gets no further than to a prophet. It never sees a redeemer; only let Jesus be one of a series of intellectual and moral geniuses for the mind to admire and he can have a standing in its lyceum. In Rome he could be admitted to the Pantheon of the gods if only those gods be exaggerated men. Faith, however, must have a Savior and Lord, one standing in a class by himself; who can unveil himself to the soul's inner eye and cause the heart to burn with his own divine authentication. But thinking never finds him; it did not then, it cannot now.

There was a rumor, indeed—perhaps the thinkers would do well to mention it since they are telling the morning's news to thier wayside guest—that certain women of their company, who were early at the tomb, had reported a vision of angels, who said that the Christ was alive; some of the disciples themselves had gone to the tomb and found it empty. Beyond the existence of these rumors, however—rumors which sentimental women might entertain—strong-minded, thinking men could scarcely credit them as fact; and so they conclude

the reference to the hearsay of the hour by the self-satisfied comment, "but him they saw not."

Thus far in the narrative, we have the religious thinker—the type of religionist ever so much bepraised. But let us observe in what follows that we have also the divine estimate of all such in the plaintive reproof of Christ, "and he said unto them, O foolish men and slow of heart to believe," etc. Now be it observed, this is not the language of mere censure when the Master said, "O foolish men;" he did not employ a mere impatient epithet. He was truly characterizing the state of these men in the stage which they had reached. He virtually said: "O men without understanding, men destitute of the higher reason; O men abnormal and irrational concerning the higher wisdom." As thus merely speculating about the problem of the Christ and your relation to him, your language is that of unreason; you forget that there is a higher nature of things in the universe, even that grounded in "the lamb slain before the foundation of the world," and that under this order there is a higher propriety in events than you have yet discovered. "Behooved it not the Christ—such a one as was predicted from of old, such a one as the Messiah of Israel, such a one as had long been waited for as the desire of all nations—behooved it not that such a Christ should have suffered these things and to enter into his glory; and beginning from Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself"—that is, the things concerning himself *on that subject*, the necessity of the dying and rising again of the world's Redeemer.

In the light of this narrative the higher rationalism of the universe is characterized by at least four things:

1. By the demonstration of the inadequacy of mere intellectualism. Christ becomes unveiled to men through the operation of other and deeper faculties than mere thought about him. The entire composite personality of man is involved. The conscience must act, the emo-

tions must move, the will yield, and the heart must burn in personal sympathy with one who is more than the Jesus of history and a prophet among prophets; even one who is yearned for as personal Redeemer and Lord.

2. By the discernment that redemption is God's deepest work, deeper than creation and prior to it. This world was created through Christ the Eternal Logos of the Divine Trinity, and hence man and his life are to be looked at from the view point of the second Adam rather than the first. Deep as is the fall, the purpose to redeem is deeper. Sin may crucify Jesus, may attempt to slay the Lord of Glory, but back of all sin's malice is God's voluntary atoning grace, which "lays down" life that it "may take it again," and become the soul's Savior and Master.

3. By honor placed on confiding fellowship, "and he made as though he would go further." This was not a deception practiced on the disciples; it was rather a coy test applied to see if they would invite him to closer relationship, or lose it. Had they let him go, they would have missed the full unveiling. Happily, the oncoming night made the companionship of the strange interpreter the more welcome, so they said: "Abide with us, for it is toward evening." His journey, therefore, sympathetically slackened with theirs, and he took them further into the secret of his presence and gave them compensation for all their weariness and heart-sickness. And thus he always does when invited into the inner sanctuary of the soul.

4. By an authentication to brokenness of spirit, he was "made known to them in the breaking of bread." When he and the disciples were all alone within the closed doors, and they were gazing reverently upon his face, they then became witness to one mystic act: he took a loaf, emblem of his own incarnate body; having sanctified it, he brake it, and in that breaking, symbolic of his own self-sacrifice and of theirs in a similar brokenness to his claims, he became fully known to them, and all the

agnosticism of the mere thinker passed into a full knowledge of experienced first-hand realization of who he was. True, he "vanished" out of their sight after such mystic disclosure, but in spirit he came again and again, and always does as often as we enthrone him. Then observe that in the new strength derived from so transcendent a vision the disciples were enabled to arise despite all the weariness of the day's march, and in superhuman vigor, strode all the way back to Jerusalem, to "rehearse the things they heard in the way." And so from similar insight into the person of the risen Christ shall we gain similar reinforcement of power for all the service to which he calls us.