

A PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek . . ."

Matthew xxi. 5.

A POET sees what we prosaic (perhaps prosy) mortals see, but he sees it clearly and with deep feeling. Then, because he is a poet, he put his vision and his feeling into words. His poem is made up of these words in combination, and the greatness of his lyric is that the poem helps us to see what he sees, to feel what he feels, and so to understand ourselves and our feelings.

The philosopher, says Irwin Edman,¹ seeks a unified vision of the universe, and his philosophy is a lyric; that is, his system of philosophy ought to be his poem about nature and destiny. His world-outlook,—*Weltanschauung*, if you want the technical term,—is the commentary made by his private spirit on the public domain of nature and reality. Observe that philosophy is being defined as world-outlook, a result, rather than as love of wisdom, presumably a dynamic. A philosophical theory is as personal as a lyric poem; it is the philosopher's song of joy or his psalm of life or his chant of mourning or his paean of victory: its theme happens to be nature and destiny.

As the British philosopher Levy says in a recent book,² man demands a philosophy that reveals his connexion with the rest of the universe, with the earth on which he stands, the food he eats, and the men he meets or reads about, so that he can see the social conditioning of his own thinking and, more important, so that he can participate in the social process whereby the world is being transformed (if the changes amount to transformation). That is a modern and up-to-date way of saying that a person wants to know what is going on in the world and to have some active part in it: if there is an election, he wants to vote, and if possible to help his party to win; if there is a war, a man wants to fight and to come out alive, but in a good cause he is willing to risk defeat or even death for a noble end;

¹ *Four Ways of Philosophy*, p. 234 f.

² *A Philosophy for a Modern Man*; cited from a review in *The Nation*.

if there is an automobile collision he wants to aid in picking up the victims or in rolling the battered machines off the highway; if there is a harvest he wants to gather a crop; if flowers bloom on the prairies and under the trees, he wants to ride along rural roads; if yards in town are beautiful, he wants to take a Sunday afternoon walk along streets that lead to beauty; if a football game is the most important event in town, he wants to see it and (in the U.S.A. at least) to cheer himself hoarse, or at the very least to learn the final score of the game.

Let me show you a multitude thronging to Jerusalem to have part in the great national religious festival of the Passover. From the populous and pious north long trains of walking pilgrims with a few slow donkeys filled the roads to Jerusalem. The arrival of Jesus doubled the crowd, for from the city both residents and festival sojourners came forth to meet Him. All the world of Jewry was represented there: everybody came and brought his wife and children. Joining the Jesus Whom they acclaimed, the whole multitude with triumphal shouting marched up the last climb to the holy city. "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." That was religion's hymn of praise. "Hosanna to the Son of David," namely, to the royal heir to a nation's throne. That was patriotism cheering a nation's leader; that was nationalism welcoming one whom they hoped to see and follow as sword-crowned king. The comment offers us all a philosophy of life.

"Behold, thy king cometh unto thee, meek . . ." That text is a bit of poetry, quoted from an old prophecy (Zech. ix. 9). Its seven English words offer a philosophy of life. They show a vision of reality, a picture of true values, a map of the trail to success: they describe the royal road on which Jesus travelled, they reveal the great process of the universe, and they point out the way to the most worth-while things that you may seek. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek." The king comes in meekness and lowliness; the meek King comes to you. Instead of being proud, He is meek and lowly. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek." There you have a whole philosophy of life.

That is a philosophy of life. It is God's truth. It is a poet's inspired summary of great truth, of greater truth than the poet knew. It is truth about God, truth about life, truth about ourselves. It is an inspired prophet's summary of great truth, truth

perhaps beyond the prophet's understanding of the events to come but probably not beyond his understanding of the divine dealings and moral principles involved. It is an inspired evangelist's summary of great truth, of truth which he understood when at last he wrote. Prediction and fulfilment, event and meaning, fact and doctrine, were brought together at last. The unity remains, and the teaching is there for us. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek." The royal road is the humble road. Jesus came as King. He knew that He was coming to die. He came humbly and peacefully, riding a little donkey. No chariot, no war-horse, not even a great strong mule; just a little donkey. They hailed Jesus as king, but He did not organize a new political party nor foment a revolution. He did not demand the keys of Jerusalem nor control of the temple. He deliberately took the lowly road. He was coming to die; He was riding toward Calvary. As King, He turned His steps down toward the Cross.

The lowly road was His royal road. He travelled through a Cross to a Crown. He was to rise again and live again, in power and glory. But he was humbling himself to death, even the cursed death of the cross. This self-forgetful pathway reminds one of the royal law in James (ii. 8), "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself". Life, as a college dean remarked to me in a military camp last summer, is a matter of comparative values. This royal law and this royal road rate oneself at a low value but set a high value upon others.

For us also the road up leads down. To climb the heights one must first go down through the valley of humiliation and perhaps wade across some slough of despond before carrying the burden of service up the steep slopes to some peak of triumph. Paradox, if you are fond of thinking that way, is found all through the gospel message. The Son of God came down and died that we might live. In God's sight, the standing of a sinner who humbly beats his breast and begs for mercy is better than that of the self-righteous Pharisee who boasts of his moral attainments and despises his sinful brother. To follow Jesus into glory, you must begin by cross-bearing. The best way to climb is on your knees, with other people's troubles burdening your back.

This royal road, this meek road of lowliness, so contrary to human pride and racial pride and personal pride, is that

planned by the King of heaven. This was the road divinely planned for Jesus Christ, the Divine Saviour of sinful humanity. He took that road. This was the predestined road for redemption in general. To change human progress from its downward slide, down an inclined plane from sin to sin to death, One from Above went still lower to lift us up from beneath. This has been the predestined and commanded road for the great men of the Church in all ages. The great missionaries gave up home and often gave up family. In war-racked China to-day our missionaries are cheerfully giving up their right to protection by their native flags and sharing danger with those among whom God has called them to preach, by word and by life and perhaps by death, the gospel of the Son of God Who loved us and gave Himself for us. God has planned such a road for all who, accepting the Christian name, undertake to live the Christian life, whether they think of it as primarily gratitude or obedience or imitation of Christ or witness-bearing or love. Think in such terms as these: not what you do to get yourself saved, but what you do in forgetfulness of self; not what you give to buy a high seat in heaven, but what you give to remove hell from someone's life on earth; not the activity of a man earning money, but the activity of a man who loves God and his fellow men.

"Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek." Serve your King; follow your King; love your King; be like your King. That is the divine plan, the great curve along which the entire universe is travelling. The great curve of the universe is not a circle, around and around and over again. The great curve of the universe is not an ellipse, with its rhythm and repetition. The great curve of the universe is not even a spiral, around and around again but ever higher and higher. We have optimistic evolutionists who find the world getting better and better; and we have dialecticians and dispensationalists who find it getting worse and worse. There are no straight lines in nature and no such simple formula is realistic. Neither is a simple formula of expansion a correct description of what is taking place, nor will increasing complexity, i.e. organized or organic heterogeneity, nor the second law of thermo-dynamics suffice any more than the magnificent emptiness of Herbert Spencer's law of evolution. ~~No simple line will do, whether a line going down or a line coming up.~~ The cosmic curve is first down, then

up. The Lord Jesus Christ went down and then came up. The mercy of God finds us down and brings us up. God's providence may cast us down in order to lift us up. He may find us low and push us lower before He carries us aloft. The royal road dips before it ascends; the upward road leads down; we must kneel in order to jump; and step down if we would climb. This is the divine plan, the great curve along which the entire universe is moving.

Lift up your hearts! Think of God, Who designed and made uncounted far-off suns that shine as blue specks in our starry heavens. Think of God, Who dwelleth in the glory of unapproachable light surrounded by angelic hosts of His own creation. Think of God, Who called visible light into being and formed the earth and the world in which we dwell. Think of God, Who created things in the beginning, Who guides their development all the time, Who wisely rules over His universe, and Who will turn all things and events that are, have been, and shall be, into His own good ends. Lift up your hearts! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, Meek. This Almighty God of Whom we are thinking chose to be surrounded in eternity by a multitude of redeemed human souls. This God wanted an innumerable multitude of forgiven sinners like us to dwell with Him, to glorify and enjoy Him forever. This God cared greatly about us and such as we, about us and our parents and grandparents, about us and our children. This God cared so much about us and our kind that for us He opened the hard but noble way through death to life. This Almighty God, Who cares, appointed our pilgrimage through long hard years to rest and reunion in joy at the end. God gave His Son to die; by death that Son Jesus won a more glorious throne. That royal road makes Him our King. A King Whose glory comes from grace; His Cross your Crown.

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