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## A Study of Festus.

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TEXT—Acts xxvi, 24: "And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, Thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad. Our authorized translation makes Festus use two expressions to describe Paul's condition—"beside thyself" and "mad." In each the words are really the same, and when in our common speech we say a man is "beside himself," we are simply stating our philosophical conception of what madness is. We each have a "self" of which we are conscious, which we distinguish from all else, and in relation to which alone we can have knowledge of aught else. It is in relation to this conscious self, that all things assume a definite and fixed order, that there is a cosmos, an intelligible universe. Hence, if a man loses himself, as we say, is "beside himself," he has lost his bearings, for him the established order of the universe is no more, all is confusion. Having lost grip of himself and of the world in relation to himself, he has no test of reality, no standard of truth, and becomes a confused dreamer.

Such a man does Festus consider Paul to be one who has shut himself up to books and religious speculations, until he has lost his balance, is beside his true common-sense self, and now mistakes the religious dreams and wild fancies of a disordered brain for facts. Paul, he thinks, has got away from his true self, and from that established order of the universe which exists in the consciousness of sane men. He seems to ignore everything in life which has reality and value, and to be wholly taken up with the creations of his imagination.

Here is a man who believes that a voice from heaven has spoken to him, and that the voice is that of one Jesus, who was crucified and is alive again in the Heavens—who believes, not only in the immortality of the soul, but in the resurrection of the body. Here is a man simple enough to believe not only that there is a God, but that He cares for men, loves them and has made sacrifice for their good. Here is an enthusiast, with such a fool's estimate of himself, that he goes from country to country imagining that because of his preaching men will repent and turn to God and live holy lives. Here is one who turns aside from all opportunities of wealth, or position or honor, and yet amid persecutions and poverty imagines he has wealth, beyond all the gift of men, and more than imperial dignity as the ambassador of one greater than all the kings of earth!

No wonder that from Festus' standpoint Paul seemed to be a madman! How could an agnostic like Festus, who lived only for the world, whose only aspiration was after material gain and political pre-eminence, understand one like Paul, who lived constantly under the influence of the unseen and eternal, and aspired after a righteousness that will be realized in its perfection only in the new heaven and the new earth! As well expect the untutored savage to appreciate the highest art, or some stupid ignoramus, who had never learned his letters, to understand Shakespeare.

Men of the world never can understand Christians, not being born again they can neither see nor enter that kingdom of God in which the Christian lives and moves and has his being. No kingdom can be understood or appreciated by those who belong to a lower order. One of Plato's most famous illustrations is that of men who had dwelt all their lives in a cave with their backs toward the entrance, and had never seen anything but shadows flitting backward and forward on the wall opposite them. When persons came to them from the outer world, and told them of the sun and moon and stars and all the beautiful objects that might be seen in their light, they refused to believe—thought that those who brought them such tales were madmen, and maintained that the shadows on the cave wall were the only realities. Plato used these men in the cave to illustrate those who are imprisoned within the world of sense, who have experience of nothing beyond what they can feel or see within the limits of time and space—who believe not in the great world of ideas above and beyond the particulars—for whom God and the good are non-existent.

Take another illustration. The ordinary man stands upon an island in one of our beautiful Muskoka lakes at sunset. He feels the air warm and pleasant. He sees an expanse of water, several islands of varying shape, the sun going down behind the distant belt of shore-land, an overhanging sky with clouds streaked by many a changing hue. That he sees and nothing more. But let a Wordsworth stand there, and he feels

A "presence" that disturbs him with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts—a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,

And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things."

I can conceive of a person for whom such a passage as this has neither sense nor beauty. You ask, "What is the poet talking about?" As far as you are concerned you might as well listen to some half-witted fellow. This, however, does not prove that the poet's sentiment is foolish, but only that you are incapable of appreciating it.

Just so, Festus was unable to appreciate the lofty sentiments and supernatural truths Paul was enunciating in his address, and as we are inclined to think every one whom we do not understand a knave, or a fool, Festus puts the most charitable construction upon it, and says "Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad." The true Christian whose citizenship and conversation are in heaven, is always beyond the ken of those who are merely of the earth earthy, always a puzzle to them. Men who always act from interested motives cannot understand those who have a lofty sense of duty and always follow it, no matter what it costs them. When those who are themselves wholly selfish and dishonest see others acting honestly and unselfishly greatly to their own inconvenience and worldly loss, they think that either these men are fools or else more consummate knaves than themselves with some deep hidden scheme to be furthered. If Festus, who always acts with a view to preferment of rank or increase of wealth cannot understand how a man like Paul can, in his sober senses, throw away all his prospects as a learned and influential Pharisee, to join the despised sect of Nazarenes. When young men who are graduates of leading Universities, who have social position, and brilliant prospects before them, give up all and, for love of God and human souls, bury themselves as missionaries in Africa or China, the world calls them fanatics, and society people say, "Poor fellows, religion has turned their heads, they are beside themselves—too much religion has made them mad."

All this is not to be wondered at. The disciple is not above his Lord. Even Jesus was accused of having a devil and being mad by a wicked and adulterous generation who understood Him not. As the tenants of a mad-house usually think all others insane but themselves, so the poor deranged creatures whom the god of this world hath blinded, who are living in selfishness and sin, think that all those who, unlike themselves, have risen into the light of God and to a life of heroic self-sacrifice are mad.

But before we can say who is beside him self and who is not, we must decide what the true self is. If man is in his essence a sentient being, with reason, and intellectual faculties given only that he may the better devise means of gratifying the flesh during the short term of earthly existence, then every sane man will avoid pain and seek pleasure by every possible method, inclination will be supreme and to it will be sacrificed any sense of right, riches and honour will be striven after as the best earth can give, while no chance for this world will be sacrificed through any foolish hope of a kingdom of God hereafter.

But if the real self in man is the spirit, if he is in essence an immortal being, if the conception of God is wrapped up in the very consciousness of self, then the only man who is

not beside his true self, is the man who makes God the centre of all his thoughts, who subordinates flesh to spirit, inclination to right, time to eternity—the man whose one aim is to develop the true life of the soul and to this end subordinates all earthly things.

If the true self is the immortal Spirit, capable of knowing, loving and obeying God, he only is a wise man who cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"—who is ready to forego honours and lands, riches and honour, life itself, that he may enjoy the heavenly vision and find that life eternal which will be manifested with Christ in power and glory when the world and the lust thereof have passed away.

To the man who has seen the heavenly vision, to whom the living Christ has appeared, who has received a message and a command from the Most High, the whole framework of existence, though unchanged in fact is altogether new in purpose and meaning. He, himself is no longer an atom disregarded among the countless millions, no longer a mere beast left to take his license in the field of time. He is the beloved, the chosen, the sent of God—an heir of life eternal. Viewing all things from the standpoint of the life spiritual and eternal, he feels that there is no madness so great, no delirium so awful as to neglect the eternal interests of the soul, to miss for ever the goal of Christ like perfection, for the sake of the poor pleasures and honors the world can give. My hearers, among all the mad things you have ever heard of, what so mad as to believe in God, and yet not live for God.

The minding of the flesh is death, but the minding of the spirit is life and peace. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul or self?

Let a man gain what he will, let him enjoy what he may, either of wealth or pleasure or applause, if in the process he is narrowing his sympathies, deadening his affections, clipping the wings of all Godward aspiration—in a word, slaying his soul and slowly dying the death eternal—he can be described only by those awful words—*damned fool*.

Wherefore my beloved brethren, "Be ye not foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. For the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."



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