

features of the picture which the Evangelist is concerned to present. The most powerful motives that could guide his pen, even if an ideal one, were precisely such as would lead him to say that Jesus did *not* die at the hour when the Paschal Lamb was sacrificed, and to accept those facts of history which he has been too hastily supposed to do his best to overthrow.

WM. MILLIGAN.

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A CHAPTER OF GOSPEL HISTORY.

8.—THE GRACIOUS INVITATION. (*St. Matt.* xi. 28, 29.)

THIS word of gracious invitation to labouring and burdened men appears to have been uttered in immediate connection with the word which we considered in our last paper, and fitly closes a remarkable Chapter, which tells how Jesus was subjected to doubting interrogation by his own forerunner; how He was thereby led to characterize the Baptist in his strength and in his weakness, and to reflect on the unworthy treatment which both Himself and John had received from a fickle and foolish generation; and how bitter thoughts of the contemptuous unbelief of the wise, and of the unstable belief of the multitude in Capernaum and the other cities by the shores of the Galilean lake, threw Him back for consolation on his consciousness of Divine dignity as the Son and the Revealer of the Father. How natural, how characteristic, that the despised and rejected One, having first by an act of religious devotion sought solace in the bosom of his Father, should next seek further consolation to his wounded spirit by turning to needy human beings, whose

condition was such as to make them ready to give Him and his evangel welcome! For the Son of God is also Son of Man, and He is not content with getting sympathy from the Lord of heaven and earth; He must also have the satisfaction of *giving* sympathy and succour to miserable men. His loving heart yearns to meet with some who shall not criticize merely, but believe; and, believing, find rest. Therefore, having spoken to his Father in audible prayer, alone in spirit though outwardly surrounded by many who heard the mysterious words, He suddenly changes his tone, and addressing Himself to his followers, says, "Come unto me, all ye labouring and burdened ones, and *I* will cause you to rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and humble in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is kindly, and my burden is light."

These words were meant for all ages and for all men. The Speaker has just claimed for Himself a position of central and absolute importance in the world as the Mediator between God and man; and we are entitled to assume that his words are meant in the most comprehensive sense as having a world-wide range, as spoken to all men in all ages, as referring to all sorts of burdens, and as promising absolute perfect rest. More than any other words of Jesus in the Gospels these possess the fundamental attributes of the Christian religion, spirituality and universality. The Son of Man addresses Himself to humanity with reference to all that pertains to humanity's deepest well-being. He speaks, indeed, immediately to the people round about Him, but

not to them alone; but to the children of sorrow everywhere and in all time, whom sorrow has made wise enough to hunger for salvation and to welcome a Saviour. His ideal audience is humanity at large; and He, the Son of Man, connected by human ties with the race, hopes to get a patient appreciative hearing from all the heavy-laden among them; from all who realize and lay to heart man's miserable plight as a creature burdened with sorrow, and care, and sin, and guilt, and ignorance, and doubt, and darkness. As the ages run on, may the tender loving voice of the Redeemer meet fitting response in many hearts, and bring peace to many souls!

As we remarked in our last paper, a recent writer on the life of Jesus has endeavoured to characterize the spirit of this passage, in contrast to the words going before, by the phrase, "Humility in the midst of elevation."<sup>1</sup> And there obviously is a contrast between the two utterances. Yet the contrast is relative only; for the dignity, the transcendent importance, of the Speaker is strongly, though indirectly, asserted even here, where it is the humility of the Speaker that is accentuated. Come to *me*, says Jesus, and *I*<sup>2</sup> will give you rest—claiming for Himself ability to do what no other had yet been found able to accomplish. The summons to take up his yoke also implies an assumption of superiority on the Speaker's part. The "yoke" meant is that which a master imposes on a disciple, or a lord upon a servant: he who takes up the yoke consents to become the Speaker's scholar, and to learn of Him. True there follow the marvellous words, "for I am

<sup>1</sup> Keim, *Jesus von Nazara*, ii. 391.

<sup>2</sup> Κάγω. The "I" is emphatic.

meek and humble in heart," the very sound of which is soothing and rest-giving ; but in the very act of uttering the words the meek and lowly One plays the part of Master. Here, as in the scene of the feet-washing, the Pattern of meekness prescribes Himself as a pattern, and so in effect asserts his lordship.

The Speaker being the Lord and Saviour of men, and the ideal audience the sinful and suffering sons of Adam, it is obvious that the gracious invitation may legitimately be made the subject of a very comprehensive exposition, far exceeding the limits of a purely historical exegesis which aims at nothing more than ascertaining what meaning the first hearers were likely to take out of the words. We may give the burden of man and the needed rest the widest definition, and bring them so defined to the text, and put them into it and take them out of it again. Such exegesis, which takes out of texts what we have previously put into them, is often very profitless, but in the present instance to interdict it might well seem a wrong done to the weary and sore distressed ; and to restrict the expositor to a purely historical interpretation may not unnaturally be regarded as dooming him to humiliating failure. But, alas ! expound as we please, with large or with limited scope, shortcoming is inevitable ; for who is sufficient to unfold this utterance of the Blessed One ? who can tell all that was in his heart when He spake the precious words ? who can adequately conceive or express the bliss which it was in his heart and in his power to impart ?

We shall try to give a mere hint, first, of what this

word of the Lord Jesus meant for its first hearers; and, next, what it means now and evermore for humanity at large.

The word "yoke" suggests the thought that Jesus had in his mind a contrast between Himself and the Rabbis or scribes, the "wise and understanding people" of whom He had previously spoken. These wise men were teachers of the law, and their disciples, in current Jewish phrase, bore their yoke. And the yoke which these masters of the law imposed on their disciples was anything but an easy and kindly one, as we know from the testimony of our Lord Himself. "They bind," He said, "heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders."<sup>1</sup> It is highly probable, therefore, that, having these legal teachers and their grievous yoke in view, Jesus here invites men who feel the legal yoke galling their spirits to come to *Him*, that they may find that which they have not found with the Rabbis—rest. Those who have already come to Him are for the most part persons happily ignorant of the law—babes. He now invites to join their company those who do know the law, and to whom knowledge has brought only weariness, sorrow, and vexation of spirit. That such persons existed in those days, the words above quoted from another part of Matthew's Gospel sufficiently attest; and that Christ felt compassion for them, is also plain from the same words, and might be taken for granted without any express evidence. What class of men were more likely to awaken sympathy in Christ's heart than those who groaned under the burden of

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxiii. 4.

*legalism*—a burden which Peter in after days described as a “yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear”?<sup>1</sup> Such burdened ones, then, Jesus invites to come to Him—men who have been instructed in all the details of a complicated ritualistic system, made more complicated by the traditions of the elders, and have been trying to order their lives in accordance with it, and who have found the task wearisome and vain, a very labouring for the fire: and He assures them of rest if they will but take his yoke upon them.<sup>2</sup> And whence this mighty difference between his yoke and that of the scribes and Rabbis? Hence: taking his yoke means *learning of Him*. “Learn of me:” that is, not merely accept me as your teacher, but learn *me* as your lesson. Put my life, my spirit, myself, in place of the complicated legal system the scribes have taught you. Christ invites to admiration, love, imitation of Himself—a living law, in place of irksome compliance with a thousand dead mechanical rules. Surely an immense relief to the human spirit, thus to be delivered from a vain conversation received by tradition from the fathers, and to have the conscience purged from dead works to serve the loving Son of God! What a difference between loving One full of grace and truth, the incarnation of Divine Love and Wisdom, and the treadmill life of the poor legalist who scrupulously strives to fulfil the behests of the Mosaic statute-book, and the precepts of Rabbis over and above! Especially easy does the yoke of the Christian disciple appear when the law of Christ, Christ’s own moral excellence, is summed up in two

<sup>1</sup> Acts xv. 10.<sup>2</sup> Meyer and Neander both take this view.

words—"meek" and "humble in heart." The one epithet (*πραΰς*) denotes patience under the ills of life, the other (*ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ*), the condescension of love which stoops to the meanest positions and functions in order to bless others.<sup>1</sup> But who can doubt that that heart has attained unto rest in which dwell the graces of patience and charity? The very peace of God, Christ's own peace, reigns there, in all situations and amid all trials.

Jesus adds, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." And so it will be found to be by the man who has learned of Christ to the effect of being meek and humble. But here an objection naturally suggests itself. Is it not difficult to attain unto patience and the humility of a holy heavenly charity? Is it not even more easy to comply with any number of legal rules than to be humble, loving, patient? And if so, how can Christ's yoke be called easy, kindly, and his burden light? In reply we say it is difficult to be Christ-like; yet it cannot be said of Christ's yoke, as of that of the scribes, that it is irksome or galling. However difficult Christ's commandments may be to keep, they are, as the Apostle John says, not *grievous*; for it must be carefully noted that difficult and grievous are by no means synonymous. A law may be difficult to fulfil, and yet not grievous or burdensome to the spirit; a moral system may be very high pitched, yet not oppressive. In fact there is a sense in which it may be said that the loftier the morality the less burden-

<sup>1</sup> Olshausen (Comment. *in loc.*) distinguishes between *ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ* and *πρωχὸς τῷ πνεύματι*, regarding the latter as a predicate of sinful men, and not applicable to Christ.

some it is. Just as the atmosphere is heavier in the valleys than on the mountain tops, so a low-pitched ethical system lies heavier on the human spirit than one which sets the ideal of life very high. "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," is not an easy precept to keep; but who does not see that it is a less grievous commandment to any right-minded man than were one enjoining that we should not rise higher in conduct than the low moral level of pagan divinities? It is not the moral loftiness of a commandment which makes it burdensome or grievous. A commandment may be grievous either because of the arbitrary unreasonable nature of its contents, or because of the compulsory nature of its motive, or because of the indisposition of the person to whom the commandment is given. From the first cause the commandments of the scribes were grievous: they were essentially arbitrary and unreasonable. From a similar cause even the ceremonial law was grievous. That law was not indeed unreasonable, but it was a law suited to a state in which the capacity for appreciating reasons was not yet developed, and it became very irksome when that childish stage was passed. From the second cause, any law, even one in its own nature most reasonable, may be grievous. Every commandment is grievous when the motive in closest contact with the conscience is the fear of penalty. Terrorism, intimidation, makes all laws—the laws of the family, the laws of the school, the laws of the land, the laws of God—burdensome. The laws of the land, however just, are grievous to one who is induced to keep them solely by the fear of the gaol, the reformatory,



or the gallows. They are not grievous to one who delights in a sober righteous life, because he never thinks of the penalty, but does the right because he loves it. In this sense we are to understand the statement of the Apostle Paul, "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient." The law, with its penal sanctions, is made for those who, but for the penalty, would do the things which are contrary to the law; not for those who, without regard to the penalty, do of their own accord the things contained in the law. From the third cause, indisposition in the subject, laws not only eminently reasonable, but which seek to ensure obedience only by the sweetest persuasives, may be burdensome. The first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," enforced by the reason annexed, "I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage," was in itself the opposite of grievous. But to a people whose sojourn in Egypt had made them familiar with the worship of the sacred ox, it was an irksome thing to be required to have no other God save Him who had delivered them out of the hands of their oppressors. God's most reasonable requirement was as burdensome to the indisposed minds of the people of Israel as the tables of stone on which the Ten Commandments were written. Indisposition will make any code of morals, however holy, just, and good, a very table of stone; and it needs that the law should be written on the heart in order that all sense of grievousness may be removed, which accordingly was promised as a characteristic blessing of the new covenant.

“ I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ”—not on tables of stone, as of old.

None of these causes of grievousness come into play in connection with Christ's yoke. His law is in the first place characterized by “sweet reasonableness.” His moral sayings commend themselves at once to our hearts and consciences as good, acceptable, and perfect. Easy to keep they certainly are not; the opposite is plainly declared in the words spoken to the disciples on the occasion of the feet-washing: “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” Still, Christ's commandments, however difficult, are not grievous. In the language of the Psalmist, his righteousness is like the great mountains, high, difficult to climb, yet objects of never-ceasing admiration, and by their very altitude provoking desire to make the ascent, and drawing the enthusiastic climber by an irresistible attraction upward toward their snowy summits. Then, secondly, Christ could say with truth, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light,” because the motives He appeals to are not compulsory, but persuasive. One, the only one expressly alluded to, is his own example—“Learn of me, I am meek and lowly in heart; be as I am.” In this respect Jesus stands in marked contrast to the scribes. They bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, *but they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers.* He, on the other hand, said to his disciples, Imitate me; and by placing all duty in imitation of Himself, He made his yoke easy: for what disciple will complain who is required simply to be as his master? Another motive

not referred to in the text (though it is latent in the words "humble in heart," "He humbled himself, and became obedient, even unto death"), but well known to Christians now, is gratitude for the blessing of redemption, for relief from the burden of guilt. Paul alludes to this motive when he says, "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice;" and again, "Ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body;" and once more, "The love of Christ constraineth us." The power of this motive was not unknown to some even in Christ's own lifetime, as, *e.g.*, to the woman "who was a sinner," and who afterwards appears to have joined those who followed Him and ministered unto Him of their substance.<sup>1</sup> Admiration, gratitude, surely these are motives fitted to make the burden of obedience light! Our Master and Lord has recourse not to intimidations but to *inspirations*, the inspiration of a lofty moral ideal realized in Himself, and the still more powerful inspiration that proceeds from the cross. Surely these inspirations ought to make his yoke easy and kindly! Surely meditation on the life and death of Christ ought to be as wings, helping us to soar to the mountain heights of duty; or as military music, inspiring courage, banishing fear, and causing us to march to battle and hardship and danger with a light step and a gay cheerful spirit! Arduous, difficult, the Christian life will be found to be by all who earnestly attempt it. But in this respect it is not singular. All things *noble* are difficult. Art is difficult, as well as Christian holiness. But it is no hardship to the artist to be required to excel in his

<sup>1</sup> Luke vii. 37; *cf.* viii. 1-3.

art. He imposes on himself the obligation, without waiting for the commandment of a master. His own ideal obliges him; and if that ideal has been suggested to him by the study of the works of a famous master, the fact does not discourage, but rather stimulates. The ideal and the example together stimulate him to effort, and give him no rest till he have reached a tolerable approximation to both. Even so is it with all genuine disciples of Jesus. As for those who are not genuine disciples, we take no account of them. Were we to include them among the number of disciples, we should have to admit that Christ's yoke, like other yokes, may be made grievous through indisposition. As a matter of fact there are multitudes of so-called Christians to whom, from this cause, Christ's yoke is grievous; knowing their Lord's will, but unwilling to do it; not in sympathy with the heroic unworldly spirit of Christian morality, content with the morally commonplace, and living as mere drudges down even on that low level. But such have never yet come to Christ's school. They are legalists, disciples of the scribes and Pharisees, carrying God's law not in their hearts, but, so to speak, on their backs, written on tables of stone, and staggering under the weight of obligation. Christ's genuine disciples have his spirit in them—"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Having Christ's spirit in them, they find his yoke easy, and can run in the way of his commandments. "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world."

Thus far we have considered the gracious invitation as addressed principally to those who, weary of legalism, hungered for another righteousness than

that of the scribes and Pharisees. It was worth our while to dwell at considerable length on this view of the passage, because, when regarded from this point of view, the words have an important bearing on the question how far Jesus meant to set aside the Jewish law. On this subject He was comparatively reticent. The number of his express utterances thereon are very few, and we are left to gather his mind rather from the undercurrent of his teaching than from explicit formal declarations. Nowhere in the Gospels, for example, do we find such a saying as that of Paul, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." <sup>1</sup> If such a word had been found among the sayings of the Church's Head, it would have saved much trouble in after days. And yet who does not feel, in reading the Beatitudes, or this gracious invitation, that Christ *means* what Paul *says*? Circumcision, ritualism, legalism, are nothing to Him who issues this invitation. He addresses Himself to men in the same state of mind as Paul when he had come to see that legal righteousness was futile; and those who respond to his call will pass into a spiritual condition essentially analogous to that of the Apostle when he was converted to Christianity. Hence if we wish to know what the rest Jesus promises in its fully developed form is, we have but to inquire what Paul gained when he ceased to be a Pharisee and became a Christian. Through the case of Paul we may learn what Jesus undertakes to do for humanity at large; the experience of the Apostle of the Gentiles being as it were typical of the universal experience of man-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 19.

kind, helping us to know in its full extent man's need, and Christ's ability to meet it.

From St. Paul's Epistles we learn that he found in Christ three forms of rest: rest to his *conscience*, through deliverance from sin; rest to his *mind*, through the knowledge of God; and rest to his *heart*, in an object of affection whom he might love with all the enthusiasm of which he was capable, without risk of idolatry. All these things men need. Each part of their nature has its own peculiar burden, and unless Christ can deliver from all the three burdens He is not entitled to say without qualification to the labouring and heavy-laden, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Paul being witness, Christ is able to remove all these burdens. With reference to the first, the burden of conscience, he represents Christ as removing it by bearing men's sin in Himself. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."<sup>1</sup> With reference to the second, the burden of ignorance, he represents Christ as removing it in virtue of his being the Incarnate Wisdom, the Revealer of God, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," "who is of God made unto us wisdom," whom to know it is worth one's while "to count all things but loss."<sup>2</sup> With reference to the third, the burden of an empty or selfish heart, he represents Christ as removing it by taking possession of the heart through his self-sacrificing love, and moving it to adopt in turn, as its principle of life, the spirit of self-sacrifice. "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Col. ii. 3; 1 Cor. i. 30; Phil. iii. 8.

then all died: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.”<sup>1</sup> And Paul’s testimony is confirmed on all these points by multitudes of Christians who have had similar experiences. Still, as of old, the Cross speaks peace to troubled consciences, doubtless through the medium of diverse theologies and theories of atonement, but essentially in the same way for all. Still, too, as of old, Christ proves Himself able to relieve perplexed minds of the heavy burden of ignorance concerning God and human destiny. The Son reveals the Father. To those who cannot be content with the unknown God of modern philosophy, and who feel the mystery of life like an intolerable burden on the heart, who in effect offer up the prayer of the old Greek poet—

Pity our eagerness to know  
 From whence we come and whither go;  
 How stole into the world, and why,  
 Sin, and her daughter, misery.  
 Teach us to whom among the blest  
 Prayer must be offered and sin confess  
 That the heavy-laden and sore distress’d  
 May to their weary souls find rest<sup>2</sup>—

to such Jesus replies: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. God is a Father. I, the Son of Man, am also his Son; in and through me, ye, too, are sons of God.” Such, in brief, is Christ’s theology. Most satisfactory, rest-giving theses, truly, to those whose

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Fragment of Euripides, translated by D’Arcy W. Thompson in *Saies Attici*, p. 183.

minds cannot rest in the Great Unknowable, the Ultimate Force, the unconscious Reason of Nature, the impersonal Moral Order of the world, the neuter Power not ourselves making for righteousness!

Finally, Christ is still able to deliver men from the burden of an unsatisfied, empty, and therefore heavy heart, which cannot find its portion in the outward, the transient, the material. To men labouring under this burden Christ says, "Love not the world; love me, and all will be well. You have been the slaves of your desires and affections hitherto, and now you feel the yoke galling. Come to me, then; become my disciples; learn to live as I live; put me in the place of possessions and friends; love me as ye have hitherto loved these—passionately, supremely—and your hearts will be at rest from the fever of life in the sweet, peaceful, divine rest of a meek and lowly mind." And his promise is not vain. Rest does come to those who so act, rest whose perfection is proved by its power to maintain itself in the midst of trouble and care. For while we live these things will be.

If I find Him, if I follow,  
What his guerdon here?  
Many a sorrow, many a labour,  
Many a tear.

Yet sorrow, labour, and tears notwithstanding, the peace of God that passeth all understanding keeps the heart and mind of the man who has taken Christ's yoke upon him,

ALEX. B. BRUCE.

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