

*THE LAWS OF THE KINGDOM AND THE
INVITATION OF THE KING.*

III.—THE INVITATION.—ST. MATTHEW xi. 28—30.

WE have considered the two great Laws of the Kingdom, brief and imperfect as all such consideration must needs be. But Christ our Master is not content with giving laws to his subjects. His revelation does not stop here. He is a King, not only in the majesty of his rule; He is a King also in the greatness of his condescension. He has laws that must be obeyed; but He has also a free and gracious Invitation, and a promise the sweetest that ever fell upon the ear of man. And the Invitation, it is of importance to observe, flows out of, and rests upon, the Laws. The Invitation is addressed, not to man's curiosity, or to man's pride, or to man's intellectual capacity, but to his need, to his sense of misery, to his weariness, to his sin. There we see the principle of the First Law, in the wants of the persons who are addressed. The principle of the Second Law is no less apparent in the character of the Person who speaks, and whose character shines with such surpassing glory in the Invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Think, first of all for a moment, of the wonderful contrast with the scene and the words just going before. Where shall we find a more striking exhibition of the "severity" and the "goodness" of God? "Then began he to upbraid the cities in which his mighty works were done: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! And thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto heaven?"—thou that, in the arro-

gance of thy heart, wouldest set thy seat among the stars—"Nay, thou shalt be thrust down to Hades." With solemn joy He beholds the righteous judgment, the inevitable fulfilment of the righteous law, the sentence of the Father's unerring wisdom: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." There is the absolute acquiescence in the Father's will as a perfectly righteous will. But does this imply any arbitrary exclusion from the kingdom? Has God erected any barrier in the way of those who would enter in? Has he pre-ordained any to the outer darkness? Let the largeness of the Invitation answer. "Come unto me, ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden."

And what shall I say of these words? Shall I call them most truly human, or most truly Divine? Certainly they are most truly Divine. Put those words into the mouth of an apostle, and then you will feel what I mean. Let the saintliest, the most loving, the most truly inspired of God's messengers to man address us in words like these: let a Paul or a John say to us, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest;" could we listen to the invitation? Should we not recoil from the human teacher or the human saint who should dare to give us such a promise? Should we not feel instinctively that it must be treacherous on his lips? No thoughtful honest man can have ever read those words, *Venite ad me omnes laborantes*, over the shrine of St. Anthony at Padua, without a painful sense of recoil as from a blasphemous parody. We cannot trust man, we cannot find rest in man. None but God

can say to us, unless in mockery, "Come unto me; learn of me; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." If I were asked to point out one passage in the Gospels which should affirm most clearly, which should bring home to the heart most consolingly, the proper Divinity of Christ our Lord, I would choose this; and I would choose it, not because of the sublime acknowledgment which it contains of the eternal righteousness of the Father, nor because of the sublime witness which it bears to the perfect and intimate union and fellowship between the Father and the Son; but because of the sublime invitation which falls from the lips of Him who spake as man never spake, saying, "Come unto me." I say, these words are most truly Divine. He who utters them, utters them in the full consciousness that all things are delivered to Him of the Father, and that He makes the revelation to whom He will. I see here the Majesty and the Sovereignty of the Speaker.

But I say also these words are most truly human. The Invitation, so full of Divine power and grace, is full also of human tenderness and pity. How soothing in their matchless sympathy, how precious to the poor struggling fainting human heart, how infinitely above the trivial sentimentality of too much human sympathy is every syllable of that Invitation! "Come unto me." Why? Not because I am the Lord of angels and of men; not because I have all power in heaven and on earth; not because resistance to me is vain and submission to me is necessary; but, "Come unto me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Blessed words, sweet as the dews of heaven, gracious as the droppings of a summer cloud.

For they fall from human lips ; He who bids us bring to Him the burden of our sorrow and the burden of our sin, and gives us his promise of rest, is One who has taken the burden upon Himself, whose nature is our nature, who suffered being tempted, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, for they are his.

This is the infinite blessedness of this Divine human revelation. It is not only its largeness, "Come unto me, *all* ye that labour and are heavy laden." That Invitation is wide as the world and long as the ages. That Invitation reaches to every phase of human life ; for what phase of life does not confess itself weary and long for rest ? Who is there, if he have left the home of his youth behind him and fairly launched upon the stormy ocean of life, that does not feel the weary tossing of the billows, and turn his wistful eyes to some land of hoped-for rest ? The dull monotony of life, the everlasting, weary, profitless round, the labour leading to nothing, which weighed like lead on the Preacher's heart as he surveyed the world, till he broke forth into the bitter cry, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," is the lot of man still. The weariness, the dissatisfaction is not less as the world grows older. Never, perhaps, did it weigh so heavily as now. Even those whom we might think freest from trouble, men who have been caressed and flattered by the world, who have been happy in their families and beloved by their friends, cannot repress the cry that goes up from their hearts, Who will give us rest ? "I have reached nearly to the length of my tether," wrote one not long ago ; "I have grown old and apathetic and stupid. All I care for in the way of personal enjoyment is quiet, ease ; to

have nothing to do, nothing to think of. My only glance is backward. There is so little before me, that I had rather not look that way." To *all* such the invitation speaks by its comprehensiveness. But it does more. It might be large, it might be wide, and yet it might not be winning. The accents might be kingly, but they might be cold withal and awful, and men might fear to obey them. But here is the blessedness of Christ's invitation, not only its freedom, its largeness, but the certainty that none can be rejected, none can be misunderstood, none can be dealt harshly with. "Come unto me, *for I am meek and lowly of heart.*" Who shall fear to come to One who thus removes their fear? Why seek for any intercessor with *Him*? Why go to saint, or angel, or Virgin Mother? Why pour the tale of guilt into the ear of human priest, when *He* says, "Come unto me, for I am meek and lowly of heart"? It is this meekness, this lowliness of heart, which speaks with such attractive power. It is this infinite gentleness united with the infinite majesty which has drawn men to Christ. It is this marvellous union of all-embracing and perfect sympathy with Divine power to succour and to save which has made Him in all ages the sovereign of human hearts. To none other can *all* turn, sure each that his own individual grief or burden will be fully shared. How impossible it is for the rich to sympathize with the poor. With the kindest and best intentions, there must always be a gulf between them. How impossible for those in health to minister with always unflinching delicate tact to the weariness and the pain of a sick bed. There are bitter sorrows that no human friend can comfort. There are heartaches to which all human

words seem as mockery. There are cruel wrestlings with doubt; there is anguish of soul so deep that no human voice can still it; there is a darkness that may be felt which no earthly light can dispel. There are shame and guilt which flee from the presence of human helpers. And yet it is a human voice, and a human hand, and a human heart, which we need. Who shall help us? God is a Spirit, awful in his sovereign greatness, and man is like ourselves, hard in judgment and weak to help. But Christ says, "Come unto me." Then it is that, "repulsed on all sides, lonely and helpless, we turn to Him whose mighty heart understands all." Breaking down beneath his burden of poverty, sorrow, pain, bereavement, doubt, anxiety, shame, sin, the man drinks in that Voice and clings to that Hand, crying, "Lord, thou biddest the weary and the heavy laden to come to Thee; and I am weary, weary with my pain, weary with my grief, weary with my perpetual conflict with unbelief, weary with my fruitless struggles against Thy love, weary with my long wandering from my Father's house. Lord, I come to Thee; give rest to my soul."

And to that cry comes the blessed answer of peace, "I *will* give rest unto your soul." And that rest Christ does give. His promise is not a deceitful promise. He does not give a stone for bread; He does not give as the world gives; He does not mock us with the mirage of happiness, which makes the fever in our veins rage more terribly than before. He does take away the weariness from life. He does fill the heart with his own mighty peace. Yet, be it observed, not without a condition. "Take my yoke upon you; learn

of me." The phrase is one which would be very intelligible to those to whom it was addressed. "The yoke of the commandments" was a phrase they had doubtless heard from their Rabbinic teachers. There is a passage in the Mishnah (*Berachôth*, ii. 2) which strikingly illustrates our Lord's words here. The two benedictions with which public worship began, morning and evening, were followed immediately by the *Shema'*, as it was called, from its first word in Hebrew (שמע), which consisted of three passages of the Law—Deuteronomy vi. 4-9, xi. 13-21; Numbers xv. 37-41. This part of the service is unquestionably of great antiquity, and there can be no doubt that our Lord must often have joined in it. But the point to which I wish to draw attention is the explanation which is given in the Mishnah of the order in which these passages follow one another. Rabbi Joshua ben Qorchah says that the section Deuteronomy vi. 4-9 precedes the section Deuteronomy xi. 13-21, to teach us "that we are to take upon ourselves first the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, and only after that the yoke of the commandments." First: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might," &c.; and then, the keeping of the commandments, the blessings of obedience, the penalty of disobedience, the duty of laying up these words in the heart, of binding them upon the hands, and as frontlets between the eyes, of teaching them to children, of speaking of them at all times, and writing them upon the posts of the doors and the gates. This is surely an interpretation displaying a remarkable spiritual insight, and wonderfully in accordance with the order of our

Lord's Invitation. Here, too, there is first the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, the summons to a personal love and devotion, the gracious Invitation, "Come unto me," the Heart of Love seeking love in return; and here, too, this is followed by the yoke of the commandments: "Take my yoke upon you, learn of me; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Must not our Lord's words have had a special significance for those whom He addressed, not only because He offered them the light yoke of loving obedience to Him instead of the hard yoke of legal and ritual observances imposed upon them by their Rabbinic masters, but also because His teaching was in accordance with, though it transcended, that with which their own public worship had made them familiar?

But Christ does impose "a yoke" and "a burden." He is a Master who would have us "learn of him." And if we need humility that we may enter his school, we need patience and meekness and docility if we are to profit by his teaching. It is *not* an easy thing to be a Christian indeed. He does not call us to an indolent, easy, self-pleasing life, in which there are few duties and fewer cares. We must bow our necks to his yoke. And it is "a yoke" to lay a restraint upon our natural inclinations and to mortify self; it is a yoke to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, to watch over our desires, to curb our unruly, peevish, sullen, irritable tempers; it is a yoke to be calm when we are naturally fretful, to be meek and gentle when we are naturally proud and overbearing, to give up our own will and our own way when we are naturally bent upon having our own will and following our own way. It is a yoke to say to ourselves day by day, "I follow a Master who

bore shame and spitting and the crown of thorns and the cross, and I must bow the head to insult and wrong, and when I am reviled revile not again, but forgive until seventy times seven, and pray for those who hate and injure me."

It is "a burden" to feel the flesh lusting against the spirit, and to know that when we would do good evil is present with us; that no day can pass without a conflict, and that, alas! too often the issue is defeat. It is "a burden" to kneel in prayer, and to be numbed and chilled and weighed down in heart, instead of rising, as on eagles' wings, toward heaven. It is "a burden" to see our efforts baffled, our good evil spoken of, our motives misconstrued, our character maligned. It is "a burden" to think that, after all, we make but little progress, that we ourselves are little nearer to heaven, that others seem little the better for our words or example, that we have not touched and won the hearts of those nearest and dearest to us, much less enlarged the borders of Christ's kingdom on earth.

And yet this "yoke is easy" and this "burden is light." For to have this yoke and this burden is to have the mind of Christ and of God. It is to be on the side of truth and purity and gentleness and goodness and love in the great battle against wrong and wickedness and selfishness in every form, but first and chiefest in ourselves. They who have taken upon them this yoke and this burden have taken upon themselves first "the yoke of the kingdom of heaven." They have entered into it by the lowly gates of humility and self-renunciation. They have accepted the revelation of the Eternal Father in Christ, they acknowledge Him as their only Teacher. "Lord, to whom shall we go ?

thou hast the words of eternal life." They love Him with supreme unhesitating love; they sit at his feet with Mary, they watch his eye, they follow his hand. Love is their inspiration, and love makes all things easy and every burden light.

The heavy burden, the galling yoke, is the burden and the yoke of sin, of sin ruling, sin enslaving, sin obeyed in the lusts thereof; not of sin hated, mourned over, prayed against, fought against, vanquished by the grace that is in Christ. The yoke which is *not* easy is the yoke of passions holding the mastery and mocking us when we do their bidding. The burden which is *not* light is the burden of an accusing conscience, of a wasted life, of the fear of death, of the terrors of judgment to come. There is none to lighten that burden, there is no hope, no joy, no victory there. The slavery grows ever more hopeless: it is the antepast of hell.

But the message of the King is to *all*. "Come unto me all ye that labour" fringes with its glorious light the dark cloud, "Thou hast hidden." It seems to carry with it infinite possibilities of hope. The mighty works were done in vain, and the pride of Capernaum hid from its eyes the things that belonged to its peace, and Jewish doctors and Pharisees laid hard burdens and grievous to be borne on men's shoulders; and all this history has been repeated in the Christian Church. But the message has been repeated too. And as then it touched the heart of her¹ who, standing by, listened to it, and came and washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head as He sat at meat in Simon's house, so it has found an echo ever

¹ The narrative in Luke vii. 36-50 seems, in all probability, to have followed the discourse here.

since in all weary heavy-laden hearts. It will sound on through all the ages, till all, through many ways, by various discipline, have found their burden intolerable, have confessed their weariness, have taken at last his yoke, have found rest and peace in Him.

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SHORT PAPERS UPON THE PROPHET
JEREMIAH.

NO. 2.—THE OPENING VISIONS.

THE visions vouchsafed to Jeremiah are destitute of the sublimity and the awful magnificence of those by which Isaiah and Ezekiel were called to the prophetic office, but they are full of meaning. And it is remarkable that while those glorious visions seemed to fore-shew a career of splendour and power for those to whom they were granted, the simple allegories which unfolded themselves to Jeremiah's view were discouraging. They spoke of difficulty chiefly, and shewed that it was a hard work, and one well nigh hopeless, to which he was summoned. Perhaps that was what Jeremiah needed. There are some natures to which danger and difficulty bring strength. Mid the soft breezes of the south they are listless and indifferent, but when the keen east wind blows they are braced for exertion, and will do battle with the fierce storm. And so it was difficulty, hardship, ill-success, that were set before Jeremiah's eyes.

The first vision was merely a rod, *i. e.*, a branch of an almond tree. Now the almond tree is as full of meaning to the people of Judæa as the snowdrop is to