

*CHRISTIANITY'S FIRST INVITATION TO
THE WORLD.*

ST. MATTHEW XI. 28-30.

CHRISTIANITY is the first religion in the world in which the messenger is identified with the message; indeed, it might almost be said to be the only such religion in the world. The only approach to it in this respect with which we are acquainted is the creed of Mohammedanism, which has certainly for one of its leading articles the personal belief in the prophet. But while there can be little doubt that what exists of similarity in the creed of Mohammed exists as a survival of the Christian spirit, it must at the same time be confessed that the personal element in Mohammedanism bears no proportion to the personal element in Christianity. Mohammed, after all, claims no rank but that of the prophet of God. He brings no message in his own right; he issues no command on his own authority. Nay, if we look more closely, we shall find that he is not the subject of his message. He calls upon the world to believe in two things—the doctrine of God's unity and his own Divine commission to proclaim that doctrine. He does not utter to the world the voice, "Come unto me;" the approach which he asks is the approach to a doctrine; the personal confidence which he asks is the confidence that he has been empowered to proclaim that doctrine: beyond this his religion is a mere abstraction. If in a form of belief which existed six centuries after Christianity, and which certainly profited by Christian experience, we find so little trace of that personal element which in Christianity is vital, it will not surprise us to find still

less in the religions before the Cross. The founder of Buddhism has left upon the world the mark of his personal greatness; yet his personal greatness was in no sense the essence of the religion which he founded: rather the reverse. The essence of Buddhism was the discouragement of trust in personality, the discouragement of trust in everything which belonged to the individual life; it was the belief that individuality was valueless, and that life was worthless. Nor can it be said that even those popular mythologies which had individual beings for their object derived their power from the imposing or attractive personalities they presented for worship. The believers in those mythologies were in reality worshippers of the world—of rank, and wealth, and fame, and power. The gods were to them not an end, but the possible means to an end. They saw in them the tributaries to their own selfishness. They beheld in them the sources through which they might succeed in gratifying the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. The order of the secular and the sacred is, in Greek mythology, just the inversion of that which prevails in Christianity. In Christianity the world is recognized as an instrument through which man can serve God; in Greek mythology the gods are recognized as an instrument through which man can serve the world. In the most personal and human form which the religion of the ancient world ever assumed, it never made the personality an object of reverence; it never said, "Come unto *me*."

In this respect, then, the position of Christianity is altogether unique. From the very outset it is primarily not a system, but a life-revelation; its Messenger is

one with its message. It is to this unique fact in the Christian revelation that we must, in great measure, refer its catholicity. In Verse 27 of this very Chapter, the Founder of Christianity expressly claims this catholicity: "All things are delivered unto me of my father." A religion whose central truth is not so much the glory of a message as the glory of him who brings it is here declared to enlist the suffrages of mankind; it is universal by reason of its personality; it is catholic by reason of its human sympathy: "Come unto me." It cannot be denied, as a matter of historical fact, that Christianity *has* been the universal religion. We do not say it has ever had the largest number of followers; Buddhism is in this respect incomparably more imposing. We do not say it has, of all forms of worship, been the most rapid in its progress; Mohammedanism can lay claim to a larger number of votaries gathered in a shorter time. But neither number of votaries nor rapidity of progress has anything to do with the question of catholicity. The religion which numbers the smallest amount of adherents may be nearer to the type of universality than that which embraces the largest. For what is the test of universality, in other words, of universal adaptation? It is not the fact that in any given nation, or in any special quarter of the globe, an immense population of human beings has been enrolled under the banner of a particular faith. It is the fact that from all nations, and from every quarter of the globe, this faith has attracted to itself representative specimens of all ranks and orders of men, of all stages of life and human experience, of all shades of fortune and circumstance. That is the test of a universal religion—not the number, but the selec-

tion of its votaries. Even were there no other religion but Christianity on earth, and even were all men believers in Christianity, that fact would not prove its power of adaptation, unless men themselves were divided into different classes, and distinguished by different characteristics. Christianity claims to be the universal religion; but it bases that claim not on the wideness of the ground which it has traversed, but on the diverse soil of those fields in which it has sown its seed. It asserts its right to the name of an universal religion, not because it embraces the voices of a multitude which no man could number, but on the far higher ground, that these voices have been gathered out of every country, and kindred, and people, and tongue.

Now, this universal claim of the Gospel is, perhaps, never more clearly manifested than in this first invitation and this earliest promise which it gives to the world. It is emphatically *to the world* that the invitation and the promise are given. Let us consider whom our Lord is addressing. There is not a shade of particularism in his utterance, not a trace of Jewish exclusiveness, not even a tinge of that partizanship which is natural to the founder of a religion. He is speaking, indeed, to men who are distinguished by certain characteristics; but it so happens that the characteristics He requires are just those which belong to all humanity, which are peculiar to no man. He appeals as a personality to all who possess personality; and He appeals to them on the ground of certain circumstances which in this world are the universal condition of personal life. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," are the words in which He issues his invitation; and it is clear that they are words which,

if they imply anything at all, must imply a universal invitation. They speak to the human race under conditions which are common to the race, which belong to all men in all ages and in all lands. For is it not a matter of moral experience that humanity habitually classes itself into the two great divisions of the labouring and the heavy-laden? There is no man, living or dead, who may not be referred to one or other of these. The words which we translate "labouring" and "heavy-laden" have, in one sense, a common meaning; they both indicate a feeling of weariness. Yet between them there is a distinctly marked shade of difference. The labouring are those who are weary with toil; the heavy-laden are those who are weary with burden-bearing. The labouring are the men of action; the heavy-laden are the men who are acted upon. The labouring are those who are worn out with work; the heavy-laden are those who are worn out by suffering. All men are either active or passive sufferers; most of us are both active and passive sufferers at different periods of our individual lives. Yet there are some men who, on the whole, have more work than suffering in their lives; there are others who, on the whole, have more suffering than work. Perhaps the latter class are the greater objects of commiseration. That work which involves the sweat of the brow and the weariness of the brain brings, indeed, a burden of toil; but for that very reason it keeps off other burdens: in the very act and the very hardness of work a man forgets the sorrows of life. But let the man be withheld from labouring, and simply called to suffer; let him be prostrated on a bed of protracted sickness, or paralyzed in the use of his limbs, or racked with

physical pain, and he will come to know the special meaning of heavy-ladenness. He will learn what it is distinctively to *bear* a cross, to have his strength exerted, not in pressing forward, but in preventing himself from falling backward; to require the power of will, not for some heroic achievement, but for the simple capacity to endure existence. The heavy-laden are, as a general rule, greater objects for our sympathy than the labouring. But what is chiefly to be remarked is that these two classes collectively owe their prominence almost exclusively to the Christian religion; they were precisely the classes of men with whom the ancient world could not sympathize. That was preëminently a world for the strong; it had no place within its Pantheon for the victims of toil and suffering. It could sympathize only where it could admire, and its admiration was limited to the attributes of physical strength and beauty. It suffered its gods to interfere in the affairs of men, but it was in their large affairs—in their politics, and plots, and battles. It allowed them to extend help to individuals, but it was to heroic individuals—to men of acknowledged prowess, who were contending for the palm of heroism. It never occurred to that world that there were greater fields of heroism than the battle-field, and higher deeds of prowess than warding off the strokes of an adversary. It had no wreath for the brows of those who supported their heavy crosses along life's dolorous way, nor did it see in such powers of endurance a greater strength than that of Hercules. And because that world had no word for the weak, its religion had no word either. Its religion was simply the apotheosis of itself, the deifying of its own worldliness, the worshipping of its

own forces; its gods were like its men, and lived for their own aggrandizement. There is, indeed, in the religious life of that world one notable exception—the creed of Buddha. Buddhism emphatically called to itself the labouring and the heavy-laden; it was to them alone that it made its appeal. It addressed those who were weary of life's battle and longing for repose; it had no voice for those who were conscious of the greatness of this world and engrossed with its joys. In this respect, then, it supplies a singular parallel to the Christian invitation—a parallel which is valuable in shewing that the call of Christianity is addressed to no artificial cravings, but to the actual needs of nature. Yet the Buddhist parallel, like the Buddhist religion, almost immediately commits suicide. What is that promise which it offers to the labouring and heavy-laden whom it calls? It is the promise of extinction. It is the promise that there is a time coming when all the toils of life, and all the burdens of life, shall be obliterated with life itself, and when, in the most physical sense, man shall rest; in other words, cease to be. What is that but to concede the position of Pagan worldliness, that the labouring and heavy-laden are incapable of being the objects of religious help. The gods of the ancient mythologies left the labouring and the heavy-laden alone; the religion of Buddha takes them up only to annihilate them: in both creeds the verdict is the same—that their earthly condition is hopeless.

Now the view of Christianity on this subject is precisely the converse. When the Divine Founder calls to *Himself* the labouring and the heavy-laden, He indicates a different path to rest from that pointed out by

the Buddhist. "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," is not the call to annihilation, but to increased activity; it is the offer of a rest through personality, through a new life. Christianity does not say to the labouring and the heavy-laden: "Come unto me, and you shall work no more; come unto me, and you shall sorrow no more; come unto me, and you shall bear burdens no more." That would have been one form of rest; it was precisely the form of rest which the Buddhist promised; but it is far from being the highest. Christianity says in effect: "Come unto me, ye who work, and I will give you strength to work without weariness; come unto me, ye that carry burdens, and I will give you power to bear yet heavier burdens, and to deem the yoke easy and the burden light." It promises to the labouring the ability to labour, to the heavy-laden the ability to bear. It proposes to impart rest, not by lessening the outward load, but by intensifying the power of the arm; not by lessening the weight, but by increasing the force that bears it. The entire character of its promise is expressed in the words, "Ye shall find rest unto your *souls*." Herein consists the peculiar power of Christianity; it imparts its strength from within: the rest which it promises is the rest of the soul. It does not profess to alter the circumstances of life. It does not say that the good man will have fewer crosses than the bad man; in one sense it affirms the contrary: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." What Christianity offers is, above all things, light; it proposes to illumine the soul in such a way that it will see the old circumstances with another eye, that, without changing

the outward position of a single fact or object, "old things shall pass away and all things shall be made new." Nor is such an aim absolutely mysterious even to the natural mind; we can see traces of its possibility in the life of every day. How frequently, for example, is our view of the same subject altered by the transition from evening into morning meditation; many problems which look dark at night become luminous in the sunshine. Yet the transition is really a mental transition; it is not the physical light considered in itself which has produced the change; it is its influence in the illumination of the soul. It is an unquestionable experience in every sphere that to enable a man to walk in the green pastures and beside the still waters, you must first restore his soul; omit this part of the process, and no pastures will be green and no waters quiet. A soul which is in unrest cannot find rest by looking without. But let the rest first be imparted to the soul, and it will impart itself to its outward surroundings. It matters not what these surroundings be. Christianity brings into union those elements which, from the worldly point of view, constitute the sharpest extremes. It shews us Christ under the immediate shadow of the Cross; and never is the inward rest more calm than when fronting this climax of outward sorrow. It is precisely at this time that the Son of Man speaks of the fulness of his joy; precisely at this hour that He bequeaths to the world the one possession of which the world's loss could not rob Him: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. He has here revealed his promise by the most intense illustration of its power, has shewn us what inward rest can do. A life of the greatest outward sorrow which

humanity has ever exhibited, at the very hour when its suffering has reached its darkest shade, is able not only to experience peace, but to impart that peace to its outward circumstances: it covers the darkness with its own light. The rest of the soul reveals itself as the only requisite rest and the source of all other rest; and the godliness which has received the life that is to come is beheld obtaining along with it the promise of the life which now is.

Yet it is to be observed that this promise which Christianity holds out, as the result of inward rest, is not offered without the accompaniment of sacrifice. Before the soul can enter into the Christian rest it must take up the Christian yoke. The rest which Christianity promises is not magical, but experimental; it is the fruit of experience, and therefore the fruit of struggle: we must *learn of Christ* before we can rest in Him. The Christian religion is never represented as a transition from bondage into license. It is, indeed, represented as a transition from bondage into liberty; but liberty is the opposite of license, freedom the opposite of freedom from law. To be free is not to be emancipated from law, but to be translated from a lower law into a higher. The highest freedom is subjection to the highest law; and the more subject we are, the more entirely are we free. There is a yoke inseparable from the life of humanity. The only question is how it will affect humanity. There are three possible ways in which men may be affected by the yoke of life: they may struggle against it; they may be resigned to it; or they may acquiesce in it. The first state is slavery; the second is service; the third is perfect freedom. When a man reaches the stage of

acquiescence, he has *taken* Christ's yoke, has voluntarily made it his own. There are two ways of saying, "Thy will be done." We may say it with that resigned apathy which is nearly allied to despair, or we may say it with that conviction of the Divine love which represents the prayer of the angels in heaven. This last alone is freedom. No man has it in his power to choose whether God's will shall or shall not be done; the will of God is inevitable. But every man has it in his power to choose whether God's will shall be his will, whether he shall take, or simply bear, the yoke of Christ. When a man is able to take the yoke, he has ceased to view God's will as a foreign power; he is no longer under the dominion of law, but law is under his dominion. The will of God has become the expression of his nature; the law of God is the order of his life.

Yet it must not be imagined that, even when a man reaches this stage of personal choice, he is immediately emancipated from the sense of sacrifice; we must remember that what he takes is a yoke, and that he takes it knowing it to be so. The beginning of all personal religion is a sense of voluntary sacrifice; the condition to all rest is the acceptance of individual pain. In the passage we are considering the yoke of life is brought before us under two aspects: it has an aspect before discipline, and it has an aspect after discipline. When a man is first told to take the yoke, he is not supposed to have found rest to his soul; he is asked to begin the process by the seemingly adverse process of sacrifice. There comes, indeed, a time when the sense of sacrifice passes away, when the yoke becomes easy and the burden light. This is the real beginning

of the promised fulfilment, the earliest entrance into rest. But then it is no longer the same yoke which the man at first assumed. That yoke has been transfigured; the cross has become a crown; the hill of Calvary has been found to be the ascent to the Mount of Olivet. He has gone forth weeping, and he has reached the summit rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. There is clearly something which has intervened between the old yoke and the new. The object itself is substantially the same. There is no change in the material; the same elements which made his cross now make his crown. The sword has become a ploughshare, but it has been *beat into* a ploughshare. It is not as if the one were thrown away in exchange for the other; the elements which constituted war now constitute peace. Again we say, something must have intervened. That something does not lie in the world without, for we have seen that the outward material remains unchanged. There is only one other world where it can lie; it must come from a process within the soul. There are five little words in this passage which reveal that process with suggestive power: "Meek and lowly in heart." That which they reveal is a picture of sacrifice, a cross behind the Olivet, a great trouble preceding the great rest. Between the taking of the yoke and the rejoicing in the yoke, there is seen a death-struggle, in which the individual life is conquered; its self-existence vanishes; it becomes "meek and lowly." The fragrance of the new world has come from the broken ointment-box. The life has found its joy in forgetting to look for it, has found its glory in emptying itself of all glory. The individual has revealed the greatness of his individuality, nay, has himself learned

the greatness of his individuality by surrendering up to death all individual desires ; he can say with St. Paul's sublime paradox, "I am crucified, yet I live ;" he has become "meek and lowly in heart," therefore he has found rest unto his soul.

And now, with that peculiar power of realization by which Christianity has united the eternal to the temporal, our Lord proceeds to shew that this thought is no mere abstraction. He tells his disciples that this is a principle which they can study and verify without resorting to any philosophic school and without the aid of any logical process. He tells them that it has been exemplified and vindicated in the personal life of humanity, and that by this exemplification and vindication it has become a fact of history. "Learn of me," He says. Recognize in me the truth of the principle I have been teaching. Behold in me the living illustration of the joy of self-surrender, of the Olivet on the summit of Calvary. The yoke which I ask you to take is my yoke, the yoke which I have taken, and the yoke which I still bear ; the rest which I promise you as its result is my rest, the rest into which I have entered, the rest which has made my yoke easy and my burden light. Receive my experience as the firstfruits of an universal experience ; "Learn of me."

But, it may be said, Jesus was Divine. Is He not, in one aspect, the last being from whom we can profitably *learn* ? How can I be encouraged to take the yoke by the fact that He has taken it ? How can I be stimulated through the promise of rest by the fact that He has received it ? Was it not a necessity to Him that the yoke should be easy, and that the burden should be light ? What human weight could overpower

a Divine nature? Was it not a necessity to Him that there should in all circumstances be rest? Surely no yoke could impose struggle on a spirit which dwelt in the eternal calm. What advantage do I derive from this historical experience? Should I not experience more advantage if I were asked to learn of some purely human model, if I were pointed as an encouragement to the successful struggles of one who claimed to have no higher portion than the common heritage of Adam? Does it not throw an air of impossibility, almost of mockery, over the whole transaction, when the Divine experience is assigned as a reason for the human, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me"?

A deeper reflection will help not only to dispel, but in some measure to reverse this conclusion. There is a sense in which the yoke of Christ was made more difficult to bear by reason of his divinity; a sense in which the struggle belonged to Him rather as the Son of God than as the Son of Man. For let us remember what is that burden of which our Lord speaks in the words, "my yoke." It is nothing less than humanity itself. The yoke which Christ took upon Himself was the entire human family, with its universal burden. Let us remember what that burden was. It was precisely that which was foreign to the nature of Divinity—the disease of sin. There are many burdens of humanity which the religious consciousness would naturally assign to a Divine rather than to a human bearer. It excites admiration, but not surprise, when we read of the Son of God sympathizing with the victims of physical suffering, and bearing that suffering away. The reason is obvious; physical suffering

follows a physical law, and every law must be a matter of interest to its Lawgiver. But the case is very different when we enter into a region of moral evil. A region of moral evil is essentially a sphere of lawlessness. The fact that no satisfactory explanation has ever yet been given of the origin of sin is a highly significant fact; it really amounts to this, that all attempts have hitherto failed to find a place in the constitution of nature for the natural evolution of evil. It is clear that the subject of such a disorder must stand to the Lawgiver in a very different position from the subjects of merely physical disorder. There is no reason to believe that the existence of physical pain in itself proves a defect in the mechanism of the universe; there is no reason to doubt that what is seemingly a disorder in the part may contribute to the symmetry of the whole. But moral evil is clearly the introduction of a defect. It is as if a portion of the universe had elected to break away from the universe, to stand apart from its organization, to live irrespective of its laws. Such at least is the testimony of our moral consciousness; and, if its witness be true, it is far-reaching. It indicates that in a certain direction there is a breach of sympathy between the Divine and the human; that the individual will of man has lost its point of junction with the universal will of God; and that, if the junction should again be resumed, it can only be through the voluntary stooping of the Divine. In the light of such a thought the struggle of the Son of Man ceases to be a make-believe; it becomes a stern, an awful reality. We see that, apart altogether from his sacrificial death, He was bound at the outset to have a sacrificial life. He came to take upon Himself a yoke

that was foreign to his soul ; and we may well believe that in its earliest contact that yoke was not easy and that burden was not light. No one can read the New Testament without being conscious that the Son of Man was made the Man of Sorrows by reason of this burden—the burden of human guilt, the weight of human sin. It is only in the light of that struggle that we can understand the mystery of his temptation, that we can understand how He could be tempted and yet be without sin. In every mere man the temptation to self-will is sin. But why? Because in every mere man the self-life is impure, and the contemplation of the self-life is the desire of impurity. But here is a Being whose self, or, which is the same thing, whose soul, is by supposition absolutely pure. Is it strange that the contemplation of Himself should have been to Him a source of pious, of cloudless joy? Is it strange that in taking upon Himself the yoke of a sinful humanity He should have found it needful to be “meek and lowly in heart ;” that, in exchanging the vision of purity for the contemplation of impurity, He should have required to crucify his individual will, and should have experienced in the process those momentary revulsions of feeling which were at once the proof of his holiness and the evidence that He was Divine?

There was, then, no mockery in Christ's invitation to the world, “Learn of me.” His Divine claim did not lift Him outside the range of human example ; in the particular question at issue it intensified His exemplary power. He had called to Him the labouring and heavy-laden ; and in that call He had conquered the yoke of humanity, had succeeded in identifying Himself with those who were his moral opposites.

What, then, is his charge to the labouring and heavy-laden themselves? What He says to them in effect is this: "I have borne for you that part of your yoke which is foreign to my nature; bear ye for one another those which you feel to be your own. You have your toils, you have your burdens; enter by these into intellectual sympathy, nay, into practical sympathy, with the toils and the burdens of your brother man. By your own sorrows you will know the sorrows of others; by knowing the sorrows of others you will assuage your own. Are you perplexed about the fortunes of the hour? Take my yoke upon you on that side in which it meets with yours. You do not stand alone; humanity is perplexed as well as you. Make your trouble the organ of your sympathy. Consider how this burden, which is pressing so heavily upon you, is pressing with equal heaviness upon the life of your brother. That consideration will lead you into his life; and the moment you come into his life you will lose your own. That which is a struggle to your individual will, will become light and easy when your will is impersonal. In lifting your brother's burden your own yoke will fall. The man who has prayed for his brother's sorrow has already said for his own, "Thy will be done."

But there is one other link wanting to complete the chain. What is my guarantee for this promise of final rest, the promise that the sacrifice will ultimately cease to be sacrificial? Admitting that Christ is a real example, an example is surely not a guarantee. Millions of human beings have striven for earthly greatness, and there are hundreds of successful examples which prove the aim to be within the reach of humanity; yet for every hundred that succeed there are thousands

who fail. Why should not I be amongst the thousands? Is not the struggle for all greatness, whether it be earthly or heavenly greatness, determined by the one inevitable law—the survival of the strongest? The robust lives strive and emerge victorious; the weak contend and are vanquished in the strife. The answer, on the heavenly side of the question, is prompt and unqualified; it rests upon this very law that the strongest must survive. “*I will give you rest.*” Christ declares that his is not merely a case of example; He says that the same force which has conquered for Him the yoke of humanity is waiting to conquer it in his followers. The power of Christianity is in all cases contemplated as the power of Christ’s own Spirit. There cannot be two Christs; there cannot be two Divine forces in the universe: the force which must ever conquer is the same Divine force which has already prevailed. No man is offered rest until he has taken Christ’s yoke, because no man who has not taken Christ’s yoke is in union with his conquering Spirit. It is only in union with that Spirit that man has any guarantee of survival in the struggle. The most intensely human example will not furnish that guarantee. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of “looking unto Jesus,” but he suggestively adds, that this Jesus to whom we look is “the author and the finisher of our faith.” He knew well that all the looking in the world would never of itself bring likeness. We might read for ever the works of master minds without coming one step nearer to the faintest appreciation of their power; the possession of a kindred spirit would reveal that power in the perusal of a single page. Even so the vision of the victorious Christ can

only be had by those who feel the strength of Christ within them. That strength is not only the purity that sees God, it is the faith that overcomes the world. What is the meaning of that phrase, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"? It means nothing, if it signifies less than this: "My strength is your strength. That force in me which has borne the yoke of humanity until the yoke has become easy and the burden light, is ready to repeat the experience in you. That Spirit in me which has endured the contradiction of sinners waits to support in you the toils of the labouring and heavy-laden. I call you to no single-handed combat. I am with you alway. I summon you to no mere personal experiment; greater is He that is for you than all who can be against you. I ask from you no impossible sacrifice; my grace is sufficient for you. The guarantee for your triumph will be the survival of the strongest: *because I live, ye shall live also.* In my patience ye shall possess your souls; in the continuity of my life shall your life be continued; for I have overcome the world, and therefore I can give you rest."

GEORGE MATHESON.

THE CALL AND COMMISSION OF ISAIAH.

ISAIAH VI.

THERE can be no doubt that this Chapter records Isaiah's call to the prophetic office. The demand for a messenger (Verse 8), and the Prophet's ready response, "Here am I, send me," evidently imply that Isaiah is now for the first time commissioned as a Divine ambassador. Had Isaiah been previously accustomed to bear God's messages, his preparation in