

THE  
**WORKS**  
OF  
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LATE RECTOR OF THE UNITED PARISHES OF  
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CONTAINING  
AN AUTHENTIC NARRATIVE, &C., LETTERS ON RELIGIOUS SUBJECTS, CARDIPHONIA,  
DISCOURSES INTENDED FOR THE PULPIT,  
SERMONS PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF OLNEY,  
A REVIEW OF ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, OLNEY HYMNS, POEMS,  
MESSIAH, OCCASIONAL SERMONS, AND TRACTS.

TO WHICH ARE PREFIXED  
**MEMOIRS OF HIS LIFE, &c.**

BY THE REV. R. CECIL, A. M.

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**COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.**

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## SERMON XV.

### MESSIAH'S EASY YOKE.

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. MATTH xi. 29, 30.*

THOUGH the influence of education and example may dispose us to acknowledge the gospel to be a revelation from God, it can only be rightly understood, or duly prized, by those persons who feel themselves in the circumstances of distress which it is designed to relieve. No Israelite would think of fleeing to a city of refuge, till, by having unwittingly slain a man, he was exposed to the resentment of the next of kin, the legal avenger of blood; but then, a sense of his danger would induce him readily to avail himself of the appointed method of safety. The skill of a physician may be acknowledged, in general terms, by many; but he is applied to only by the sick, Matt. ix. 12. Thus our Saviour's gracious invitation to come to him for rest, will be little regarded, till we really feel ourselves weary and heavy laden. This is a principal reason why the gospel is heard with so much indifference. For though sin be a grievous illness, and a hard bondage, yet one effect of it is, a strange stupidity and infatuation, which renders us (like a person in a delirium) insensible of our true state. It is a happy time when the Holy Spirit, by his convincing power, removes that stupor, which, while it prevents us from fully perceiving our misery, renders us likewise indifferent to the only mean of deliverance. Such a conviction of the guilt and desert of sin, is the first hopeful symptom in a sinner's case; but it is necessarily painful and distressing. It is not pleasant to be weary and heavy-laden; but it awakens our attention to him who says, Come unto me, and I will give you rest, and makes us willing to take his yoke upon us.

Oxen are yoked to labour. From hence the yoke is a figurative expression to denote servitude. Our Lord seems to use it here, both to intimate our natural prejudices against his service, and to obviate them. Though he submitted to sufferings, reproach, and death for our sakes; though he invites us, not because he has need of us, but because we have need of him, and cannot be happy without him; yet our ungrateful hearts think unkindly of him. We conceive of him as a hard master; and suppose, that if we engage ourselves to him, we must bid farewell to pleasure, and live under a continual restraint. His rule is deemed too strict, his laws too severe; and we imagine, that we could be more happy upon our own plans, than by acceding to his. Such unjust, unfriendly, and dishonourable thoughts of him, whose heart is full of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love, are strong proofs of our baseness, blindness, and depravity; yet still he continues his invita-

tion, "Come unto me."—As if he had said, "Be not afraid of me. Only make the experiment, and you shall find, that what you have accounted my yoke is true liberty; and that in my service, which you have avoided as burdensome, there is no burden at all; for my ways are ways of pleasantness, and all my paths are peace." I have a good hope, that many of my hearers can testify, from their own happy experience, that (according to the beautiful expression in our liturgy) his service is perfect freedom.

If we are really Christians, Jesus is our Master, our Lord, and we are his servants. It is in vain to call him Lord, Lord (Luke vi. 46), unless we keep his commandments. They who know him will love him; and they who love him will desire to please him, not by a course of service of their own devising, but by accepting his revealed will as the standard and rule, to every part of which they endeavour to conform in their tempers and in their conduct. He is likewise our Master in another sense, that is, he is our great Teacher; if we submit to him as such, we are his disciples or scholars. We cannot serve him acceptably, unless we are taught by him. The philosophers of old had their disciples, who imbibed their sentiments, and were therefore called after their names, as the Pythagoreans and Platonists, from Pythagoras and Plato. The general name of Christians, which was first assumed by the believers at Antioch (possibly by divine direction) intimates that they are the professed disciples of Christ, Acts xi. 26. If we wish to be truly wise, to be wise unto salvation, we must apply to him. For in this sense, the disciple or scholar cannot be above his Master, Luke vi. 40. We can learn of men no more than they can teach us. But he says, "Learn of me and he cautions us against calling any one Master upon earth. He does, indeed, instruct his people by ministers and instruments; but unless he is pleased to superadd his influence, what we seem to learn from them only, will profit us but little. Nor are the best of them so thoroughly furnished, nor so free from mistake, as to deserve our implicit confidence. But they whom he condescends to teach, shall learn, what no instruction, merely human, can impart. Let us consider the peculiar, the unspeakable advantages of being his scholars.

1. In the first place, this great Teacher can give the capacity requisite to the reception of his sublime instructions. There is no prospect of excelling in human arts and sciences, without a previous natural ability, suited to the subject. For instance, if a person has not an ear and taste for music, he will make but small proficiency under the best masters. It will be the same with respect to the mathematics, or any branch of science. A skilful master may improve and inform the scholar, if he be rightly disposed to learn, but he cannot communicate the disposition. But Jesus can open and enliven the dullest mind; he teaches the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. By nature we

are intractable, and incapable of relishing divine truth, however advantageously proposed to us by men like ourselves. But happy are his scholars! he enables them to surmount all difficulties. He takes away the heart of stone, subdues the most obstinate prejudices, enlightens the dark understanding, and inspires a genius and a taste for the sublime and interesting lessons he proposes to them. In this respect, as in every other, there is none who teacheth like him, Job xxxvi. 26.

2. He teacheth the most important things. The subjects of human science are comparatively trivial and insignificant. We may be safely ignorant of them all. And we may acquire the knowledge of them all, without being wiser or better, with respect to the concerns of our true happiness. Experience and observation abundantly confirm the remark of Solomon, That he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, Eccles. i. 8, 18. Unless the heart be seasoned and sanctified by grace, the sum-total of all other acquisitions is but vanity and vexation of spirit, Eccles. ii. 17. Human learning will neither support the mind under trouble, nor weaken its attachment to worldly things, nor control its impetuous passions, nor overcome the fear of death. The confession of the learned Grotius, towards the close of a life spent in literary pursuits, is much more generally known than properly attended to. He had deservedly a great name and reputation as a scholar; but his own reflection upon the result of his labours expresses what he learnt, not from his books and ordinary course of studies, but from the Teacher I am commending to you. He lived to leave this testimony for the admonition of the learned, or to this effect: *Ah, vitam prorsus perdidit nihil agendo laboriose!* "Alas! I have wasted my whole life in taking much pains to no purpose." But Jesus makes his scholars wise unto eternal life, and reveals that knowledge to babes, to persons of weak and confined abilities, of which the wisdom of the world can form no idea.

3. Other teachers, as I have already hinted, can only inform the head; but his instructions influence the heart. Moral philosophers, as they are called, abound in fine words and plausible speeches, concerning the beauty of virtue, the fitness of things, temperance, benevolence, and equity; and their scholars learn to talk after them. But their fine and admired sentiments are mere empty notions, destitute of life and efficacy, and frequently leave them as much under the tyranny of pride, passion, sensuality, envy, and malice, as any of the vulgar whom they despise for their ignorance. It is well known, to the disgrace of the morality which the world applauds, that some of their most admired sentimental writers and teachers have deserved to be numbered among the most abandoned and despicable of mankind. They have been slaves to the basest and most degrading appetites, and the

tenor of their lives has been a marked contradiction to their fine-spun theories. But Jesus Christ effectually teaches his disciples to forsake and abhor whatever is contrary to rectitude or purity; and inspires them with love, power, and a sound mind. And if they do not talk of great things, they are enabled to perform them. Their lives are exemplary and useful, their deaths comfortable, and their memory is precious.

4. The disciples of Jesus are, or may be, always learning. His providence and wisdom have so disposed things, in subserviency to the purposes of his grace, that the whole world around them is as a great school, and the events of every day, with which they are connected, have a tendency and suitability, if rightly improved, to promote their instruction. Heavenly lessons are taught and illustrated by earthly objects; nor are we capable of understanding them at present, unless the mode of instruction be thus accommodated to our situation and weakness. The scripture (John iii. 12) points out to us a wonderful and beautiful analogy between the outward visible world of nature, and that spiritual state which is called the kingdom of God; the former is like a book written in cypher, to which the scripture is the key, which when we obtain, we have the other opened to us. Thus, wherever they look, some object presents itself, which is adapted, either to lead their thoughts directly to Jesus, or to explain or confirm some passage in his word. So likewise, the incidents of human life; the characters we know, the conversation we hear, the vicissitudes which take place in families, cities, and nations, in a word, the occurrences which furnish the history of every day, afford a perpetual commentary on what the scriptures teach concerning the heart of man and the state of the world, as subject to vanity, and lying in wickedness; and thereby the great truths which it behoves us to understand and remember, are more repeatedly and forcibly exhibited before our eyes, and brought home to our bosoms. It is the peculiar advantage of the disciples of Christ, that their lessons are always before them, and their Master always with them.

5. Men who are otherwise competently qualified for teaching in the branches of science they profess, often discourage and intimidate their scholars, by the impatience, austerity, and distance of their manner. They fail in that condescension and gentleness which are necessary to engage the attention and affection of the timid and the volatile, or gradually to soften and to shame the perverse. Even Moses, though eminent for his forbearance towards the obstinate people committed to his care, and though he loved them, and longed for their welfare, was, at times, almost wearied by them, Numb. xi. 11, 12. But Jesus, who knows beforehand the weakness, the dullness, and the refractoriness of those whom he deigns to teach, to prevent their fears is pleased to say, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly."

With what meekness did he converse among his disciples, while he was with them upon earth? He allowed them at all times a gracious freedom of access. He bore with their mistakes, reproved and corrected them with the greatest mildness, and taught them as they were able to bear, with a kind accommodation to their prejudices; leading them on step by step, and waiting for the proper season of unfolding to them those more difficult points, which, for a time, appeared to them to be hard sayings. And though he be now exalted upon his glorious throne and clothed with majesty, still his heart is made of tenderness, and his compassions still abound. We are still directed to think of him, not as one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but as exercising the same patience and sympathy towards his disciples now, which so signally marked his character during his state of humiliation. The compliment of the orator to a Roman emperor, though excessive and absurd when addressed to a sinful worm, that they who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness, and they who durst not were equally ignorant of his goodness, is a just and literal truth, if applied to our meek and gracious Saviour. If we duly consider his greatness alone, it seems almost presumption in such creatures as we are, to dare to take his holy name upon our polluted lips; but then, if we have a proportionable sense of his unbounded goodness and grace, every difficulty is overruled, and we feel a liberty of drawing near to him, though with reverence, yet with the confidence of children when they speak to an affectionate parent.

A person may be meek, though in an elevated situation of life; but Jesus was likewise lowly. There was nothing in his external appearance to intimidate the poor and the miserable from coming to him. He was lowly or humble. Custom, which fixes the force and acceptation of words, will not readily allow us to speak of humility as applicable to the great God. Yet it is said, He humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth, Psal. cxiii. 6. Humility, in strictness of speech, is an attribute of magnanimity; an indifference to the little distinctions by which weak and vulgar minds are affected. In the view of the high and holy One who inhabiteth eternity (Is. lvii. 15), all distinctions that can obtain among creatures vanish; and he humbles himself no less to notice the worship of an angel, than the fall of a sparrow to the ground. But we more usually express this idea by the term condescension. Such was the mind that was in Christ, Phil. ii. 5. It belonged to his dignity as Lord of all, to look with an equal eye upon all his creatures. None could recommend themselves to him by their rank, wealth, or abilities, the gifts of his own bounty; none were excluded from his regard, by the want of those things which are in estimation among men. And to stain the pride of human glory, he was pleased to assume an humble state. Though he was rich, he made himself poor (2 Cor. viii. 9), for the

sake of those whom he came into the world to save. In this respect he teaches us by his example. He took upon him the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 7), a poor and obscure man, to abase our pride, to cure us of selfishness, and to reconcile us to the cross.

The happy effect of his instructions upon those who receive them, is, rest to their souls. This has been spoken to before; but as it is repeated in the text, I shall not entirely pass it over here. He gives rest to our souls,—by restoring us to our proper state of dependence upon God; a state of reconciliation and peace, and deliverance from guilt and fear; a state of subjection; for till our wills are duly subjected to the will of God, we can have no rest—by showing us the vanity of the world, and thereby putting an end to our wearisome desires and pursuits after things uncertain, frequently unattainable, always unsatisfying—by a communication of sublimer pleasures and hopes than the present state of things can possibly afford—and lastly, by furnishing us with those aids, motives, and encouragements, which make our duty desirable, practicable, and pleasant.

How truly then may it be said, that his yoke is easy, and his burden light! such a burden as wings are to a bird, raising the soul above the low and grovelling attachments to which it was once confined. They only can rightly judge of the value of this rest, who are capable of contrasting it with the distractions and miseries, the remorse and forebodings, of those who live without God in the world.

But we are all, by profession, his scholars. Ought we not seriously to enquire, what we have actually learned from him? Surely the proud, the haughty, the voluptuous, and the worldly, though they have heard of his name, and may have attended on his institutions, have not hitherto sat at his feet, or drank of his Spirit. It requires no long train of examination to determine, whether you have entered into his rest, or not; or, if you have not yet attained it, whether you are seeking it in the ways of his appointment. It is a rest for the soul, it is a spiritual blessing, and therefore does not necessarily depend upon external circumstances. Without this rest, you must be restless and comfortless in a palace. If you have it, you may be, at least comparatively, happy in a dungeon. Today, if not before today, while it is called to-day, hear his voice; and while he says to you by his word, “Come unto me, and learn of me,” let your hearts answer. “Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God,” Jer. iii. 22.