

CHRIST THE LABORING MAN'S FRIEND.

BY PASTOR A. J. GORDON.

"WIFE," said John Bunyan, the dissolute young tinker of Bedford, as he sat one day with his face buried in his hands, "is there any place in the Bible where it says 'Go to Jesus?'" "I will see," she said, and taking the good Book, she sat down by the side of her wicked, but now distressed and penitent husband. And after turning over page after page, she replied, "I cannot find any place where it says 'Go to Jesus,' but I can show you where Jesus says, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'"

I need not dwell on the moral sublimity of such an utterance, that calm, assured self-confidence in the invitation, "Come unto Me, *all*." No mere man could utter such words without justly subjecting himself to the charge of insufferable egotism. Say what you will, the words are beautiful and majestic only as we concede that they come from the mouth of a Divine Being.

"Ye that labor."

Christ is the laboring man's friend in a way that we have too little thought of. That decree which says "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work," is not nearly so onerous as that other one, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, which if a man *do* them, he shall live by them."

If I am in good health and sound of body, I can labor six days and do my work. But if by some exposure to danger I get both my hands cut off, it is a very hard necessity which requires me to earn my livelihood by manual labor. Yet the law is inexorable, "*work or starve*." The poor cripple with only strength enough to wield his crutches, and the man with every limb intact and every muscle in full play, is under the same law, "by the sweat of thy brow, shalt thou eat thy bread."

But Philanthropy comes in as a *mediator* between the labor law and its helpless subject, and says, "Here, we cannot annul the statute. The requirement is universal, work and earn your bread."

But here is a class that cannot work. Perhaps they are to blame for their inability; perhaps this cripple lost his limbs by a foolhardy exposure to danger; perhaps this imbecile lost his mind by strong drink; perhaps this consumptive ruined his constitution by fashionable dissipation; however that may be, they must be fed. And now let us provide for them. Not by throwing contempt upon the law of toil, saying "It is unjust, it is oppressive to hold that all men must live by labor when they cannot labor." No, that law is salutary and wholesome. But there are some that have more than they need. Having used their capacity well, and having been prospered, they are able not only to feed themselves, but to do much toward feeding their unfortunate neighbors. Let them become the benefactors and saviours of these poor unfortunates, and build almshouses for them and erect hospitals and homes of refuge, and form provident societies, and charitable institutions.

It is done, and the helpless and dependent are provided for. See now those magnificent piles of brick, that rise in so many parts of our commonwealth, inviting the maimed and the starving to come within their shelter and be fed and clothed. What is their significance? Are they the organized and expressed defiance of the law of labor? Do they say to the industrious working man, as he passes by them, "Drop your trowel or your spade—throw away your ledger or your plane! You are free! You are no longer subject to that galling law of labor? No! These very piles are a standing tribute to the excellence of that law,—the noblest vindication of its majesty. Every brick in yonder almshouse was paid for by honest toil! Every pound of bread there eaten, and every yard of cloth there worn, were earned by somebody's sweat! Benevolence having provided *out* of the law and in noble loyalty to it, a remedy for its suffering subjects, an asylum for its disabled servants, now proclaims from every almshouse and hospital, Come ye that must labor, but cannot, ye that are weary of trying to toil without hands, and work without strength, and I will give you rest!

Now the law of *physical* labor is matched by another just as inexorable, just as un-

repealable, viz: the law of *spiritual* labor. And as sustenance for the body must be dug out of the ground by rigid toil; so sustenance for the soul, its inward joy, its spiritual peace, its holy affections and repose, must be, so to speak, dug out of the ten commandments by hard prolonged obedience. "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law—that the man that doeth these things shall live by them." The soul must earn its livelihood by the toil of good works. Conscience must get peace for itself, by dint of hard labor at obedience. The spiritual strength must be renewed through the agency of a daily keeping of the commandments.

But now comes the difficulty. One says, "My hands have been cut off, and it comes very hard for me to get a living with nothing to work with. In other words, my will is weak and has not strength to do right; my moral purpose has somehow lost its hold on obedience, and I fail every day in performing duty. I see the law requires me to live by *doing*, and yet I cannot *do* right. This is a universal complaint.

Moral pauperism is vastly more prevalent than social. It is only one in a hundred perhaps that cannot earn his bread by the sweat of his brow; it is *not one in a hundred* that can earn the bread of eternal life and inward peace by the sweat of his soul. As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Rom. 3: 10-12.

And from this witness of Scripture, I appeal to the witness of your own heart. Do you do right and keep the law? Do you not constantly fail? Do you not repeatedly come short? Is there one of you that dares to say, I have done perfectly right, I have nothing to condemn myself for? Answer, Oh Conscience, for thou canst tell. I know what that answer must be. Our heart condemns us, and God is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things, how much more must He condemn us.

And yet we are *laboring* to do right; laboring until we are tired out; sweating over the tables of the law and getting no thanks for it, but an aching conscience

and an accusing heart, upbraiding us for our short-comings. And why? Because we are disabled in our moral faculties. Because we have not the stalwart will to enable us to close in with duty and do it. That experience of the apostle is a universal experience: "When I would do good, evil is present with me." To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not; for the good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do."

Yet we labor on! And then we hear the invitation of Christ breaking upon our ear "Come *unto Me* all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And we reply, "Who art thou Lord? Art thou an abolisher of the law of labor, the originator of a system of moral pauperism to which you wish to reduce us all, exempting us from *doing* and supporting and saving us on the sole ground of our *believing*?" "No," answers the Lord from heaven, "I have done for you; I have kept the law in your behalf; and now I invite you to enter into the fruit of my labor—oh ye that labor in vain, and spend your strength for naught; ye that are toiling without hands and laboring without strength, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." In the gospel, I have put all the *funds of my righteousness* at your disposal; I have endowed you with all the wealth of my obedience, that you may not longer be hopelessly dependent on your doing, but may simply fall back on what I have done for you.

Now this is the simple philanthropy of the gospel. It is a plan for helping those who cannot help themselves. It is a perfectly fair and honest method. It does not propose to defraud the law of a single item of its dues.

It is because the rich man has used the law of labor and got wealthy out of it, that he is able now to say to his sick neighbor, here, you are not fit to work, go home and rest, and I will take care of you and your family." And it is because Jesus Christ has rendered a supreme obedience to the holy law of God, and by an eternal covenant with his Father, has been allowed to stand bail for us who are condemned by that law, that he can now say to us, "You have not and you cannot do right; accept my infinite right doing instead of yours

and *enter into rest*. "Come unto Me, all ye that labor, and I will give you rest."

But some of you are saying, "I am not ready to take the poor debtor's oath! I do not quite relish being sent so summarily into the almshouse of faith, and so to become a pensioner on the well-doing of another, a dependent on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. I prefer still to earn my own living, and do my own obedience. Very well. No one has the slightest objection, if you *can do it*. But *can* you? Take the first commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." Have you done it? With the constant gravitation of the affections downward, with our self-love and worldly love and sinful love, can we honestly say that we have ever loved God with all our heart, soul and strength? If not we are condemned hopelessly, irretrievably. Even if we have kept every *other command*, the violation of this were enough to convict us. For whoso shall keep the *whole law*," says the Scripture, "and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If a man steals, though he has kept every other command on the statute-book, it will not save him from prison. And so a single commandment broken, is enough to bring upon us the whole weight of that penalty "the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

What then can we do? I would say, "Oh, Lord Jesus, I have labored without success to keep that law which is holy, just and good; I have failed. But I have learned through thy gospel that Thou hast kept the whole law for me, and so become the "end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Lord I believe; I accept Thee as my substitute, and I surrender from my poor endeavor to save myself, and take Thee as my Saviour."

"Humbly at thy cross I bow
Jesus save me, save me now."

So shall you find rest to your soul.

BECAUSE Christ took man's judgment He became man's Judge. Because He exhausted the curse He acquired the monopoly of blessing. He who met the whole law became the law's Lord.