

## A Dying Man's Regrets.

### 2. THE STUDY OF THE WORD OF GOD.

JANUARY 20, 1856.

MY dear friends, last Sunday I began to show you, under the title of the regrets of a dying man, the views he then takes of many things that he wishes he had done otherwise than he has, and of the way in which he would do them if he were recalled to life from his half opened tomb. Among the ideas suggested by this subject, one of the most important is the way in which he has studied the Word of God. Ah! he certainly then says, How differently I ought to have acted with regard to the Word of God! how much more I ought to have studied it! how much better I ought now to be acquainted with it, to be both better able at the same time to put in practice its precepts, and to communicate it to others. Let us pause a few moments upon this salutary subject, to humble those for whom the end of time approaches, and to enlighten those to whom time is yet given, but who know not for how long.

What are the Holy Scriptures? Men can never precisely explain the manner in which they were composed, nor, in particular, how the Spirit of God and the spirit of man are combined in them so as to make them at the same time Divine and human—a Divine word reaching to heaven, and at the same time human, and quite near to us. This is not less difficult to explain than the manner in which the Divine and human nature were united in Jesus Christ. This parallel is not mine, for Scripture calls itself the written Word, and it calls Jesus Christ the “Word made flesh.” But however the Holy Scriptures may have been composed, “they literally are heaven speaking upon earth;” they are the maxims of the kingdom of heaven communicated to men in human language, as if the invisible world were come down amongst them, and placed before their eyes. There is no other book, even amongst the best, which like this makes known to us the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. All are more or less tainted with human errors: this alone is exempt from them.

It is the book of God, full of the truth of God; in it we hear God speak by the Holy Spirit. We see God, man—the present, the future—time and eternity, described exactly as they are.

For any one who has thus understood what Scripture is, it will not be difficult to confess the use he ought to make of it. We ought to interrogate the Scriptures as we would an angel from heaven, sent by God at this very moment on purpose to instruct us; or, what is still better, as we would question the Lord Jesus Christ if we could speak to Him and hear Him. And, in fact, we do speak to Him and hear Him when we read the Holy Scriptures, for they reveal Him, and through Him they reveal all things by His Spirit.

Oh! how can we sufficiently love and venerate this book? It is true it is not the book that saves us, but it is the book that reveals the way of salvation,

without which we could never have known it; and by which, the better we know it, the better we shall know Jesus the Saviour of our souls. No Christian will contest the truth of this principle, and yet how few there are who really study the Scriptures! The greater number read them superficially, and are satisfied with knowing some great leading truths, without penetrating more deeply into them, and as far as possible really understanding them in all things, as it is written: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever." And why this strange contradiction with our own convictions? It arises from the difficulties that the study of the Bible presents. We must acknowledge that on beginning it there are many difficulties and much obscurity. Some labour is necessary to dissipate them; and as the mind of man is naturally slow and idle, and he easily loses courage, and is satisfied with reading over and over again without penetrating further than the surface, so he learns nothing new, and the constant perusal of the same things causes weariness, as if the Word of God were not interesting—as if we could not always find some new instruction in it—as if it were not inexhaustible as God himself! Let us, however, beware of thinking these difficulties insurmountable. No, my friends, but we must give ourselves trouble; for here, as in every part of the Christian life, God will have us to be labourers with himself. And the knowledge of the Bible, a relish for the Bible, are the fruit and recompense of this humble, sincere, and persevering labour.

Ah! then, let every one return to his Bible with renewed courage. Take book after book, seeking not only to gather from your study a general idea of outward piety, but a deep and growing knowledge of the kingdom of heaven. Study a book till you understand it as well as you can, and then take a second, and a third, and so on, and you will find on a second or third reading many difficulties that seemed insurmountable disappear, and even though some should remain, you will not profit the less by this labour, patiently undertaken before God. In this study, you must not except the most difficult books, such as the prophets—the minor prophets, that many Christians pass by as unintelligible; but if you take the trouble to study them, you will find much in them that is very interesting.

Besides, there are, through the goodness of God, many books that may be useful—commentaries upon certain portions of Scripture—that are as a key to other parts, and by the help of them we may penetrate more and more into the knowledge of the Word of God. Then we may give more attention to those parts of the book more especially addressed to Christians, but, I repeat it, without neglecting any part. The fruit and the recompense of those who are thus faithful and persevering in understanding the Word of God, will be to love it—to penetrate more and more deeply into it—and to find the time always too short for becoming well acquainted with it.

I know a man who spent seven hours every day in the study of the Bible, and he always found increasing charms in it. If any one in faith, making use of the resources that God gives him, and looking to God for guidance, should carry out these rules, which it is impossible for me to do more than indicate, he will find in the Word of God treasures of which he has no idea. It will be for him

as firm a support as it was for Jesus when He was tempted in the desert. It will become for him what it was for all the saints of the New Testament, and for those of the Old Testament, as regards those portions of Scripture which existed before them—what it was for David—what it was for Daniel—what it was for St. Paul—what it always has been for all the saints of God. May God grant us all this grace; and may He to whom it is not more difficult to bless in a short than in a longer time, nor with little strength than with much strength, so make the words that I address to you penetrate into your hearts, that they may cause a transformation in your plan of studying the Bible, for which you will bless God through all eternity! Amen.