

XX.

The Scriptures.

FEBRUARY 24, 1856.

THOSE of you who have been present at some of these meetings know that I especially desire, in the few words I address to you, my dear friends in Christ, who give me so great a proof of your love in coming to me, to take a retrospective view of the recollections of a Christian who thinks himself near to the time of his appearing before God, and to communicate to you the principal results of his study of the Word of God, and the convictions in which he desires to end his life. Having in this way already made known to you my firm belief concerning sin, and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, I shall today say something to you concerning His Word.

I declare, as before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, where I expect soon to appear, that all my researches and study, whether of the Scriptures, of the history of the Church, or of my own heart, that all the discussions that have arisen in these latter years about the inspiration and divine authority of the Word of God, during the triple period of my ministry (three periods of about ten years each, at Lyons, at Montauban, and at Paris), have, though in ways that the wisdom of God has varied, only served to confirm me in the conviction that when the Scriptures speak, it is God who speaks, and that when they proclaim His will, the way of salvation, the great doctrine of sin, of free grace, of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, what they say is not less certain than if the heavens opened at this moment above our heads and the voice of God were heard as formerly on Sinai, saying the same things.

There is no limit to the confidence and the submission that we owe to the Scriptures—no more limit than to the truth and the faithfulness of God; so that in a day of which God only knows the date, and to which I aspire as to a deliverance (without daring to hasten it)—when this day comes and I shall enter the invisible world, I do not expect to find things different from what the Word of God has represented them to me here, excepting, indeed, the immense difference in the condition and in the state of the soul before and after death—in time and in eternity. But, in fact, the voice I shall then hear, which shall be invested with all power to judge, and shall reign over all created beings—that voice will be the same I now hear upon the earth, and I shall say, “This is indeed what God said to me, and how thankful I am that I did not wait till I had seen in order to believe.” For Scripture is the Divine exposition of the truths and maxims which constitute the very groundwork of things that are unseen and eternal; it is a letter that God has written from the invisible world to His children, who are still detained in this world, in order that, upon the faith of God, they may learn even now what these things are, and may act upon them to the salvation of their souls. Those who believe in God will save their souls, but those who believe not in Him, how can they save them? Scripture is then the Word of God in the most elevated, and at the same time the most simple

and popular sense of the word. It is the only certain rule of faith and life—a rule before which all others must give way. All the meetings in the world for committees, for conferences, for prayer, for searching the Scriptures, are all without any value, except in as far as they are submitted and subordinated to the sovereign, infallible, immutable authority of the Word of God.

The witness that I bear to it is only the same that was borne—I do not only say by Moses, David, St. Paul, St. John, Augustine, Chrysostom, and by all the saints in all ages—but it is the witness borne by God himself, and by Jesus Christ, who gives to the Word of God the same glory that He receives from it. The experience and observation which we may be allowed to invoke, provided it be with humble diffidence, mercifully add their witness to the others; for it was never given to any man, nor to any set of men, to compose a book, however short, which can be compared to the Holy Scriptures, and which is able to produce the same fruits of consolation, of sanctification, of conversion; and never will it be given to any man, or any set of men, unless the Holy Spirit guide them in the same special manner in which He guided the apostles and the prophets. It is not a question of personal holiness, since the holiness that we recognise in the Scriptures is not less visible in the words of St. Paul than in those of Jesus Christ himself. It is a question of Divine direction. And this Divine direction appears still more clearly when we reflect that this book was written quite in an historical order; and yet, that though it comprises a space of nearly two thousand years, it has, upon every point, a settled and consistent doctrine. The Bible is a book by itself—a book which no other ever did, or ever can equal; and it reigns supreme over all the systems, all the uncertainties, and all the questions that absorb or agitate humanity.

But no sooner (here I enter into a new order of ideas) have I, for my part, sanctioned the title of the Word of God, which the Bible receives from God himself and from Jesus Christ, but in closer examination of it I find it full of man, so many are the proofs of humanity in it; though, at first, I might have felt a sort of fear, as if I had gone too far in the testimony I bear to it. I recognise, indeed, in the writers of this book so marked an individuality both of style and of character, that if (supposing an impossibility) we should now find some book that by error or oversight had not hitherto made part of the canon of Scripture, there is not a man, however little conversant with the Holy Scriptures, who would not be able immediately to say if it were written by Jeremiah or Isaiah, by Peter, by John, or by Paul, so great is the diversity of these writers, and so much has each of them stamped his own particular character on what he has written. I find many things that the writers of these books might have said without any special help from the Spirit of God (2 Tim. iv. 13), and as God never works useless miracles, we thus see the place that the spirit of man has in the composition of the Word of God. And besides, I find in it certain facts to remind us of human infirmity, as, for instance, when St. Paul seeks to call to his recollection, without venturing to trust it, the number of persons he had baptized at Corinth; but he is not careful concerning this, “not having been sent to baptize, but to preach Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. i. 14-17, &c.) It was evidently intended by God that, at every page of this book, which we

call the Word of God, we should recognise at the same time the word of man. But if a man who has not reflected upon the subject feels a sort of fear at this discovery, it will not be long before he takes courage, and sees in it, on the contrary, a pledge of blessing, of light, and of spirituality, in the share that humanity has had in the composition of the Scriptures. For how could it be avoided? It could have been avoided only if they had been dictated word by word, without the influence of personal character or historical events. Let us take an extraordinary example, which I quote with profound respect. When God places in the mouth of a stupid animal words of reproof to an unfaithful prophet, it is evident that His Word operates without any intermediate agent endowed with will, and that the inspiration (for such indeed it is) is in this case so much the more visible that the instrument is the more completely passive. Now, what is there in this inspiration of a being without reason which may be compared to the inspiration of an apostle, fully imbued with his own experience and with his personal sentiments? A similar remark, applied to all the degrees of the intermediate scale, in proportion to the activity or the passiveness of the instrument, would show that the interest of inspiration increases as it becomes more personal, without its losing any of its authority. And then how much more lovely, how much more touching, is Scripture as it was thus given us! given by God in the order of history, through the instrumentality of men whose spirit was led by the Spirit of God,—of men like unto ourselves, who could say, “I believed, therefore have I spoken,”—of men of whom it might be said, for instance, “Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” Thus the Word of God, having been given and handed down to us by men like ourselves, and not having been brought by higher and invisible beings, but by men, weak like ourselves, saved like ourselves—who were first to believe, and who could say, I have believed what I exhort you to believe has by that alone a life, a freshness, a power which penetrates much more deeply into the heart, and forms between the heart and this Word, as it were, a secret and familiar friendship, which makes this most solemn of all books at the same time the most loved. This shows a profound knowledge of the heart of man, and constitutes one of the greatest and most inherent beauties of the Word of God.

Thus the Bible—from having been composed by simple men, who, while they were writing it, had not ceased to combat against sin, and to depend personally upon the faith they proclaimed—not only is on this account no less truly the Word of God, but it is the more Divine as it is the more human; that is to say, that the power and the presence of the Spirit of God, and its influence upon our souls, are the more felt, because God used instruments to write it to whom His Spirit alone could impart that power and supernatural light which made of them “chosen vessels” to carry the truth to the ends of the world. It is for this reason, also, that the Scriptures penetrate the deepest recesses of our hearts, and while they instruct us in God’s name, they do it by the instrumentality of men; thus uniting at one and the same time all the conditions neces-

sary to awaken, to enlighten, to convert to God, to draw us from the darkness of the present age, and to accomplish all things in all of us.

There is, my dear friends—and this is my last remark—there is a contrast, or rather a comparison, which serves at the same time to elucidate and to confirm what I have been saying; and that is the view we took last Sunday, and which the Scriptures constantly give us, of Jesus Christ uniting in himself the human and Divine nature in so marvellous a manner that we cannot explain it, but which is, however, the ground and the consolation of our faith. Last Sunday we began by considering Jesus Christ in His human perfection, after which we contemplated Him in His Divinity. Now, suppose we had reversed this order, and that we had first spoken of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ, and the obligation under which we are to adore Him as God himself, and that we had afterwards, for the first time, made this reflection,—But Jesus Christ is a man, capable of suffering, of dying,—a certain fear might have entered our mind, as if we had attributed to Him too much of the Divine nature. But, as we saw last Sunday, Scripture always represents this perfect Divinity united in Him with perfect humanity, so that the one only enhances the value of the other, without in any way compromising its reality. It moreover reveals that the more He is God the more He is man, and that the more He is man the more He is God. For when does Jesus Christ most appear man? Is it not in the temptation in the desert, in the anguish of Gethsemane, and in the terrible agony of the cross? And is it not also at these same seasons that He is the most God, vanquishing as He did the tempter, rising above suffering, and triumphing over the cross by the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in Him, not with measure as in us, but without measure as in the only begotten Son of the Father? There is something similar about the Word of God. It is the Word of God, His true and eternal Word, and at the same time it is the Word of man, in which we see the movement of the spirit of man reflected, and feel the pulsation of the heart of man. And it is for this reason that it may be said that it is Divine the more it is human, because in St. Paul, in St John, for instance, it is precisely in the moments in which the fight of faith, the persevering struggle against sin, are the most visible, that we also see the most clearly how Divine is the light poured into their souls, to enable them first of all to struggle for themselves, and then to shed this light with a Divine power over the whole world.

How admirable does this analogy between Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures appear to me! It is an analogy which you may easily believe I did not invent, but which is furnished by the Word of God itself. For one who knows that the Word does not speak in vain, it is sufficient to remember one thing that is very astonishing: the Word sometimes gives the same name to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Scriptures; it calls both the Word of God. The one, Jesus Christ, is the living Word of God, the personal manifestation of His perfections, clothed with humanity; the other, the Scripture, is the written Word of God, or a verbal manifestation in language of these same invisible perfections. They are inseparable for us; for Jesus Christ is revealed to us only by the Scriptures, and the Scriptures are given to us in order only to reveal Jesus

Christ. Thus Scripture is the written Word of God, as Jesus Christ is the living Word of God. Those who find in the human character of Scripture a pretext for denying its Divinity, reason like those who find in the human personality of Jesus Christ a pretext for refusing Him the title of God, because they do not understand that the Divine and human natures are united in the person of Jesus Christ, as the human and Divine Word are united in the Scriptures. It is not more surprising that Scripture, though the Word of God, should at the same time bear so many traces of humanity, than it is that Jesus Christ, though God, should be man. As to the manner in which the two natures in one case, and the two voices in the other, are blended—this is the very foundation on which faith rests concerning this subject; a profound mystery, no doubt, but, as St. Paul says, a “mystery of godliness,” which fills our soul with joy and hope.

Yes, Scripture is the only way by which we can attain to a knowledge of Jesus Christ without danger of error, as Jesus Christ is the only way by which we can draw nigh to the Father. If we wish our souls to be saved, we must believe in the Word of God; we must submit to the Word of God; we must seek nothing in ourselves under any pretext whatever, whether it be under the name of reason, intelligence, sentiment, or conscience, which would predominate over, which would judge, which would control the Word of God; we have not to control, but to be controlled by it. The greatest of all God's servants are those who humble themselves the most before His Word; such as St. Paul, David, Luther, Calvin, who were jealously anxious to humble themselves to the very dust before it, and even lower if they could.

Let this Word of my God and Saviour then reign supreme—this Word to which I am so happy to be able to bear witness “before I go hence and am no more”—till this standard of eternal life, which we can only half unfold here below, shall be completely unfurled for us in the pure and peaceful light above!