

V.

A Few Words on the Reading of the Bible.

NOVEMBER 11, 1855.

I AM accustomed on these occasions to address a few words of Christian exhortation to the friends who have the kindness to meet around me. My state of suffering deprives me of this consolation today. I can only relate a fact of Christian experience, which may awaken in you salutary reflections upon the value of the Word of God, and I shall gather it in Christian simplicity from what has happened to me this week. During a night in which I suffered much and slept little, towards the end of the night, about half-past four o'clock, I had settled myself in my bed, with the hope of getting a little rest, when I proposed to my *veilleur*¹—one of those good young men who have the kindness to devote to me a part of their time and strength—to read a chapter of the Word of God. He offered to read the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. I accepted the offer, only begging him, in order to be able to appreciate more fully the drift of the argument, to begin with the sixth, and even the fifth. We read successively these four chapters—fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth—and I no longer thought of sleeping, so completely were my attention, my interest, my admiration, excited by the heavenly language of St. Paul; I mean of the Holy Spirit speaking by St. Paul. Then we read the ninth and following chapters till the end of the Epistle with an equal and unabated interest; and then, to omit nothing, and have the whole Epistle, we read the four first chapters.

About two hours passed in this way, and I thought only of listening to the Word of God, and profiting by it. And the Lord, in His mercy, made up for the rest I had lacked. But I cannot tell you how much I was struck, on reading in this way the Epistle to the Romans from beginning to end, by that seal of divinity, of truth, of holiness, of love, and of power, which is stamped on every page and every word. Without having communicated our thoughts to each other, my young friend and I both felt that the voice came from heaven; and that, independently of all those proofs that attest the inspiration and divine authority of the Scriptures, they bear witness to themselves, as Jesus Christ, by His works, bore witness to himself in a way fully sufficient. We both felt also how useful it is to read the Scriptures as a whole, and how much we lose by taking only parts, fragments, or separate verses. We only understand a book by reading it now and then from beginning to end. This circumstance made us feel that the Word of God ought to be studied in two ways:—First, it should be read as a whole, to produce the blessed impression we had just received; and, secondly, in detail, to be able to enter into and understand every verse and every word. But the deepest impression we received was one of humiliation, and we said to each other, How is it possible that, having such a treasure near us, we should neglect diligently to search into it! We had spent two hours in heaven; we had been transported not only into the midst of the best of men, the holy and inspired organs of the Holy Spirit, but of the elect angels, and the com-

pany of Jesus Christ; and we resolved, commending our resolution to the care of Him who alone can protect the resolutions of His children, to study the Scriptures with more ardour than we had yet studied them; to sacrifice, if needful, other reading—instructive and useful though it may appear, but not comparable to the Bible—and to live with this Word as we should wish to live with God himself, because the reading of this Word, inspired by the Spirit of God, is like holding intercourse with God himself. I recommend to you, my dear friends, the constant reading and profound meditation of the Word of God. This will raise us above everything; it will be the strength of our life, the joy of our heart, and our all-powerful consolation in life and in death, by Jesus Christ. This is my prayer for you and for myself. Amen!

FOOTNOTE

1 During nearly six months, a small number of young men, almost all medical students, had the kindness to pass the night in Mr Monod's room. Their affectionate and devoted attention alleviated his long nights of sleeplessness and suffering.