THE GOSPEL IN PARIS:

*SERMONS*

BY THE

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*WITH PERSONAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR*

BY THE

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LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

MDCCCLXXXIII.

XIII.

*WASTED LIVES.*

“Why stand ye here all the day idle?”—MATT. xx. 6.

HAVE you never reflected with profound sorrow upon the vast number of useless existences there are upon earth? Have you never thought of those thousands of beings who allow all their powers, thoughts, affections, energy, to be scattered by frivolity and lost in nothingness, just as the rain of heaven is absorbed by the sands of the desert? Those beings live on without so much as asking them­selves whither they go or why they have been placed here below. Whilst St. Paul sees in the human life the grandest and most solemn thing in the world; whilst for him days, and even hours, are of the weightiest moment; whilst he saves, whilst he “redeems” time, whilst in order to accomplish his task he creates it, so to speak, by his marvellous employment of every instant, they allow their life to be frittered away without ever under­standing its value. When we see them instinctively submitting to their destiny, when we see that not a thought, not an action in those lives has eternity as its object, we are inclined to smile at all the beautiful things that have been said on the greatness of the human soul, on its noble and unbounded aspirations. We look upon all this as hyperbolical and declamatory; we are even tempted to question whether these beings have a soul at all; and when, having lived their little day on earth, they become the prey of death, willingly would we apply to them the words of our text: “Why have ye stood there all the day idle?

Let us be just, however. Many of them might answer as did the labourers of the parable, “Because no man hath hired us.” No one has pointed out to them the true end of life. No one has told them why they were here below.

None of those who hear me today will be able to offer this excuse. Not one of you will be able to allege his ignorance in justification of his wasted life. At whatever hour of life we may have been called, we all know that God claims us for His service. Let us then for a few short moments forget others and think only of ourselves. Let us see if we are not of those who waste in idleness the time which has been given them, and whilst we speak of the days and hours which are continually being frittered away, grant, O God, that this hour at least may not be last!

I take as my starting-point a principle which is at the foundation of all the teaching of the Gospel. It is this: Every life which does not willingly make of the service of God its principal object is a useless life. I say *will­ingly,* for, in a general sense, every life has the service of God as its object, since God in His admirable wisdom often causes good to come out of evil, and makes even the blasphemies of His foes and the crimes of the most depraved beings subservient to His ends. Of this He has given us a striking example in saving humanity by the death of Christ, that is, by the most odious of crimes. None, however, will suppose that Pilate or Judas served God. The service in question is, therefore, a voluntary service, and in this sense I affirm that every life of which the principal aim is not the service of God is a useless life. Besides, I acknowledge that among those who serve Him there are many stages. Some know Him in the fulness of His love and holiness, such as Jesus Christ has revealed Him; others still grope for Him, as it were, and though they know Him but imperfectly, endea­vour notwithstanding to serve Him. They serve Him in the person of their brethren “whom they see,” as St. John says, until they obtain a full knowledge of the invisible God; they remind us of those heathen of whom St. Paul speaks, who, having no law, yet seek to accomplish the works of the law. God, who knoweth the heart, will judge such men according to His righteousness. He alone knows what will be their eternal future; but, however imperfect their knowledge may be, if from the midst of their darkness they have aimed at serving God, we have no right to say that their life has been lost and that they have remained idle here below.

But when, taking the Gospel as our guide, we affirm that a life which is in no degree whatever referred to God is a wasted life, I know what objections such an affirmation raises on the part of the world. Men point us to lives of which God is certainly not the object, but which, nevertheless, are active, fruitful in services ren­dered to humanity, to lives which leave after them a long trail of light and glory, and they ask us if we still dare to call these useless lives.

I understand this objection, but it does not shake the principle I have laid down. It is most natural that men should consider as useful those existences which out­wardly have been well employed, for man can only judge from appearance. But God looks to the heart. He judges of a life from the principle which has governed it, and therefore His judgment differs from ours. I shall explain my thought by one or two examples.

Here is a man whose passage has traced a deep furrow upon the earth; his is an intellect which has made grand discoveries, an energetic will which has obtained the noblest results. We who enjoy the fruits of his labours, we exalt his name, we bless his memory. But let me suppose that the only motive of his labours has been personal interest, the selfish seeking of his own glory. . . . In the eyes of God that life is wasted. According to the stern saying of Christ, it has already its reward upon earth, but it is lost for heaven.

I go further and take an extreme example; God grant it may never be realised! Here is an apostle of the Gospel, a preacher of the truth, who, having received at the hands of God intelligence to understand the Divine truths, the power of speech to translate them, and warmth of feeling to communicate them, exerts upon his contemporaries that mighty influence which produces a religious revival. Who would dare to call such a life useless? We religiously preserve its memory in our hearts—we bless it. But let me suppose that this man, while seeming to serve God, has served only his own glory; that, while defending the interests of Jesus Christ, he has sought only his own interest. In the eyes of God his life has been wasted as far as he himself is concerned. In saving others he has lost himself. He must be num­bered among those who at the last day will say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by Thy name, and by Thy name cast out devils?” and to whom it will be answered, “Depart from me; I never knew you.”

Now let us choose an opposite example. Here is a poor labourer, whose life has been absorbed by a crushing labour. . . . But no! That example would not be sufficiently telling. . . . Here is a lame man, condemned to pine away year after year upon a bed of pain. What can he do here below? Nothing, nothing whatever. Everything fails him, energy, strength, wealth. Thus will his monotonous life glide away; thus, for him, will day succeed day, until the hour when, without a friend to accompany his mortal remains, he will rejoin in the common grave so many other beings as soon forgotten as himself. . . . What will remain of this life? Not one apparent work, not one visible service rendered to humanity. That is what men call an abortive existence, a lost and wasted life. . . . Well, if in that man’s soul the love of God has been the inspiring sentiment, if he has obeyed God in suffering, if his heart, the only organ of his shattered frame in which life was not wholly extinct, has been filled with love and faith, that life will weigh more in the balance of the righteous Judge than all those that have made most noise in the world, but of which selfishness has been the ruling principle.

That is how we are to estimate human life, not accord­ing to its outward acts only, but according to the principle by which it is governed. Now this principle, God alone knows it; far from us, therefore, be the thought of judg­ing others! Once again, let us look only to ourselves.

But is not this view of the true aim of our life at the same time a revelation of its greatness? How grand is that life of which God Himself is the object! how grand it is even for the poorest, for the most wretched, for the most destitute! Ah! let worldlings fritter it away in unworthy frivolity; let them, according to their own criminal expression, *kill* the time which God, in His goodness, has given them. You, my brother, cannot do so; you know what is human life; you know that its end is the service of God; for you it has a most solemn im­portance; in the Scriptures you have learned that it is a time of trial, the time for scattering the seed, the harvest of which we shall reap in the eternal day. . . . To this sublime instruction your conscience has responded, and anything inferior to it would fail to satisfy you. . . . And it is not your conscience alone that tells you what is the value of life. You know what it is worth since the Son of God has honoured it by taking it upon Him­self, since, by showing what it can be, He has imparted to it a Divine greatness. . . . You know what it is worth since, by dying for you upon the cross, Ile has taught you what, in His sight, is the value of your soul. . . . You know what it is worth, and the very name you bear, you who call yourselves the redeemed of God, reminds you of it with incomparable force. You know what it is worth, for you have understood that you are called—O sublime destiny!—to become co-workers with God. Well, that life which the Gospel has made so noble and so beautiful, what use do you make of it? Such is the question which God asks of each of you today.

Alas! at this very moment a painful and ironical con­trast strikes my mind. I have recalled the beauty and greatness of life such as the Gospel has made it, and involuntarily I compare it with that of many of those who now hear me. Answer, where is the beauty of those lives which frivolity fills up from morn to night, and what signifies the value of time for those who waste the precious hours in that which is but vanity?

I know what answer you will make. You will tell me that it is impossible to have continually in view the serious object of life; that the soul must have its hours of relaxation and repose; that, moreover, we dwell in the midst of a world with which we cannot break, and which lays upon us its obligations, whether we will or no. Yes, you are always ready to speak of the obligations you owe to the world, but you seem to forget that your first obligations are towards God. The relaxation you require consists, you say, in the most innocent recreations. Re­creations! Ah! is it not most sure, on the contrary, to that worldliness invades everything so completely that at length no place is left for God in your life! Recreations! Ah! who does not see that worldly life is like the abysses of which the Book of Proverbs tells, which constantly cry out, “More, more!” until they have devoured all? Think of the many hours it claims, not only of those spent at your entertainments, but of those which precede them—of those hours devoted to the selection of a fitting costume, for instance. . . . Think of those hours which follow them, of that stupor which leaves the soul so weary, of those dreams which trouble and bewilder it. Thus your days are consumed, . . . thus your time glides away with the most frightful rapidity, and with terror you some­times question what share will be left for God. But no; there are works of piety. Works of piety! Is that the name you give them? Yes, I see many works the aim of which is the alleviation of the sufferings of the poor, the instruction of the ignorant, the salvation of souls; I see that you are not slow in performing them; I see that they are the fashion; but vainly do I seek in them the share of God. Where is it, for instance, in those bazaars on behalf of the poor which are sometimes transformed into veritable shows, where all the petty passions of the world seem to have assembled? Where is it in those days, commenced at so late an hour, and from which the sweet and pure influences of early prayer are absent—in those days without serious reading or meditation? Where is it in those profaned Sabbaths? Where is it, alas! even in this hour of worship, to which you bring but a divided attention, and during which your eyes often close with weariness, because the dawn had found you still in the ball-room?

Those, some will say, are extreme examples. Let us admit it, if you will, and comfort ourselves with the thought that, wholly mistaken as regards those who hear me, I have traced out mere imaginary pictures. Will this be sufficient to reassure us? No; it is possible to condemn wild dissipation and excessive worldly agitation more strongly even than I have done, and nevertheless consume one’s life in frivolity. In fact, there is a frivolity which I will call serious, for want of a better name, and which often reigns in circles where too shocking a dissipa­tion is very loudly condemned.

You belong to a society the general tone of which is serious; no scandal ever disturbs its habitual aspect; all its pleasures are correct, decorous, moderate. And yet, if any one should ask you how your days are spent, you would be at a loss what to answer. Think of all those honourable but superficial relations, of all those visits paid and received, of all those conversations in which not a word is exchanged that speaks to the soul, of those books read without aim or method, and which leave not one spark of light for the mind, nor one fruitful emotion for the soul. A society such as this, you think, is most innocent. You are not losing your soul in it, I admit, but can you say that you are living the true life? Do you not see that insensibly, and for want of a higher in­spiration which would stimulate you to love and sacrifice, were it at the risk of suffering, you are allowing your soul to become thoroughly engrossed by trivial occupa­tions, by insignificant habits, by soulless pleasures, by relations of pure etiquette which weaken and consume it gradually but fatally? Can you conceive of anything more tyrannical than this laborious idleness? Is there in the wide world a vocation which takes up so many hours and produces so little result? And is it surpris­ing that so many wandering but ardent souls, wishing *to live* at any cost, should shake off the yoke of that heavy and dismal servitude?

Here we must make a reflection. The great majority of our fellow-men are condemned to the most irksome and wearing manual toil. A very limited number have re­ceived of God fortune, and with fortune leisure. To this minority belong most of those who are here today. Well, think you that this very leisure does not impose the most serious obligations upon you? Think you that you are permitted to waste it in idleness? Are you not called, as it were, to think for those who, below you, have no time for reflection; to look after the higher interests of their souls, to which they can scarcely give a few moments’ attention themselves? When we speak of the working classes and of their sufferings, I often hear their improvidence, their prejudices, their hatred of the upper classes thundered against. People bewail their condition, wish them more instruction, a higher degree of morality, more religion especially; they tell them of the blessed­ness of home life, of the happiness of a peaceful fireside, of the innocent joys of reciprocated love. I will not examine whether these accusations and these lessons might not well be reversed and cast back with gloomy and bitter wrath at those who lavish them so profusely, and who often belie them by the most scandalous life. . . . No, I accept these facts, and I ask myself how this reform of the working classes is to be accomplished. Will you leave the care of it to those who are worn out by manual toil? Will you call to this work those agitators, those ambitious individuals who lay bare the wounds and sufferings of the masses only to make a show of philanthropy and in order to obtain popularity? . . . This work is yours, brethren. The leisure which God has given you lays upon you the most sacred duties towards those who have no spare hours. You are therefore en­listed by Divine command in all the grand, noble, and generous causes. Well, how do you answer this call?

I do not know your life, but I have only to cast a glance round me to state sorrowfully that it is precisely those who have most leisure who most complain of the want of time. Why is this? Because when the soul is no longer stimulated by pressing and urgent needs, it gives itself up to its favourite pursuits, and thus sur­rounds itself with tyrannical occupations and habits, which little by little entangle it in an inextricable network.

Follow him, this man of leisure. You will see him dreaming for a whole day, of what? Of those noble works I have told you of? . . . Oh, no! Of a picture, of a curious piece of furniture, of a rare object which is wanting in his collections, of the embellishment of his dwelling, of a fancy which he has long been wishing to gratify! Those are his noble thoughts! To realise them, you will see him wandering about from place to place, taking no end of proceedings, leading a busy life,—so busy, alas! that we shall scarcely be able to obtain a few moments’ conversation with him to tell him of some work which needs aid or of some wretched man who is dying for want of bread. . . . Thus his days and years glide by, and because this existence is outwardly irre­proachable, you will not allow me to call it a wasted life, a life which is useless to God and to humanity!

You, my brother, cannot take your share of this re­proach, of course; you cast a glance of pity upon those miserable victims of idleness. No one can accuse you of frittering your life away; labour fills it from morn to night. No recreation ever draws you for a moment away from it.... Day after day finds you at it. Fixing your eye steadfastly upon the aim to be reached, upon the wealth to be acquired, upon the important part to be acted, you pursue it with an ardour which nothing can abate and which goes on increasing with years. All other preoccupations vanish before this all-absorbing thought. So much perseverance and skill have not been fruitless. You have been encouraged by success. Who can tell the secret joy which fills your heart at times when you see your affairs prosper and your wealth increase? . . . Yours is a useful life. . . . Who would dare to tell you that it has been wasted? . . . Brother, God Himself will tell you so at the last day if in that life you continue to refuse Him the first place which is His. . . . God Himself will tell you what the lord of the parable said to the labourers: “Why hast thou stood here all the day idle? “And, in truth, you have done nothing so long as you have thought only of yourself, so long as you have not served God.

But how is it possible to serve God, you answer, in an absorbing profession which has no religious character whatever, and of which every part has earth as its object? Brethren, I have said God looks to the heart, to the intention; and if you consecrate your life to Him, truly it will never be lost, even though nothing in your activity would be visibly referred to His service. What God asks of you is not to abandon your calling, but to perform each of the duties it lays upon you faithfully. True, there are certain professions which no Christian should ever accept, because in them conscience is forced to yield to intrigue and falsehood; there are certain associations to which no Christian should ever submit. But should such be the case, this man’s soul must be saved at any cost; he must shake off that yoke at any sacrifice, yea, even at the sacrifice of what is most pre­cious to him upon earth. But this is the exception. There are very few callings in which God cannot be served. Be, therefore, what you are—statesmen, magis­trates, merchants, artists, workmen, servants—and in each of these vocations be Christians; in each of them you may by your integrity, uprightness, and love of justice show what is the all-governing principle of your life. What though, on account of the multiplicity of the duties they involve, these callings should absorb you completely and leave you no time for directly religious works? You might still arrive at the close of your career sure that your life has not been wasted. . . . But is not this sup­posing an impossibility?

Is it true that you can never labour directly for God? Is it true that your active life is so completely absorbing as to leave you not one moment that you may devote to the interests of the reign of God, to the consolation of those who suffer, to that vast work of restoration and salvation which is intrusted to the Church? If truly you love God, will you not be all the more anxious to find Him again that your everyday occupations forcibly draw your thoughts away from Him? Ah! let us beware of false excuses. Let us beware of saying that time fails us, when we know so well how to find hours for pleasure, and perhaps for sin. Time, it has been said, is not com­posed of hours and minutes only, but of love and will. He that loves much finds means to do much.

I now come to those of my hearers whose life is out­wardly engaged in the service of God. They cannot recognise themselves in any of the situations which I have depicted. The excessive dissipation of worldliness appears to them criminal; the frivolity of a superficial existence is repugnant to their feelings, and for a long time their awakened conscience has told them that they must serve God above all else. In truth, you see them enlisted under the banner of Christian works. But the fact that they are thus enlisted does not necessarily imply that they are actively engaged. Idleness and languor may exist under pious appearances, and a seem­ingly religious life may glide away without leaving any traces behind it. Shall I surprise you when I affirm that of all masters God is the one whom men serve with most indolence and irresolution? I question whether any worldly undertaking would, I do not say prosper, but simply subsist, if it were led with the inconsistency and want of method which we bring to the service of God. Have you ever remarked with what facility we complain at the slightest vexations, at the most trifling sacrifices which our vocation of Christians involves? Have you ever counted all the moments which we waste in speaking of our busy life, all the hours which are taken up by incurably frivolous conversation, in which we slip here and there, and for conscience’ sake, a few sanctimonious phrases? At the close of many an appa­rently well-employed day, have we not been seized with the feeling that our strength had been consumed in vain words and that “no virtue had come out of us “? Have we not been terrified when we have seen how skilfully, nay, how craftily, we lull our conscience to sleep by vain resolutions of future activity? “Tomorrow,” we say, “tomorrow!” And the morrow finds us more feeble, more undecided than ever. Ah! when I behold the Son of Man in that marvellous career of three years’ duration, from which has sprung the regeneration of the world, I am struck with the solemn importance which He who oft embraces centuries at one glance attaches to the days and hours which are assigned to Him for action here below. See how, as He advances towards the end, He remembers that time is short, that the day is declining, that the night cometh in which no man can work. Thus His life appeared to Him, and that is why each of the hours of which it was composed has weighed more than thousands of existences in the history of humanity.

But though I lay before you the value of life and the necessity for action as points of the most vital importance, think not, however, that I would urge you, above all things, to a merely outward and visible activity. Nothing is farther from my thoughts than this. No, life cannot be measured by a certain amount of works accomplished in a given space of time; no, the most spiritual of all religions has not been given to the world to submit it to the yoke of a low utilitarianism. The important, the essential point is that the soul act; and if it be idle, then all outward works may be useless. Nay, more. There are times when external activity may be a snare and a delusion. In such cases, what are we to do? We must retire in solitude; we must reflect; we must, leav­ing the crowd and His disciples themselves, follow Jesus upon the mountain, and there pour out our soul in prayer. Do not be mistaken; thus to give up regular activity for a time is to act more really than ever. Therefore, judge them not, I pray you, those Christians who refuse, it may be, to unite their external efforts with yours, and who do not labour in the same manner as you. Who can tell if this is not their appointed hour for solitude and meditation? Who can tell if, far from you, they will not do more good than with you? What matters how they act, so long as they are with the Lord?

Ah! worldly activity, multiplied meetings, numerous associations, works supported, have we not often placed too much confidence in them all? And, after having exhausted our powers in those collective works, have we not often heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Why have ye stood here all the day idle?” Why? Alas! because no one acted in reality; because no one made of these works his work; because no one brought to their per­formance an undivided heart. We thought we had strengthened ourselves by uniting ten or twenty individual wills for the attainment of some particular end, and we had merely associated our failings, our moral infidelities. Not in contact with one another will they transform themselves into vital forces, love, or holy energy.

Let us then beware lest we allow ourselves to be deceived by an empty appearance of life, and let us re­member the son in the parable who said to his father, “I go work today in thy vineyard,” but whom the father found not there.

I have told you how we waste the time which God gives us; I have still to show what are the consequences of this inactivity.

The first and most direct is the decline of faith. There is a fact which must have struck you in the Gospel; it is that God never demonstrates religious truths by proofs of an intellectual order. Never will reasoning alone lead to faith. Something else is required for this—action on the part of the soul. “*Do* the will of God and ye shall know of my doctrine whether it be of God,” said Jesus Christ. This is so evident, that if we say, rightly, that action is the result of faith, we may, with still greater reason, add that faith is the result of action. . . . Yes, serve God in humility, in holiness and love; serve Him, and I affirm that you will feel your faith in Him strengthened. . . . What have been the epochs of strong faith? Those in which the Church has been active, and especially those in which it has suffered. . . . When has unbelief invaded it? In the days of its prosperity, when it had complacently settled upon earth, when it had neglected its sublime mission. That which is true of the Church is also true of individuals. . . . Let indolence seize upon you in the midst of ease and worldly life; one day your faith will disappear, and in darkness you will seek it with terror, but in vain!

To this first consequence is added another: the less we act, the less capable of action we become. Our soul is, as it were, pendent between two rival forces, each of which aspires at absorbing and ruling it—selfishness and charity; it must yield to one or other of these; there is no middle course. But in the path of charity there is activity and climbing, while the path of selfishness is an easy descent; whence it follows that when it ceases to act, our soul takes rapid strides downwards towards selfish­ness. This explains why the Christian’s inactivity is not only guilty, but corrupting and fatal to his own soul, and why the first punishment of whoever does not serve God is the continually increasing inability to serve Him; for, just as in the physical world, the swiftness of a falling body grows greater as it nears the earth, so the soul follows the same fearful progression as it descends towards selfishness.

In consequence, obedience becomes ever more difficult, sacrifice ever more impossible; it costs the soul an effort to give up the most insignificant of its interests. “Each of its comforts,” says Vinet, “each of its habits, henceforth becomes a sacred thing;” the will of God alone loses its holy character. . . . Thus, as a tree which the frost has injured, many a life which seemed full of promise withers and decays. Then, finally, age comes—age that gives the last icy touch to the heart which the love of God no longer warms with its flame, and before us is the dis­tressing spectacle of a selfish old age and of a hardened soul.

You will not fall so low as this, brethren. Such a future terrifies you; God will spare it you. Nevertheless, reflect seriously upon this: even supposing you might, by your future activity, make up for your past inaction, you will always feel its effects. Let us remember that each hour of our life has its special duties, which are not those of that which precedes or of that which follows it. You will always feel what it is to have neglected the first. Just as, when the years which should have been devoted to study have been frittered away, a man may endeavour by the most intense application to make up for lost time, there however always remain some essential points on which he feels himself weak—points of which the foundation is wanting, and which it will henceforth be impossible for him to acquire; so, in the Christian life, the most unwearied activity in the present cannot com­pensate for inaction in the past. In the days of your youth you refused to bend beneath the yoke of God; later you will know what it costs to break with inveterate habits. You have refused to govern your passions or your pride when that submission would have been easy; you will learn by hard struggles and shameful defeats all there is of vitality in those enemies which you have spared too long. You have been unwilling, when still it was time, to renounce the approbation of the world and the rapturous delight of flattered self-love. Well, in the day when you will be called, in presence of men, to bear testimony to the truth and to proclaim a noble indepen­dence, you will be feeble, undecided, and you will perhaps have recourse to some cowardly compromise. You have, when a favourable opportunity has been afforded you, neglected to strengthen your faith by that constant com­munion with the Divine Word, by that careful study which alone reveals to us its intimate truths; will you be able to do so when attacked by hostile criticism, when engaged in the all-consuming activity of life? Who feels this terrible consequence more strongly than the pastor whom God has intrusted with the care of enlightening and establishing souls? . . . Suppose that for many years he has neglected to work—to work in carefully studying the truths he preached, in weighing the objections of his ad­versaries, in strengthening the souls which God had con­fided to him; . . . to work, especially, in interceding for them. Suddenly his conscience is roused. Unbelief has invaded his flock. Here it comes, bold, learned, proud. In terror he mourns. He is anxious to work. He acts, alas! but then it is he understands that a new ministry cannot be produced without preparation, that one cannot acquire in a day that which the slow and patient toil of years alone could have given. Then it is he sees that the most pressing appeals and the most feverish activity are not to be compared with an unwavering fidelity. Then it is that, feeling himself incapable of defending clearly and powerfully those truths he loves, and for which he would give his life, he exclaims with sorrow, “Why have I stood here all the day idle?”

Idle! Ah! brethren, if the Christian’s inactivity be so hurtful to his own soul, how guilty must it appear to us when we reflect upon the state of the world in the midst of which he is placed! Were we surrounded with angels, still should we act in order to prove our gratitude to God. But where are we? In a world where God is forgotten and despised; in a world where men suffer; in a world where men are rushing on to perdition. These two ad­verse powers, selfishness and charity, are at war in the world as well as in our own heart. Whoever sides not with right, by this very reason sides with evil. . . . The weakness of the good does more harm in the world than the perversity of the wicked. Men who coldly and reso­lutely choose evil are rare, but that which gives them the appearance of strength, and soon, alas! its reality, is the connivance of cowards, the seeming assent of those who dread the struggle. As those stones which, rolling down from the summits of the Alps, drag whole rocks along with them and soon produce the formidable avalanche which nothing can resist, so evil, though often feeble at the outset, is increased and strengthened by our inactivity and our cowardly indolence. . . . Who can tell how far our responsibility reaches? See that soul going astray under your eyes; what has failed it? A word which, on a certain day, you should have spoken. And that other soul yonder, what has irritated and scandalised it? Our moral apathy, our want of zeal; in a word, our indolence. Calculate all those consequences, if you can. . . . You cannot fail being appalled at them. Alas! those sorrows, those iniquities, those crimes which sadden you, may, in a certain measure, be laid at your door. You should have acted, and you have remained idle; you should have resisted, and you have had neither a firm word nor a resolute attitude, . . . , and you have wasted your strength and your soul in unworthy frivolities. . . . Ah! when I see our torpor and our dull indifference in pre­sence of the evil winch surrounds us on all sides, I am reminded of the Apostles asleep in Gethsemane, and the sorrowful words of the Man of Sorrows come back to my memory: “Could ye not watch with Me one hour?”

And here again, do not delude yourselves with the thought that your present activity will atone for all. Ah! doubtless, warned by remorse, you will now think of those who are suffering and losing themselves before your eyes. You will set to work, and the occasions for sacrifice will astonish you by their number. But what­ever you may do today will not blot out your past inactivity. It is beautiful to struggle against present injustice, but your courage will not efface one iniquity which you will formerly have allowed to subsist. It is sweet to minister to the wants of the needy, but the bread you now give will not satisfy the miserable beings beside whom you have so often passed unconcerned. Ah! painful thought! To be willing to work and to be able no longer to do so! To stretch out our hands towards that past which escapes us, and on which we have lost our power! To remember those souls whom we have caused to go astray, those afflicted ones whom we have sent away sorrowing, despairing perhaps; those sufferings which have vainly knocked at the door of our hearts! . . . And what then will it be when death itself will separate us from those to whom we have refused our love? Ah! the dead are inexorable! Yes, the masses are right, the dead come back to earth. They come back to those who have neglected them; they come back, and their menacing voice accuses our cowardice. They come back and tell us, “Why were you idle in the day when you might have warned us? Why did your lips remain silent? Why have we claimed your love in vain?” Oh, ye dear but terrible images, ye images of those whom we have neglected! alarm us unto salvation, and teach us what use we are to make of the time which God still gives us here below.

It is time to conclude, but it is also time to turn our looks towards Him who alone can forgive and atone for all. If we have lamented over our useless lives; it is time to persuade ourselves that the God of the Gospel is a merciful God, who raises, converts, and regenerates. The time of mourning is over; now is the time to hope. And why should I not tell you the thought that comes to me as I contemplate this assembly? Who are we here? A few hundreds of souls. Now, do you know all there may be amongst us of hitherto wasted powers, intellect, moral energy, love, devotion? Do you know what those precious seeds might become, and what a magnificent harvest they might bring forth? Yes, if this call could but be heard, if these souls could but be stirred!

Who can tell the grand future which God might lay in store for you if your life, so miserably consumed in unmeaning preoccupations and selfish pleasures, could at length take its flight towards a sublime end! Who can tell, O my young sister! all the treasures of tenderness and sympathy, of hope and consolation, that would spring from your heart which the breath of the world threatens to dry up more and more? Who can tell, O my brother! the good it might be given you to do, if, firm and faith­ful in the humble position which is yours, you concen­trated upon some work of justice or charity those powers of your soul which are being consumed in nothingness! Ah, though you were a labourer of the eleventh hour, who till now had remained idle, still would it be time, and in your well-nigh withered soul everything still might come to life again under the eye of God.

In a word, who can tell all that might come forth out of this assembly? Who will tell us all that the breath of spring causes to germinate and grow on the most ungrateful and sterile soil? Who can foresee all the blessings, all the powers of life and salvation which you might produce? And why should it not be so? Why, when God is willing to act, should we remain idle? Let us be up and doing, brethren, it is time! . . . And Thou, whose breath causes the wilderness to blossom as the rose, Thou who hast called Thyself the resurrection and the life, pour upon us the renewing Spirit, and may we all submit to Thy Divine influence! Amen.