

1 "Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth"
2 *Oxford University Sermons* sermon 5
3 St. John Henry Newman
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5

6 "Out of weakness were made strong." Heb. xi. 34.
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8 {75} THE history of the Old Testament Saints, conveyed in these few words, is
9 paralleled or surpassed in its peculiar character by the lives of those who first
10 proclaimed the Christian Dispensation. "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among
11 wolves," was the warning given them of their position in the world, on becoming
12 Evangelists in its behalf. Their miraculous powers gained their cause a hearing, but did
13 not protect themselves. St. Paul records the fulfilment of our Lord's prophecy, as it
14 contrasts the Apostles and mankind at large, when he declares, "Being reviled, we
15 bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat; we are made as the
16 filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." [1 Cor. iv. 12, 13.]
17 Nay, these words apply not only to the unbelieving world; the Apostle had reason to be
18 suspicious of his Christian {76} brethren, and even to expostulate on that score, with his
19 own converts, his "beloved sons." He counted it a great gain, such as afterwards might
20 be dwelt upon with satisfaction, that the Galatians did not despise nor reject him on
21 account of the infirmity which was in his flesh; and, in the passage already referred to,
22 he mourns over the fickleness and coldness of the Corinthians, who thought themselves
23 wise, strong, and honourable, and esteemed the Apostles as fools, weak, and despised.

24 2. Whence, then, was it, that in spite of all these impediments to their success, still they
25 succeeded? How did they gain that lodgment in the world, which they hold down to this
26 day, enabling them to perpetuate principles distasteful to the majority even of those who
27 profess to receive them? What is that hidden attribute of the Truth, and how does it act,
28 prevailing, as it does, single-handed, over the many and multiform errors, by which it is
29 simultaneously and incessantly attacked?

30 3. Here, of course, we might at once refer its success to the will and blessing of Him
31 who revealed it, and who distinctly promised that He would be present with it, and with
32 its preachers, "alway, even unto the end." And, of course, by realizing this in our minds,
33 we learn dependence upon His grace in our own endeavours to recommend the Truth,
34 and encouragement to persevere. But it is also useful to inquire into the human means
35 by which His Providence acts in the world, in order to take a practical view of events as
36 they successively come before us in the course of human affairs, and to understand
37 {77} our duty in particulars; and, with reference to these means, it is now proposed to
38 consider the question.

39 4. Here, first of all,—
40 It is plain that we cannot rightly ascribe the influence of moral truth in the world to the
41 gift of miracles, which was entrusted to the persons who promulgated it in that last and
42 perfect form, in which we have been vouchsafed it; that gift having been withdrawn with
43 the first preaching of it. Nor, again, can it be satisfactorily maintained that the visible

44 Church, which the miracles formed, has taken their place in the course of Divine
45 Providence, as the basis, strictly speaking, on which the Truth rests; though doubtless it
46 is the appointed instrument, in even a fuller sense than the miracles before it, by which
47 that Truth is conveyed to the world: for though it is certain that a community of men,
48 who, as individuals, were but imperfectly virtuous, would, in the course of years, gain
49 the ascendancy over vice and error, however well prepared for the contest, yet no one
50 pretends that the visible Church is thus blessed; the Epistle to the Corinthians
51 sufficiently showing, that, in all ages, true Christians, though contained in it, and forming
52 its life and strength, are scattered and hidden in the multitude, and, but partially
53 recognizing each other, have no means of combining and cooperating. On the other
54 hand, if we view the Church simply as a political institution, and refer the triumph of the
55 Truth, which is committed to it, merely to its power thence resulting,— {78} then, the
56 question recurs, first, how is it that this mixed and heterogeneous body, called the
57 Church, has, through so many centuries, on the whole, been true to the principles on
58 which it was first established; and then, how, thus preserving its principles, it has, over
59 and above this, gained on its side, in so many countries and times, the countenance
60 and support of the civil authorities. Here, it would be sufficient to consider the three first
61 centuries of its existence, and to inquire by what means, in spite of its unearthly
62 principles, it grew and strengthened in the world; and how, again, corrupt body as it was
63 then as now, still it preserved, all the while, with such remarkable fidelity those same
64 unearthly principles which had been once delivered to it.

65 5. Others there are who attempt to account for this prevalence of the Truth, in spite of its
66 enemies, by imagining, that, though at first opposed, yet it is, after a time, on mature
67 reflection, accepted by the world in general from a real understanding and conviction of
68 its excellence; that it is in its nature level to the comprehension of men, considered
69 merely as rational beings, without reference to their moral character, whether good or
70 bad; and that, in matter of fact, it is recognized and upheld by the mass of men, taken
71 as individuals, not merely approved by them, taken as a mass, in which some have
72 influence over others,—not merely submitted to with a blind, but true instinct, such as is
73 said to oppress inferior animals in the presence of man, but literally advocated from an
74 enlightened capacity for criticizing it; and, in consequence {79} of this notion, some men
75 go so far as to advise that the cause of Truth should be frankly committed to the
76 multitude as the legitimate judges and guardians of it.

77 6. Something may occur to expose the fallacy of this notion, in the course of the
78 following remarks on what I conceive to be the real method by which the influence of
79 spiritual principles is maintained in this carnal world. But here, it is expedient at once to
80 appeal to Scripture against a theory, which, whether plausible or not, is scarcely
81 Christian. The following texts will suggest a multitude of others, as well as of Scripture
82 representations, hostile to the idea that moral truth is easily or generally discerned. "The
83 natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." [1 Cor. ii. 14.] "The light
84 shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." [John i. 5.] "Whosoever
85 hath, to him shall be given." [Matt. xiii. 12.] "Wisdom is justified by her children." [Matt.
86 xi. 19.]

87 7. On the other hand, that its real influence consists directly in some inherent moral
88 power, in virtue in some shape or other, not in any evidence or criterion level to the
89 undisciplined reason of the multitude, high or low, learned or ignorant, is implied in
90 texts, such as those referred to just now:—"I send you forth as sheep in the midst of
91 wolves; *be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*"

92 8. This being the state of the question, it is proposed to consider, whether the influence
93 of Truth in the world at large does not arise from *the personal influence*, {80} direct and
94 indirect, of those who are commissioned to teach it.

95 9. In order to explain the sense in which this is asserted, it will be best to begin by
96 tracing the mode in which the moral character of such an organ of the Truth is formed;
97 and, in a large subject, I must beg permission to be somewhat longer (should it be
98 necessary) than the custom of this place allows.

99 10. We will suppose this Teacher of the Truth so circumstanced as One alone among
100 the sons of Adam has ever been, such a one as has never transgressed his sense of
101 duty, but from his earliest childhood upwards has been only engaged in increasing and
102 perfecting the light originally given him. In him the knowledge and power of acting rightly
103 have kept pace with the enlargement of his duties, and his inward convictions of Truth
104 with the successive temptations opening upon him from without to wander from it. Other
105 men are surprised and overset by the sudden weight of circumstances against which
106 they have not provided; or, losing step, they strain and discompose their faculties in the
107 effort, even though successful, to recover themselves; or they attempt to discriminate
108 for themselves between little and great breaches of the law of conscience, and allow
109 themselves in what they consider the former; thus falling down precipices (as I may say)
110 when they meant to descend an easy step, recoverable the next moment. Hence it is
111 that, in a short time, those who started on one line make such different progress, and
112 diverge in so many directions. Their conscience still speaks, but having been trifled with,
113 it does not tell {81} truly; it equivocates, or is irregular. Whereas in him who is faithful to
114 his own divinely implanted nature, the faint light of Truth dawns continually brighter; the
115 shadows which at first troubled it, the unreal shapes created by its own twilight-state,
116 vanish; what was as uncertain as mere feeling, and could not be distinguished from a
117 fancy except by the commanding urgency of its voice, becomes fixed and definite, and
118 strengthening into principle, it at the same time developes into habit. As fresh and fresh
119 duties arise, or fresh and fresh faculties are brought into action, they are at once
120 absorbed into the existing inward system, and take their appropriate place in it.
121 Doubtless beings, disobedient as most of us, from our youth up, cannot comprehend
122 even the early attainments of one who thus grows in wisdom as truly as he grows in
123 stature; who has no antagonist principles unsettling each other—no errors to unlearn;
124 though something is suggested to our imagination by that passage in the history of our
125 Blessed Lord, when at twelve years old He went up with His parents to the Temple. And
126 still less able are we to understand the state of such a mind, when it had passed
127 through the temptations peculiar to youth and manhood, and had driven Satan from him
128 in very despair.

129 11. Concerning the body of opinions formed under these circumstances,—not
130 accidental and superficial, the mere reflection of what goes on in the world, but the
131 natural and almost spontaneous result of the formed and finished character within,—two
132 remarks may be offered. (1.) That every part of what may be called {82} this moral
133 creed will be equally true and necessary; and (if, as we may reasonably suppose, the
134 science of morals extends without limit into the details of thought and conduct)
135 numberless particulars, which we are accustomed to account indifferent, may be in fact
136 indifferent in no truer sense, than in physics there is really any such agent as chance;
137 our ignorance being the sole cause of the seeming variableness on the one hand in the
138 action of nature, on the other in the standard of faith and morals. This is practically
139 important to remember, even while it is granted that no exemplar of holiness has been
140 exhibited to us, at once faultless yet minute; and again, that in all existing patterns,
141 besides actual defects, there are also the idiosyncrasies and varieties of disposition,
142 taste, and talents, nay of bodily organization, to modify the dictates of that inward light
143 which is itself divine and unerring. It is important, I say, as restraining us from judging
144 hastily of opinions and practices of good men into which we ourselves cannot enter; but
145 which, for what we know, may be as necessary parts of the Truth, though too subtle for
146 our dull perceptions, as those great and distinguishing features of it, which we, in
147 common with the majority of sincere men, admit. And particularly will it preserve us from
148 rash censures of the Primitive Church, which, in spite of the corruptions which disfigured
149 it from the first, still in its collective holiness may be considered to make as near an
150 approach to the pattern of Christ as fallen man ever will attain; being, in fact, a
151 Revelation in some sort of that Blessed Spirit in a bodily shape, who was promised to us
152 as a second {83} Teacher of Truth after Christ's departure, and became such upon a
153 subject-matter far more diversified than that on which our Lord had revealed Himself
154 before Him. For instance, for what we know, the Episcopal principle, or the practice of
155 Infant Baptism, which is traceable to Apostolic times, though not clearly proved by the
156 Scripture records, may be as necessary in the scheme of Christian truth as the
157 doctrines of the Divine Unity, and of man's responsibility, which in the artificial system
158 are naturally placed as the basis of Religion, as being first in order of succession and
159 time. And this, be it observed, will account for the omission in Scripture of express
160 sanctions of these and similar principles and observances; provided, that is, the object
161 of the Written Word be, not to unfold a system for our intellectual contemplation, but to
162 secure the formation of a certain character.

163 12. (2.) And in the second place, it is plain, that the gifted individual whom we have
164 imagined, will of all men be least able (as such) to defend his own views, inasmuch as
165 he takes no external survey of himself. Things which are the most familiar to us, and
166 easy in practice, require the most study, and give the most trouble in explaining; as, for
167 instance, the number, combination, and succession of muscular movements by which
168 we balance ourselves in walking, or utter our separate words; and this quite
169 independently of the existence or non-existence of language suitable for describing
170 them. The longer any one has persevered in the practice of virtue, the less likely is he to
171 recollect how he began it; what were his difficulties on starting, {84} and how
172 surmounted; by what process one truth led to another; the less likely to elicit justly the
173 real reasons latent in his mind for particular observances or opinions. He holds the

174 whole assemblage of moral notions almost as so many collateral and self-evident facts.
175 Hence it is that some of the most deeply-exercised and variously gifted Christians, when
176 they proceed to write or speak upon Religion, either fail altogether, or cannot be
177 understood except on an attentive study; and after all, perhaps, are illogical and
178 unsystematic, assuming what their readers require proved, and seeming to mistake
179 connexion or antecedence for causation, probability for evidence. And over such as
180 these it is, that the minute intellect of inferior men has its moment of triumph, men who
181 excel in a mere short-sighted perspicacity; not understanding that, even in the case of
182 intellectual excellence, it is considered the highest of gifts to possess an intuitive
183 knowledge of the beautiful in art, or the effective in action, without reasoning or
184 investigating; that this, in fact, is *genius*; and that they who have a corresponding insight
185 into moral truth (as far as they have it) have reached that especial perfection in the
186 spiritual part of their nature, which is so rarely found and so greatly prized among the
187 intellectual endowments of the soul.

188 13. Nay, may we not further venture to assert, not only that moral Truth will be least
189 skilfully defended by those, as such, who are the genuine depositories of it, but that it
190 cannot be adequately explained and defended in words at all? Its views and human
191 language are incommensurable. For, after all, what *is* language but {85} an artificial
192 system adapted for particular purposes, which have been determined by our wants?
193 And here, even at first sight, can we imagine that it has been framed with a view to
194 ideas so refined, so foreign to the whole course of the world, as those which (as
195 Scripture expresses it) "no man can learn," but the select remnant who are "redeemed
196 from the earth," and in whose mouth "is found no guile"? [Rev. xiv. 3, 5.] Nor is it this
197 heavenly language alone which is without its intellectual counterpart. Moral character in
198 itself, whether good or bad, as exhibited in thought and conduct, surely cannot be duly
199 represented in words. We may, indeed, by an effort, reduce it in a certain degree to this
200 arbitrary medium; but in its combined dimensions it is as impossible to write and read a
201 man (so to express it), as to give literal depth to a painted tablet.

202 14. With these remarks on the nature of moral Truth, as viewed externally, let us
203 conduct our secluded Teacher, who is the embodied specimen of it, after his thirty
204 years' preparation for his office, into the noise and tumult of the world; and in order to
205 set him fairly on the course, let us suppose him recommended by some external gift,
206 whether ordinary or extraordinary, the power of miracles, the countenance of rulers, or a
207 reputation for learning, such as may secure a hearing for him from the multitude of men.
208 This must be supposed, in consequence of the very constitution of the present world.
209 Amid its incessant din, nothing will attract attention but what cries aloud and spares not.
210 It is an old proverb, that {86} men profess a sincere respect for Virtue, and then let her
211 starve; for they have at the bottom of their hearts an evil feeling, in spite of better
212 thoughts, that to be bound to certain laws and principles is a superstition and a slavery,
213 and that freedom consists in the actual exercise of the will in evil as well as in good; and
214 they witness (what cannot be denied) that a man who throws off the yoke of strict
215 conscientiousness, greatly increases his producible talent for the time, and his
216 immediate power of attaining his ends. At best they will but admire the religious man,
217 and treat him with deference; but in his absence they are compelled (as they say) to

218 confess that a being so amiable and gentle is not suited to play his part in the scene of
219 life; that he is too good for this world; that he is framed for a more primitive and purer
220 age, and born out of due time. [*Makarisantes humon to apeirokakon*], says the scoffing
221 politician in the History, [*ou zeloumen to aphron*];—would not the great majority of men,
222 high and low, thus speak of St. John the Apostle, were he now living?

223 15. Therefore, we must invest our Teacher with a certain gift of power, that he may be
224 feared. But even then, how hopeless does this task seem to be at first sight! how
225 improbable that he should be able to proceed one step farther than his external
226 recommendation carries him forward! so that it is a marvel how the Truth had ever been
227 spread and maintained among men. For, recollect, it is not a mere set of opinions that
228 he has to promulgate, which may lodge on the surface of the mind; but he is to be an
229 instrument in {87} changing (as Scripture speaks) the heart, and modelling all men after
230 one exemplar; making them like himself, or rather like One above himself, who is the
231 beginning of a new creation. Having (as has been said) no sufficient eloquence—nay,
232 not language at his command—what instruments can he be said to possess? Thus he
233 is, from the nature of the case, thrown upon his personal resources, be they greater or
234 less; for it is plain that he cannot commit his charge to others as his representatives,
235 and be translated (as it were), and circulated through the world, till he has made others
236 like himself.

237 16. Turn to the history of Truth, and these anticipations are fulfilled. Some hearers of it
238 had their conscience stirred for a while, and many were affected by the awful simplicity
239 of the Great Teacher; but the proud and sensual were irritated into opposition; the
240 philosophic considered His doctrines strange and chimerical; the multitude followed for
241 a time in senseless wonder, and then suddenly abandoned an apparently falling cause.
242 For in truth what was the task of an Apostle, but to raise the dead? and what trifling
243 would it appear, even to the most benevolent and candid men of the world, when such a
244 one persisted to chafe and stimulate the limbs of the inanimate corpse, as if his own life
245 could be communicated to it, and motion would continue one moment after the external
246 effort was withdrawn; in the poet's words,

247 *[thrasos akousion*
248 *andراسi thneskousi komizon]*.

249 Truly such a one must expect, at best, to be accounted {88} but a babbler, or one
250 deranged by his "much learning"—a visionary and an enthusiast,—

251 [*kart' apomousos estha gegrammenos*],

252 fit for the wilderness or the temple; a jest for the Areopagus, and but a gladiatorial show
253 at Ephesus, [*epithanaios*], an actor in an exhibition which would finish in his own death.

254 17. Yet (blessed be God!) the power of Truth actually did, by some means or other,
255 overcome these vast obstacles to its propagation; and what those means were, we shall
256 best understand by contemplating it, as it now shows itself when established and

257 generally professed; an ordinary sanction having taken the place of miracles, and
258 infidelity being the assailant instead of the assailed party.

259 18. It will not require many words to make it evident how impetuous and (for the time)
260 how triumphant an attack the rebellious Reason will conduct against the long-
261 established, over-secure, and but silently-working system of which Truth is the vital
262 principle.

263 19. (1.) First, every part of the Truth is novel to its opponent; and seen detached from
264 the whole, becomes an objection. It is only necessary for Reason [[Note 1](#)] to ask many
265 questions; and, while the other party is investigating the real answer to each in detail, to
266 claim the victory, which spectators will not be slow to award, {89} fancying (as is the
267 manner of men) that clear and ready speech is the test of Truth. And it can choose its
268 questions, selecting what appears most objectionable in the tenets and practices of the
269 received system; and it will (in all probability), even unintentionally, fall upon the most
270 difficult parts; what is on the surface being at once most conspicuous, and also farthest
271 removed from the centre on which it depends. On the other hand, its objections will be
272 complete in themselves from their very minuteness. Thus, for instance, men attack
273 ceremonies and discipline of the Church, appealing to common sense, as they call it;
274 which really means, appealing to some proposition which, though true in its own
275 province, is nothing to the purpose in theology; or appealing to the logical accuracy of
276 the argument, when every thing turns on the real meaning of the terms employed, which
277 can only be understood by the religious mind.

278 20. (2.) Next, men who investigate in this merely intellectual way, without sufficient basis
279 and guidance in their personal virtue, are bound by no fears or delicacy. Not only from
280 dulness, but by preference, they select ground for the contest, which a reverent Faith
281 wishes to keep sacred; and, while the latter is looking to its stepping, lest it commit
282 sacrilege, they have the unembarrassed use of their eyes for the combat, and
283 overcome, by skill and agility, one stronger than themselves.

284 21. (3.) Further, the warfare between Error and Truth is necessarily advantageous to the
285 former, from its very nature, as being conducted by set speech or treatise; and this, not
286 only for a reason already assigned, {90} the deficiency of Truth in the power of
287 eloquence, and even of words, but moreover from the very neatness and definiteness of
288 method required in a written or spoken argument. Truth is vast and far-stretching,
289 viewed as a system; and, viewed in its separate doctrines, it depends on the
290 combination of a number of various, delicate, and scattered evidences; hence it can
291 scarcely be exhibited in a given number of sentences. If this be attempted, its advocate,
292 unable to exhibit more than a fragment of the whole, must round off its rugged
293 extremities, and unite its straggling lines, by much the same process by which an
294 historical narrative is converted into a tale. This, indeed, is the very *art* of composition,
295 which, accordingly, is only with extreme trouble preserved clear of exaggeration and
296 artifice; and who does not see that all this is favourable to the cause of error,—to that
297 party which has not faith enough to be patient of doubt, and has just talent enough to
298 consider perspicuity the chief excellence of a writer? To illustrate this, we may contrast

299 the works of Bishop Butler with those of that popular infidel writer at the end of the last
300 century, who professed to be the harbinger of an "Age of Reason."

301 22. (4.) Moreover, this great, though dangerous faculty which evil employs as its
302 instrument in its warfare against the Truth, may simulate all kinds of virtue, and thus
303 become the rival of the true saints of God, whom it is opposing. It may draw fine
304 pictures of virtue, or trace out the course of sacred feelings or of heavenly meditations.
305 Nothing is so easy as to be religious {91} on paper; and thus the arms of Truth are
306 turned, as far as may be found necessary, against itself.

307 23. (5.) It must be further observed, that the exhibitions of Reason, being complete in
308 themselves, and having nothing of a personal nature, are capable almost of an
309 omnipresence by an indefinite multiplication and circulation, through the medium of
310 composition: here, even the orator has greatly the advantage over the religious man;
311 words may be heard by thousands at once,—a good deed will be witnessed and
312 estimated at most by but a few.

313 24. (6.) To put an end to these remarks on the advantages accruing to Error in its
314 struggle with Truth;—the exhibitions of the Reason, being in their operation separable
315 from the person furnishing them, possess little or no responsibility. To be anonymous is
316 almost their characteristic, and with it all the evils attendant on the unchecked
317 opportunity for injustice and falsehood.

318 25. Such, then, are the difficulties which beset the propagation of the Truth: its want of
319 instruments, as an assailant of the world's opinions; the keenness and vigour of the
320 weapons producible against it, when itself in turn is to be attacked. How, then, after all,
321 has it maintained its ground among men, and subjected to its dominion unwilling minds,
322 some even bound to the external profession of obedience, others at least in a sullen
323 neutrality, and the inaction of despair?

324 26. I answer, that it has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by
325 argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such {92} men as
326 have already been described, who are at once the teachers and the patterns of it; and,
327 with some suggestions in behalf of this statement, I shall conclude.

328 27. (1.) Here, first, is to be taken into account the natural beauty and majesty of virtue,
329 which is more or less felt by all but the most abandoned. I do not say virtue in the
330 abstract,—virtue in a book. Men persuade themselves, with little difficulty, to scoff at
331 principles, to ridicule books, to make sport of the names of good men; but they cannot
332 bear their presence: it is holiness embodied in personal form, which they cannot steadily
333 confront and bear down: so that the silent conduct of a conscientious man secures for
334 him from beholders a feeling different in kind from any which is created by the mere
335 versatile and garrulous Reason.

336 28. (2.) Next, consider the extreme rarity, in any great perfection and purity, of simple-
337 minded, honest devotion to God; and another instrument of influence is discovered for

338 the cause of Truth. Men naturally prize what is novel and scarce; and, considering the
339 low views of the multitude on points of social and religious duty, their ignorance of those
340 precepts of generosity, self-denial, and high-minded patience, which religion enforces,
341 nay, their scepticism (whether known to themselves or not) of the existence in the world
342 of severe holiness and truth, no wonder they are amazed when accident gives them a
343 sight of these excellences in another, as though they beheld a miracle; and they watch it
344 with a mixture of curiosity and awe.

345 29. (3.) Besides, the conduct of a religious man is quite {93} above them. They cannot
346 imitate him, if they try. It may be easy for the educated among them to make speeches,
347 or to write books; but high moral excellence is the attribute of a school to which they are
348 almost strangers, having scarcely learned, and that painfully, the first elements of the
349 heavenly science. One little deed, done against natural inclination for God's sake,
350 though in itself of a conceding or passive character, to brook an insult, to face a danger,
351 or to resign an advantage, has in it a power outbalancing all the dust and chaff of mere
352 profession; the profession whether of enlightened benevolence and candour, or, on the
353 other hand, of high religious faith and of fervent zeal.

354 30. (4.) And men feel, moreover, that the object of their contemplation is beyond their
355 reach—not open to the common temptations which influence men, and grounded on a
356 foundation which they cannot explain. And nothing is more effectual, first in irritating,
357 then in humbling the pride of men, than the sight of a superior altogether independent of
358 themselves.

359 31. (5.) The consistency of virtue is another gift, which gradually checks the rudeness of
360 the world, and tames it into obedience to itself. The changes of human affairs, which
361 first excited and interested, at length disgust the mind, which then begins to look out for
362 something on which it can rely, for peace and rest; and what can then be found
363 immutable and sure, but God's word and promises, illustrated and conveyed to the
364 inquirer in the person of His faithful servants? Every day shows us how much depends
365 on firmness for obtaining {94} influence in practical matters; and what are all kinds of
366 firmness, as exhibited in the world, but likenesses and offshoots of that true stability of
367 heart which is stayed in the grace and in the contemplation of Almighty God?

368 32. (6.) Such especially will be the thoughts of those countless multitudes, who, in the
369 course of their trial, are from time to time weighed down by affliction, or distressed by
370 bodily pain. This will be in their case, the strong hour of Truth, which, though unheard
371 and unseen by men as a body, approaches each one of that body in his own turn,
372 though at a different time. Then it is that the powers of the world, its counsels, and its
373 efforts (vigorous as they seemed to be in the race), lose ground, and slow-paced Truth
374 overtakes it; and thus it comes to pass, that, while viewed in its outward course it seems
375 ever hastening onwards to open infidelity and sin, there are ten thousand secret
376 obstacles, graciously sent from God, cumbering its chariot-wheels, so that they drive
377 heavily, and saving it from utter ruin.

378 33. Even with these few considerations before us, we shall find it difficult to estimate the
379 moral power which a single individual, trained to practise what he teaches, may acquire
380 in his own circle, in the course of years. While the Scriptures are thrown upon the world,
381 as if the common property of any who choose to appropriate them, he is, in fact, the
382 legitimate interpreter of them, and none other; the Inspired Word being but a dead letter
383 (ordinarily considered), except as transmitted from one mind to another. While he is
384 unknown to the {95} world, yet, within the range of those who see him, he will become
385 the object of feelings different in kind from those which mere intellectual excellence
386 excites. The men commonly held in popular estimation are greatest at a distance; they
387 become small as they are approached; but the attraction, exerted by unconscious
388 holiness, is of an urgent and irresistible nature; it persuades the weak, the timid, the
389 wavering, and the inquiring; it draws forth the affection and loyalty of all who are in a
390 measure like-minded; and over the thoughtless or perverse multitude it exercises a
391 sovereign compulsory sway, bidding them fear and keep silence, on the ground of its
392 own right divine to rule them,—its hereditary claim on their obedience, though they
393 understand not the principles or counsels of that spirit, which is "born, not of blood, nor
394 of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

395 34. And if such be the personal influence excited by the Teacher of Truth over the
396 mixed crowd of men whom he encounters, what (think we) will be his power over that
397 select number, just referred to, who have already, in a measure, disciplined their hearts
398 after the law of holiness, and feel themselves, as it were, individually addressed by the
399 invitation of his example? These are they whom our Lord especially calls His "elect,"
400 and came to "gather together in one," for they are worthy. And these, too, are they who
401 are ordained in God's Providence to be the salt of the earth,—to continue, in their turn,
402 the succession of His witnesses, that heirs may never be wanting to the royal line
403 though death sweeps away each successive {96} generation of them to their rest and
404 their reward. These, perhaps, by chance fell in with their destined father in the Truth, not
405 at once discerning his real greatness. At first, perhaps, they thought his teaching
406 fanciful, and parts of his conduct extravagant or weak. Years might pass away before
407 such prejudices were entirely removed from their minds; but by degrees they would
408 discern more and more the traces of unearthly majesty about him; they would witness,
409 from time to time, his trial under the various events of life, and would still find, whether
410 they looked above or below, that he rose higher, and was based deeper, than they
411 could ascertain by measurement. Then, at length, with astonishment and fear, they
412 would become aware that Christ's presence was before them; and, in the words of
413 Scripture, would glorify God in His servant [Gal. i. 24.]; and all this while they
414 themselves would be changing into that glorious Image which they gazed upon, and be
415 in training to succeed him in its propagation.

416 35. Will it be said, This is a fancy, which no experience confirms? First, no irreligious
417 man can know any thing concerning the hidden saints. Next, no one, religious or not,
418 can detect them without attentive study of them. But, after all, say they are few, such
419 high Christians; and what follows? They are enough to carry on God's noiseless work.
420 The Apostles were such men; others might be named, in their several generations, as
421 successors to their holiness. These communicate their light to a number of lesser

422 luminaries, by whom, in its turn, it is distributed through the {97} world; the first sources
423 of illumination being all the while unseen, even by the majority of sincere Christians,—
424 unseen as is that Supreme Author of Light and Truth, from whom all good primarily
425 proceeds. A few highly-endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come.
426 Before now even one man [Note 2] has impressed an image on the Church, which,
427 through God's mercy, shall not be effaced while time lasts. Such men, like the Prophet,
428 are placed upon their watch-tower, and light their beacons on the heights. Each
429 receives and transmits the sacred flame, trimming it in rivalry of his predecessor, and
430 fully purposed to send it on as bright as it has reached him; and thus the self-same fire,
431 once kindled on Moriah, though seeming at intervals to fail, has at length reached us in
432 safety, and will in like manner, as we trust, be carried forward even to the end.

433 36. To conclude. Such views of the nature and history of Divine Truth are calculated to
434 make us contented and resigned in our generation, whatever be the peculiar character
435 or the power of the errors of our own times. For Christ never will reign visibly upon
436 earth; but in each age, as it comes, we shall read of tumult and heresy, and hear the
437 complaint of good men marvelling at what they conceive to be the especial wickedness
438 of their own times.

439 37. Moreover, such considerations lead us to be satisfied with the humblest and most
440 obscure lot; by showing us, not only that we may be the instruments {98} of much good
441 in it, but that (strictly speaking) we could scarcely in any situation be direct instruments
442 of good to any besides those who personally know us, who ever must form a small
443 circle; and as to the indirect good we may do in a more exalted station (which is by no
444 means to be lightly esteemed), still we are not absolutely precluded from it in a lower
445 place in the Church. Nay, it has happened before now, that comparatively retired posts
446 have been filled by those who have exerted the most extensive influences over the
447 destinies of Religion in the times following them; as in the arts and pursuits of this world,
448 the great benefactors of mankind are frequently unknown.

449 38. Let all those, then, who acknowledge the voice of God speaking within them, and
450 urging them heaven-ward, wait patiently for the End, exercising themselves, and
451 diligently working, with a view to that day when the books shall be opened, and all the
452 disorder of human affairs reviewed and set right; when "the last shall be first, and the
453 first last;" when "all things that offend, and they which do iniquity," shall be gathered out
454 and removed; when "the righteous shall shine forth as the sun," and Faith shall see her
455 God; when "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they
456 that turn many to righteousness as the stars, for ever and ever."

457 (Preached on Sunday afternoon, January 22, 1832, in his turn as Select Preacher.)

458 Notes

459 1. [Here, as in the foregoing Discourse, by Reason is meant the reasoning of secular
460 minds, (1) *explicit*, (2) *à posteriori*, and (3) based on *secular assumptions*.

461 2. Athanasius.