

1 "The Religious Use of Excited Feelings"  
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3 St. John Henry Newman  
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5 "The man out of whom the devils were departed besought Him that he might be with  
6 Him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, Return to thine own house, and show how great  
7 things God hath done unto thee." Luke viii. 38, 39.

8 IT was very natural in the man whom our Lord had set free from this dreadful visitation,  
9 to wish to continue with Him. Doubtless his mind was transported with joy and gratitude;  
10 whatever consciousness he might possess of his real wretchedness while the devils  
11 tormented him, now at least, on recovering his reason, he would understand that he had  
12 been in a very miserable state, and he would feel all the lightness of spirits and activity  
13 of mind, which attend any release from suffering or constraint. Under these  
14 circumstances he would imagine himself to be in a new world; he had found  
15 deliverance; and what was more, a Deliverer too, who stood before him. And whether  
16 from a wish to be ever in His Divine presence, ministering to Him, or from a fear lest  
17 Satan would return, nay, with sevenfold power, did he lose sight of Christ, or from an  
18 undefined notion that all his duties and hopes were now changed, that his former  
19 pursuits were unworthy of him, and that he must follow up some great undertakings with  
20 the new ardour he felt glowing within him;—from one or other, or all of these feelings  
21 combined, he besought our Lord that he might be with Him. Christ imposed this  
22 attendance as a command on others; He bade, for instance, the young ruler follow Him;  
23 but He gives opposite commands, according to our tempers and likings; He thwarts us,  
24 that He may try our faith. In the case before us He suffered not, what at other times He  
25 had bidden. "Return to thine own house," He said, or as it is in St. Mark's Gospel, "Go  
26 home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and  
27 hath had compassion on thee." [Mark v. 19.] He directed the current of his newly-  
28 awakened feelings into another channel; as if He said, "Lovest thou Me? this do; return  
29 home to your old occupations and pursuits. You did them ill before, you lived to the  
30 world; do them well now, live to Me. Do your duties, little as well as great, heartily for My  
31 sake; go among your friends; show them what God hath done for thee; be an example  
32 to them, and teach them." [Col. iii. 17.] And further, as He said on another occasion,  
33 "Show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony  
34 unto them," [Matt. viii. 4.]—show forth that greater light and truer love which you now  
35 possess in a conscientious, consistent obedience to all the ordinances and rites of your  
36 religion.

37 Now from this account of the restored demoniac, his request, and our Lord's denial of it,  
38 a lesson may be drawn for the use of those who, having neglected religion in early  
39 youth, at length begin to have serious thoughts, try to repent, and wish to serve God  
40 better than hitherto, though they do not know how to set about it. We know that God's  
41 commandments are pleasant, and "rejoice the heart," if we accept them in the order and  
42 manner in which He puts them upon us; that Christ's yoke, as He has promised, is (on  
43 the whole) very easy, if we submit to it betimes; that the practice of religion is full of

44 comfort to those who, being first baptized with the Spirit of grace, receive thankfully His  
45 influences as their minds open, inasmuch as they are gradually and almost without  
46 sensible effort on their part, imbued in all their heart, soul, and strength, with that true  
47 heavenly life which will last for ever.

48 But here the question meets us, "But what are those to do who *have* neglected to  
49 remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and so have lost all claim on Christ's  
50 promise, that His yoke shall be easy, and His commandments not grievous?" I answer,  
51 that of course they must not be surprised if obedience is with them a laborious up-hill  
52 work all their days; nay, as having been "once enlightened, and partaken of the Holy  
53 Ghost" in baptism, they would have no right to complain even though "it were  
54 impossible for them to renew themselves again unto repentance." But God is more  
55 merciful than this just severity; merciful not only above our deservings, but even above  
56 His own promises. Even for those who have neglected Him when young, He has found  
57 (if they will avail themselves of it) some sort of remedy of the difficulties in the way of  
58 obedience which they have brought upon themselves by sinning; and what this remedy  
59 is, and how it is to be used, I proceed to describe in connexion with the account in the  
60 text.

61 The help I speak of is the excited feeling with which repentance is at first attended. True  
62 it is, that all the passionate emotion, or fine sensibility, which ever man displayed, will  
63 never by itself make us change our ways, and do our duty. Impassioned thoughts, high  
64 aspirations, sublime imaginings, have no strength in them. They can no more make a  
65 man obey consistently, than they can move mountains. If any man truly repent, it must  
66 be in consequence, not of these, but of a settled conviction of his guilt, and a deliberate  
67 resolution to leave his sins and serve God. Conscience, and Reason in subjection to  
68 Conscience, *these* are those powerful instruments (under grace) which change a man.  
69 But you will observe, that though Conscience and Reason lead us to resolve on and to  
70 attempt a new life, they cannot at once make us *love* it. It is long practice and habit  
71 which make us love religion; and in the beginning, obedience, doubtless, is very  
72 grievous to habitual sinners. Here then is the use of those earnest, ardent feelings of  
73 which I just now spoke, and which attend on the first exercise of Conscience and  
74 Reason,—to take away from the *beginnings* of obedience its *grievousness*, to give us  
75 an impulse which may carry us over the first obstacles, and send us on our way  
76 rejoicing. Not as if all this excitement of mind were to last (which cannot be), but it will  
77 do its office in thus setting us off; and then will leave us to the more sober and higher  
78 comfort resulting from that real *love* for religion, which obedience itself will have by that  
79 time begun to form in us, and will gradually go on to perfect.

80 Now it is well to understand this fully, for it is often mistaken. When sinners at length are  
81 led to think seriously, strong feelings generally precede or attend their reflections about  
82 themselves. Some book they have read, some conversation of a friend, some remarks  
83 they have heard made in church, or some occurrence or misfortune, rouses them. Or,  
84 on the other hand, if in any more calm and deliberate manner they have commenced  
85 their self-examination, yet in a little time the very view of their manifold sins, of their  
86 guilt, and of their heinous ingratitude to their God and Saviour, breaking upon them, and

87 being new to them, strikes, and astonishes, and then agitates them. Here, then, let them  
88 know the *intention* of all this excitement of mind in the order of Divine providence. It will  
89 not continue; it arises from the novelty of the view presented to them. As they become  
90 accustomed to religious contemplations, it will wear away. It is not religion itself, though  
91 it is accidentally connected with it, and may be made a means of leading them into a  
92 sound religious course of life. It is graciously intended to be a set-off in their case  
93 against the first distastefulness and pain of doing their duty; it must be used as such, or  
94 it will be of no use at all, or worse than useless. My brethren, bear this in mind (and I  
95 may say this generally,—not confining myself to the excitement which attends  
96 repentance,—of all that natural emotion prompting us to do good, which we involuntarily  
97 feel on various occasions), it is given you in order that you may find it easy to obey at  
98 starting. Therefore obey *promptly*; make use of it whilst it lasts; it waits for no man. Do  
99 you feel natural pity towards some case which reasonably demands your charity? or the  
100 impulse of generosity in a case where you are called to act a manly self-denying part?  
101 Whatever the emotion may be, whether these or any other, do not imagine you will  
102 always feel it. Whether you avail yourselves of it or not, still any how you will feel it less  
103 and less, and, as life goes on, at last you will not feel such sudden vehement  
104 excitement at all. But this is the difference between seizing or letting slip these  
105 opportunities;—if you avail yourselves of them for acting, and yield to the impulse so far  
106 as conscience tells you to do, you have made a leap (so to say) across a gulf, to which  
107 your ordinary strength is not equal; you will have secured the beginning of obedience,  
108 and the further steps in the course are (generally speaking) far easier than those which  
109 first determine its direction. And so, to return to the case of those who feel any  
110 accidental remorse for their sins violently exerting itself in their hearts, I say to them, Do  
111 not loiter; go home to your friends, and repent in *deeds* of righteousness and love;  
112 hasten to commit yourselves to certain definite *acts* of obedience. Doing is at a far  
113 greater distance from intending to do than you at first sight imagine. Join them together  
114 while you can; you will be depositing your good feelings into your heart itself by thus  
115 making them influence your conduct; and they will "spring up into fruit." This was the  
116 conduct of the conscience-stricken Corinthians, as described by St. Paul; who rejoiced  
117 "not that they were made *sorry* (not that their feelings merely were moved), but that they  
118 sorrowed *to change of mind* ... For godly sorrow (he continues) worketh repentance to  
119 salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death." [2 Cor. vii. 9,  
120 10.]

121 But now let us ask, how do men usually conduct themselves in matter of fact, when  
122 under visitings of conscience for their past sinful lives? They are far from thus acting.  
123 They look upon the turbid zeal and feverish devotion which attend their repentance, not  
124 as in part the corrupt offspring of their own previously corrupt state of mind, and partly a  
125 gracious natural provision, only temporary, to encourage them to set about their  
126 reformation, but as the substance and real excellence of religion. They think that to be  
127 thus agitated is to be religious; they indulge themselves in these warm feelings for their  
128 own sake, resting in them as if they were then engaged in a religious exercise, and  
129 boasting of them as if they were an evidence of their own exalted spiritual state;  
130 not *using them* (the one only thing they ought to do), using them as an incitement  
131 to *deeds* of love, mercy, truth, meekness, holiness. After they have indulged this luxury

132 of feeling for some time, the excitement of course ceases; they do not feel as they did  
133 before. This (I have said) might have been anticipated, but they do not understand it so.  
134 See then their unsatisfactory state. They have lost an opportunity of overcoming the first  
135 difficulties of active obedience, and so of fixing their conduct and character, which may  
136 never occur again. This is one great misfortune; but more than this, what a perplexity  
137 they have involved themselves in! Their warmth of feeling is gradually dying away. Now  
138 they think that *in it* true religion consists; therefore they believe that they are losing their  
139 faith, and falling into sin again.

140 And this, alas! *is* too often the case; they *do* fall away, for they have no root in  
141 themselves. Having neglected to turn their feelings into principles by acting upon them,  
142 they have no inward strength to overcome the temptation to live as the world, which  
143 continually assails them. Their minds have been acted upon as water by the wind,  
144 which raises waves for a time, then ceasing, leaves the water to subside into its former  
145 stagnant state. The precious opportunity of improvement has been lost; "and the latter  
146 end is worse with them than the beginning." [2 Pet. ii. 20.]

147 But let us suppose, that when they first detect this declension (as they consider it), they  
148 are alarmed, and look around for a means of recovering themselves. What do they do?  
149 Do they at once begin those practices of lowly obedience which alone can prove them  
150 to be Christ's at the last day? such as the government of their tempers, the regulation of  
151 their time, self-denying charity, truth-telling sobriety. Far from it; they despise this plain  
152 obedience to God as a mere unenlightened morality, as they call it, and they seek for  
153 potent stimulants to sustain their minds in that state of excitement which they have been  
154 taught to consider the essence of a religious life, and which they cannot produce by the  
155 means which before excited them. They have recourse to new doctrines, or follow  
156 strange teachers, in order that they may dream on in this their artificial devotion, and  
157 may avoid that conviction which is likely sooner or later to burst upon them, that emotion  
158 and passion are in our power indeed to repress, but not to *excite*; that there is a limit to  
159 the tumults and swellings of the heart, foster them as we will; and, when that time  
160 comes, the poor, mis-used soul is left exhausted and resourceless. Instances are not  
161 rare in the world of that fearful, ultimate state of hard-heartedness which then succeeds;  
162 when the miserable sinner believes indeed as the devils may, yet not even with the  
163 devils' trembling, but sins on without fear.

164 Others, again, there are, who, when their feelings fall off in strength and fervency, are  
165 led to despond; and so are brought down to fear and bondage, when they might have  
166 been rejoicing in cheerful obedience. These are the better sort, who, having something  
167 of true religious principle in their hearts, still are misled in part,—so far, that is, as to rest  
168 in their feelings as tests of holiness; therefore they are distressed and alarmed at their  
169 own tranquillity, which they think a bad sign, and, being dispirited, lose time, others  
170 outstripping them in the race.

171 And others might be mentioned who are led by this same first eagerness and zeal into a  
172 different error. The restored sufferer in the text wished to be with Christ. Now it is plain,  
173 all those who indulge themselves in the false devotion I have been describing, may be

174 said to be desirous of thus keeping themselves in Christ's immediate sight, instead of  
175 returning to their own home, as He would have them, that is, to the common duties of  
176 life: and they do this, some from weakness of faith, as if He could not bless them, and  
177 keep them in the way of grace, though they pursued their worldly callings; others from  
178 an ill-directed love of Him. But there are others, I say, who, when they are awakened to  
179 a sense of religion, forthwith despise their former condition altogether, as beneath them;  
180 and think that they are now called to some high and singular office in the Church. These  
181 mistake their duty as those already described neglect it; they do not waste their time in  
182 mere good thoughts and good words, as the others, but they are impetuously led on  
183 to *wrong acts*, and that from the influence of those same strong emotions which they  
184 have not learned to use aright or direct to their proper end. But to speak of these now at  
185 any length would be beside my subject.

186 To conclude;—let me repeat and urge upon you, my brethren, the lesson which I have  
187 deduced from the narrative of which the text forms part. Your Saviour calls you from  
188 infancy to serve Him, and has arranged all things well, so that His service shall be  
189 perfect freedom. Blessed above all men are they who heard His call then, and served  
190 Him day by day, as their strength to obey increased. But further, are you conscious that  
191 you have more or less neglected this gracious opportunity, and suffered yourselves to  
192 be tormented by Satan? See, He calls you a second time; He calls you by your roused  
193 affections once and again, ere He leave you finally. He brings you back for the time (as  
194 it were) to a second youth by the urgent persuasions of excited fear, gratitude, love, and  
195 hope. He again places you for an instant in that early, unformed state of nature when  
196 habit and character were not. He takes you out of yourselves, robbing sin for a season  
197 of its in-dwelling hold upon you. Let not those visitings pass away "as the morning cloud  
198 and the early dew." [Hosea vi. 4.] Surely, you must still have occasional compunctions  
199 of conscience for your neglect of Him. Your sin stares you in the face; your ingratitude  
200 to God affects you. Follow on to know the Lord, and to secure His favour by *acting* upon  
201 these impulses; by them He pleads with you, as well as by your conscience; they are  
202 the instruments of His spirit, stirring you up to seek your true peace. Nor be surprised,  
203 though you obey them, that they die away; they have done their office, and if they die, it  
204 is but as blossom changes into the fruit, which is far better. They *must* die. Perhaps you  
205 will have to labour in darkness afterwards, out of your Saviour's sight, in the home of  
206 your own thoughts, surrounded by sights of this world, and showing forth His praise  
207 among those who are cold-hearted. Still be quite sure that resolute, consistent  
208 obedience, though unattended with high transport and warm emotion, is far more  
209 acceptable to Him than all those passionate longings to live in His sight, which look  
210 more like religion to the uninstructed. At the very best these latter are but the graceful  
211 beginnings of obedience, graceful and becoming in children, but in grown spiritual men  
212 indecorous, as the sports of boyhood would seem in advanced years. Learn to live by  
213 faith, which is a calm, deliberate, rational principle, full of peace and comfort, and sees  
214 Christ, and rejoices in Him, though sent away from His presence to labour in the world.  
215 You will have your reward. He will "see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your  
216 joy no man taketh from you."