

"Intellect, the Instrument of Religious Training"
Sermons Preached on Various Occasions sermon 1
St. John Henry Newman
1856

"And when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was carried out, the only son of his mother: and she was a widow." Luke vii. 12.

1 THIS day we celebrate one of the most remarkable feasts in the calendar. We
2 commemorate a Saint who gained the heavenly crown by prayers indeed and tears, by
3 sleepless nights and weary wanderings, but not in the administration of any high office
4 in the Church, not in the fulfilment of some great resolution or special counsel; not as a
5 preacher, teacher, evangelist, reformer, or champion of the faith; not as Bishop of the
6 flock, or temporal governor; not by eloquence, by wisdom, or by controversial success;
7 not in the way of any other saint whom we invoke in the circle of the year; but as a
8 mother, seeking and gaining by her penances the conversion of her son. It was for no
9 ordinary son that she prayed, and it was no ordinary supplication by which she gained
10 him. When a holy man saw its vehemence, ere it was successful, he said to her, "Go in
11 peace; the son of such prayers cannot perish." The prediction was fulfilled beyond its
12 letter; not only was that young man converted, but after his conversion he became a
13 saint; not only a saint, but a doctor also, and "instructed many unto justice." St.
14 Augustine was the son for whom she prayed; and if he has been a luminary for all ages
15 of the Church since, many thanks do we owe to his mother, St. Monica, who having
16 borne him in the flesh, travailed for him in the spirit.

17 The Church, in her choice of a gospel for this feast, has likened St. Monica to the
18 desolate widow whom our Lord met at the gate of the city, as she was going forth to
19 bury the corpse of her only son. He saw her, and said, "Weep not;" and he touched the
20 bier, and the dead arose. St. Monica asked and obtained a more noble miracle. Many a
21 mother who is anxious for her son's bodily welfare, neglects his soul. So did not the
22 Saint of today; her son might be accomplished, eloquent, able, and distinguished; all
23 this was nothing to her while he was dead in God's sight, while he was the slave of sin,
24 while he was the prey of heresy. She desired his true life. She wearied heaven with
25 prayer, and wore out herself with praying; she did not at once prevail. He left his home;
26 he was carried forward by his four bearers, ignorance, pride, appetite, and ambition; he
27 was carried out into a foreign land, he crossed over from Africa to Italy. She followed
28 him, she followed the corpse, the chief, the only mourner; she went where he went, from
29 city to city. It was nothing to her to leave her dear home and her native soil; she had no
30 country below; her sole rest, her sole repose, her *Nunc dimittis*, was his new birth. So
31 while she still walked forth in her deep anguish and isolation, and her silent prayer, she
32 was at length rewarded by the long-coveted miracle. Grace melted the proud heart, and
33 purified the corrupt breast of Augustine, and restored and comforted his mother; and
34 hence, in today's Collect, the Almighty Giver is especially addressed as "Mœrentium
35 consolator et in Te sperantium salus"; the consoler of those that mourn, and the health
36 of those who hope.

37 And thus Monica, as the widow in the gospel, becomes an image of Holy Church, who
38 is ever lamenting over her lost children, and by her importunate prayers, ever
39 recovering them from the grave of sin; and to Monica, as the Church's representative,
40 may be addressed those words of the Prophet: "Put off, O Jerusalem, the garments of
41 thy mourning and affliction; arise, and look about towards the East, and behold thy
42 children; for they went out from thee on foot, led by the enemies; but the Lord will bring
43 them to thee exalted with honour, as children of the kingdom."

44 This, I say, is not a history of past time merely, but of every age. Generation passes
45 after generation, and there is on the one side the same doleful, dreary wandering, the
46 same feverish unrest, the same fleeting enjoyments, the same abiding and hopeless
47 misery; and on the other, the same anxiously beating heart of impotent affection. Age
48 goes after age, and still Augustine rushes forth again and again, with his young
49 ambition, and his intellectual energy, and his turbulent appetites; educated, yet
50 untaught; with powers strengthened, sharpened, refined by exercise, but unenlightened
51 and untrained,—goes forth into the world, ardent, self-willed, reckless, headstrong,
52 inexperienced, to fall into the hands of those who seek his life, and to become the victim
53 of heresy and sin. And still, again and again does hapless Monica weep; weeping for
54 that dear child who grew up with her from the womb, and of whom she is now robbed; of
55 whom she has lost sight; wandering with him in his wanderings, following his steps in
56 her imagination, cherishing his image in her heart, keeping his name upon her lips, and
57 feeling withal, that, as a woman, she is unable to cope with the violence and the artifices
58 of the world. And still again and again does Holy Church take her part and her place,
59 with a heart as tender and more strong, with an arm, and an eye, and an intellect more
60 powerful than hers, with an influence more than human, more sagacious than the world,
61 and more religious than home, to restrain and reclaim those whom passion, or example,
62 or sophistry is hurrying forward to destruction.

63 My Brethren, there is something happy in the circumstance, that the first Sunday of our
64 academical worship should fall on the feast of St. Monica. For is not this one chief
65 aspect of a University, and an aspect which it especially bears in this sacred place, to
66 supply that which that memorable Saint so much desiderated, and for which she
67 attempted to compensate by her prayers? Is it not one part of our especial office to
68 receive those from the hands of father and mother, whom father and mother can keep
69 no longer? Thus, while professing all sciences, and speaking by the mouths of
70 philosophers and sages, a University delights in the well-known appellation of "Alma
71 Mater." She is a mother who, after the pattern of that greatest and most heavenly of
72 mothers, is, on the one hand, "Mater Amabilis," and "Causa nostræ lætitiæ," and on the
73 other, "Sedes Sapientiæ" also. She is a mother, living, not in the seclusion of the family,
74 and in the garden's shade, but in the wide world, in the populous and busy town,
75 claiming, like our great Mother, the meek and tender Mary, "to praise her own self, and
76 to glory, and to open her mouth," because she alone has "compassed the circuit of
77 Heaven, and penetrated into the bottom of the deep, and walked upon the waves of the
78 sea," and in every department of human learning, is able to confute and put right those
79 who would set knowledge against itself, and would make truth contradict truth, and

80 would persuade the world that, to be religious, you must be ignorant, and to be
81 intellectual, you must be unbelieving.

82 My meaning will be clearer, if I revert to the nature and condition of the human mind.
83 The human mind, as you know, my Brethren, may be regarded from two principal points
84 of view, as intellectual and as moral. As intellectual, it apprehends truth; as moral, it
85 apprehends duty. The perfection of the intellect is called ability and talent; the perfection
86 of our moral nature is virtue. And it is our great misfortune here, and our trial, that, as
87 things are found in the world, the two are separated, and independent of each other;
88 that, where power of intellect is, there need not be virtue; and that where right, and
89 goodness, and moral greatness are, there need not be talent. It was not so in the
90 beginning; not that our nature is essentially different from what it was when first created;
91 but that the Creator, upon its creation, raised it above itself by a supernatural grace,
92 which blended together all its faculties, and made them conspire into one whole, and act
93 in common towards one end; so that, had the race continued in that blessed state of
94 privilege, there never would have been distance, rivalry, hostility between one faculty
95 and another. It is otherwise now; so much the worse for us;—the grace is gone; the soul
96 cannot hold together; it falls to pieces; its elements strive with each other. And as, when
97 a kingdom has long been in a state of tumult, sedition, or rebellion, certain portions
98 break off from the whole and from the central government, and set up for themselves;
99 so is it with the soul of man. So is it, I say, with the soul, long ago,—that a number of
100 small kingdoms, independent of each other and at war with each other, have arisen in it,
101 such and so many as to reduce the original sovereignty to a circuit of territory and to an
102 influence not more considerable than they have themselves. And all these small
103 dominions, as I may call them, in the soul, are, of course, one by one, incomplete and
104 defective, strong in some points, weak in others, because not any one of them is the
105 whole, sufficient for itself, but only one part of the whole, which, on the contrary, is made
106 up of all the faculties of the soul together. Hence you find in one man, or one set of
107 men, the reign, I may call it, the acknowledged reign of passion or appetite; among
108 others, the avowed reign of brute strength and material resources; among others, the
109 reign of intellect; and among others (and would they were many!) the more excellent
110 reign of virtue. Such is the state of things, as it shows to us, when we cast our eyes
111 abroad into the world; and every one, when he comes to years of discretion, and begins
112 to think, has all these separate powers warring in his own breast,—appetite, passion,
113 secular ambition, intellect, and conscience, and trying severally to get possession of
114 him. And when he looks out of himself, he sees them all severally embodied on a grand
115 scale, in large establishments and centres, outside of him, one here and another there,
116 in aid of that importunate canvass, so to express myself, which each of them is carrying
117 on within him. And thus, at least for a time, he is in a state of internal strife, confusion,
118 and uncertainty, first attracted this way, then that, not knowing how to choose, though
119 sooner or later choose he must; or rather, he must choose soon, and cannot choose
120 late, for he cannot help thinking, speaking, and acting; and to think, speak, and act, is to
121 choose.

122 This is a very serious state of things; and what makes it worse is, that these various
123 faculties and powers of the human mind have so long been separated from each other,

124 so long cultivated and developed each by itself, that it comes to be taken for granted
125 that they cannot be united; and it is commonly thought, because some men follow duty,
126 others pleasure, others glory, and others intellect, therefore that one of these things
127 excludes the other; that duty cannot be pleasant, that virtue cannot be intellectual, that
128 goodness cannot be great, that conscientiousness cannot be heroic; and the fact is
129 often so, I grant, that there *is* a separation, though I deny its necessity. I grant, that,
130 from the disorder and confusion into which the human mind has fallen, too often good
131 men are not attractive, and bad men are; too often cleverness, or wit, or taste, or
132 richness of fancy, or keenness of intellect, or depth, or knowledge, or pleasantness and
133 agreeableness, is on the side of error and not on the side of virtue. Excellence, as
134 things are, does lie, I grant, in more directions than one, and it is ever easier to excel in
135 one thing than in two. If then a man has more talent, there is the chance that he will
136 have less goodness; if he is careful about his religious duties, there is the chance he is
137 behind-hand in general knowledge; and in matter of fact, in particular cases, persons
138 may be found, correct and virtuous, who are heavy, narrow-minded, and unintellectual,
139 and again, unprincipled men, who are brilliant and amusing. And thus you see, my
140 Brethren, how that particular temptation comes about, of which I speak, when boyhood
141 is past, and youth is opening;—not only is the soul plagued and tormented by the
142 thousand temptations which rise up within it, but it is exposed moreover to the sophistry
143 of the Evil One, whispering that duty and religion are very right indeed, admirable,
144 supernatural,—who doubts it?—but that, somehow or other, religious people are
145 commonly either very dull or very tiresome: nay, that religion itself after all is more
146 suitable to women and children, who live at home, than to men.

147 O my Brethren, do you not confess to the truth of much of what I have been saying? Is it
148 not so, that, when your mind began to open, in proportion as it opened, it was by that
149 very opening made rebellious against what you knew to be duty? In matter of fact, was
150 not your intellect in league with disobedience? Instead of uniting knowledge and
151 religion, as you might have done, did you not set one against the other? For instance,
152 was it not one of the first voluntary exercises of your mind, to indulge a wrong
153 curiosity?—a curiosity which you confessed to yourselves to be wrong, which went
154 against your conscience, while you indulged it. You desired to know a number of things,
155 which it could do you no good to know. This is how boys begin; as soon as their mind
156 begins to stir, it looks the wrong way, and runs upon what is evil. This is their first wrong
157 step; and their next use of their intellect is to put what is evil into words: this is their
158 second wrong step. They form images, and entertain thoughts, which should be away,
159 and they stamp them upon themselves and others by expressing them. And next, the
160 bad turn which they do to others, others retaliate on them. One wrong speech provokes
161 another; and thus there grows up among them from boyhood that miserable tone of
162 conversation,—hinting and suggesting evil, jesting, bantering on the subject of sin,
163 supplying fuel for the inflammable imagination,—which lasts through life, which is
164 wherever the world is, which is the very breath of the world, which the world cannot do
165 without, which the world "speaks out of the abundance of its heart," and which you may
166 prophesy will prevail in every ordinary assemblage of men, as soon as they are at their
167 ease and begin to talk freely,—a sort of vocal worship of the Evil One, to which the Evil

168 One listens with special satisfaction, because he looks on it as the preparation for worse
169 sin; for from bad thoughts and bad words proceed bad deeds.

170 Bad company creates a distaste for good; and hence it happens that, when a youth has
171 gone the length I have been supposing, he is repelled, from that very distaste, from
172 those places and scenes which would do him good. He begins to lose the delight he
173 once had in going home. By little and little he loses his enjoyment in the pleasant
174 countenances, and untroubled smiles, and gentle ways, of that family circle which is so
175 dear to him still. At first he says to himself that he is not worthy of them, and therefore
176 keeps away; but at length the routine of home is tiresome to him. He has aspirations
177 and ambitions which home does not satisfy. He wants more than home can give. His
178 curiosity now takes a new turn; he listens to views and discussions which are
179 inconsistent with the sanctity of religious faith. At first he has no temptation to adopt
180 them; only he wishes to know what is "said." As time goes on, however, living with
181 companions who have no fixed principle, and who, if they do not oppose, at least do not
182 take for granted, any the most elementary truths; or worse, hearing or reading what is
183 directly against religion, at length, without being conscious of it, he admits a sceptical
184 influence upon his mind. He does not know it, he does not recognize it, but there it is;
185 and, *before* he recognizes it, it leads him to a fretful, impatient way of speaking of the
186 persons, conduct, words, and measures of religious men or of men in authority. This is
187 the way in which he relieves his mind of the burden which is growing heavier and
188 heavier every day. And so he goes on, approximating more and more closely to
189 sceptics and infidels, and feeling more and more congeniality with their modes of
190 thinking, till some day suddenly, from some accident, the fact breaks upon him, and he
191 sees clearly that he is an unbeliever himself.

192 He can no longer conceal from himself that he does not believe, and a sharp anguish
193 darts through him, and for a time he is made miserable; next, he *laments* indeed that
194 former undoubting faith, which he has lost, but as some pleasant dream;—a dream,
195 though a pleasant one, from which he has been awakened, but which, however
196 pleasant, *he* forsooth, cannot help *being* a dream. And his next stage is to experience a
197 great expansion and elevation of mind; for his field of view is swept clear of all that filled
198 it from childhood, and now he may build up for himself anything he pleases instead. So
199 he begins to form his own ideas of things, and these please and satisfy him for a time;
200 then he gets used to them, and tires of them, and he takes up others; and now he has
201 begun that everlasting round of seeking and never finding: at length, after various trials,
202 he gives up the search altogether, and decides that nothing can be known, and there is
203 no such thing as truth, and that if anything is to be professed, the creed he started from
204 is as good as any other, and has more claims;—however, that really nothing is true,
205 nothing is certain. Or, if he be of a more ardent temperature, or, like Augustine, the
206 object of God's special mercy, then he cannot give up the inquiry, though he has no
207 chance of solving it, and he roams about, "walking through dry places, seeking rest, and
208 finding none." Meanwhile poor Monica sees the change in its effects, though she does
209 not estimate it in itself, or know exactly what it is, or how it came about: nor, even
210 though it be told her, can she enter into it, or understand how one, so dear to her, can
211 be subjected to it. But a dreadful change there is, and she perceives it too clearly; a

212 dreadful change for him and for her; a wall of separation has grown up between them:
213 she cannot throw it down again; but she can turn to her God, and weep and pray.

214 Now, my Brethren, observe, the strength of this delusion lies in there being a sort of
215 truth in it. Young men feel a consciousness of certain faculties within them which
216 demand exercise, aspirations which must have an object, for which they do not
217 commonly find exercise or object in religious circles. This want is no excuse for them, if
218 they think, say, or do anything against faith or morals: but still it is the occasion of their
219 sinning. It is the fact, they are not only moral, they are intellectual beings; but, ever
220 since the fall of man, religion is here, and philosophy is there; each has its own centres
221 of influence, separate from the other; intellectual men desiderate something in the
222 homes of religion, and religious men desiderate something in the schools of science.

223 Here, then, I conceive, is the object of the Holy See and the Catholic Church in setting
224 up Universities; it is to reunite things which were in the beginning joined together by
225 God, and have been put asunder by man. Some persons will say that I am thinking of
226 confining, distorting, and stunting the growth of the intellect by ecclesiastical
227 supervision. I have no such thought. Nor have I any thought of a compromise, as if
228 religion must give up something, and science something. I wish the intellect to range
229 with the utmost freedom, and religion to enjoy an equal freedom; but what I am
230 stipulating for is, that they should be found in one and the same place, and exemplified
231 in the same persons. I want to destroy that diversity of centres, which puts everything
232 into confusion by creating a contrariety of influences. I wish the same spots and the
233 same individuals to be at once oracles of philosophy and shrines of devotion. It will not
234 satisfy me, what satisfies so many, to have two independent systems, intellectual and
235 religious, going at once side by side, by a sort of division of labour, and only accidentally
236 brought together. It will not satisfy me, if religion is here, and science there, and young
237 men converse with science all day, and lodge with religion in the evening. It is not
238 touching the evil, to which these remarks have been directed, if young men eat and
239 drink and sleep in one place, and think in another: I want the same roof to contain both
240 the intellectual and moral discipline. Devotion is not a sort of finish given to the
241 sciences; nor is science a sort of feather in the cap, if I may so express myself, an
242 ornament and set-off to devotion. I want the intellectual layman to be religious, and the
243 devout ecclesiastic to be intellectual.

244 This is no matter of terms, nor of subtle distinctions. Sanctity has its influence; intellect
245 has its influence; the influence of sanctity is the greater on the long run; the influence of
246 intellect is greater at the moment. Therefore, in the case of the young, whose education
247 lasts a few years, where the intellect is, *there* is the influence. Their literary, their
248 scientific teachers, really have the forming of them. Let both influences act freely, and
249 then, as a general rule, no system of mere religious guardianship which neglects the
250 Reason, will in matter of fact succeed against the School. Youths need a masculine
251 religion, if it is to carry captive their restless imaginations, and their wild intellects, as
252 well as to touch their susceptible hearts.

253 Look down then upon us from Heaven, O blessed Monica, for we are engaged in
254 supplying that very want which called for thy prayers, and gained for thee thy crown.
255 Thou who didst obtain thy son's conversion by the merit of thy intercession, continue
256 that intercession for us, that we may be blest, as human instruments, in the use of those
257 human means by which ordinarily the Holy Cross is raised aloft, and religion commands
258 the world. Gain for us, first, that we may intensely feel that God's grace is all in all, and
259 that we are nothing; next, that, for His greater glory, and for the honour of Holy Church,
260 and for the good of man, we may be "zealous for all the better gifts," and may excel in
261 intellect as we excel in virtue.

262 (Feast of St. Monica—Sunday after Ascension, 1856. Preached in the University
263 Church, Dublin.)