

"Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth"
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St. John Henry Newman
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"Out of weakness were made strong." Heb. xi. 34.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

230 16. Turn to the history of Truth, and these anticipations are fulfilled. Some hearers of it
231 had their conscience stirred for a while, and many were affected by the awful simplicity
232 of the Great Teacher; but the proud and sensual were irritated into opposition; the
233 philosophic considered His doctrines strange and chimerical; the multitude followed for
234 a time in senseless wonder, and then suddenly abandoned an apparently falling cause.
235 For in truth what was the task of an Apostle, but to raise the dead? and what trifling
236 would it appear, even to the most benevolent and candid men of the world, when such a
237 one persisted to chafe and stimulate the limbs of the inanimate corpse, as if his own life
238 could be communicated to it, and motion would continue one moment after the external
239 effort was withdrawn; in the poet's words, [*thrasos akousion andrasi thneskousi*
240 *komizōn*]. Truly such a one must expect, at best, to be accounted but a babbler, or one
241 deranged by his "much learning"—a visionary and an enthusiast,— [*kart'*
242 *apomousos estha gegrammenos*], fit for the wilderness or the temple; a jest for the
243 Areopagus, and but a gladiatorial show at Ephesus, [*epithanatios*], an actor in an
244 exhibition which would finish in his own death.

245 17. Yet (blessed be God!) the power of Truth actually did, by some means or other,
246 overcome these vast obstacles to its propagation; and what those means were, we shall
247 best understand by contemplating it, as it now shows itself when established and
248 generally professed; an ordinary sanction having taken the place of miracles, and
249 infidelity being the assailant instead of the assailed party.

250 18. It will not require many words to make it evident how impetuous and (for the time)
251 how triumphant an attack the rebellious Reason will conduct against the long-

252 established, over-secure, and but silently-working system of which Truth is the vital
253 principle.

254 19. (1.) First, every part of the Truth is novel to its opponent; and seen detached from
255 the whole, becomes an objection. It is only necessary for Reason [Note 1] to ask many
256 questions; and, while the other party is investigating the real answer to each in detail, to
257 claim the victory, which spectators will not be slow to award, fancying (as is the manner
258 of men) that clear and ready speech is the test of Truth. And it can choose its questions,
259 selecting what appears most objectionable in the tenets and practices of the received
260 system; and it will (in all probability), even unintentionally, fall upon the most difficult
261 parts; what is on the surface being at once most conspicuous, and also farthest
262 removed from the centre on which it depends. On the other hand, its objections will be
263 complete in themselves from their very minuteness. Thus, for instance, men attack
264 ceremonies and discipline of the Church, appealing to common sense, as they call it;
265 which really means, appealing to some proposition which, though true in its own
266 province, is nothing to the purpose in theology; or appealing to the logical accuracy of
267 the argument, when every thing turns on the real meaning of the terms employed, which
268 can only be understood by the religious mind.

269 20. (2.) Next, men who investigate in this merely intellectual way, without sufficient basis
270 and guidance in their personal virtue, are bound by no fears or delicacy. Not only from
271 dulness, but by preference, they select ground for the contest, which a reverent Faith
272 wishes to keep sacred; and, while the latter is looking to its stepping, lest it commit
273 sacrilege, they have the unembarrassed use of their eyes for the combat, and
274 overcome, by skill and agility, one stronger than themselves.

275 21. (3.) Further, the warfare between Error and Truth is necessarily advantageous to the
276 former, from its very nature, as being conducted by set speech or treatise; and this, not
277 only for a reason already assigned, the deficiency of Truth in the power of eloquence,
278 and even of words, but moreover from the very neatness and definiteness of method
279 required in a written or spoken argument. Truth is vast and far-stretching, viewed as a
280 system; and, viewed in its separate doctrines, it depends on the combination of a
281 number of various, delicate, and scattered evidences; hence it can scarcely be exhibited
282 in a given number of sentences. If this be attempted, its advocate, unable to exhibit
283 more than a fragment of the whole, must round off its rugged extremities, and unite its
284 straggling lines, by much the same process by which an historical narrative is converted
285 into a tale. This, indeed, is the very *art* of composition, which, accordingly, is only with
286 extreme trouble preserved clear of exaggeration and artifice; and who does not see that
287 all this is favourable to the cause of error,—to that party which has not faith enough to
288 be patient of doubt, and has just talent enough to consider perspicuity the chief
289 excellence of a writer? To illustrate this, we may contrast the works of Bishop Butler
290 with those of that popular infidel writer at the end of the last century, who professed to
291 be the harbinger of an "Age of Reason."

292 22. (4.) Moreover, this great, though dangerous faculty which evil employs as its
293 instrument in its warfare against the Truth, may simulate all kinds of virtue, and thus

294 become the rival of the true saints of God, whom it is opposing. It may draw fine
295 pictures of virtue, or trace out the course of sacred feelings or of heavenly meditations.
296 Nothing is so easy as to be religious on paper; and thus the arms of Truth are turned, as
297 far as may be found necessary, against itself.

298 23. (5.) It must be further observed, that the exhibitions of Reason, being complete in
299 themselves, and having nothing of a personal nature, are capable almost of an
300 omnipresence by an indefinite multiplication and circulation, through the medium of
301 composition: here, even the orator has greatly the advantage over the religious man;
302 words may be heard by thousands at once,—a good deed will be witnessed and
303 estimated at most by but a few.

304 24. (6.) To put an end to these remarks on the advantages accruing to Error in its
305 struggle with Truth;—the exhibitions of the Reason, being in their operation separable
306 from the person furnishing them, possess little or no responsibility. To be anonymous is
307 almost their characteristic, and with it all the evils attendant on the unchecked
308 opportunity for injustice and falsehood.

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

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

319 27. (1.) Here, first, is to be taken into account the natural beauty and majesty of virtue,
320 which is more or less felt by all but the most abandoned. I do not say virtue in the
321 abstract,—virtue in a book. Men persuade themselves, with little difficulty, to scoff at
322 principles, to ridicule books, to make sport of the names of good men; but they cannot
323 bear their presence: it is holiness embodied in personal form, which they cannot steadily
324 confront and bear down: so that the silent conduct of a conscientious man secures for
325 him from beholders a feeling different in kind from any which is created by the mere
326 versatile and garrulous Reason.

327 28. (2.) Next, consider the extreme rarity, in any great perfection and purity, of simple-
328 minded, honest devotion to God; and another instrument of influence is discovered for
329 the cause of Truth. Men naturally prize what is novel and scarce; and, considering the
330 low views of the multitude on points of social and religious duty, their ignorance of those
331 precepts of generosity, self-denial, and high-minded patience, which religion enforces,
332 nay, their scepticism (whether known to themselves or not) of the existence in the world
333 of severe holiness and truth, no wonder they are amazed when accident gives them a

334 sight of these excellences in another, as though they beheld a miracle; and they watch it
335 with a mixture of curiosity and awe.

336 29. (3.) Besides, the conduct of a religious man is quite above them. They cannot
337 imitate him, if they try. It may be easy for the educated among them to make speeches,
338 or to write books; but high moral excellence is the attribute of a school to which they are
339 almost strangers, having scarcely learned, and that painfully, the first elements of the
340 heavenly science. One little deed, done against natural inclination for God's sake,
341 though in itself of a conceding or passive character, to brook an insult, to face a danger,
342 or to resign an advantage, has in it a power outbalancing all the dust and chaff of mere
343 profession; the profession whether of enlightened benevolence and candour, or, on the
344 other hand, of high religious faith and of fervent zeal.

345 30. (4.) And men feel, moreover, that the object of their contemplation is beyond their
346 reach—not open to the common temptations which influence men, and grounded on a
347 foundation which they cannot explain. And nothing is more effectual, first in irritating,
348 then in humbling the pride of men, than the sight of a superior altogether independent of
349 themselves.

350 31. (5.) The consistency of virtue is another gift, which gradually checks the rudeness of
351 the world, and tames it into obedience to itself. The changes of human affairs, which
352 first excited and interested, at length disgust the mind, which then begins to look out for
353 something on which it can rely, for peace and rest; and what can then be found
354 immutable and sure, but God's word and promises, illustrated and conveyed to the
355 inquirer in the person of His faithful servants? Every day shows us how much depends
356 on firmness for obtaining influence in practical matters; and what are all kinds of
357 firmness, as exhibited in the world, but likenesses and offshoots of that true stability of
358 heart which is stayed in the grace and in the contemplation of Almighty God?

359 32. (6.) Such especially will be the thoughts of those countless multitudes, who, in the
360 course of their trial, are from time to time weighed down by affliction, or distressed by
361 bodily pain. This will be in their case, the strong hour of Truth, which, though unheard
362 and unseen by men as a body, approaches each one of that body in his own turn,
363 though at a different time. Then it is that the powers of the world, its counsels, and its
364 efforts (vigorous as they seemed to be in the race), lose ground, and slow-paced Truth
365 overtakes it; and thus it comes to pass, that, while viewed in its outward course it seems
366 ever hastening onwards to open infidelity and sin, there are ten thousand secret
367 obstacles, graciously sent from God, cumbering its chariot-wheels, so that they drive
368 heavily, and saving it from utter ruin.

369 33. Even with these few considerations before us, we shall find it difficult to estimate the
370 moral power which a single individual, trained to practise what he teaches, may acquire
371 in his own circle, in the course of years. While the Scriptures are thrown upon the world,
372 as if the common property of any who choose to appropriate them, he is, in fact, the
373 legitimate interpreter of them, and none other; the Inspired Word being but a dead letter
374 (ordinarily considered), except as transmitted from one mind to another. While he is

375 unknown to the world, yet, within the range of those who see him, he will become the
376 object of feelings different in kind from those which mere intellectual excellence excites.
377 The men commonly held in popular estimation are greatest at a distance; they become
378 small as they are approached; but the attraction, exerted by unconscious holiness, is of
379 an urgent and irresistible nature; it persuades the weak, the timid, the wavering, and the
380 inquiring; it draws forth the affection and loyalty of all who are in a measure like-minded;
381 and over the thoughtless or perverse multitude it exercises a sovereign compulsory
382 sway, bidding them fear and keep silence, on the ground of its own right divine to rule
383 them,—its hereditary claim on their obedience, though they understand not the
384 principles or counsels of that spirit, which is "born, not of blood, nor of the will of the
385 flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

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

407 35. Will it be said, This is a fancy, which no experience confirms? First, no irreligious
408 man can know any thing concerning the hidden saints. Next, no one, religious or not,
409 can detect them without attentive study of them. But, after all, say they are few, such
410 high Christians; and what follows? They are enough to carry on God's noiseless work.
411 The Apostles were such men; others might be named, in their several generations, as
412 successors to their holiness. These communicate their light to a number of lesser
413 luminaries, by whom, in its turn, it is distributed through the world; the first sources of
414 illumination being all the while unseen, even by the majority of sincere Christians,—
415 unseen as is that Supreme Author of Light and Truth, from whom all good primarily
416 proceeds. A few highly-endowed men will rescue the world for centuries to come.
417 Before now even one man [Note 2] has impressed an image on the Church, which,
418 through God's mercy, shall not be effaced while time lasts. Such men, like the Prophet,

419 are placed upon their watch-tower, and light their beacons on the heights. Each
420 receives and transmits the sacred flame, trimming it in rivalry of his predecessor, and
421 fully purposed to send it on as bright as it has reached him; and thus the self-same fire,
422 once kindled on Moriah, though seeming at intervals to fail, has at length reached us in
423 safety, and will in like manner, as we trust, be carried forward even to the end.

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

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

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

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

449 Notes

450 1. [Here, as in the foregoing Discourse, by Reason is meant the reasoning of secular
451 minds, (1) *explicit*, (2) *à posteriori*, and (3) based on *secular assumptions*. Vide
452 Preface.]

453 2. Athanasius.