

The Mission of St. Philip Neri

by Venerable John Henry Card. Newman C.O.

(Part 1)

"I awaked last of all, and as one that gathereth after the grape-gatherers. In the blessing of God I also have hoped; and as one that gathereth grapes, have I filled the wine-press. See that I have not laboured for myself only, but for all that seek discipline." Eccli. XXXIII, 16-18.

{199} The Picture of St. Philip is ever in this Chapel, and his image is ever in our minds. Not only we, who belong to his Congregation, and have devoted ourselves to his service, but you, my dear Brethren and Children, who come to worship here under his shadow, you, too, I am persuaded, carry him away with you to your homes, and find by experience the benefit of such a Patron. His commemoration is of daily wont in this neighbourhood, and the Octave of his Festival runs round the full circuit of the year. At no season is it necessary to remind you of him; nor at this particular season is there any {200} special reason, either from ritual or from custom, which makes it suitable or dutiful to do so. And yet, in our own case it is more natural to think and speak of him at this time than at any other, for we are approaching the anniversary of his coming into England and into Birmingham, and are returning thanks to our good God in a series of devotions, for all the mercies which, through his intercession, have, in the course of two years, been poured out upon us. We are now close upon completing the second year since the first introduction of the Oratory into England [Note 1]; close upon completing the first, since it took up its abode in this populous town [Note 2], to which the Apostolical Brief sent it. Our prospects, we know surely, will extend, and our successes multiply, as time goes on; and we may be enabled to furnish the elements, or to lay the rudiments of Oratories for other places; but, if the proverb be true, that "he who begins, does half the work," we had a mercy shown us this time last year, the like of which we never can have shown us again.

Nor do we at this season turn only in gratitude to our dear Saint and Father, for what he has gained for us; we also turn to him as our most necessary pattern in the acknowledgment which we must make to God for it. He who has gained for us God's mercies, he, my dear Fathers of the Oratory, must teach us to use them worthily, and this leads us to think over and dwell both on him and on his history, as though it were now his yearly festival;—to enlarge upon the special traits of his character and memorable passages of his life, if not for {201} his sake, at least for our own; if not to do him honour, at least to gain guidance for ourselves, by reason of the light which all that is recorded of him casts upon our vocation, our duties, and our work; for then only are we his true followers when we do as he did. Moreover, although all this is a subject of thought which concerns us, the members of the Oratory, primarily, yet it must have an interest for those also who, like yourselves, my Brethren, make use of our ministrations; for, whereas there are many professions, missions, and undertakings in the length and breadth of the Catholic Church, you will, by considering it, understand more exactly what it is in particular, that the Oratory proposes to do for you.

Let us, then, inquire what St. Philip's times were, and what place he holds in them; what he was raised up to do, how he did it, and how we, my Fathers of the Oratory, may make his work and his way of doing it a pattern for ourselves in this day.

1. His times were such as the Church has never seen before nor since, and such as the world must last long for her to see again; nor peculiar only in themselves, but involving a singular and most

severe trial of the faith and love of her children. It was a time of sifting and peril, and of "the fall and resurrection of many in Israel." Our gracious Lord, we well know, never will forsake her; He will sustain her in all dangers, and she will last while the world lasts; but, if ever there was a time when He seemed preparing to forsake her, it was not the time of persecution, when thousands upon thousands of her choicest were cut off, and her flock decimated; it was not {202} in the middle age, when the ferocity of the soldier and subtlety of the sophist beleaguered her,—but it was in that dreary time, at the close and in the fulness of which St. Philip entered upon his work. A great author, one of his own sons, Cardinal Baronius, has said of the dark age, that it was a time when our Lord seemed to be asleep in Peter's boat; but there is another passage of the Gospel still more wonderful than the record of that sleep, and one which had a still more marvellous accomplishment in the period of which I have to speak. There was a time when Satan took up bodily the King of Saints, and carried Him whither he would. Then was our most Holy Saviour and Lord clasped in the arms of ambition, avarice, and impurity:—and in like manner His Church also after Him, though full of divine gifts, the Immaculate Spouse, the Oracle of Truth, the Voice of the Holy Ghost, infallible in matters of faith and morals, whether in the chair of her Supreme Pontiff, or in the unity of her Episcopate, nevertheless was at this time so environed, so implicated, with sin and lawlessness, as to appear in the eyes of the world to be what she was not. Never, as then, were her rulers, some in higher, some in lower degree, so near compromising what can never be compromised; never so near denying in private what they taught in public, and undoing by their lives what they professed with their mouths; never were they so mixed up with vanity, so tempted by pride, so haunted by concupiscence; never breathed they so tainted an atmosphere, or were kissed by such traitorous friends, or were subjected to such sights of shame, or were clad in such blood-stained garments, as in the centuries upon {203} and in which St. Philip came into the world. Alas, for us, my Brethren! the scandal of deeds done in Italy then is borne by us in England now.

It was an age when the passionate wilfulness of the feudal baron was vigorous still; when civilization, powerless as yet to redress the grievances of society at large, gave to princes and to nobles as much to possess as before, and less to suffer; increased their pomp, and diminished their duties and their risks; became the cloak of vices which it did not extirpate, made revenge certain by teaching it to be treacherous, and unbelief venerable by proving it to be ancient. Such were the characteristics of St. Philip's age; and Florence, his birth-place, presented the most complete exhibition of them,—and next to Florence, Rome, the city of his adoption.

Florence was at that time the most intellectual, the most magnificent city of Italy. About a century before, one of its richest merchants and bankers [Note 3] had become its virtual ruler, and had transmitted his power to his descendants, who still possessed it. The history of this family is intimately connected with that of the Holy See; at times they were its enemies: they ended in giving to it three or four princes of their own blood to fill it: but whether in alliance with it or at war, whether at Florence or at Rome, they exerted, at least for many years, an influence prejudicial to its real, that is, its religious well-being.

This was the time of the revival of what is called classical learning; that is, the learning of ancient Greece and Rome. Constantinople had lately been taken by the {204} Turks, who still hold it; its scholars, with their traditions and their manuscripts, escaped to Italy, and they found a home at Florence with this powerful family. The heads of this family became the special patrons of Literature and the Arts, and leaders of the classical revival. Under their auspices, public schools were opened; the Greek language was studied; an academy was established for philosophy; a library was founded, and placed in the Dominican Convent of St. Mark. Its librarian in course of time became Pope [Note 4], and founded at Rome the famous Vatican Library. Books in the languages of the East,—Hebrew, Arabic, even Indian, were collected; the lost writings of Greek and Roman authors were brought to light and published.

So far, you will see, there was little which could be censured; the revival of learning was in itself a great benefit to mankind, and the labour which it involved was well bestowed. But, in this world, evil follows good as its shadow; human nature perverting and corrupting what is intrinsically innocent or praiseworthy. So, in this instance, the pursuit of the old learning became a passion. As the crumbling cloisters of the East were ransacked, and manuscripts were found and deciphered,—as the ruins of pagan edifices were excavated, mounds of earth removed, and the sculptures of classical art disinterred,—an uncontrollable excitement, an intoxication, seized upon the classes which were engaged in the work. It seized upon young and old: while one celebrated archæologist [Note 5] spent fifty years in the discovery of ancient authors, and another's [Note 6] hair turned white on his losing by shipwreck his cargo of discoveries, noble ladies became {205} prodigies of learning, and a youth [Note 7] of twenty exhibited himself at Rome as the master of twenty-two languages, and proposed nine hundred subjects for disputation.

The wonderful art of printing, which had been lately discovered, added to the excitement, not merely by what it actually did in that day, but by the brilliant future which it opened on the imagination, to the advance both of knowledge and of society.

Nor was this the limit of the discoveries of that remarkable age;—news came of another continent beyond the ocean; America, North and South, became known to Europe, and the extent of the earth was doubled. The strangest tales were circulated, true and false, of the riches, of the gold, silver, and gems, of the animals, of the vegetable productions, of the new hemisphere. The public mind was agitated by a thousand fancies; no one knew what was coming; anything might be expected; a new era had opened upon the world, and enormous changes, political and social, were in preparation. There was an upheaving of the gigantic intellect of man; he found he had powers and resources which he was not conscious of before, and began in anticipation to idolize their triumphs.

And, while the world was becoming so strong, the Church, on the other hand, was at the moment proportionally weak, as far as relates to the human instruments of her power. Great, indeed, was her temporal exaltation at that day; great she was then, as she will ever be, in her invisible, divine strength; but in the ordinary elements of her greatness and weapons of her {206} success, in order and discipline, in pastoral vigilance, in the sanctity of her individual members, in these respects certainly she was taken at disadvantage. I do not like, nor would you, my Brethren, wish me, to enlarge upon a most sorrowful subject. The great Italian families intrigued and fought for her supreme rule, as if it had been a mere earthly principality. And on this account, she was unable at the moment, from scarcity of champions, to cope with the vehement enthusiastic movement which I have been describing, and which assailed her within and without. All things are good in their place: human learning and science, the works of genius, the wonders of nature, all, as I have said, have their use, when kept in subordination to the faith and worship of God; but it is nothing else but an abuse, if they are suffered to engross the mind, and if religion is made secondary to them. Yet they are so fascinating,—so enchanting,—so present, tangible, constraining, in their influence,—that, unless the watchmen of the Holy City are on the alert, they are almost sure to act to the prejudice of the highest interests of man. So it was at the time I speak of; what was beautiful was placed before what was true; or rather, the beauty of the creature was preferred to the transcendent beauty of the Creator. Nature and art, the rich material, the creative mind, were suffered to invade and oppress the Church, instead of ministering to her. The world entered her sacred precincts forcibly, and embellished them after its own fashion. It addressed itself to her rulers, who were already enervated by the homage of nations; and it attempted to persuade them to disguise the awful Bride {207} of the Lamb in an old heathen garb, of which her very coming had long since been the destruction. More seemly by far had it been to ask her to take part in the abolished ceremonies of the Mosaic law, than to intrude classical literature upon her instead of the teaching of the Holy Fathers. It was

Satan carrying her up to the high mountain, and showing her all the kingdoms of the earth and their glory, with the hope of tempting her to forget her mission.

"Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die:" so was it said of old by the heathen; so was it now said, almost in the same words, by Christians, not meaning, indeed, to deny the life to come, but hoping to inherit the future without giving up any enjoyment of the present. The artists, poets, and philosophers, who flourished under the smile of the great Florentine family, and their disciples through Italy, if they were not allowed to decorate Holy Church at their will and pleasure, at least could do as they would with the world; and fallen as it is, they made it still, by the splendour of their genius, a very paradise of delight. They flung a grace over sin, and a dignity over unbelief. Life was to them one long revel; they feasted, they sported, they moulded forms and painted countenances of the most perfect human beauty; they indulged in licentious wit, they wrote immodest verses, they lightly used the words of Scripture; they quarrelled, they used the knife, they fled to sanctuary, and then they issued forth again, to go through the same round of pleasure and of sin. Festivals and Carnivals became seasons of popular licence, for dramas and masquerades; and the excesses of paganism were renewed {208} with the refinements supplied by classical associations. Dances, processions, and songs, formed part of the entertainment. Florence especially was the scene of the pageant, and its whole population were either actors in it, or spectators. The time chosen for it was the night; the performances were carried on by torchlight; bands of women, as well as of men, had their appointed parts in them, nor were they concluded till after daybreak. On St. John Baptist's day, in the year preceding St. Philip's birth, such an exhibition, with tournaments and other celebrations, was held in that same city, his birth-place. Seven sacred princes came up incognito to attend it; two lions and a panther were sent as a present from a member of the reigning family, then seated in the Vatican; and a triumphal arch was erected, in honour of the donor, opposite to the Dominican convent of St. Mark.

All this for the people:—Their rulers, who had introduced or patronized these shows, and the immediate circle of those rulers, went further. They took heathen names; they kept the feasts of the heathen founder of Rome, and the heathen philosopher Plato; they died with heathen consolations sounding in their ears. They attempted to hold intercourse with the evil powers;—we have the record of a scene in the great Roman amphitheatre, called the Coliseum. The sorcerer is said to have possessed a sacred character; thousands of devils are described as rising at his incantation, who promised, and who kept their promise, to grant a wicked gratification to the celebrated artist [Note 8] who consulted them. A {209} greater sin could not have been committed by an ecclesiastic, but scandals there were worse. If even in the very opening of the Gospel, when faith was keenest and the heart purest, there was a Judas among the Apostles, and a Nicolas among the deacons, and a Simon Magus among the neophytes, we need not wonder, much as we may lament, that in the degenerate age I am speaking of, lapses should occur, far more numerous than those early ones, if not so great in enormity of crime. One of the most zealous restorers of the ancient learning, who has been already spoken of, was an ecclesiastic with a family [Note 9]; one of the chief writers of licentious tales had on him both religious and episcopal obligations [Note 10]. And a writer [Note 11], who is reckoned the vilest of his day, being patronized by one of the great Florentine family at Rome, was audacious enough to set his heart (unsuccessfully) on becoming a Cardinal of Holy Church.

Good and evil, sacred prerogatives and sinful hearts, were brought into close contact, marvellously and awfully. The Sovereign Pontiffs were familiarly dealt with, and then slandered behind their backs by the profligate artists whom they had benefited. Holy men grew up and won their crowns, out of families on which history has set its note of shame. Two saints, contemporaries of St. Philip, will occur to you, my dear Fathers, as instances of this portent:—St. Francis Borgia, the third Father-General of the Society of Jesus, bears a name, shameful in the history of Rome; St. Mary

Magdalene of the Pazzi came of a Florentine stock infamous {210} for a deed of combined sacrilege, bloodshed, and treachery perhaps without a parallel.

These are some of the traits of the times in which St. Philip was sent on earth: certainly, an Apostle was needed both for Florence and for Rome.

2. And for Florence, that Apostle seemed to have been found just before St. Philip's day. You may recollect, my Brethren, I have more than once spoken of the great Dominican convent of St. Mark. That convent, built though it was by the first prince of the rich family I have so often mentioned, was devoted to a style of art and a description of learning far different from those for which Greece or Rome was famous. Under the shadow of St. Dominic, such learning alone had place, which ministered to the most symmetrical theology, and to a philosophy in accordance; and the serene wisdom which his name recalls, had been carried out into poetry and the fine arts, by the genius of his children and his clients. That very convent of St. Mark is still adorned by the celebrated paintings executed by the Dominican artist, called, like the Dominican St. Thomas, the Angelical; and about the same time, it had been under the rule of the celebrated Dominican confessor and writer, afterwards archbishop of the city, St. Antoninus. Here, too, came about thirty years afterwards, and shortly before St. Philip's birth, that fiery Reformer, also a Dominican, of whom I am to speak as a sort of Apostle of Florence, a man certainly of commanding eloquence and extraordinary influence, full of the traditions of his order, and cherishing a fierce hatred of the reviving heathen literature {211} and the classical taste of the day; I mention his name, on account of the affection which St. Philip felt for his memory,—Savonarola.

A true son of St. Dominic, in energy, in severity of life, in contempt of merely secular learning, a forerunner of the Dominican St. Pius in boldness, in resoluteness, in zeal for the honour of the House of God, and for the restoration of holy discipline, Savonarola felt "his spirit stirred up within him," like another Paul, when he came to that beautiful home of genius and philosophy; for he found Florence, like another Athens, "wholly given to idolatry." He groaned within him, and was troubled, and refused consolation, when he beheld a Christian court and people priding itself on its material greatness, its intellectual gifts, and its social refinement, while it abandoned itself to luxury, to feast and song and revel, to fine shows and splendid apparel, to an impure poetry, to a depraved and sensual character of art, to heathen speculations, and to forbidden, superstitious practices. His vehement spirit could not be restrained, and got the better of him, and—unlike the Apostle, whose prudence, gentleness, love of his kind, and human accomplishments are nowhere more happily shown than in his speech to the Athenians [[Note 12](#)]—he burst forth into a whirlwind of indignation and invective against all that he found in Florence, and condemned the whole established system, and all who took part of it, high and low, prince or prelate, ecclesiastic or layman, with a pitiless rigour,—which for the moment certainly did a great deal more than St. Paul was able to do at the Areopagus; for St. Paul made {212} only one or two converts there, and departed, whereas Savonarola had great immediate success, frightened and abashed the offenders, rallied round him the better disposed, and elicited and developed whatever there was of piety, whether in the multitude or in the upper class.

It was the truth of his cause, the earnestness of his convictions, the singleness of his aims, the impartiality of his censures, the intrepidity of his menaces, which constituted the secret of his success. Yet a less worthy motive lent its aid; men crowded round a pulpit, from which others were attacked as well as themselves. The humbler offender was pleased to be told that crime was a leveller of ranks, and to find that he thus was a gainer in the common demoralization. The laity bore to be denounced, when the clergy were not spared; and the rich and noble suffered a declamation which did not stop short of the sacred Chair of St. Peter.

"In the houses of great prelates and great doctors," he cried out, "nothing is thought of but poetry and rhetoric. Go and see for yourselves; you will find them with books of polite literature in their hands, pernicious writings, with Virgil, Horace, and Cicero, to prepare themselves for the cure of souls withal. Astrologers have the governance of the Church. There is not a prelate, there is not a great doctor, but is intimate with some astrologer, who predicts for him the hour and the moment for riding out, or for whatever else he does. Our preachers have already given up Holy Scripture, and are given to Philosophy, which they preach from the pulpit, and treat as their queen. As to Holy Scripture, they make it the handmaid, because to preach philosophy looks {213} learned, whereas it should simply be an aid in the interpretation of the divine word."

"Our Church," he continued, "has outside many fine ceremonies in divine worship, fine vestments, an uncommon display of drapery, gold and silver candlesticks, so many fine chalices, quite magnificent. Those great prelates with their fine mitres on, of gold and jewels, with crosiers of silver, with their fine chasubles, and copes of brocade, there they are at the altar, singing fine vespers, fine masses, so solemnly, with so many fine ceremonies, so many organs and singers, that your head turns. And they seem to you, those men, to have great gravity and a saintly show; and you think that they cannot do wrong, but that their words and their deeds are Gospel, and claim your observance. That is how the modern Church is made. Men feed on these husks, and make themselves happy in these ceremonies, and say that the Church of Jesus Christ never was in a more flourishing state, and that divine worship never was so well carried out as at present,—as on one occasion a great prelate said, that the Church never was in such honour, and its prelates never in such repute, whereas its first prelates were but small men, because they were humble and poor, because they had not such ample bishoprics, such rich abbeys, as ours of this day, nor had they as yet such gold mitres, such chalices. Do you take me? I mean in the primitive Church, the chalices were of wood, and the prelates of gold; but now the chalices are of gold, and the prelates are wooden."

"O Italy!" he cried out in the tone of a prophet, "O rulers of Italy! O prelates of the Church! the wrath {214} of God is over you, and your conversion alone will avert it. Do penance, while the sword is in the scabbard, and ere it is imbrued in your blood. O Italy! thou shalt be given into the hands of a fierce, a barbarous nation, whose only pleasure will be to do thee ill. And Rome shall fare worse from them than any other city; your possessions and your treasures shall be given into their hands."

Such bold language effected for the moment a revolution rather than a reform. The eloquent preacher became the political partisan; the great family was forced by political circumstances to give way, and for the better part of ten years Savonarola was ruler of Florence. Not only the populace, but courtiers, noble ladies, scholars, artists, all put themselves at his disposal, and became his disciples. He found a way to the hearts of philosophers, poets, painters, engravers, sculptors, architects, and made them renounce their heathen tastes and heathen aspirations. "Behold the sun," he said; "its beauty consists in possessing light; behold the blessed spirits, their beauty is light; and God Himself, because He is the most full of light, is beauty itself. The beauty of every creature is more perfect, the more closely it resembles God's beauty; and the body is beautiful in proportion to the beauty of the soul. Conceive what must have been the beauty of the Blessed Virgin, who possessed such sanctity, sanctity that shone from all her features. Conceive how beautiful was Christ, who was God and man. Now even Aristotle, who was a pagan, bids us not to tolerate indecent pictures, lest children, seeing them, be corrupted; but what shall I say to you, Christian {215} painters, who execute these immodest figures? I tell you to do so no more. You who have them and destroy them, will do a work pleasing to Almighty God and the Holy Virgin. 'You have dedicated My temple and My Churches to your God Moloch,' says the Almighty. See how they act at Florence! mothers take their unmarried daughters to the cathedral, decked out for show, till they

look like nymphs. 'These are your idols, which you have placed in My Temple.' The young men say of this or that maiden, 'This is Magdalen,' 'That is St. John,' because you paint figures in the church, which resemble this woman or that. You painters act wrongly; you introduce worldly vanities into the Church. Do you believe that the Blessed Virgin was dressed as you represent her? I tell you that she was modestly dressed, and so veiled that one could scarce see her face; and St. Elizabeth too was modest and simple in her attire." [Note 13]

Wonderful were the conversions which followed on the enunciation of truth so undeniable, so grave in import, so earnestly enforced. As to the artists, many of them became Dominicans, and the convent of St. Mark had to be enlarged to hold them. The members of another convent in the city, feeling their state of relaxation, begged to be allowed to come over to him in a body, and to take the rule of St. Dominic upon them. The population of Florence rose from their beds after midnight in winter to attend upon his sermons. There they stood in the Church, waiting, taper in hand, or singing hymns, or praying, or saying office, for three or four hours, till he began to preach. They showed the fruits of his exhortations {216} in their homes. Women reformed their dress, youths unlearned their light songs, heads of families read the lives of the Saints to their children. At length the zealous preacher determined on having, in token of repentance, a solemn conflagration in the great square, of all the scandals and the various occasions of sin with which the city abounded. At the time of the Carnival, the special festival of the world, the flesh, and the devil, he invited the whole city to this stern act of reparation. He raised a high pyramid, with a quantity of gun-powder at its base. His innumerable penitents formed in long procession, and hither they marched with the instruments and incentives of iniquity in their hands, to be offered up in expiation of their sins. It was a costly sacrifice, ruthlessly performed. Artists brought their beautiful pictures, portraits, and figures in ivory or alabaster, and flung them upon the pyre; others brought richly worked tapestries; others, lutes, flutes, guitars, cards, dice, looking-glasses, perfumery, paint, masks, disguises; others, novels and poems. Lighted torches were then applied, and, amid the ringing of bells and the acclamations of the vast multitude, the whole was reduced to ashes. A foreigner had in vain offered 20,000 crowns to ransom them from the flames. The same impressive ceremony was repeated in the following year.

A very wonderful man, you will allow, my Brethren, was this Savonarola. I shall say nothing more of him, except what was the issue of his reforms. For years, as I have said, he had his own way; at length, his innocence, sincerity, and zeal were the ruin of his humility. He presumed; he exalted himself against a power which {217} none can assail without misfortune. He put himself in opposition to the Holy See, and, as some say, disobeyed its injunctions. Reform is not wrought out by disobedience; this was not the way to be the Apostle either of Florence or of Rome. Then trouble came upon him, a great reaction ensued; his enemies got the upper hand; he went into extravagances himself; the people deserted him; he was put to death, strangled, hung on a gibbet, and then burned in the very square where he had set fire to the costly furniture of vanity and sin. And then the rich and powerful family returned to Florence; and things went on pretty much as before; and, on the very year preceding St. Philip's birth, took place that riotous festivity on St. John Baptist's day, over against the convent of St. Mark, of which I have already spoken.

And now I have added something more to the picture, which I have proposed to give you, of the state of things both in Florence and in Rome, when St. Philip was raised up to be an Apostle of another sort.

(Preached Jan. 15, 1850, in the Birmingham Oratory on occasion of its first Anniversary.)

Notes

1. February 2, 1848.
2. Birmingham.
3. Cosimo de' Medici.
4. Nicholas V.
5. Poggio.
6. Guarino.
7. Pico della Mirandola.
8. Cellini.
9. Poggio.
10. Bandello.
11. Pietro Aretino.
12. Acts XVII.
13. Vide Father Meehan's translation of Marchetti's work.

The Mission of St. Philip Neri

by Venerable John Henry Card. Newman C.O.

(Part 2)

{218} Florence, then, had her Apostle;—we have reviewed his commencement and his end:—a zealous, heroic man, but not, as far as we can judge, reaching to the level of a saint. It is not by the enthusiasm of the multitude, or by political violence,—it is not by powerful declamation, or by railing at authorities, that the foundations are laid of religious works. It is not by sudden popularity, or by strong resolves, and demonstrations, or by romantic incidents, or by immediate successes, that undertakings commence which are to last. I do not say, that to be roused, even for a moment, from the dream of sin, to repent and be absolved, even though a relapse follow it, is a slight gain; or that the brilliant, but brief, triumphs of Savonarola are to be despised. He did good in his day, though his day was a short one. Still, after all, his history brings to mind that passage in sacred history, where the Almighty displayed His presence to Elias on Mount Horeb. "The Lord was not in the wind," nor "in the earthquake," nor "in the fire"; but after the fire came "the whisper of a gentle air."

So was it with the Lord of grace Himself, when He came upon earth; so it is with His chosen servants after Him. He grew up in silence and obscurity, overlooked {219} by the world; and then He triumphed. He was the grain cast into the earth, which, while a man "sleeps and rises, night and day, springs up and grows whilst he knoweth not." He was the mustard seed, "which is the least of all seeds, but, when it is grown up, becometh a tree, and shooteth out great branches, so that the birds of the air dwell under its shadow." He grew up "as a tender plant, and as a root out of a thirsty land"; and "His look was, as it were, hidden and despised, wherefore we esteemed Him not." And, when He began to preach, He did not "contend nor cry out, nor break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax"; and thus "He sent forth judgment unto victory." So was it in the beginning, so has it been ever since. After the storm, the earthquake and the fire, the calm, soothing whisper of the fragrant air. After Savonarola, Philip.

1. Philip was born in Florence within twenty years after him. The memory of the heroic friar was then still fresh in the minds of men, who would be talking familiarly of him to the younger generation,—of the scenes which their own eyes had witnessed, and of the deeds of penance which they had done at his bidding. Especially vivid would the recollections of him be in the convent of St. Mark; for there was his cell, there the garden where he walked up and down in meditation, and refused to notice the great prince of the day [Note 1]; there would be his crucifix, his habit, his discipline, his books, and whatever had once been his. Now, it so happened, St. Philip was a child of this very convent; here he received his first religious instruction, and in after times {220} he used to say, "Whatever there was of good in me, when I was young, I owed it to the Fathers of St. Mark's, in Florence." For Savonarola he retained a singular affection all through his life; he kept his picture in his room, and about the year 1560, when the question came before Popes Paul IV. and Pius IV., of the condemnation of Savonarola's teaching, he interceded fervently and successfully in his behalf before the Blessed Sacrament, exposed on the occasion in the Dominican church at Rome. This was in his middle age.

To return to his youth: at the age of eighteen, he left Florence for good, first going to a town in the kingdom of Naples; then at the end of two years, to Rome, where he lived for sixty years, without once going beyond the circuit of its seven Basilicas. There he died, when he had nearly completed his eightieth year. A simple outline of a history, you will say, my Brethren, singularly deficient in

incident or adventure; yet, though he made only one journey in his long life, he turned it to account; and the chances of external situation which then befell him, few as they were, were instruments in the formation of his mind and in the direction of his future course. The Florentine pupil of St. Dominic fell under the inspirations of St. Benedict in the territory of Naples, and found St. Ignatius in person, and in the flesh, when he got to Rome.

Benedict, Dominic, Ignatius:—these are the three venerable Patriarchs, whose Orders divide between them the extent of Christian history. There are many Saints besides, who have been fruitful in followers and institutions, and have multiplied themselves in Christendom, {221} and lived on earth in their children, when they themselves were gone to heaven. But there are three who, in an especial way, have had committed to them the office of a public ministry in the affairs of the Church one after another, and who are, in some sense, her "nursing fathers," and are masters in the spiritual Israel, and ruling names in her schools and her libraries; and these are Benedict, Dominic, and Ignatius. Philip came under the teaching of all three successively.

2. It was the magnificent aim of the children of St. Dominic to form the whole matter of human knowledge into one harmonious system, to secure the alliance between religion and philosophy, and to train men to the use of the gifts of nature in the sunlight of divine grace and revealed truth. It required the dissolution and reconstruction of society to give an opportunity for so great a thought; and accordingly, the Order of Preachers flourished after the old Empire had passed away, and the chaos which followed on it had resulted in the creation of a new world. Now, in the age of St. Philip, a violent effort was in progress, on the part of the powers of evil, to break up this sublime unity, and to set human genius, the philosopher and the poet, the artist and the musician, in opposition to religion. Accordingly, the work of the glorious Order of St. Dominic was more than ever called for, whatever might be those new methods of prosecuting it, more suitable to the times; and, if Philip was destined, as he was, to play an important part in them in the cause of God, it was therefore necessary that he should be imbued with the great idea of that Order. It was necessary that he should have deeply fixed within {222} him, as the object of his life, that single aim of subduing this various, multiform, many-coloured world to the unity of divine service. I mean there are Saints, whose mission lies rather in separating off from each other the world and the Truth; that of other Saints lies in bringing them together. Philip's was the latter. Suitably then, and reasonably, did he receive his elementary formation of mind from the Fathers of St. Mark. And when this had been secured, then he was sent off, "not knowing whither he went," to other tutors, and towards the scene of his destined labours, to do a work like St. Dominic's work, though he was not to be a Dominican.

3. Then he came to St. Benedict. Close by the town to which his father had sent him, is the celebrated monastery of Monte Cassino, the principal seat of the Benedictine Order. The relaxation, which at that time prevailed in so many regular communities, seems not to have reached this ancient sanctuary [Note 2]; but the judgments, which even in Savonarola's day were falling on Italy, had not fallen short of Monte Cassino. The neighbourhood had been the scene of war; and the foreign troops had pillaged the Church, and the new generation of monks had been nurtured in adversity. "Not far from San Germano," that is, the town to which Philip had been sent, says the author of his life, "there is a celebrated mountain, which, according to a very ancient and common tradition, is one of those which opened at our Saviour's death. It belongs to the Benedictine Fathers of Monte Cassino, who have a church there dedicated to the Most Holy Trinity. This mountain is split from {223} top to bottom by three huge fissures; and in the middle of the three, which is the steepest, there is a little chapel on a rock, under the care of the monks, and on it is a crucifix painted, which the sailors salute with their guns as they pass by. Here Philip was in the habit of retiring for prayer and meditation on the Lord's Passion."

Observe, my dear Brethren, Philip is now in quite a new scene,—no longer amid the mediæval grandeur, but among the Saints and associations of primitive ages; it is no longer the busy, gaudy town, but the calm and pure country; no longer cloisters and paintings, but rocks and sea, leading to meditation; no longer golden mitres and jewelled copes, under high arches and painted windows, but secluded, unfurnished chapels, and rude crucifixes; no longer the vision of our Lord's Passion portrayed by sacred art, but the very rent in the solid mountain, opened in that same hour when He hung upon the Cross; no longer the holy doctrines and devotions of later piety, but the aboriginal mystery, contained in Scripture, Creed, and Baptism, and battled for in the first centuries, the dogma of the most Holy Trinity. Thus, everything about Philip threw him back into the times of simplicity, of poverty, of persecution, of martyrdom; the times of patience, of obscure and cheerful toil, of humble, unrequited service; ere Christianity had gained a literature, or theology had become a science, or any but saints had sat in Peter's chair; while the book of nature and the book of grace were the chief instruments of knowledge and of love. Such was the school of St. Benedict; nor did that dear and venerable Father let the {224} young pilgrim go, even when his two years' sojourn in his neighbourhood was at an end. For if a direct divine summons took him to Rome, still St. Benedict, as I may say, chose out for him his lodgings there; for he sent him to those ancient basilicas, and cemeteries, and catacombs of the Holy City which spoke of the early monks and the primitive religion, and these you know he haunted, or almost lived in them, till ten years and more had passed from the date of his leaving Florence. "Philip Neri is a great saint," said a Dominican Friar, who kept his eyes upon the youth; "and among his other wonderful things, he has dwelt for a whole ten years in the caves of St. Sebastian, by way of penance;" lodging, I say, as St. Benedict would have had him, with the old martyr Popes, and their saintly court and retinue, their deacons and chamberlains, and chaplains; with St. Callistus, and St. Sebastian, and St. Laurence; with St. Mark and St. Marcellian, with St. Agnes and St. Cecilia, with St. Nereus and St. Achilleus, with St. Papias and St. Maurus, till at length he had that marvellous visitation, when the Holy Ghost came down upon him in a ball of fire, about the time of Pentecost, and filled his heart with consolations so overwhelming that, lest he should die of ecstasy, he came up into the world of men, and set about a work to flesh and blood more endurable.

Thus was the second stage of Philip's education brought to a close; and, as from St. Dominic he gained the end he was to pursue, so from St. Benedict he learned how to pursue it. He was to pursue Savonarola's purposes, but not in Savonarola's way; rather, in the spirit and {225} after the fashion of those early Religious, of which St. Benedict is the typical representative. Those early Religious lived in communities, which were detached from each other, not brought together under one common governance; they were settled in one place, and had no duties beyond it; vows were not a necessary element of their state; they had little or nothing to do with ecclesiastical matters or secular politics; they had no large plan of action for religious ends; they let each day do its work as it came; they lived in obscurity, and laid a special stress on prayer and meditation; they were simple in their forms of worship, and they freely admitted laymen into their fellowship. In peculiarities such as these we recognize the Oratory of St. Philip. Least thought had he of all men, of living in his works beyond his day; he could scarcely be brought to throw his disciples into the form of community, and to perpetuate that form by ecclesiastical recognition. Then he would not go and preside over them: then, when obliged to go, he would not let them call him Father Superior. Then he would not listen to their founding houses in other cities. Much less would he take dignities himself, or suffer them to do so. He would not permit any forms or observances to be the characteristics of his Congregation, besides mutual love and hard work. For the interior life he sent them back, with especial earnestness, to the Apostolic Epistles, and to the traditions of that early monk, John Cassian. In his exterior worship, he imitated, as Cardinal Baronius observes, the form furnished by St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. "It is by a divine counsel," says that glory of the Oratory, speaking in his Annals, {226} in the tone of an historian, "that there has been in great measure renewed in our age in Rome, after the pattern of the Apostolic assembly, the edifying

practice of discoursing in sermons of the things of God. This has been the work of the Reverend Father Philip Neri, a Florentine, who, like a skilful architect, laid the foundation of it. It was arranged, that almost every day those who were desirous of Christian perfection should come to the Oratory. First, there was some length of time spent in mental prayer, then one of the brothers read a spiritual book, and during the reading the aforesaid Father commented on what was read. Sometimes he desired one of the brethren to give his opinion on some subject, and then the discourse proceeded in the form of dialogue. After this, he commanded one of them to mount a seat, and there, in a familiar, plain style, to discourse upon the lives of the Saints. To him succeeded another, on a different subject, but equally plain; lastly, a third discoursed upon ecclesiastical history. When all was finished, they sang some spiritual hymn, prayed again for a short time, and so ended. Things being thus disposed, and approved by the Pope's authority, it seemed as though the beautiful form of the Apostolical assembly had returned, as far as times admitted."

This, of course, took place long after that portion of Philip's life on which I am immediately engaged. From eight to eighteen, ten years, he was under the teaching of St. Dominic; from eighteen to twenty-eight or twenty-nine, he was with St. Benedict, and the ancient Saints of Rome. Nor even, when the end of that period was come, did he quite leave St. Benedict. During the {227} whole sixty years that he passed at Rome, there was only one great turning-point or crisis of his life; it was when, at about the age of forty, he thought of going to the East. Now, to determine this point, he did not take the counsel of any Dominican, nor of any Jesuit, either of which courses might have seemed natural, but he went to a Benedictine of the great Basilica of St. Paul, and by him was referred to another monk of the Benedictine family, who lived on the spot of St. Paul's martyrdom, and this father, directed by St. John the Evangelist, told him that *'his Indies were to be in Rome, where God would make much use of him.'* Observe this, too, my Brethren: St. John the Evangelist was the informant. Philip lives in especial intercourse with the Saints of the Apostolic ages, with St. Paul, with St. John the Evangelist. Again, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Philip and St. James were his own particular patrons; and St. John the Baptist appeared to him in vision. I do not recollect any Saints of a later date, with whom he was in such intimate communion.

4. Such was the character of the devotions, such the cast and fashion of interior life, which are proper to St. Philip; Benedictine, as I may call them. At length he came back to the world, and there he found and made acquaintance with the third great Patriarch whom I have named, St. Ignatius, who was then in Rome. That memorable Saint had taken up his abode, and established his Society there, while Philip was in his long retreat, and now he was at hand for Philip to hear and to consult, for the space of eleven years, when he died. Now what did St. Ignatius do for him? There is a {228} remarkable resemblance, as any one may see, in the practical teaching of the two, and that, in matters where that teaching is in contrast to what was more usual in and before their day. It cannot be doubted that, while in theological traditions St. Philip was one with St. Dominic, in the cure of souls he was one with St. Ignatius. An earnest enforcement of interior religion, a jealousy of formal ceremonies, an insisting on obedience rather than sacrifice, on mental discipline rather than fasting or hair-shirt, a mortification of the reason, that illumination and freedom of spirit which comes of love; further, a mild and tender rule for the Confessional; frequent confessions, frequent communions, special devotion towards the Blessed Sacrament, these are peculiarities of a particular school in the Church, and St. Ignatius and St. Philip are Masters in it. From St. Benedict's time there had been a broad line between the world and the Church, and it was very hard to follow sanctity without entering into Religion. St. Ignatius and St. Philip, on the contrary, carried out the Church into the world, and aimed to bring under her light yoke as many men as they could possibly reach. Both of them, of course, acted under a divine guidance; but, as they lived at the same time and on the same spot, it is natural to think that, humanly speaking, one must have taken his tradition from the other; and, as St. Philip is the younger, it is as natural to think that he gained it from St. Ignatius.

As then he learned from Benedict *what to be*, and from Dominic *what to do*, so let me consider that from Ignatius he learned *how he was to do it*.

St. Philip, on one occasion, acknowledged his debt in {229} one particular to the elder Saint; he said to some Jesuits whom he met, "You are children of a great Father. I am under obligations to him, for your Master, Ignatius, taught me to make mental prayer." Nay, strange as it may appear, it would seem that, at least at one time of his life, he wished to be admitted among his children; at another time, perhaps, to which I have already alluded, to join them in the East with others in his train.

5. My Brethren, I do not feel it to be any want of devotion or reverence towards our dear Father, to speak of him as looking out to be taught, or willing to be governed. It is like his most amiable, natural, and unpretending self. He was ever putting himself in the background, and never thought of taking on himself rule, or seizing on a position, in the Church, or of founding a religious body. And I seem to have Father Consolini's authority for saying that I please him more by doing towards him what he would do for himself, than by showing now a zeal in his behalf, for which he would not have thanked me when living. Father Consolini, as you recollect, was the most intimate friend of St. Philip, of all his spiritual children. The Saint "was most jealous in concealing his gifts from the eyes of the world," but "from Consolini he hid nothing." Well, then, you would think, that after Philip's death, his loving disciple would tell all that he could, as loudly and as widely as he could, in his honour. Not so; so far from it, that the author of that Father's life, whom I have just been quoting, tells us that, although he was the most devoted, as well as the best beloved of the sons {230} of St. Philip, yet, when the Holy Father's canonization was first commenced, he did not wish it to be forwarded by the Congregation. He himself at first refused to give evidence in the Process, and, when commanded by his Superiors, he gave it with evident reluctance. How natural this is! St. Philip was too *near* him to allow of his speaking to his praise. To praise him was to praise himself and all the Fathers. Let strangers praise him, not a son of his own. And if they wish to love him, let them come and learn to love him for what he is. We too do not wish him other than he is; we love him too much for what he is, to wish him praised for what he is not.

It is further said of Father Consolini: "He was so deeply penetrated with this feeling, that, though he knew from the Saint himself the way in which he received from the Holy Ghost that wonderful visitation of the fracture of his ribs, yet he never revealed the particulars to any living person till within a few days of his death." He recollected the Saint's words, "*Secretum meum mihi*," "My secret is my own." And again: "When he heard that some priests had united together under the invocation and institute of St. Philip, with the name of Reformed Priests, he was gravely displeased with the vanity of such a title, saying, that had Philip been living, he would have gone to the Pope to dissolve such a Congregation."

O touching and most genuine traits of our sweetest and dearest Father, and most impressive lesson to us, and remarkable contrast to the spirit of the vehement friar of St. Mark's! Philip had shown them from a boy. One {231} of the first things told us of him in his very childhood is, that "he never spoke lightly, as boys do, of becoming a priest or a religious; he concealed the wish of his heart, and from childhood upwards he eschewed display, of which he ever had a special hatred." Things which other saints have allowed in themselves, or rather have felt a duty, he could not abide. He did not ask to be opposed, to be maligned, to be persecuted, but simply to be overlooked, to be despised. Neglect was the badge which he desired for himself and for his own. "To despise the whole world," he said, "to despise no member of it, to despise oneself, *to despise being despised*." He took great pleasure in being undervalued and made little of, according to the Apostle's sentiment, "If any man among you seem to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." And hence you know, when he became so famous in his old age, and every one was thinking of him

mysteriously, and looking at him with awe, and solemnly repeating Father Philip's words and rehearsing Father Philip's deeds, and bringing strangers to see him, it was the most cruel of penances to him, and he was ever behaving himself ridiculously on purpose, and putting them out, from his intense hatred and impatience of being turned into a show. "He was always trying," says his biographer, "either by gestures, or motions, or words, or some facetious levity, to hide his great devotion; and when he had done any virtuous action, he would do something simple to cover it."

6. This being the disposition of St. Philip, you will understand how it was, that while he wished to do the very work which Savonarola intended, he set about it, {232} not on principle merely, but on instinctive feeling, in so different a way. Here, as in other cases, the slowest way was the surest, and the most quiet the most effectual; and he rather would not have attempted that work at all, than have sacrificed his humility and modesty to the doing of it. Accordingly he, whose mission was to Popes, Cardinals, and nobles, to philosophers, authors, and artists, began with teaching the poor who are found about the doors of the Roman Churches. This was his occupation for years; soon he added to it another undertaking of the same kind. He used to go about the squares, shops, warehouses, schools, and shop-counters, "talking with all sorts of persons in a most engaging way about spiritual things, and saying, 'Well, my brothers, when are we to set about serving God, and doing good?'" and he began to make some great conversions.

Rome was at that time in a very different state from what it was when Savonarola had discharged his threats upon it. A most heavy judgment had come upon it a few years before Philip arrived there, and that judgment had come in mercy upon the city of God's choice. The Germans and Spaniards had besieged, taken, and sacked it, with excesses and outrages so horrible, that it is thought to have suffered less from the Goths and Huns than from troops nominally Christian. Its external splendour has never been recovered down to this day; its churches were spoiled and defaced; its convents plundered; its Cardinals, Bishops, monks, and nuns, treated with the most extreme indignities, and many of them murdered; and sacrileges committed innumerable. People thought what happened was the fulfilment of the predictions of Savonarola; {233} but, amid these miseries, the grace of God spoke, and the guilty population was softened. First St. Cajetan, who was himself tortured by the ruffianly soldiers, had already begun to call to prayer and repentance; St. Ignatius followed, preaching. Then came St. Philip, but in his own quiet way, like "the whispering of a gentle air," "his speech trickling like dew, as a shower upon the herb, and as drops upon the grass."

He began, as I have said, with the poor; then he went among shopmen, warehousemen, clerks in banks, and loungers in public places. Encouraged by these successes, he addressed himself to men, not merely of careless, but of the worst kind of lives, and them also he gained for God. His charity brought him into various situations of trial; but when attempts were made upon his virtue, his zeal and devotion brought him through them. All this time he was visiting the hospitals, and attending to the necessities, both bodily and spiritual, of the sick.

This had been his life, in some degree, before he left his retreat in the basilicas and cemeteries; and it lasted altogether ten years. At the end of them he joined a small community of pious people, in number fifteen, "simple and poor," we are told, "but full of spirit and devotion," and "inflaming one another, by words and by example, with the desire of Christian perfection." Philip, though still a layman, preached: and, because he was doing an unusual thing, dissolute youths came to make game of him; but it was dangerous for such to come near him; on one occasion he converted thirty of them by a single sermon. He and his associates made it their duty to attend on the pilgrims, and on the sick {234} who had left the hospitals, convalescent, but not recovered. Thus his work gradually extended; for these pilgrims and sick were from all countries, and many of them were Jews or heretics, whom he brought into the fold of the Church.

7. He had been fifteen years in Rome before he was ordained; and then at length, on his receiving faculties for hearing confessions, he began, at the age of thirty-five, his real mission,—that long course of ministry, which, carried on for years three times fifteen, down almost to the hour of his death, has gained for him the title of Apostle of Rome.

You know, my Brethren, what is commonly meant by an Apostle of a country. It means one who converts its heathen inhabitants to the Christian faith, such as St. Augustine of England; accordingly, his proper function is Baptism. Hence you find St. Augustine, St. Patrick, St. Boniface, or St. Francis baptizing their hundreds and thousands. This was the office to which St. Philip wished to minister in India; but it was his zeal and charity that urged him, not his mature judgment; for the fierce conflicts, and the pastoral cares, and the rude publicity of such exalted duties, were unsuited to his nature; so he was kept at home for a different work. He was kept at home, in the very heart of Christendom, not to evangelize, but to recover; and his instrument of conversion was, not Baptism, but Penance. The Confessional was the seat and seal of his peculiar Apostolate. Hence, as St. Francis Xavier baptized his tens of thousands, Philip was, every day and almost every hour, for forty-five years, restoring, teaching, encouraging, {235} and guiding penitents along the narrow way of salvation.

We are told in his Life, that "he abandoned every other care, and gave himself to hearing confessions." Not content with the day, he gave up a considerable portion of the night to it also. Before dawn he had generally confessed a good number. When he retired to his room, he still confessed every one who came; though at prayers, though at meals, he broke off instantly, and attended to the call. When the church was opened at daybreak, he went down to the Confessional, and remained in it till noon, when he said Mass. When no penitents came, he remained near his Confessional; he never intermitted hearing confessions for any illness. "On the day of his death he began to hear confessions very early in the morning;" after Mass "again he went into the Confessional;" in the afternoon, and "during the rest of the day down to supper time," he heard confessions. After supper, "he heard the confessions of those Fathers who were to say the first Masses on the following morning," when he himself was no longer to be on earth. It was this extraordinary persevering service in so trying, so wearing a duty, for forty-five years, that enabled him to be the new Apostle of the Sacred City. Thus it was, as the lesson in his Office says, that "he bore innumerable children to Christ." He was ever suffering their miseries, and fighting with their sins, and travailing with their good resolves, year after year, whatever their state of life, their calling, their circumstances, if so be that he might bring them safe to heaven, with a superhuman, heroic patience, of {236} which we see so few traces in the fiery preacher at Florence.

Savonarola, in spite of his personal sanctity, in spite of his protests against a mere external sanctity in Catholics, after all, began with an external reform; he burned lutes and guitars, looking-glasses and masks, books and pictures, in the public square: but Philip bore with every outside extravagance in those whom he addressed, as far as it was not directly sinful, knowing well that if the heart was once set right, the appropriate demeanour would follow. You recollect how a youth came to his Exercises one day, dressed out "in a most singular and whimsical fashion"; and how Philip did but fix his eyes on him, and proceed with the discourses and devotions of the Oratory, and how, by the time that they were at an end, the poor sinner had become quite another man; his nature was changed all at once, and he became one of the Saint's most fervent penitents. A rich ecclesiastic came to him in coloured clothes, like a layman: Philip talked with him for a fortnight, without saying a word about his dress. At the end of the time he put it off of his own accord, and made a general confession. His biographer says: "He was very much against stiffness and off-hand prohibitions about wearing fine clothes, collars, swords, and such-like things, saying that if only a little devotion gained admittance into their hearts, you might leave them to themselves." If he spoke of them, it was good-naturedly and playfully. You recollect he said to a lady, who asked if it was a

sin to wear slippers with very high heels, according to an excessive fashion of the day, "Take care they do not {237} trip you up." And to a youth, who wore one of those large, stiff frills, which we see in pictures, he remarked, "I should caress you much more, if your collar did not hurt me."

Savonarola is associated in our minds with the pulpit rather than the confessional: his vehemence converted many, but frightened or irritated more. The consequences came back upon himself and his penitents. Some of his convert artists were assassinated, others were driven into exile, others gave up their profession altogether in disgust or despair. Philip had no vocation, and little affection, for the pulpit; he was jealous of what the world calls eloquence, and he mortified his disciples when they aspired to it. One he interrupted and sent down; another he made preach his sermons six times over: he discoursed and conversed rather than preached. And "he could not endure harsh rebukes," says the writer of his life, "or anything like rigour. He allured men to the service of God so dexterously, and with such a holy, winning art, that those who saw it cried out, astonished: 'Father Philip draws souls as the magnet draws iron.' He so accommodated himself to the temper of each, as, in the words of the Apostle, to become 'all things to all men, that he might gain all.'" And his love of them individually was so tender and ardent, that, even in extreme old age, he was anxious to suffer for their sins; and "for this end he inflicted on himself severe disciplines, and he reckoned their misdeeds as his own, and wept for them as such." I do not read that Savonarola acted thus towards Pope Alexander the Sixth, whom he so violently denounced. {238}

It is not surprising that, with this tenderness, with this prudence, and with the zeal and charity to which both were subordinate, his influence increased year by year, till he gained a place in the heart of the Roman population, which he has never lost. There are those whose greatest works are their earliest; there are others, who, at first scarcely distinguishable from a whole class who look the same, distance them in the long run, and do more and more wonderful works the longer they live. Philip was thirty-five before he was ordained; forty, before he began his exercises in his room; fifty, before he had a church; sixty before he formed his disciples into a congregation; near seventy, before he put himself at the head of it. As the Blessed Virgin's name has by a majestic growth expanded and extended itself through the Church, "taking root in an honourable people, and resting in the Holy City," so the influence of Philip was, at the end of many years, paramount in that place which he has so long dwelt in as an obscure, disregarded stranger. Sharp eyes and holy sympathies indeed had detected "Philip Neri, as a saint living in caves," when he was a youth; but it required half a century to develop this truth to the intelligence of the multitude of men. At length there was no possibility of mistaking it. Visitors to Rome discerned the presence of one who was greater than Pope and Cardinals, holy, venerable and vigilant as the rulers of the Church then were. "Among all the wonderful things which I saw in Rome," says one of them, writing when Philip was turned fifty, "I took the chief pleasure in beholding the multitude of devout and spiritual persons who frequented the Oratory. Amid the {239} monuments of antiquity, the superb palaces and courts of so many illustrious lords, it appeared to me that the glory of this exemplar shone forth with surpassing light." "I go," says another visitor, ten years later, "to the Oratory, where they deliver every day most beautiful discourses on the gospel, or on the virtues and vices, or ecclesiastical history, or the lives of the saints. Persons of distinction go to hear them, bishops, prelates, and the like. They who deliver them are in holy orders, and of most exemplary life. Their superior is a certain Reverend Father Philip, an old man of sixty, who, they say, is an oracle, not only in Rome, but in the far-off parts of Italy, and of France and Spain, so that many come to him for counsel; indeed he is another Thomas à Kempis, or Tauler."

But it required to live in Rome to understand what his influence really was. Nothing was too high for him, nothing too low. He taught poor begging women to use mental prayer; he took out boys to play; he protected orphans; he acted as novice-master to the children of St. Dominic. He was the teacher and director of artisans, mechanics, cashiers in banks, merchants, workers in gold, artists,

men of science. He was consulted by monks, canons, lawyers, physicians, courtiers; ladies of the highest rank, convicts going to execution, engaged in their turn his solicitude and prayers. Cardinals hung about his room, and Popes asked for his miraculous aid in disease, and his ministrations in death. It was his mission to save men, not from, but in, the world. To break the haughtiness of rank, and the fastidiousness of fashion, he gave his penitents public mortifications; {240} to draw the young from the theatres, he opened his Oratory of Sacred Music; to rescue the careless from the Carnival and its excesses, he set out in pilgrimage to the Seven Basilicas. For those who loved reading, he substituted, for the works of chivalry or the hurtful novels of the day, the true romance and the celestial poetry of the Lives of the Saints. He set one of his disciples to write history against the heretics of that age; another to treat of the Notes of the Church; a third, to undertake the Martyrs and Christian Antiquities;—for, while in the discourses and devotions of the Oratory, he prescribed the simplicity of the primitive monks, he wished his children, individually and in private, to cultivate all their gifts to the full. He, however, was, after all and in all, their true model,—the humble priest, shrinking from every kind of dignity, or post, or office, and living the greater part of day and night in prayer, in his room or upon the housetop.

And when he died, a continued stream of people, says his biographer, came to see his body, during the two days that it remained in the church, kissing his bier, touching him with their rosaries or their rings, or taking away portions of his hair, or the flowers which were strewed over him; and, among the crowd, persons of every rank and condition were heard lamenting and extolling one who was so lowly, yet so great; who had been so variously endowed, and had been the pupil of so many saintly masters; who had the breadth of view of St. Dominic, the poetry of St. Benedict, the wisdom of St. Ignatius, and all recommended by an unassuming grace and a winning tenderness which were his own. {241}

Would that we, his children of this Oratory, were able—I do not say individually, but even collectively, nor in some one generation, but even in that whole period during which it is destined to continue here—would that we were able to do a work such as his! At least we may take what he was for our pattern, whatever be the standard of our powers and the measure of our success. And certainly it is a consolation that thus much we can say in our own behalf,—that we have gone about his work in the way most likely to gain his blessing upon us, because most like his own. We have not chosen for ourselves any scene of exertion where we might make a noise, but have willingly taken that humble place of service which our Superiors chose for us. The desire of our hearts and our duty went together here. We have deliberately set ourselves down in a populous district, unknown to the great world, and have commenced, as St. Philip did, by ministering chiefly to the poor and lowly. We have gone where we could get no reward from society for our deeds, nor admiration from the acute or learned for our words. We have determined, through God's mercy, not to have the praise or the popularity that the world can give, but, according to our Father's own precept, "to love to be unknown."

May this spirit ever rule us more and more! For me, my dear Fathers of the Oratory, did you ask me, and were I able, to gain some boon for you from St. Philip, which might distinguish you and your successors for the time to come, persecution I would not dare to supplicate for you, as holy men have sometimes supplicated; for the work of the Oratory is a tranquil work, and requires {242} peace and security to do it well. Nor would I ask for you calumny and reproach, for to be slandered is to be talked about, and to some minds notoriety itself is a gratification and a snare. But I would beg for you this privilege, that the public world might never know you for praise or for blame, that you should do a good deal of hard work in your generation, and prosecute many useful labours, and effect a number of religious purposes, and send many souls to heaven, and take men by surprise, how much you were really doing, when they happened to come near enough to see it; but that by the world you should be overlooked, that you should not be known out of your place, that you should

work for God alone with a pure heart and single eye, without the distractions of human applause, and should make Him your sole hope, and His eternal heaven your sole aim, and have your reward, not partly here, but fully and entirely hereafter.

Blessed shall you and I be, my dear Fathers, if we learn to live now in the presence of Saints and Angels, who are to be our everlasting companions hereafter. Blessed are we, if we converse habitually with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,—with the Apostles, Martyrs, and great Fathers of the early Church,—with Sebastian, Laurence, and Cecilia,—with Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine, with Philip, whose children we are,—with our guardian angels and our patron saints, careless what men think about us, so that their scorn of us involves no injury to our community, and their misconception of us is no hindrance to their own conversion.

(Preached Jan. 18, 1850, in the Birmingham Oratory on occasion of its first Anniversary.)

Notes

1. Lorenzo de' Medici.
2. Vide Tosti's history of that abbey.