

“The Mission of St. Philip – Part 2”
Sermons Preached on Various Occasions sermon 12b
St. John Henry Newman
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1 FLORENCE, then, had her Apostle;—we have reviewed his commencement and his
2 end:—a zealous, heroic man, but not, as far as we can judge, reaching to the level of a
3 saint. It is not by the enthusiasm of the multitude, or by political violence,—it is not by
4 powerful declamation, or by railing at authorities, that the foundations are laid of
5 religious works. It is not by sudden popularity, or by strong resolves, and
6 demonstrations, or by romantic incidents, or by immediate successes, that undertakings
7 commence which are to last. I do not say, that to be roused, even for a moment, from
8 the dream of sin, to repent and be absolved, even though a relapse follow it, is a slight
9 gain; or that the brilliant, but brief, triumphs of Savonarola are to be despised. He did
10 good in his day, though his day was a short one. Still, after all, his history brings to mind
11 that passage in sacred history, where the Almighty displayed His presence to Elias on
12 Mount Horeb. "The Lord was not in the wind," nor "in the earthquake," nor "in the fire";
13 but after the fire came "the whisper of a gentle air."

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

26 1. Philip was born in Florence within twenty years after him. The memory of the heroic
27 friar was then still fresh in the minds of men, who would be talking familiarly of him to
28 the younger generation,—of the scenes which their own eyes had witnessed, and of the
29 deeds of penance which they had done at his bidding. Especially vivid would the
30 recollections of him be in the convent of St. Mark; for there was his cell, there the
31 garden where he walked up and down in meditation, and refused to notice the great
32 prince of the day [Note 1]; there would be his crucifix, his habit, his discipline, his books,
33 and whatever had once been his. Now, it so happened, St. Philip was a child of this very
34 convent; here he received his first religious instruction, and in after times he used to
35 say, "Whatever there was of good in me, when I was young, I owed it to the Fathers of
36 St. Mark's, in Florence." For Savonarola he retained a singular affection all through his
37 life; he kept his picture in his room, and about the year 1560, when the question came
38 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, 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 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.

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

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

127 and filled his heart with consolations so overwhelming that, lest he should die of
128 ecstasy, he came up into the world of men, and set about a work to flesh and blood
129 more endurable.

130 Thus was the second stage of Philip's education brought to a close; and, as from St.
131 Dominic he gained the end he was to pursue, so from St. Benedict he learned how to
132 pursue it. He was to pursue Savonarola's purposes, but not in Savonarola's way; rather,
133 in the spirit and after the fashion of those early Religious, of which St. Benedict is the
134 typical representative. Those early Religious lived in communities, which were detached
135 from each other, not brought together under one common governance; they were
136 settled in one place, and had no duties beyond it; vows were not a necessary element
137 of their state; they had little or nothing to do with ecclesiastical matters or secular
138 politics; they had no large plan of action for religious ends; they let each day do its work
139 as it came; they lived in obscurity, and laid a special stress on prayer and meditation;
140 they were simple in their forms of worship, and they freely admitted laymen into their
141 fellowship. In peculiarities such as these we recognize the Oratory of St. Philip. Least
142 thought had he of all men, of living in his works beyond his day; he could scarcely be
143 brought to throw his disciples into the form of community, and to perpetuate that form by
144 ecclesiastical recognition. Then he would not go and preside over them: then, when
145 obliged to go, he would not let them call him Father Superior. Then he would not listen
146 to their founding houses in other cities. Much less would he take dignities himself, or
147 suffer them to do so. He would not permit any forms or observances to be the
148 characteristics of his Congregation, besides mutual love and hard work. For the interior
149 life he sent them back, with especial earnestness, to the Apostolic Epistles, and to the
150 traditions of that early monk, John Cassian. In his exterior worship, he imitated, as
151 Cardinal Baronius observes, the form furnished by St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the
152 Corinthians. "It is by a divine counsel," says that glory of the Oratory, speaking in his
153 Annals, in the tone of an historian, "that there has been in great measure renewed in
154 our age in Rome, after the pattern of the Apostolic assembly, the edifying practice of
155 discoursing in sermons of the things of God. This has been the work of the Reverend
156 Father Philip Neri, a Florentine, who, like a skilful architect, laid the foundation of it. It
157 was arranged, that almost every day those who were desirous of Christian perfection
158 should come to the Oratory. First, there was some length of time spent in mental prayer,
159 then one of the brothers read a spiritual book, and during the reading the aforesaid
160 Father commented on what was read. Sometimes he desired one of the brethren to give
161 his opinion on some subject, and then the discourse proceeded in the form of dialogue.
162 After this, he commanded one of them to mount a seat, and there, in a familiar, plain
163 style, to discourse upon the lives of the Saints. To him succeeded another, on a
164 different subject, but equally plain; lastly, a third discoursed upon ecclesiastical history.
165 When all was finished, they sang some spiritual hymn, prayed again for a short time,
166 and so ended. Things being thus disposed, and approved by the Pope's authority, it
167 seemed as though the beautiful form of the Apostolical assembly had returned, as far as
168 times admitted."

169 This, of course, took place long after that portion of Philip's life on which I am
170 immediately engaged. From eight to eighteen, ten years, he was under the teaching of

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

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

213 St. Philip, on one occasion, acknowledged his debt in one particular to the elder Saint;
214 he said to some Jesuits whom he met, "You are children of a great Father. I am under

215 obligations to him, for your Master, Ignatius, taught me to make mental prayer." Nay,
216 strange as it may appear, it would seem that, at least at one time of his life, he wished
217 to be admitted among his children; at another time, perhaps, to which I have already
218 alluded, to join them in the East with others in his train.

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

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

250 O touching and most genuine traits of our sweetest and dearest Father, and most
251 impressive lesson to us, and remarkable contrast to the spirit of the vehement friar of St.
252 Mark's! Philip had shown them from a boy. One of the first things told us of him in his
253 very childhood is, that "he never spoke lightly, as boys do, of becoming a priest or a
254 religious; he concealed the wish of his heart, and from childhood upwards he eschewed
255 display, of which he ever had a special hatred." Things which other saints have allowed
256 in themselves, or rather have felt a duty, he could not abide. He did not ask to be
257 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, 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; 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

301 of lives, and them also he gained for God. His charity brought him into various situations
302 of trial; but when attempts were made upon his virtue, his zeal and devotion brought him
303 through them. All this time he was visiting the hospitals, and attending to the
304 necessities, both bodily and spiritual, of the sick.

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

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

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

334 We are told in his Life, that "he abandoned every other care, and gave himself to
335 hearing confessions." Not content with the day, he gave up a considerable portion of the
336 night to it also. Before dawn he had generally confessed a good number. When he
337 retired to his room, he still confessed every one who came; though at prayers, though at
338 meals, he broke off instantly, and attended to the call. When the church was opened at
339 daybreak, he went down to the Confessional, and remained in it till noon, when he said
340 Mass. When no penitents came, he remained near his Confessional; he never
341 intermitted hearing confessions for any illness. "On the day of his death he began to
342 hear confessions very early in the morning;" after Mass "again he went into the

343 Confessional;" in the afternoon, and "during the rest of the day down to supper time," he
344 heard confessions. After supper, "he heard the confessions of those Fathers who were
345 to say the first Masses on the following morning," when he himself was no longer to be
346 on earth. It was this extraordinary persevering service in so trying, so wearing a duty, for
347 forty-five years, that enabled him to be the new Apostle of the Sacred City. Thus it was,
348 as the lesson in his Office says, that "he bore innumerable children to Christ." He was
349 ever suffering their miseries, and fighting with their sins, and travelling with their good
350 resolves, year after year, whatever their state of life, their calling, their circumstances, if
351 so be that he might bring them safe to heaven, with a superhuman, heroic patience, of
352 which we see so few traces in the fiery preacher at Florence.

353 Savonarola, in spite of his personal sanctity, in spite of his protests against a mere
354 external sanctity in Catholics, after all, began with an external reform; he burned lutes
355 and guitars, looking-glasses and masks, books and pictures, in the public square: but
356 Philip bore with every outside extravagance in those whom he addressed, as far as it
357 was not directly sinful, knowing well that if the heart was once set right, the appropriate
358 demeanour would follow. You recollect how a youth came to his Exercises one day,
359 dressed out "in a most singular and whimsical fashion"; and how Philip did but fix his
360 eyes on him, and proceed with the discourses and devotions of the Oratory, and how,
361 by the time that they were at an end, the poor sinner had become quite another man;
362 his nature was changed all at once, and he became one of the Saint's most fervent
363 penitents. A rich ecclesiastic came to him in coloured clothes, like a layman: Philip
364 talked with him for a fortnight, without saying a word about his dress. At the end of the
365 time he put it off of his own accord, and made a general confession. His biographer
366 says: "He was very much against stiffness and off-hand prohibitions about wearing fine
367 clothes, collars, swords, and such-like things, saying that if only a little devotion gained
368 admittance into their hearts, you might leave them to themselves." If he spoke of them,
369 it was good-naturedly and playfully. You recollect he said to a lady, who asked if it was
370 a sin to wear slippers with very high heels, according to an excessive fashion of the day,
371 "Take care they do not trip you up." And to a youth, who wore one of those large, stiff
372 frills, which we see in pictures, he remarked, "I should caress you much more, if your
373 collar did not hurt me."

374 Savonarola is associated in our minds with the pulpit rather than the confessional: his
375 vehemence converted many, but frightened or irritated more. The consequences came
376 back upon himself and his penitents. Some of his convert artists were assassinated,
377 others were driven into exile, others gave up their profession altogether in disgust or
378 despair. Philip had no vocation, and little affection, for the pulpit; he was jealous of what
379 the world calls eloquence, and he mortified his disciples when they aspired to it. One he
380 interrupted and sent down; another he made preach his sermons six times over: he
381 discoursed and conversed rather than preached. And "he could not endure harsh
382 rebukes," says the writer of his life, "or anything like rigour. He allured men to the
383 service of God so dexterously, and with such a holy, winning art, that those who saw it
384 cried out, astonished: 'Father Philip draws souls as the magnet draws iron.' He so
385 accommodated himself to the temper of each, as, in the words of the Apostle, to
386 become 'all things to all men, that he might gain all.'" And his love of them individually

387 was so tender and ardent, that, even in extreme old age, he was anxious to suffer for
388 their sins; and "for this end he inflicted on himself severe disciplines, and he reckoned
389 their misdeeds as his own, and wept for them as such." I do not read that Savonarola
390 acted thus towards Pope Alexander the Sixth, whom he so violently denounced.

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

420 But it required to live in Rome to understand what his influence really was. Nothing was
421 too high for him, nothing too low. He taught poor begging women to use mental prayer;
422 he took out boys to play; he protected orphans; he acted as novice-master to the
423 children of St. Dominic. He was the teacher and director of artisans, mechanics,
424 cashiers in banks, merchants, workers in gold, artists, men of science. He was
425 consulted by monks, canons, lawyers, physicians, courtiers; ladies of the highest rank,
426 convicts going to execution, engaged in their turn his solicitude and prayers. Cardinals
427 hung about his room, and Popes asked for his miraculous aid in disease, and his
428 ministrations in death. It was his mission to save men, not from, but in, the world. To
429 break the haughtiness of rank, and the fastidiousness of fashion, he gave his penitents
430 public mortifications; to draw the young from the theatres, he opened his Oratory of

431 Sacred Music; to rescue the careless from the Carnival and its excesses, he set out in
432 pilgrimage to the Seven Basilicas. For those who loved reading, he substituted, for the
433 works of chivalry or the hurtful novels of the day, the true romance and the celestial
434 poetry of the Lives of the Saints. He set one of his disciples to write history against the
435 heretics of that age; another to treat of the Notes of the Church; a third, to undertake the
436 Martyrs and Christian Antiquities;—for, while in the discourses and devotions of the
437 Oratory, he prescribed the simplicity of the primitive monks, he wished his children,
438 individually and in private, to cultivate all their gifts to the full. He, however, was, after all
439 and in all, their true model,—the humble priest, shrinking from every kind of dignity, or
440 post, or office, and living the greater part of day and night in prayer, in his room or upon
441 the housetop.

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

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

467 May this spirit ever rule us more and more! For me, my dear Fathers of the Oratory, did
468 you ask me, and were I able, to gain some boon for you from St. Philip, which might
469 distinguish you and your successors for the time to come, persecution I would not dare
470 to supplicate for you, as holy men have sometimes supplicated; for the work of the
471 Oratory is a tranquil work, and requires peace and security to do it well. Nor would I ask
472 for you calumny and reproach, for to be slandered is to be talked about, and to some
473 minds notoriety itself is a gratification and a snare. But I would beg for you this privilege,

474 that the public world might never know you for praise or for blame, that you should do a
475 good deal of hard work in your generation, and prosecute many useful labours, and
476 effect a number of religious purposes, and send many souls to heaven, and take men
477 by surprise, how much you were really doing, when they happened to come near
478 enough to see it; but that by the world you should be overlooked, that you should not be
479 known out of your place, that you should work for God alone with a pure heart and
480 single eye, without the distractions of human applause, and should make Him your sole
481 hope, and His eternal heaven your sole aim, and have your reward, not partly here, but
482 fully and entirely hereafter.

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

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

493 Notes

494 1. Lorenzo dé Medici.

495 2. Vide Tosti's history of that abbey.