

## AUGUST XXIII.

## ST. PHILIP BENITI. C.

From the *Annals of the Order of Servites* compiled by Giani, with the notes of Garbi, printed at Lucca in 1719, in two vols. fol. and the notes of F. Cuper the Bollandist, *Augusti*, t. 4, p. 654; also from Paulus Florentinus in his *Dialogues*, *De Origine Servorum B. Mariæ V.* published in the *Deliciæ Eruditorum*, Romæ, 1754, t. 10; and *Chronicon Rerum Ordinis Servorum B. M. V. a Fr. Mich. Florentino*. Florentiæ, 1567 4to.

A. D. 1285.

ST. PHILIP BENITI or BENIZI, the principal ornament and propagator of the religious Order of the Servites in Italy, was descended of the noble family of Benizi in Florence, and a native of that city. His virtuous parents were well persuaded that the right or wrong state of human nature depends as necessarily upon the education of children, as that of a plant upon proper culture; and that the whole of this art consists, not only in strengthening the body by suitable exercise, and opening and improving the faculties of the mind by proper studies, but above all by forming in youth strong and lasting habits, and inspiring them with the most noble sentiments of all virtues. Through their care, assisted by a special grace, Philip preserved his soul untainted by vice and the world, and daily advanced in the fear of God. Having gone through the studies of humanity in his own country, he was sent to Paris to apply himself to the study of medicine,\* in which charity was his motive; and Galen,

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\* The study and practice of physic, like other sciences, were then fallen into the hands of the clergy, as Fleury and Dom Rivet observe. The council of Rheims under Innocent II. in 1131, forbade monks to frequent schools of medicine, or practise it out of their own monastery, on account of the law of enclosure; but some monks still pursued it at home; and some among the secular clergy continued to teach and practise it as before. Peter Lombard, canon of Chartres, (a different person from the Bishop of Paris of the same name,) was first physician to King Lewis the Young; and Mauger, archdeacon of Evreux, afterwards bishop of Winchester in 1199, was first physician to Richard I. king of England. (Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, tom. 2, p. 478.) The council of Lateran, in 1215, forbade the clergy, who practised medicine, to perform any operations in which steel instruments or fire are applied.

In the thirteenth century surgery began to be a distinct profession from medicine. Till that time this latter was looked upon in the schools as a part of physics or natural philosophy; nor was it made a distinct faculty before the year 1472. Though the belles lettres were still neglected, till the Greeks revived the taste of them in the West, the study of medicine

though a heathen, was a strong spur to him in raising his heart continually from the contemplation of nature to the adoration and praise of its great Author. From Paris he removed to Padua, where he pursued the same studies, and took the degree of doctor, which then was the same in that faculty as in Arts.<sup>(1)</sup> After his return to Florence he took some time to deliberate with himself what course to steer, earnestly begging God to direct him into the path in which he should most perfectly fulfil his divine will.

The religious Order of Servites, or servants of God under the special patronage of the Blessed Virgin, had been instituted in that country fifteen years before. Seven very rich merchants of Florence had laid the foundation of this institute, having by mutual agreement retired to Monte Senario, six miles from that city. They lived there in little cells, something like the hermits of Camaldoli, possessing nothing but in common, and professing obedience to Bonfilio Monaldi, whom they chose superior. The austerities which they practised were exceedingly great, and they lived in a great measure on alms. Bonfilio

(1) Hist. Littéraire, t. 9, p. 191.

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began to be much cultivated with other serious sciences in the eleventh and twelfth centuries; but anatomy and botany were little known, without which physicians are no better than empirics. Medicine then consisted in reading principally Galen and Hippocrates, and in observing nature, the only true method of that study which Hippocrates leads his attentive readers to pursue. The most famous schools for medicine set up in the twelfth age were those of Paris and Montpellier. (See Du Chesne, *Scriptores Hist. Franc.* t. 5, p. 323.) That of Padua succeeded them; and they were preceded by that of Salerno, of all others at that time the most celebrated, and much resorted to from France, England, &c., as appears from the learned John of Salisbury, in his *Metalogicus*, (l. 1, c. 4.) See Bernier, *Histoire de la Médecine*. The famous Medical Institutions of the School of Salerno, collected by the professor Peter of Milan, chiefly from the Arabians and Galen, which have been so often reprinted, were compiled in the eleventh age. Robert, duke of Normandy, having consulted the school of Salerno, as he passed through Italy in his return from the first crusade, a copy of this book was soon after addressed to him under the title of King of England. It is to be wished that the late French edition of this book had been enriched with a curious investigation of each precept; that those of Hippocrates had been distinguished from others borrowed from the Arabians, and that some mistakes had been pointed out, and corrected from modern observations, since a new path has been struck out in that study by Baglivi and Bellini, and has been so laudably pursued by Lommius, Sydenham, Boerhaave, Van Swieten, Hoffman, &c.

Monaldi, the first superior of this fervent company, at the request of certain pious persons, founded a small convent near one of the gates of Florence, with a chapel under the title of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin. St. Philip happening to hear mass in this chapel on Thursday in Easter week, was strongly affected with the words of the Holy Ghost to the deacon Philip, which were read in the epistle of that day, (1) *Draw near, and join thyself to the chariot*. His name being Philip he applied to himself these words of the Holy Ghost, as an invitation to put himself under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin in that holy Order. The night following he seemed to himself, in a dream or vision, to be in a vast wilderness (representing the world) full of precipices, rocks, flint stones, briers, snares, and venomous serpents, so that he did not see how it was possible for him to escape so many dangers. Whilst he was in the utmost dread and consternation, he thought he beheld the Blessed Virgin seated in a chariot, calling him to this new Order. The next day Philip revolved in his mind, that great watchfulness and an extraordinary grace are requisite to discover every lurking rock or sand in the course of life in the world, and he was persuaded that God called him to this Order, established under the patronage of his Mother, as to a place of refuge. Accordingly he repaired to the little chapel where he had heard mass, and was admitted by F. Bonfilio to the habit, in quality of lay-brother, that state being more agreeable to his humility. He made his religious vows on the 8th of September in 1233, and was sent by his superior to Monte Senario, there to work at every kind of hard country labour. The saint cheerfully applied himself to it in a perfect spirit of penance, but accompanied his work with constant recollection and fervent prayer; and all his spare hours he devoted to this holy exercise in a little cave behind the church; where, inebriated with heavenly delights, and in ecstasies of divine love he often forgot the care which he owed to his body. He most industriously concealed his learning and talents, till they were at length discovered; in the mean time those who conversed with him admired the heavenly prudence and light with which he spoke on spiritual things. He was charged with the care of a new con-

(1) Acts viii. 29.

vent that was founded at Sienna, where he undesignedly displayed his abilities in a discourse on certain controverted points, in presence of two learned Dominicans and others, to the great astonishment of those that heard him. The superiors of his Order were hereupon engaged by others to draw this bright light from under the bushel, and to place it on the candlestick. Having therefore obtained a dispensation of his holiness, they took care to have him promoted to holy orders, though nothing but their absolute command could extort the humble saint's consent to such a step. He was soon after made definitor, then assistant to the general; and, in 1267, the fifth general of his Order.

Upon the death of Clement IV. the cardinals assembled at Viterbo began to cast their eyes on him to raise him to the apostolic chair. Having intelligence of this design, in the greatest alarm he retired into the mountains with only one religious companion, and lay concealed there till Gregory X. was chosen. He rejoiced to find in this retreat an opportunity of redoubling the macerations of his body, and giving himself up to the sweet exercise of heavenly contemplation. All this time he lived chiefly on dry herbs, and drank at a fountain, since esteemed miraculous, and called St. Philip's bath, situate on a mountain named Montagnate. He returned from the desert glowing with holy zeal, to kindle in the hearts of Christians the fire of divine love. After preaching in many parts of Italy he appointed a vicar-general there to govern his Order, and with two religious companions undertook an extensive mission, preaching with great fruit at Avignon, Toulouse, Paris, and in other great cities in France; also in Flanders, Friesland, Saxony, and Higher Germany. After two years' absence he came back to hold the general chapter of his Order at Borgo in 1274, in which he used all his endeavours to be released from the burden of the generalship; but was so far from being heard that he was confirmed in that dignity for life. Indeed no one was more worthy of it than he who most sincerely judged himself to be, of all persons living, the most unworthy. In the same year he repaired to the second general council of Lyons, from which he obtained the confirmation of his Order, Pope Gregory X. presiding there in person. The saint announced the word of God wherever he

came, and had an extraordinary talent in converting sinners, and in reconciling those who were at variance. Italy was at that time horribly divided by intestine discords and hereditary factions, particularly those of the Guelphs and Gibellins.\* Holy men often sought to apply remedies to these quarrels, which had a happy effect upon some; but in many, these discords, like a wound ill cured, broke out again with worse symptoms than ever. St. Philip wonderfully pacified the factions when they were ready to tear each other to pieces at Pistoia, and in many other places. He succeeded at length also at Forli, but not without first exposing himself to many dangers. The seditious insulted and beat him in every part of the city; but his invincible patience at length disarmed their fury, and vanquished them. St. Peregrinus Latiozi, who was their ringleader, and had himself struck the saint, was so powerfully moved by the example of his meekness and sanctity, that he threw himself at his feet, and with many tears begged his pardon and prayers. Being become a perfect model of penitents he was received by him into the Order of Servites at Sienna, and continued his penance in sackcloth and ashes to his happy death in the eightieth year of his age. So evident were his miracles and other tokens of his heroic sanctity and perseverance, that he was canonized by Benedict XIII. in 1726.

St. Philip made the sanctification of his religious brethren the primary object of his zeal, as it was the first part of his charge.† Nor was he a stranger to the maxim which the zea-

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\* The Guelphs were those who adhered to the popes; and the partisans of the emperors in their contests about investitures, &c., were called Gibellins. The distinction of these two factions was first heard of in Germany. In 1140, the Emperor Conrad III. disposed of the duchy of Bavaria in favour of his brother Leopold, margrave of Austria, expelling the family of the Guelphs, who had long enjoyed it. Guelph VII. maintained by arms the right of his family, in favour of his ward Henry, surnamed the Lion, to whom Conrad's successor, Frederic Barbarossa, afterwards restored it. Conrad was born at Waiblingen in Suabia, whence his adherents were called Waiblingi, which word by the Italian pronunciation was softened into Gibellini. These factions subsisted in Germany for above a hundred years; but in Italy almost four hundred; they not being quite extinct there before the reign of Charles V. See Rimius's History of the House of Hanover, and Barre's Histoire d'Allemagne.

† The Order of the Servites was approved by Alexander IV. and Benedict XI. St. Philip propagated it in most parts of Italy, and built some convents in France. It is at present divided into twenty-seven provinces.

lous reformer of La Trappe so strenuously inculcated,(1) that a religious community in which regular discipline is enervated, and those who profess the Order are strangers to its true spirit, is not a harbour or place of refuge, but a shipwreck of souls. Scarcely could a saint be able to resist such a torrent of example, or the poison of such an air, in which, as in the pest-house, every one is confined. Though gross crimes of the world are shut out, the want of the religious spirit, and a neglect of the particular duties of that heroic state, are enough to damn souls. To preserve his family from so fatal a misfortune, our saint never ceased to watch and pray. Judging at length by the decay of his health that the end of his life drew near, he set out to make the visitation of the convents of his Order at Florence, Sienna, Perugia, and other places. Arriving at Todi, he went straight to the altar of our Lady, and falling prostrate on the ground prayed with great fervour, and said: "This is the place of my rest for ever." The day following he made a moving sermon on the glory of the blessed. His disorder manifested itself by a sharp fever on the feast of the Assumption of the Mother of God. The time of his sickness he employed in admirable sentiments of compunction; and on the octave day, falling into his agony, he called for his *book*, by which word he usually meant his crucifix, and devoutly contemplating it, calmly expired. To give place to the octave of the Assumption, his feast is kept on the following day, the twenty-third of the month. He was canonized by Clement X. in 1671; but the bull was only published by Benedict XIII. in 1724.

In the lives of the saints we see the happiness of a rooted virtue, which by repeated fervent exercises, is formed into strong and lasting habits of temperance, meekness, humility, charity, and holy zeal. Such a virtue is never warped by

(1) Abbé Rancé, *Maximes et Oblig. de l'Etat Relig. &c.*

The chief house is that of the Annunciation in Florence. The primitive austerity of this institute was in process of time much relaxed. Wherefore, in 1593, it was by a severe reformation brought back to its original manner of living in the hermitages on Monte Senario. These reformed religious men are called Hermite Servites. In the fifteenth century the Popes Martin V. and Innocent VIII. declared the Servites a fifth mendicant Order, and associated it in this respect with the four former Orders of Mendicants, the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Carmelites, and the Hermits of St. Austin.

selfish views; it never belies or is inconsistent with itself; it vanquishes all enemies, discovers their snares, triumphs over their assaults, and is faithful to the end. If ours be not such, we have reason to fear it is false, and unworthy of a crown.

### SS. CLAUDIUS, ASTERIUS, NEON, DOMNINA, AND THEONILLA, MM.

THOUGH the emperors Dioclesian and Maximian were, for a great part of their reign, favourable to the Christians, and passed no edicts against them till the latter end; yet several martyrs suffered in the beginning of their reign, especially at Rome, and in Gaul and Britain, and some also in the East. This was owing to particular occasions, or to the humour of certain governors of provinces, who acted by virtue of former laws which had never been repealed. In this manner the above-mentioned five martyrs were crowned in Cilicia. Claudius, Asterius, and Neon were three brothers, who were impeached as Christians before the magistrates of the city, *Ægea*, in which they dwelt, by their mother-in-law, whose principal view was to possess herself of their estate. About the same time two pious women named Domnina and Theonilla with a little child (perhaps Domnina's) were likewise, on account of their faith, thrown into prison by the same magistrate, and brought to their trial before the pro-consul of Cilicia, whose name was Lysias. Their acts are extant and entire, as they were copied from the proconsular register.

The pro-consul visiting his province arrived at *Ægea*, a seaport, and a free town of Cilicia, forty-six miles south-east from Tarsus; and being there seated on his tribunal, said: "Let them bring before me the Christians whom the officers have delivered to the city magistrate." Euthalius the jailor said: "The magistrate of this city having, pursuant to your orders, made the strictest inquiry after the Christians, has apprehended six of this profession; three young men all brothers, two women, and a small child. One of them is here before you." Lysias said to him: "Well; what is your name?" He answered: "Claudius." "Be not such a madman," said Lysias, "as to throw thyself away in thy youthful days; but sacrifice to the gods, the only way to escape the torments prepared for thee in case of refusal." Claudius: "My God requires no