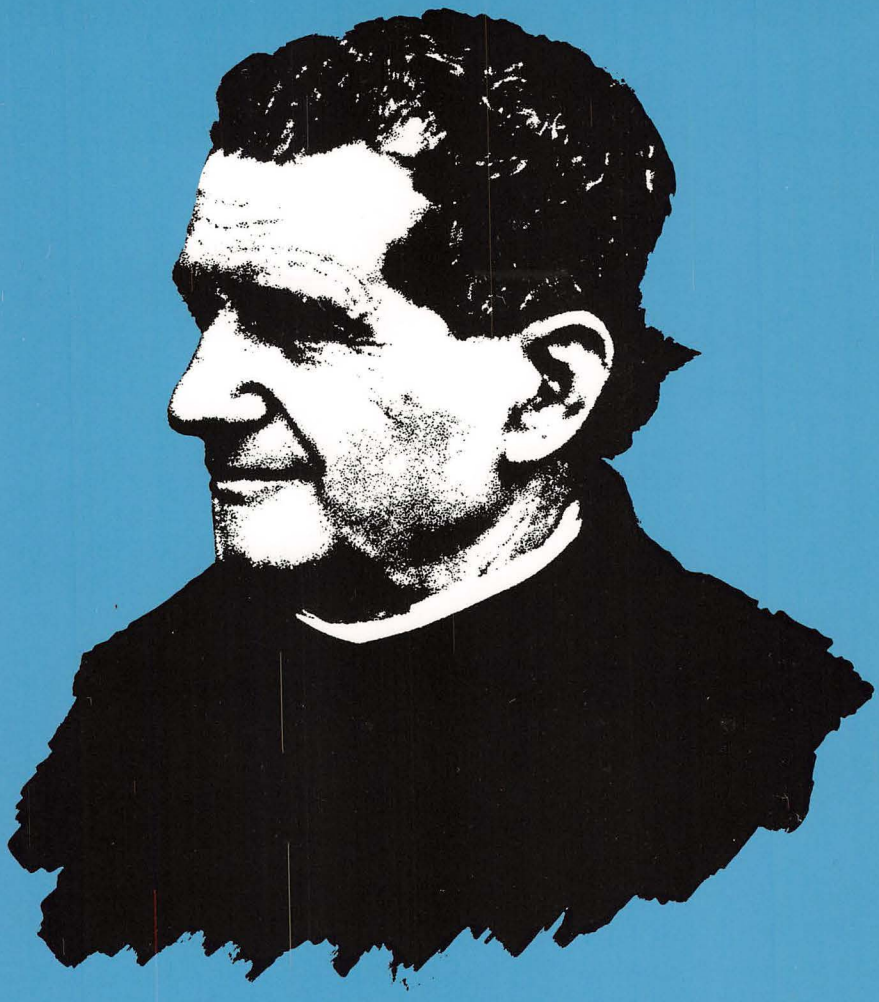

VOLUME VII - 1862-1864

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco

Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne

FATHER GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE (1839-1916) was the first and great chronicler of the life of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

From their first, providential meeting in 1864, Father Lemoyne esteemed Don Bosco as a person of outstanding character and holiness. He not only strove to understand and acquire his spirit, but also took upon himself the task of committing to writing anything of significance that Don Bosco did or said. Information concerning earlier events he painstakingly gathered from eyewitnesses and other sources.

In 1883 he came to the Mother House as editor of the **Salesian Bulletin** and Secretary of the Superior Chapter. The five years that followed he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and heard from the Saint himself the story of the arduous road he had to climb in his youth to arrive at the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Providence guided the Salesian work.

After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was formally charged with the compilation of available materials for the life of the Saint. Forty-five large volumes of galley proofs bear witness to his dedicated research and provide the material for the nineteen volumes of the **Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,** the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are the **Life of Don Bosco** in two volumes and the **Life of Mamma Margaret,** Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin on September 14, 1916 at the age of 77.

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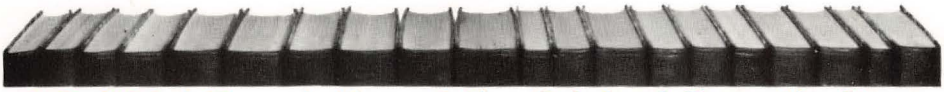

A Faithful Translation of the Original Expertly Done

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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

SALESIANA PUBLISHERS

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco

by

REV. GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

REV. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

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1862–1864

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FIRST EDITION

Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE

TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

VERY REVEREND FELIX J. PENNA, S.D.B.

(1904–1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT

This Volume

Is Humbly Dedicated

TO

MOST REVEREND RICHARD PITTINI, S.D.B.

(1876–1961)

Archbishop of Santo Domingo

***

Outstanding Missionary

Eloquent Preacher

Zealous Apostle of Youth

He Made Don Bosco Known and Loved

In Uruguay, the United States, and the Antilles.

A Model

Of Christian Kindness and Fortitude

He Won Countless Souls to Christ.

Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes

SAINT John Bosco, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when other orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the Risorgimento; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of youth.*

He is known familiarly throughout the world simply as Don Bosco.[1] His now famous system of education, which he called the *Preventive System,* was based on reason, religion and kindness, and indicated by its descriptive name that, also in education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He always sought to place pupils in the moral impossibility of committing sin, the moral disorder from which all evils flow.

To ensure the continuation of his educational mission in behalf of youth he founded two worldwide religious congregations, the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) which today number more than 40,000 members conducting 2,800 educational institutions throughout the world.

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content himself with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth.*

[1] *Don* is an abbreviation of the Latin *dominus,* master. It is used in Italy as a title for priests; it stands for *Father.*

Fortunately, *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available, unabridged, in this American edition not only to his spiritual children, devotees and admirers, but also to all who are interested in education.

In these volumes Don Bosco is shown in action: not *theorizing* but *educating*. What he said and did in countless circumstances was faithfully recorded by several of his spiritual sons, chief among them Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. From the day he first met Don Bosco in 1864 to his own death in 1916, Father Lemoyne spent his life recording words and deeds of Don Bosco, gathering documents, interviewing witnesses, and arranging raw material for the present nineteen volumes of the life of Don Bosco, eight of which he himself authored besides readying another volume for the press before his death.

In the compilation of *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell'Oratorio dal 1835 al 1855* (Memoirs of the Oratory from 1835 to 1855) written by Don Bosco himself, the diaries and chronicles of various Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales) written by Father John Bonetti, S.D.B., and personally checked by Don Bosco, the proceedings of the diocesan process of beatification and other unimpeachable contemporary documents and testimonies. Above all, Father Lemoyne, intelligent, conscientious and well-informed, not only used reliable sources, but was himself an eye witness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This enabled him to write a true history even though not according to modern critical methods.[2] He concerned himself principally with

[2] True history in the sense that what he narrates is substantially true, though his method of presentation, his chronology, and his treatment of sources stand improvement. The episodes and incidents he reports did not necessarily take place *exactly* as described.

presenting chronologically his vast selected material and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.[3] When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, *The Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

In editing the translation of *The Biographical Memoirs* accuracy and readability were the goals we set. This was not easy and occasionally, as regards the latter, we may have fallen short of the mark. Nineteenth-century Italian does not readily lend itself to an agile version that strives to be an accurate translation and not a paraphrase.

We have departed from the original in only one minor point: the lengthy titles or series of subtitles in each chapter. Father Lemoyne's method of chronological sequence in his narration necessarily made the content of each chapter fragmentary. As it was not possible, under these circumstances, to give them a meaningful title and the volumes were not indexed, Father Lemoyne prefaced each chapter with many subtitles. In some volumes such subtitles fill a whole page. Since we have indexed each volume and subtitles become unnecessary, we selected in each chapter the most outstanding episode and gave it a title. Finally, although we did not aim at publishing a critical edition, we researched and—in most cases—were able to enrich the text by adding in brackets first names, dates, and scriptural sources, as well as numerous, helpful footnotes.

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and

[3] Cf. Francis Desramaut, S.D.B., *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco,* Lyon, 1962, pp. 411ff.

women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
June 5, 1965

124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

NOTE

As with Volume VI—and continuing through Volume X—we will omit material from the original text that is of little interest to American readers and of no direct consequence to these biographical memoirs. Such omissions will always be pointed out in the footnotes, except when they concern *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] in which case dots will be used.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
December 8, 1971

Acknowledgments

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Reverend August Bosio, S.D.B., Provincial emeritus of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsor of this project, and to the Very Reverend John J. Malloy, S.D.B., his successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Head of the English Department of Don Bosco College, Newton, New Jersey, for his editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular, Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City. We also wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Ufficio Stampa of the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy, for its *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani,* a valuable source of many footnotes in this volume.

Fr. Diego Borgatello, S.D.B.
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SALESIAN GLOSSARY

(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASSISTANCE: Salesian method of supervision of boys and students, friendly and informal in manner stressing the preventions of disorders rather than the punishment of offenders.

ASSISTANT: A Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

CLERIC: a member of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood.

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

COMPANION OF YOUTH, THE: a prayer book composed by St. John Bosco for the use of boys, originally entitled *Il Giovane Provveduto.*

COOPERATOR: one who contributes in any manner to the development of Salesian work.

EXERCISE FOR A HAPPY DEATH: a monthly practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion as if for the last time.

FESTIVE ORATORY: a Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities mostly on Sundays and festive days.

The Festive Oratory was St. John Bosco's first work and, for a good many years, his only one. He called it "oratory," that is, a place of prayer, because its primary purpose was to teach boys to go to church and pray. "Its objectives were the practice of religion and virtue, the boys' moral education, and, consequently, the salvation of their souls; recreation, entertainment, singing, and schooling, which followed in due time, were only the means." (*The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, p. 71. *See also* Vol. III, pp. 67f)

GOOD NIGHT: a short talk immediately after night prayers, given by the Director or someone in his stead. It consists of advice, exhortations, or occasional remarks.

ORATORY: *see* Festive Oratory, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

ORATORY, THE: abbreviated form of "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." (*See below*)

ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, THE: the *first* festive oratory and the *first* boarding school for boys founded by St. John Bosco in a district of Turin known as Valdocco; the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PREVENTIVE SYSTEM: the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

VALDOCCO: a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum,* the valley of the slain—i.e., some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (*See The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco,* Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

A Wondrous Experience

Gloria filiorum patres eorum! [The glory of children is their parentage—Prov. 17, 6] Our glory is Don Bosco! Memorable is the day—July 24, 1907—when Holy Mother Church declared him a "Venerable Servant of God!" He had been the good and faithful servant who had traded the talents he had received and attuned his mind and heart perfectly to God.

Scripture says: *Misericordiam et veritatem diligit Deus.* [Ps. 83, 12] Indeed, all of Don Bosco's works bespoke mercy and truth, not necessarily to please the world, but rather to deserve the promised eternal reward. "If I were . . . striving to please men," St. Paul wrote, "I should not be a servant of Christ." [Gal. 1, 10] This is the memento that Don Bosco left to his pupils over and over again, phrasing it in the words of Tobias: "Serve the Lord in truth, and seek to do the things that please Him." [Tob. 14, 10]

With this premise we will now return to Don Bosco, to whom—in our opinion—God, the lover of truth, revealed unknown, hidden mysteries of His wisdom. Don Bosco's own words and actions will bear out our assertions.

Toward the end of Volume VI of these *Memoirs* we stated that shortly after Christmas he fell ill with erysipelas and had to take to bed for several days.[1] On the evening of December 31 [1861], however, against everyone's cautionary advice—for they feared a relapse—he arose and went downstairs to greet all his dear boys and give them the *strenna* [2] for the year 1862. At the same time he

[1] *See* Vol. VI, p. 630. [Editor]

[2] A New Year's gift customary in Italy. From the very beginning of the Oratory (*see* Vol. III, p. 433), Don Bosco had started the custom of giving a spiritual *strenna* or gift to his boys and co-workers on the last day of the year. It took the form of a motto or slogan to be practiced throughout the year then about to dawn. This custom is still kept by Don Bosco's successors. [Editor]

promised a personal amazing, extraordinary *strenna* for each of them on the morrow.[3]

What happened on January 1, 1862, is recorded in the Ruffino and Bonetti chronicles,[4] which are fully concordant:

When the *Angelus* bell rang at dawn, Don Bosco was ordered (as he himself asserted, though he declined to say by whom) to go immediately to church and celebrate Mass. He obeyed. Afterward he came into the dining room for a cup of coffee. He likewise came down for dinner [5] and, convinced of his cure, discarded his medication and let the doctor know his services were no longer needed.

Meanwhile, the boys were in a ferment. The excitement caused by Don Bosco's promise [of a personal *strenna*] defies description. How slowly the hours dragged that night of December 31 and all the next day. How eagerly the youngsters awaited evening to hear what their good father had to tell them. At last, night prayers were over and the boys, perfectly silent, stood waiting for Don Bosco. He mounted the little platform and unveiled the mystery, saying, "The *strenna* I am about to give you is not my own. What would you say if the Madonna Herself were to come in person and say something to each one of you —if She Herself had prepared a little note for each of you to tell you what you most need or what She desires from you? Well, that's exactly what has happened. The Madonna gives a *strenna* to each of you!

"At the very outset, though, I must lay down a few conditions. The first is that you keep this within this house, lest I be embarrassed. Secondly, you are free to believe it or not. If you do not believe it, tear up your note and forget it, but do not joke about it in the least. Above all, be wary of making fun of it.

"I foresee that some will want to know more and will ask, 'How did this happen? Did the Madonna write the notes Herself? Did She speak to Don Bosco in person? Is Don Bosco Our Lady's secretary?' I shall not add anything to what I have already said. I myself wrote the notes, but I am not free to disclose how it all came about. Nor should anyone take it upon himself to question me, for this would place me in a very awkward position. Be satisfied with the assurance that each note comes from Our Lady.

"It's an amazing thing! For several years I have been praying for

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 632. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 282f. [Editor]
[5] In Italy the main meal was—and still is—taken at noon. [Editor]

this grace and have at last obtained it. Let each of you, then, take this advice as coming from Our Lady's very lips. Come, therefore, to my room and I shall give each of you your note. Read it, share it with a friend of yours perhaps, or tear it up after reading it if you want to, but, please, beware of making fun of it.

"I urge you, though, to save your note very carefully, because I am not permitted to keep a copy. I assure you that I have no idea of what is written on each slip or for whom they are intended. I wrote each in a register beside your names. I shall cut out the messages and keep only the names. If anyone loses or forgets his *strenna,* that's the end of it. No one will know a thing about it. Since it will take me some time to give out these messages, I shall start tonight with the priests, clerics, and lay Salesians.[6] Pleasant dreams to all!"

Those mentioned followed Don Bosco to his room and that evening or the next received the first of those precious New Year's messages. John Bonetti's [7] read as follows: "Increase the number of My sons." He at once recorded it in his chronicle, adding: "My loving Mother, along with this dear advice, give me also the means to carry it out. Grant me grace to succeed in this and to be included among Your sons."

What then had actually happened that memorable night? What had Don Bosco seen? We have attentively examined the register which Don Bosco mentioned and which is kept in our archives. It is a thick old folio ledger in which Don Bosco used to jot down miscellaneous memos in no particular order. Here and there we first noted payments of board and tuition fees and disbursements to Oratory suppliers during 1853, 1854, and 1855;

[6] At this time the non-clerical members of the Salesian Congregation were not yet called "coadjutors." [Editor]

[7] Bonetti (1838–1891) entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. From 1858 to 1863 he kept an extensive chronicle of Oratory events concerning Don Bosco. (*See* Vol. VI, p. 283) In 1859 he was one of the group of young men who banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its [Superior] Chapter. In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he also authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, polemical, and Salesian publications. An important work of his is *History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these *Biographical Memoirs.* (*See* p. x) In 1886 he was elected Spiritual Director of the whole Salesian Congregation. He died in that post at the age of fifty-three, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that Father Bonetti would be the first member of the Superior Chapter to follow him to the grave. [Editor]

then, conduct and study habits grades of many boarders, both students and artisans, over a period of years, and the reasons for the dismissal of some; finally, the roster of the Oratory pupils from 1853 through 1858. There was no list at all of pupils from 1859 through 1862.

After examining this ledger, one may reasonably reconstruct what took place, even though it could not be pried out of Don Bosco. He must have been sitting at his desk before midnight; a sudden apparition and a command must have made him grab the closest copybook. He then wrote offhand, under dictation, the names of all the Oratory boys and residents in no particular alphabetical order. Next to each name he also wrote the corresponding message, fitting both into one single line. These single lines filled more than twenty pages, each on one side of the sheet, not consecutively inasmuch as some pages had already been either fully or partially written on. In all, there were five hundred and seventy-three sentences, maxims, or admonitions—whatever one wants to call them—about things to be done or avoided. They were terse, varied, and suited to each individual, offering either encouragement or a reprimand. To think out so many messages—so personal and so suited—in a single night was no easy task. We may well call it an impossible task. Obviously, though it was Don Bosco's hand that wrote, someone else's mind dictated. As we shall see, some messages revealed secrets which caused their receivers serious concern.

Furthermore, something strange occurred in those days. A couple of days elapsed between Don Bosco's announcement of such an extraordinary *strenna* and the complete delivery of all the messages. During this interval, two unscrupulous boys (as Don Bosco repeatedly told us) schemed to sneak into his room when he was out, seize the register, and search for anything concerning them or at least read the messages before they were given out. Was it mischief, curiosity, or perhaps just the desire to know their companions' secrets for the sake of a little fun? Whatever the answer, the youngsters succeeded in getting at the register. Eagerly they turned its pages over and over, but to their amazement each page was perfectly blank. Frustrated, they returned the book to its place. Later, Don Bosco told all the assembled boys that God had

punished those two mischievous lads. Father Joachim Berto [8] heard him confirm this story years later.

The boys meanwhile, not without a certain trepidation, hastened to Don Bosco's room to pick up their *strenna.* The impression was overwhelming, and the good effects defy description. During those days, some were beside themselves with joy, others looked pensive, while still others cried or kept to themselves. Some did show their *strenna* to friends; others jealously guarded theirs.

The cleric Dominic Ruffino [9] tried to collect as many as he could in order to copy them and save them for posterity. Forty-eight boys obliged, but with few exceptions the remaining five hundred and twenty-five either were not asked or preferred to keep their *strenna* a secret. Surely, these must have contained the most characteristic and most pointed messages threatening evils or revealing secrets of conscience. A continuous stream of boys going to confession was the first effect of this *strenna.*

We shall now report the messages which were collected and saved. For the sake of discretion, some will be anonymous.

Father Alasonatti: With patience and courage you will increase the number of My sons.

Rua: In your spiritual needs put your trust in Me.

Durando: The world plans to attack you.

Provera: With kindness you will gain Me many sons.

Dassano: The world is filling your heart with clay.

[8] Father Berto (1847–1914) entered the Oratory in 1862, joined the Salesian Society in 1865, and was ordained a priest in 1871. While Berto was still a clerical student, Don Bosco made him his secretary—a post he retained for the next twenty years. During this time he accompanied Don Bosco on his most important trips to Rome and Florence. While carrying out his secretarial duties, Father Berto also carefully recorded and documented more important details concerning Don Bosco and the Salesian Society. He also authored many devotional and ascetical pamphlets. He died at the Oratory on February 21, 1914. [Editor]

[9] Ruffino (1840–1865) had begun corresponding with Don Bosco in 1856 while a diocesan seminarian at Giaveno. In 1857, at Don Bosco's invitation, he spent part of the summer at the Oratory. (*See* Vol. V, pp. 470f) In 1859 he had the foresight to start, on his own, a diligent chronicle of all Don Bosco said or did. He applied for membership in the Salesian Congregation in 1860. Ordained a priest in 1863, he continued his chronicle till October 1864, when Don Bosco sent him to Lanzo, near Turin, to open and direct its Salesian school. He died prematurely the following year, a victim of priestly zeal. [Editor]

Costamagna: Let the example of good people be the norm of your conduct.

Perino: Confide in Me. I am your Mother.

Pelazza: Seek a true friend, and when you have found him, do all he tells you.

Cottino: Why do you so rarely ask My help?

Ruffino: Practice and promote the virtue of humility.

Boggero: Sanctify your conversations.

Pellegrini: Patience, patience! But charity, too, and fervor.

Parigi: Summon up your courage and persevere. Trust in Me more than in men.

Momo: Be humble and you will be dear to Me and to My Son.

Chiapale: You do not yet know what obedience means.

Buratto: Reflect on yourself and have recourse to Me.

Hyacinth Perucatti: Remember that life's thorns become roses at death.

Chiariglione: In all you do, see if you are acting for God's glory.

Arcostanzo: You cannot get to heaven by having a good time.

Felix Galetti: Why don't you listen to him who wants to make you happy?

Mona: More deeds, less words.

Quattroccolo: You have a few dangerous bosom friends. Confide more in Me than in them.

Damiasso I: You can produce, but you do not. Shake off your laziness.

Damiasso II: If you do not have recourse to Me more frequently, you will work in vain for body and soul.

Capello: Take care not to turn back. Pray better.

Matthew Galliano: Work more for heaven, and you will succeed in your studies.

Rebuffo: If you rely on yourself, you will spoil everything. Put more faith in Me and in your guide.

Baietto: Why are you so afraid of work? Won't you be paid for it? Have more trust in Me.

Perazza (day boy): You work in vain for body and soul unless you find yourself a good counselor.

Macocco: Receive the Bread of the Angels more often and acquire the queen of virtues.

Mosselli: If you do all you can, I will help you, but pray better.

Protti: Heaven is not for sluggards. Why do you waste so much time?

Ansaldi: Take heart! Nourish yourself with the Bread of the Strong and have recourse to Me often.

Panetti: Why do you so rarely seek My help?

Peire: Be more assiduous in your duties and pray to Me more willingly.

Ignazio Demagistris: You do not make full use of your talents and suffer spiritual loss. What of your soul?

Ghella: If you cannot excel in study, you can in piety.

[The following messages are anonymous:]

C. . . . C. . . . C. . . .

Do not lose the loveliest of virtues.

The world is filling your heart with clay.[10]

Try to understand what charity and humility mean.

As long as your heart is full of clay, it will have no room for true love of God.

Beware of turning back. Listen to the friend of your soul.

Your deeds are a thorn in My heart.

You are the devil's slave, but you still have time.

You are small, but your malice is big. Hurry to mend your ways.

Chastity, charity, candor.

If only you knew the great reward prepared for the queen of virtues! Courage!

We shall add four more *strenne* that came into our possession only a short time ago:

Anglois: Redouble your efforts; have recourse to Me more often; and go ahead.

Garino: Remember Me, for I am your Mother.

B. . . . Do not expect to become a saint at one stroke.

S. . . . Every day one needs to take another step toward heaven.

The stream of boys coming to Don Bosco's room to receive their personal *strenna* lasted several days. But even before all the messages were delivered, eagerness and curiosity somewhat waned. Toward the end, a number of boys, noting the effect made upon their companions, began to realize that it was no laughing matter. Too faint-hearted to resolve to start serving God and fearing to face the all too unpleasant truth, they had second thoughts about

[10] This message is an exact duplicate of the one given to Dassano. *See* fifth message above. [Editor]

picking up their *strenna.* A few, when called by Don Bosco, obliged after some hesitation, but thirteen declined. Their messages are still in that notable register beside their names. We shall report them anonymously:

1. You could do much more for your soul's good.
2. Your negligence and want of piety displease Me. Wake up!
3. Have more frequent recourse to Me. Fight! I will help you win.
4. A worm gnaws at your soul and body. Woe to you if you do not destroy it!
5. Choose better companions—don't be negligent—pray better.
6. Strive to make up for the past by a better future. Why wait?
7. You like being idle, you knowingly pamper your taste, but you are displeasing Me and My Son, Jesus Christ. Woe to you if you do not mend your ways.
8. Your carelessness renders all your efforts ineffective. Don't be idle. Study and pray.
9. Receive the sacraments—pray better—be more obedient.
10. Put your conscience in order—make better use of your time —pray better.
11. Idleness and gluttony cause Me worry over you. Mend your ways: pray better.
12. You are much concerned about your body, hardly about your soul. Death draws near. Get ready.
13. Meditate more on things eternal. Be more steady in your piety. Why do you so seldom have recourse to Me?

"These admonitions," wrote Father Francis Dalmazzo,[11] "revealed the source and greatness of Don Bosco's charism in reading hearts. He divined the weakness of each boy, as I myself experienced. The *strenna* he gave a former rhetoric classmate of mine was couched in these terms: 'Revolutionary ideas won't lead you to heaven!' These were prophetic words! After leaving the Oratory, the youth became a professor and went to Switzerland; with Protestant aid, he was soon appointed director of a boarding school in one of the cantons. Later he became a spokesman of the most rabid revolutionaries and, thanks to his oratorical gifts, swayed

[11] Father Dalmazzo (1845–1895) entered the Oratory as a rhetoric student in 1860. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 453ff) After his ordination in 1868 he filled important positions in the Salesian Society, his last assignment being rector of the Catanzaro diocesan seminary, where he died on March 10, 1895. [Editor]

crowds to his views. He died just past the age of thirty, in the arms of revolutionaries, without the sacraments."

Father Dominic Ruffino narrated another incident:

Toward the end of 1861, a twenty-two-year-old carpenter came to the Oratory. Like everyone else, he too received his *strenna;* I don't know its contents. Anyway, on reading it, he flew into a rage and told the bystanders that he would show it to his pastor to let him decide whether he deserved such an unjustified reprimand. He kept asserting that he had always gone to confession regularly and had carried out his other Christian duties. Furthermore, he went to Father Prefect to say he intended to leave. When Don Bosco heard of this tirade, he sent word to the youth to bring him a note from his pastor concerning his religious conduct at home.

"I did go to confession at Easter, but not to my pastor," the youth protested.

"Tell the young man that I'll be satisfied with a single note stating that he did his Easter duty," Don Bosco insisted.

"What?" the youth replied when Don Bosco's message was delivered to him. "I've always carried out my Easter duty." And he stalked off, muttering under his breath. As the day went by, the young man did some serious thinking. The following day, chastened and stirred, he called on Don Bosco.

"Well?" the latter asked him kindly.

"You were right, Father. I want to put my conscience in order right now!"

CHAPTER 2

Young Apostles

DON Bosco's zeal for his pupils' spiritual welfare and the ardent devotion for the Queen of Heaven which he could inspire in their hearts, as well as Her own aid to render his holy efforts spiritually fruitful, were responsible for the flourishing condition of the Turin festive oratories and of the sodalities at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Although at this time Don Bosco could count on the valuable help of priests, clerics, and laymen for the boys' supervision and religious instruction, he still kept up his personal intense care of them, especially in the confessional.

The older artisans [1] preferred him to any other confessor because he was very kind to them and told them of God's mercy and eternal life with such unction as to move them. Then too—quite candidly and unexpectedly—he would say or do something to spur them on to firm spiritual resolutions. On this point, Father John Turchi [2] wrote:

A young man who was an Oratory pupil for several years and now [1895] lives in Turin, a practicing Catholic, told me that one evening, as he went to Don Bosco for his usual confession, he happened to be the last penitent. It was getting dark. Don Bosco heard his confession and then asked, "Do you have a match?"

"Sure!" he answered. As he was fumbling in his pocket, Don Bosco continued, "Well, then, kindle a little love for God in your heart."

For reasons stated above, the activities of the affiliated chapters

[1] This was the name given to the boys learning a trade, to distinguish them from those taking academic courses. The latter were called "students." [Editor]

[2] Father Turchi was a pupil and later a teacher at the Oratory, where he said his first Mass on May 26, 1861. Years after, during the process for Don Bosco's beatification, he submitted very important testimony in writing concerning Don Bosco's relations with Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Turin. [Editor]

of the St. Vincent de Paul Society [3] still continued in Don Bosco's three festive oratories in Turin. In fact, they kept going a few more years. Routinely every year, at a special meeting attended also by members of the regular chapters of the St. Vincent De Paul Society and presided over by Don Bosco, the boys reported on their charities of the past year. Unfortunately, all these reports have been lost, even those covering the activities of 1861, which were publicly read at the 1862 meeting of the affiliated chapters of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco and of the St. Joseph Festive Oratory at Borgo Nuovo [also called Borgo San Salvario].[4] Fortunately, we have the report [5] of the small, affiliated chapter of the Guardian Angel Festive Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, directed by Father Michael Rua.[6]

[3] *See* Vol. V, pp. 306–11, 334f; Vol. VI, p. 281. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 85f. [Editor]

[5] *See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

[6] Michael Rua first met Don Bosco when the Oratory had as yet no permanent quarters. (*See* Vol. II, pp. 247f) In 1847, drawn by Don Bosco's kindness, Rua began attending the festive oratory regularly. On graduating with honors from the Christian Brothers School of Turin in 1850, he became a day student at the Oratory and later a boarder on September 22, 1852. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 97f, 334) Barely two weeks later, on October 3, he donned the clerical habit and became Don Bosco's most valued assistant. (*Ibid.*, pp. 337f) On December 18, 1859 he was elected Spiritual Director of the fledgling Salesian Congregation. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1884, at Don Bosco's request, Pope Leo XIII named him Don Bosco's Vicar with right of succession. He became Rector Major on December 31, 1888 and died in this post on April 6, 1910. The diocesan process of beatification was started in 1922. In 1936 the cause moved to Rome and in 1953 he was declared venerable. His beatification has been scheduled for 1972. [Editor]

CHAPTER 3

A Wearisome Apostolate

AS we continue these biographical memoirs, Don Bosco amazes us by his heroically unceasing intellectual and physical activity. We have already considered his many virtues and labors, but have as yet only mentioned the charity he showed in giving audiences. This particular activity, begun in 1846, kept expanding, but until 1857 or 1858 it did not prevent Don Bosco from going out of the Oratory between ten-thirty and eleven in the morning. After 1860, however, to the day of his last illness, Don Bosco's callers became so numerous as to keep him busy from nine to one.

As spiritual heir to Father [Joseph] Cafasso,[1] Don Bosco had become one of the main forgers of that compact, solid union of noblemen and middle-class citizens who exercised such a strong influence on the people by their unyielding loyalty to Church teachings and to sound moral principles. It might be said that the best, choicest, and most outstanding elements of every level of society, by common consent and instinctive attraction, looked up to Don Bosco. He had become their inspiring leader and guide.

Bishop John Cagliero [2] describes what we all witnessed:

Throughout my long stay at the Oratory, I always noticed a long stream of callers who came to him firmly persuaded of his unique virtues, charisms, and holiness. They came to ask his prayers and blessing, to tell him of youngsters in trouble, to get some recommenda-

[1] Father Cafasso died June 23, 1860. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 369–74) For further information *see* Indexes of preceding volumes. [Editor]

[2] Cagliero (1838–1926) had entered the Oratory in 1851. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 200ff) He was ordained a priest in 1862, led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in 1875 (*see* Vol. XI, pp. 348f), became the first Salesian bishop in 1884, and a cardinal in 1915. He died at Rome in 1926. In June 1964, his remains were transferred and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma, Argentina. For further details *see* Indexes of Vols. IV, V, VI, and XI. [Editor]

tion or other, to plan a charitable project, to seek remedies to evils, to offer donations for the Oratory, and not infrequently just to talk to him.

And these people were not just laborers. They included judges, government officials, cabinet ministers, learned priests, seminary rectors, bishops, archbishops, and cardinals from Italy and abroad. Princes or commoners, rich or poor, friends or strangers, learned or ignorant, good or bad, they all sought him as a counselor, consoler, father, and friend. Pastors and curates too turned to him for guidance in the spiritual direction of others. Moreover, upon completing courses at the Convitto Ecclesiastico,[3] many priests would call on Don Bosco for his blessing before reporting to their assignments.

Superiors of religious orders, rectors of religious communities, monks, and nuns came to consult him. Father James Bosco, a fellow seminarian of his, spiritual director of the Sisters of St. Joseph for over thirty years, and highly respected in the diocese for truly priestly virtues, considered him a saint. Many times he told nuns seeking his advice, "Go to Don Bosco. . . . He is a saint. He will know what to tell you. . . ." John Villa[4] declared: "Daily so many people came to see him that all of us boys were edified by his boundless charity and sacrifice."

At about 8:30 each morning [except Sundays] Don Bosco would leave the confessional and go up to his room. His former bedroom had been converted into a waiting room, opening into another room of equal size having one window facing south, another facing east, a small bed in a corner, and a few simple furnishings. Don Bosco's secretary kept note of appointments and made sure each visitor had his turn.

Always outspoken and honest, Don Bosco never flattered his callers or sought their praise. He received them with great respect, as though all were opulent noblemen whose aid he needed. He made no distinction between a rich man who brought him a generous donation and a poor widow or peasant who offered him a few *soldi*,[5] the fruit of her sacrifices. His words evinced a deep

[3] An ecclesiastical college specializing in pastoral theology. It was here that Don Bosco started his work for boys while attending courses immediately after his ordination. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff, 54–61. [Editor]

[4] Villa began attending the Oratory in 1855 and continued frequenting it until his death in 1870. [Editor]

[5] A *soldo* was worth five centesimi (cents). [Editor]

humility, and his ways were constantly so gentle and kind as to endear him to heaven and earth. He took an interest in all he was told and seemed to have nothing else in mind at that moment, listening with undivided attention, without interrupting. If anyone broke in on him, he immediately became silent. Then, when his visitor was through speaking, he resumed the thread of his own conversation with admirable presence of mind. [In a discourse read at a solemn commemoration of Don Bosco on June 24, 1903] Attorney Charles Bianchetti declared:

Don Bosco's room breathed forth heavenly peace. I cannot tell whether, like flowers, we opened ourselves to the dew of consolation or whether we shut tightly upon the heavenly breath which flooded our souls. Don Bosco sat at a plain desk which had drawers and small pigeonholes. Letters and papers were bundled in heaps before him, increasing with each new mail delivery. But Don Bosco was not concerned with that; he pushed the piles aside. It was his belief that even little things should be done unhurriedly, well, without distractions. He gave the appearance of having very little or nothing else to do.

He carried on with each caller as if he had no one else to listen to that morning. Like St. Francis de Sales he held that haste makes waste. Never the first to end a conversation, he would not even hint at shortening it. Rather, if a visitor feared he had been indiscreet and wanted to leave, Don Bosco would graciously beg him to stay a bit longer. At times, a considerate visitor would remind him that others were waiting. "Let them be patient," he would reply. "I am like the barber who tells his customers, 'I'll be with you in a moment,' and then takes his time with his job as though no one were waiting. After all, customers must get their money's worth! It wouldn't be fair for a barber to rush and chop away at his customers!"

In Don Bosco simplicity went hand in hand with a strong sense of duty. He would not end an interview until he had adequately discussed a problem. His conversation was most delightful, generously interspersed with timely, humorous anecdotes and incidents. To make them more effective he would say they were his personal experiences or that he had heard them from Father [Joseph] Cafasso or Father [Louis] Guala [6] or Father [John] Borel [7] or someone else. His pleas-

[6] The founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico. *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff. [Editor]

[7] Father Borel was the first priest to help Don Bosco in the trying first years of the Oratory. Don Bosco met him during his seminary days when Father Borel preached a retreat in 1839 at the Chieri seminary. *See* Vol. I, pp. 341f and the Index of Vol. II. [Editor]

antries made an incisive, vivid impression and were always appropriate. So gracious was his manner that no one could reproach him for being less than gentlemanly and discreet. "Even when pulling teeth," he used to remark, "one must be tactful, or else. . . ." There was in Don Bosco a respectful, good-natured, warm-hearted approach which in no way impaired his skill—metaphorically—in pulling a tooth or catching a big fish. "Fishermen, thieves, and pickpockets," he often quipped, "have something in common. We must close one eye or both when souls are at stake."

How successful he was in fishing souls! It is not easy to visualize the impact of his words. With amazing intuition he said the right thing at the right time. Was it God speaking through him? Was it experience that inspired him with the right word for the right person? The truth is that slowly slowly, wisely though artlessly, he would express concepts worthy of the Church Fathers—a thought, perhaps, on the need of a good confession, on devotion to the Blessed Virgin, or on heaven. Whatever it was, he said it with such love of God that callers experienced what people of every condition have felt in the presence of saints—a spiritual uplift.

With priests, he would ask about their priestly spirit, the sanctification of souls, their daily meditation, spiritual reading, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, their assiduous ministry of the confessional, and their zeal in preaching. "Such queries," Father [Felix] Reviglio [8] declared, "he would make particularly of pastors and curates whom he had guided to the priesthood. This he did with me. He also gave me guidelines for the zealous performance of my duties."

He would often urge priests to promote the decorum of the house of God, defend religion, distribute good literature, encourage priestly and religious vocations, help foreign missions, or contribute to the building of new churches.

"You are so talented!" he would say to someone. "Why not lend me a hand in preparing a pamphlet on this or that subject?"

To a wealthy, generous, and influential priest he would keep saying, "Help me save souls!" In this case, though, he would not ask for alms. He merely disposed such a one to charity by mentioning the needs of his boys.

[8] Father Reviglio first met Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1847 at the age of sixteen. Later he became a priest and pastor in Turin. *See* Vol. III, pp. 239ff. [Editor]

To some other priest he would say, "I need a preacher (or a confessor) for my boys. May I count on you? Please help."

When necessary, he would not shy from reprimanding. Once a religious of a distant town came to see him. He wore civilian clothes either for comfort or to avoid abuse. He greeted Don Bosco courteously, but the latter pretended not to recognize him. In amazement the religious emphatically protested that they were friends. At last Don Bosco remarked, "I wouldn't have believed it! Is it you in this garb? Go! I have no time to waste on you."

"Please, listen! I was afraid I'd be insulted. You know religious receive little respect nowadays."

"Don't bother me! I have other people to attend to. If you want me to listen to you, put on your habit!"

Seeing how determined Don Bosco was, the religious apologized and promised he would never again lay aside his habit. Don Bosco relented and received him.

His conversations, however, were not a mere exchange of words. If consulted on some matter, he would not reply immediately but would seek more detailed information. Then he would lift his eyes to heaven, as though seeking light from God. At other times he might keep talking of less important matters as he thoroughly pondered the problem. Then he would return to the crux of the question and suggest what he thought would best promote God's glory and the good of souls.

Now and then, if faced with very complex matters, he would not fully rely on his own judgment but would postpone his answer a few days, inviting the person concerned to join him in prayer. Meanwhile, he would consult books or experts. Sometimes he would even send his callers to them, particularly to the distinguished moralist Father John Baptist Bertagna.[9] However, his own advice was rarely improved upon. For legal matters he usually sent Father Rua to consult experienced lawyers. A constant witness of Don Bosco's activities, Father Rua left us this written declaration:

Thus, Don Bosco managed to unravel most complex matters. I could not possibly guess how many people credited him with having consoled

[9] Father Bertagna, renowned professor of moral theology at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, was later appointed auxiliary bishop in the same city. [Editor]

and cheered them in their time of sorrow and aided them with remarkable prudence in their difficulties.

At times, Don Bosco gave immediate, direct answers, as though disclosing God's will. Occasionally his advice might have seemed unwise from a human standpoint, but, on being taken and carried out, it restored peace to troubled minds, ended deplorable quarrels, restored concord to families, and guided the hesitant in their vocations. Persons who chose not to abide by his advice had reason enough to regret it, as they themselves admitted to me later, saying that matters would have turned out well if they had only heeded his words. Nearly everyone, though, accepted his decisions as if they had come from God, so greatly did they trust him.

One day an unknown lady called on Don Bosco at the Oratory but had to wait more than two hours. On being finally ushered in, she manifested her problems and anxieties and asked whether she could feel at ease in conscience. Don Bosco replied that she had nothing to fear. As she did not seem convinced, he added: "Are you going to do God's will or your own?"

"God's, of course!"

"Well then, do as I say, and do not worry!"

She thanked him and left, saying, "Now I am happy!"

Similar incidents occurred daily. Although not all visits were important or quickly settled, Don Bosco never complained of the inconvenience caused him by ignorant, talkative, uncivil, or persistent callers who never felt satisfied, nor did he ever turn anybody away, regardless of how tiresome or vexing that person might be. To slow-minded people he would keep repeating the same thing over and over again just as calmly as the first time. He was equally courteous with those who called on him unnecessarily or for trivial, absurd matters—a mother praising some nonsensical prowess of a child, or a patient going into tiresome details of his illness, or someone delving into particulars of a lawsuit of his. Don Bosco would listen, ask questions, and request explanations, thus encouraging such people to continue in the same vein. His interest in what they had to say showed a personal concern, and he always managed some word of praise and esteem for all. However, he could also steer futile, frivolous conversation into spiritual channels, turning their very importunity into a means of doing good. His advice always bore good fruit; his utterances,

effortless and gracious, became unforgettable norms. One might say that his was the magic of transforming all conversations into spiritual gold. The following incident will demonstrate this.

Two men came to ask him what numbers to play in the lottery, convinced that if he did tell them, they would win. He tried to sidetrack them, but they refused and impatiently kept saying, "That's not what we came for! We want to know what numbers to play."

"All right, then, play five, ten, and fourteen."

They thanked him and were about to go, when he added: "Let me explain why I gave you those numbers."

"You don't have to!"

"That's where you are wrong!"

"All right, then, let's hear it."

"Five stands for the five commandments of the Church; ten for the commandments of God; fourteen for the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. If you play these numbers, you will win heavenly stakes."

On another occasion he told his callers to play two and four, symbolizing respectively confession and Communion and the Four Last Things—death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Other occasions called for similar witty answers.

We must take into account, too, that most callers did not come to give, but to receive. Don Bosco helped them whenever he could. According to the [combined Bonetti and Ruffino] chronicles, he one day narrated this incident to Bonetti, Ruffino, and a few other clerics:

> An active democrat once called on me. He was hard up and needed money for a shirt, promising to repay me within a few days. I opened my wallet, but there was little there. Glancing toward my bed, I noticed a fine clean shirt which [Joseph] Rossi [10] had laid out for me. "Here you are," I told him. "Silver and gold I have none, but what I have, that I give you." [Acts, 3, 6]

[10] Rossi, a Salesian coadjutor, entered the Oratory in 1859 at the age of twenty-four. The following year, he asked to join the Salesian Society and was accepted. In 1869 Don Bosco appointed him purveyor for the Oratory and the other Salesian Houses. He was invited by Don Bosco to sit in on the General Chapters of 1877 and 1886 as a consultor. Rossi continued to enjoy the trust of Don Bosco's first successor till his own death in 1908. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 159f, 274, 362, 426, 559ff. [Editor]

He looked at me in surprise. "How about yourself?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me," I replied. "The same Providence that has taken care of you today will provide for me tomorrow!"

At this the man was so moved that he knelt before me, exclaiming, "How much good a priest can do!"

Don Bosco concluded, "That man became a great friend of priests after that. This is how to win the hearts of men."

Even those who had hurt him received his help, for he ignored personal offenses, generously forgetting them, even at the cost of sacrifice, as Bishop Cagliero and Bishop Bertagna have testified. If, for instance, some overzealous individual at the Oratory, spotting some such person among the callers, hastened to alert Don Bosco and remind him of a past injury, he would expertly sidetrack the conversation into bringing out the offender's good points.

When asked for favors he could not grant, he would answer negatively but so charitably and courteously as to leave the petitioner just as well satisfied. Many, extolling his courteous manner, would remark, "Don Bosco can't seem to say no," adding that they preferred a "no" from him to a "yes" from others. Everyone was satisfied and left full of admiration.

In cases of accidents, misfortunes, harassment, or quarrels, when he could not then and there offer other help, he at least managed to comfort the victims and alleviate their anguish. Often Father Joachim Berto heard him say, "God is a good Father and will never allow us to be afflicted more than we can bear." If people complained that God seemingly had forgotten the good they had done, Don Bosco would exclaim, "God does not forget. He will repay everything abundantly in heaven." To others who griped about the ingratitude of relatives or employees, he would say, "Remember, God does not pay us for results but for effort."

His patience in listening to other people's troubles was inexhaustible, and so his callers were encouraged to return. Audiences became a most important task of Don Bosco and enabled him to carry out all the spiritual works of mercy. He taught the ignorant, admonished the sinner, comforted the afflicted, and prayed to God and Our Lady to bless the souls and bodies of those who sought aid and protection through his prayers.

Yet not all his callers were unpretending or courteous. Some called on him to complain—harshly at times—about imaginary wrongs he or his associates had done to them. Occasionally, they even dared to stoop to insults and threats. Yet Don Bosco was so unalterably meek that they would finally leave not only pacified but friendly. Others—self-esteeming, irritable, overbearing—patronizingly acquainted him with their business plans to have his opinion. Don Bosco never disabused them of their snobbish notions. Courteously, he gave his view but left the matter to their own judgment.

Sometimes, in a difference of opinion on some question, a caller would become rather insolent, and when Don Bosco was later asked why he had been so patient with him, he would reply, "Such persons must be handled as sick people." The only time he found it hard to restrain himself was when God's honor was at stake. For example, on February 21, 1863 he told his pupils of an incident that had occurred two days before:

A man called on me and, unable to get what he wanted, began to blaspheme shockingly. Up to that moment I had put up with him, but at such conduct I could no longer control myself. I strode over to the stove, grabbed a pair of tongs and, seizing the blasphemer by the coat, exclaimed, "Out, or I'll teach you a lesson!"

"I apologize if I offended you," the man replied.

"Apologies won't do! That's no way to speak of God! I don't want a demon in my room."

I pushed him out. Whenever I hear a curse or an insulting epithet to God's holy name, I really lose self-control, and, were it not for God's restraining grace, I might do things which I should later regret.

But, apart from such rare cases, Don Bosco never let anyone go away disgruntled. After fully satisfying his caller, he would usually escort him out. He was so openly affable and amiable that many people who spoke to him briefly or merely caught sight of him avowed that, could they visualize Our Savior's image and goodness, they would, with due reverence and measure, think of Don Bosco. Father Francis Dalmazzo left us this testimony:

Once a very wealthy merchant—a freethinker—called on Don Bosco out of mere curiosity. Later, I saw him come out of his room bewildered,

muttering, "What a man! What a man!" When I asked him what Don Bosco had said to him, he replied that he had heard things one does not usually hear from ordinary priests and that Don Bosco had ended the visit by saying, "Let's make sure that you with your money and I with my poverty will be in paradise together one day."

John Bisio [11] declared:

Just to give an idea of what Don Bosco was able to say and do, I recall that once I escorted to him a Jew who was about fifty years old and had expressed the desire to meet him. I do not know what passed between them, but when the Jew left, he told me that if there were a Don Bosco in every town, the whole world would be converted. The pastor of my home town also confided to me that a rabbi of Alessandria had told him: "I have called on Don Bosco twice already and will not see him again, because if I do, I know I won't be able to leave him." This shows how effective were his gentle, persuasive words. This also explains the boys' attachment to him and his ability to better them.

[11] Bisio was Don Bosco's receptionist from 1864 to 1871. (*See* Vol. VI, p. 20) Later, he became a lifelong Salesian cooperator. *See also* Vol. III, p. 352; Vol. IV, p. 131; Vol. V, p. 450. [Editor]

CHAPTER 4

A Wearisome Apostolate (Continued)

AUDIENCES were a heavy but meritorious cross for Don Bosco. More often than not, they were a grave physical burden because of his poor health, weak stomach and protracted conversations. After a few interviews, his breathing became labored and his tongue parched, and he was sometimes so exhausted that his voice was hardly audible. Then, too, intense concentration in solving grave problems would bring on such violent headaches as to move bystanders to compassion. These hardships, however, did not make him desist. Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J., declared that even if Don Bosco had done no other penance in his whole life, this alone would have sufficed to qualify his virtue as heroic. His entire life was a steady succession of audiences, even on the city streets or in public conveyances. When urged to drop such a heavy burden, he would answer, "I can't. . . . I don't have the heart. . . . Poor people! . . . Many even come from far off. They too are busy. Besides, this is my mission." Then he would add: "Poor people! They have troubles they want to confide to me. . . . They have been waiting so long. . . . I feel pity for them. They must be satisfied. . . . Then, too, one can always do a little good this way."

He even managed to joke about it. Once, one of his priests asked him, "Isn't there some way to lighten the burden of so many unnecessary audiences?"

"Of course," he replied.

"How?"

"Well, by acting half-witted or insane. If the rumor got around that Don Bosco is out of his mind, people would stop coming. But such a trick would be blameworthy and detrimental to our Congregation because we need everybody. So it's best not to interfere with Divine Providence."

In view of this, his door was always open to anybody. Even at

dinner time, he would not eat until he had satisfied everybody. By the time he was through with dinner, he would find other callers waiting. "Let me go," he would tell his young clerics when they tried to dissuade him. "I can't let so many people wait for me." When they begged him one day to set up a schedule and stop receiving people at any hour lest he ruin his health, he replied, "The Lord put us into this world to help others!"

In urging [Salesian] superiors to sacrifice themselves constantly for the good of their fellow men, he exhorted them not to neglect interviews, when practical, so as to exercise charity toward all sorts of people. He urged them to respect everybody. After the example of St. Vincent de Paul he made them see Jesus Christ in every person—Jesus the Pontiff in the Pope and the bishops; Jesus the Priest in priests; Jesus the King in kings; Jesus the Judge in magistrates; Jesus the Good Samaritan in merchants. He portrayed Him as a workman among workmen, a pauper among paupers, a sick man among the sick. Similarly, as in the parables, he portrayed Him as the head of a family, the bridegroom, the vineyard keeper, the landowner. . . .

He told superiors to take great pains never to send people away disgruntled. Among other things, he told his secretary: "Do your best to please people, just as Don Bosco does." The secretary honestly tried, but a few days later he had to report that he had found it impossible to please everybody. Would Don Bosco have any suggestions? After a moment's reflection, Don Bosco answered: "Please *everybody?* . . . That's impossible, of course. Listen, this morning a lady kept insisting that I go to church to hear her confession. 'I have no time,' I told her. 'Besides, what we are talking about is no matter for confession.' She burst out, 'St. Francis de Sales didn't treat his penitents like this!' 'But in this case, he would have given you the same reply,' I answered. The good woman was not convinced and left unhappy. Yet, even in such cases, an unperturbed serenity will eliminate or tone down unpleasantness. To manage this, though, one needs a habit of prayer, mature reflection, friendliness, patience, and love of truth." He then added, "Be prudent, but do not forget that our prudence must consist in always safeguarding our faith, our conscience, and our soul."

As a matter of fact, the Oratory priests, clerics, and pupils received an object lesson on receiving people and holding effective interviews when they themselves called on him and had to admire his conduct.

On meeting people, he sized up their temperament, inclinations, and traits at a glance. His conversation was such as to please everybody. When asked how to win over people's good will and esteem, as he could do, he suggested showing interest by asking them about their state of life, profession, or job. A past master himself in the art of adapting himself to all kinds of people and becoming one of them, he even chatted with very young children—babbled with them, we might say. So too, in discussing trivial matters, he did not mind letting a man of mediocre intelligence think he was Don Bosco's equal in knowledge and business ability.

No less toilsome was his letter writing. So as not to be disturbed while reading his voluminous mail, he would go to the Convitto Ecclesiastico or to some café near Our Lady of Consolation Shrine after dinner and stay there until he had made marginal notes for each reply. For some twenty years he spent half the night answering letters—a task of intense concentration either because of the advice asked or the problems to be solved. He was always circumspect in answering strangers' questions by mail. If he could not clearly grasp from the context what troubled them or if the matter was too delicate, he would suggest that they consult and follow the advice of their own pastor, spiritual director, or a competent person.

Letter writing, no less than interviews, gave him a chance of practicing patience and humility. He used to say that a kind, respectful, prompt reply to an angry and insulting letter unfailingly triumphed and turned one's enemies into friends. As Scripture says, "A mild answer calms wrath." [Prov. 15, 1] He had experienced the truth of this maxim a hundred times.

About the year 1863, a nobleman, known to him only by name, wrote to him on an important matter. At that particular time Don Bosco had some very pressing, difficult correspondence to handle. Since the nobleman's letter contained nothing confidential, Don Bosco asked one of his priests to reply for him. The nobleman—quite conscious of his dignity and the considera-

tion due him—became very indignant and wrote Don Bosco a sharply insolent letter, the gist of which was that, since Don Bosco could not possibly be unaware of the identity of the person who had honored him with a personally written letter, he had insulted the man by not duly acknowledging the social gap between them and by disdaining to send a personal reply. The nobleman further went on to say that he had often written to the king, the Pope, and very important people and had in each case received a personal reply, not a secretary's note. Did Don Bosco perhaps fear demeaning himself, or did he rate himself higher than king and Pope? He should have felt it his duty to bring him a reply in person, and so on.

Unperturbed by such rudeness, Don Bosco wrote back saying he was grateful for such a gracious letter and such masterful acting. Though he knew him to be a well-educated, brilliant man, he had never thought him to be such a great joker. Don Bosco further thanked him for his candor—such as befitted a sincere friend—and went on to say that he felt so honored by his friendship that he did not want to bypass his chance of strengthening it. Since he could not just then write at greater length, he would dine with him on a certain day and hour, so as to have leisure to discuss the matter contained in his previous letter.

Once his indignation abated, the nobleman felt greatly ashamed. When Don Bosco arrived for dinner, his host was waiting for him at the head of the stairs. Somewhat uneasy at first, he soon smiled and warmed up to Don Bosco, who had seemingly interpreted his letter as a friendly, subtle ruse for getting him there. Dinner was a pleasant affair. Amiably Don Bosco won his host's heart, and from then on the nobleman became the Oratory's good friend and benefactor.

Similarly, a pastor of the Saluzzo diocese, after a lengthy correspondence with Don Bosco, became peeved at not having his plans seconded and wrote him a seven-page letter in terms seemingly chosen for maximum insult. Don Bosco answered with an apology for having so badly, though unwittingly upset him, assuring him that he had no intention of thwarting his wishes. In fact, he was withdrawing any displeasing remark he might have made, and was leaving the entire matter in the pastor's hands. He closed with a

final apology. Such an unexpected reaction calmed the pastor, who apologized in turn, begged Don Bosco to destroy that unfortunate letter of his and forget it had ever been written. He ended by saying he was at Don Bosco's service for anything he might need. He faithfully kept his word.

On another occasion, a prominent priest wrote to Don Bosco, who did not get the letter because he was away from Turin. Since no reply came, the priest became resentful, believing that Don Bosco was snubbing him. Angrily and publicly he declared that Don Bosco was proud and snobbish, remarking, "If that's what the superior of this new Congregation is like, who knows what type the members are?" He concluded with several accusations, adding that Don Bosco had better explain his lack of courtesy. When Don Bosco heard of this, he wrote to the priest and asked him not to expect any rebuttal of his accusations since he, Don Bosco, pleaded guilty to all of them and to more serious ones too. Since sudden death was a constant threat to all men, all he asked was pardon because he wanted to face God with a clear conscience. Abashed by such a reply, the priest wrote an apology for his rude, slanderous invectives and declared he felt bound to come to Turin to kneel before Don Bosco and beg his pardon.

Don Bosco was quite right in reiterating that whoever returns insult for insult, whether orally or in writing, will always lose because "a harsh word stirs up anger." [Prov. 15, 1]

CHAPTER 5

A Mysterious Globe

GOD'S glory and the salvation of souls were the sole aims of Don Bosco's undertakings and labors. It should not seem strange therefore that the Blessed Virgin should assist him personally as he carried out his duties and watched over the Oratory boys. No reasonable man can deny that communication with the supernatural world is a fact. Abundant supernatural phenomena occurring throughout the centuries are part of history; unbiased critics are free to examine, discuss, and accept or reject them. Therefore we shall leave it to them to look into what we are now about to narrate. We must remark, however, that the wondrous incidents and utterances highlighting Don Bosco's life were witnessed this year [1862] by five hundred pupils as well as by priests, young clerics, and other Oratory residents. With this in mind, we now describe how Our Lady truly continued Her generous assistance to the Oratory.[1] The Bonetti chronicle reads:

Thursday, January 9, 1862. Toward nine [this evening] three boys —Vallania, Sciolli, and Finelli—went to the St. Aloysius dormitory, located in the new wing of the house, instead of joining their companions at night prayers. While they were gabbing away (or more precisely indulging in questionable conversation) they felt a quiver through the room followed by the abrupt hiss of an approaching gust of wind. Then, a ball of fire flashed outside a closed window, came through it with a hushed sound, skimmed over the boys' heads, crossed the entire dormitory, and then, stopping in the center, split into countless tongues of fire which scattered through the room and briefly lit up every corner. At the same time, the boys heard footsteps of someone walking through the dormitory. The fiery tongues then fused back into a globe, glided out through the same window, and vanished.[2] Thoroughly frightened, the boys hid under their blankets.

[1] For past instances *see* Vol. V, pp. 476ff; Vol. VI, pp. 450f, 582ff. [Editor]
[2] For similar phenomena *see* Vol. V, p. 42; Vol. VI, pp. 578f. [Editor]

Such a strange occurrence could not remain secret. Vallania told me about it, assuring me that it was a fact; surely, his admission did him little credit. The news spread like wildfire, and of course there were many interpretations. Father [Michael] Rua and Father [Angelo] Savio [3] had seen the same extraordinary brilliance as they were leaving their classrooms but had believed it to be an optical illusion. [Francis] Provera,[4] too, saw it about seven feet above his head as he was standing on the terrace at the rear of the house near the window. While he stared, it silently burst into a shower of sparks. Immediately afterward, the area was plunged into intense darkness. Some people even declared they had seen a fiery ball above Don Bosco's room. Other unfounded rumors kept circulating among the pupils who, chastened by a holy fear, longed to hear Don Bosco's explanation.

On Sunday, January 12 [1821], after night prayers, Don Bosco confirmed, described, and fully explained the strange occurrence to an assembly of both students and artisans. In conclusion he stated:

"Such was the occurrence. Those who saw it are here present and can testify that things happened as I described them. I will add that the fiery globe, after leaving the dormitory, entered another room and revealed that unseemly conversation was going on in that part of the house. Not long after that, Father Rua, Father Savio, and the cleric Provera saw it too.

"These past few days, this globe of light has been the topic of much talk. Several ask, 'What could it be? Perhaps the soul of Martano in need of our prayers? . . . Was it a meteorite?' Brushing aside all conjecture I can tell you exactly what it was. Listen, here at the Oratory we have several individuals who stubbornly resist God's grace and call on themselves His wrath and the threat of dire punishment. The Blessed Virgin, who has always protected this house, visibly

[3] Angelo Savio entered the Oratory in 1850. On December 18, 1859, when the Salesian Congregation was officially founded, he, a deacon, was elected Economer General—a position he filled till 1875 when Don Bosco entrusted him with supervising the construction of new Salesian schools and, particularly, of the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. In 1885, at the age of fifty, he went to South America. Traversing all of Patagonia on horseback, he opened schools in Chile, Peru, and Paraguay, proving himself an untiring, zealous missionary. In 1892, after a short respite in Italy, he went to Ecuador to open a new mission, dying there on January 17, 1893 during an exploration trip. In the dream *The Wheel of Eternity* Don Bosco had seen him in remote regions. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 540, 549) [Editor]

[4] Francis Provera entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twenty-two, made his triennial vows in the Salesian Society in 1862, was ordained a priest in 1864, and filled important administrative and teaching posts. He died in 1874 after much suffering, as Don Bosco had foretold. For further details *see* the Index of Vol. VI. [Editor]

held back these punishments, as we have just seen, and mercifully warned those hardened individuals.

"I assure you that I grieve and weep when I think of the spiritual condition some of you are in. It's heartbreaking to see boys so indifferent and unconcerned about their souls, in spite of endless heavenly favors showered on them. Unless these youngsters quickly make up their minds to give up sin and return to God, they may never again have a chance to mend their ways. Let them hearken to my advice: if they do not want to break off from sin, then let them leave this house—and quickly. I do not want to be responsible for what may befall them. Let each of them think it over. Some need a general confession; others must confess what they have long withheld; others still have a sorry mess to straighten out, and still they keep putting it off. All these boys should be concerned, and rightly so. As for those whose consciences are in order, they need have no fear. I assure them that no harm will befall us, for we are under the Blessed Virgin's protection. If you are in God's grace you have nothing to fear from any noise or light. A short time ago your consciences underwent a very minute inspection, but none of you were aware of it. For the good, this must be a comfort and a guarantee of their spiritual salvation; for the thoughtless, a warning to give serious thought to their predicament.

"This very day one of you was saying, 'I want to leave; I don't want to stay here with all these strange goings-on.' My dear boy, do you think that when God wants to draw us to Him, He will not be able to find us, no matter where we hide? David said: 'If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I sink to the nether world, You are present there. If I take the wings of the dawn and fly to the farthest limits of the sea, even there Your hand shall guide me and Your right hand hold me fast.' [Ps. 138, 8–10]

"Now I exhort you all to pray tomorrow to Our Lord and to Our Lady to grant us the graces we need for our souls. I shall pray to the Blessed Virgin for my spiritual welfare and for yours as well. Now go to bed and sleep well."

As Don Bosco finished, young Vallania approached me (Bonetti), assuring me that what Don Bosco had said corresponded exactly to what he had seen in his dormitory.

Many interpreted the phrase "A short time ago your consciences underwent a very minute inspection, but none of you were aware of it" as obviously alluding to the *strenne* or messages distributed some days before to each of the boys, accurately gauging their spiritual condition. They inferred, therefore, that the *strenne* and the fiery globe were the same thing with the same purpose, or that the fiery globe was perhaps

a sequel to the *strenne*. Such were the boys' thoughts as they wished Don Bosco good night.

After the pupils left, several young clerics and others crowded about Don Bosco with questions. Among other things, they asked what he meant by saying that "the fiery globe, after leaving the dormitory, entered another room and revealed that unseemly conversation was going on in that part of the house." Don Bosco declined to comment but elusively gave us to understand that the globe had entered his room and he had learned many other things through its medium.

He then went on to comment on Our Lady's usual appearances on earth. First, however, he gave us an idea of his own firm grasp of theology by explaining, as best he humanly could, the intuitive vision of God by which the saints, in the vision of God, can see mirrored in Him the past, present and future within the limits He has set for them. Moreover they can see any part of the universe or be present there. Later, he told us that, should the Blessed Virgin wish to be in a particular spot, all She has to do is will to be there, and there She will be, usually dressed according to local custom. At other times She may choose to reveal Her presence through symbols.

We were enchanted to hear him talk so well and freely about mystic things. A few inquired whether he had ever experienced any such visions, and he answered that his entire knowledge was from books. Since such books would deal with speculation and more likely interest would-be contemplatives, Father Rua asked whether the Oratory had any boys who could appreciate such books. Don Bosco pleasantly replied that he was too inquisitive. "Those who could read and understand them," he answered, "do not believe themselves so endowed. God help them if they did! He would permit them to be humbled."

He was also asked about what should be done to avoid losing ground spiritually and to persevere in God's grace. "We must do our best," he said. "We must consider ourselves as nothing before the Lord and be convinced that without His help we can do nothing but commit sin."

Thus reads the Bonetti chronicle. It was probably in this apparition that Don Bosco heard the Blessed Virgin add a few stanzas to Silvio Pellico's [5] sacred poem, "Cuor di Maria che gli

[5] Silvio Pellico (1789–1854), a Piedmontese patriot, spent most of his early adult life in Milan where he joined the "Carbonari," a secret society working for Italian independence. Arrested by the Austrians, who then ruled Lombardy, he was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor. Pardoned in 1830, he returned to Turin. Up to his imprisonment, Pellico had been a lukewarm Catholic, but

Angioli." [6] Don Bosco thought that he himself had intoned it and an immense choir had joined in heavenly harmony till its end.

At the song's end a deep silence fell on all, and the Blessed Virgin herself sang a hymn of indescribable harmony and melody whose gist remained impressed on Don Bosco's mind. In fact, he told a few intimate friends of his that he had written down all he remembered. He, however, never disclosed other details.

There can be no doubt of the truth of his words. In a careful scrutiny of his papers after his death, we found one, yellowed with age, containing six stanzas written by Don Bosco in the same meter of the above-quoted poem of Silvio Pellico. It seems to be an addition to it and tells how Our Lady continues to encourage and advise a faithful devotee of Hers.

Can this be the paper for which we were hunting? Whatever be the case, we reproduce it here,[7] because anything pertaining to Don Bosco is precious to us.

We shall now return to the Bonetti chronicle:

> No one can tell how much that fiery globe meant to the boys. Many who had been remiss roused themselves to a general confession and resolved to frequent the sacraments. That same evening they vied with each other in getting a medal to wear about their necks. Good boys became more perseverant and fervent; bad boys turned over a new leaf.

But this ferment for self-reform would not have produced all its good effects had not Don Bosco had a continual supernatural knowledge of his boys' state of conscience. The chronicle continues:

> On one of these days, as he left the Oratory with [Francis] Provera and [Celestine] Durando,[8] Don Bosco remarked, "I was hoping

in the distress of prison life he resolved to love God and his fellow man. In 1832 he wrote the story of his prison life, *Le Mie Prigioni,* which became the most famous book in Risorgimento literature. At Don Bosco's time, he was employed as secretary to Marchioness Barolo in Turin. [Editor]

[6] *See* Appendix 2. [Editor]

[7] *See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

[8] Celestine Durando (1840–1907) entered the Oratory in 1856, and on the very first day met Dominic Savio, with whom he later founded the Immaculate Conception Sodality. In 1859, with other young clerics, he joined Don Bosco in

I'd get some relief from confessions by asking our ever obliging Father [Francis] Marengo [9] to take over more often. I also asked Father [Joseph] Rocchietti [10] to do so. Things however did not work out as I had hoped. There were serious drawbacks those two wonderful priests could not be aware of. Now and then I had to call some boy or other to my room and ask, "When will you come and put your conscience in order?"

They would answer, "I just went to confession to Father Rocchietti (or to Father Marengo) the day before yesterday. I even made a general confession."

"But did you confess this and that?" They would stand in stunned silence. Finally they would stammer, "It's true. I was afraid to confess that."

We can conclude by saying that Don Bosco was assisted by Our Lord, of whom St. John wrote, "He . . . knew what was in man." [John 2, 25]

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forming the Salesian Congregation. He was ordained a priest in 1864. The following year he became a member of the Superior Chapter and held that office for nearly forty years. He also authored an excellent Latin grammar and dictionary and other works. A zealous priest, he distinguished himself in the ministry of the confessional. He died at the Oratory on March 27, 1907. [Editor]

[9] Father Marengo, a diocesan priest, had been helping Don Bosco ever since the beginning of the Oratory. [Editor]

[10] Joseph Rocchietti, an Oratory pupil, had donned the cassock at Becchi in 1852 with Michael Rua. In 1858, he became the second Oratory alumnus to be ordained a priest. In 1862, he made his triennial vows in the Salesian Congregation, but shortly afterward had to withdraw for reasons of health and join the diocesan clergy. *See* pp. 101, 181. [Editor]

CHAPTER 6

Some Noteworthy Incidents

TOWARD the end of 1861, Don Bosco, devoted as ever to the Pope, wrote to Pius IX for several spiritual favors, but, as with other confidential letters, he did not keep a copy. For various reasons Pius IX was always glad to hear from him. The favors Don Bosco asked for were immediately granted in a rescript enclosed with the following letter; both letter and rescript bore the Holy Father's own signature.

To Our Beloved Son
Father John Bosco
Turin

Beloved Son:

Greetings and apostolic benediction!

We were very happy to receive your letter of December 25 on behalf also of your many priests, clerics, and lay members and were gratified by the reverence and affection which you and the aforesaid ecclesiastics and lay members profess for us and this Holy See.

Doubtless, you will readily understand our deep sorrow and consternation on learning of the savage war which the children of darkness have declared against our most holy religion, particularly in our unhappy Italy. Poisonous books and newspapers, classroom teaching, and all sorts of well-financed and cunning evil ruses are being used to lure the Italian people from the Catholic faith, ensnare them in most baneful errors, corrupt them beyond redemption, and endanger their eternal salvation with truly satanic maliciousness. Yet, in the midst of such afflictions and this frightening conspiracy of the godless against the Catholic Church, it is no mean comfort to us to see how our venerable brethren, the bishops, with fortitude and constancy befitting their office, valiantly defend the cause, rights, and teachings of God and His holy Church. We are also heartened by the sight of so many loyal priests

who, closely united to us and their bishops, bravely wage the Lord's battles. Lastly, we are gladdened by the filial love proudly borne by so many for this Apostolic See, and by their resistance to godless attacks. In the midst of these grievous sorrows we feel truly comforted by learning from your letter of the zeal with which you, beloved son, and the aforementioned priests and lay members are working for the spiritual welfare of the faithful in order to denounce and rebut our enemies' snares and errors. We heartily congratulate all of you and exhort you to continue in upholding the cause of our divine religion with ever increasing ardor. We earnestly hope you and yours will offer unceasing, most fervent prayers to our merciful God that He rise to the defense of His cause and assist and aid His Church with His most powerful help.

The enclosed rescript will show how willingly we have granted all your requests.[1] In closing we impart our apostolic benediction to you and the aforesaid clerical and lay members with all our heart, as a token of heavenly graces and of our own personal benevolence.

Rome, St. Peter's, January 13, 1862, 16th year of our Pontificate
Pope Pius IX

Don Bosco told the festive oratory boys too of the Holy Father's gracious favors. He now had the opportunity of adding a chapter[2] to Part II of the Regulations for the Festive Oratory, confirming the practices of piety already in use for Holy Week and the month of May.

Pius IX's letter was publicly read to the members of the Salesian Congregation, who, as of January 1862, numbered thirty-eight, including Don Bosco; five were priests, twenty-eight clerics, and five lay members.

[At a chapter meeting] two excellent candidates were proposed for admission, as we gather from the minutes:

On January 20, 1862, the Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales was assembled by Don Bosco, its director, and accepted [for probation] the subdeacon Bartholomew Fusero, son of Clement, of Caramagna, and the cleric Peter Racca, son of James, of Volvera. Both applicants received favorable votes and were admitted [to the practice of the rules of the Salesian Society].

[1] Don Bosco had petitioned for permission to celebrate Christmas Midnight Masses at the Oratory and for various indulgences. [Editor]

[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The Bonetti chronicle adds this:

Don Bosco spoke about the [religious] vows. Leaving aside poverty and chastity, he commented on obedience, as follows: "Obedience is defined as a ready will to dedicate oneself to those things which pertain to God's service. This definition matches that of devotion. We must each of us be willing to sacrifice our own will, even at heavy cost. There is no need to sacrifice one's health or money or to undergo privations, penances, or extraordinary fasts. The sacrifice that is needed is the sacrifice of the will. Each of us must be equally prepared to preach or to cook, to teach or to sweep, to catechize or to pray, to supervise or to study, to command or to obey. Such an attitude shall obtain God's blessing on us because we shall then be true, faithful disciples and servants. As Samuel said to Saul, 'Does the Lord desire holocausts and victims and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices and to hearken rather than to offer the fat of rams.' [1 Kings, 15, 22] We are therefore to hearken and generously follow our superior's voice, for he represents God and the call of duty. Thus we shall achieve the purpose of our vocation, earn many merits, and save our own souls and those of others."

He often dwelt on the topic of obedience, stressing the great reward that an obedient religious receives even here on earth by being privileged to save souls. The Bonetti chronicle continues:

On the morning of January 23 [1862], as Don Bosco was conducting the clerics' usual weekly *Testamentino* lesson,[3] he was asked for a moral from the Scripture passage they were studying. He chose the verse *Qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem* [John 3, 21] and developed this thought among others: "How fortunate is the cleric who has experienced the delight of working for the welfare of souls! He shall no longer fear cold or heat, hunger or thirst, heartaches, insults, death itself. He will not mind sacrificing everything if he can thus win souls for God. *Qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem.* One who does good will soon see its splendor. Try it and you'll see. . . ."

While Don Bosco sought to instill his own spirit into his clerics'

[3] In 1853 Don Bosco directed that the Oratory's philosophy and theology students should memorize ten verses of the New Testament each week in Latin and recite them at a meeting on Thursdays [a regular school holiday]. This practice later became known as *Testamentino,* meaning a short lecture on the New Testament. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 109f. [Editor]

hearts, some of whom did not belong to the Society of St. Francis de Sales, the Oratory was visited for a few days by Father Seraphim Allievi, a learned, zealous priest and a true apostle of youth who was doing good work as director of the St. Aloysius Oratory in Milan. Don Bosco, who had been his guest in 1850,[4] warmly welcomed him, and one evening asked him to give the "Good Night" to the boys.

Father Allievi was planning to open a home for derelict boys and to found a religious congregation to look after them, and so he sought Don Bosco's advice. Well aware of the serious difficulties involved in such an undertaking, Don Bosco asked him—for his own sake—if he had ever experienced anything of a supernatural character which could assure him that this was God's will. Father Allievi answered negatively. Thereupon Don Bosco dissuaded him from the attempt, though he encouraged him to continue unflaggingly in his work. Father Allievi was grateful for the advice. However, he did make some attempts toward realizing his plans, but with little success. He mentioned Don Bosco's caution to Father Francis Rainoni—now (1908) a curate at the Blessed Virgin's shrine in Treviglio; in turn, Father Rainoni told Father John Garino.[5]

Having himself received divine assurances, Don Bosco never bypassed any opportunity of trying to make his pupils worthy of them. [The Bonetti chronicle continues:]

At the "Good Night"[6] on January 22 [1892], when a cleric asked him how he could best spend the carnival season,[7] he answered: "First dedicate all you do to Our Lady's honor and glory; secondly, offer it all also in suffrage of the souls in purgatory." He then said many other things (*Bonetti wrote*) that I had no time to jot down. He

[4] *See* Vol. IV. pp. 119, 123. [Editor]

[5] Father Garino (1845–1908) entered the Oratory in 1857. Some years later, in 1862, he took triennial vows in the Salesian Society. Ordained a priest in 1869, he distinguished himself as a Latin and Greek scholar and a fervent religious. He died in 1908. [Editor]

[6] A short talk, immediately after night prayers, giving advice, exhortations, or comments. Since these short talks always ended with the words "Good night," they came to be known as "Good Nights." They have been a custom in Salesian Houses since 1847. For their origin *see* Vol. III, p. 142. [Editor]

[7] The carnival season began on the feast of the Epiphany and reached its peak on the last three days before Ash Wednesday. [Editor]

also announced that Louis Bianciotti of Cantalupo, then seventeen, had died at St. John's Hospital in Turin on January 21.

In the days that followed, Don Bosco told a group of boys clustered about him, "Do you want to become saints? Here is the secret. Confession is the lock; confidence in your confessor is the key. This is how you open heaven's gates." On another occasion he said, "You can fly to heaven on the wings of confession and Communion!" At other times he would whisper to someone, "Courage, son, the time of trial is at hand." That sufficed to alert the boy to the devil's snares.

During recreation he could not bear to see boys standing aloof; similarly, he would not allow benches in the playground. Father Anglois (then an Oratory pupil, and, later, chaplain in the women's penitentiary in Turin) told us in 1905 that during recreation one day, Don Bosco spotted three pupils straddling a large rafter which was to be used for construction. He approached them and said very affably, "Apart you're three wonderful boys. Together you spell trouble." At this the three boys ran off to play.

He seemed, too, to have a sixth sense in supervision. It was a house rule that pocket money was to be deposited with the prefect [8] who would prudently administer it according to the depositor's wish. It was a reasonable precaution to forestall trouble. In this regard, the Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

On January 31 [1862], Don Bosco was strolling in the porticoes with several boys after dinner when he suddenly stopped and, calling the deacon John Cagliero to his side, whispered, "I hear the jingle of coins but can't locate the spot. Look for these three boys (*he told him their names*) and you'll find them playing for money."

Cagliero told me he searched high and low for them, but in vain. Finally, he spotted one of them. "Where were you?" he asked. "I've been looking for you for some time."

"I was in such and such a place."

"Doing what?"

"Playing marbles."

"With whom?"

"With N . . . and R . . ."

"You were playing for money, weren't you?"

The boy mumbled but did not deny it.

[8] The superior in charge of administration. [Editor]

Cagliero went straight to the hideout mentioned by the boy, but the other two had already left. He continued his investigation and learned for certain that all three of them had heatedly been playing for money ten minutes earlier. He told Don Bosco. The following day, Don Bosco disclosed that in a dream the night before he had seen those three boys hotly playing for money.

Thus January came to an end, rich in striking episodes and marked, too, by some breach of order, as we came to know from Father Anglois. After a heavy snowfall, students and artisans built two forts and waged a mock battle. It was at first harmless fun and the superiors did not mind. The following night, however, students razed the artisans' fort, and the next morning the artisans, crying treachery, rebuilt it and posted sentries. Friction in a school between two distinct groups for genuine or imaginary reasons is nothing exceptional, but in this case the incident triggered hot tempers. On the morning of the third day, to the blast of trumpets, artisans, armed with sticks, attacked the well-defended students' fort. Both assault and defense were fierce, as snowballs whizzed wildly about, until Father Alasonatti, Father Anfossi, Buzzetti, and Rossi darted into the fray and called for a cease-fire. The boys reluctantly obeyed and, as the bell rang for class or shop, they all went to their assignments. Buzzetti and a few helpers took advantage of the time to demolish the forts quickly. Meanwhile, both students and artisans realized that their excitement had carried them too far, and at midday they approached Don Bosco as he was coming down for his noon meal and asked his pardon. They volunteered to eat lunch in silence as a self-punishment, promising never again to act so foolishly.

Don Bosco stood silent a few moments. One of the superiors standing by him urged him to make an example of a few, but Don Bosco replied, "Can't you see they're sorry?" After a moment's thought, he went on, "They have asked pardon, and I am satisfied. Yes, they are forgiven, but let them go and eat their meal in silence." And so it was done. That night Don Bosco prohibited mock battles and urged everyone to say with greater fervor the usual Hail Mary for peace in the house.

CHAPTER 7

A Printshop at the Oratory

DON Bosco's apostolic zeal for the salvation of souls effectively encompassed the youth of the entire world. He was quite aware of the snares which young people would then and later face in heretical, irreligious, and impious schools. With his co-workers, he often deplored the existence of such schools and stressed the need to counteract them with many Catholic schools. To this end he invoked God's aid, and God answered his prayers beyond all expectations. In the space of a few years, we shall see him open nearly a thousand schools—some through his own efforts in Europe and America; others at his suggestion in Africa and Asia—thus bringing about a wondrous religious revival among nations, as their leaders have repeatedly assured us.

In 1862 who would have foreseen such astounding achievements? It was the reward for his zeal. Trusting in the Blessed Virgin's promises, he made use of even the most feeble means to benefit all types of boys through religious education which was his primary goal. Besides establishing day grade schools in the festive oratories, he also began to draw large numbers of schoolboys to Valdocco on Thursdays for recreation. In his concern for the religious education of the young he urged parents to send their children to Catholic schools. Since many of his friends were public school teachers, he visited their schools so as to meet the boys and teach them catechism. He also accepted a certain number of them in his own secondary classes at the Oratory. To help youngsters he reopened the Giaveno junior seminary, and later he started special summer classes for students who needed tutoring.

In 1861, in an apartment of the Bellezza building, he had opened, at his own expense, a small hostel for boys who, because of age or for some other reason, could not be admitted to the

Oratory boarding school. Their teacher, James Miglietti, took them daily to the Oratory [half a block away] for their own Mass; on Sundays, they attended all the religious services with the Oratory boys. Their classroom was a hall near the doorkeeper's office. Among his pupils were some neighborhood boys whom Miglietti picked up here and there. Every evening quite a few youngsters came to learn reading, writing, and arithmetic.

During the sixteen years in which Don Bosco's elementary day and evening classes had borne such abundant fruit, he had been composing and trying out a new set of regulations which he published many years later as a norm for such schools in future festive oratories. He added these regulations to those already in force at the Oratory, under the heading: Part III–*Elementary Day and Evening Schools.*[1]

In 1862, despite considerable difficulties and opposition, Don Bosco managed to open a modest Catholic school in Corso Vittorio Emanuele in Turin to counteract the Waldensian schools. A few years before, in December 1857, he had submitted plans for this school to the general meeting of the St. Vincent de Paul Society,[2] and from time to time he had gone to Ivrea to consult Bishop [Louis] Moreno on the project. This we gather from the Bonetti chronicle:

On [Tuesday] February 18 [1862] Don Bosco went to Ivrea to reach an agreement with the bishop regarding teachers for the Catholic schools about to be opened. The Ivrea diocese was well off in this regard. Though Don Bosco had planned on a short stay, he had to remain four days, as the bishop was so fond of his company that he always managed to find some pretext to delay his departure. Finally, on Friday morning, Don Bosco decided he must leave. Learning from the bishop that it would take fifteen minutes to get to the station, he arose and said, "Then it's time for me to go."

"You still have five minutes to spare," the bishop interjected. "Let me enjoy them to the last!"

When Don Bosco finally took his leave, he found many priests in the hall, among them Canon Tea, anxiously waiting to talk to him. As he could delay no longer, they tried to confer with him while

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 513ff. [Editor]

walking the short distance to the station. Some five or six, unable to manage even that little, bought tickets and traveled with him as far as Chivasso.

Staffing Catholic schools was not Don Bosco's only business with Bishop Moreno. He also showed him plans for a printshop to turn out expurgated editions of dictionaries and of Greek, Latin, and Italian classics besides printing *Letture Cattoliche* and other wholesome publications. Both Bishop Moreno and Don Bosco shared the view of Louis Cardinal Pie [3] who had written: "Even the most religious, devout Catholic population will become irreligious and rebellious if all it reads is an impious press. From a human standpoint, no amount of preaching will offset the power of an evil press."

Don Bosco's eleven-year-old wish for a printshop of his own [4] was finally realized in the last months of 1861. In September, after moving John Miglietti's pupils to a large room on the east side of the house which he had bought from the Filippi brothers, he turned the former classroom into a shop and installed two used handpresses, a work bench, and font cases. The last two items had been made by the Oratory cabinet shop. He often told his boys, "Just watch! We'll start with one printshop. Then we'll have two and even ten! You'll see!" He seemed to be already visualizing the future [Salesian] printshops at Sampierdarena, Nice, Barcelona, Marseilles, Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and elsewhere.

On October 26, 1861, Don Bosco requested the governor [5] of the province of Turin for a printshop license.[6] The shop was to be known as "Printshop of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." After a few legal blocks were cleared, the license was issued on December 31, 1861.

[3] Louis Pie, born in 1815 and ordained in 1839, was made bishop of Poitiers in 1849 and a cardinal in 1879. As bishop, he erected over a hundred and twenty churches, founded a diocesan society of missionary priests, and promoted liturgy, education, and discipline among his clergy. A talented writer and orator, he constantly upheld the rights of the Church and the Holy See. As president of the Commission on Faith at Vatican Council I, he drafted the schema *De Ecclesia* and greatly contributed to the definition of papal infallibility. He died in 1880. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 479f; Vol. V, pp. 4ff, 20f, 30ff, 174. [Editor]

[5] Shortly afterward, the title was changed to "prefect." [Editor]

[6] We are omitting this petition and other related correspondence. [Editor]

While Don Bosco was busy with these details, Paravia Press was setting up the February issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled: *A Siberian Maiden* by Xavier De Maistre. . . . The March, April, and May-June issues were likewise printed by Paravia under these titles: *Two Jewish Orphans, The Orphan of Fénelon,* and *A Marian Diary.*

Meanwhile the printshop had been officially opened. Mr. Andrew Giardini was hired as instructor and foreman. Several boys were assigned to typesetting, others to printing, and soon, thanks to their diligence, they became skilled craftsmen. Their supervision was entrusted first to Joseph Buzzetti [7] for a year or so, and then to Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia of Santo Stefano [8] who managed this shop as well as the bookbindery.

Having launched this new enterprise, Don Bosco hastened to send out a circular on behalf of his boys to inform their friends of this new addition to the Oratory shops.[9] Congratulations by word and letter poured in from the benefactors. No one could then have foreseen that the two small hand presses would grow to four and then to twelve, and that manual operation would yield successively to steam, water, gas, and electricity, or that the shop would be equipped for stereotyping, copperplating, and typecasting. Who could then foresee the vast funds Divine Providence would send Don Bosco for the purchase of supplies and for nonprofit publications? Who could foresee the endless number of books and pamphlets—many in foreign languages—even during Don Bosco's lifetime? Who could foretell the outstanding awards to be won at leading European fairs, such as Rome's Vatican Fair, London's Italian Fair, and the international fairs of Brussels, Turin, and other centers?

[7] Buzzetti and his brother Charles had been among the first boys to attend Don Bosco's festive oratory before it acquired permanent quarters. In 1847, Don Bosco persuaded Joseph to study Latin and prepare for the priesthood. He donned the clerical habit in 1852, at the age of twenty. Unfortunately, the loss of his left finger shortly afterward (*see* Vol. IV, p. 253) disqualified him from priestly ordination. He remained with Don Bosco and greatly helped him in many tasks. In 1877 he took his vows in the Salesian Society as a coadjutor brother. He died at Lanzo in 1891. For further details *see* the Index of preceding volumes. [Editor]

[8] Frederick Oreglia, a late vocation, came to the Oratory in 1860 and became a Salesian in 1862, but left in 1869 to join the Society of Jesus. [Editor]

[9] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 8

Diabolical Vexation

WE now return to the Bonetti chronicle:

These days [January-February 1862] many Protestant families are turning to the true Church. Don Bosco frequently meets with a Waldensian minister named Wolff,[1] a Catholic at heart, though not yet formally, who now and then calls on Don Bosco with some co-religionists of his. By listening to Don Bosco, they too become convinced of their error and willingly embrace the Catholic faith.

On Thursday, February 13 [1862], at our *Testamentino* lesson, Don Bosco commented on the versicle "The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth." [John 4, 23] He commented that Protestants misinterpret these words as an argument against exterior worship, and he spoke about a tough debate he had five or six days before with Protestants in a private home:

"To begin with, do you know what 'in spirit' means?" I asked.

"It means that God should be adored selflessly and fervently in one's own heart, not superstitiously as Catholics do," they replied, considering our exterior worship a mere masquerade.

"Were this really so," I rejoined, "I'd agree with you. But it is decidedly not. Anyway, let's continue. What does 'in truth' mean?"

"It means that God should be adored in a 'real,' not in an empty way."

"Did you say 'real'?"

"Yes!"

"Very well. 'Real' means something concrete. How can a concrete thing be only 'in one's own heart'?"

Rather put out, my opponents had to admit that I was right.

"Well then," I went on, " 'in spirit and in truth' must also be taken to read that exterior means may and should be used in worshiping

[1] *See* Vol. IV, p. 157. [Editor]

God. Furthermore they also reveal serious doctrinal and liturgical differences between Hebrew and Christian ritual and ceremony. 'In spirit and in truth' means that all Old Testament rites and sacrifices—mere figures of those of the New Testament—would one day be superseded by a 'real' sacrifice truly pleasing to God. Read the first chapter of St. Luke's Gospel, and you will see a magnificent sacrifice being celebrated with all the splendor of exterior rite and ceremony—with altar, thurible, and incense. All this foreshadowed the solemn Mass—the real, true sacrifice. The first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that they met with the disciples in the cenacle to pray. The next chapter shows them offering the Eucharistic sacrifice and partaking of Communion at that gathering. The authentic history of Christianity's first three centuries proves that Christians, following the Apostles' tradition, celebrated Holy Mass with altars, solemn rites, psalm singing, flowers, incense, and lights. Read the fourth and subsequent chapters of the Apocalypse. They describe a sacred rite so minutely that you will think you are watching the sacrifice offered in our own [Catholic] churches. You will see the altar, the censer, the incense, the candlesticks, the lamps, the scented golden vessels, the elders' golden crowns or miters, the ritual bows, the harps, the canticles, and the procession of white-clad virgins—in a word, everything the Church uses for ritual splendor."

When I finished speaking, one of the Protestants looked for a copy of the New Testament. All they had was the adulterated Diodati [2] translation. I let them use it anyway, because I was certain that it would contain enough to convince them. After they had checked the passages I had quoted, I pointed out and explained a few others then and there. They concluded, "We really had never paid much attention to these passages."

So I went on, "Now, tell me, how do your churches resemble Jerusalem's holy temple? Do you have altars, censers, incense, candles? Does your manner of honoring God resemble what the Apostles did and what the angels themselves do in heaven? Don't you think we are reasonable in imitating the saints and the angels as we adore God?"

"Of course! Truthfully, we must admit we have nothing of all you mentioned."

In conclusion, one of them—an evangelical minister—remarked, "This is something we shall have to think about."

This debate and the Waldensian minister's misgivings dealt a serious

[2] Giovanni Diodati (1576–1649), a Swiss Protestant theologian, published an Italian translation of the Bible in 1607. [Editor]

blow to their position. As a result, these days many Protestants are turning to the Catholic Church.

Thus reads the testimony of Don Bosco. The chronicle continues:

Now Don Bosco has a new task on his hands—rebutting Waldensian errors. But he does not limit himself to words and pamphlets. He invites many poor families who have returned to the true fold to live near the Oratory, assuring them that he will provide for their necessities. This too is a wonderful gesture of his, considering the heavy expenses he already bears to provide for some five hundred and seventy pupils and to put up new buildings.

We can add that when it was necessary he also placed children of such families with charitable people. The following letter to Marchioness Fassati tells us of an instance when a girl had become a burden to her foster parents:

Turin, March 22, 1862

Dear Marchioness:

We are still waiting for developments. I do not think this is a case of herpes; more likely it's scabies. So please do all you can for this poor girl. As a last resort, I shall ask the Cottolengo Hospital to take her. They probably will.

I really can't take care of this problem today, though they can't wait to be rid of this nuisance. Poor child, if she had at least been baptized!

The Lord grant you and your family a nice day.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco always acted quite prudently. In certain cases, before becoming a guardian of sorts, he always obtained written statements from parents and legal guardians so as to avoid disputes and harassment from such people's former co-religionists.[3] Infuriated at losing these souls, Satan vented his rage on Don Bosco by depriving him of his sleep, as Bishop John Cagliero has well reported:

[3] We are omitting a footnote reporting one such authorization. [Editor]

This truly diabolical vexation began in the first days of February [1862]. We became aware that Don Bosco was daily getting more and more worn-out. He was pale, gaunt, dispirited, more tired than usual, and obviously in need of rest. We asked him what was wrong. "I just need to sleep," he replied. "I haven't slept the last four or five nights."

"Well," we answered, "don't work at night anymore. Go to bed and sleep!"

"I wish I could, but he won't let me."

"Who?"

"For some nights now," he replied, "the devil has been having fun at my expense. No sooner do I fall asleep than a booming voice shouts into my ear and drives me out of my mind; then a blast of wind rattles me as in a storm and plays havoc with my papers and books. Late one night, for instance, I had been editing a forthcoming issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *The Power of Darkness* and had left it on my desk. In the morning, I found it on the floor. Other mornings I had to search for it. Strange! I suppose the devil likes to visit people who write about him." He smiled and then went on, "The last three nights I've heard someone chopping wood near my fireplace. Last night, though there was no fire lit, flames burst out of it spontaneously. I thought they would burn the house down. Another time I had just put out the light and fallen asleep, when I felt the blankets being slowly tugged to the foot of the bed, leaving me half uncovered. The footboard is high enough to keep the blankets from slipping off. I didn't think much of it and just kept pulling the blanket up again until I felt something was wrong, lit the lamp, and made a thorough search of the room. Finding nothing special, I went back to bed, leaving the light on, and put myself in God's hands. Nothing untoward occurred as long as the lamp was lit, but no sooner would I put it out than the blankets would be slowly pulled down. Filled with inexplicable loathing, I had to keep the light on, since the phenomenon would stop abruptly, only to start again if I put the light out. Once I even saw the flame blown out with a loud puff. Now and then my pillow would begin rocking just as I was about to drop off to sleep. If I made the Sign of the Cross, the disturbance ceased. After praying a few moments, I would again settle myself down for a brief sleep, but as soon as I would begin to doze off, the bed would be shaken by some invisible power and the door of my room would creak, as though under pressure from a fierce wind. I would keep hearing strange, dreadful noises over my room, like vehicles in motion, and bloodcurdling screams would startle me. One night the door of my

room even burst open, and I saw a horrible monster, jaws wide open, advance to devour me. The Sign of the Cross made it disappear."

The Oratory superiors and I heard all the foregoing from Don Bosco himself. No one sleeping in adjacent rooms had heard any noise. One night Father Angelo Savio decided to stand watch in Don Bosco's antechamber to verify the happenings. Toward midnight a sudden, chilling clamor so frightened him that he fled in terror to his own room. Yet, he was one of the bravest at the Oratory, as he had proved on several occasions.

Don Bosco would have liked someone to stay up with him, but no one dared. Once, the clerics Bonetti and Ruffino decided to spend the night in the adjoining library, but within moments they became frightened and gave up. Don Bosco had to resign himself to stay alone and wonder when the vexing harassment would end.

Bishop Cagliero's report ends here. John Bonetti wrote what we might call the official bulletins of this war which lasted for several months. We shall draw from his chronicle:

February 12 [1862]. Don Bosco narrated the following incident:

"The night of the 6th or 7th of this month, I had just gone to bed and was about to doze off, when I was seized by the shoulders and vigorously shaken. I was terrified! 'Who are you?' I cried. I lit the lamp and looked under the bed and in every corner of the room. Nothing! I tried the door; it was closed. I checked the door leading into the library; it was closed too. So I went back to bed. I had hardly dozed off when another jolt thoroughly frightened me. I wanted to ring for Rossi or Reano,[4] but then I decided I had better not disturb them. Lying on my back, I tried to sleep. Abruptly, I felt a crushing weight on my stomach and could not breathe. I had to cry out, 'What is it?' I struck out with my fist and met only air. I turned over on my stomach, but that didn't help. All in all, it was a horrible night. The next evening, I blessed the bed before going to sleep, but it did no good. I went through the same ordeal for the following four or five nights. I wonder what will happen tonight!" (It was Wednesday evening, February 12, eve of the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death. The following day would be the first time we could gain a plenary indulgence granted by Pius IX on January 13 of this same year.)

February 15 [1862]. After supper this evening, Chevalier Oreglia,

[4] Joseph Reano was the day students' teacher. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 324, 348. [Editor]

together with a few priests and clerics, gathered around Don Bosco and asked him if he had been able to sleep the night before. "When I went to my room," he replied, "I found the bedside table doing a tap dance. *Isn't this something,* I thought. I asked the table, 'What do you want?' The only answer was more tap dancing. I started pacing the room, and the table stood still; I went near it and the tap dancing resumed. If someone had told me this, I would certainly not believe it. Doesn't it all sound like old folks' tales of witches and magic? It would be awful if I told the boys these things. They'd be scared to death."

We begged him for more details, but he was at first reluctant. "When one has something to say," he remarked, "he should consider whether it will redound to God's glory and the welfare of souls. My story would not meet this standard."

At this point I (Bonetti) interjected, "Who knows? It might help our souls." As the others sided with me, Don Bosco went on, "While I was in bed I saw some horrible sights. Successively, I saw the shapes of a bear, a tiger, a wolf, and a monster serpent. These phantoms kept hovering about the room, leaped up to my bed, and squatted there. For a little while I said nothing. Then I exclaimed: 'O good Jesus!' In a flash the phantoms vanished. And so the night went by."

February 16 [1862]. This evening several of us remarked that Don Bosco had not taken milk with his coffee at breakfast for the last five or six days. We figured that he must be fasting to win God's favor and be rid of his nightly torment. When asked if he had spent a peaceful night, Don Bosco answered, "Yes, a little."

Monday, February 17. This morning a few of us sat around Don Bosco as he was having a cup of coffee. We asked him if he had again been disturbed during the night. "Yes," he replied. "The bedside table danced about and knocked the lampshade to the floor. As soon as I lay down, I felt something cold lightly brush my forehead. I pulled down my nightcap, but the mysterious brush—whatever it was—kept tickling my nostrils and lips and kept me awake all night. This happened on other occasions too, and I thought it was most likely an odorous tail awakening me with a start. This morning I arose dead tired."

The following night Don Bosco was again tormented till dawn. No sooner would he doze off than the pillow would begin rocking and rising.

February 22. Chevalier Oreglia asked Don Bosco if he were not afraid of such torments of the evil spirit. He replied, "Horrified, yes, but not afraid. Just as I have no fear of angels because, as I hope, I am a friend of God, likewise I do not fear demons because I am an enemy of God's enemies. He will protect me. Satan can do whatever he pleases now, because this is his moment, but mine will come too!"

Sunday, February 23. Don Bosco was extremely tired and had to go to bed—a most unusual thing for him. Some fifteen minutes later, Chevalier Oreglia told him of a sick call. Don Bosco got up instantly, walked over to a nearby address and confessed and comforted the patient. He later went back to bed. That evening, Father Michael Rua dropped in to inquire how he felt. "I am very, very tired," he replied. "I can't rest. I am continually awakened. Last night I kept dozing on and off. No sooner would I close my eyes than I would hear hammer blows striking under my pillow. If I sat up, the noise stopped; if I lay down, it began anew. Such torture! I longed for daybreak. I laugh when I talk about these things, but you can be sure that I don't feel like laughing at all. I am very much disturbed. Last year was a hectic year for the Oratory, but this year beats it by far!"

"Then exorcise this evil spirit."

"Well, the day after tomorrow I'll go to Ivrea and spend a few days with Bishop Moreno. If, on my return, this demon starts tormenting me again, I know what I'll do. I'll try a trick I've been saving up."

"What's that?"

"I shall question him in the name of Jesus Christ and force him to tell me if he is sent by God to put me to a test or from Lucifer to hinder the good work we have begun. He will have no choice."

"What if he refuses to answer?"

"I shall force him. He shall have to."

"What will you say to him?"

"I shall tell him, 'I adjure you in the name of Jesus Christ to tell me what you are and what you want.' "

"But don't you know yet why he torments you?"

"I have an idea that the devil does not want our Catholic school at Porta Nuova to open because it may checkmate the Protestant one."

"Are you the only one involved in this project?"

"I suggested it, I promoted it, and I initiated the purchase of the land. Then I agreed to provide the teachers and pay their salaries. . . . No, the evil spirit shall not prevail."

February 26. Don Bosco returned to Ivrea where he had sought refuge with Bishop Moreno a few days before to rid himself of his nightly diabolical visitations. It was his first peaceful night in a whole month, and he felt greatly refreshed.

One evening, after talking with the bishop till one in the morning, he went tranquilly to his room thinking that the devil had lost track of him. As soon as he put the light out, the pillow began to rock, just as at the Oratory, and a horrid monster appeared at the foot of his bed, ready to pounce upon him. At this sight he screamed so loudly that he

woke everybody up. The servants, the bishop's secretary, the vicar general, and the bishop himself dashed to his room, fearing harm for Don Bosco. They found him exhausted but calm. Though they anxiously questioned him, he smilingly gave an evasive answer: "Oh, it was nothing . . . just a nightmare. Please go back to bed." The following day, however, he told the bishop the whole story.

March 4. It is a few days since Don Bosco's return from Ivrea. His nightly disturbances continue. "On the night of March 3," he told us, "the demon lifted my bed aloft and then let it drop to the floor. I was so shaken from my waist up that I felt my head must be gushing with blood. After tormenting me the whole night by rattling doors and windows, toward morning the demon took the poster on which was written 'Every minute is a treasure' and dashed it to the floor so violently that it sounded like a rifle shot. In the morning I found it in the middle of the room."

We then insistently begged him to do what he had threatened if the devil would keep tormenting him on his return from Ivrea.

"If I chase him from me," he replied, "he will go after the boys."

"Do you mean, then," Provera asked him, "that when you were at Ivrea and spent a peaceful night the devil harmed some boys?"

"Yes, he did a lot of harm!"

"Then ask him what he wants," we insisted.

"Who says I haven't?" he replied.

"Then tell us!" we all shouted together. But he changed the subject, and all we got from him was, "Pray!"

The boys did pray, and little by little he regained his strength. Nevertheless, on and off, that battle with the spirit of darkness went on until 1864.

One evening in 1865 Don Bosco was telling a group of boys about the frightful nights he had experienced in the past few years. We were present.

"I'm not afraid of the devil," one boy interrupted.

"Don't say that!" Don Bosco replied with surprising vehemence. "You have no idea what power the devil can wield if God would let him."

"Sure! . . . If he came my way, I'd grab him by the neck and let him have it!"

"Don't be silly! You'd die of fright the moment you saw him!"

"But I'd make the Sign of the Cross."

"That would help for a moment."

"Then how did you get rid of him?"

"I found a way of scaring him for a long time to come."

"What was that? The Sign of the Cross?"

"Yes, but not that alone. The Sign of the Cross was effective for the moment."

"How about holy water?"

"Even that is not enough sometimes."

"So, what was your remedy?"

"It was. . . ." He stopped and declined to go on further, merely concluding, "This is certain: I would not wish anyone to experience the frightful things I went through. We should all pray to God not to allow our enemy to play such tricks on us."

CHAPTER 9

Don Bosco's Tips on Purity

THE Bonetti chronicle tells us that at the beginning of February [1862], [Bartholomew] Bellisio,[1] a fine portrait painter who had made a name for himself, came to visit Don Bosco and his former schoolmates. Chevalier Oreglia and Father Savio took the occasion to persuade Don Bosco to pose for this good son of his—not for a portrait, since this had already been done, but just for a sketch. After much insistence, Don Bosco gave in. While posing, he sighed deeply, "This is one of the things I dislike most!" Quickly, Bellisio once more sketched his features and, after a careful retouching to bring out his ideal conception, gave the sketch to Father [Angelo] Savio. [The Bonetti chronicle continues:]

A newly risen anxiety of Don Bosco's co-workers is responsible for this new sketch. Of late, Don Bosco keeps speaking of this mortal life's drawbacks and of heaven's beauty. He longs to go there soon, he says, and rid us of his useless presence. Though regretting that he physically cannot carry out new undertakings, he leaves it all up to God who can find many better instruments than him. His remarks cause much talk and grief among us, as we seriously fear he may leave us soon. God save us from such a misfortune! His health is consistently poor. His spittle seems to burn into his handkerchief. His doctors say he would not live long if he didn't take a walk every day.

And still Don Bosco subjected himself to the ordinary privations of community life, despite his doctor's orders for more suitable food. On this score, James Reano gave Father Bonetti this written report:

[1] This young artist was quite attached to the Oratory, which he had attended from its very beginning. In 1855 he painted a portrait of Mamma Margaret and gave it to Don Bosco on his name day. He also made pencil sketches of Don Bosco from photographs. *See* Vol. IV, pp. 332f; Vol. VI, p. 568. [Editor]

On the eve of a solemn feast, Don Bosco heard confessions till nearly midnight. Then, escorted by the cleric [John Baptist] Francesia and one other person, he went into the kitchen for some supper. The cook was gone but had left Don Bosco's supper in a cold oven. The main course —vegetables—was cold and the farina soup had jellied. To my edification, he did not utter the least complaint. When Francesia brought the soup in, Don Bosco toyed with it with his spoon and tried to eat some, but it was a jelly and he was so tired out after long hours of confessions that he could not swallow it. He asked Francesia for a glass of water. He took it, poured it into the soup, stirred it, and ate. "It isn't very hot," he remarked jokingly, "but I eat it with a good intention, and it will do me just as much good."

Often his food was set aside with little consideration. One evening, the waiter asked the cook to serve Don Bosco's food a little warmer, but the rude retort was, "And who's Don Bosco? He's like anybody else!" Someone reported this insolent reply, but Don Bosco calmly replied, "He is right!"

Such utter detachment from comfort was an endless sacrifice which he offered to God for his boys' spiritual betterment. The Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

February 9 [1862]. While in the dining room with some clerics and lay members, Don Bosco spoke of the afflictions of this life. "Nothing matters," he concluded, "so long as I can go to heaven with my boys and with Bonetti" (for I was standing near him and he was looking at me).

"How many of us do you want with you?" I asked.

"At least ten thousand," he replied. He had said the same on other occasions, and the rumor had spread so far and wide that one day a woman came all the way from Caramagna to ask him to include her son among the ten thousand, even though she could not enroll him at the Oratory.

"How many of your boys are already in heaven?" I went on.

"About two hundred!" he answered.

"Of those you have already set on the road to heaven but are still living, and of those who were or still are at the Oratory, how many will get to heaven?"

"My dear friend, you are asking me something I don't know. Who can rely on a boy's good conduct? Sometimes boys, who are doing quite well spiritually and are my joy, grow lax and cause me grief by their

conduct. I can single out every one of the Oratory boys who is at this moment in God's grace, but I cannot tell whether they will persevere to the end."

At his "Good Nights"—as though trading blows with the foul fiend who tormented him so cruelly—he never tired of expounding the beauties of purity. So eloquently—and discreetly—did he extol its worth and beauty that those who listened to him were spellbound. So strong was his abhorrence of the opposite vice that for many years he could not bring himself to mention it. Only toward the end of his life, realizing that the knowledge of evil had steadily increased among boys who had been victims or spectators of immoral deeds as children, did he—on two or three occasions—reluctantly reveal the terrible consequences of impurity. But even more than his words, the halo of purity surrounding him won him his pupils' hearts. His mere presence, a glance, a gesture, a smile, his whole being, made him a model to imitate. How edifingly would he lightly rest his hand on a boy's head and say, "God bless you!"

Father Joachim Berto stated, "I was near him more than twenty years, and I can declare that he practiced modesty in looks, words, and actions to the highest degree. His entire secret was a constant intellectual activity, an excessive load of work both day and night, and an imperturbable calm. From him emanated a life-giving power. For myself, I can say that at his mere presence all evil thoughts left me."

This extraordinary power stemmed from his ardent love of Our Savior with whom he was in ceaseless, intimate prayer. His oft-repeated, short invocations, however, were seldom noticed—perhaps only when he intended them to be heard as a norm for his listeners to follow in similar circumstances. One day, for instance, a priest named Father Merlone accompanied Don Bosco to the Rifugio.[2] Before entering, he heard him whisper, *Fac, Domine, ut servem cor et corpus meum immaculatum Tibi ut non confundar.* [O Lord, keep my heart and my body spotless in Your sight that I may not be put to shame.] Turning to Father

[2] An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *See* Vol. II, pp. 184f. [Editor]

Merlone, Don Bosco said, "My friend, a priest faithful to his vocation is an angel. Unfaithful, what can he be but an object of pity and contempt?"

He wanted all his sons to be angels and constantly suggested what he himself practiced, forewarning them against potential spiritual dangers. Bonetti's chronicle of February [1862] records several such exhortations that we shall recount here:

February 10. This evening Don Bosco offered the boys some tips on keeping the virtue of modesty. He summed them up in two verses he had read some twenty-five years before in [a book by Anthony] Foresti [S.J.]: *Abstrahe ligna foco si vis extinguere flammam; si carnis motus, otia, vina, dapes.* [Remove the wood from the fire if you want it to die out; avoid idleness, wining, and dining if you want to control the rebellion of the flesh.]

February 11. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco exhorted the boys not to be idle even for a minute, but to keep their minds busy lest they give the devil a chance to tempt them. He urged them to pray when it was time for prayer, to study when it was time for study, to play when it was time for play. If, at night, sleep was slow to come, they should busy themselves by mentally going over their lessons or translations due on the next day, or outlining the main points of a written assignment.

"When I was young," he said, "and could not fall asleep, I would recite entire cantos from Dante or count from one to ten thousand. At other times I prayed, and this I particularly suggest to you. If you find it hard to fall asleep, especially if you are tempted, I urge you to say fifty Hail Marys for sure victory. Start saying them at once, counting on your fingers. I assure you that God and the Blessed Virgin will unfailingly help you. Besides, the effort of counting these Hail Marys will help you fall asleep long before you have said half or a third of them."

February 12. Don Bosco particularly and warmly stressed devotion to the Blessed Virgin and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

February 14. This evening after prayers Don Bosco further suggested a means to safeguard purity. "Form the habit of saying short invocations," he said. "For instance, when temptation assails you, have immediate recourse to Mary. Cry to Her, 'Mary, my beloved Mother, help me!' Or say in the words of Holy Mother Church, 'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a sinner, now and at the hour of my death.' You might make the Sign of the Cross—something Christians

sadly neglect and too little appreciate. I assure you that if you then ask onefold, the Lord will give you tenfold. If you wish even more, pray for this virtue during Holy Mass. Look, from the very beginning of the Oratory, I directed that at Mass all singing, vocal prayers, and any sound must cease at the Elevation. Why? Just so that each of you at this precious moment may undistractedly ask the Lord for the virtue of modesty. My dear boys, believe me, if you beg the Lord at that solemn moment to grant you that grace, He will most surely do so."

Sunday, February 16. This evening Don Bosco offered another tip for safeguarding modesty. "Go to confession every fifteen days or once a month," he said. "Never go less than that. Better still, let those who can, follow the advice of that great friend of youth, St. Philip Neri: 'Go to confession every week and even more frequently to Communion, as your confessor advises.' I also say: Go to confession every week, but not oftener, because—bear this in mind—it is not the number of confessions which makes us good but the benefits we derive from each confession. I except the case when one wishes to receive and is bothered in conscience. Let him go to confession, explain his problem, and seek advice. This is not really a confession but a reconciliation.

"Mind well the two things I am about to say because they are basic:

"1. Keep to a confessor who knows you thoroughly. Never change him for fear he may come to know a fall of yours. Though it is no sin to change a confessor because one feels he dare not confess something, still it is very dangerous for the virtue of modesty. For when you go back to him, he will be unable to advise you properly regarding this virtue because he does not know you well.

"2. Listen carefully to your confessor's advice and carry it out. It may be a suggestion or a single word, but what he tells you in confession always carefully fits your spiritual needs. My dear sons, St. Philip Neri made many saints by such advice. Who knows? If we carry it out, we too may have the good fortune of becoming not only good, but even holy."

In a conference to his priests and clerics Don Bosco warned them also to be on guard against every least thing which, though legitimate, might occasion scandal to others. He urged them to observe norms of temperance, not to eat or drink between meals, and never to make coffee for themselves in their own rooms. He added, "Let no one ever go to visit parents, relatives, friends, or acquaintances except for the good of the Congregation or for motives of charity. On no pretext at all

should you accept invitations to wedding dinners or worldly parties of any sort. If possible, one should never travel on Sundays or holy days, and never with women. While traveling, don't be idle. Say your breviary or rosary or read a good book."

March 5. Today, Ash Wednesday, at the *Testamentino* lesson, we recited the passage describing the meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Sichar's well. Don Bosco's comment was an exhortation to prefer spiritual to bodily food and to strive to increase our appetite for this exquisite nourishment of heaven. "We too," he said, "enjoy a ripe harvest in this and our other Oratories. We can do much good to both boarders and day boys if we set about it in real earnest."

On every possible occasion, publicly and privately, he tried to instill in his clerics zeal for the salvation of souls. This year [1862] the Lenten catechetical instructions will start on March 10. Prospects are very promising.

At about this time, Don Bosco asked me to review a biography of Blessed Catherine of Racconigi which he had annotated, and to check pertinent documents, but he suggested that before editing it, I strike a deal with the saint.

"What kind of deal?" I asked.

"That she grant you grace to win as many souls for God as there are pages in her biography and furthermore that your soul be the first."

Don Bosco's love for souls was certainly inspired by his love of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar. We have already dwelt on his manner of offering it.[3] Now we shall point out how very willingly he served Mass.

The Bonetti chronicle records an incident which took place during this year and month. Count [Victor] Camburzano told some Salesians about it after a visit to Don Bosco:

Not long ago Don Bosco visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation to pray to the Blessed Virgin. While there, he heard a bell calling for someone to serve Mass. At once he went to the sacristy, took the Missal, and went to the altar. Later, someone told the priest that his server had been Don Bosco himself, who had already left. In amazement, the priest dashed out to thank him but could not find him.

When Don Bosco served Mass, he also kindly admonished

[3] *See* Vol. I, p. 387; Vol. II, pp. 20f; Vol. IV, pp. 313ff. [Editor]

the priest if he had somehow not observed the rubrics. The Bonetti chronicle continues:

One morning, sometime this month [March 1862], while speaking of some priests' haste in celebrating Mass, Don Bosco told us this incident:

"This particular priest whose Mass I served rattled the words off so fast that I could understand nothing at all. His hurry was obvious the moment he started with the Sign of the Cross. So, purposely, I very slowly made the first response, *Ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem meam.* Before I was halfway through it, he had already gone on into the next verse and then got to the *Confiteor,* leaving me far behind. I let him finish. Then I took up from where I had been interrupted. Finally he caught on and recited the rest clearly, though not without some effort. After Mass he said, 'Do you know I had to sweat to say all those words clearly?' That's why I always insist, watch, and have others watch that my boys learn their responses well and say them clearly and distinctly. Once, one of our young clerics served Mass for a very hasty priest who, from habit or for some reason of his own, chewed up the words. The cleric responded quite calmly. 'A little faster, please,' urged the priest. 'A little slower, please,' retorted the cleric. I learned of this from the priest himself, who was really edified by his server's wise admonition. The time range I set for Mass is twenty-two to twenty-seven minutes, nothing less."

His love for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass made all the more welcome Cardinal Corsi's [4] gift of a magnificent chasuble which to this day is a most treasured vestment in our Church of Mary, Help of Christians. The following letter accompanied the gift:

Pisa, March 12, 1862

Dear Don Bosco:

I have never forgotten my visit in 1860 to your wonderful institute nor the joy I experienced on that occasion—a joy which is veritably renewed as often as I am privileged to receive the results of your prolific pen. In view of this, I make bold to send you a chasuble so that you and your charges may more often be inspired to pray for my diocese and intentions. May Almighty God shower His blessings,

[4] In 1860, James Cardinal Corsi, archbishop of Pisa, had been under house arrest in Turin. When he was freed, he paid the Oratory a visit before returning to Pisa. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 303f, 377f. [Editor]

fervor, and success upon you and yours. Assuring you of my greatest esteem, I remain,

Affectionately in the Lord,
Cosimus Cardinal Corsi, *Archbishop of Pisa*

The cardinal's confidence in the prayers of the Oratory pupils was certainly not misplaced, as we gather from the Bonetti chronicle:

One evening at the beginning of February 1862, Don Bosco exhorted us to pray for a special grace, promising to tell us about it if we obtained it. The boys took his request particularly to heart and went to the sacraments oftener than usual. Of course, we were waiting to hear about the result of our poor prayers. Since nothing was forthcoming, we questioned him. "Relations were strained in those days between Austria and Prussia," he replied, "and I could foresee that were this tension to persist, the revolution would triumph and just about anything could happen to Rome. So I said to myself, 'I want to put my boys' prayers to the test.' I therefore exhorted you to pray that the Lord might put an end to the ill feelings between those two governments. Then I waited to see what would happen. For two or three days the news did not improve, and the two official newspapers kept snarling at each other, but a few days later they eased up, reports became more conciliatory, and now there is harmony between them. Things are looking up now. When I urged you to pray for this intention, I mentioned it to Marquis Dovando. After learning of this rapprochement between both nations, he sent word that he would like to discuss this matter with me at his house."

Don Bosco did not tell everyone of this, only a few young clerics, cautioning them to keep it to themselves.[5]

Here we should take notice of Don Bosco's subtle prognostications. He had said: "Were this tension to persist, the revolution would triumph and just about anything could happen to Rome."

[Prussia and Austria did not remain at peace for long.] The victorious war waged by the Austrian-Prussian alliance against Denmark in 1864 gave rise to new, grave friction over the partition of Holstein and Schleswig.[6] The battle of Sadowa in 1866

[5] We are omitting some details of European history. [Editor]
[6] Historical regions in northwestern Germany. [Editor]

made Prussia mistress of Germany and barred Austria from the new confederation. In turn, the debilitation of Austria made possible the terrible invasion of France by Prussia and the conquest of Alsace and Lorraine. Finally Bismarck allowed Italy to seize Rome in reward for its neutral stand.

CHAPTER 10

Don Bosco's 1862 Lottery

NEITHER Don Bosco's manifold activities—Catholic schools, printshops, debates with Protestants, reception of converts, jousts with the devil—nor his chronic ailments and daily cares for his pupils' spiritual welfare had slackened his efforts to raise funds to maintain and expand his apostolate by erecting new buildings at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

Father [Felix] Reviglio wrote:

> Don Bosco's care to find new funds kept pace with his expanding plans and the ever increasing number of his boys. His whole life was spent in providing for their spiritual and material needs. Sometimes he was so literally penniless that as he went out to call on benefactors he had to ask Joseph Rossi for a few *soldi* to give alms on the way. Prominent families of Turin, who could readily recognize virtue when they saw it, realized that Don Bosco was a priest with a special God-given mission, and the more they saw him, the more they esteemed him. His visits brought him not only financial assistance but also the affection and respect that, in my opinion, would have been shown to a saint.

A few people felt that Don Bosco begged too often, but he merely answered that good had to be done and he had to find funds to do it, since, without money, little or nothing could ever be accomplished. Even the most famous saints had needed money. That he was quite successful was clear, for God had evidently endowed him with this talent.

His words were wondrously persuasive. One day, moments after he had spoken on detachment from worldly goods, he was approached by a gentleman who had loaned him twelve thousand lire just that morning.

"Here is your receipt," he said. "Tear it up. I don't need it any longer. You have opened my eyes. God alone matters, nothing but

God." Some years later, that same gentleman left the world to live in poverty with Don Bosco, giving up a considerable fortune.

To minimize Don Bosco's achievements someone remarked that "he did good with somebody else's money." But this is precisely the reason we should admire him. Had he been a millionaire and built his schools with his own money, there would be little reason for amazement, as he would only have returned to God a little of the bounty God had bestowed on him. But, penniless as he was, he moved the rich to take an interest in the poor, expanded the field of charity, shared his merits with his benefactors, and forged firmer links of brotherly love between the haves and the have-nots. This is why his achievement is so extraordinary!

His efficacy of speech which the good Lord had granted him [1] extended also to his writings. To accomplish his global goals, he had to appeal not just to a city, but to provinces, kingdoms, indeed the entire world. Publicity with him was a must. Bold and dogged in all his undertakings, he did not hide behind a reticent modesty. Though humble and modest in his person, he knew he had to make his mission known to all. As he extended his works, he made entire populations realize their potentials and build huge charitable institutions, even when hard times counseled otherwise.

Don Bosco had no qualms about publicity. As he had always done in the past, despite the disapproval of many who later followed his example, he would do in the future. And so he did in 1862 by launching a lottery and publicizing it in a circular dated January 30, 1862.[2] Benefactors hastened to encourage him,[3] among them Baron [Feliciano] Ricci [des Ferres] to whose letter Don Bosco replied as follows:

February 9, 1862

Dear Baron:

I'll probably be able to get you a good servant. We'll discuss it on your next visit to Turin. I'll be at your service at any time; generally, I'm home from nine to twelve in the morning.

[1] *See* Vol. I, p. 386. [Editor]

[2] Omitted in this edition along with another circular to the general public. For previous circulars on lotteries *see* Vol. IV, pp. 228ff; Vol. V, pp. 403, 406ff, 625f. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting one such letter. [Editor]

Many thanks for your kind response to our lottery. I hope it will be a great success.

This morning there was quite a house search at Count Cays' [4] from ten to three. Of course, being the president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. . . .

The Lord grant you and your wife health and grace.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On February 22, 1862 Don Bosco formally asked the royal princes Umberto and Amedeo of Savoy to accept the chairmanship of the lottery, but they could not oblige. Hence, he turned—with success—to the mayor of Turin, Marquis Emmanuel Lucerna of Rora.[5]

[4] Count Charles Cays (1813–1882) was a staunch Catholic and deputy in the Piedmontese Parliament from 1857 to 1860. After withdrawing from politics, he busied himself in works of charity; then in 1877, he became a Salesian and was ordained a priest the following year. Till his death in 1882 at the age of 69 as he himself had predicted, he gave Don Bosco invaluable assistance. We are omitting the brief description of the house search to which he was subjected.

[5] We are omitting the list of committee members. [Editor]

CHAPTER 11

Don Bosco's 1862 Lottery (Continued)

WE draw once more from the Bonetti chronicle:

There was quite an ado now at the Oratory, receiving and displaying lottery prizes in several second floor rooms, east of the central staircase (where the infirmary now [1909] stands). Don Bosco was kept quite busy. On the morning of March 3, chancing upon some young clerics and lay members, he smilingly asked one of them, "Of all the things you've ever seen in your lifetime, what did you like best?"

"Don Bosco," was the answer.

Apropos of this, Don Bosco told the following story:

"At our last lottery, a peasant and his wife and children came to look at the prizes and I took them around. While people stopped to admire the beauty or value of some prizes, the good peasant seemed not at all impressed by anything. I thought, "Is there possibly nothing here to strike his fancy?" Continuing on our tour, we came to the food prizes, among which was a gorgeous salami. At this sight the peasant was delighted!"

We all laughed, but some whispered, "Is he likening himself to a salami?" [1]

Don Bosco's story sounded like a joke, but it faithfully conveyed his humble opinion of himself. No praise ever went to his head. The chronicle continues:

One of these days, Father Rua was telling those sitting near him at dinner that when Don Bosco and he were in Rome [in 1858] [2] he found the Romans very well informed about Don Bosco's miracle in

[1] In Italian, "salami" is figuratively used to denote a nincompoop or ignorant lout. [Editor]

[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 534–602. [Editor]

Turin of calling a boy back to life.[3] Though seated some distance away, Don Bosco heard them talking. He blushed deeply and, turning to Father Rua, sternly said, "Stop it! I never said it was I, and no one must know of it!"

Father Dominic Bongiovanni remarked:

Indeed, Don Bosco was utterly unaffected by both praise and blame. When he addressed us former pupils when we honored him on his name day, he graciously credited us and his co-workers for all the good that had been done, but we knew better. On the occasion of my brother Joseph's first Mass, December 21, 1862, I paid tribute to Don Bosco, sitting there with the Oratory boys. "In speaking of you," I said, "the Pope has already used the word 'saint.'" Not the least sign of complacency crossed his face. Such was also the experience of attentive observers; in similar circumstances, they never detected the slightest sign that he took pleasure in such praise.

Lottery prizes had meanwhile risen to three hundred and eighty-three. The handsomest, an oil painting of St. Anthony's temptation in the desert by Chevalier Frederick Peschiera, professor at the Accademia Ligustica of Genoa, was valued at six thousand lire. The official appraisers—John Volpato for art objects and Joseph Buzzetti for the rest—listed the prizes to meet legal requirements and submitted their statements.[4] Art objects were valued at 24,771 lire, and the others at 10,168 lire and sixty centesimi. The same day, March 14, Don Bosco applied to the prefect of the province for permission to hold the lottery. With the application . . . he enclosed a ticket sample, a list of the committee members, a program, requirements, a prize list, and appraisals. Authorization was granted a week later. . . .

A hall had already been set up for exhibiting the ever increasing number of gifts. The chronicle continues:

On Sunday, March 23 [1862]—as the Oratory celebrated its cherished feast of St. Joseph—the lottery was officially opened by Mr. Galvagno, a city hall official representing the mayor. Though many

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 554. *See also* Vol. III, pp. 349ff. [Editor]

[4] Omitted in this edition. Similar omissions in this chapter will be indicated by dots. [Editor]

guests had been invited, hardly anyone showed up because of a heavy snowstorm. There was a short entertainment featuring music, prose, and poetry, and one of Cagliero's musical compositions—*The Poet and the Philosopher*. Apart from that, it was a thoroughly miserable day.

Once the lottery was officially opened, Don Bosco planned to boost it by personally visiting several towns in Piedmont. To offset heavy traveling expenses, he had recently requested the Minister of the Interior to renew his second-class railroad pass of 1861. He trusted his application would be favorably received since he had accepted several boys whom the same official had recommended to the Oratory. Instead, on February 20, 1862, he was asked to submit additional information. He complied, but then, on May 18, 1862, the Department of Public Works informed him that regretfully it could not oblige because of a law of December 26, 1861 restricting such a privilege to members of Parliament and other high officials.[5]

Don Bosco then tried another plan. [Bettino] Ricasoli [premier since June 1861] had resigned on March 3 [1862] and had been succeeded by Urbano Rattazzi [6] who also held the portfolio of the Department of the Interior. Fortunately, Don Bosco managed to get the railroad pass through the good offices of Senator Bartholomew Bona, Director General of Railroads.[7]

One of Don Bosco's first trips was to Vercelli where he called on the archbishop, on Father Peter Degaudenzi, senior cathedral canon, and on Father John Momo, pastor at Santa Maria Maggiore.[8] On his way back, as always was true when he traveled, something noteworthy occurred. We learned of it from his fellow traveler, Monsignor Bonelli, pastor of Rossignano:

I boarded the train at Vercelli with a Genoese priest who was preaching a Lenten mission in my parish. Our destination was Casale. Nearly all the seats had been taken when a young-looking priest

[5] The last two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

[6] Rattazzi was well acquainted with Don Bosco and his works. *See* Vol. V, pp. 34–39, 142–45, 281–84, 299, 350, 459–62; Vol. VI, p. 365. [Editor]

[7] Bona too had befriended Don Bosco in the past. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 284f. [Editor]

[8] Don Bosco had preached there in September 1861. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 605ff. [Editor]

entered. As the conductor checked our tickets,[9] I noticed that the young priest handed him a white ticket—obviously a free pass. I became curious. He saw me watching him and asked me point-blank, "Excuse me, Father, what is your name?"

"I beg your pardon," I answered, "but would you first identify yourself?"

"I am just a plain priest. I don't think my name will mean anything to you."

"Are you perhaps from Turin?"

"No, but I was born near Turin, at Castelnuovo d'Asti."

"I know some people there—for example, Father Bertagna, a schoolmate of mine. Would you know Don Bosco?"

"Yes, quite well in fact."

"I hear he intends to open a school at Mirabello." [10]

"Yes, I've heard that too."

"Do you think he'll succeed?"

"We'll have to wait and see! Really, the good man is tackling a rather daring undertaking. How it will end up, nobody knows."

"I am convinced all will go well. So far, Don Bosco has succeeded in all his attempts."

"I am not so sure. Anyway, we'll see what he can do."

"I know that his schools are doing very well in Turin and that he has excellent teachers. Certainly he will have some for Mirabello too. Incidentally, since you seem so well informed about Don Bosco, could you tell me whether all his teachers are certified?"

"Some have equivalent certification. All are quite talented, learned, and hard-working. He even has an eighteen-year-old young man teaching Rhetoric I." [11]

The Lenten preacher had listened respectfully all this time, but now he exclaimed somewhat ironically, "Come! An eighteen-year-old teaching rhetoric! My dear Father, that's a tall story."

"Well," our priest replied, "go to Turin and test this young man in Latin, Greek, history, and literature, and see if I am not telling the truth." (*This boy was the cleric Francis Cerruti.*)[12]

[9] A routine procedure on Italian and other European railroads. [Editor]

[10] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 429f, 614. [Editor]

[11] A course roughly corresponding to the junior year in high school. [Editor]

[12] Cerruti (1844–1917) entered the Oratory in November 1856. After completing the five-year secondary school course in only three years, he was chosen by Don Bosco for teacher certification studies. He was also among the first seventeen young men who joined Don Bosco and his fledgling Salesian Congregation in 1859. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1866 he was ordained a priest and

"I quite believe that an eighteen-year-old may be a *fair* rhetoric student. I'd even grant he could be an *excellent* student, but a teacher! . . . No, I could never believe that."

Since the Genoese priest's tone had grown more ironic and had drawn all the other passengers' attention, I cut him short. "How old are you?" I asked our priest.

"Forty-seven."

"Then you must be Don Bosco."

"Yes, Father, I am." Immediately all the passengers doffed their hats to Don Bosco. The Genoese priest was taken aback for a moment. "Forgive me," he then said to Don Bosco, "if I have been somewhat outspoken. I did not know I had the honor of speaking with you. Now that I know who you are, I assure you that I fully believe all you've said."

On my part (*Monsignor Bonelli went on*) I have told this incident to seminarians in order to draw this conclusion from my sermons: "If priests are not respected, it is at times their own fault. Most people, if not all, always respect a good priest. In fact [as this incident shows] even those who did not know Don Bosco greeted him once they heard his name."

When Don Bosco returned to the Oratory, the display rooms were still not ready. In many towns and villages of northern and central Italy, promoters—three hundred and twenty-seven men and two hundred and eight women, including members of the nobility—were busily taking in gifts and selling tickets. At this juncture [on April 4, 1862] Don Bosco was unexpectedly notified by competent authorities that a directive of the Minister of Finance temporarily enjoined him from proceeding with the lottery . . . [until the closing of the one then in progress on behalf of disabled veterans].

The delay was a blessing in disguise for Don Bosco. In a circular . . . he immediately notified all promoters [urging them to hasten the mailing of gifts to the display center and energetically to sell tickets privately]. He was not slackening his activities on behalf of

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received his Ph.D. in literature. At Don Bosco's request he compiled an Italian dictionary and deepened his knowledge of education. He filled administrative posts and became director, provincial, and finally prefect general of studies. Through his efforts several Salesian schools received accreditation. He died at the Oratory at the age of 73. [Editor]

the lottery. Yet, in those very days, he had suffered a very grevious loss in the death of Archbishop Louis Fransoni. The prelate had died on March 26, 1862 at Lyons, blessing friends and enemies. He could well have had made his own the words of St. Gregory VII: *Dilexi iustitiam et odivi iniquitatem; propterea morior in exilio.* [I loved justice and hated wickedness; for that reason I am dying in exile.] The cathedral chapter of Turin elected Canon [Joseph] Zappata as vicar capitular.

Many prayers were said at the Oratory for the soul of this undaunted, illustrious prelate. Deprived of revenues and forced to economize even on necessities, Archbishop Fransoni still managed to save and give to the poor and to Don Bosco's oratories. The boys did not forget their beloved shepherd. His memory is and will always be held in blessing in the Society of St. Francis de Sales. Wherever Don Bosco will be remembered, there too will the archbishop be honored. Much credit must be given to him for Don Bosco's success. He was Don Bosco's counselor, defender, benefactor, and father.

CHAPTER 12

Another Workshop at the Oratory

WHILE the lottery was being held up, Don Bosco went on with his plans for a new building at the Oratory, notwithstanding his chronic lack of funds and heavy debts. That the latter were pressing we surmise from the following letter of his to Marchioness [Mary] Fassati:

Turin, March 26, 1862

My dear Marchioness:

This morning I am in a real scrape. I simply cannot put off paying a bill and am short of four hundred lire. If you could speak to the marquis for me and ask him to donate or at least loan this sum, you would be doing a very kind deed. In the latter case, I could repay the loan from the expected lottery proceeds.

Please forgive this inconvenience. The Lord will surely reward you and your family abundantly.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

At this time too he asked his young clerics to sign a petition to the king for a subsidy. It was promptly granted.[1]

The new building along Via della Giardiniera—well shaded by a row of mulberry trees—occupied the same area as the old shed which the Filippi brothers had leased years before to Mr. Visca [2] and had become Don Bosco's property. Somewhat longer than the old shed, the new building was to be approximately one hundred and ninety-five feet long, twenty-four feet wide, and forty feet high. The main floor was to house the printshop with floor space for twice the present equipment, a supply room, and the

[1] We are omitting the petition and the reply. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. II, p. 418. [Editor]

cabinetmaking shop; the second floor and attic were to serve as dormitories. The carriage entrance, reception room, and doorkeeper's lodge were to be located at the eastern end of the building. The former entrance was to be walled up, and the old reception room, lobby, and doorkeeper's lodge were to be converted into a workshop and storeroom for paper and books.

All this entailed a considerable expense, but at the start of the year Don Bosco had remarked, "When my plans redound to God's glory, I don't go by the money I have, but only by the need of such and such a work. I am convinced Divine Providence will help us. It has never failed us."

As far back as 1861, Father Francis Dalmazzo had often heard him say that Valdocco's little house would one day be a vast complex of buildings and ample porticoes, that the Salesian Society would spread from there to the world, and that many Oratory boys would become priests and missionaries to far-off America.

Charles Buzzetti, who at Don Bosco's urging had secured a building contractor's license, was given the job. A comprehensive plan to be carried out in phases would have been ideal and Don Bosco wanted one, but, pressed for time, he had to make the best of a bad situation of scanty funds, limited space, and urgent needs. Hence, the foundations and part of the wall of the former [Visca] shed were incorporated into the new building. If we look at the Oratory now [1909], we see that the new building cut diagonally across the playground to the south. Don Bosco often remarked that the building marred the Oratory's symmetry and would eventually be demolished, but that in his lifetime he would not permit such a waste. "The Lord has promised us all we need for our vast work," he would say, "but He promises us nothing for what is purely ornamental."

The money came in. During the summer vacation of 1862 Don Bosco himself told his boys of a providential or at least striking occurrence that had happened in June. Buzzetti, the contractor, had asked Don Bosco for several thousand lire in wages. Don Bosco, though absolutely sure that he had no money, in view of Buzzetti's need, did not dare give a negative reply. Shortly afterward, he went up to his room wondering where to turn for money. As he sat at his desk and went through the mail, he found a

blank envelope containing five thousand lire—the very sum he needed. Tranquilly he went downstairs and gave it to Buzzetti. This proves well enough that God takes care of His servants. In this case, He might have inspired someone to bring the money in secretly or—and let us dare say it—He might have made the money appear miraculously on Don Bosco's desk. God is good! Don Bosco could never find the donor.

Buzzetti was given yet other jobs [3] . . . but as these required quite a good deal of ironwork, Don Bosco opened a blacksmith shop. . . .

This endless rise in workshops—for tailors and shoemakers, bookbinders, cabinet makers, printers, even dyers and hatters—prompted Don Bosco to revise two previous sets of regulations which had made craftsmasters responsible for the pupils' work, thriftiness, discipline, and moral conduct.[4] The new regulations [5] assigned the total supervision of each shop to a lay Salesian who would work with the craftsmaster. The first Salesians to assume such duties were Joseph Rossi and Joseph Buzzetti. Shortly afterward, Chevalier Frederick Oreglia of Santo Stefano was appointed manager of the print and bookbinding shops.

This updating of the artisans' regulations was not final. As boys and production increased, discipline and conduct were entrusted to the clerics, who were called "assistants," while the lay Salesians were put in charge of the workshops' management. Later, Don Bosco drew up a fourth set of regulations; they have remained substantially unchanged to this day and have become part of the Regulations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales printed in 1877.

A new set of regulations for the workshops became an obvious need in 1862, when a serious breach of Article 3 of the Regulations occurred in the blacksmiths' workshop. The article read: "Smoking, drinking wine, playing cards, and such games are absolutely forbidden. Strict silence is to be observed as compatible with the shop's operation."

Since the feast of St. Eligius—patron of this trade—was approaching, the two craftsmasters (outside employees) and their

[3] We are omitting some construction details. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 460, 574. [Editor]
[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

apprentices planned to celebrate with a good dinner or a little party. All chipped in for food and drinks. When Don Bosco heard about it, he forbade it. He had to forestall eventual disorders and did not want to establish a precedent for other shops. But some blacksmiths were newcomers at the Oratory and had not yet adjusted to obedience. Impatient with rules and backed by those who should have curbed them, they went ahead with their celebration, though not quite openly. Though Don Bosco was mild in his orders, he was also quite firm in enforcing them, if he had to. While he would not tolerate insubordination, he shrank from hasty, harsh measures. Biding his time, therefore, he gave his order to Father Prefect the next day. The prefect called in the young offenders, and after calmly showing them the wrong they had done, he sent them home. It was a fair, effective lesson for others who might be entertaining similar notions. As a result, there were no serious, concerted breaches of discipline for years to come. "The wicked man being scourged, the fool shall be wiser," says the Holy Spirit. [Prov. 18, 25]

Don Bosco eventually took most of those boys back when they begged his pardon and promised to obey, but he firmly refused to rehire the two employees. He was right because, more than anyone else, craftsmasters can influence pupils for good or evil, since their professional training and their future lives depend on them. Don Bosco had to be very cautious in selecting craftsmasters and firm in removing them if they proved unfit for their positions. At times God seemed to corroborate his verdict, as the following episode, which we heard from Joseph Reano, will demonstrate:

Once, by San Dalmazzo's Church, I met a craftsmaster who had been dismissed from the Oratory. "Reano," he said to me, "I want you to know I'll get even with Don Bosco and Father Savio."

"Why tell me?" I replied. "I'd rather know nothing about it. It only upsets me."

He kept up his threats until I interrupted him. "Listen, let bygones be bygones," I said. "I can't set myself up as a judge. You have a job, haven't you? So let things take their course. Why fight Don Bosco? I wouldn't dare do so for all the money in the world."

This only angered him, so that he even insulted me, and we parted quite uncivilly.

Only a few months later, his wife and later his older son left him. Within six months, the man himself suffered a stroke which paralyzed his left leg and forced him to walk with a cane. A year later, a second stroke ended his life. His orphaned younger son had to struggle to get along and sometimes received help from Don Bosco.

Divine Providence meanwhile came to Don Bosco's aid with good, even excellent craftsmasters, whom we shall mention in due time. For the moment we shall recall only John Baptist Garando, a blacksmith who was a strongly religious man and skilled worker. For several years he had hired boys recommended by Don Bosco, and all had been quite happy with him. Then financial setbacks and a work shortage forced him to close his shop and look for a job. In 1863 Peter Enria,[6] who had been employed by him for three years, met him in town. After warm greetings, he asked him how he was faring. "Well," was the reply, "I feel fine, thank God, but at the age of seventy I have to work for somebody else as if I were an apprentice."

At this Enria exclaimed, "My good John, why don't you come to the Oratory with me? I'm sure Don Bosco will be glad to have you. He has had trouble setting up a blacksmith workshop."

"If the Lord and Our Lady grant me this grace," Garando rejoined, "I'll never leave the Oratory."

Don Bosco put him in charge of the shop. The good man was so thrilled that he kept repeating: "This is heaven!" He worked like a man of twenty, diligently taught his pupils, and saw to it that their conduct would please Don Bosco. He was the one who did all the ironwork—windows, particularly—for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. He lived four years at the Oratory, repeating to his last hour, "I bless the day Don Bosco took me into his house."

[6] Enria, born in 1841, had entered the Oratory in 1854. He later became a Salesian coadjutor brother and nursed Don Bosco during several illnesses, including his last one. He died in 1898. [Editor]

CHAPTER 13

A Dream: Death's Messenger

DON Bosco kept up his works of mercy also outside the Oratory, especially by visiting the sick. Whenever he called on people, rich or poor, and knew that some member of the household was ill, he would ask to see him to offer spiritual comfort. So well known was this habit of his that he was often called to the patient's bedside. We read in the Bonetti chronicle:

The sick feel better whenever Don Bosco is near them. They are anxious to have him at their side as though his presence gave them a greater assurance of heaven. Today, Friday, March 14 [1862], Countess Lazzari fell ill and sent for Don Bosco. He had just gone to town, but her servant, knowing how impatiently she was awaiting Don Bosco, asked where he could likely be found. He did manage to locate him, and the good lady, greatly consoled, insistently begged him to say whether she would go straight to heaven were she to die then. "Were all my confessions good?" she kept asking. Don Bosco smiled at her high opinion of him and, as he had done in similar circumstances, dodged the issue by asking her a few questions so that her answers might help him set her heart at peace.

Don Bosco also knew how to comfort those who were seriously ill. The chronicle continues:

On March 16, speaking to us of death, Don Bosco remarked that this fateful moment terrified even very devout people, the greatest saints themselves. "When someone is critically ill," he said, "I don't tell him to prepare for death, for such an approach would hardly allay his fears. Rather, I insist that we are all in God's hands, that God is the best Father we could possibly wish for, ever watching over us, ever knowing what is best for us. I urge the patient to abandon

himself to Him, just as a child does with his father, and to be tranquil. This allays the patient's fear of death. He is delighted by the thought that his fate is in God's hands and he peacefully waits for God to do as He wills in His infinite goodness."

But Don Bosco brought more than comfort and encouragement to those who were ill, as we gather from a written statement of Mrs. Delphine Marengo:

In the winter of 1862 my mother, forty, fell seriously ill with typhus and pneumonia; within two months she was at death's door. At the suggestion of Father Felix Golzio, her confessor, Don Bosco visited her after she had received the Last Sacraments. Sitting by her bed, he gently asked how she felt. My mother, perfectly conscious, recognized Don Bosco and thanked him. Then the saintly priest had me and my sister recite three Hail Marys with him. Afterward, he turned to me, the older one, and said, "Don't worry. Your mother will live. You are both young and need her." Then, speaking to our mother, he went on, "But I have asked the Lord to let you have your purgatory here on earth. Do not be alarmed if you have much to suffer." My saintly mother whispered, "I ask only to do God's will."

"Good!" Don Bosco rejoined. He blessed her and left.

Mother began feeling better immediately and the next day asked the doctor for asparagus. Amazed at finding her still alive, the doctor felt her pulse. "Not asparagus," he exclaimed, "but some chicken." Her convalescence was long and painful, but she recovered perfectly and stayed well for some thirty years. She suffered a great deal indeed, especially morally, but at every new cross she would jokingly say, "Another one of Don Bosco's visits!"

Death came to her at the age of seventy-five. Father Valimberti, curate at Our Lady of Mount Carmel, assisted her in her last moments. Totally ignorant of Don Bosco's long-standing prediction, he comforted me by saying that since my mother had had her purgatory here on earth, there was good reason to hope that she had gone straight to heaven.

Don Bosco was no less astounding in the Oratory. "On March 21 [1862]," the Bonetti chronicle records, "he mounted his little platform to give the 'Good Night' to the boys. After a few moments' silence, as if to catch his breath, he began:

I must tell you a dream. Try to picture to yourselves the Oratory at recreation time loud with happy, boisterous youngsters. I seemed

to be leaning out of the window of my room, watching boys joyfully playing their games, running, and dashing about the playground. Suddenly I heard a loud disturbance at the main entrance. I looked and saw a tall old man;[1] he had a wide forehead, oddly sunken eyes, a long white beard, and white locks thinly falling about his shoulders. He was draped in a winding sheet which he clutched tightly in his left hand, while in his right he held a dark blue flaming torch. He advanced slowly and gravely, halting at times to search stoopingly about, as if trying to find a lost object. Unseen, he wandered about the entire playground several times, while the boys went on with their games.

Dumbfounded and puzzled, I kept watching him. He went up to the carpenter shop, halted before a boy who was playing *barra rotta,*[2] and, extending a lanky arm, held the torch up to the lad's face. "He's the one, I'm sure," he muttered and brusquely nodded two or three times. Then abruptly he cornered the boy and handed him a note from the folds of his winding sheet. Taking it, the boy unfolded it and visibly paled as he read it.

"When?" he asked. "Soon?"

"Now," was the ghastly reply.

"Can't I finish the game?"

"You may be caught while you're playing."

It meant a sudden death. Trembling, the boy tried to say something, to plead, but somehow couldn't. Unclutching his robe, the stranger then pointed to the portico with his left hand: "Look," he said. "Do you see that coffin? It's for you! Quick, let's go!" In the center of the passageway leading into the orchard lay a coffin.

"I'm not ready. . . . I'm still too young to die!" the boy screamed. Silently the stranger quickly strode away.

As I tried to learn who he was, I woke up. From what I have said you may well understand that one of you must prepare himself because the Lord will soon call him into eternity. I know who he is because I saw the whole thing. I know the boy to whom the stranger handed the note. He is here now, listening to me, but I shall tell no one till after his death. However, I'll do all I can to prepare him for a happy death. Let each of you look after himself, for while he wonders who it is, he himself may be just the one. I have told you this because if I failed to do so, the Lord would ask me, "Why don't you speak up at

[1] In the original of this dream the protagonist is called in quick succession *personaggio, vecchione, spettro,* and *sconosciuto,* meaning "personage, old man, phantom, and stranger." [Editor]

[2] A sort of cops-and-robbers game. [Editor]

the proper time?" So, let each one correct himself, especially during these last three days of the novena before the feast of the Annunciation. Pray especially for this purpose and, during these three days, say at least one Hail, Holy Queen to the Blessed Virgin for the boy who has to die. When he departs from this life, our several hundred prayers will greatly help him.

The Bonetti chronicle continues:

When Don Bosco stepped down, some asked him privately to tell them at least if that boy would die soon. He replied that this would unfailingly happen before two feast days beginning with the letter "P" and perhaps even before the first of those feasts; it might be two or three weeks.

This dream caused shudders; everyone feared he might be the one. As on previous similar occasions,[3] it did a lot of good. Each one took heed of his spiritual welfare, and on the following day the boys went to confession in greater numbers than usual.

For several days many lads personally tried to get Don Bosco to tell them their fate, but they kept asking in vain. Two things stood out very clearly in their minds: death would be sudden and it would occur before two solemn feast days beginning with the letter "P"—obviously *Pasqua* [Easter] and *Pentecoste* [Pentecost]. The first fell on April 20. The Bonetti chronicle goes on:

There was a great hubbub at the Oratory on April 16 [1862] when a twelve-year-old boy, Louis Fornasio of Borgaro Torinese, died at home. There are several things to be said about him. When Don Bosco announced that one of the boys was to die, this lad, though by no means bad, began to be a model of good behavior. The first few days after the announcement he pestered Don Bosco to let him make a general confession. Reluctant at first, because the youngster had already made one before, Don Bosco finally relented as a special favor and heard his confession in two or three different sessions. Moreover, on the same day that he had asked for this favor, or on the day when he started his confession, the youngster began to feel slightly sick, and this condition persisted for the next few days. At this juncture, two of his brothers came to visit him and, seeing that he was ill, got Don Bosco's permission to take him home for a while. On this very day—or

[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 484–89. [Editor]

the day before—Fornasio had finished his general confession and had also received Communion. He went home with them, was on his feet for a few days, but then had to take to bed. His illness soon took a turn for the worse, affecting his brain and depriving him of speech and at times his consciousness. Of course, he could not make his confession or receive Communion. When Don Bosco, a good father, paid him a visit, Fornasio recognized him and tried to say something, but after vain efforts he broke into sobs while his whole family wept with him. He died the following day.

When this news reached the Oratory, several clerics asked Don Bosco whether Fornasio was the boy of the dream. Don Bosco gave them to understand that he was not. Nevertheless several believed that this boy's death had fulfilled the prediction. [At the "Good Night"] that same evening (April 16), Don Bosco announced Fornasio's death, remarking that it taught them all an important lesson. "Make hay while the sun shines," he said. "Let us not allow the devil to delude us into thinking we may put our conscience in order at the moment of death." When someone publicly asked him whether Fornasio was the boy destined to die, he replied that he would say nothing for the moment. He added, though, that it was usual at the Oratory for boys to die in pairs—one calling another—and that, therefore, we should still be on guard and heed Our Lord's advice: "Be ready because at an hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." [Matt. 24, 44].

When he descended from the platform, he said quite plainly to a few priests and clerics that Fornasio was not the boy of the dream.

On April 17, during after-dinner recreation, a crowd of boys kept pestering Don Bosco, "Tell us the name of the boy who is to die!" Smilingly, Don Bosco kept shaking his head, but they insisted, "If you don't want to tell us, then tell at least Father Rua." Don Bosco continued to shake his head.

"Just tell us his initial, then," several insisted.

"All right, I'll satisfy you in that," he replied. "He has the same initial as the name of Mary."

The disclosure spread like wildfire, but a guess was still difficult. More than thirty boys had surnames beginning with "M."

There were some skeptics too because a boy named Louis Marchisio was seriously ill and there were grave fears for his life. In fact, the following day, April 18, he was taken home. These skeptics, guessing that Don Bosco had been alluding to him, remarked, "Well, we too can predict that someone whose name begins with 'M' is going to die!"

CHAPTER 14

A Dream: Death's Messenger (Continued)

THE Bonetti chronicle continues:

On Easter Sunday, April 20 [1862], Don Bosco became very ill. So weak was he that he could hardly stand on his feet or speak. Nevertheless, he left his room and heard confessions from six-thirty to nine. When we reminded him that he had to take care of himself and not work so hard, he answered, "Now is the time to work. When I'm gone, there will be others to do more than I. The great number of unknown lads that came to confession yesterday morning recalled to my mind how, some twelve or fourteen years ago, I would sometimes have a hundred and fifty and more festive oratory boys lined up waiting to make their confessions to me. How they loved me, and how receptive they were!"

He then went on to speak of the good being done by Lenten catechism classes and gave the clerics some tips for dealing with certain topics. For example, he told us that when we taught boys about blasphemy, we should cautiously avoid repeating horrible epithets which people join to God's holy name, even if we had to illustrate our meaning or caution them about specific words.

Almost in tears, he assured us, "I am more hurt by blasphemy than by a slap on the face. Even in hearing confessions, I feel so bad after listening to two or three such sins that I can endure it no longer."

We remarked that, when preaching against blasphemy, Father Borel would often repeat the actual blasphemies people used.

"Father Borel is a very zealous priest," Don Bosco replied. "No one can deny that his lively, interesting sermons have converted many people. But I can't stand this habit of his. I've cautioned him several times and begged him to get rid of it, but sometimes force of habit and a flush of eloquence carry him away."

At this point the chronicle carries this notice:

April 21. Since we were all very busy during Lent teaching catechism or doing other work, we could not keep up our diary on Don Bosco or hold meetings. We shall now use our spare time as best we can to resume our task for God's glory and record Don Bosco's more important words or doings. We'll start off immediately by reporting on the fulfillment of the dream [he narrated on March 21].

This brief entry reassures us that the commission formed [in 1861] to record the highlights of Don Bosco's life [1] had been active all along examining, approving, or amending the reports of Bonetti, Ruffino, and other members.

After filling in the events of March and April [1862], Bonetti goes on to record the fulfillment of Don Bosco's March 21 prediction, as follows:

A month had gone by since the prediction, and the healthy apprehension it had generated was now waning. Yet many kept wondering, "Who will die and when? *Pasqua* [Easter]—the first 'P'—is gone!"

Quite unexpectedly, on April 25, Victor Maestro of Viora (Mondovì), thirteen, died of a stroke. He was a very fine lad who went to Communion several times a week. To the very day of Don Bosco's prediction he was well, but two weeks before his death his eyes began bothering him and his vision dimmed in the evening. Two or three days before the stroke, he complained of slight chest pains, for which the doctor prescribed longer sleep.

One morning Don Bosco met him on the stairs. "Would you like to go to heaven?" he asked.

"Of course," Maestro answered.

"Then get ready!" The boy was startled for a moment, but then, thinking that Don Bosco had spoken in jest, he regained his composure. However, Don Bosco, keeping close to him for the next few days, prepared him properly and induced him to make a general, most consoling confession.

On April 24, a boy noticed Maestro sitting on the infirmary balcony. Impulsively he approached Don Bosco. "Is it true that Maestro is the boy who wants to die?" he asked.

"How would I know!" Don Bosco replied. "Ask him!"

The lad went up to the balcony and did just that. Maestro broke into a laugh and, going downstairs, asked Don Bosco to let him go

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 505ff. [Editor]

home for a few days. "Surely," Don Bosco agreed, "but before you go, have the doctor give you a written report on your illness." The boy felt relieved. He had said to himself, *Someone is to die at the Oratory. If I go home, it can't be me. I'll have a longer* [*Easter*] *holiday and come back in perfect shape.*

The next day, Friday, April 25, Maestro got up with the others and heard Mass; then, feeling quite tired, he returned to bed, after telling his schoolmates how glad he was that he could go home.

When the bell rang for classes at nine, his friends wished him a happy vacation and a safe return, said good-bye, and went to school. Maestro was left alone in the dormitory. Toward ten, the infirmarian looked in to tell him that the doctor was expected soon, and that he should get up and report to the infirmary.

The doctor arrived shortly. A boy in the adjoining dormitory, who also had to see the doctor, went to Maestro's dormitory and called him loudly from the doorway. Hearing no answer, he called again. There was still no reply. Thinking that Maestro was sound asleep, he went to his bedside and shook him, calling his name. Maestro was motionless. Frightened beyond words, the lad screamed, "Maestro is dead," and dashed out to call someone. The first one he met was Father Rua who ran to Maestro's bedside in time to give him absolution as he died. Father Alasonatti, the prefect, was informed immediately, and I (Bonetti) went to call Don Bosco.

The news spread like lightning through classrooms and workshops. Boys came running and knelt down in prayer. Others, hoping that Maestro might still be alive, brought bedwarmers and cordials to revive him, but it was all useless. On first sight Don Bosco knew the boy was dead. Everybody was heartbroken, particularly because Maestro had died with no friend by him. Knowing the boys' grief, Don Bosco assured them of Maestro's eternal salvation. He had received Communion on Wednesday, and since the feast of All Saints he had especially behaved and was properly prepared for death. A steady flow of clerics and boys paid him their last respects. As they mourned him, they realized that his death had fulfilled Don Bosco's prediction.

That evening Don Bosco's "Good Night" moved all to tears. He called attention to the fact that within the last nine or ten days God had taken two of our companions, and neither had had a chance to receive the Last Sacraments. "How mistaken people are," he exclaimed, "to delay clearing their conscience till the end of their life. Let us thank the Lord for thus calling into eternity two companions who,

we are sure, were spiritually ready. How much more would we grieve if others had been taken whose conduct is quite unsatisfactory."

Maestro's death was a blessing of the Lord. On Saturday morning and evening boys in great numbers wanted to make a general confession. With two or three words Don Bosco put their minds at ease. Later he said very plainly, "Maestro was the boy whom I saw receive the note in my dream. What deeply consoles me is that he went to the sacraments that very Friday morning, as several boys have assured me. His death was sudden but not unprovided."

Maestro's body was interred on the morning of Sunday, April 27. A remarkable incident fulfilled the prediction to the last detail. The mysterious stranger of the dream had handed a note to Maestro as he was standing in the portico facing the passageway leading to the orchard. From there he pointed out to the boy the coffin in the passageway only a few feet away.

When the undertaker and his assistants came, they carried the body down the central staircase, along the portico up to that passageway. There they stopped, sent for chairs, and placed the coffin on them as they waited for the priest and students who were to escort the body to the cemetery.

[Thus reads the Bonetti chronicle.]

We must point out too that John Cagliero [then a deacon], passing by, was distressed by this arrangement because, at other funerals, the coffin had customarily been set down at the far end of the portico near the door of the stairs adjoining the church. He was more displeased to learn that the morticians themselves had had the chairs removed from their customary place. He insisted that the coffin be placed at the usual spot, but the men gruffly refused.

Just then Don Bosco came out of church. Looking very sadly upon the coffin, he remarked to [John Baptist] Francesia and others, "What a coincidence! That's the way I saw it in the dream!"

These details were also described in a report by Secundus Merlone.[2]

[2] A seminarian of the Asti diocese studying at the Oratory. *See* Vol. VI, pp. 339, 431. [Editor]

Though none of the pupils had been able to learn beforehand that Maestro was the boy destined to die, two persons in the house had been given that information and even more. Toward the end of February [1862], a former Oratory pupil died at home. John Cagliero and a classmate of his—both then in major orders—learned of it and one morning, meeting Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs, told him the news which they knew would, as always, bring him grief. "He won't be alone," Don Bosco commented. "Within two months two more boys shall die." Then he told the clerics the boys' names. Often enough Don Bosco would disclose such matters in strict secrecy to someone he knew to be level-headed so that, unbeknown to the boys concerned, he might encourage them to be good and receive the sacraments, while safeguarding them from spiritual danger.

Both clerics willingly took on the role of guardian angels. They wrote down Don Bosco's prediction, its date, and the boys' names and, after signing the document, went to the prefect's office and had it sealed and locked away.

Now [1909], forty-seven years later, John Cagliero confirms what we have just described and can still recall the pity he felt on seeing those two boys happily running around the playground, totally unaware of their impending, though not unhappy, fate. He recalls too the exact fulfillment of the prediction and the emotion all felt—Father Alasonatti included—when they broke the seal and read the document they had written two months before.

We return now to the Bonetti chronicle:

In those days, feeling the need to rid themselves of melancholy thoughts, the pupils began asking Don Bosco about the mysterious dog which had on several occasions saved him from danger. Don Bosco narrated several incidents of his life with a good deal of humor and then went on to describe the heroism of "Grigio," [3] the mysterious gray dog, to the boys' excitement and merriment.

When they asked how long it had been since he had last seen it, he replied that Grigio had appeared and escorted him just the year before, very late one night. He then went on: "Late one evening, as I was walking alone from Buttigliera to Moncucco, Grigio suddenly loomed before me to protect me from some huge mastiffs which

[3] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 496–502. [Editor]

had dashed out of a nearby farmhouse and were wildly rushing at me."

We can advisedly say that the story of this dog not only intrigues us but also touches on the supernatural, especially in view of the fact that Grigio at times was visible to Don Bosco alone. Father John Garino wrote:

In 1862, one Saturday afternoon at two, Don Bosco asked me to go with him into town. Just as he was about to step past the Oratory gate, he seemed unable to move. I stood right behind him. After making several attempts to left and right, he gave up. "I can't get out," he said, turning to me. "Grigio won't let me!" Don Bosco had to stay home that day. On the next day I heard rumors that someone had planned to ambush Don Bosco the previous day.

We now return to Sunday, April 27. At the Oratory it was marked by general Communion and the burial of Maestro. [We close this chapter with one more excerpt from the chronicle:]

At the evening church services, Don Bosco gave the talk, since the regular preacher was away. He spoke movingly like a saint and drew tears also from us. His topic was the ancient Paschal celebration which lasted all of Easter week, each day being a holy day. The octave of Easter was called *Dominica in Albis* because it was the day for the catechumens to put aside the white robes they had been clothed with at Baptism. He then went on to speak of Jesus' apparition to the Apostles and of the institution of the sacrament of Penance. He concluded with the Lord's greeting, *Pax vobis.* Saying that it was time we made our peace with the Lord, he extolled the mercy of God who, offended by us, offers to make peace, while we should rather be the ones to approach Him and beg for peace with burning tears. "Is there anyone here," he asked, "who, on offending God, would persist in waging war against Him when He Himself makes the first move for peace? My beloved sons, let us accept His offer of peace. Our life will end. If we are at peace with God today, we shall also have the joy of hearing Our Lord greet us at that faithful hour with a consoling and everlasting *Pax vobis."*

CHAPTER 15

A Painful Withdrawal

THE souls of the Giaveno junior seminarians[1]—for whom too Don Bosco was responsible before the Lord—were no less dear to him than those of his own Oratory boys. His visits to the Giaveno seminary at the start of the school year and in January 1862 had helped boost priestly vocations and the boys' intellectual and spiritual progress. They had listened to him as to a saint. On his part, Don Bosco had made himself available for confessions. Nevertheless, some narrow-minded individuals, unversed in the Lord's ways, could not bear his wholesome sway over the young seminarians or their trust in him. Mostly, they resented the norms and suggestions which he felt he had to give those who had received their charge from him. Ill feelings and criticism arose.

On several occasions, a chancery official had written to Don Bosco, subtly pointing out the advisability of not meddling too much in the seminary's management but rather of staying behind the scenes so as not to embarrass its rector. Knowing full well who was responsible for such suggestions, Don Bosco simply ignored them. Of course, he was aware that the Council of Trent had subjected seminaries to the ordinary's authority, but the latter had not yet dared to revoke the mandate giving Don Bosco full powers.[2]

While these maneuvers went on, Archbishop Fransoni—Don Bosco's main supporter—died. The opposition promptly made the most of it. Local clergymen, egged on by malcontents, began to complain that Don Bosco's sway over the seminary was hurting the chancery's rightful prestige. In a letter to Canon [Alexander]

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 343ff. For further details consult the Index of the same volume under "Giaveno Seminary." [Editor]

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 418f. [Editor]

Vogliotti they described the situation in terms which would wound his pride. Chancery officials took these remonstrances under advisement and, realizing that Giaveno was as flourishing as it had been formerly,[3] decided to ask Don Bosco to sever his ties with it. In fact, one of them personally called on him. Their conversation went like this:

"Don Bosco, we can't thank you enough for all you have done for us, but you will surely understand that since the [Giaveno] seminary belongs to the diocese, it is proper that it be run like our other diocesan seminaries."

"What do you find discordant or undesirable in our management?" Don Bosco asked.

"We feel that there is excessive piety and a too frequent reception of the sacraments. In fact, some people regard this as an abuse [of the sacraments]."

"How else could you guarantee a genuine education and the growth and quality of priestly vocations?"

"We think what we used to do was good enough. So many Communions smack too much of Jesuitism!"

"Jesuitism? If the Jesuits have found that this is a better way to educate young people, I'll instantly side with them."

"But, Father, don't you realize that these times of ours run completely contrary to anything smacking of religious fanaticism? Your system differs too much from that used in all of Piedmont's diocesan seminaries. You must also consider that anticlericals are doing their best to discredit us with all sorts of poisonous insinuations, ridicule, and caustic remarks on new devotions."

"I understand," Don Bosco interrupted. "I see very well what you are leading up to. I have worked hard and made many sacrifices for this junior seminary. . . . I sent many boys there who without my urging would have gone elsewhere or stayed at home. I even provided administrative personnel. I did all this and obligingly accepted your formal invitation assuring me of full freedom of action. Now you want me out. Well, so be it!

"By no means!"

"No? My dear Father, I'm not that blind."

"Please don't take it amiss. Why should we want you out? No! You will always retain the overall management, and we will always regard

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 619. [Editor]

you as an eminent benefactor. . . . All we ask is that you let others do their part and that you not meddle with the rector's authority. After all, this arrangement would lighten your burden. . . ."

The chancery official ended up by making Don Bosco understand that, for the sake of peace, he should keep away from the Giaveno seminary for a while. "If that's how things stand," Don Bosco calmly but firmly replied, "I withdraw."

The following day, Canon Vogliotti went to Giaveno and notified Father [John] Grassino [4] that—as expected and planned—Don Bosco was definitely relinquishing the seminary's direction. The canon then sent for the cleric [Francis] Vaschetti [5] and so persuasively promised him an ecclesiastic patrimony and priestly ordination a year ahead of time that the cleric agreed to stay on. Though deeply attached to Don Bosco, Vaschetti was not particularly obliged to him. Then, too, he was anxious to do pastoral work and to get a permanent position in the diocese.

The cleric [Dominic] Ruffino, a native of Giaveno, came to know the details of the maneuvering which had been going on for over a year against Don Bosco and could not help exclaiming, "This is a betrayal!" Equally convinced, one of the older Oratory clerics wrote a very sharp letter to Vaschetti, who forwarded it to Don Bosco complainingly. Good father that he was, Don Bosco replied in pacifying words. To this day (1908), Vaschetti treasures this letter for his comfort and justification.

Meanwhile Don Bosco wrote to his own clerics at Giaveno to return to the Oratory, but Father Grassino, acting on instructions, urged them openly to side with him. [John] Boggero [6] and [Joseph] Bongiovanni [7] preferred to obey Don Bosco and promptly walked back to the Oratory since they had no money. Incidentally, both clerics had taught for two years without the least remuneration [from the chancery]. Don Bosco himself, satisfied that his great sacrifice had restored the seminary to a flourishing condition and had thus saved [8] it for the diocese, also with-

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 419. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 218f, 293, 409, 424, 427f, 539, 548, 591, 593. [Editor]
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 426, 466f, 492, 591, 593. [Editor]
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 181, 362, 540. [Editor]
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 425f. [Editor]

drew without any compensation. Still, in spite of this, a regular conspiracy of several years seemed to be formed against him. Every time he had a particularly talented, virtuous priest or cleric at the Oratory, someone would come with generous promises to lure him away from Don Bosco who had done so much to feed, house, and educate him and had shown him the love of a father. Such people may have had the best intentions, but they frequently stole those very ones in whom Don Bosco had put so much hope.

He harbored no grudge. Gratifyingly, we must add that all those who had even serious ideological or financial differences with Don Bosco still speak of him with deep gratitude, recalling how friendly he remained with them. In Father Vaschetti's own hearing and mine, Father Grassino declared that, after the Giaveno rift, Don Bosco repeatedly and affectionately told him he was welcome to board at the Oratory whenever he wished. Nor did he nurse ill feeling toward the chancery. Father Michael Rua testified under oath, as follows:

After Archbishop Fransoni's death, Don Bosco found that he had to resist demands that would have destroyed his work and to uphold rights granted him by the deceased archbishop and by the Pope himself. Aside from that, he was always respectful and submissive. There arose differences now and then concerning the desirability of having his young clerics reside at the diocesan seminary during their studies or of having them attend at least the liturgy lectures with the local clergy. Don Bosco never complained of such demands, but he did point out that after all he had raised those clerics on his own with great sacrifices, because of his urgent need of them, and that, furthermore, he could not afford their seminary fees. At the same time, he had his clerics attend the seminary as day students and he provided approved diocesan instructors for their training in sacred ceremonies. If such men were not available, he got other competent priests who were in good standing with the chancery. Thus he satisfied vicars or provicars general who had raised these objections. Matters went on thus until 1867, when Archbishop Alexander Riccardi was installed as Turin's new ordinary.

How did the Giaveno junior seminary fare during these years? Our above account is a faithful retelling of what our companion

Vaschetti—now Canon Vaschetti and vicar forane of Volpiano —revealed to us. What follows is likewise based on what he told us.

Father Grassino soon realized his blunder in depriving himself of Don Bosco's solid support. As for the cleric Vaschetti, he kept backing his rector with heroic loyalty, constantly reminding him of the vital principles which Don Bosco had instilled into them and selflessly shouldering additional responsibilities. Toward the end of 1863, however, tired of it all, he decided to leave. Canon Vogliotti tried to dissuade him with new promises and a handsome financial gift for his three years of service. He even exerted firm, though friendly, moral pressure upon the cleric, but he would not change his mind. He enrolled at the Convitto Ecclesiastico and for two years came every Sunday to the Oratory to teach the boys catechism and confer with Don Bosco.

As for Giaveno, the chancery now had the finances to support it as it had for the seminaries of Bra, Chieri, and Turin. Canon [Celestine] Fissore—the vicar general, cordially hated by the government because he was as firm as Archbishop Fransoni in upholding the Church's rights—had now been superseded by Canon [Joseph] Zappata, the vicar capitular. The government, soothed by the latter's conciliatory disposition, made a good-will gesture by returning to the chancery not only the majestic seminary building but its revenues as well. Consequently, many seminarians could be taken in gratis.

But money alone cannot make a seminary flourish. With nobody to check or caution him, Father Grassino kept spoiling things by his innate hotheadedness. He seemed completely to have forgotten Don Bosco and his teachings. Father John Turchi, a staff member of the seminary in 1863–64, was astounded to find nothing at all at Giaveno to recall Don Bosco's merits.

As enrollment kept declining year after year, in 1866 Father Grassino was forced to resign. As late as 1872, his successors were no luckier; seminarians continued to decrease until finally few more than a score were left. Understandably, all human institutions are to some extent subject to ups and downs. However, those which partake of the Church's life and keep a spark of her vivifying spirit rise up again before long. And so it was with the Giaveno junior seminary.

[Sometime in 1874], three years after his appointment as Archbishop of Turin, Lawrence Gastaldi sent for Father Vaschetti, formerly pastor of Volpiano, and asked him to recount the Giaveno seminary's past history: the reason for its first decline, Don Bosco's means to restore it, the conditions under which he had agreed to run it, and the motives which had forced his withdrawal. Father Vaschetti gave him an accurate report. The archbishop fully endorsed Don Bosco's course of action and then told Father Vaschetti that he positively wanted Don Bosco's educational methods reinstated in Giaveno.

Hearing such praise and knowing the disagreements which had already risen between the archbishop [9] and Don Bosco, Father Vaschetti ventured to ask: "Why is it that Your Excellency opposes Don Bosco?"

"I want to keep this treasure exclusively for our diocese," the archbishop answered. "Then, too, I am nettled by what he does to keep clerics for himself."

"It's not so, Your Excellency," Father Vaschetti answered. "I have just come from the Oratory. I have five boys from my own parish there, and they will soon enter the seminary."

On receiving this information about Giaveno, Archbishop Gastaldi moved to reform the seminary. His first step was to appoint an excellent priest as rector, Father Joseph Aniceto of Susa, who took over in September 1875. He had been trained at the Little House of Divine Providence, and—as arranged by its superior, Canon Louis Anglesio—had attended secondary school courses at the Oratory with other schoolmates of his.[10] In 1857, at the official closing of the school year, Don Bosco, in awarding Aniceto the first prize, had told him, "Remember, the Lord has great plans for you." Besides being a talented educator, Father Aniceto had gained considerable experience as an assistant and then as a teacher at the Giaveno seminary.

Following Don Bosco's principles, Archbishop Gastaldi gave the rector complete authority within the seminary. At the archbishop's order, Father Aniceto restored the Oratory's customary

[9] Canon Gastaldi—a close friend of Don Bosco—had been made bishop of Saluzzo in 1867. His appointment as archbishop of Turin in 1871 marked the beginning of a rift that lasted till his death on March 25, 1883. [Editor]

[10] *See* Vol. V, pp. 363f. [Editor]

spiritual direction and all its practices of piety, especially very frequent reception of Holy Communion. In a short time he was thus able to restore this junior seminary to a flourishing condition, to the diocese's great advantage. During the twenty-four years of his administration the pupils' yearly enrollment went beyond two hundred and fifty, so that he had to add new buildings and break ground for a magnificent chapel. Unbendingly firm in dismissing pupils of doubtful morality, he cultivated a very large number of priestly vocations. Monsignor Pechenino, who visited the seminary for many years as superintendent of studies, used to say that Giaveno made him feel as though he were at the Oratory. The same feeling was experienced by the Salesian professors, Father Celestine Durando and Father John Baptist Francesia,[11] who were often asked to conduct the students' examinations.

Don Bosco rejoiced in the good work that was being done and would be done at Giaveno by Father Aniceto and his successors, thanks to the initial thrust he himself had given to that seminary. He could indeed make his own, as he had already done on so many other occasions, St. Paul's words, "But what of it? Provided only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is being proclaimed. In this I rejoice, yes, and I shall rejoice." [Phil. 1, 18]

[11] Francesia (1838–1930) began attending the Valdocco Festive Oratory when he was about twelve; two years later he became a resident student. In 1859 he was among the sixteen pupils who joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Society. He was also the first Salesian to earn academic degrees at the University of Turin. Ordained a priest in 1862, he soon filled important administrative positions, distinguishing himself for his fatherly kindness. He was also a prolific writer and a distinguished Latin and Italian scholar. His last forty years were spent at the Oratory where he died January 17, 1930. For further details *see* Index of Vol. VI. [Editor]

CHAPTER 16

An Unforeseen Controversy

ALREADY in 1861, foreseeing his withdrawal from the Giaveno junior seminary, Don Bosco had eagerly looked forward to providing a new outlet for his zealous clerics through another boarding school somewhere in Piedmont. At just the right time the town authorities of Dogliani, in the diocese of Mondovì, invited him to take over their resident school. Our revered friend, Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi,[1] gave us a written report on how the offer came to be made:

When I was a young cleric in 1861 I took a little trip with Father Francis Reggio, pastor of Vigone. At Dogliani we were hosted by the wonderful Bruno family. At the time (it was the end of August) the Dogliani town council was considering reorganizing its elementary and resident secondary school, but was in a quandary as to what course to follow. Attorney Bruno—our host, a town council member—happened to mention these difficulties. "Call on Don Bosco," Father Reggio broke in, "and he will solve your problems." The council acted on this suggestion, and I was asked to mention the matter to Don Bosco. After a visit to the local shrine, I returned to the Oratory and gave him the message.

We now shift to the Bonetti chronicle:

Don Bosco welcomed this offer which also had the endorsement of Father Alphonse Drochi, pastor of SS. Cyriacus and Paul, and negotiations began. One evening, about the beginning of May 1862, Don Bosco told some clerics that he eagerly looked forward to taking over

[1] John Baptist Anfossi had entered the Oratory as an orphan at the age of thirteen, in December 1853. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 467f) In 1862 he became a Salesian and in 1864 was ordained a priest. Later, he joined the diocesan clergy, remaining always devoted to Don Bosco. [Editor]

the Dogliani boarding school and that, since the deal was practically closed, he was already thinking about its staff. "I pray a good deal," he told them, "and ask others to pray so as to know whom I should choose for such a mission. In picking personnel, I first think of one of you and jot his name down; then I pray and finally discuss the matter thoroughly with him. I do the same with another cleric and so on. But that is not all. Neither now nor in the future will I open a house without first coming to an agreement with the proper church authorities. I call on them or write. I will not commit myself [definitely] to any undertaking of that kind without their explicit consent."

This was and is a saint's policy for assuring himself of God's will. The Bonetti chronicle continues:

On the evening of May 26 [1862] Don Bosco warmly urged the boys to pray for his intentions inasmuch as he had grave problems. We are not sure of what they are. Perhaps the local bishop had raised difficulties in regard to the Dogliani school. While Don Bosco has already committed himself to the town council, he does not want to go against the bishop's wishes. Others think he is upset about the Giaveno situation. A few maintain he has problems with the management of *Letture Cattoliche*.[2]

[We shall now return to Anfossi's report:]

When the mayor of Dogliani urged Don Bosco to accept the management of the school, he replied, "On one condition: that Bishop Ghilardi give his approval. I shall call on him at once." The council members had to admire the prudence and reasonableness of his condition. Without delay Attorney Bruno made a dinner appointment, and soon after Don Bosco and I left for Mondovì. The bishop—a distinguished and learned admirer of Don Bosco—gave us a warm, hearty reception. I come now to the important matter—the purpose of our meeting. Don Bosco briefed the bishop on the Dogliani town council's plan and on his intention to accept the offer in order to work for youth, especially by fostering priestly vocations. The bishop—quite familiar with the Oratory inasmuch as he never failed to visit when he came to Turin—readily conceded that Don Bosco would be very

[2] We are omitting minute details of the negotiations between Don Bosco and the town council. [Editor]

successful in Dogliani. "But, my dear Don Bosco," he continued, "if you take over that school, my junior seminary will be deserted in a few years! Why not take over my seminaries instead? I'd gladly entrust them to you. Please, stay away from Dogliani." Don Bosco respectfully suggested that the seminary would not suffer in the least but rather would benefit, but he could not convince the bishop. The result was that Don Bosco had to call off the almost completed negotiations. I notified Attorney Bruno of this in Don Bosco's name. I do not know if Don Bosco himself wrote. We see how submissive Don Bosco was not only to the orders, but also to the wishes of bishops, even at his own loss. I was a witness to all this.

Canon John Baptist Anfossi

Indeed Don Bosco was always most cooperative and respectful toward church authorities. If he passed through a residential see, after visiting the Blessed Sacrament, he would promptly call on the bishop and, before leaving, humbly kneel and request a blessing on himself and his dear ones.

Such humble, loving deference, however, failed to clear up the disagreements which for some time now had distressed him; that was why he had asked his boys to pray for him on May 26. The bone of contention was *Letture Cattoliche* which Don Bosco was determined to have printed in his own Oratory shop. Some background is necessary for the understanding of this problem.

From its very start *Letture Cattoliche* had been a great success, having an annual subscription of over nine thousand from 1853 through 1862. It was Don Bosco's brainchild,[3] and he regarded it as something entirely his own. However, when Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea became partner and co-founder [in 1852][4] Don Bosco had to give him a voice in the management as befitted his episcopal dignity, apostolate, learning, interest, and long-standing friendship. On his part, Bishop Moreno considered himself co-founder and co-owner, and justly so, also because of the prestige he gave *Letture Cattoliche* and because of the considerable number of subscribers in his diocese. . . . Actual business administration had been entrusted to Canon Francis Valinotti[5]

[3] *See* Vol. IV, p. 364. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 367ff. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 368. [Editor]

[who had an office in Turin]. He represented the bishop and heartily supported him. . . .

Because of his position, Canon Valinotti came to be regarded as a third co-founder and co-owner and his office soon became the *de facto* focal point of management. He himself began to act as his own master and to believe he actually was. . . . It was to his office that both the bishop and Don Bosco had to forward all financial matters. On this point, the bishop was entirely in the dark since he unreservedly trusted his representative and never made inquiries. Don Bosco, however, who bore the entire editorial burden, often inquired in a friendly way, only to be told that expenses considerably exceeded income. In deference to the bishop lest he break a long-standing friendship, Don Bosco accepted or seemed to accept such reports, abhorring contentions which could harm his cherished publication. Furthermore, he planned to gain complete ownership and perpetuate the publication by giving it in legacy to the Salesian Congregation. Since his printshop was ready, he was now determined to have *Letture Cattoliche* printed at the Oratory. Obviously it was the thing to do. By word and writing he had tried to convince the bishop of the necessity [and advantages] of such a solution which would give his boys steady work and cut down expenses.

At first the bishop agreed, but, at the beginning of May, Canon Angelo Pinoli, provicar, writing for his bishop, took Don Bosco to task for this innovation which he had no right to initiate since he was not the exclusive owner of *Letture Cattoliche.* What had made the bishop change his mind? It may have been someone who had an interest in the status quo. Conjectures ran wild. Was this to be seen as probably Don Bosco's first step in shaking off a merely tolerated yoke? What if Paravia Press, which would lose this order, should demand immediate payment of outstanding debts? What if assets and liabilities had to be declared at a time when various circumstances made an accounting impossible? For these reasons it was expedient to contend that Don Bosco had disregarded the bishop's rights as co-owner, that Don Bosco's venture would have failed without his support, and that the change of printshop might hurt the publication.

Such were the arguments of Canon Pinoli's letter. Since the

canon was Don Bosco's personal friend, he had probably been forced to write it at somebody else's dictation. As Father Valinotti had taken it upon himself to forward the letter to Don Bosco, the reply was addressed to him:

Turin, May 10, 1862

Dear Father:

You cannot imagine how hurt I was by the letter you sent me, both in its contents and in its source. Yesterday I made several attempts to answer but was too upset. I am doing it now, after offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and putting everything into God's hands. I shall simply state how things really stand.

It never entered my mind that *Letture Cattoliche* was somebody else's property. I planned the publication, I saw to its printing, and I always took care of it. I wrote or edited every issue and always assumed responsibility for its contents. To increase its circulation I made long trips, wrote circulars, and asked others to do the same. Public opinion, as well as the Holy Father himself in three letters of his, considers me as the founder of *Letture Cattoliche.*

While retaining my full authority, which was not always fully respected, I always delegated material chores of mailing and accounting to others. Of late, in view of constant printing delays, I gave the job to Ferrando Press; then, seeing I had no guaranteed production schedule, I decided to set up my own printshop and match Paravia's specifications for *Letture Cattoliche* pamphlets. Since all the copy is ready and printing operations have already started for this year's issues, I intend to continue the printing here at the Oratory, in order to provide work for our needy boys.

You yourself, dear Father, told me on more than one occasion, "Hurry up, Don Bosco, and set up a printshop so we can get out of this scrape."

I do not believe that Bishop Moreno authorized Canon Pinoli's letter, for on several occasions the bishop himself, both at Ivrea and Turin, told me, and I quote: "We must not look for any profit from *Letture Cattoliche.* Should there be any, it will come in handy for the Oratory which certainly can use it." Now, what kind of profit would there be in this publication if, after ten years' hard toil without compensation, I should even be deprived of the authority to provide work for my boys? To this day no one ever disputed my ownership of a project which I began myself and kept up despite so much work and expense.

You may say there are debts to pay. Let's pay them. After all, I have worked ten years without one *soldo* of salary. And I don't want any now. Money has never entered my mind in projects connected with God's glory.

I am very much afraid that Satan has a hand in this affair and that, by raising a conflict of interests, he may succeed in causing a rift between us; he will spoil—to the regret of many of us—the little good which selflessly may be done for the welfare of souls.

I write this with my mind still very much in turmoil over Canon Pinoli's unfortunate letter. If I have used seemingly biting terms, I want you to know it is unintentional. Let me assure you that I have written nothing more than what I feel redounds to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

Kindly acquaint Canon Pinoli, and, if you see fit, Bishop Moreno himself, of this letter's contents. I believe that both will readily appreciate the logic of my decision.

Please consider me always among those who love you in the Lord.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

After writing this letter, Don Bosco went ahead with his plans and had his boys typeset and print *Letture Cattoliche.*

The first issue was the one of July [1862]: *Theophilus or the Young Hermit.* . . . Then came the August, September, and October issues, respectively entitled *The Pontificate of St. Felix I and St. Eutichian, Popes and Martyrs,* . . . *The Power of Darkness,* . . . and *Two Young Orphan Girls.* . . .

While his young printers eagerly prepared these booklets, Don Bosco strove to smooth troubled waters by deliberately refraining from asking questions about bookkeeping, although he feared a deficit through ineptitude or negligence. Father Valinotti continued unbothered in his bookkeeping, the sole difference being that the Oratory printshop had now replaced Paravia for orders and payments, although Don Bosco had arranged for other orders to his former printer.

Things kept on this way for another two years . . . but Don Bosco's friendship with Bishop Moreno had meantime been badly shaken.

CHAPTER 17

First Formal Religious Profession

DON Bosco's days—even troublesome ones—were always marked by singular, pleasant occurrences. On November 9, 1861, pressed by financial needs, he had sold a piece of land [1] adjoining the Oratory to a man named James Berlaita . . . who shortly afterward turned it into a cabbage field. His crop seemed very promising until a wave of caterpillars threatened to destroy it. Greatly upset, the gardener ran to Don Bosco and begged him to go over and read the ritual against such a scourge. Don Bosco obliged and then lingered a while to chat with the man. Meanwhile strange things were happening. Caterpillars were wriggling out of the cabbages and streaming toward a small door in the Oratory wall, across from which was a long ditch full of running water, spanned by a plank. The caterpillars crossed the ditch and crawled toward the chapel. Then they inched up the outside wall of the St. Aloysius side altar, swarmed through the open window above the altar, and finally settled in a black mass on the cornice and sidewalls, where they died and had to be swept away. People were astounded by this inexplicable occurrence, as Berlaita's cabbage patch was completely rid of caterpillars. Father Rua asserted the truth of this to us.

Father John Garino told us the following incident:

In 1862 I was being daily consumed by a relentless fever so that I could no longer attend to my philosophy studies. When Don Bosco found out, he gave me pills in a little box, telling me to take three every morning and to say three Hail Marys per pill. I complied; the fever soon disappeared completely. I must add that to this day (May 6, 1888) I have never again run a temperature.

[1] We are omitting a few irrelevant real estate details. [Editor]

In turn, the Bonetti chronicle records the experience of a prominent Turinese lady, as she herself described it:

One day, after repeated requests, Don Bosco came to dinner. I wanted to ask him to accept a boy into the Oratory but hesitated for fear that, to avoid such a bother, he might never again visit us. As I was mulling this over, Don Bosco abruptly said to me, "As to that boy (*he mentioned his name*), bring him to the Oratory at the end of the month." I was dumbfounded. He had read my mind.

After narrating this episode, the Bonetti chronicle gives us summaries of a few of Don Bosco's talks to the boys during May and also records noteworthy incidents that occurred that month at the Oratory:

May 2 [1862]. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco said that he wished to stress three things: cheerfulness, work, and piety. He kept repeating St. Philip Neri's maxim to boys: "Run, jump, have all the fun you want at the right time, but, for heaven's sake, do not commit sin."

Sunday, May 4. While telling his boys what he expected of them during Mary's month, he suddenly changed theme. "A thought just struck me," he stated, "and I can't keep it from you. Will someone die here this month? . . . We shall see!" He then resumed his previous topic. Such an unusual digression left us all wondering.

May 6. No one can adequately tell how much Don Bosco loves the Holy See and the Pope. Today he remarked that Pius IX, though so busy with matters of world concern, often thinks lovingly of his little Oratory boys in a corner of Turin and sends them his apostolic blessing as a token of heavenly favors. Then he went on to urge us to love the Pope not so much as Pius IX, but as the one appointed by Jesus Christ to rule His Church. He ended, "I would like every Oratory boy everywhere to be a fearless defender of Pius IX."

Some days later, speaking to his Salesians, he said, "Daily the Catholic Church loses material resources for doing good, the support of governments, and many souls through the perfidy of her enemies. It is high time that we close ranks ever more around Pius IX and, if necessary, fight with him unto death. Fools may say that some of Pius IX's ideas are nought but stubborn notions. Ignore that! It's far better to go to heaven with Pius IX and his stubborn notions than to land in hell with all the false glamor of this world."

May 8. This evening, after the "Good Night," Don Bosco called to his room those priests, clerics, and boys who were willing to remain at the Oratory and join the Salesian Congregation. After describing how noble, meritorious, and divine was the mission of saving souls and how much Our Lord loved youngsters, he urged us to labor tirelessly for youth, pointing out that the harvest was most abundant and that Divine Providence would extraordinarily bless our efforts. He then suggested that, as a test, we bind ourselves closer to Our Divine Savior and promise to observe the rules by vowing poverty, chastity, and obedience for three years.

We had been preparing for this great step for an entire year. Since no one had any objection, we decided to pronounce our vows the following Wednesday.

Thus the Blessed Virgin had prepared Don Bosco's greatest consolation in the month sacred to Her. On this occasion, he too would fulfill his boyhood vow to become a religious. May 14, 1862 was a red-letter day! The Chapter minutes have this entry:

[Today] the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales were called together by their superior. Most of them confirmed their allegiance to the fledgling [Salesian] Society by formally pronouncing triennial vows. The ceremony took place as follows:

Wearing a surplice, Don Bosco, our superior, asked us to kneel; then, kneeling himself, he began to recite the *Veni, Creator* alternately with us, concluding with the proper versicles and prayer. There followed Our Lady's Litany and a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria,* versicles, and a prayer in honor of St. Francis de Sales. These prayers over, all the members loudly and clearly pronounced their vows together according to the formulary *Acknowledging the instability of my will . . .* and signed their names in a special register, as follows: Father Victor Alasonatti, Father Michael Rua, Father Angelo Savio, Father Joseph Rocchietti, [Deacon] John Cagliero, [Deacon] John Baptist Francesia, Dominic Ruffino; the clerics Celestine Durando, John Baptist Anfossi, John Boggero, John Bonetti, Charles Ghivarello, Francis Cerruti, Louis Chiapale, Joseph Bongiovanni, Joseph Lazzero, Francis Provera, John Garino, Louis Jarach, Paul Albera; and the lay members Chevalier Frederick Oreglia of Santo Stefano and Joseph Gaia.

John Bonetti's chronicle thus records the event:

May 14 [1862]. This evening, for the first time, after long yearning, those members of the newly-founded Society [of St. Francis de Sales] who had completed their novitiate year, and felt called to this life, formally pronounced their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. How wonderful to describe the humble circumstances of this memorable ceremony! There we were, squeezed into a small room, without even any benches to sit on, most of us in the prime of life: students of rhetoric, philosophy, theology; a few in sacred orders; the lay members perhaps looking forward to a happy family life. A pleasurable future lay before us all, the world beckoning to us with its promises and allurements. But in front of us stood a small table with two lighted candles and a crucifix, as if readied for the sacrifice of our hearts, of our very lives. Yes, Jesus was calling us to Himself with His heavenly promises. We were a small flock, nothing in the world's eyes, unnoticed even by most of the people of the Oratory. Nevertheless these lowly beginnings did not dishearten us; rather, they buoyed us up, for we were all aware that, as the Apostle Paul had written, God chooses the weak things of the world to overcome the strong, the foolish to confound the wise, the base and despicable and that which is nought to destroy the things that are. [Cf. 1 Cor. 1, 28]

Twenty-two of us, besides Don Bosco, who was kneeling by the table on which the crucifix stood, took vows as prescribed by our rules, repeating the formulary, phrase by phrase, as Father Rua read it.

Afterward, Don Bosco alone stood up and gave us a few comforting words of encouragement. Among other things, he said:

"I do not intend these vows to impose upon you any other obligation than that of continuing to keep the house rules as you have been doing. I have very much at heart that none of you fall prey to any fear or worry. Should this happen, come to me and lay bare your heart, your doubts, your problems. I say this because conceivably the devil, seeing the good work you can do within this Society, might well try to lure you away from where God wants you to be. If you promptly come to me, I can study the problem, restore your peace of mind, and even free you from your vows should God's will and the good of souls so require.

"One may wonder, *Did Don Bosco make those vows too?* Well, as you were making your vows before me, I too was making them in perpetuity before this crucifix. I offered myself in sacrifice to the Lord, ready to bear anything for His greater glory and the welfare of souls, particularly the souls of the young. May the Lord help us to be faithful to our vows."

We then arose and Don Bosco went on, "My dear sons, we live in

troubled times. It may almost seem foolhardy to try setting up a new religious community in this unhappy hour when the world and hell itself are jointly doing their utmost to destroy existing orders. But never mind. I have sound reasons—not mere probable ones—that it is God's will that our Society be born and grow. In the past, many attempts were made to foil it, but they failed totally. Not only that, but those few who more obstinately opposed it paid dearly for their trouble. Not very long ago a prominent person—whom for various reasons I shall not identify—strongly opposed our Society, prompted perhaps by zeal. He fell seriously ill and died within a few days.

"Were I to tell you of the many instances of heavenly protection since the Oratory's start, I would not finish this evening. Everything leads us to believe that God is with us. Therefore, knowing that we are doing God's holy will, we can confidently go ahead with our work.

"Yet these are not the reasons which make me entertain high hopes for our Society. There are more important ones, the greatest being the sole goal we have set for ourselves—God's greater glory and the good of souls. Who knows but that the Lord may wish to use this Society to achieve much good in His Church! Twenty-five or thirty years from now, if the Lord continues to help us as He has done so far, our Society may count a thousand members in different countries engaged in such tasks as catechizing the poor, sheltering homeless boys, teaching, and writing and spreading good books—all united in supporting, like true Christians, the Roman Pontiff and all sacred ministers. How much good will be accomplished!

"Pius IX believes us to be fully ready for our task. Well, we are so tonight. Let us fight with him for the cause of the Church, which is God's cause. Let us take courage and work with all our hearts. God is a generous master and will amply reward us. Eternity is long enough for us to rest."

We noticed how unspeakably happy Don Bosco was this evening. He seemed utterly unable to part from us, remarking that he would love to spend the whole night in pious conversation. He lingered longer to speak charmingly of the Oratory's early beginnings and of the tragic fate of some people who wanted to prevent him from gathering youngsters together.

May 23. After prayers, Don Bosco announced that one of our companions, Louis Marchisio, twenty-two, of Calliano [Asti], had died at home on the 19th. Thus Mary's month did not go by without the passing of one of our companions, as Don Bosco had strangely mused at the "Good Night" [on May 4].

Had he perhaps received a special enlightenment? Circumstances

seem to so indicate. This companion of ours was already sick when he got home.[2] Don Bosco told us of a conversation he had had with him some time before. It revealed both the young man's resignation and Don Bosco's ingenuity in instilling a love of heaven in the hearts of the sick so that they might depart from this life with a longing for eternal happiness. Don Bosco reconstructed the conversation as follows:

"Marchisio, will you do an errand for me once you're in heaven?"

"Gladly, if I can," Marchisio answered.

"Well then, as soon as you are there, please greet the Blessed Virgin for me and for all the Oratory boys."

"Surely. What else?"

"Tell Her to shower blessings upon the Oratory."

"I shall."

"Then come back sometime to tell us of the Oratory boys who are already there."

"Will the Lord let me return?"

"Ask Him. If He does, well and good! If not, you'll have to be satisfied to watch us and pray for us that we may all soon join you!"

Don Bosco knew how to solace his listeners. Marchisio's pastor, who notified us by mail of this death, told us that periodically he had called on the youth not so much to edify him, as to be edified by him. To his last breath, he was very patient and intensely devoted to the Blessed Virgin. This is how youngsters learn to die if they have been fortunate enough to live with Don Bosco.

The Ruffino chronicle has more to say on this point:

Marchisio's death was marked by one of Don Bosco's usual predictions. One evening at the beginning of March, while sitting in the dining room amid a crowd of boys, Don Bosco remarked that one of them would be called into eternity toward the end of May. "Who is it?" they all asked. Don Bosco declined to say. At this, they pestered him to write his name on a piece of paper and put it in a sealed envelope, to be opened only at the appointed time. Father Rua concurred with the boys' request and so Don Bosco obliged. He wrote the name, sealed it in an envelope, and handed it to Ferdinand Imoda, a man who was known to keep a secret. Not long afterward, Marchisio fell sick. When Fornasio [3] and Maestro [4] died in extraordinary circumstances in April,

[2] *See* p. 79. [Editor]
[3] *See* pp. 78f. [Editor]
[4] *See* pp. 81f. [Editor]

the envelope was not opened, but as soon as news came of Marchisio's death, the boys rushed to Imoda, clamoring that he read the mysterious note. He did so in Father Rua's presence. The piece of paper, in Don Bosco's own hand, carried but one word—Marchisio.

We now return to the Bonetti chronicle:

May 24. At the "Good Night," Don Bosco very joyfully told us of some miraculous events connected with a painting of Mary near Spoleto.[5]

May 25. Don Bosco's reputation for learning and holiness draws many penitents even from faraway places. Today four people came to the sacristy to make their confessions to Don Bosco, each from a different town: Chieri, Fossano, Verzuolo, and Mondovì.

May 26. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco urged us to beg Our Lady tomorrow to help us always in this life but especially at the hour of our death. He warmly exhorted us to close Mary's month in a holy manner. He particularly addressed himself to those few who have as yet been uncooperative, urging them to show good will. He asked us to offer Mary all our chapel devotions tomorrow, that She may soften the hearts of these few stubborn individuals, make them see the light, and sincerely turn to God. He then promised that on the last or second last day of the month he would have something pleasant to tell us.

May 29. Feast of the Ascension. This morning Don Bosco, continuing his talks on church history, spoke of the vestal virgins of Roman times and dwelt at length on the virtue of purity. His words are always inspiring, his sermons always absorbing, but when he speaks of this queen of virtues, he no longer speaks like a man, but like an angel. I would like to jot down some of the things he said, but I am afraid to spoil the beauty and power of his expressions. I'd rather not do it. Suffice it to say that not only does he bear the name of the disciple beloved of Jesus, but he also shares his virginal purity. No wonder he can speak so beautifully of this precious virtue. For the past seven years I have been privileged to be one of his spiritual sons, to live with him, and to listen to his heaven-inspired words. I have often heard him preach on this topic and must say that each time the power of his words more and more inspired me to make any and every sacrifice for the sake of so inestimable a treasure. I am not alone in this. All who have heard him testify to this.

[5] We are omitting a detailed description of this event, which Don Bosco described in a booklet entitled *Le Meraviglie della Madre di Dio*. [Editor]

As they filed out of church, many clustered together, remarking with me and others. "What a wonderful sermon! I could listen to Don Bosco day and night! If only God would grant me the grace one day, as a priest, to inspire young and old with the love of this beautiful virtue."

CHAPTER 18

A Dream: The Two Columns

ON May 26 [1862] Don Bosco had promised the boys that he would tell them something pleasant on the last or second last day of the month, and so at the "Good Night" on May 30 he narrated this parable, or allegory, as he chose to call it:

A few nights ago I had a dream. True, dreams are nothing but dreams, but still I'll tell it to you for your spiritual benefit, just as I would tell you even my sins—only I'm afraid I'd send you scurrying away before the roof fell in. Try to picture yourselves with me on the seashore, or, better still, on an outlying cliff with no other land in sight. The vast expanse of water is covered with a formidable array of ships in battle formation, prows fitted with sharp, spearlike beaks capable of breaking through any defense. All are heavily armed with cannons, incendiary bombs, and firearms of all sorts—even books—and are heading toward one stately ship, mightier than them all. As they close in, they try to ram it, set it afire, and cripple it as much as possible.

This stately vessel is shielded by a flotilla escort. Winds and waves are with the enemy. In the midst of this endless sea, two solid columns, a short distance apart, soar high into the sky: one is surmounted by a statue of the Immaculate Virgin at whose feet a large inscription reads: *Auxilium Christianorum* [Help of Christians]; the other, far loftier and sturdier, supports a Host of proportionate size and bears beneath it the inscription *Salus credentium* [Salvation of believers].

The flagship commander—the Roman Pontiff—seeing the enemy's fury and his auxiliary ships' very grave predicament, summons his captains to a conference. However, as they discuss their strategy, a furious storm breaks out and they must return to their ships.

When the storm abates, the Pope again summons his captains as the flagship keeps on its course. But the storm rages again. Standing at the helm, the Pope strains every muscle to steer his ship between the two

columns from whose summits hang many anchors and strong hooks linked to chains.

The entire enemy fleet closes in to intercept and sink the flagship at all costs. They bombard it with everything they have: books and pamphlets, incendiary bombs, firearms, cannons. The battle rages ever more furious. Beaked prows ram the flagship again and again, but to no avail, as, unscathed and undaunted, it keeps on its course. At times a formidable ram splinters a gaping hole into its hull, but, immediately, a breeze from the two columns instantly seals the gash.

Meanwhile, enemy cannons blow up, firearms and beaks fall to pieces, ships crack up and sink to the bottom. In blind fury the enemy takes to hand-to-hand combat, cursing and blaspheming. Suddenly the Pope falls, seriously wounded. He is instantly helped up but, struck down a second time, dies. A shout of victory rises from the enemy and wild rejoicing sweeps their ships. But no sooner is the Pope dead than another takes his place. The captains of the auxiliary ships elected him so quickly that the news of the Pope's death coincides with that of his successor's election. The enemy's self-assurance wanes.

Breaking through all resistance, the new Pope steers his ship safely between the two columns and moors it to the two columns; first, to the one surmounted by the Host, and then to the other, topped by the statue of the Virgin. At this point, something unexpected happens. The enemy ships panic and disperse, colliding with and scuttling each other.

Some auxiliary ships which had gallantly fought alongside their flagship are the first to tie up at the two columns. Many others, which had fearfully kept far away from the fight, stand still, cautiously waiting until the wrecked enemy ships vanish under the waves. Then, they too head for the two columns, tie up at the swinging hooks, and ride safe and tranquil beside their flagship. A great calm now covers the sea.

"And so," Don Bosco at this point asked Father Rua, "what do you make of this?"

"I think," he answered, "that the flagship symbolizes the Church commanded by the Pope; the ships represent mankind; the sea is an image of the world. The flagship's defenders are the laity loyal to the Church; the attackers are her enemies who strive with every weapon to destroy her. The two columns, I'd say, symbolize devotion to Mary and the Blessed Sacrament."

Father Rua did not mention the Pope who fell and died. Don Bosco, too, kept silent on this point, simply adding: "Very well, Father, except for one thing: the enemy ships symbolize persecutions. Very grave trials await the Church. What we suffered so far is almost nothing

compared to what is going to happen. The enemies of the Church are symbolized by the ships which strive their utmost to sink the flagship. Only two things can save us in such a grave hour: devotion to Mary and frequent Communion. Let's do our very best to use these two means and have others use them everywhere. Good night!"

This dream caused the boys no end of wonderment, especially regarding the two popes, but Don Bosco volunteered no further information.

The clerics [John] Boggero, [Secundus] Merlone, and [Dominic] Ruffino, and a layman, Caesar Chiala,[1] wrote down this dream. We still have their manuscripts; two were written on May 31 and two much later. All four narratives agree perfectly except for the omission of some details. We must, nevertheless, remark that in this and similar instances flaws were unavoidable, even though Don Bosco's narration was taken down immediately and as accurately as possible. A talk lasting a half hour or, at times, a whole hour naturally had to be summarized. Some phrase may have gone by unheard or forgotten. Furthermore, as mental fatigue set in, doubts might arise concerning the sequence of events. In such cases, rather than hazard an amplification, the writers preferred to omit what they were not certain of. This of course increased the obscurity of a matter unclear of itself, especially if it concerned the future. Hence, endless arguments and conflicting explanations, as was the case in the dream or parable just described. Some claimed that the popes who successively commanded the flagship were three, not two. This was the opinion of Canon John Maria Bourlot, former pastor of Cambiano (Torino), who in 1862, as a philosophy student, was present at Don Bosco's narration of the dream. In 1886, he visited the Oratory. At dinner, reminiscing with Don Bosco about the old days, he began to narrate the dream of the two columns, stating unequivocally that *two* popes had fallen. He explained that, when the first was struck down, the captains of the other ships exclaimed, "Let's hurry! We can quickly replace him"; whereas when they gathered a second time they did not say that.

[1] As a young boy, Chiala had been among the first to attend the festive oratory at Valdocco. At this time [1862] he was a twenty-five-year-old postal clerk. He became a Salesian in 1873 and was ordained a priest the following year. He died in 1876. For other details *see* Vol. V, p. 521. [Editor]

While Canon Bourlot was speaking, the author of these *Memoirs* was talking with the one next to him at the table. Noticing this, Don Bosco said to him, "Listen carefully to what Father Bourlot is saying."

When he replied that he was well acquainted with the matter, thanks to the manuscripts in his possession, and that he believed there had been two popes—no more—on the flagship, Don Bosco rejoined, "You know nothing at all!"

On another visit to the Oratory in 1907, Father Bourlot gave another proof of his excellent memory. Forty-eight years after he had first heard that dream he repeated it in its entirety, again maintaining that there had been *three* popes in all and recalling our former argument on his assertion and Don Bosco's statement.

In view of the above, which of the two versions is correct? Events may still resolve the doubt. We shall conclude by saying that Caesar Chiala—as he himself told us—and the three above-mentioned clerics took this dream as a genuine vision and prophecy, even though Don Bosco in telling it seemed to have no other purpose than spurring the boys to pray for the Church and the Pope and fostering their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Immaculate.

Indeed, there was need of that. A fierce war was being waged against the Holy See, and it was imperative that loyal clergymen rally to defend papal rights menaced and attacked even by some unworthy priests. One of these was Father Charles Passaglia, a Jesuit. Intellectual pride and disappointment in not obtaining certain desired church positions had pushed him into the Roman Liberal Party and compelled his superiors to dismiss him from the order. Invited to Turin by Cavour, he had, among other things, joined him in planning a strategy to be carried out at the conclave to be convened at Pius IX's death. He then returned to Rome and unsuccessfully sought to bribe several prelates into persuading the Pope to give up his rights. Toward the middle of 1861 he issued from Florence an appeal to bishops entitled *Pro causa Italica,* to imbue them with his principles concerning papal temporal power. Eventually he discarded his clerical garb and returned to Turin to lead the opposition. There he gained the chair of moral philosophy at the Royal University and founded the newspaper *Il Mediatore* to dupe liberal or unsuspecting priests into

believing that they could serve both the Church and the revolution. Finally, he published a manifesto urging priests to sign a petition to the Pope threatening schism if he did not relinquish his temporal power.

Meanwhile, a Turin-based group of apostates, financed and abetted by the government, was hard at work with the support of the local civil authorities. Swarming over all Italy, clerical and lay agents managed to obtain several hundred signatures for that petition through violence, threats, blackmail, promises and bribes. Their official claim ran as high as 1,943 signatures, but many priests denied having ever signed it, and other signatures were proved to be counterfeits. Many other priests claimed that they had been deceived; others recanted when apprised of ecclesiastical penalties.

In several cities, too, there sprouted schismatic and liberal associations of renegade priests picked here and there from the depths of human degradation. To top matters, on December 21, 1861, Bishop Michael Caputo of Ariano was elected honorary president of these federated associations and accepted the post. As head chaplain to Garibaldi's troops, he was the only rebel bishop. There was reason enough to fear that he might head a much vaunted National Church with Mass in the vernacular and with doctrines savoring of Gnosticism and Protestantism. But death claimed him, unrepentant, in Naples on September 6, 1862.

When discussing defections of prominent ecclesiastics or other public scandals with his co-workers, Don Bosco would exclaim, "Don't be surprised at anything. People and waywardness go hand in hand. The Church has nothing to fear because, even if all were to conspire to overthrow her, the Holy Spirit would still uphold her."

However, he continued his efforts to contact these renegades in the hope of planting the seed of repentance into their hearts. During May [1862] he strove to reach two priests and one layman. One responded immediately; the other two repented on their deathbeds. Certainly, his prayers and those of his boys contributed to their eternal salvation. One of these priests was Father Passaglia, about whom the Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

In May [1862] a vigorous campaign was waged to induce the clergy to rebel. One day, Mr. Dini, a rhetoric professor, formerly a Protestant and now a fervent Catholic, spoke of Don Bosco to the notorious Father Passaglia. The latter, expressing himself in his usual bombast, remarked, "Don Bosco has all the charisms," adding that he would call on him, but not just then, because he feared to be won over. Told of this by Professor Dini, Don Bosco one day remarked to his clerics that Father Passaglia's case required an extraordinary stroke of grace, not human arguments, and that they had to pray for his conversion.

Nevertheless, since the soul of a priest who was giving such great scandal to the Church was now at stake, he acted toward Father Passaglia as he had toward Father Grignaschi [2] and others.[3] He sought to get in touch with him and managed to hold several discussions marked by exquisite prudence and charity. The unfortunate priest acknowledged that he was in the wrong, but Don Bosco realized that he would never bring himself to admit it publicly. Seeing how avidly he sought praise and demonstrations of respect, Don Bosco praised him generously, and deservedly, for his scholarly, renowned *Commentary on the Immaculate Conception* published in 1854. Likewise, whenever they chanced to meet in busy streets, he openly greeted him.

As a deputy to Parliament, Father Passaglia submitted a bill which would have obliged the clergy to take an oath of allegiance to the king and to the Constitution and would also have required that they in no way oppose the unification of Italy, but the bill was defeated. A short time later he tempered his views and retired from politics. As a professor of moral philosophy, he no longer attacked the Church's rights. Instead, he authored and published several very valuable works, such as his rebuttal of Renan's [4] *Life of Jesus* and a treatise against divorce. Yet in spite of this and his torment of remorse, he could not bring himself to ask the Pope's pardon. Finally, in 1887, realizing that death was near, he recanted in full, devoutly received the sacraments, and departed from this life on March 12.

[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 69–72. [Editor]

[3] *See* Vol. V, pp. 89–94, 433f. [Editor]

[4] Joseph Ernest Renan (1823–1892), French philologist and historian. His *La Vie de Jésus* was published in 1863. [Editor]

The apostate layman was Nicomede Bianchi, of Modena, who had fled to Turin after conspiring against his sovereign and working with the revolutionaries. There he was given a city hall job and later became director of state archives.

"On the evening of May 12 the Oratory held a [repeat] performance of the Latin play *Minerval,*" [5] the chronicle tells us. "Invitations had been sent as usual, and we were sure that all prominent teachers in town would come. Unfortunately a steady, heavy rain made the day miserable." Nicomede Bianchi, too, had been invited. On the following day, Don Bosco received this note from him:

May 13, 1862

Liceo del Carmine
Office of the Principal

Very Reverend Father:

Yesterday's bad weather prevented me from attending your institute's performance to which I had been looking forward. I would, however, like to thank you most cordially for your gracious invitation.

Your devoted servant,
Nicomede Bianchi

For many years, Don Bosco had serious problems with this gentleman, who was most hostile to religious educational institutions. Personally, however, Don Bosco always treated him with that warm courtesy which won him so many friends even among his enemies. Nicomede Bianchi also authored an anticlerical history of Italian diplomacy in Europe entitled *Diplomazia Italiana in Europa.* With the same intent he wrote *Storia della Monarchia Piemontese,* which, however, he never finished. Toward the end of his life he changed his views, returned to the Church, and died a Christian death [in 1886]. Another convert led back to the Church by Don Bosco was Father Andrew Taranelli, who on this occasion issued and signed a formal retraction.[6]

[5] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 521, 573, 664f. [Editor]
[6] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 19

Filial Freedom

WE have seen how in past years Don Bosco occasionally absented himself from the Oratory to travel to various towns and villages of Piedmont and Lombardy.[1] Now these absences, always prompted by God's glory and the welfare of souls, will become more frequent and longer. Since people were anxious to go to confession to him wherever he went, he thought it advisable to petition the Holy See for authority to absolve from certain sins specified by the Sacred Penitentiary, although the Pope had orally granted him global faculties. His request was granted on May 3, 1862. As for faculties to absolve from sins reserved by bishops, many prelates had already granted him such permission on their own initiative or at his request; at times he was given such authorization as soon as he entered a diocese.

As Don Bosco planned his itinerary, preparations were afoot in Rome for the solemn canonization of the Japanese martyrs. In this connection, on June 4 [1862], the countess of Camburzano wrote to Don Bosco from Nice: "You have certainly made a great sacrifice, Father, in not going to Rome. Doubtlessly, your fervent prayers and those of your boys have contributed to the peace now reigning in the Holy City, and to this major triumph for the Church, so clearly evinced by this imposing assembly of bishops, priests, and faithful. We see this as a harbinger of the papacy's accomplished victory to which we prayerfully look forward."

The canonization took place on June 8 [1862] in the presence of forty-three cardinals, five patriarchs and primates, fifty-two archbishops, and one hundred and sixty-eight bishops. Not one Italian bishop was present because the government had forbidden

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 173f; Vol. IV, pp. 89ff, 122–26; Vol. VI, pp. 295–301, 429ff, 495ff, 606f. [Editor]

them to travel to Rome. But in letters and speeches they proclaimed their loyalty, reverence, and love for St. Peter's Chair as well as their deep regret at having been prevented from paying their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Don Bosco's joy over the celebrations at Rome and the Catholic Church's new splendors was enhanced by a more intimate and longed-for event equally dear to him. At the Oratory, on Ember Saturday, June 14 [1862], three deacons—Bartholomew Fusero, John Cagliero, and John Baptist Francesia—were ordained priests by Bishop Balma. After the ceremonies, Father Francesia read a thank-you address on behalf of all the religious and diocesan clerics who had been ordained—a task that always fell on the Salesians because of their literary reputation. The following day, Father Fusero said his first Mass in his home parish at Caramagna, while Father Francesia and Father Cagliero celebrated the Community and the high Mass respectively at the Oratory amid general rejoicing.

Dinner was followed by an outdoor assembly program in their honor with vocal and instrumental music, prose and poetry, and enthusiastic applause clearly manifesting the boys' love and respect for the newly ordained priests. The cleric Berruti, now [1909] bishop of Vigevano, opened his address with a quotation from Isaiah [and the Acts of the Apostles]: *Dedi te in lucem gentium . . . ut portes nomen Meum usque ad fines terrae.* [I set you as a light for the nations . . . that you may carry My name to the ends of the earth. Cf. Isa. 42, 6; Acts 9, 15.] It was a well-chosen passage, because Father Cagliero, marked by his zeal, had always excelled among his companions. Even as a young cleric, he had so won their affection and trust that after saying good night to Don Bosco, they would do the same to him.

During playtime after Vespers, Don Bosco was surrounded by a number of boys, clerics, and priests. We have elsewhere described [2] the interesting, familiar talks which took place on such occasions. The pupils always had a string of questions which flew thick and fast, utterly unrelated, just as they popped up in their minds. Occasionally, such questions had been mulled over a long time until a favorable opportunity came to voice them. This proves

[2] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 225–43. [Editor]

how well the boys and clerics remembered anything Don Bosco told them. Indeed, he had to be very careful not to be found at fault—something which his own conscience would anyway have vetoed. Their questions were all the more uninhibited as their freedom and confidence were favored by a most loving father.

After talking about the joyful celebration they had just enjoyed, the boys began to express their doubt concerning a prediction Don Bosco had made the year before. They were sure of the fulfillment of those made this year. Therefore they tossed in a question which they had already put to him on September 10, 1861.[3] The Ruffino chronicle records the whole conversation:

One of the boys asked Don Bosco, "Do you recall that on June 3 last year, while we were making the Exercise for a Happy Death, you said that one of us would never again be able to make it? [4] Well, did that come true? We didn't notice anything."

"As a matter of fact," Don Bosco replied, "that boy did not make the Exercise for a Happy Death. I haven't heard from him since. I'm waiting to see what will happen so that I can tell you all about it."

Then, in a lighter mood, he smilingly added, "And what of it, even if it did not come true?"

The boys laughed and the conversation shifted to some other topic, until an older youth broke in, "May I say something?"

"Speak up," Don Bosco replied.

"According to our limited knowledge, it would sometimes seem that our choice of vocation is not entirely free, or at least not entirely without some moral pressure. For example, your nephew Louis did not feel he was called to be a priest and so he was obliged to become a farmer. He had no other choice. It was the same with Rigamonti. He went home because he felt he was not called, and his parents told him, 'In that case, you'll be a farmer like us.' And you approved this decision as being right."

"Here at the Oratory," Don Bosco answered, "one's choice of vocation is entirely free. No one, for example, may don the clerical habit without the necessary qualifications. Donning the cassock is in itself already a sign of vocation. As for those who have no priestly vocation, considering the wretched times in which we live, I think they are far better off as farmers. About Louis Bosco I can say this: he was guided

[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 604f. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 575. [Editor]

in choosing his state of life. When he finished his rhetoric year and felt he was not called to the priesthood, he went home and was put to work on the farm. Even then he couldn't make up his mind as to what he preferred. As regards Rigamonti, let's not forget that his parents are farmers. If he had been a middle-class boy, it would have been ill-advised to make him do farm work. But if a farm boy is encouraged to study to see if he has a priestly vocation and then realizes that he is not called to that state, no harm is done him in sending him back to the farm. In fact, it's better for him."

The New Year's *strenna* [5] and its effects were still lingering in the boys' minds. As soon as Don Bosco finished speaking, another pupil asked him, "Won't you tell us anything more about the *strenna?* Do you really mean to keep it a close secret? I wish you'd tell me something."

"Whatever had to be said for God's greater glory has already been said," Don Bosco replied. "If I were free, I would say more, but since personal matters are at stake, it is better that I do not."

"But at least tell us if there is any connection between the globe of fire [6] and the *strenna.*"

"Who knows? . . . It is a fact, though, that Our Lady wants a clean house. That's why some twenty boys left the Oratory of their own accord after Christmas. That Batt . . . was really a pain for us. Unfortunately we could not send him away because he had been recommended by Count X . . . and furthermore would have been homeless. Hence, I could not decide to expel him, though he was a fake and hurt others by his bad example. Well, as things turned out, he left of his own accord. . . . Then too there are some who weren't in the least impressed last year by all that was said and done; public or private admonitions proved ineffective. And yet the *strenna* impelled them to put their conscience in order."

"Indeed, we can't deny," another boy remarked, "that God gives many favors to those who are accepted here."

"Yes," Don Bosco rejoined. "We must truly thank God for His mercy. You all knew young Delma! . . . He came here not so long ago. I had already been informed about his past conduct—which was just what one could expect of a Garibaldi volunteer. He roamed about, always on the alert to see if someone was spying on him, trying to size up someone he could trust, only to find out eventually that this was no place for him. He saw eyes upon him everywhere. At last he came to see me one evening.

[5] *See* Chapter 1. [Editor]
[6] *See* Chapter 5. [Editor]

" 'What's your name?' I asked.
" 'Delma.'
" 'What's your name?'
" 'Delma.'
" 'What's your name?'
" 'Delma.'
" 'And who am I?'
" 'Don Bosco!'
" 'Who am I?'
" 'Don Bosco!'
" 'Once again: who am I?'
" 'Don Bosco! Who else?'
" 'Now, do you want to know why I made you repeat the same answer three times? Because the Lord has three things to tell you: stop sinning; put your conscience in order; give yourself to God before it's too late. Good-bye.'

"Delma went to bed upset. He spent the whole next day brooding over my words. That evening he came to see me again quite beside himself. At first I thought he had quarreled with someone, but, weeping, he told me, 'I am in your hands, Don Bosco. Please help me save my soul. . . .' "

"But the good the Oratory does goes beyond it," another boy said. "What about *Letture Cattoliche* and Protestant conversions?"

"Yes, indeed," Don Bosco continued. "I wish I had more time to work for [the conversion of] Protestants. There is a movement toward Catholicism among them. The other day a leader of theirs sent me a note to tell me that, after being out of the true Church for eighteen years, he wanted to make his confession. This Saturday I have an appointment with another Protestant for the same purpose. Some twenty there are who want to return to the Catholic Church."

"In that case," one of the smaller boys piped up, "the Oratory will quite make a name for itself, once these things are known."

"Well," Don Bosco commented, "I've found that the more the Oratory remains unnoticed, the better off it is. Often, things which seemingly should redound to God's glory, once publicized, turn out otherwise."

Thus ended this familiar conversation which also revealed Don Bosco's efforts for the conversion of Protestants.[7]

[7] At this point, we are omitting the retraction of a fallen-away Catholic. [Editor]

CHAPTER 20

Don Bosco's Name Day

THE Six Sundays' devotion in honor of St. Aloysius [1] had fittingly prepared the Oratory boys for the novena and feast of that angelic youth, postponed to June 29 to space it somewhat from that of St. John the Baptist [Don Bosco's name day]. However, not wanting June 21 [the liturgical feast day] to go unnoticed, Don Bosco warmly exhorted the boys the night before to receive Holy Communion that day. Nearly all did. The afternoon was marked by the staging of a Latin play to which many distinguished literary men of Turin had been invited. Father Francesia had written the Latin invitation.[2]

On Sunday, the third day of the novena honoring St. Aloysius, another modest but cherished event took place—a [Salesian] Chapter meeting. The minutes read as follows:

On June 22 [1862], after the usual invocation to the Holy Spirit, Father John Bosco, director, proposed the admittance of two young students: Joseph Cagliero, son of Jacob, of Castelnuovo, and Louis Peracchio, son of John, of Vignale. Both candidates received favorable votes and were admitted to the [practice of the rules of the Salesian] Society.

The following evening, eve of the feast of St. John the Baptist, Don Bosco's name day was joyously celebrated. Attorney Charles Bianchetti thus described this happy yearly event in a speech he gave at a solemn commemoration of Don Bosco on June 24, 1903:

I can still see our revered, venerable Don Bosco! All the buildings

[1] A devotion practiced in Salesian schools. *See* Vol. III, pp. 13f. [Editor]
[2] Omitted in this edition. For similar ones *see* Vol. VI, pp. 664f. [Editor]

facing the playground were draped with inscriptions, flags, banners, streamers, lanterns, and tiny colored lights, all bespeaking our joy. Priests, resident students and artisans, benefactors, cooperators, friends, and numberless curious spectators jammed the playground amid universal rejoicing, happy bustling, and hushed whispers. Suddenly a blast of trumpets and trombones, cymbals and drums announced our honored guest's appearance. He was quite taken aback, almost abashed. Thunderous applause, cheers, and vivas greeted him as caps and handkerchiefs waved in the already seemingly charged air. Then came declamations in prose and poetry and vocal and instrumental music, each number punctuated by applause, and all the time Don Bosco stood there, unassuming, flustered, modestly and gracefully radiant, smiling, almost overwhelmed by such a demonstration. He did not know what to say. He just shook his head, looking left and right as in a dream, smiling greetings and thanks. At the end he said a few words, assured each and every one of us that the celebration had gone straight to his heart, and admitted that he did not know how to show his gratitude.

The following day, June 24, of all the gifts of pupils and benefactors the one he cherished most was the result of the final examinations of his Oratory clerics—Salesian and interdiocesan —at the Turin seminary; twenty-three were theology students and twenty-nine philosophy students. Ten scored *egregie;* nine, *per optime;* eighteen, *optime;* four, *fere optime;* seven, *bene.* Only one was rated "fair" and he was not a Salesian. As his personal tribute to Don Bosco, Father John Cagliero had composed his famous *Missa de Requie,* to this day a veritable jewel of faith and harmony.

We cannot adequately express how much such tokens of the gratitude and affection of his beloved boys moved Don Bosco. A proof of this is a letter he asked the cleric Louis Jarach to write for him to Severino Rostagno, a fine young man we have already mentioned,[3] who died at Pinerolo on March 12, 1863:

Turin, June 28, 1862

My dear brother in Christ,

Your welcome letter, coming as it did straight from your heart, greatly pleased Don Bosco. He dearly loves you, and nothing would

[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 445ff, 587ff, 615. [Editor]

delight him more than to write to you himself. I know that a "thank you" in his own hand would be a most cherished gift, but I am sure you understand that his countless chores, problems, and ailments make it impossible for him to do what both he and you would wish. Therefore he has asked me to tell you for him that his heart goes fully out to you and that he always prays that Mary will keep you as Her very own. As a loving father he asks too that you be ever a son to him, as when you fully shared our life here, and that you especially remember him in your Communions and prayers to Mary.

Another thing: since you cannot remain with us, Don Bosco would love to have you come and spend at least a few days at the Oratory. Feel free to stay as long as you wish.

Your friend,
Louis Jarach

Every night during the last few days of the St. Aloysius novena Don Bosco narrated an interesting story. The Bonetti chronicle has this entry under June 25 [1862]:

On one of my trips I sat beside the coachman who kept using Our Lord's holy name profanely. When I tactfully brought this to his attention, he shrugged it off with the excuse that it was only a habit, and he couldn't help it. I promised him an eight-*soldi* coin if he managed to refrain from such profanities for the rest of the trip. "I'll try," he said. He did. Now and then he would just about slip, but catch himself in time. So careful was he that he managed to reach Turin without a curse. "See," I told him in giving him the coin, "for the sake of eight *soldi* you mastered yourself. Why not try it to earn heaven? Besides, how will you fare with God if you don't overcome this bad habit?"

My words so impressed him that he came to the Oratory some time later to make his confession.

The Ruffino chronicle reports another incident which Don Bosco narrated at the "Good Night" on June 26:

At the beginning of this month I had a sick call. As the patient, a woman, was making her confession, her brother—not the church-going type—came in from town. From the patient's room I could hear efforts being made to hush him until his sister could finish her confession, but he would not keep silent. "Even if the emperor were in there, I wouldn't

care," he protested. He stalked in and in my presense began to upbraid his sister for racking her brains when she was so ill. But she begged him to let her set her conscience aright.

"Did you send for the priest?" he demanded.

"Yes, I did. I feel near death, and I want to settle my accounts with God."

Peevishly muttering whatever came to his mind about priests and religion, he let his sister finish her confession. Later, in the adjoining room, he remarked to me, "I doubt that I'll give you so much trouble when I get sick."

His sister overheard him. "You'd be lucky if, by God's grace, you could have a priest at your bedside. Pray that it doesn't happen that you need one and can't get him!"

If I well remember, this occurred on Saturday, May 31. The following day this man set out for a distant village. As soon as he arrived there, he developed a high temperature and was soon in critical condition. In his predicament he screamed for a priest, crying that he was choking and felt he was already in hell. The pastor came, calmed him down, and heard his confession. Afterward, as the priest got up to leave, the sick man begged him to stay and not to leave him alone amid flames and demons. On Monday evening he died. We have good reason to believe that God was merciful to him. "Tell everybody about this," he begged the pastor. "Only the other night I was ridiculing my sister for wanting to make her confession. She warned me not to mock such things because I might be unable to get a priest in my own last moments. The Lord was merciful to me and did not let this happen. Tell people they can ridicule just about everything, but not matters of religion."

The pastor wrote all this to the man's sister, and today she showed me the letter. So I too say, "Be careful not to laugh at or mock what concerns God's worship. Don't criticize your good companions for their deportment, their reception of the sacraments, or their avoidance of worldly-minded schoolmates. Such mockery may call God's judgment upon you."

On June 29, the Oratory solemnly kept St. Aloysius Gonzaga's feast. The celebration was chaired by John Trivella, the "prior," [4] to whom the boys dedicated a sonnet still kept in our archives. As

[4] Originally the "prior" was an officer of the St. Aloysius Sodality. (*See* Vol. III, p. 459) Later on, this title came to be bestowed on any benefactor who agreed to be honorary chairman of a certain celebration. He usually responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

customary to this very day, there was a procession and fireworks in the evening. At the "Good Night"—as reported in the Ruffino chronicle—Don Bosco spoke of St. Aloysius' devotion to Our Lady, of the countless graces She had granted him, and of those She keeps in store for the Oratory boys if they but ask for them with faith. Don Bosco closed as follows:

Yesterday someone told me this incident. A good housewife, sorely troubled by an ailment, promised Our Lady to light an oil lamp every Saturday and burn a *soldo's* worth of oil if she were cured. The favor was granted, but her husband wasn't quite happy about the expense. In fact, last Saturday he began to jeer, "Now that you have wasted this oil, will the Madonna repay you the cost?"

"She already did," the woman answered. "Look, ten months ago I began lighting this lamp. Since then I haven't been sick one day and haven't spent a *soldo* for doctors and medicines or lost any time. Our Lady has more than repaid me!"

"I suppose you're right," the husband admitted. He himself told me this yesterday, adding, "I'm glad that my wife told me straight from the shoulder. I really deserved it. Now I boast of Mary's protection and praise it to the sky."

This episode should spur us to trust in the Madonna and not to think that She is deaf to us when things don't turn out the way we want them to. Otherwise, we will act like that husband who expected the Madonna to repay the oil his wife burned in Her honor, not realizing that the Madonna had already repaid her a hundred times over by freeing her of doctors and medicines.

The feast of St. Aloysius thus ended with Mary's name because Don Bosco wanted his sons to be worthy of Her. This was often the topic of his conferences to his priests. One entry in the Bonetti chronicle brings out some tips Don Bosco gave to them:

June 30, 1862. We must forewarn our boys against the time they will be seventeen or eighteen. "Look," we should tell them, "you will soon face a dangerous crisis; the devil will try to ensnare you. To start with, he will tell you that frequent Communion is good for children, not for adults, and that once in a great while is quite enough for you. Then he will do his best to keep you from sermons by making you feel bored with God's Word. He will convince you that certain things are

not sinful. Then you'll have to tussle with friends and what they might say, with [dangerous] readings, with your own passions, and so on. Be on your guard. Do not let the devil rob you of that peace of mind and purity of soul which make you God's friend!"

Boys do not forget such words! Years later, when we meet them again as mature men and we ask, "Do you remember what I once told you?" they will agree that we were right. This reminiscence will do them good.

The chronicle continues:

On a previous occasion, he called together the Oratory confessors and warned them to be very cautious in questioning boys about the Sixth Commandment lest they teach them things they don't know. He also urged them not to refuse absolution to backsliders and habitual sinners if they show at least some good will to correct themselves, unless they felt that denying absolution or permission for Communion in some cases seemed likely to shake them and make them take positive steps for reform. In cases of seduction, however, they should be very severe and of one mind even in refusing absolution to an active accomplice, so as to prevent wolves from slaughtering the flock; likewise they were to urge an accomplice or victim to denounce the wolf or wolves prudently to their superiors in order to keep sin and scandal from others. He urged confessors not to begrudge time spent in zealously helping insufficiently prepared penitents and to meditate upon the frightful condition of a soul which lives in mortal sin even a single hour. Lastly, he exhorted them not to give a light penance for grave sins, but to prescribe one that would be effective in preventing relapses, for example, daily meditations for a week from *The Companion of Youth*,[5] or the Exercise for a Happy Death, the Stations of the Cross, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, a chaplet in honor of Our Lady of Sorrow, and so on, all contained in the same prayerbook. In short, the penitent is to be brought to concentrate on some fact or truth therein contained. Such penances will bear fruit.

During the first week in July [1862] he urged his priests to be very kind and patient in hearing boys' confessions so as not to lose their confidence. At the same time he stressed that the prudence and persuasiveness needed by a confessor to win youngsters' hearts are heavenly gifts attainable only by constant prayer, pure intention, and acts of penance and sacrifice such as zealous confessors practice. He

[5] A prayerbook for boys compiled and first published by Don Bosco in 1847 under the title *Il Giovane Provveduto*. *See* Vol. III, pp. 7–18. [Editor]

then went on to speak about sacrilegious confessions of boys deliberately concealing mortal sins. He clarified the point with a personal incident. "One night," he said, "I dreamed of a boy. His heart was being eaten up by worms as he tried to pluck them out. I paid no attention to the dream, but the following night I again saw this boy. Now a giant mastiff straddled him, gnawing away at his heart. I was sure that the Lord had some special grace in store for this boy, whose conscience must have been badly muddled. I kept an eye on him. One day I cornered him. 'Would you do me a favor?' I asked.

" 'Sure, if I can.'

" 'You can if you want to.'

" 'What is it?'

" 'Will you really do it?'

" 'Yes, I will.'

" 'Tell me, have you ever kept anything back in confession?'

"He was about to deny it, but I immediately added, 'Why don't you confess this and that?' He glanced at me and burst into tears. 'It's true,' he said. 'It's years since I've wanted to confess that, but I'm too scared!' I comforted him and told him how he could make his peace with God."

But while Don Bosco gave his co-workers wise tips for saving souls and he himself tirelessly labored to make his boys worthy children of God, a new storm was brewing against Peter's bark [through Garibaldi's attempts to march against Rome].[6]

[6] At this point we are omitting a detailed description of Garibaldi's unsuccessful expedition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 21

Don Bosco's 1862 Lottery (Continued)

THE state lottery for disabled Italian war veterans was to end June 18 [1862]. Though only after that date could Don Bosco display his own lottery prizes, this restriction did not prevent him from a full-scale promotion. A steady flow of encouraging letters promised help. Among his well-known correspondents and supporters were Count Frederick Sclopis, the bishops of Tortona, of Mondovì, and of Iglesias, Aloysius Cardinal Vannicelli, archbishop of Ferrara, and Cardinal Marini.[1] Pius IX, too, wanted to show his support by donating two precious, exquisite cameos of SS. Peter and Paul. *L'Armonia* publicized this gift in an article of June 24 [1862]. . . .

Meanwhile, since doubts had arisen concerning the value of yellow and red lottery tickets, Don Bosco sent out an explanatory circular. . . . At the moment, though, what mattered most was permission to display the lottery prizes, a step-up in the sale of tickets, and a few minor concessions. To this end Don Bosco successfully applied to the competent authorities. . . . Once he received the permission, he lost no time in mailing out a circular . . . announcing that the lottery prizes would be on display for two months, starting Thursday, July 3, from 9 to 12 noon, and from 4:30 to 7 P.M. daily.

In the meantime he had had the Speirani Press print a 104-page brochure listing prizes and donors, along with his prefatory appeal to all charitably-minded persons, lottery regulations, committee members' names, and promoters' names and addresses. It was published at the end of June; the number of prizes had already reached a total of 2,430. Subsequent gifts—570 in all—were listed in a later brochure. . . .

[1] We are omitting their letters of support and a promotional article of *L'Armonia*. In this chapter we shall likewise omit or condense circulars, business letters, and technical details, indicating this fact each time with dots. [Editor]

On July 2, the feast of Our Lady's Visitation, the exhibit was officially opened by Marquis [Emmanuel] Lucerna of Rorà, mayor of Turin and president of the lottery commission. *L'Armonia* described the event in an article of July 3 [1862]. . . .

It had been agreed, the chronicle informs us, that on this occasion there should be an assembly program to make up for the one so badly marred in March by a heavy snowfall.[2] This time the weather was gorgeous. Don Bosco received the mayor at the Oratory gate. After inspecting the exhibit, the boys' quarters, and the workshops, the mayor took his place on a platform in the porticoes, where all the boys were assembled. After a song with band accompaniment, a pupil named Ramognini stepped forward and greeted the honored guests with a short, charming address drafted by Don Bosco. . . .

The mayor listened with visible satisfaction and then, a brilliant orator himself, gave the boys a brief, eloquent address. Referring to Don Bosco, he said, "He organizes festivities in honor of others, but who deserves to be honored more than he? He credits his imposing undertakings to others, but isn't he the author of them all? He generously praises others, but who should be praised, if not he? I am happy that I can thank him in the name of Turin, which has vastly benefited by his generosity." He concluded with, "Boys, do you want to be good citizens? Obey Don Bosco!"

Once the lottery was officially opened, Don Bosco sent another circular to his benefactors, inviting them to visit the exhibit and to return the proceeds of the ticket sale. . . .

The volume of lottery mail became impressive, thanks also to the support of Turin's mayor and the prefect of the province. The former sent circulars, printed at the Oratory, to other mayors of the province, while the latter contacted the prefects of Piedmont and Sardinia. . . . Count [Casimir] Radicati, first councilor of the prefecture of Turin and a very influential friend of Don Bosco, gave his wholehearted support and had one of his clerks handle lottery matters. Furthermore, the mayor of Turin pressed lottery tickets on cabinet ministers, urging them to accept them as the royal family itself had done. . . . In fact, Don Bosco had very successfully written to several members of the House of Savoy and to Victor Emmanuel II. . . .

[2] *See* pp. 65f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 22

A Dream: The Red Horse

JULY [1862] was marked by further amazing events centering on Don Bosco. The Ruffino chronicle has this entry: "July 1, 1862. After dinner today, Don Bosco remarked to a few around him, 'We shall have a funeral this month.' He repeated this later on, but always to only a few."

These confidential disclosures keenly excited the clerics' curiosity, and so, during recreation, unless assigned elsewhere, they would cluster around Don Bosco, hoping to pick up other startling bits of information. One such fact they learned in this way was a plan to also open girls' schools. Both John Bonetti and Caesar Chiala recorded this in writing.

On July 6, Don Bosco narrated a dream he had had the night before. His audience consisted of Father [John Baptist] Francesia, Father [Angelo] Savio, Father [Michael] Rua, [Francis] Cerruti, [Bartholomew] Fusero, [John] Bonetti, Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia, [John Baptist] Anfossi, [Celestine] Durando, [Francis] Provera, and a few others. He spoke as follows:

Last night I had a strange dream. With Marchioness Barolo[1] I seemed to be strolling about a small plaza which opened into a vast plain where the Oratory boys were happily playing. As I respectfully attempted to move to her left, she stopped me, saying, "No, stay where you are." She then began talking about my boys. "It's wonderful that you look after boys," she said. "Let me care for the girls. Leave that to me, so that there'll be no disagreements."

"Well," I replied, "didn't Our Lord come into this world to redeem both boys *and* girls?"

[1] Marchioness Juliette Colbert Barolo (1785–1864), born in Vendée, France, had married Marquis Tancredi Falletti of Barolo, Italy. She used her wealth to build and maintain several charitable institutions in Turin, among them the Rifugio—a home for wayward girls—where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *See* Vol. II, pp. 182–86 and *passim*. [Editor]

"Of course," she rejoined.

"Then I must see to it that His Blood be not uselessly shed for either group."

As we were thus talking, an eerie silence suddenly fell over the boys. They stopped playing and, looking very frightened, fled helter-skelter. The marchioness and I stood still for a moment and then rushed to learn what had caused the scare. Suddenly, at the far end of the plain, I saw an enormous horse alight upon the ground. So huge was the animal that my blood ran cold.

"Was the horse as big as this room?" Father Francesia asked.

"Oh, much bigger! It was a truly monstrous thing, three or four times the size of Palazzo Madama.[2] Marchioness Barolo fainted at the sight. I myself was so shaken up that I could barely stand. In my fright I took shelter behind a nearby house, but the owners drove me off. "Go away!" they screamed. "Go away!" Meanwhile I kept thinking, *What can this horse be? I must stop running and try to get a close look at it.* Still quaking with fear, I pulled myself together and, retracing my steps, walked toward the beast. What a horror to see those ears and that frightful snout! At times it seemed to be carrying a load of riders; at other times it seemed to have wings. "It must be a demon!" I exclaimed.

Others were with me. "What kind of monster is this?" I asked one of them.

"The red horse of the Apocalypse," he replied.

At this point I awoke in a cold sweat and found myself in bed. Throughout the morning, as I said Mass or heard confessions, that beast kept haunting me. Now I would like someone to check if a red horse is really mentioned in the Scriptures and find out what it stands for.

[Celestine] Durando was chosen to do the research. Father Rua, though, remarked that a red horse—symbol of bloody persecution against the Church, according to Martini [3]—is indeed mentioned in the Apocalypse, Chapter 6, verse 4: "And when he opened the

[2] Palazzo Madama, located in the center of Piazza Castello in the heart of Turin, is a massive building consisting of three structures of different origin—Roman, medieval, and modern—summing up the city's two thousand years of history. Its magnificent internal staircase and eighteenth-century façade by Filippo Juvarra represent one of the finest creations of European baroque. Palazzo Madama was the seat of the Subalpine Senate from 1840 to 1860 and of the Italian Senate until 1864. At present it houses the City Museum of Ancient Art. [Editor]

[3] Antonio Martini (1720–1809), archbishop of Florence, translated the New Testament from Greek and the Old Testament from the Vulgate into Italian. His version became the most popular in Italy. [Editor]

sacred seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come!' And there went forth another horse, a red one; and to him who was sitting on it, was given to take peace from the earth, and that men should kill one another, and there was given him a great sword."

Perhaps in Don Bosco's dream the red horse symbolized contemporary [European] godless democracy which, fuming against the Church, was steadily making headway to the detriment of the social order and gaining control over national and local governments, education, and the courts. Its goal was to complete the destruction of the rights of ownership of every religious society and charitable institution, which had been started by conniving national governments. Don Bosco used to remark, "To prevent this calamity, all the faithful, and we too in our small way, must zealously and courageously strive to halt this unbridled monster."

How? By alerting the masses to its false teachings through the practice of charity and wholesome publications and by turning their minds and hearts to St. Peter's Chair—the unshakable foundation of all God-given authority, the master key of all social order, the immutable charter of man's duties and rights, the divine light which unmasks the deception of evil passions, the faithful and powerful guardian of natural and Christian morality, the irrevocable guarantor of eternal reward and punishment. The Church, St. Peter's Chair, and the Pope are one and the same thing. That is why Don Bosco wanted an all-out effort to make these truths accepted. His goals were to fully document the incalculable benefits brought by popes to civil society, to rebut all slanders hurled against them, and to foster gratitude, loyalty, and love for them.

This was Don Bosco's attitude. In his love of the Sovereign Pontiff, he was truly great, both in deed and in word. He used to say that he could kiss each page of Salzano's church history, because this Italian historian had clearly shown therein his love for the popes. To his young clerics he gave a practical rule of thumb in appraising a book: "If its author is somewhat unfavorable to the Pope, don't read the book."

The Bonetti chronicle has this entry for this same year, 1862:

When Don Bosco talks about the popes he can go on forever. He always has new praises for them and speaks so charmingly as to inflame his listeners. He is at his best in two subjects: the virtue of purity and the papacy. He entrances and amazes everyone. To believe this, one must only read his works, especially his *Lives of the Popes* which we consider required reading for anyone chosen by Divine Providence to write the biography of this faithful servant of God.

Don Bosco, however, mindful of the scriptural dictum, "Where there is no hearing, pour not out words," maintained a prudent reserve when speaking with anticlericals; he had reason to fear, too, that they might have been sent to question him "to trap him in his talk." [Luke 20, 20]

Meanwhile cries of "Rome or Death" resounded throughout all of Italy, so that it was almost impossible to dodge questions on the Pope's temporal power. On this point the Bonetti chronicle gives us this information:

On July 7 [1862], after supper, a group of us—priests and clerics—tried to bait Don Bosco into this topic in order to learn how we could handle it in these troublesome times. Without his catching on, we managed to get him to say the following:

Today I happened to be in a private home with a group of democrats and some of Passaglia's [4] clerical followers. Eventually the conversation got around to the current political situation. The dyed-in-the-wool liberals brazenly wanted to know what I thought of our government's attempts to seize Rome. Realizing that in arguing with such people I would only waste my breath, I answered quite frankly, "I am a Catholic; I stand by the Pope and obey him blindly. If he were to tell us Piedmontese, 'Come to Rome,' then I too would say: 'Let's go!' But as long as he considers the Piedmontese expedition to Rome a seizure, I will agree with him."

"But your homage should be rational," they shouted.

"Yes, as St. Paul meant it to be. God's worship is expressed through the spirit of the liturgy and one's holiness of life. Our worship should be rational in its manifestations, such as the way we say morning and night prayers, make daily brief meditations, or hear and say Mass.

[4] *See* pp. 110f. [Editor]

In things like this our worship should be guided by reason. But when a dogma or a moral precept is at stake, then true Catholics must be of one mind and heart with the Pope."

"Well, tell us at least what you think of our chances of success in this expedition."

"My opinion is that you are dreaming if you think that the Piedmontese army will enter Rome, and that you are still dreaming if you think the army can hold it. And don't forget that while you dream you may crack your skull!"

They all laughed and questioned me no more. This is the way to win an argument with a hostile opponent who would otherwise get all worked up and become more obstinate in his views.

On another occasion a rather obtuse government employee wanted to argue with me about the Pope's temporal power. I immediately asked, "What aspect shall we discuss–historical, theological, philosophical, or just oratorical?"

"I don't know what you mean," he replied.

"I mean that we can discuss this topic from the viewpoint of history, theology, philosophy, or eloquence."

"I haven't studied such things," he rejoined.

"In that case," I said, "brush up on them. It would be nonsensical to argue about something concerning which you know nothing. If you wish, I can suggest some books." That ended the argument.

CHAPTER 23

Special Charisms

THOUGH he looked alert and cheerful as usual, Don Bosco did not feel at all well during these days [of July 1862], as the Bonetti chronicle tells us:

Truthfully, Don Bosco has the patience of a saint. Seeing him invariably cheerful regardless of ailments spurs us on to accept serenely even the sharpest pains. Around this time, a boy begged him to ask Our Lord to free him of these troubles. "Even if a little prayer were enough to cure me," he replied, "I would not say it."

Ailing as he was, on July 15 he went to St. Ignatius' Shrine above Lanzo [1] for his spiritual retreat. Several noteworthy things happened. At the beginning of July, Don Bosco had said that an Oratory boy would die during that month. In fact, on Friday, July 18, while Don Bosco was still at St. Ignatius', eighteen-year-old Bernard Casalegno of Chieri died a saintly death at home. That very day Don Bosco told some Oratory boys who were with him at the retreat house that he had been at Casalegno's bedside at his last moments. Though we knew nothing of this back at the Oratory, Don Bosco had already written to Father Alasonatti of Casalegno's death and asked that prayers be said for him. After Don Bosco's return, I (Bonetti) questioned the boys who had been on retreat with him and learned that he had told them of that death but a short while after it had occurred.

Though it was humanly impossible for Don Bosco to know of it because Chieri is more than twenty-one miles away, we should not be surprised; God, in His goodness, has granted such experiences to other saints. It is all the more probable when we consider how much Casalegno longed to see Don Bosco again before dying and how much he meant to Don Bosco.

We will add that the youth's father, Chevalier Joseph Casalegno,

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 96f, 112f. [Editor]

also declared to Father Bartholomew Gaido that Don Bosco, while far away, had publicly announced his son's death at the very moment in which he expired. The chronicle continues:

No less surprising is the following incident. Knowing that Don Bosco was away from the Oratory and thus hoping that their escapade would go unpunished, three artisans—Davit, Tinelli, and Panico—skipped afternoon church services on Sunday, July 20, to enjoy a swim in the canal near the Dora Riparia River. In the vast crowd of resident and day boys, neither Father Alasonatti nor the young assistants noticed their absence. As their escapade remained undetected that day and the following day, the culprits felt sure of themselves, but their hopes of evasion were rudely shattered unexpectedly. Don Bosco had seen them. The first thing on Monday, July 21, he mailed a very fatherly letter to everyone at the Oratory, incidentally mentioning the escapade without identifying the culprits:

St. Ignatius' Shrine, July 21, 1862

Dearest Sons:

I know that you, my dear children, are anxious to hear from me, and I too—having left without saying good-bye—feel that I must converse with you through this letter. I shall speak frankly, as a father to the children he dearly loves. This letter will make you laugh and also cry.

I was not too well on the evening of [Tuesday] July 15 when I boarded a coach for St. Ignatius' and sat on an upper deck seat. From Turin to Caselle, the generous sunshine gave me a free steam bath, but from Caselle to St. Maurice I was successively treated to a gentle breeze, then to a cold, blustering wind, and finally to thunder, lightning, and rain. The stretch from St. Maurice to Ciriè was marked by rain mixed with hail—a trifle compared to the steady downpour that drenched us for five miles between Ciriè and Lanzo to the accompaniment of thunder and buffeting icy winds. The horses moved slowly, barely able to pull the coach. I was outside on the upper deck, but I did not feel at all like a king surveying his domain. Among my fellow passengers, two had umbrellas, but that did me no good! Since I was hemmed in between them, the drippings fell onto my shoulders, so that when I arrived at Lanzo I was thoroughly soaked and frozen.

My dear boys, you should have seen me get off that coach! I was as soaked as one of those big rats you sometimes see straggle out of the ditch behind the courtyard. If Father Francesia had been there, he would have felt inspired to write a few appropriate verses.

I was scheduled to arrive at Lanzo at 7, but it was then 8:45, too late to go on to St. Ignatius', so I inquired at the coach office where I could find a place to change my clothes. There was nothing available, and therefore, after asking someone to take my bag to the rectory, I walked there. Since my bag was slow in coming, the pastor (Father Frederick Albert) [2] kindly and generously gave me all I needed. He did not have a cassock my size and had me wear a sort of frock coat which made me look like an abbot. Soon I was again dry, but though warmed by some soup, I felt exhausted and went to bed early. What with the trip, a boil on my nose, and a headache, I was unable to sleep in spite of the nice room, comfortable bed, and warm blankets. I rose at 7 the next morning, hired a little donkey, and, after a steep three-mile climb, arrived at St. Ignatius'. I was sick all that day, Thursday, and Friday. On Wednesday evening the boil broke and so I was able to sleep a little that night. On Saturday I felt quite better; on Sunday, thanks to the Blessed Virgin, I was again in fairly good shape.

So far I have only talked of myself. Let's now talk about you. I'll start off with our beloved Bernard Casalegno. After suffering much and receiving the Last Sacraments in a most edifying way, he died on July 18 without the least fear of death, fully trusting in the Blessed Virgin's protection. He was quite ready for that fateful moment. His serene expression, his last smile, his whole life, and his preparation for death give us good reason to hope that he has joined Dominic Savio in heaven. He was buried last Saturday. Prayers were offered for him at Chieri and you did likewise yesterday. Furthermore, on the first day of this month, I had already set aside all our meritorious works for the spiritual needs of this companion of ours, whom the Lord wanted to call unto Himself. *Requiescat in pace.* May God give us, too, the grace of a happy death.

In my several visits to the Oratory [since my departure] I found good and bad things. I saw four wolves roaming about among the boys, biting a few. Perhaps not all these ravenous wolves will still be at the Oratory when I return. If they are, I intend to rip the lambs' clothing off them!

On another visit I noticed a few boys chatting on the balcony near the clocktower during night prayers and others on the small staircase of the new wing. Provera sighted a few on the main floor but missed the others upstairs. I also saw some sneak out Sunday morning to skip part of the church services. But I was quite upset when I spotted several youngsters slipping out during afternoon services to go swimming! Poor boys, how little they care for their souls!

[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 152. [Editor]

I also noticed that some boys had a serpent coiled about their bodies, striking at their throats. Some were crying, "We have sinned"; others laughingly sang, "We have sinned, and what yet has befallen us?" But then their throats swelled, almost choking them. Today I see that the devil is causing great havoc through idleness.

Courage, my boys, I shall soon be with you. With the help of Father Alasonatti, priests and clerics, and Chevalier Oreglia and his beard, I shall chase away wolves, serpents, and idleness. I shall tell you everything then.

I'd love to say more but have no time. I have received many delightful letters from the boys; regretfully I cannot reply to each individually. I thank all, and if I can find a little time, I shall write to them, God willing. I hope to be with you Friday morning, the 25th. The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always! May the Blessed Virgin keep us as Her own now and forever.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Father Rua or Father Alasonatti will please read this letter to the boys after night prayers.

There was also a letter for Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia:

Lanzo, July 21, 1862

My dear Chevalier:

I received both your letters. Good! Look for money, sell tickets, get gifts for prizes.[3] What you are doing is fine.

Take heart, very much so! *Rumores fuge,* otherwise you will be deafened.

Meanwhile, remember me to Mrs. Gastaldi, Mrs. Massarola, and Mr. Grosso and thank them for all they are doing for the lottery. Say hello for me to Boggero, Bonetti, Cuffia, the two Perucattis, Morando, Bongiovanni, Pelazza, and Father Francesia, all of whom have written to me.

Tell Father Alasonatti to have money ready, etc. Perhaps the trip to Morialdo would not be advisable.

God willing, I shall be back at the Oratory on Friday in good shape. *Vale in Domino.*

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

That same evening Father Alasonatti read Don Bosco's letter to

[3] A lottery was being readied by Don Bosco. *See* Chapters 10, 11 and 21. [Editor]

the entire Oratory community. Everyone was stunned by these revelations because there was no way that Don Bosco could have known such things. The culprits meanwhile, though as yet unidentified, were very much afraid. Don Bosco had noted their names under two categories: "Deceivers" and "Deceived." Their number makes it obvious that a superior should never flatter himself into believing that his house is free from evil. An apparent calm may sometimes signal an approaching storm.

Everyone anxiously awaited Don Bosco's arrival for further details. He returned on Friday, July 25. After night prayers, he mounted the little platform to give the "Good Night." We shall now quote the chronicle:

Asked by Father Rua to give more details [about what he had written], he said quite frankly that from St. Ignatius' he had seen those three boys sneak out of the Oratory and miss afternoon church services to go swimming. Smiling at our amazement, he went on:

"Perhaps some of you will wonder: *How did Don Bosco manage to know these things?* It's really quite simple: I have a telegraph of my own through which, even when I am far away, I can make contact and see and know everything that may redound to God's honor and glory and the welfare of souls.

"Really, I shouldn't tell you these things, but, then, I think I must, lest anyone mistakenly imagine that he can get away with things when I am not here. Remember, though, that I do not want you to avoid evil just for fear that Don Bosco may see you or find you out, but only because God sees you and on judgment day will demand a very strict account of you.

"I should now speak to you individually and tell you many things, but time does not permit. I'll just say that from St. Ignatius' I saw the chief enemy of each and every one of my boys. As time allows, I shall try to speak to each of you personally and give you needful advice. I love your souls so much, my beloved sons, that never will I stop talking to you of the many wonderful things that can contribute to your spiritual welfare."

Chevalier Oreglia wanted to know if Don Bosco could also do things through his "telegraph." "Oh, yes!" he replied laughingly. "I could have given each of those fellows a spanking. As it was, they did feel something, whether through my telegraph or otherwise. While they were in the water, a smack startled them. They thought that a soldier who was swimming with them had struck them. They even asked him."

As Don Bosco was speaking, young Tinelli turned to a friend standing nearby, to whom he had secretly confided his escapade, and whispered, "Now I know where those smacks came from. I even argued with that soldier. I thought he had hit us." I (Bonetti) was standing behind Tinelli. On hearing this, I took him by the hand to Father Alasonatti. Tinelli told him everything, naming his two companions. All three confirmed Don Bosco's story, confessing that, upon being struck, they were seriously puzzled, and that immediately after getting out of the water, they fearfully donned their clothes and went straight back to the Oratory.

It is amazing how God aids His servants, especially those who are zealous for His love and the welfare of souls.

A few days later, during the students' final examinations, Tinelli went home.

The chronicle also tells us that, during the last few days of the school year, Don Bosco used to conduct a triduum of sermons in the evening to help the boys go on their vacation fortified in God's grace. In one of these sermons in 1862, he narrated the following incident which had occurred that very week:

One afternoon, during recreation, a man called on him and begged him to come at once to give the Last Rites to a woman. Somewhat suspicious, Don Bosco took a good look at the man. "Is it a place that a priest may enter?" he asked.

"She's a wretched woman and alone," the man replied.

Don Bosco went. The dying woman was skin and bones. "A priest!" she exclaimed as soon as she saw him. "How merciful is the Lord. At least I'll save my soul." She was just eighteen and indeed a pitiful sight! After dismissing the woman who was looking after her, Don Bosco revived her hopes in God's infinite goodness and heard her confession. Afterward, most deeply sorry for her sins, the girl broke into groans and prayers, amid occasional convulsions which made her hair bristle as she shrieked curses against her betrayers. Particularly she blasted her attendant who had now returned into the room, for she too had cooperated in the girl's ruin. "You wretches," the girl screamed. "God's vengeance will fall upon you. May lightning strike you dead. . . . You ruined me!"

"No, no, my child," Don Bosco said, trying to calm her. "Do not think of revenge. Forget the past. God has forgiven you. You too must forgive!"

This brought the poor girl to her senses. "You are right. I have for-

given them, I do forgive them with all my heart, but I can't forget the day I ran away from home and disgraced my parents. Those first days I was here, I wanted to go back to my mother. I wept, but you," she said, turning to the woman again, "you did not let me; you seized me and held me back. Because of you I suffer such remorse. . . ."

On and on she moaned, until Don Bosco succeeded in making her focus her thoughts on God alone. As she entered her death throes, an eerie silence settled upon the room. The dying girl's head sank in the pillow and she lay motionless, hardly breathing. Suddenly she sat up in bed, stared about her with sightless eyes, held the crucifix in her right hand, and cried out: "Scandal-mongers, I shall meet you at God's court!" Then she fell back upon the pillow, dead.

The way Don Bosco told this incident made such an impression that even the priests were shocked. Some time previously, he had told them a similar incident:

He had been hastily called to the deathbed of a consumptive sixteen-year-old former festive oratory boy, near San Rocco. Overjoyed, the poor lad made his confession, after which his parents returned to his bedside. Don Bosco remained at the head of the bed. A ghastly melancholy now suddenly settled upon the boy's features. "Please, mother," he said suddenly, "ask the boy downstairs to come up. He used to be my friend."

"Why do you want him?"

"I must tell him something."

Noting that the boy's parents were not happy with this request, Don Bosco tried to dissuade him. "Don't bother," he said. "Do you really need to see him?"

"Yes, I want to tell him good-bye."

The boy was called. With a frightened look at his friend, he edged up to the foot of the bed, while the dying youth, helped by his parents, struggled to a sitting position.

"You murderer," he managed to gasp between racking coughs while pointing at him, "cursed be the moment I first met you! . . . Because of you I am dying so young. . . . You taught me things I never knew. . . . You betrayed me. . . . You made me lose God's grace. . . . Your foul language and example led me into evil and now make me miserable. Had I only listened to those who begged me to keep away from you. . . ."

Everyone was in tears. Shaken and paler even than his dying friend, that wretched boy clung to the bedstead.

"Enough," Don Bosco told the dying boy. "Calm down! Why get upset over the past? Forget it! You've made a good confession and have nothing to fear. God is so good. Everything has been erased and forgotten."

"True, but if it weren't for him, I'd still be innocent. . . . I'd be happy. . . . I wouldn't be reduced to this state. . . ."

"There now, forgive him just as the Lord has forgiven you," Don Bosco went on. "Your pardon will obtain mercy for him!"

"Yes, I forgive him!" the poor boy exclaimed, burying his face in his hands and breaking into sobs.

The heartrending scene was more than anyone could bear. At a nod from Don Bosco, the parents took the other boy away, sobbing and so shaken up that he had to be supported. Don Bosco meanwhile, with a few words that only he could say, again restored peace to the unhappy boy and stayed with him until he died.

One of the last talks Don Bosco gave his boys before they left for their summer vacation was on July 27. He stressed good example:

When you are home, give good example. Practice your faith. Now when freedom is so much talked about, use it to do good, to show yourselves true Christians by being exact in obeying God's commandments and those of the Church. I want you to know how effective was the good example of one of our young students. The first day he was home on vacation, he said grace, to his parents' great surprise. *Look at the example our son gives us,* they reflected. *We should have done that first. Instead, he is teaching us.* From then on, they too formed the habit of saying grace.

After the awards, every pupil received the following keepsake from Don Bosco:

Tips for the Summer Vacation

1. *Daily.* Serve Mass if possible. Engage in a short meditation and spiritual reading; avoid idleness; give good example at all times.
2. *Weekly.* Confession and Communion.
3. *Sundays and Holy Days.* Mass, sermon, Benediction.
4. *Always.* Avoid sin. God sees us. God will judge us.

SCHOOL WILL RESUME AUGUST 16

CHAPTER 24

A Dream: The Snake and the Rosary

SINCE many boys and young clerics would remain at the Oratory for the summer, Bonetti and Ruffino began jotting down in their chronicles some highlights of the pupils' conversations with Don Bosco. John Garino and Francis Provera did likewise, though on a minor scale.

We first draw from the Bonetti chronicle:

August 3 [1862]. Today, the cleric Dominic Bongiovanni told Don Bosco: "Tomorrow is my name day. Will you give me a present in St. Dominic's honor, as you usually do?"

"My present," Don Bosco replied, "will be a crown of thorns."

That evening Bongiovanni felt sick and had to go to bed early. The next day a severe, splitting headache set in and put him into a delirium for days. This was not the only time that Don Bosco had warned pupils to brace themselves for illness. One such instance among many was his prediction to the cleric Ballesio of a grave illness under the symbol of a black robe. It came true three or four days later.

Whenever Don Bosco is late for his meals and the other superiors have already left, the boys burst in as usual and almost smother him with their numbers. One day, when a cleric poked his head closer to Don Bosco to hear him, Don Bosco suddenly seized it and gently bumped it against his own. "Yes, put our heads together," the cleric remarked. "Only God's love can unite them," Don Bosco rejoined.

The Ruffino chronicle reports Don Bosco's "Good Night" on August 6 [1862]:

Today, at twelve-thirty, a stranger gave me a note bearing the address of a critically ill person. After taking care of a brief errand of my own in town, I went to that address. As soon as I got there, I knew that I was in a house of ill repute.

"Is anybody sick here?" I asked.

"Yes, come this way."

Nervously I followed my guide to a room. I could see that the devil himself ran that place. The patient was a woman. As soon as she saw me, she stretched out her arms. "Please, save my soul!" she begged, seizing my hand. "Is there still hope for me?"

"Surely," I replied. I dismissed the other women and heard her confession—none too soon, for within minutes she was in death's throes. As I left the room, the other women crowded about me. "Has she a chance?"

"None at all! She will be gone in a few moments."

"Poor girl!" they grieved.

"You had better worry about yourselves," I replied, "because you are barely a step from hell." And I gave them a sermon such as they had never heard before.

"What you say is true," they rejoined, "but what can we do?"

"Get out of this house."

"Will she be allowed the Last Sacraments?"

"I don't know! I'm afraid that, were the Lord to come here, the whole house would collapse and bury you all."

"What will you do now?"

"I'll report to the pastor. He will do whatever he thinks best." So I did.

"I'll take care of her," the pastor told me. He just had time to give the woman the Anointing of the Sick. By nightfall all those women had left. That girl was fortunate that God gave her time for confession. Her sorrow makes up hope for her eternal salvation. To realize what a terrible scourge sin is, especially at death's hour, you should have seen how frightened, pale, and shocked those women were! Father Cafasso used to say that even if sin brought no other punishment than remorse, this should be reason enough to avoid it. A person cannot long endure the spiritual anguish which is his when, reflecting even briefly on his spiritual condition, he feels his conscience torn asunder by remorse.

That same evening Don Bosco suggested that we do something to honor the Madonna, such as avoiding improper glances and bad books, and saying a Hail, Holy Queen every day. Amen!

[John] Garino jotted down this incident:

On August 15 [1862] fourteen-year-old John Petiti of Fossano died at St. John's Hospital in Turin. He was the boy Don Bosco had hinted at

some time before when telling a small group (I was with them) that within three moons an Oratory pupil would die. During those three months, a nineteen-year-old apprentice tailor, David Quadrelli of Novara, fell seriously ill. Don Bosco visited him to offer him comfort and the Last Sacraments. "I don't want to die!" Quadrelli exclaimed as soon as he saw him.

"In that case," Don Bosco replied, looking at him kindly, "you'll recover. Another boy will take your place. . . ." Then he blessed him. Quadrelli fully recovered.

We shall now draw from [Francis] Provera's notes:

"The life of man upon earth is a warfare." [Job 7, 1] [During these days] Don Bosco received yet another proof of the devil's unceasing, devastating attacks against souls and of the need to repel him constantly and free his victims. [By mid-August] about a hundred pupils had returned to the Oratory for summer school.[1] At the "Good Night" on August 20, 1862, Don Bosco, after giving some disciplinary reminders, addressed them as follows:

I want to tell you a dream I had some nights ago, most probably on the eve of the Assumption. I dreamed that I was at my brother's home at Castelnuovo d'Asti with all my boys. While they were at play, a total stranger came up to me and asked me to go with him. He took me to a meadow alongside the playground and pointed to a huge, ugly snake, over twenty feet long, coiled in the grass. Frightened, I wanted to run off, but the stranger held me back. "Get closer and take a good look," he said.

"What?" I gasped. "Don't you realize that monster could spring on me and gobble me up in no time?"

"Don't be afraid! Nothing of the sort will happen. Just come with me."

"Nothing doing! I'm not crazy!"

"Then stay where you are," the stranger replied. And he went to fetch a rope.

"Take this end," he said on his return, "and grip it tightly with both hands. I'll hold the other, and we'll let it dangle over the snake."

"And then?"

"Then we'll snap it across its back."

"You must be crazy! The snake will leap up and tear us to pieces."

[1] *See* Vol. V, p. 178. [Editor]

"No, it won't. Leave that to me."

"Count me out! I have no intention to risk my life for a thrill of this kind!"

Again I tried to run away, but the stranger once more assured me that I had nothing to fear because the snake would do me no harm. He talked so persuasively that I stayed on and agreed to his plan. He went around to the other side of the monster. We stretched the rope and then snapped it across the snake's back. The monster immediately sprang up and struck at the rope, but, as it did so, it ensnared itself as in a noose.

"Hold on!" the stranger shouted. "Don't let go!" He ran to a nearby pear tree and tied his end of the rope to it. Then he came to me and tied my end to the iron grating of a window in the house. The snake kept furiously struggling to free itself, writhing, thrashing, and flailing about. In its fury it tore itself to pieces, scattering its flesh over the area, till it was slashed to a mere skeleton.

The stranger then untied the rope and coiled it up. "Now watch very carefully!" he said as he put it into a box and closed it. By this time the boys had swarmed about me. Within a few moments he opened the box. We looked in and were astounded to see the rope shaped into the words *Ave Maria.*

"How did that happen?" I asked.

"The snake," the man replied, "is a symbol of the devil, whereas the rope stands for *Ave, Maria* or, rather, the rosary, a succession of Hail Marys with which we can strike, conquer, and destroy all of hell's demons."

What I've told you so far—Don Bosco concluded—is the first part of the dream. What followed is even stranger and more amazing, but it's too late to tell you now. I'll leave it for tomorrow. In the meantime let us give thought to what that stranger said about the Hail Mary and the rosary. Let us devoutly say a Hail Mary whenever we are tempted, and we'll be sure to win. Good night.

Since Don Bosco gave no interpretation of this dream, we shall volunteer a few comments.

The pear tree is the same one to which Don Bosco, as a boy, often used to tie one end of a tightrope as he got ready for the acrobatic performances with which he enticed his peers to a catechism lesson. Seemingly, we may see this tree as an image of the tree in Chapter 2, verse 3 of the Canticle of Canticles: "As an

apple tree among the trees of the words, so is my lover among men." Tirino and other famous biblical commentators hold that this apple tree stands for any fruit tree. Hence, the fruit tree, with its delightful, refreshing shade, is a symbol of Jesus and His cross, the source of effective prayer and certain victory. Possibly this may be the reason why one end of the rope, so fatal to the snake, was tied to the pear tree. The other end, secured to the iron grating of a window, can mean that the mission of spreading devotion to the rosary was entrusted to the one that dwelt in that home and to his [spiritual] sons.

Don Bosco had promptly understood that. He first began the annual celebration of Our Lady of the Rosary at Becchi. Then he directed that in all his schools pupils should daily recite five decades of the rosary. Finally, in his sermons and writings he strove to restore this ancient practice in families. He looked upon the rosary as a weapon which would bring victory not only to individuals but to the Church as well. That is why his [spiritual] sons published all the encyclicals of Leo XIII on this prayer so beloved by Mary and, through the *Bollettino Salesiano,* warmly promoted the desires of the Vicar of Jesus Christ [concerning the establishment of the Confraternity of the Rosary in all parishes].[2]

[2] We are omitting a footnote on this matter. [Editor]

CHAPTER 25

A Dream: The Snake and the Rosary (Continued)

TO our speculations on the symbolism of Don Bosco's house and pear tree at Becchi we now add other details of the dream and Don Bosco's comments, as taken down by Francis Provera:

On August 21 [1862], after night prayers, we were all anxious to hear the second part of the dream which Don Bosco had described as strange and interesting, but we were disappointed. "Last night," Don Bosco said, "I stated that I would tell you the second part of the dream but, regretfully, I do not think it opportune to keep my promise."

A general murmur of regret and disappointment greeted these words. When it subsided, Don Bosco went on: "What can I say? I thought it over last night and again today, and I decided I had better not disclose the dream's second part because of some things I do not wish known outside this house. Therefore, be satisfied with making the best of what I have already told you."

The following day, August 22, we again pestered him to tell us, at least privately, the part of the dream he had not revealed. He did not want to change his mind, but after much insistence on our part, he finally relented and promised that he would tell us more that evening. At the "Good Night" he spoke as follows:

Yielding to your repeated entreaties, I shall tell you the second part of the dream or at least what little I can. First, I must make it clear that no one is to write or talk about it outside this house. Discuss it among yourselves, laugh at it, do as you wish, but only among yourselves.

Now, while talking with that stranger about the rope, the snake, and what they symbolized, I turned around and saw boys picking up scraps of snake meat and eating them. "What are you doing?" I shouted. "Are you mad? That meat is poisonous!"

"It's delicious!" they replied.

And yet, no sooner had they swallowed it than they would crumple

to the ground and their bodies would swell and harden like stone. I was helpless because, despite this, more and more boys kept eating that meat. I shouted and yelled at them, and even slapped and punched them to keep them from eating, but in vain. For every one who crumpled to the ground, another took his place. Then I called the clerics and told them to go among the boys and do all they could to make them stop eating that meat. My order was ineffective; worse yet, some clerics themselves began to eat it and they too fell to the ground.

Nearly out of my mind at seeing so many boys lying about me in such a pitiful state, I turned to the stranger. "What does this mean?" I asked. "These boys know that this meat will kill them, yet they eat it. Why?"

"Because 'the sensual man does not perceive the things that are of God.' That's why!" he answered.

"But isn't there some way of saving these boys?"

"Yes, there is."

"What?"

"Anvil and hammer."

"Anvil and hammer? What for?"

"To put the boys back in shape!"

"You mean I am to put them on an anvil and strike them with a hammer?"

"Look," the stranger said "this whole thing is a symbol. The hammer symbolizes confession, and the anvil symbolizes Holy Communion. These are the remedies you must use." I went to work and found the treatment very effective, but not for all. While most boys were restored to life and recovered, a few did not because their confessions were bad.

After the boys had retired to their dormitories, I (Provera) asked Don Bosco privately why his order to the clerics had proved ineffective. "Because not all obeyed," he replied. "Worse yet, some even ate that meat."

On the whole, these dreams represent real life. Along with Don Bosco's words and deeds, they reveal the state of things in any average community where the most outstanding virtues are matched by deplorable weaknesses. This comes as no surprise, because evil unfortunately tends to spread far more readily than virtue.

Consequently, constant vigilance is necessary. It may be said that it would have been better to play down or even eliminate more disgusting details, but we disagree. If history must properly fulfill its noble mission and teach life, it must describe the past as it happened, so that future generations may not only draw inspiration and courage from the noble examples of preceding ages, but also learn through their failings and errors how they must act themselves. A one-sided report of historic facts can lead only to distorted views. When suppressed and unacknowledged, mistakes and failings will repeat themselves, while a misguided apologia will neither help the favorably disposed nor make the hostile change their views. Only uninhibited frankness will generate belief and trust.

To speak our mind fully, we shall add that, while giving explanations which better met the boys' intellectual level, Don Bosco let it be known that he passed over other details of no less account because they probably did not concern them. In fact, in his dream he outlined not only the present but the future, as in the dream *The Wheel of Eternity* [1] and in others we shall later narrate. The poisonous meat of that monstrous snake might well symbolize scandal which destroys one's faith, or immoral, irreligious readings. Likewise, what else might disobedience, collapsing, swelling up, and hardening signify but pride, obstinacy, and love of sin? These are the evil effects of the deadly poison fed them by that accursed food, by that dragon described by Job and identified by the Fathers of the Church as a figure of Lucifer. "His heart shall be as hard as stone." (Job 41, 15) Indeed, the hearts of those poisoned wretches become rebellious and obstinate in sin. What cure is there for such hardness? Don Bosco used a somewhat obscure symbolism which basically pointed to supernatural aid. We are inclined to explain it thus: The prayers and sacrifices of the just must first ask that God's grace warm hardened hearts and soften them so that the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist—the hammer and the anvil on which the metal is shaped into lasting art before it is tempered—may exercise their divine efficacy. Thus the hammer's blows and the anvil's support will both bring about the cure of an ulcer-ridden but now docile heart. As the sparks fly, the heart is reconditioned.

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 530–44, 546–57. [Editor]

We now resume our narrative. Certain that with Mary's protection he could withstand and overcome hell's attacks, Don Bosco prepared his pupils to celebrate the feast of Our Lady's Nativity. On August 29 he gave the first nosegay for the novena. He also personally gave the next five on successive evenings. Bonetti recorded them in his chronicle:

1. Let us all strive to commit no sin whatever during this novena.
2. Let us give a friend some good advice.

(*On the following evening he set an example himself by suggesting that we make necessary sacrifices to overcome bad habits while we are still young and urging us to have the greatest confidence in our superiors in both spiritual and material matters.*)

3. Those who have never made a general confession should consider doing so; those who have should recite an act of contrition for all the sins of their past life.
4. He told us of Father Cafasso's reply to a menial laborer who had asked him what would most please Our Lady. "What pleases mothers most?" he questioned the man in turn.

"When we show our love for their children."

"Good," Father Cafasso went on. "You are right. Therefore, if you want to please the Madonna, love Her Divine Son first by receiving Him in Holy Communion, and then by keeping your heart free of all sin, even venial." This was Father Cafasso's reply, and now I pass it on to you.

5. Tomorrow do your best in church not to sit back on your heels or on the pew behind you or anything like that. I say this to those who have this habit. To all I suggest this nosegay: Speak Italian [instead of your dialect] and remind those who forget.
6. Show perfect obedience in everything. Tomorrow let's see to it that we don't have to be reminded about house rules and our chores. If you're told to do something special, obey promptly and readily. I assure you that this will be the most welcome flower we can offer Our Heavenly Mother. In this way we shall deserve to be called Her children. As a loving Mother, She will teach us the holy fear of God, as She Herself promises through Holy Scripture: "Come, children, hear Me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord." [Ps. 33, 12]

Thus did Don Bosco talk to his sons as he was about to leave them to go to Montemagno for the feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary which fell on September 8. Marchioness [Mary] Fassati had

donated a magnificent painting by Lorenzoni for Our Lady's altar and had established a yearly fund of four hundred lire for the pastor to provide a priest for Holy Mass, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament at Our Lady's altar every Saturday. The Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary was to be set up [in that parish] and a triduum of sermons was to be given as a spiritual retreat of sorts in preparation for this solemn act. Since the beginning of August, Marchioness Fassati had discussed the matter with Don Bosco who readily agreed to preach. The following letter is his reply to the marchioness' daughter, Azelia, who had written to him on behalf of her mother:

Turin, August 15, 1862

Beloved daughter in Jesus and Mary:

Canon [Eugene] Galletti and I will come to Montemagno to honor Mary. All we need know is:

1. When do we start and how many sermons are we to preach?
2. Should we preach in Italian or Piedmontese?

Many thanks for your wonderful news. I am sorry that I cannot write more often. I exhort you to behave so as to become your parents' joy and a model of Christian conduct to Emmanuel. The enemy of our souls will put you to the test, but do not be afraid. Be obedient and place your hope in the Blessed Sacrament and in Mary Immaculate.

May the Lord bless you, your parents, and my good friend Emmanuel. Ask them all to pray for me.

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

To Marchioness Fassati he wrote as follows:

Turin, August 29, 1862

Dear Marchioness:

All will be done as you stated. Kindly clear up a few doubts of mine:

1. Will it be too late for us to leave here at 11 on September 6?
2. Does the pastor expect us to preach three sermons on Sunday and Monday?

3. Does he prefer Italian or Piedmontese? It makes no difference to us.

Please ask the pastor to make arrangements with the vicar general regarding faculties for confession, since we are in another diocese. Ask the pastor also to provide confessors. On these occasions there is always too little time and too few priests to hear all the confessions.

May the Immaculate Virgin keep us all as Her children! May Our Lord's blessings fall abundantly upon you, the marquis, and your family!

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Canon Eugene Galletti and Don Bosco arrived at Montemagno on the appointed day. Their preaching, as expected, reaped a rich harvest, befitting the zeal of these two saintly priests. Father Louis Porta told us that Canon Galletti spoke like a seraph of Mary. Don Bosco too—Father Rua declared—spoke very highly of the canon's austere saintliness and inspiring sermons, as though he himself were far inferior to that servant of God in Christian perfection. Yet his sermons, too, were enthusiastically listened to by the crowded church.

While Don Bosco was in Montemagno to bless the picture of the Sacred Heart of Mary, a horrible, distressing sacrilege took place in Turin on September 8 [1862]. As established by law, a procession was being held that day to commemorate the liberation of the city from the French siege of 1706.[2] The procession had just started within the cathedral when suddenly a man leaped up to the dais holding the statue of Mary and the Holy Child which was to be carried in procession. Pulling a hatchet from under his jacket, he began to hack savagely at the Virgin and Child. Though the statue was made of silver-coated copper, the Child's head and one arm were severed and fell to the floor. Screams, cries, confusion, and chaos filled the vast cathedral. Quickly, a carabiniere dashed to the maniac as he stood hacking away and struck at him with his sword. Bleeding, handcuffed, and shielded from lynching, he kept shrieking, "They made me do it. They paid me to do it!" He had no record of insanity, but the civil authori-

[2] *See* Vol. II, p. 299. [Editor]

ties, feeling bound to cover up the foul play of a rival political party, had the culprit declared insane and confined to a mental hospital. A solemn triduum of atonement was held first at the cathedral and then at the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Don Bosco took part in the latter when he returned from Montemagno.

The Oratory boys had been longing for him. The feeling was mutual, for he wanted nothing more than to be with them. The Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

September 13 [1862]. One can always learn something just by staying close to Don Bosco. His conversations—at times even just one word—are a great spur to virtue. After dinner one day, we had crowded about him, anxious to hear some choice advice. When the conversation shifted to ways and means to holiness, some of us remarked that all true servants of God had loved and practiced penance, as our own Dominic Savio had done. Don Bosco dwelt on the topic at length, citing example after example, and then concluded, "I can tell you this. Some of our own Oratory boys will be raised to the honors of the altar. If Dominic Savio continues to work miracles as he has been doing so far, I have no doubt at all that, if I'm still living and able to promote his cause, the Church will permit his cult at least in the Oratory."

"What a day that will be for us!" we all exclaimed.

At this point Don Bosco asked the cleric [John Baptist] Anfossi, "What do you think is the easiest way we can become saints?" Several voiced their opinions. Don Bosco listened and then remarked, "The easiest way is this: to see God's will in all our superiors command us and in all that befalls us in our life. Sometimes it may not seem so, but that is when we must be brave and reflect, *Since I was told to do this, I'll go ahead and do it.* At other times, we may feel depressed because of misfortune or physical or moral difficulties. In such cases, we are not to lose heart but rather take comfort in the cheering thought that all was ordered to our good by Our Merciful Heavenly Father. Let us offer ourselves and our possessions to Him. It is the surest way to scale the heights of perfection. There may be some, for instance, who wish to do penance and fast although their superior advised otherwise. Let us obey, because then we shall be sure of doing God's will and climbing one step higher on the ladder of sanctity."

On another occasion, when speaking of his wish to save his boys'

souls, he remarked, "If I were as anxious to save my own soul as I am in trying to save the souls of others, I would be sure of my salvation." Another time, when commenting on his yearning to possess his boys' hearts, he added, "I would give up everything to win my boys' hearts and thus be able to offer them as a gift to the Lord."

Meanwhile, during this year, 1862, Don Bosco had the Ferrando Press print the third edition of his *Storia d'Italia* [History of Italy] which was favorably reviewed by *Civiltà Cattolica.*[3]

[3] *Civiltà Cattolica,* Series V, Volume III, p. 474. We are omitting this review. For information on Don Bosco's *History of Italy* and other reviews, *see* Vol. V, pp. 322–31; Vol. VI, pp. 80f, 156f, 657–61. [Editor]

CHAPTER 26

Don Bosco's 1862 Lottery (Continued)

THE lottery [1] should have ended during the first week of September, but Don Bosco, wishing to make the best of favorable circumstances, sought and obtained a month's extension.[2]

He was tireless in seeing that bundles of tickets were mailed to individuals or institutes which might have been overlooked, and even to people who he knew would refuse them. The lottery would at least acquaint them with his work. Furthermore, as some tickets were still to be disposed of, he sent a second mailing to many generous benefactors. Some accepted, but others did not. A few of the former mildly chided Don Bosco, who in turn gently apologized for his indiscretion. One such letter was addressed to Baron Feliciano Ricci at Cuneo:

Charitas benigna est, patiens est. (St. Paul)

Turin, September 5, 1862

My dear Baron:

I deserved your chiding but am glad you kept the tickets for our poor boys' sake.

The baroness returned them. Please tell her that when I am in desperate need, I shall again appeal to her all the same. She is so good and kind that she will not be able to refuse me. She will have to send me money, even though I shall have no lottery tickets to send her.

I have accepted the boy Cavallo, whom you kindly recommended, at a monthly fee of fifteen lire to be contributed by his mother. As you offered to add something to this sum from your own pocket, I set no fixed sum but shall accept any alms you may be pleased to offer for our poor boys.

[1] *See* Chapters 10 and 11. [Editor]
[2] We are omitting trivial details. [Editor]

Enclosed please find lottery tickets. . . . (For heaven's sake, am I already forgetting your recent reprimand?) I was only fooling!

God bless you and your good baroness.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The archbishop of Florence likewise had received a similar surprise, since both Don Bosco and the committee chairman had separately sent him circulars and [a total of one hundred twenty-five] lottery tickets. The generous prelate kept them all and sent in his donation with a gracious letter.

Only one category of donors had not yet been tapped--the foreign embassies in Turin. This task was entrusted to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia. Our archives possess the replies of only the embassies of Holland, Spain, and Portugal.

CHAPTER 27

Don Bosco's 1862 Lottery (Continued)

SINCE nearly all the lottery tickets had been sold, the executive committee met to set a date and place for drawing the winning numbers. The secretary was to ask the mayor's consent as well as his suggestions on adding glamor to the ceremony.[1] The drawing took place at City Hall on September 30 [1862] . . . and the winning numbers were published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno*. . . .

The lottery was a great success. However, roses have thorns, and so, as the result of a printer's error, two people validly claimed the first prize—a magnificent painting of St. Anthony, officially appraised at five thousand lire, which had been donated by Chevalier Frederick Peschiera, professor at the Accademia Ligustica in Genoa. In settlement, one winner was awarded the painting and the other its cash value. This was a considerable loss for Don Bosco, but Divine Providence wanted to put him to the test and generously compensate him later. Meanwhile correspondence and mailing of prizes kept him busy for several months. . . .

In view of the Oratory's expansion and the lottery's success, many important people, including politicians, tried to persuade Don Bosco to have the government recognize his institutions as legal moral bodies. He had experienced similar overtures, not to say pressures, also in the past.[2] Even his friend, [Joseph] Cotta, a banker, and other benefactors insistently urged him to take this step, pointing to its far-reaching advantages—protection of the authorities, enhanced public standing, greater confidence on

[1] We are omitting the secretary's letter requesting permission to hold the drawing at City Hall. We are likewise omitting pertinent press announcements. Other similar omissions in this chapter will be indicated by dots. For details of a previous lottery, *see* Vol. IV, pp. 225–30, 246–54. [Editor]

[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 74. [Editor]

the part of benefactors that legacies to the Oratory would not be litigated, reduction of the inheritance tax, and exemption from other taxes and tariffs. Then they dangled before his eyes the probability of vastly increased donations, as was daily the case with the Cottolengo Institute. Furthermore, pastors and notaries would be free to recommend his institutions with greater assurance to people who wanted to make charitable bequests. Finally, they kept insisting that he would be the sole, independent administrator during his lifetime, and that, thanks to better income, his could be an easier and more tranquil life. Since Don Bosco did not let himself be swayed by these considerations, a certain coolness arose between him and these good friends of his, but later events proved how much more prudent he had been. He had foreseen—possibly in the dream of the red horse [3]—what lay ahead. Loving God and not himself, he loved poverty too. He realized that [should the Oratory become a legal moral body recognized by the state] he would have to retain buildings, lands, and funds bequeathed to the Oratory, thereby running the risk of exciting the greed of politicians. He feared that government supervision would degenerate into government control of goals and policies. He foresaw also the squandering and misuse of charitable funds; perhaps he even anticipated the Crispi bill of 1892 which would force the merger of institutions having the same goals.

Above all, Don Bosco wanted total independence and freedom of action. He absolutely rejected any interference except from the Holy See, to whose aid and defense he had fully committed his congregation. So well known was this commitment that [because of it] he never received sizable bequests for purely philanthropic reasons. "Prominent people," Father Rua declared, "wanted to persuade him to make his institutions merely philanthropic in their scope, but he never relented, with the result that he often lost large legacies." Yet, many religious superiors from all over the world often called on him for first-hand information on his principles and mode of operation in this most important matter.

[3] *See* pp. 128f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 28

The 1862 Yearly Outing

AS work on the lottery was being wrapped up, Don Bosco made necessary preparations for the [annual] fall excursion.[1] Toying with the idea of going as far as Vigevano, he wrote to the local pastor, Canon Ludwig Colli Cantone, as follows:

Turin, September 20, 1862

Dear Reverend Father,

I wrote to you a few weeks ago, but perhaps my letter went astray because of a faulty address. Last year you mentioned the feasibility of bringing some of my boys to Vigevano. I would now like to know if you can provide straw bedding for about seventy of them for four or five nights, as well as bread and soup. The rest we can easily buy elsewhere.

I shall deeply appreciate a prompt answer. Young Albasio is well and doing fine.

Wishing you heavenly blessings, I am gratefully,

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

For reasons unknown to us the reply was negative, and so he had to change plans.

On September 25, a small group of boys, a few clerics, and a priest or two set out for Becchi to start the novena in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary. The others were to join them on the vigil of the feast. This [annual] outing was meant to be a reward for the best pupils, an exercise in obedience and mortification for those whom duty forced to remain at the Oratory, and a well-deserved punishment for those whose conduct had been unsatisfactory.

[1] For other such outings, *see* Vol. V, pp. 223–26, 353f; Vol. VI, pp. 143–54, 436–43, 608–14. [Editor]

Among those who usually went on these outings was a hard-working, talented young man, a jack-of-all-trades who had proved himself a veritable popular factotum: singer, musician, comedian, waiter, and what have you. His many talents, however, were spoiled by serious flaws that Don Bosco could not possibly ignore, as the youth himself confessed to us in writing:

One day at the beginning of June 1862, Don Bosco passed by me and said, "My dear Peter, I'm no longer pleased with you. I hear a lot of complaints." He had cautioned me several times before, but on those occasions, although I was terribly hurt to hear such a remonstrance, I had kept silent. This time I don't know what happened to me. Instead of promising to do my best and avoid more trouble, I lost control. "I'm sick and tired of being picked on," I replied. "All I hear is complaints. I'm sorry I ever learned to do so many things for the Oratory!" Another superior might have soundly smacked me for such insolence and thrown me out, but Don Bosco loved my soul, and so he merely said, "Then start unlearning." Without another word, he went up to his room, leaving me alone to absorb what he had said. I immediately felt deflated. *What have I done!* I said to myself. *What a fool to talk that way to such a good father!*

That day Don Bosco had to leave town on matters concerning the lottery. On his return a few days later, we all hastened to welcome him back. He had a smile and greeting for everyone. When I took his hand to kiss it, he ignored me and spoke kindly to another boy. Seeing that he paid me no attention, I was sure that I was no longer worthy of his friendship and love. I went to my room and cried all day.

From then on, Don Bosco no longer sent for me to give him his weekly shave. Two months later he called for me, but he never said a word. I was miserable, but to that moment I had never thought of apologizing.

Autumn came and with it the annual excursion in which I had always taken part as a musician and comedian. However, when Joseph Buzzetti gave Don Bosco the names of those who were to go, Don Bosco crossed mine out.

As customary, the names of the chosen ones were publicly read the evening before departure. The name all expected to hear was not read. No one can comprehend my feelings at finding myself left out, especially when Buzzetti told me that Don Bosco himself had struck my name

off. Such a thing had never happened to me before. Don Bosco gave no reason for his action and nobody ever knew about it, but I was left behind at the Oratory. The happy brigade set out with Joseph Buzzetti, Andrew Pelazza,[2] Charles Gastini,[3] and a few superiors. At the first stop—probably Chieri—Don Bosco had a friend of mine write me this note on his behalf: "Dear Peter, I have nothing against you. Don Bosco is still your friend and still loves you. All he seeks is your eternal salvation. What I did was only to teach you a lesson. Never reply insolently to your superiors. Pray for me. I daily remember you in my Holy Mass. Cheer up!" These few lines assuaged my sorrow somewhat, but I still kept asking myself: "Why did I abuse such a good father?"

Don Bosco arrived at Becchi on October 2; the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary fell on the 5th. That day he wrote to Chevalier Oreglia whom he had invited to Becchi:

Castelnuovo, October 5, 1862

My dear Chevalier:

I only invited you in the event you could come up. In view of what you say, please stay on the job with our good Suttil.[4]

The clerics and lay members who were not included in our excursion should not worry. Either they were needed at the Oratory or good reasons made this arrangement necessary.

While I am writing, I hear that Suttil has just arrived. Therefore, carry on as best you can.

May God help you to persevere in doing good works.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Before Benediction in the afternoon, Father Cagliero preached on the glories of the rosary to a vast crowd of fellow villagers from a makeshift pulpit in the yard fronting Don Bosco's house. At one point of his popular, stirring sermon, he told all to look

[2] Pelazza applied for admission to the Salesian Society on May 8, 1863. One of his last assignments was the management of a Salesian paper mill. He died in Turin in 1905 at the age of 62. [Editor]

[3] Gastini was one of the pioneers of the Oratory. He had begun frequenting it at the age of eleven in 1848 at Don Bosco's invitation. *See* Vol. III, pp. 243ff. [Editor]

[4] A talented young musician and political refugee. *See* Vol. IV, p. 292; Vol. VI, pp. 441f. [Editor]

fondly upon the little hillock where they stood because it might one day become famous as Don Bosco's birthplace. "Am I a mere blind worshiper of him who has been a second father to me?" he asked. "God forbid if I exaggerate his merits. But your very presence bolsters my belief what will hopefully be done by our successors." [5] This happy allusion to a more glorious future delighted his listeners, and was properly understood and applauded.

An amazing incident occurred in those days. One of the pupils, wandering alone into the nearby woods, quite unexpectedly came upon a foul-mouthed person. The lad was stunned and could scarcely believe his ears. Suddenly, he distinctly heard his name called twice. Immediately he ran to his teacher, thinking it was he who had called him. When he learned otherwise, he quickly realized the danger he had run into and who had saved him. He went to Don Bosco who was surrounded by a crowd of boys. As Don Bosco fixed his gaze on him with a knowing smile, the boy knew for certain that Don Bosco had seen everything.

Another time, after supper, a throng of boys jammed the room where Don Bosco was having his meal. "Get me Marcora, Salvi, and Daniele!" he suddenly said. Several boys ran out to look for them. The three had left the premises without permission. By sending for them, Don Bosco wanted his boys to realize that nothing escaped his attention. After checking to see if anyone had tipped Don Bosco, the boys had to exclaim, "How could he know?" How often we heard that exclamation!

On Monday morning, October 6, in spite of a steady rain, the boys were raring to go hiking to several local villages. "What can we do now?" they asked Don Bosco as he came out of the chapel.

"What our grandfathers did."

"What was that?"

"They let it rain."

After breakfast, at about nine, a glimmer of sunshine broke through the clouds. Amid general applause, all eyes turned to Don Bosco. "Are we going?"

"With such brave soldiers we have nothing to fear," Don Bosco replied smilingly, after a brief reflection. "Let's go."

[5] Don Bosco's birthplace is now a popular shrine. Next to it stand an imposing church and school. [Editor]

"Hurrah for Don Bosco!" they shouted. "Let the band lead!" They all set out and reached Castelnuovo at eleven. Father Cinzano, the pastor, thrilled by their visit, treated them to a generous lunch, after which they resumed their march toward Villa San Secondo. Since it had rained during their meal and the sky was still threatening, a few sickly lads were told to wait there and later return to Morialdo.

Meanwhile a kind gentleman offered Don Bosco a lift in his carriage. The boys broke ranks to let him pass and cheered him. "I'm going ahead to get your supper ready," he shouted and waved his hat.

As the boys trekked along, the sun came out again, but when they got past Mondonio, they were caught in a two-hour downpour which turned the road into a torrent of sticky mud and clay. They kept going, but it was dark when they reached Piea, and they feared that they would lose their way if they pushed on to Villa San Secondo.

"Now what?" they asked.

The priest in charge had been given emergency instructions by Don Bosco. "Listen," he said. "We have friends here in Piea. We shall go to the castle and ask them to put us up for the night."

"Yes, let's," they all shouted.

The castle topped a small hill. The path was mostly gravel and the slippery climb was slow and precarious, with many a tumble. However, they soon heard friendly voices urging them up. They finally reached the wide-open gate where servants told them that Don Bosco was waiting for them. He had arrived an hour earlier to tell Chevalier [Mark] Gonella [6] of their coming.

The chevalier and his family warmly welcomed them and provided clothes from their wardrobe and the wardrobes of the farm manager and of the estate tenants. The boys took off their drenched clothes and put on anything available, emerging in the strangest outfits: oversized jackets, bathrobes, topcoats, frock coats, blouses, blankets, clogs, slippers, boots, and so on. All laughed merrily at each other's strange garb. A huge fire was kindled to dry their garments. Meanwhile, soup, a main course, and a huge

[6] A generous benefactor of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. III, p. 22; Vol. VI, pp. 27f, 153, 436. [Editor]

pot of polenta were made ready, and all ate with giant appetites. Toward ten o'clock the rain had ceased and Don Bosco wanted to continue his march, but his host would not hear of it and ushered all the boys into a large hall on the upper floor to sing and entertain. The cleric Bongiovanni impersonated Gianduia,[7] and Suttil sang a Venetian song as well as a ballad, "The Bridge of Pity," his own composition. All chatted freely until midnight, to the great delight of the distinguished family, who also provided plenty of blankets for the night.

Meanwhile two of the older boys had gone ahead to Villa San Secondo, where Don Bosco was expected for a religious service on the following day. The two youths allayed the pastor's anxiety, assuring him that, rain or shine, Don Bosco and his boys would be there on time. By the next morning the weather had improved and Don Bosco and his boys left the castle. Around ten, the band led the Oratory group into Villa San Secondo under glowing skies. In the parish church Don Bosco held a short service for the local St. Aloysius Sodality by blessing a framed painting of their patron saint, the work of Charles Tomatis. After the ceremony he preached on the joy St. Aloysius was now experiencing for having loved God during his youth. In the evening the Oratory boys staged a small performance which was interrupted by rain.

On Wednesday, October 8, after an early lunch and the recitation of the *Angelus,* they left [for Calliano]. The sun was blazing hot. At about half past three, as the boys, sweating and panting, began climbing a hill, a man who had been actively engaged in the 1860 government confiscations [of religious property] spotted Don Bosco and called to him from across his fenced garden as they went by. Don Bosco recognized his voice. "Let's ignore him," he whispered to the priest walking at his side. "It's better that way!"

At last they reached Calliano and the band heralded their arrival with a tune. The pastor, Father Joseph Sereno, and his assistant warmly welcomed them. That same morning Don Bosco had sent a message to the pastor about providing bread for the whole group. Father Sereno immediately invited the boys to his newly built rectory where tables and benches were rapidly set up

[7] A popular puppet of the Piedmontese theater. [Editor]

and a full meal was served, but he insisted on entertaining Don Bosco in his old rectory. The latter wanted to continue on his way after a brief rest, but Father Sereno would not hear of it. That evening there was solemn Benediction with orchestral accompaniment, and at nine a stage play was given for the village folk in a courtyard lit by torches and oil lamps. That evening the village boys had the time of their life. Meanwhile, plenty of straw had been laid out in the new rectory for the boys' bedding.

On the following morning, Thursday, October 9, the Oratory boys edified the villagers by their devout attendance at Mass and their numerous Communions. At ten, they left. Toward noon, they met a schoolmate near the small hamlet of San Desiderio. "Accomasso, Accomasso!" they called out as soon as they spotted him. The boy, who was on vacation,[8] made his way through his cheering friends, kissed Don Bosco's hand, and invited him on his parents' behalf to pay them a brief visit, telling him that a little snack was ready for the whole group. Afterward, resuming their march, they passed through Grana and pushed on toward Montemagno to call on Marquis Dominic Fassati and his wife.

As they approached the village, a well-to-do twelve-year-old boy happened to be playing with his friends in a nearby gully close to a little country shrine known as Our Lady of Valino. A rapid drumbeat and bugle blast interrupted his game. "Did you hear that?" he cried. "Let's go and see what it is!" Leaving hat, shoes, and jacket on the grass, they all raced toward the music. By that time Don Bosco's group had reached the village square. The boy elbowed his way through the crowd until he stood in front of Don Bosco. Instantly impressed by the boy's bold, candid look, the saintly priest asked, "What's your name?"

"Louis Lasagna."

"Would you like to come to Turin with me?"

"What for?"

"To go to school with all these boys."

"Sure!"

"Well, then, tell your mother to see me tomorrow morning at the rectory in Vignale."

[8] At this time in Piedmont's rural districts school opened in late October because of the grape harvest. [Editor]

As the boys and the band made their way to the castle, they were met by Marquis Fassati who was thrilled by their unexpected visit. Instantly his son ordered the household staff to prepare a hearty snack for the visitors. "Show them what you can do!" his mother urged.

Father Cagliero played the piano; then there was vocal and instrumental music, followed by a "thank you" to the friendly hosts, and then a final piece as the band and the boys resumed their trek to Vignale, just opposite Montemagno atop one of Monferrato's highest hills. There Count and Countess Callori were expecting Don Bosco. A year previously, the countess had met Don Bosco at a dinner at Marchioness Fassati's and had invited him to bring his boys to her castle at Vignale the following year.

"Do you really want me to?" Don Bosco had asked.

"Certainly! I'll be delighted!"

"Then I'll come."

At that time the countess was having serious problems. "Pray that they end soon," she had asked Don Bosco.

As was his habit, Don Bosco had momentarily raised his eyes to heaven. "No, I won't pray for that."

"Do you mean my troubles will continue?"

"Yes, they will."

"And perhaps get worse?"

"Correct!"

"Then I must have patience." Don Bosco had foreseen the future.

The group reached Vignale toward eight that evening. Thick crowds of peasants disrupted their ranks. Count Frederick Callori came down to meet them, but, unable to approach Don Bosco, he turned back and, with some difficulty, managed to lead the band to the castle. Don Bosco was hemmed in by swarms of people. Luckily a few sturdy youths shielded him from the crush. With torches lighting the way, they reached the castle at last. The count's eldest son elbowed a way for Don Bosco through the crowd into the princely castle. Halls and corridors were brightly lighted. He personally seated the Oratory boys at the heavily laden tables, and after supper he brought them to the top floor where they found comfortable sleeping quarters.

On the next day, Friday, October 10, Don Bosco said Mass in the beautiful private chapel for the Callori family and his pupils. Since they could not all fit in, the boys heard Mass from the adjoining hall.

During Don Bosco's stay at Vignale, the cleric Celestine Durando interviewed and gave entrance tests to prospective Oratory students, among them Louis Lasagna, who was escorted by his mother. Father Evasio Beccaris, vicar forane, introduced him and three other boys to Don Bosco. Looking at Lasagna, Don Bosco remarked, "I can say nothing about the other three boys, but I am sure that this little redhead (Lasagna) will turn out well." All the boys were admitted to the Oratory as students.

On Saturday the young count escorted the boys on a tour of the ancient castle ruins and the adjacent family mausoleum fenced by tall cypresses.

On Sunday, October 12, the feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Don Bosco and other priests spent four hours hearing confessions. Almost everyone received Communion. At ten, a Salesian priest sang the high Mass, served by ten altar boys, while Father Cagliero led the choir. After Vespers, Don Bosco preached in dialect to the crowds filling the long, majestic nave. He told them the history of the archconfraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary founded for the conversion of sinners, and so effectively did he speak that the entire congregation was deeply moved. In the sanctuary, Father Joseph Goria, vicar forane, wearing the *mozzetta* of his office, kept his eyes, brimming with tears, fixed on Don Bosco as he spoke for over an hour, even though it did not seem that long. When Don Bosco returned to the crowded sacristy, Father Goria went to him and kissed his hand, tearfully thanking him for the good he had done for his people and especially their pastor. The Litany of the Blessed Virgin and Benediction followed. Later that evening, the boys staged a play. Festivities concluded with fireworks and clouds of balloons.

That same evening a more memorable event occurred. A number of boys—among them Joseph Buzzetti and the student Modesto Davico—were standing around Don Bosco, when he suddenly became pensive and after a few moments said: "Let us kneel and say an *Ave* and *De Profundis* for a companion of yours who shall die tonight." In utter amazement, the boys knelt

to pray. Then, as they stood up, Davico said to Don Bosco: "This is strange! You bring us on an outing and then tell us that somebody has to die!"

"Davico must be scared," Don Bosco remarked. "He is afraid that he is the one!"

"I'm not afraid!" rejoined Davico, "but it's not cheering to be told that!"

"Don't worry," Don Bosco went on. "It's none of you! The boy who will die is at the Oratory now, feeling fine and merrily playing with his companions. He has no idea that before dawn he shall stand at God's judgment seat!"

In 1888, Jerome Suttil gave us this written report:

After supper on October 12 [1862], we went to the chapel with our hosts for night prayers. Then Don Bosco, who had been kneeling on the altar steps, arose and, facing us, said loudly and clearly, "Let us pray for one of our boys who is now very sick at the Oratory."

The next day we heard the stunning news. Don Bosco had told us to pray for our dying schoolmate at ten o'clock the night before. Of course, no mail was delivered during the night, nor was there a telegraph office at Vignale. Yet the next morning at five, when we were in the chapel for morning prayers, Don Bosco, before vesting for Mass, turned to face us, as he had done the night before, and said, "Let us say a *De Profundis* for the soul of the boy who died last night at the Oratory."

The following day, Tuesday, a letter came from Father Alasonatti, announcing the death which had occurred as Don Bosco foretold. I can vouch for the truth of this statement. The incident made such a deep impression on me that I never forgot it. Bishop Cagliero and others who were on the same outing with us recall it too and will corroborate my words.

The Oratory necrology has this entry: "October 12, 1862. Rosario Pappalardo, of Giarre (Catania), died suddenly." A schoolmate of his, Joseph Sandrone, who heard Don Bosco's prediction and testified to its truth, described the youngster as a rather short, plump, rosy-cheeked ten-year-old who wore a gunner's uniform. He had gone to bed apparently healthy and very much alive, but the next morning he was found dead in bed.

On October 13, after dinner, the boys were allowed to do some

sightseeing about Vignale in small groups. The next day, Don Bosco took them all to Casorzo, where they had been invited by Father Felix Bova, its very zealous pastor. He welcomed them with complete warmth and generosity. The entire village was entertained by the boys' vocal and instrumental music and by stage presentations. Here Don Bosco had an occasion to show his zeal not only for the spiritual welfare of his boys and the faithful in general, but also for that of priests. As he was about to leave, a priest, the son of a wealthy family, handsomely dressed like a man of the world and sporting fancy footwear, tie, and gold pin, came up to him. He began to compliment Don Bosco on the excellent conduct of his many boys and then launched into a lengthy praise of Don Bosco's training. Don Bosco let him finish, never even glancing at his face or giving a sign of attention. When the priest was through, Don Bosco, as though he had just noticed him, asked, "Who are you, and where do you come from?"

"I am from Asti," he replied. "I heard that you were passing through the village, and I wanted to see you and introduce myself."

"What!" exclaimed Don Bosco. "You dared to come all the way from Asti dressed like this?"

"Certainly! I've dressed this way for a long time, and nobody ever said anything."

"Do you mean to say that the vicar capitular of Asti never called you to task?" And quite heatedly he pointed out to the priest the harm he was doing by such conduct. Their conversation was rather lengthy, but, after excuses and apologies, the priest at last respectfully capitulated to Don Bosco's admonition. The following day he returned in clerical garb and assured Don Bosco that from then on he would follow his wholesome suggestions.

Meanwhile Don Bosco, thinking of his return trip, sent the cleric John Baptist Anfossi to Commendatore Bona, director general of railroads, to request free passage on two third-class coaches. The cleric was well received and was told to return on the next day for an answer. It was contained in a letter testifying to Don Bosco's most valuable contributions to society and the government and directing all stationmasters to assign him two coaches for any destination at no charge. The same favor was granted in 1863 and 1864. With this matter settled, Don Bosco decided to leave Vignale where his friendly, inspiring conversation had won him all hearts.

Count and Countess Callori rank among the most generous and steady Salesian benefactors. The countess, for instance, promised Don Bosco a handsome contribution for the construction of the Mirabello school, and then she actually increased the sum. She was a mother to him, and he often sought her advice. Generally they were of one mind, as she quite perfectly understood Don Bosco's spirit and objectives. When he decided to build the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he mentioned it to her, without however giving any hint as to its title. "To whom shall we dedicate this church?" he asked. "To Mary, Help of Christians!" she replied instantly. Likewise, it was she who later suggested that Don Bosco's new church in Corso del Re be named after St. John the Evangelist, exactly as Don Bosco had planned to do. But while the latter aimed at thus honoring Pius IX, the countess intended to perpetuate Don Bosco's name.

Late Tuesday morning [October 14, 1862], Don Bosco and his boys left Vignale with a thousand gold lire for travel expenses—a gift of the countess. At Camagna they were offered refreshments by Father Peter Varvelli, the pastor; by evening they reached Mirabello, where they spent the night as guests of the Provera family. Mr. Provera already had plans for the new school drawn up, and he had stocked a good amount of construction materials. Don Bosco conferred with him, and they decided to speed up the work so as to have the school ready by the following fall.

On [Wednesday] October 15, the boys walked the long distance between Mirabello and Alessandria, with a single stop at Castelletto Scazzoso where they were treated to refreshments by the local pastor. They reached Alessandria late at night and silently walked to the seminary, where the rector, Father Peter Parnisetti, joyfully welcomed Don Bosco and turned the building over to him. Here each boy had a bed, because the seminarians were still on vacation.

On Thursday, October 16, after Mass in the beautiful seminary chapel, the boys went sightseeing while Don Bosco made courtesy calls on the vicar capitular, Canon Philip Ansaldi, and other prominent priests and laymen.

On Friday morning, October 17, they got permission from General Count Radicati to visit the imposing citadel; in the afternoon they walked to the battlefield of Marengo, scene of Napole-

on's famous victory over Austria on June 17, 1800. They also visited the local museum housing his carriage, a number of weapons, and other mementos of that historic event, which Don Bosco had previously described in detail to them. That evening they staged a play for a large audience.

On Saturday morning, October 18, Don Bosco took them to the cathedral to say good-bye to the Madonna della Salve; then, after dinner, they marched behind the band to the railroad station. Father Lawrence Grossi, the pastor of St. Peter's, led them, brandishing a baton like a drum major. He had invited Don Bosco to Alessandria, had met the group on arrival, and had obtained permission for the band to march and play. Don Bosco caught up with his boys at the station. He was accompanied by many priests, among whom were his friends and cooperators, Canon Victor Bolla and Canon Charles Braggione. He immediately went to pay his respects to the stationmaster. When the train arrived, the boys got on and shouted their good-byes to Alessandria.

Toward evening, amid blaring trumpets, the happy brigade filed through the Oratory gate. The house was full of pupils, old and new. After greeting Don Bosco, they mobbed their newly arrived schoolmates, helping them with their belongings and bombarding them with questions. Their inquiry went on for weeks.

As he was having supper, Don Bosco was informed of the illness of Peter—the young man who, as we have already seen, had not been allowed to take part in the outing. That evening he paid him a visit. "He came immediately," the youth wrote. "He cheered me up, heard my confession, gave me his blessing, and never again mentioned my misconduct. I was ill for several months, partly because of my grief for having offended Don Bosco, but I finally recovered."

CHAPTER 29

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate

DON Bosco returned to Turin for the start of a new school year and for a ceremony which, though mournful, he personally cherished. Father Cafasso's admirers, considering it unbecoming that his remains lie unprotected from the dampness of the earth, wanted to line his grave with bricks. With the necessary permit, therefore, they exhumed the coffin—still in excellent condition—and, chanting the *Miserere,* carried it processionally to the cemetery chapel for an overnight stay. The next day, after a sung requiem Mass and exequies attended by many guests, the coffin was again interred with the chanting of the *Miserere.* Meanwhile the walls of the grave had been bricked over and supports had been placed on the bottom to keep the coffin away from the bare clay. Before being lowered, the coffin was opened and absolution repeated once more. To everyone's amazement, the body appeared as at the burial two years and four months before,[1] except for slight decay in one ear and a hair growth of about one inch. Canon [Eugene] Galletti recited a brief eulogy and then the coffin was locked, interred, and covered with flowers. A few weeks later a bas-relief inscription was placed on the grave. In 1891 another identification of the body was made, but by then only the skeleton remained. Don Bosco thus showed his respect for his saintly, venerated teacher.

Meanwhile, the November issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was mailed, and the galleys of the December issue—which he had proofread on the last outing to Becchi—were being returned to the printer.

The Ruffino chronicle has this entry under October 28 [1862]: "Don Bosco said: 'The Lord sent me to look after boys. I must

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 372f. [Editor]

therefore cut down on other work and keep myself fit for them.' But how could he do that when, directly or indirectly, he saw his boys in everything he did?" For their use, too, he published *Letture Cattoliche*. To the November issue, entitled *Germaine, a Cabinetmaker*—a story centered on the happiness of the Christian family—he added an *Appendix* for the spiritual guidance of boys exposed to moral dangers:

Tips for Boys

1. Don't fancy that your age can make you look forward to a long life. It is too uncertain, my dear boys. Rather, it is quite certain that some day you shall die and that a bad death brings eternal misery. Therefore, be more concerned with keeping yourselves in the state of grace in order to meet death than with anything else.

2. If you happen to be doing some good, the devil and your own sense of self-satisfaction will tell you that you've probably done more than enough already; maybe people will even tag you as fanatic and overscrupulous. At death, though, the good you have done will seem so slight that you will realize you have been deceived. Strive to be aware of this now.

3. A good thing for boys to think of seriously is the choice of a vocation. Unfortunately, most youngsters hardly give it a thought and end up choosing the wrong state of life, with present and future unhappiness. Therefore, consider it and ask God to enlighten you. Then you will make the right choice.

4. Two enemies we can never fully overcome: our flesh and our fear of what others may think of us. You will be fortunate indeed if you get used to fighting and subduing them while you are still young.

5. Amusements are not necessarily bad, but it is not easy to choose and use them moderately. Always ask your confessor's advice and use them sparingly. If you can sometimes do without them to exercise self-control, you will have achieved a victory and a reward.

6. Don't consider yourself truly spiritual-minded until you go to confession and Communion gladly and can really enjoy spiritual books and devout companions.

7. The boy who cannot put up with offenses, but must entertain revengeful feelings, or who cannot accept a reprimand, even undeserved, from his superiors or parents, is still far behind in virtue.

8. No poison is more fatal to youth than bad literature. More than ever today, books are to be feared because of their abundance and

disguise. If you value your faith and your soul, do not read them unless you have your confessor's approval or the advice of other learned, pious persons. I repeat—learned and pious.

9. As long as you do not fear and avoid bad companions, consider yourself to be in serious danger. In fact, fear you are bad yourself.

10. Choose your friends and companions among people who are known to be good; in fact, choose the best among them. As you associate with them, imitate the best in them and avoid their shortcomings. We all have those.

11. Be neither stubborn nor fickle. I have always noticed that fickle-minded people usually fail in all they do.

12. The worst folly of a Christian is to keep putting off his conversion, as though he were sure of the future and felt that it mattered little to play safe. Be truly smart. Put your conscience in order as if it were your last chance. Go to confession at least every two weeks; make some meditation and do some spiritual reading daily; examine your conscience every evening; pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady; attend Sunday congregation;[2] make the Exercise for a Happy Death. Above all, be deeply, sincerely, and constantly devoted to the Blessed Virgin. If you could only understand how important this is, you would not trade it for all the gold in the world! Therefore, cherish this devotion. I hope and pray that you may one day say, "All good things come to me together with it." [Wis. 7, 11]

The December issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Work,* was authored by Father Felix, a famous Jesuit orator. . . .

Upon his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco had the pleasure of meeting a fine priest, Father Dominic Pestarino. Born on January 5, 1817 at Mornese, in the Acqui diocese, he went through all his schooling, including elementary grades, at the Genoa seminary. A model of self-denial, he had an ardent love for Jesus Crucified and Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. As a student and later as a seminary prefect, he won the hearts of all by his kindly ways and thus was able to promote piety and frequent reception of the sacraments. His closest friends—the learned Father Cajetan Ali-

[2] The Sunday "congregation," as the term implies, was a "gathering" of school children designed to have them attend Mass and catechetical instruction together. This custom was observed also by public schools, though at this time it was dying out, especially in the large cities, because of the neglect of school authorities. [Editor]

monda,[3] Father [Joseph] Frassinetti,[4] prior of St. Sabina, and Father [Louis] Sturla,[5] a zealous missionary—always spoke of him as an exemplary priest. In 1849, he was forced by the revolution to return to Mornese, his native village, where he found piety nearly extinct. Hardly anybody went to the sacraments; worse yet, much of the young people's behavior was scandalous.

His apostolic zeal soon remedied this lamentable situation, so much so that Bishop Modesto Contratto, on his pastoral visit, exclaimed, "Mornese is the garden of my diocese." When Father Pestarino first returned to Mornese, Communion on weekdays was almost unheard of, but within a few years most men and women received daily. Though he was all things to everyone, he took particular care of the young. We shall just mention what he did during the last three days of the carnival season to keep them from moral dangers. He invited them to the rectory, provided games at his own expense, led them in singing, gave them skits to act out, and served them refreshments. He stayed with them all the time. At a suitable hour in the evening he took them to church for night prayers. After inviting them to Mass, Communion, and the rosary the next day, he dismissed them and they quietly returned home. Similar entertainment he provided for girls in another house under the care of a woman teacher, [Angela] Maccagno, but always at his own expense.

In 1850, when only eighteen, this fine teacher, under Father Pestarino's spiritual direction, decided to devote herself entirely to God while remaining in the world. She found some other girls who shared her ideals and on December 8, 1855, formed the Sodality of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate—a secular institute in which the members, though staying with their families or living in the world, would have the means of attaining Christian perfection and zealously assisting in their neighbors' eternal salvation.

This pious association aimed at supplying an alternative to many young women who could not join a religious congregation because of lack of means or for other reasons. Membership was restricted to girls aspiring to Christian perfection through the practice of the

[3] In later years Father Alimonda became bishop of Albenga in 1877, cardinal in 1879, and then archbishop of Turin in 1883. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. V, p. 401. [Editor]

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 528. [Editor]

three evangelical counsels; however, they assumed no formal vows or other moral obligation that would bind them under penalty of sin. Their regulations were quite simple, spelling out their duties toward attaining their dual purpose, the procedure to be followed in their meetings which were similar to spiritual conferences, and their way of life. On May 20, 1857, Bishop Modesto Contratto [of Acqui] approved the association, which spread so rapidly that by 1862 it existed in almost all Italian provinces.[6]

Father Pestarino entrusted all the young girls of Mornese—who, no less than the boys, loved and obeyed him—to the foundress of this association. Indefatigably he preached and heard confessions night and day, occasionally remaining fifteen hours consecutively in the confessional. He loved all, did good to all, and was in turn loved by all. Truthfully, he was the people's true friend. His fellow villagers repeatedly elected him municipal councilor. On his part, he repaid their trust by consistently promoting their spiritual and temporal welfare. Neighboring villages too took no important decision without first consulting him.

Father Pestarino came to hear of Don Bosco and was anxious to meet him. Before going to Turin, though, he took the advice of Father Raymond Olivieri, the pastor of Lerma, and made a pilgrimage with him to the Shrine of Our Lady of the Rocchette to beg his Heavenly Mother to manifest Her will. There he felt inspired to dedicate his life and possessions—which were considerable—to further Don Bosco's works. At the Oratory he was so impressed by Don Bosco's zeal and charity that they became fast friends. Enchanted by the Salesian spirit, he immediately sought to join the Salesian Society and began to practice its rules most exemplarily. He promised Don Bosco unlimited obedience and declared that he was ready to live at the Oratory, but in view of his good work in his parish, Don Bosco told him to stay on, lest the Daughters of Mary Immaculate at Mornese and elsewhere be deprived of such a pious and wise spiritual director.

Could Don Bosco have foreseen that within ten years he would choose the more virtuous of those girls to start the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians? Seemingly, he did. When, in 1863, Caroline Provera of Mirabello, sister of our own

[6] *Vita ed Istituto di Santa Angela Merici* per Giuseppe Frassinetti, Priore di Santa Sabina (Genova), Tipografia Salesiana, Torino.

Father Francis, spoke to Don Bosco of her wish to enter a religious congregation, he replied: "If you can wait a little while, Don Bosco will have Salesian sisters just as he now has Salesian clerics and priests." However, she preferred not to wait, went to France, and took vows in the congregation of The Faithful Companions of Jesus. Father Evasio Rabagliati heard this from the good sister herself when he met her in Paris together with the superiors of [their convent in] Rue de la Santé.

Father Pestarino returned to Mornese. Don Bosco, meanwhile, kept waiting for a reply to a petition he had sent to Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of the Interior, who shortly before had donated five hundred lire to the lottery. Don Bosco's fertile mind was always looking for new ways to help the young, expand his work, and obtain financial help:

Turin, October 2, 1862

Your Excellency:

I respectfully bring to your attention a grave, long-felt need of boys in their pre-teen years. The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and similar institutions provide for older boys, but there are no homes for destitute younger boys, as officials in your department have often enough learned.

I earnestly desire to do something about this and plan to open a hostel near the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales with regulations of its own, entirely different from those of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

The hostel would take in boys between the ages of six and twelve to give them a proper education and prepare them for whatever art or trade they are qualified. After their twelfth birthday, these boys would be transferred to the Oratory of St. Francis of Sales.

The main problem in starting this project is lack of funds. Hence I appeal to your department for a loan of five thousand lire, which will be repaid by accepting into this hostel twenty-five youngsters recommended by you. The daily cost per boy would run to sixty-five *centesimi* for board, tuition, clothing, and supervision, but we would assess the government forty.

I trust that Your Excellency, who so concernedly promotes the moral welfare of homeless lads, will agree to my plan. Further suggestions are welcome.

Graciously forgive any inconvenience I may have caused you in my desire to help my fellow man.

Humbly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco probably did not expect his plan to be taken into consideration, as indeed it was not. Nevertheless, he brought it to the attention of a cabinet minister who very earnestly esteemed him and who always protected his institutions. The petition chiefly expounded ideas which, he felt sure, would not be adversely criticized. On several occasions he had been unable to accept boys insistently recommended by the Department of the Interior because they were too young. He now offered a solution. As we have already narrated, he had assigned an apartment of the rented Bellezza house to a teacher, [James] Miglietti, for this very purpose; [7] other rooms could be added to meet his plan. He was also ready to provide supervision for the boys. At the same time, without appearing to do so, Don Bosco spelled out conditions as regards fees. Although his proposal was not approved, he did accept several children recommended to him by civil authorities and entrusted them to Miglietti's care. He also petitioned proper authorities for discarded army clothing, and his request was granted.[8]

[7] *See* pp. 39f. [Editor]
[8] We are omitting the routine notification. [Editor]

CHAPTER 30

Gleanings from Oratory Life

WHEN Don Bosco returned to the Oratory [toward the end of October 1862] the resident pupils numbered over six hundred. Among them was Joachim Berto of Villar Almese who had heard of Don Bosco from childhood. He became a Salesian [in 1865], and Divine Providence disposed that he should become Don Bosco's personal secretary from 1866 to 1886. It is to him that the Salesian Congregation is indebted for much information on Don Bosco.

Also among the new boys were those whom Don Bosco had admitted personally as he traveled through Montemagno, Vignale, and other villages during the fall outing. Upon his return to Turin, he also made good his promise to Secundus Bernocco, a young busboy at a café in Piazza San Carlo, to whom one evening he sent Dominic Belmonte, then a rhetoric student, to tell him he could pack his things and come to the Oratory.

"Did Don Bosco send you?" the youth asked.

"Yes."

Without further ado, he came to the Oratory, completed his courses, and eventually received his degree in literature and a professorship in Rome. He died toward the end of 1889.

The sight of so many boys prompted people in the house to ask Don Bosco, "How are you going to feed them?"

"The Lord sent them to me; the Lord will provide for them!" he would smilingly answer. He liked to join them at playtime, entertaining them in his own amazing way as he closely observed their characters, inclinations, deficiencies, spiritual progress or decline, and probable vocation. We would call this study the first phase of a charism which Our Lord bestows on His servants for the discernment of spirits, a favor obtained through prudence,

prayer, and patient charity. Don Bosco made his own St. Paul's dictum to the Thessalonians, "Test all things; hold fast that which is good," and he often repeated it to his co-workers as a general norm to follow. His conversation sparkled with anecdotes and interesting material. One such instance was reported to us in writing by Jerome Suttil on November 21, 1884, as follows:

One day toward the end of autumn in 1862, shortly before two in the afternoon, Don Bosco was leaning against the pillar between the staircase and the hall, just under the gaslight, with several boys and young men about him. I couldn't say exactly who was there with me, but I am pretty sure about Father Cagliero, the clerics Durando and Jarac, the boy Lasagna, and others. Don Bosco pointed his finger at all of us in turn (I still seem to see him), stopping at no one in particular, and then said these exact words: "Someday one of you will be a bishop." I never forgot those words, nor any other he said. When Father Rua wrote to me in Paris of Father Cagliero's departure for [South] America, I instantly recalled that prediction. "He is the bishop Don Bosco foretold," I exclaimed, still feeling the impact of his words. Since I do not presume to interpret Don Bosco's prediction and cannot swear that Father Cagliero was present, he might have well meant someone else, possibly one of the boys, maybe Lasagna himself. Who knows?

Louis Lasagna was then twelve. Whenever Don Bosco appeared, Louis immediately felt drawn to him and considered himself to be lucky indeed if Don Bosco said a word to him or gave him a kindly glance. He was a spirited lad, wild to a degree, and dominating. His first few days at the Oratory were marked by boisterous quarrels with his companions. Used to the free life of a farm, he found discipline and rules irksome, and at times he was not slow to show it. Intensely sensitive and imaginative, he managed to run home one day when he felt homesick, but his parents promptly brought him back. Don Bosco did not reprimand him. Rather, he treated him so kindly and understandingly that he won him over to God and the salvation of his fellow man.

Don Bosco immediately perceived the boy's rare gifts. He was frank, artless, generous, exceptionally strong-willed, very affec-

tionate, and endowed with remarkable memory and intelligence. Even then Don Bosco would often remark, "There is good stuff in this boy, you'll see!" It was the stuff of which bishops are made.

Don Bosco also had a striking gift of discerning which boys were suitable for his Oratory. Francis Provera gave us the following written account:

A man wanted to place his son at the Oratory, but Don Bosco firmly refused. The father insisted so much, however, that finally he felt almost forced to give in. When the boy—seemingly a good lad—arrived with his father, Don Bosco called the youngster aside.

"Will you like it here?" Don Bosco asked.

"Sure! I couldn't wait to come," was the answer.

"Well, then. If you want to stay here," Don Bosco whispered to him, "you must not do such and such a thing again. . . ." The boy was startled.

'Who told you all that?"

"Nobody! I just happen to know it."

"Then I don't want to stay here, and no one can make me!"

"Why not?"

"You know too much."

He hastened to his father, and nothing could persuade him to stay.

The school year 1862–63 started, as scheduled, under the direction of Father Michael Rua, but the teachers were not certified. In the past, school authorities had given Don Bosco no trouble, but in 1861–62 they had begun to make inquiries about the staff, ratio of pupils to a classroom, and finances.[1]

In his reply Don Bosco had admitted that he had no certified teachers, but was willing to accept teachers sent by the Department of Education if he did not have to pay their salaries. As a result, he had been left in peace that year. Meanwhile, he took steps to have some of his teachers certified. For this reason, he wrote to Canon Vogliotti, seminary rector and diocesan provicar, requesting him to exempt some Oratory clerics from seminary examinations so

[1] We are omitting a letter to that effect from the superintendent of schools. The next paragraph is a condensation of Don Bosco's efforts to comply with scholastic legislation. [Editor]

that they could study for certification. He also asked for other concessions for young clerics and boys studying for the priesthood. He then petitioned competent government officials to help provide the required ecclesiastical patrimony for poor seminarians who were about to be ordained.

His efforts benefited the archdiocese too, as in the case of Father Joseph Rocchietti, who, after ordination, had remained at the Oratory for a year, but was forced to leave for reasons of health. Despite this, he returned to the Oratory because of his love for Don Bosco and joined the Salesian Congregation, remaining in it as long as he was needed. He daily heard the boys' confessions and preached at Sunday evening services. His sermons were simple and well planned. When his health worsened and made religious life too burdensome, he again withdrew, with Don Bosco's permission, and joined the diocesan clergy. In 1862 he became spiritual director of the Giaveno junior seminary. Thus the Oratory gave the diocese an apostle. For many years he labored very zealously as a pastor, promoting priestly vocations. He died a saintly death in Chieri some months after becoming a Vincentian novice.

At Father Rocchietti's departure, Don Bosco assigned the Sunday evening sermons to Father John Cagliero. His first sermon in this capacity, on the feast of All Saints and the commemoration of All Souls, revealed his striking oratorical talents. He carried out this duty every Sunday until he left for the missions of Argentina. The first three years he preached in Piedmontese, as was then the custom, and then switched to Italian when Don Bosco banned the use of dialects at the Oratory.[2] By this time regular class schedules for both artisans and students gave the house the look of a well-established boarding school. That same year, 1865, Don Bosco, who until then had always preached in Piedmontese, also switched to Italian in his narration of the lives of the popes.

On Sunday, November 2, Don Bosco took a short trip to an out-of-the-way upland village of the Alba diocese. His mission over, as he and his companion were returning to the Bra train station, they got lost. Darkness set in, and it began to rain. Realizing that they could not make the train, Don Bosco decided to seek the hospitality of a chaplain whose church stood on a

[2] *See* Vol. VI, p. 277. [Editor]

small knoll alongside the road. As the rain kept pouring, he knocked, but it was a long while before the door opened. The chaplain received Don Bosco rather coldly as the latter explained his predicament, apologizing for the inconvenience they were causing him. After offering them a chair, the chaplain asked who they were.

"We are two priests from Turin," Don Bosco answered.

"Where are you stationed?"

"At a church in the Valdocco area."

"Have you already had supper?"

"Not yet. We would appreciate anything you have."

"Regretfully I'm low on groceries, but I have bread and cheese. . . ."

"That will be fine! We are thankful for that."

The chaplain had his housekeeper serve them their meager supper.

"Are you planning to stay overnight?" the chaplain inquired while they were eating.

"In this kind of weather," Don Bosco replied, "I wouldn't know where else to go."

"True, but unfortunately I have no spare beds."

"That's no problem. Two chairs will do, particularly since we plan to leave early in the morning."

"In that case, make yourselves at home. I am sorry I cannot offer you better accommodations. Incidentally, did you say you come from Turin?"

"Yes."

"Do you happen to know a priest named Don Bosco?"

"Slightly," answered Don Bosco. By this time, Father Savio, somewhat peeved at such niggardly hospitality, was beginning to enjoy the humor of the situation. Shadowed by the lamp and unnoticed by the chaplain, he winked at Don Bosco.

"I have never met Don Bosco," the chaplain went on, "but somehow I need a favor from him. Is he usually obliging?"

"Yes. He'll be glad to help."

"I thought I'd write him tomorrow."

"Don't bother," Father Savio exclaimed. "Just give your message to this priest."

"Are you a good friend of his?" the chaplain asked Don Bosco.

"I'd say so!" Don Bosco answered smilingly.

"He *is* Don Bosco!" Father Savio blurted, no longer able to hold his laughter.

"You, Don Bosco?" the chaplain exclaimed, amazed and highly embarrassed. "Why didn't you tell me before! Please forgive me if I haven't treated you properly. . . . Your arrival was so sudden, so unexpected. Forget that cheese. . . . I recall now that I have something left over from dinner. Let me get it." From the pantry he took half a roast chicken and told the servant to fry some eggs and spread a clean tablecloth. Don Bosco smiled gracefully while Father Savio keenly enjoyed the fun.

At bedtime, the chaplain laid a mattress over some chairs and converted a sofa into a bed. Charmingly putting him at ease, Don Bosco asked what he could do for him, and when he learned that the priest wished to place a boy at the Oratory he promptly obliged.

However, never failing to give a bit of advice when he thought it necessary for the good of others, the next morning, on taking his leave, he thanked his host, and as the latter apologized, he interrupted him: "Don't mention it! Let's learn from everything that happens to us. If we have nothing, we can give nothing; but if we have a little, let's give a little. If we have much, let's give accordingly. In all cases, let charity be our guide, for ultimately it will be to our advantage."

At Bra, Don Bosco boarded the train with Father Savio. After praying a while and reading a few letters, he told his companion an amusing incident which had happened to him some time before on a similar trip. He had often heard of a very wealthy, devout countess, and had hoped to interest her in his work. To that time, however, he had had no opportunity to meet her. The countess had an understandable feminine weakness: she bristled at a mere hint of her age. Since her daughter was over thirty, she could not bear to hear herself alluded to as the "old countess."

One day Don Bosco met her in the same train coach. Deep in thought, he sat beside her, unaware of her presence. As the train began to move, she turned to him. "Excuse me, Father," she asked, "might you be Don Bosco?"

"Yes, madam. And with whom do I have the honor of speaking?"

"I am Countess X. . . ."

"Oh, I'm delighted to meet you. And how is your mother?"

"My mother? It's been some time since Our Lord called her to Himself."

"Impossible! Just a few weeks ago I heard that she was perfectly well."

"Perhaps you are mistaken. I am the mother countess."

"I would never have believed it!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "You look so young and healthy that I may well be excused for my error."

"Well," the countess said, visibly gratified, "I take care of myself. I have never indulged in excesses, and that's why I enjoy such good health."

"I will pray that the Lord will keep you so for many more years," Don Bosco rejoined.

They kept talking until Don Bosco had to get off. From then on Countess X . . . was an enthusiastic supporter of Don Bosco, and she helped him until her death.

Toward the beginning of November, Don Bosco published his almanac for 1863, entitled *Il Galantuomo* [3] *and His Tales.* . . . The Table of Contents was followed by this notice:

"For important reasons, *Il Galantuomo* will not explain his prophecies [of 1861].[4] Likewise, it will not disclose what his bizarre brain may come up with!"

Prudence had prompted this step. If prophecies of previous years [5] had created some stir in Turin and other cities of Piedmont, those of 1861 had given rise to many rumors, rubbed certain liberal circles the wrong way, and intensified the suspicion that there were disloyal or indiscreet officials in certain government departments. It was obvious that Don Bosco knew more than he should have known, and that there was no clue as to how he managed to penetrate government secrets. We know that many of his predictions came from his dreams. In fact, even before they appeared in print, he revealed some of them to his boys, explaining

[3] *Galantuomo* means an honest and upright man, an honorable man, a gentleman. *See* Vol. IV, pp. 448f. [Editor]

[4] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 472ff. [Editor]

[5] *See* Vol. V, pp. 187f. [Editor]

them clearly and in detail. Subsequent events proved them true, as many witnesses who are still living can testify.

At the end of 1859, government officials had warned him not to compromise himself by such revelations, and Don Bosco promised discretion. . . . But before the end of 1861, a government official, Chevalier A. Buglione of Monale, summoned him to his office. "Don Bosco," he told him on the premier's behalf, "we are all fond of you, but *Il Galantuomo* is embarrassing to us. We are often asked, 'How can Don Bosco know such things?' Imagination runs wild, and this annoyance is exasperating. Take my advice in a friendly way and stop writing certain things in your almanac."

Don Bosco understood that, for all its polite wording, this was a formal prohibition, and from then on he ceased making any predictions in print.

CHAPTER 31

A Threat Averted

ALERTED by telltale signs and secret tip-offs, Don Bosco could foresee that a storm was threatening the Oratory. Rattazzi's cabinet, relentlessly assailed, slandered, and threatened by political rivals, could not last much longer, and Rattazzi's resignation was expected at any moment. Don Bosco knew he could no longer rely on his support, whatever it amounted to.

As we have already narrated,[1] Don Bosco had run into serious trouble after being falsely accused of pursuing an anti-government policy. We also reported that he had successfully defended his good name before Farini and Rattazzi and so had warded off the storm which hung over the Oratory, to the acute embarrassment and pique of some who had plotted its destruction.[2] But his enemies—revolutionaries and mere political opportunists—refused to acknowledge defeat, renewing their attack at the end of 1862, after a two-year truce, and giving Don Bosco no end of trouble. Strictly for the sake of history and without rancor, we shall now point out some of their blameworthy actions; in fact, we are glad that good faith can exonerate them in part. Indeed, some of them, on becoming better acquainted with the facts, befriended Don Bosco and his boys and in some instances even championed their cause.

The ringleader of this cabal was Chevalier Stephen Gatti, chief inspector of the Department of Education, with whom our readers are already well acquainted.[3] This time the pretext was not political but educational. Don Bosco's enemies knew that, to keep his schools going, he had to depend on uncertified teachers. They

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 390f. [Editor]
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 384–93. [Editor]
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 348ff. [Editor]

also knew that at this time of the year, with school already in session, he could neither find certified teachers nor afford to pay them. An order to hire such teachers would force him to close his schools. Therefore, they bided their time, waiting for a propitious moment to carry out their strategy.

Aware of their scheme and of the serious predicament he was in, Don Bosco immediately decided to call on Chevalier Gatti and mollify him. Gatti received him with a show of affability and politeness and suggested that he have his teachers take certification exams, feeling sure that they would be totally unprepared on such short notice. On hearing that they were ready and indeed wanted to be examined, he warmly congratulated Don Bosco, but, as we shall soon see, from that moment on he racked his brains to find some pretext to prevent them from taking the exams.

Don Bosco had not been fooled by Gatti's feigned courtesy. He too realized that certification of his teachers was the only way to keep his schools open. Some time before he had hinted at this in a letter to Canon Vogliotti. Now, therefore, he asked the Department of Education to admit Father John Baptist Francesia and the clerics Francis Cerruti, Celestine Durando, and John Baptist Anfossi to exams for state certification.[4] When his letter went unacknowledged, he sought an audience with the minister of education, Senator Charles Matteucci, but in vain.

It was during this trying period that Don Bosco remarked, "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was born of hard knocks, grew under hard knocks, and continues to thrive under hard knocks." In fact, the harsh treatment of a destitute boy by the sacristan of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin had given Don Bosco the opportunity to begin his oratories for poor, abandoned youth.[5] As his work expanded, thanks to his care and the charity of his benefactors, it faced such relentless opposition and hostility, as we have seen,[6] that it barely escaped extinction. From then on, at more or less brief intervals, it underwent attacks from other enemies who were no less bold and powerful.

Whenever his co-workers felt downhearted at so many diffi-

[4] We are omitting his letter. [Editor]
[5] *See* Vol. II, pp. 56–61 [Editor]
[6] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 384ff. [Editor]

culties and persecutions, Don Bosco would cheer them by saying, "We need have no fear. I have experienced God's help to be all the greater as human means are at their lowest." At other times he would say, "Our trust in God must be greatest when our trials are hardest." He often exclaimed, "If this work is Yours, O Lord, then You will sustain it. If it is mine, I don't mind if it fails."

On December 1 [1862], Rattazzi announced that the king had accepted his resignation and that of his cabinet. Charles Farini and Joseph Pasolini were asked to form a new cabinet, which was sworn in on December 8. [Luigi] Farini became premier without portfolio, Senator Michael Amari became minister of education, and Francis Selmi was appointed superintendent of schools for the Turin province, succeeding [John] Muratori. Selmi was a druggist from Modena whom Farini had known in 1860 as commissioner of Emilia.[7]

Selmi shared Chevalier Gatti's poor opinion of Don Bosco's work, and he moved at once against the Oratory by demanding that Don Bosco submit his teachers' credentials. Don Bosco replied by sending their names and declaring that their credentials would be soon forthcoming because they were already taking courses in Italian, Latin, and Greek literature at the Royal University of Turin. He also pointed out that his schools were charitable institutions for indigent boys and had for some years been recommended and befriended by local school authorities, by the superintendent of the province, and even by the minister of education. All these officials had granted the Oratory teachers full freedom and had not demanded that they be certified by the state. Don Bosco also quoted from a letter of Minister John Lanza, dated April 29, 1857, in which the latter stated that his department would offer its fullest cooperation for these schools' greatest possible development. In conclusion, Don Bosco requested that the superintendent authorize these same teachers to continue teaching at least until they had taken the certification exams. However, Selmi would not listen. He adamantly turned a deaf ear to petitions, disdainfully rejected mediation, and insisted that Don Bosco either hire certified teachers by the end of the [civil] year or close his schools.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 284. [Editor]

Don Bosco decided to make another attempt, realizing that if he could avert that fatal blow for a year, "time and necessity would suggest a defense for the future." Rather than write or send mediators, he himself, after reciting his usual Hail Mary, called on the superintendent at the beginning of December [1862]. After several hours' wait in the antechamber, Don Bosco was eventually ushered into the dignitary's presence. Patient research and the assistance of a witness to this episode enable us to reconstruct substantially that confrontation.

The superintendent, sitting pompously in his armchair, first ordered Don Bosco to stand before him.

"So, I have the honor of meeting a famous Jesuit, indeed the mentor of the Jesuits!" he exclaimed. By this remark he meant that Don Bosco was an enemy of modern institutions. Then he began ranting against priests and religious, against the Pope, and against Don Bosco, his schools, and his books. So sharply and insultingly did he speak that even Job's patience would have been sorely tried. Don Bosco, perhaps remembering Our Lord's exhortation to the faithful to rejoice at insults in His name, listened to this stream of abuse with a calm smile. His dignified bearing, so sharply in contrast with the superintendent's, finally got on Selmi's nerves.

"What!" he almost snarled with eyes blazing. "Here I am foaming with rage, and you laugh?"

"Commendatore," replied Don Bosco, "I am not laughing at you but at what you say. Those things do not concern me."

"Aren't you Don Bosco?"

"Yes, I am."

"Aren't you the director of the Valdocco school?"

"Yes, I am."

"Aren't you Don Bosco, the Jesuit *par excellence?*"

"I don't quite understand."

"Are you an idiot?"

"I leave that to Your Excellency's judgment. If I cared to use such language, I would have both reasons and words to do so, but I am an upright citizen. Respect for authority and the need to provide for several hundred young orphan lads enjoin me to keep silent, not to take offense, and to beg a kind hearing of Your Excellency."

Such words of admirable patience and charity somewhat soothed the ruffled superintendent.

"Just what are these schools you want favors for?" he asked a little more courteously.

"They are schools for poor boys who come from various parts of Italy and even from foreign countries. Some take academic courses, and others are taught a craft or trade which someday will help them to earn an honest living."

"How many boys do you have?"

"Over a thousand, counting day boys."

"For heaven's sake! Over a thousand? Who pays you for looking after them?"

"Nobody! My reward will come from God, our just master. Likewise, I have no income. I must toil from morning to night to get them food and clothing."

At this, the superintendent became not only calmer but more courteous. He asked Don Bosco to take a seat.

"Listen, Father," he continued, "I thought you were an idiot, but I now see I was mistaken. No idiot could ever run an institution like yours. But why do you keep fighting government and local authorities?"

"Commendatore, I challenge that assertion. I have lived in this city over twenty years and have always enjoyed the good will of all my fellow citizens. No one has ever charged me with disobedience to civil authority. My whole life—all I have ever said, written, or done—bears witness to that. My activities were always regarded with respect until political upheavals drove my fellow citizens from public office to make room for their successors. I don't mean you. But ever since, I have become the target of these newcomers who care not a bit for the dire needs of poor children but readily attack and abuse those who do. Worse, they conspire to destroy what has cost money, toil, and sweat."

Don Bosco's words were too clear to be misunderstood. "Just a moment," Selmi, himself a new appointee, interrupted. "Do you think that I am your enemy because I am a newcomer?"

"No, Commendatore. That's why I specifically excepted you. I was referring to individuals who have no scruples about lying and sacrificing the welfare of their fellow citizens in order to

advance their own careers or to pursue other selfish interests. These despicable individuals are the ruin of civil society."

Painfully aware that Don Bosco was coming too close to touchy matters, Selmi tried to steer the conversation into other channels. "Right," he said adroitly. "I perfectly agree with you, but I must say that I don't particularly like your writings."

Of course, Don Bosco's writings had nothing to do with the issue. Nevertheless, in the hope of bringing some light into darkness and drawing Selmi on to better ground, Don Bosco went along with the digression. "I am sorry that my writings do not meet with your approval," he replied. "Kindly point out some faults so that I may remedy them in future editions."

"Didn't you write a biography of Dominic Savio?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well, that is a fanatical book! Ever since my son read it, he has been pestering me to take him to you. I fear for his sanity."

"This would prove that the subject matter was presented clearly, interestingly, and intelligibly, and that was exactly my intention. Did you find anything wrong with its style or language?"

"No, not at all. In fact the language is excellent, and the style is easy and simple. But, leaving this booklet aside, I can't approve of your *Storia d'Italia*[8] which finds its way into everybody's hands. What you wrote about Ferdinand Charles III, duke of Parma, would be enough to destroy the book's value.[9] You made a hero and martyr of a scoundrel who stopped at nothing. He was so hated that two thousand people bound themselves by oath to kill him."

"I did not know of this detail," Don Bosco rejoined, "but even if I had, I dare say I might not have mentioned it. I was writing a short history for young people, and so I had to keep within limits by selecting only such facts as might prove morally useful to my readers. Besides, I was not writing that prince's biography but simply describing his tragic death, which I called a Christian death. Indeed he died utterly resigned to God's will, after receiving the Last Sacraments and forgiving his assassin."

[8] *See* Vol. V, pp. 323–31. [Editor]

[9] We are omitting a footnote reporting an excerpt from Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia*. [Editor]

"Well, I suggest that you revise the book before reprinting it."

"Kindly point out, personally or through others, what should be revised, and I assure you that I will give it serious thought."

"I appreciate your being so obliging. I like that. But now let's talk of the problems you have run into with your schools and of your difficulties in submitting to local school authorities."

"There are no difficulties. I am only requesting that you permit my teachers to continue teaching."

"Who are they?"

"[John Baptist] Francesia, [Celestine] Durando, [Francis] Cerruti, and [John Baptist] Anfossi."

"Who pays their salaries?"

"They receive no salary. They are former pupils themselves, and they are glad to work for the benefit of youngsters, as others once did for them."

"Then I see no trouble. If that's how matters stand, I give your teachers my approval without further ado. Just draw up a formal petition to me, listing their names and the classes they teach, and as soon as I get it, I'll send you the proper decree of approval immediately."

"My deepest thanks, Commendatore! I shall be ever grateful for this favor. Before taking leave, I would like to ask a further favor—that you kindly keep my boys under your protection and at your convenience honor us with a visit. I am sure that, with your deep interest in the poor, you will be quite gratified to see a thousand poor children under one roof."

Selmi was deeply stirred. "My dear Don Bosco," he said warmly, "you are an angel on earth. I assure you that from now on I'll do all I can for your boys. Very soon I shall pay your Oratory a friendly visit and take my family along. I hope that our future meetings will begin more cordially than this one did. I am glad to have met you and to have gotten to know you. Everything is settled. I'll be looking forward to seeing you again!"

Thus ended a visit which had first boded a tragic outcome! From then on Selmi, convinced of the vast good that the Oratory was doing for the poor, always showed Don Bosco great consideration and favored him in every way he could. As soon as he got

home, Don Bosco sent the formal petition as agreed.[10] But before granting approval, perhaps wishing to be fully acquainted with the matter or to let it be known that he would not be led blindly, Selmi sent this note to Don Bosco:

Turin, December 11, 1862

I have asked Dr. Camillo Vigna of this department to visit your institute. I inform you of this so that, should you yourself be absent when he comes, he may be assisted in carrying out his task.

Francis Selmi, *Superintendent of Schools*

Dr. Camillo Vigna came and pronounced himself satisfied with the premises and the boys' deportment. The superintendent then issued the promised authorization on December 21. Thus the Oratory was spared further problems during that school year. Shortly afterward, Selmi requested the 1861–62 school statistics, which Don Bosco forthwith dispatched.

[10] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 32

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

JESUS crucified teaches a solemn lesson to those who can take it: only from suffering are great things born, and from thorns manly virtues blossom. Always modeling himself on Christ, Don Bosco understood His teachings and put them to good account. He suffered and strove through most of his life. Suffering tempered his character. Never straying from the path pointed out to him, he actually accomplished wonders. Serene and patient, he turned sorrow into merit and solace, for through sorrow does man accord with God's will.

The trying last weeks of 1862, which would have normally discouraged weaker hearts, further corroborate our assertion. In fact [in the midst of these difficulties] Don Bosco was editing the January-February issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Blessed Catherine De Mattei of Racconigi,* a short biography marked by supernatural incidents. . . .

Meanwhile the Immaculate Conception novena had begun and Don Bosco exhorted his pupils to make it very devoutly. Every evening, at the "Good Night," he assigned a nosegay and commented on it. When necessary, Father Michael Rua substituted for him. The nosegays were as follows:

Nine Safeguards for the Holy Virtue of Purity

1. Avoid idleness.
2. Shun bad companions.
3. Associate with good companions.
4. Go to confession frequently.
5. Receive Communion often.
6. Pray to Mary often.
7. Hear Mass devoutly.

8. Make up for past faulty confessions.
9. In Mary's honor, make small but frequent acts of self-denial.

Awareness of God's presence is purity's best and strongest safeguard.

During all Her novenas, the Blessed Virgin, pleased with the boys' prayers and nosegays, in various ways rid the Oratory of those unworthy of Her protection.

Such was the case of an unfortunate lad whose name began with "Ton. . . ," a classmate of Father Dominic Belmonte, who told us about it. Though grieved by remorse for his very blameable conduct, he could not bring himself to mend his ways and stubbornly refused to go to confession. He consistently shunned Don Bosco and foiled his companions' efforts to bring him to his spiritual father. One evening he told Belmonte: "I have something to tell you, but keep it secret. Something strange has been happening to me several nights in a row. At a certain time, I feel my blankets being yanked to the foot of the bed. I awake and pull them up again, but it's no use. Slowly they keep being pulled down. I can't tell you how awfully scared I am!"

"Maybe you've been dreaming," Belmonte remarked.

"Dreaming? I was just as awake as I am now. I even tried to hold on to the blankets with my teeth, but it was no use because the hem got ripped."

Belmonte took a look at the blankets. The hem was indeed torn.

"Do me a favor," the boy begged him. "Ask Don Bosco what this means."

"Ask him yourself," Belmonte replied. "You know how anxious he is to have a talk with you."

"Me? Never! But what could this mean?"

"It's the devil!"

"What should I do?"

"Go to confession!"

The boy preferred to leave the Oratory.

The novena was now in its fourth day, and everything seemed to be conspiring to force Don Bosco to close the Oratory's secondary school. He had promised Count Xavier Provana of Collegno that he would be in Cumiana the next day [December 3] for the

feast of St. Francis Xavier, Apostle of the Indies [and the count's name day], but he could not keep his appointment because of the Oratory's critical situation. He excused himself in the following letter which is marked by serenity:

[No date]

Dear Chevalier:

My distinguished delegate, Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia, will explain why I cannot come to Cumiana for the cherished feast of St. Francis Xavier. Patience! I hope to make up for this when you and your family come to Turin.

Still, I do not want my staying here to be your loss. The Oratory boys are also very much devoted to this saint, and many will go to confession tonight and tomorrow morning. Both their Communions and the Mass which, God willing, I hope to celebrate will be offered for your intention as a humble gift to you on your name day.

I enclose a few holy pictures; give them out as you see fit. Please accept these small tokens of my affection and gratitude toward you and your entire family. Wishing you every possible blessing from heaven, I am honored to remain,

Your servant and friend,
Fr. John Bosco

As the storm over the Oratory teachers' certification died down, the Blessed Virgin gave further proof of Her favors by inspiring another long-lasting undertaking to Don Bosco. Father Paul Albera is our source for what we are about to say.

One Saturday night in December, possibly the 6th, Don Bosco finished hearing confessions around eleven and went to the dining room for his long overdue supper. He looked very pensive. Only Albera was with him. "There were a lot of confessions tonight," he suddenly remarked, "but truthfully I hardly know what I said or did, because all the time I had something on my mind which totally absorbed me. I kept thinking: *Our church is too small. We have to pack in our boys like sardines. We must build a larger, more imposing one under the title of Mary, Help of Christians. I don't have a penny, nor do I know where to find the money, but that's not important. If God so wills, it will be done. I'll try. If I*

fail, I am willing to take the blame. I won't mind if people say: This man began to build and was not able to finish." [Luke 14, 30]

Albera kept this confidence to himself. Shortly afterward, in 1863, Father Alasonatti remarked to Albera, his acting secretary, "Do you know, Don Bosco has told me confidentially that he intends to build a large church. He has already begun doing something about it. He is sending this request for a subsidy to the Grand Master of the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus. Please copy it in good penmanship."

Don Bosco also let Father John Cagliero in on this plan, as the latter himself disclosed:

In 1862, Don Bosco told me that he was thinking of building a magnificent church worthy of the Blessed Virgin. "Up to now," he said, "we have celebrated the feast of the Immaculate Conception with pomp and solemnity. Indeed, it was on this day that our work of the festive oratory began. But the Madonna wishes us to honor Her under the title of Mary, Help of Christians. The times are so bad that we sadly need Her help to preserve and safeguard our faith. But there is another reason. Can you guess it?"

"I believe," I replied, "that this church will be the mother church of our future congregation, the source of all our undertakings for youth."

"Right!" he exclaimed. "The Blessed Virgin is our foundress. She will also be our support."

That year [1862] the feast of the Immaculate Conception was a very happy one at the Oratory, particularly because the problem of the teachers' certification had been resolved at least temporarily. The Bonetti chronicle gives us this additional information:

On the evening of December 8, while conversing with several boys and clerics, Don Bosco mentioned matters concerning the Oratory. (We must remember that ever since the beginning of his work, Don Bosco used to address his co-workers on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.) As the conversation shifted to the new school to be opened, God willing, next year at Mirabello, the cleric Provera asked him if he could already foresee qualified outsiders joining his congregation. Don Bosco's reply was that the Lord would do everything through former

Oratory boys. Then he went on to tell us (as we already have amply described) [1] that when he had been [chaplain] at the Rifugio he had seen a building resembling the present one, surmounted by a huge inscription: *Hic nomen Meum. Hinc inde exibit gloria Mea.* [Here is My name; hence shall My glory go forth.]

We asked him whose words these were, and he assured us that they were the Lord's, adding that he had not had them inscribed on the building lest we be accused of pride. He went on to say that his constancy (which he calls stubbornness) in the face of desertion and ridicule, even from his most intimate friends, stemmed from those words, and that at last the Lord had indeed given him the house he had envisioned; we all live in it now.

He also mentioned the struggles he had had to face, and the opposition of former co-workers who later did their utmost to induce the boys to leave him. So successful were they, in fact, that out of over five hundred boys attending the Oratory on Sundays, only seven or eight remained faithful to him. These troubles had begun back in 1848, when Don Bosco had adamantly refused to let the Oratory boys join in so-called "national" demonstrations.[2] In those days, when a co-worker of his at the St. Aloysius festive oratory had taken the boys to one such demonstration, Don Bosco had made it clear to him that he intended to keep unity of direction, that his orders were to be carried out, and that he no longer needed the individual's services. The dismissal set off attacks, vicious lies, and all sorts of abuse, the mildest being that he, Don Bosco, was a bit touched in the head.

A frequent utterance of Don Bosco was that "the Lord would do everything through boys who have been brought up at the Oratory." Meanwhile he kept up his conferences to the Salesians. Father Paul Albera recalls one of this period which deeply impressed the members:

In a dream Don Bosco saw himself surrounded by boys and priests, and he suggested that they all set out to climb a nearby mountain. All agreed. At its summit, tables were set for a delicious repast, amid music and entertainment. Here and there along the way, various obstacles made the climb so difficult and frustrating that at one point Don Bosco and the tired climbers sat down. After a rest, he encouraged

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 321. *See also* Vol. II, p. 191. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 292–96. [Editor]

them to go on and resumed the climb at a hurried pace. At a certain point he looked back and discovered that all his followers had abandoned him. He quickly retraced his steps to look for them. He found them and led them again up the rocky slopes, but once more they all deserted him.

"Then," Don Bosco continued, "I thought to myself: *I must get to the top of the mountain, but with many followers. This is my goal, my mission. How am I to accomplish it? I know! My first followers were picked at random. They were virtuous and willing, but untested, and not imbued with my spirit. They were not used to hard going and were not bound to each other or to me by special ties. That is why they left me. I will remedy this. My disappointment is too bitter to be forgotten. I know now what I must do. I can rely only on those whom I have trained myself. Therefore I shall now go down to the foot of the mountain. I will gather many boys, win their affection, and train them to face hardships and sacrifices bravely. They will gladly obey me; together we shall climb the Lord's mountain.*"

Then, looking at those about him, he told them that he had put his hopes in them. Speaking at length and with emotion, he exhorted them to be faithful to their vocation in view of Our Lady's countless graces, and of the unfailing reward prepared for them by the Lord.

Among the many who had some time before enthusiastically answered Don Bosco's appeal was the deacon Joseph Bongiovanni, a promoter of the Immaculate Conception Sodality,[3] and the founder and president of the sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament [4] and of the Knights of the Altar.[5] He was to be ordained a priest on December 20 [1862] during the forthcoming Ember days.

[3] *See* Vol. V, pp. 312f. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 499f. [Editor]
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 517f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 33

Special Charisms (Continued)

IN a previous volume [1] we spoke of the mutual, strong brotherly ties between Don Bosco and [his elder brother] Joseph. The Oratory boys, too, deeply loved Joseph, always swarming around him on their visits to Becchi and on his visits to Turin. They never tired of hearing his delightful recollections of Don Bosco's virtues as a young boy, as he took the cows to pasture, or worked at hoeing, pruning, mowing, harvesting, binding and piling sheaves, and threshing and gleaning wheat. Always and everywhere—Joseph recalled—John had an inseparable companion: a book. Even during the short lunch break when others relaxed, he would pore over a book while munching on a piece of bread. At night, when all had retired to rest, he would study for hours in his room. For some time, he rose very early in the morning to take lessons from the chaplain at Morialdo and did his homework at night. Nor did Joseph omit telling how John went to the grade school of Castelnuovo, and then to the secondary school and seminary at Chieri, yet never once did he even hint at the grave sacrifices he had made so that his younger brother might become a priest.

The Oratory boys listened avidly to these reminiscences but, unfortunately, the opportunities to enjoy them were few and far between, since Joseph came to the Oratory but two or three times a year and then only for a few days. His farm and business dealings kept him in Morialdo. In Castelnuovo and adjoining villages he was well known as a singularly talented, upright, and generous man. His neighbors' most knotty, troublesome litigations were amicably settled by submitting them to his perfectly ac-

[1] *See* Vol. V, pp. 399f. *See also* Vol. IV, pp. 334ff and the Index of other volumes. [Editor]

ceptable decisions. If a neighbor of his was pressed by debts, Joseph paid the creditor whenever he could. Everybody loved him and looked upon him as a consoling angel.

His many endearing virtues stemmed from the Christian education that his mother, Mamma Margaret, had given him. He did not live for the things of earth but for heavenly treasures. Seemingly he had a foreboding of death. Quite unexpectedly, he showed up at the Oratory one day, settled some business matters in town, and went to confession and Communion.

"It's very unusual for you to visit us at this time of year," Don Bosco remarked. "What's up?"

"Nothing! I just felt a strong urge to settle my affairs and make my confession," Joseph replied. "Something seems to tell me to make haste."

Don Bosco wanted him to stay on at the Oratory a few days, but he refused. Not many days later, though, he returned. "Has anything happened at home?" Don Bosco asked.

"No, but I need your advice. As you know, I am the guarantor of so-and-so. Now I am quite worried. While I live, I'll stand by my word, but what if I should die?"

"If you die, you'll have nothing to worry about," Don Bosco answered, smiling. "The living will have to pay."

"But I wouldn't like the creditor to suffer a loss because of his trust in me."

"Don't worry about that. I'll be your guarantor."

"Thank you. Now I won't worry anymore."

He returned home and put all his affairs in order, as if certain of imminent death, though he felt perfectly well. Yet, barely a week later, he had to take to bed. Within an hour his condition became critical. The sad news reached Don Bosco on the evening of December 11. He immediately hired a carriage and rode to Becchi, accompanied by Francis Cuffia, a pupil.

"What do you bring me from Turin?" Joseph asked him as soon as he arrived.

"God's kingdom," Don Bosco replied. He had the consolation of administering the comforts of our faith and assisting his brother in his last moments. On the next day, December 12, 1862, Joseph died peacefully in Don Bosco's arms. An excellent portrait of

Joseph Bosco, painted by [Charles] Tomatis,[2] is still on view at Becchi.[3]

Upon his return from Castelnuovo, Don Bosco was glad to learn that the chancery had granted him permission to keep the Oil of the Sick at the Oratory and administer it to its residents.[4] This permission—privilege, rather—which eventually became permanent, rid Don Bosco of many worries, especially in emergencies. The ever increasing number of pupils made the Oratory a parish in its own right.

Meanwhile the Christmas novena had begun, rendered all the more joyful by Father Joseph Bongiovanni's First Mass on December 21, the Fourth Sunday of Advent. Don Bosco's conviction that this young priest would stay on in the [Salesian] Congregation made up for his disappointment over the ingratitude of two other clerics who, despite his love and sacrifices, left him. Perhaps this prompted the following conversation between Don Bosco and a Salesian who left us an account in writing. Bishop Cagliero witnessed its truthfulness and Father Paul Albera confirmed the fulfillment of Don Bosco's predictions. We quote:

Many are the incidents which bring out Don Bosco's charism of prophecy, especially in regard to spiritual matters or, more precisely, temporal matters closely linked to the spiritual. On December 19, 1862, while at table with him, I remarked, "The cleric Da . . . is in trouble."

"What kind?" he asked.

"He is a seminarian at Bra. His doctor told me that a mouth infection, probably caused by a bad tooth, has brought him to Turin in search of a good dentist."

"What else did the doctor say?"

"He suggested that the cleric stay with the Capuchin Fathers. Do you think that his trouble will get worse?"

"It certainly will. Da . . . wants to do things his own way, but he won't succeed."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you familiar with previous details?"

[2] A young artist whom Don Bosco first met in 1847. Thereafter he regularly attended the Valdocco festive oratory. *See* Vol. III, pp. 118ff. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting here a digression about Joseph's children and grandchildren. [Editor]

[4] We are omitting this notification. [Editor]

"Very vaguely."

"Well, Da . . . wanted to become a Salesian. I admitted him and found a benefactor to provide him with clothes, books, and other necessities, and eventually also to offer an ecclesiastical patrimony. Once he realized that he no longer had to worry about his temporal needs, he decided to leave the congregation. Knowing that he was making a mistake, I warned him myself that God would punish him physically if he persisted in his error. So too, at my request, did several companions of his, particularly Cagliero with whom he was on very good terms. But he stubbornly stuck to his decision. Soon the good Lord gave him a second warning through a painful pus-discharging glandular inflammation which racked him through the fall and into the winter of 1862. I renewed my warnings. Unable to stand the pain any longer, he finally asked me if I would cure him if he accepted my advice. "Follow the path the Lord has traced for you," I replied, trying to make him experience God's goodness, "and I guarantee that you will be perfectly cured within eight days." He complied. Within a week, he was well again. A short time later, though, perhaps overconfident of his good health, he forgot his promise and again quit. Once more his throat ailment flared up and did not abate when he went home or when he entered the Bra seminary. Now you tell me that a fistula has developed."

"Poor fellow," I remarked. "Let's hope and pray that his condition will not worsen."

"Yes, of course! After all, he is a fine young man."

"And yet, who knows, if the Lord should withdraw His grace, he might turn out to be a bad priest!"

"No, this will never happen!"

"Will he put aside the clerical habit?"

"No."

"Will he die?"

"Yes, before he can put it aside," concluded Don Bosco with a nod.

Noticing his talkative mood, I was trying to find a way of sounding him on other matters when he forestalled me.

"We shall soon witness another frightening example," he went on. "Another cleric will fare far worse!"

"Will you tell me who it is?"

"Certainly! It's the cleric Ca . . . He, too, became a Salesian. This past summer, while he was home on vacation, I had Father Rua write to him that, since he was no longer happy with us, he had better stay home. His reply was that, on the contrary, he was quite happy to be a Salesian and wished to remain so. I allowed him to return. His con-

duct is very unsatisfactory, but he thinks that nobody is aware of it and that he can fool Don Bosco."

"I'm sorry to hear that," I remarked. "Will he turn out to be a bad priest or just walk out on his vocation? Will he become a bad layman or a Protestant?"

"He will end up badly," Don Bosco said simply.

Eventually Don Bosco dismissed him during his philosophy course because of unacceptable behavior. The cleric entered the diocesan seminary, was ordained, received a degree in theology, and then emigrated to North America. We lost track of him after that. But, as regards the first cleric, we can confirm that Don Bosco's prediction was fulfilled. In due time he was ordained, taught moral theology, and did pastoral work. He lived a devout, blameless life, but had to carry the cross Don Bosco had predicted and died at a young age of tuberculosis.

In those very days, Don Bosco made other predictions about which our written source is Jerome Suttil:

On Saturday, December 20 [1862], at the "Good Night," Don Bosco said these exact words: "By Christmas one of us will go to heaven." Since no one was sick, each looked rather uneasily after his own affairs. Sunday, December 21, passed uneventfully. No one was in the infirmary, as many of us verified personally. That evening, the play *Cosimus II Visits the Prisons* was presented on the Oratory stage. On December 22, after Christmas novena services, Joseph Blangino, a fine ten-year-old lad from Sant'Albano took sick and went to the infirmary. Within a few hours his condition became critical, and he was given up by the doctor.

What happened next was described in writing by Francis Provera:

The evening of December 23, Blangino received Holy Viaticum. At about ten, Don Bosco was in the infirmary talking with Father Rua about the boy's condition. "If you wish, I'll willingly sit up with him through the night," Father Rua said.

"It won't be necessary," Don Bosco replied. "There will be no danger until two in the morning. Go to bed now, but have someone call you at two. You will be needed then."

In fact, at that hour, Father Rua administered the Anointing of the Sick to the boy. At two-thirty Blangino died. The next morning, Don Bosco revealed that he had dreamed of the dying boy that night:

"I dreamed that Father Alasonatti, my mother (who has been dead these last six years), and I were nursing Blangino. Father Alasonatti was praying on his knees, my mother was smoothing up the bed, and I was sitting nearby. As she got close to the boy, she exclaimed, 'He's dead!'

" 'Is he?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'What time is it?'

" 'Almost three.'

" 'Would that all our boys could die so tranquilly,' Father Alasonatti remarked.

"That's when I awoke. Immediately I heard a very loud banging on the walk as with a board. 'Blangino is now on his way to eternity,' I cried out. I opened my eyes to see if dawn had arisen but saw nothing. Certain of the youngster's death, I recited the *De Profundis.* The clock struck two-thirty."

At the Christmas Midnight Mass a very large number of boys received Communion and prayed for the repose of Blangino's soul.

As always on such occasions, the boys felt closer to Don Bosco. On December 28, one came up to him. "Will you please give me some advice?" he asked.

"On what?" Don Bosco replied with a smile.

"On my soul!"

"Well, then, for three and a half years you have lived in mortal sin."

"It can't be. I regularly go to confession to Father Savio."

"Then listen!" And Don Bosco named some fifty sins that the boy had always concealed. As each was mentioned, the youngster had to admit that it was true and promised to make a good confession.

Thus reads the witness of Francis Provera. Something even more extraordinary took place toward the end of 1862. As in Blangino's case, there were over six hundred witnesses.

Albert C. . . , a strapping sixteen-year-old student, had taken a turn for the worse through the evil influence of Felix G. . . , a schoolmate of his native town. As was always the case in such instances, Albert shunned Don Bosco as much as he could. The latter sent for him several times, but Albert always balked. Finally,

one November day, as he was rushing down the stairs, he found himself face to face with Don Bosco and blushed red as a beet.

"Albert, why do you keep running away from me?" Don Bosco asked, gripping his hand. "Don Bosco wants to help you. You must make a good confession as soon as possible." The boy pursed his lips. "You refuse?" Don Bosco went on. "The time will come when you'll ask for me and won't find me. Think it over seriously."

At the "Good Night" on Monday, December 1 [1862], Don Bosco urged the boys to make well the Exercise for a Happy Death because one of them would die before he could make another.

"He is right here among you," Don Bosco said, "but I can never get to him because he always steers clear of me. I have tried to speak to him of his soul, but to no avail, and yet one day he will call for me and I will not be around. In his last moments he will cry out for Don Bosco, but Don Bosco will not be found. He will yearn for him but in vain, because Don Bosco will be away, and he will die without ever seeing him again. I would very much like to talk to him, to help him straighten out within the short time left to him, but he keeps dodging me. Still, I'll secretly put a guardian angel at his side to lead him to me. He does not know and does not want to know that he is doomed to die [shortly]. He does not want to die, but it has been irrevocably so decreed. We shall prepare him, we shall remind him. The feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Christmas are propitious occasions. Let's hope that one of them may draw him to a good confession. But let him bear in mind that he will not be here for the next Exercise for a Happy Death."

The next day the whole Oratory was astir with this stunning prediction. Meanwhile Don Bosco told Francis Cuffia, the infirmarian—a student himself—to look after him prudently and try to persuade him to receive the sacraments, especially to go to confession as soon as possible since time was running out. Cuffia understood and strove to be a guardian angel, but his efforts failed.

Notwithstanding Don Bosco's frightening prediction, Albert was not troubled. His thinking went somewhat like this: *Don Bosco has the reputation of being a prophet. He said that someone would*

lead the doomed boy to him and that he would warn him. But I won't let myself be caught. Since he won't be able to warn me, I can't be the one he is talking about.

His unfortunate ruse succeeded all too well. Through that entire month not once could Don Bosco even get a glimpse of him. The feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Christmas came and went, and Albert never even thought of mending his ways or going to confession.

According to the Oratory's time-honored custom, the Exercise for a Happy Death was scheduled for New Year's Day. Don Bosco was on the alert for a chance to be with Albert at least in his last moments. Unfortunately, at this very time Duchess [Laval] Montmorency invited him on behalf of the pastor of Borgo Cornalese,[5] her property and residence, to preach the Forty Hours devotion on December 31, 1862, and January 1 and 2, 1863. A distinguished benefactress, she brooked no refusal. Though ostensibly an invitation, this was actually a command.

"I really cannot oblige this time," Don Bosco apologized. "I've something very urgent on hand. Please forgive me. I'll go out of my way to please you next time. . . ."

"Very well," she replied. "When you ask me to help your boys, I too will tell you that I cannot!"

Despite her threat, Don Bosco dared add, "In those very days [of the Forty Hours devotion] the Oratory boys will make their Exercise for a Happy Death and go to Communion. I must hear their confessions. Please understand. . . ."

"Forget it!" the duchess rejoined imperiously.

"In that case, I shall come," Don Bosco resignedly replied.

On Wednesday morning, December 31, Don Bosco sent for Chevalier Oreglia and Father Alasonatti. They knew he had to go to Borgo Cornalese. "I'll be away for three days," he told them. "Is it all right? Is anybody sick?"

"Have no worry. Everything is fine. The infirmary is empty." And so Don Bosco left.

Albert was in excellent health and in high spirits. In the dormitory, he was handed a letter from a certain Moisio, a friend of his who had left the Oratory the year before to enter

[5] A village about fifteen miles from Turin. [Editor]

the diocesan seminary. "Are you alive or dead?" his friend asked. "If you're alive, why don't you write?"

"I'm going to write to him that I'm dead!" Albert remarked after reading the letter to his companions.

So he did to the great amusement of all and mailed the letter. The rest of the day went by uneventfully. Like everybody else, Albert took part in the weekly walk. On their return, he was told to get the bread for the usual afternoon snack.[6] He helped himself generously, eating it with salted fish and drinking plenty of water. Later, he went to supper and then to choir practice. When the bell rang for night prayers, he too went along, but toward the end of prayers he suddenly felt weak and close to fainting. Felix G. . . , a schoolmate, propped him up and with another boy helped him to the infirmary. No sooner was he in bed than excruciating stomach pains set in, and his throat began to swell. The doctor was sent for and did all that he could, but he soon realized that the case was very serious and that the patient should receive the Last Sacraments without delay. The infirmarian broke the news to Albert. Sensing his critical condition, the poor boy, grieved by his bad conduct, asked to make his confession. "Shall I call Father Alasonatti?" the infirmarian suggested. "No," Albert replied. "I want Don Bosco!" Boys ran all over the house looking for him, while the youngster kept repeating, "I want Don Bosco! I want Don Bosco!"

He was greatly dismayed when he was told that Don Bosco was out. Uttering a heartrending cry, he broke into a flood of tears. Back into his mind flashed Don Bosco's words a month before. "I'm lost," he cried. "I'll die without ever seeing Don Bosco again! I always kept away from him because I didn't want to talk to him, and now God is punishing me."

He then asked for another priest. Felix G . . . ran to fetch Father Rua who came at once. Albert made his confession with true sorrow. Father Alasonatti, too, informed of the boy's critical condition, hastened to his bedside.

[6] It was customary at the Oratory to give the boys a fresh bun at four to tide them over till suppertime. Usually two boys carried the bread basket to the appointed place. The boys then filed by on both sides of the basket and picked up their bun. [Editor]

At peace with God, Albert turned to his two superiors. "Tell Don Bosco I am sorry. Tell him that though I don't deserve his pardon, I hope he will forgive me, just as I hope God has forgiven me. I'm truly sorry. I ask pardon of everybody. . . ." Toward eleven thirty, he edifyingly received Holy Viaticum, the Anointing of the Sick, and the papal blessing. Meanwhile, Felix G. . . , who had done his utmost to be helpful, stood in the corridor, looking in once in a while. Albert spotted him.

"Come in, Felix," he called. Felix stepped to the foot of the bed.

"It's your fault if I die without seeing Don Bosco," Albert went on reproachfully, "but I forgive you because I too need God's pardon. You know who is responsible for my becoming bad. But no more of that. You will see my father and mother. Tell them that I repented before dying and that I'll be waiting for them in heaven. But you—it's because of you that Don Bosco is not here now to comfort me!" Deathly pale, Felix could not utter a word.

Albert died around three o'clock on the morning of January 1, 1863. That same day, his friend Moisio, back in Casale, received Albert's letter with the message, "I am dead!"

The burial took place two days later, Saturday, January 3. It had been scheduled for four-thirty in the afternoon, but Father Cagliero and Father Francesia prevailed upon the local pastor to anticipate it by an hour, so that it could be over before Don Bosco's return. When he arrived, everything was finished.

Don Bosco went immediately into the confessional because the Exercise for a Happy Death [originally scheduled for New Year's Day] had been postponed to the following Sunday because of his trip to Borgo Cornalese. Confessions over, he went to his room and had supper. Thoroughly briefed on Albert's death, he was deeply grieved, tears streaming from his eyes. Father Rua, Chevalier Oreglia, and others present found it hard to comfort him. "If a good death like this grieves you so," Oreglia remarked, "what other death could ever console you? How good must a death be?"

After many other explanations, Don Bosco calmed down. Felix

left the Oratory and some time later was mortally wounded in a fight. Before dying, he forgave his assailant and begged God's forgiveness, as well as Don Bosco's, with a deeply moving letter.

Bishop John Cagliero, Father Michael Rua, Father Francis Cerruti, Father Francis Dalmazzo, and Peter Enria testified in writing to this episode.

Another striking incident marked the end of 1862. On a visit to the marchioness of Sommariva, Don Bosco stayed overnight. Outside his bedroom he could see a climbing rose, barren and bare at this time of year. That night it snowed heavily. The next morning, the servant went into Don Bosco's room to air it while he was saying Mass. On opening the window, he noticed that the climbing rose had flowered. In astonishment he hurried to tell the marchioness. She had not seen such flowers on that bush in years.

We never heard Don Bosco mention this. Only much later did rumors of it begin circulating. On April 19, 1888, after Don Bosco's death, Father John Garino asked Countess Caroline of Soresina-Vidoni-Soranzo if she knew of any miraculous occurrence about Don Bosco. "I am very sure of the flowering of a climbing rose in December 1862, or, at the latest, 1863," she declared, "because I heard it directly from my late aunt, the marchioness of Sommariva del Bosco, a very trustworthy lady."

Bishop [Joseph] Apollonio of Treviso, a friend of both noble families and of Don Bosco, was also acquainted with this incident and told it himself to Father Tullio De Agostini, pastor of St. Peter's Church in Padua. He was firmly convinced of the authenticity of this astonishing event.[7]

On May 8, 1903, Mother Julie Sannazzaro, of the Sacred Heart Sisters, a niece of the marchioness of Sommariva, wrote to Sister Pierina Rabiola, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, as follows:

> Do you want details of your Blessed Father's miracle? . . . One of his apostolic trips took him to Sommariva del Bosco near Bra. Without previous notice—as was his custom with intimate friends—he called at

[7] The report that follows is taken from Appendix 1 of Volume XV of *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco,* p. 824. [Editor]

the castle around eleven or eleven-thirty. It was November 19, 1862, feast of St. Elizabeth [of Hungary] and my grandmother's name day. Like our uncles and aunts, she was a Salesian cooperator.

During lunch Don Bosco became aware of the celebration in grandmother's honor. Simply and charmingly he expressed his regret at not having known of it beforehand, adding hopefully that the good Lord would make up for his oversight. We all took his words as a gracious compliment and nothing more.

When lunch was over, we moved to the adjacent drawing room which opened into grandmother's bedroom. (Both rooms have two windows). Imagine our astonishment at seeing all four windows framed in gorgeous roses and the entire castle wall on the side of grandmother's bedroom literally covered with them. A climbing rose, barren at this time of year, had suddenly flowered.

Joyous shouts came from all, as Don Bosco good-naturedly kept saying, "You see, the good Lord really did remember grandmother's name day!"

CHAPTER 34

A Dream: A Fiendish Elephant

AS of January 1, 1863, the Society of St. Francis de Sales had thirty-nine members, including Don Bosco, most of them young clerics, of whom twenty-two had consecrated themselves to God with triennial vows. There were six priests: five professed and one without vows.

Don Bosco began the new year by appealing for financial help. The lottery proceeds, though substantial,[1] could not provide for the construction of the new wing along Via della Giardiniera,[2] the maintenance of the Oratory boarders, and the realization of other major projects which Don Bosco had been planning for some time. First on his mailing list were cabinet ministers, the royal family, and their almoner, Father Camillo Pelletta of Cortanzone.[3]

Don Bosco still owed his boys the yearly *strenna,* and at the same time he felt he had to reveal to them something extraordinary for their spiritual welfare. The deaths he had predicted at the end of the year had reformed many hearts, but not all. A number of new pupils and a few old ones still refused to make their peace with God and went on living thoughtlessly in spite of God's wondrous mercy. "Good and upright is the Lord," says the Psalmist; "He shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, He teaches the humble His way." [Ps. 24, 8] This we have already seen and shall continue to see.

Since he had not been able to give the [annual] *strenna* to his pupils on the last day of the year, Don Bosco, on Sunday, January 4 [1863], after returning from Borgo Cornalese, promised to do so on the evening of the feast of the Epiphany. Therefore,

[1] *See* Chapter 27. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 70f. [Editor]
[3] We are omitting these appeals. [Editor]

on [Tuesday] January 6, 1863, after night prayers, as all artisans and students eagerly awaited him, he mounted the platform and addressed them:

Tonight I should give you the *strenna.* Every year around Christmas, I regularly beg God to suggest a *strenna* that may benefit you all. In view of your increased number, I doubled my prayers this year. The last day of the year [Wednesday] came and went, and so did Thursday and Friday, but nothing came to me. On Friday night [January 2] I went to bed exhausted, but could not fall asleep. The next morning I got up, worn out and almost half dead, but I did not feel upset over it. Rather, I was elated, knowing from past experience that a very bad night is usually a forewarning that Our Lord is about to reveal something to me. That day I went on with my work at Borgo Cornalese; the next day by [early] evening I arrived back here. After hearing confessions, I went to bed. Tired from my work at Borgo and from not sleeping the night before, I soon dozed off. Now began the dream which will give you your *strenna.*

My dear boys, I dreamed that it was a feast day afternoon and that you were all busy playing, while I was in my room with Professor [Thomas] Vallauri[4] discussing literature and religion. Suddenly there was a knock at my door. I rose quickly and opened it. My mother—dead now for six years—was standing there. Breathlessly she gasped, "Come and see! Come and see!"

"What happened?" I asked.

"Come! Come!" she replied.

I dashed to the balcony. Down in the playground, surrounded by a crowd of boys, stood an enormous elephant.

"How did this happen?" I exclaimed. "Let's go down!"

Professor Vallauri and I looked at each other in surprise and alarm and then raced downstairs.

As was only natural, many of you had run up to the elephant. It seemed meek and tame. Playfully it lumbered about, nuzzling the boys with its trunk and cleverly obeying their orders, as though it had been born and raised at the Oratory. Very many of you kept following it about and petting it, but not all. In fact, most of you were scared and fled from it to safety. Finally, you hid in the church. I, too, tried to get in through the side door which opens into the playground, but as I

[4] A contemporary lexicographer, prominent literary man, and dear friend of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. IV, p. 442; Vol. VI, pp. 191, 596. [Editor]

passed Our Lady's statue beside the drinking fountain and touched the hem of Her mantle for protection, She raised Her right arm. Vallauri did likewise on the other side of the statue, and the Virgin raised Her left arm. I was amazed, not knowing what to think of such an extraordinary thing.

When the bell rang for church services, you all trooped in. I followed and saw the elephant standing at the rear by the main entrance. After Vespers and the sermon, I went to the altar, assisted by Father Alasonatti and Father Savio, to give Benediction. At that solemn moment when you all deeply bowed to adore the Blessed Sacrament, the elephant—still standing at the end of the middle aisle—knelt down too, but with its back to the altar.

Once services were over, I tried to dash out to the playground and see what would happen, but I was detained by someone. A while later, I went out the side door which opens into the porticoes and saw you at your usual games. The elephant too had come out of the church and had idled over to the second playground where the new wing is under construction. Mark this well, because this is precisely the place where the grisly scene I am going to describe occurred.

At that moment, at the far end of the playground I saw a banner followed processionally by boys. It bore in huge letters the inscription *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris!* [Holy Mary, help Your forlorn children!] To everybody's surprise, that monstrous beast, once so tame, suddenly ran amuck. Trumpeting furiously, it lunged forward, seized the nearest boys with its trunk, hurled them into the air or flung them to the ground, and then trampled them underfoot. Though horribly mauled, the victims were still alive. Everybody ran for dear life. Screams and shouts and pleas for help rose from the wounded. Worse—would you believe it?—some boys spared by the elephant, rather than aid their wounded companions, joined the monstrous brute to find new victims.

As all this was happening (I was standing by the second arch of the portico, near the drinking fountain) the little statue that you see there (*and he pointed to the statue of the Blessed Virgin*) became alive and grew to life-size. Then, as Our Lady raised Her arms, Her mantle spread open to display magnificently embroidered inscriptions. Unbelievably it stretched far and wide to shelter all those who gathered beneath it. The best boys were the first to run to it for safety. Seeing that many were in no hurry to run to Her, Our Lady called aloud, *Venite ad Me omnes!* [Come all to Me!] Her call was heeded, and as the crowd of boys under the mantle increased, so did the mantle

spread wider. However, a few youngsters kept running about and were wounded before they could reach safety. Flushed and breathless, the Blessed Virgin continued to plead, but fewer and fewer were the boys who ran to Her. The elephant, meanwhile, continued its slaughter, aided by several lads who dashed about, wielding one sword or two and preventing their companions from running to Mary. The elephant never even touched these helpers.

Meanwhile, prompted by the Blessed Virgin, some boys left the safety of Her mantle in quick sorties to rescue some victims. No sooner did the wounded get beneath Our Lady's mantle than they were instantly cured. Again and again several of those brave boys, armed with cudgels, went out and, risking their lives, shielded the victims from the elephant and its accomplices until nearly all were rescued.

The playground was now deserted, except for a few youngsters lying about almost dead. At one end by the portico, a crowd of boys stood safe under the Virgin's mantle. At the other stood the elephant with some ten or twelve lads who had helped it wreak such havoc and who still insolently brandished swords.

Suddenly rearing up on its hind legs, the elephant changed into a horrible, long-horned specter and cast a black net over its wretched accomplices. Then, as the beast roared, a thick cloud of smoke enveloped them, and the earth suddenly gaped beneath them and swallowed them up.

I looked for my mother and Professor Vallauri to speak to them but could not spot them anywhere. Then I turned to look at the inscriptions on Mary's mantle and noticed that several were actual quotations or adaptations of Scriptural texts. I read a few of them:

Qui elucidant Me vitam aeternam habebunt. They that explain Me, shall have life everlasting. [Sir. 24, 31]

Qui Me invenerit, inveniet vitam. He who finds Me, finds life. [Prov. 8, 35]

Si quis est parvulus, veniat ad Me. Whoever is a little one, let him come to Me. [Prov. 9, 4]

Refugium peccatorum. Refuge of sinners.

Salus credentium. Salvation of believers.

Plena omnis pietatis, mansuetudinis et misericordiae. Full of piety, meekness and mercy.

Beati qui custodiunt vias Meas. Blessed are they that keep My ways. [Ps. 8, 32]

All was quiet now. After a brief silence, the Virgin, seemingly exhausted by so much pleading, soothingly comforted and heartened the

boys and, quoting the inscription I had inscribed at the base of the niche, *Qui elucidant Me, vitam aeternam habebunt,* She went on:

"You heeded My call and were spared the slaughter wrought by the devil on your companions. Do you want to know what caused their ruin? *Sunt colloquia prava:* Foul talk and foul deeds. You also saw your companions wielding swords. They are those who seek your eternal damnation by enticing you from Me, just as they did with many schoolmates of yours.

"But *quos [Deus] diutius exspectat durius damnat:* Those for whom God keeps waiting, He punishes more severely. The infernal demon enmeshed and dragged them to eternal perdition. Now, go in peace, but remember My words: 'Flee from companions who befriended Satan, avoid foul conversation, have boundless trust in Me. My mantle will always be your safe refuge.' "

Our Lady then vanished; only our beloved statuette remained. My deceased mother reappeared. Again the banner with the inscription *Sancta Maria, succurre miseris* was unfurled. Marching processionally behind, the boys sang *Lodate Maria, o lingue fedeli.* [Praise Mary, ye faithful tongues.] Shortly afterward, the singing waned and the whole scene faded away. I awoke in a sweat. Such was my dream.

My sons, now it's up to you to draw your own *strenna.* Examine your conscience. You'll know if you were safe under Mary's mantle, or if the elephant flung you into the air, or if you were wielding a sword. I can only repeat what the Virgin said: *Venite ad Me omnes.* Turn to Her; call on Her in any danger. I can assure you that your prayers will be heard. Those who were so badly mauled by the elephant are to learn to avoid foul talk and bad companions; those who strive to entice their companions from Mary must either change their ways or leave this house immediately. If anyone wants to know the role he played, let him come to my room and I'll tell him. But I repeat: Satan's accomplices must either mend their ways or go! Good night!

Don Bosco had spoken with such fervor and emotion that for a whole week afterward the boys kept discussing that dream and would not leave him in peace. Every morning they crowded his confessional; every afternoon they pestered him to find out what part they had played in that mysterious dream.

That this was no dream but a vision, Don Bosco had himself indirectly admitted when he had said: "I regularly beg God to suggest. . . . A very bad night is usually a forewarning that

Our Lord is about to reveal something to me." Furthermore, he forbade anyone to make light of what he had narrated.

But there is more. On this occasion he made a list of the wounded and of those who wielded one or two swords. He gave it to Celestine Durando, instructing him to watch them. The cleric handed this list over to us, and it is still in our possession. The wounded were thirteen—probably those who had not been rescued and sheltered beneath Our Lady's mantle. Seventeen lads wielded one sword; only three had two. Scattered marginal notes next to a boy's name indicate an amendment of life. Also, we must bear in mind that the dream, as we shall see, referred also to the future.

That it mirrored the true state of things was admitted by the boys themselves. "I had no idea that Don Bosco knew me so well," one of them stated. "He revealed my spiritual condition and my temptations so exactly that I could find nothing to add."

Two other boys were told that they were wielding swords. "It's quite true," each admitted. "I knew it all along." They mended their ways.

One afternoon, while talking of this dream and remarking that some boys had already left the Oratory and others would soon follow lest they harm their companions, he came to mention his own "wizardry," as he called it. In this connection he told the following incident:

> Some time ago, a boy wrote home and falsely accused priests and superiors of this house of grave wrongdoings. Fearing that Don Bosco might see his letter, he held on to it till he could secretly mail it. That same day, right after dinner, I sent for him. In my room I told him of his misdeed and asked why he had told such lies. Brazenly he denied everything. I let him talk and then, word for word, I repeated the contents of the letter to him. Embarrassed and frightened, he knelt at my feet in tears. "Was my letter intercepted?" he asked.
>
> "No," I replied. "Your family has probably received it by now, and it's up to you to put matters right."

The boys around him asked how he had found that out. "Oh, it's my wizardry," he answered with a laugh. This wizardry and his dream, which revealed not only the boys' present spiritual

condition but their future as well, must have been one and the same thing. Many years later, a boy who had been quite close to Father Rua wrote him a long letter, giving his full name and Turin address. We report it here:

Turin, February 25, 1891

Dear Father Rua:

. . . Among other things I recall a vision of Don Bosco in 1863, when I was at the Oratory. He saw the future of all the boarders. He himself told us about it after night prayers. It was the dream about the elephant. (*After describing the dream, he went on:*) At the end, Don Bosco told us, "If you want to know what part you played, come to my room and I will tell you.

I too went. "You," he told me, "were one of those trailing after the elephant both before and after church services. Naturally you became a victim. The elephant flung you high into the air with its trunk. When you tumbled down, you were so badly hurt that you could not make it to safety, though you tried hard. A companion of yours, a priest, unrecognized by you, grabbed your arm and dragged you under the Madonna's mantle."

This was not a dream, as Don Bosco called it, but a genuine revelation of my future which Our Lord made to His servant during my second year at the Oratory, when I was a model of conduct and piety. Yet Don Bosco saw me in that condition.

When the summer vacation of 1863 came around, I went home because of health and I did not return to the Oratory. I was then thirteen. The following year, my father apprenticed me to a shoemaker, and two years later (1866) I went to France to complete my training. There I associated with anticlericals, gradually stopped going to church and the sacraments, began to read irreligious books, and even grew to loathe and hate the Catholic faith. Two years later I returned to Italy but kept reading impious books, drawing further and further away from the true Church.

Yet all this time I constantly prayed to God in the name of Jesus to enlighten me and lead me to the true faith. This struggle lasted thirteen years. I strove continually to raise myself up, but I was wounded. I had fallen prey to the elephant and was powerless.

Toward the end of 1878, during a mission which drew great crowds, I went to hear those good preachers. I was delighted by the incontestable truths they expounded. The very last sermon was on the Blessed

Sacrament, about which I still had grave doubts. (In fact I no longer believed in the real or even spiritual presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.) The preacher presented the truth so clearly and so convincingly that, touched by God's grace, I decided to go to confession and place myself under the Blessed Virgin's mantle. Since then I have never ceased to thank God and Our Blessed Mother for this grace.

Please note that, as Don Bosco had seen in his dream, I later found out that the missionary had been a schoolmate of mine at the Oratory.

Dominic N . . .

P.S. Should you see fit to publish this letter, I also authorize you to edit it, short of substantial changes, because what I wrote is genuinely true. I kiss your hand respectfully, dear Father Rua, and by this act I intend to pay homage to our beloved Don Bosco.

Certainly, this dream must also have enlightened Don Bosco in appraising priestly and religious vocations and the applicants' inclinations to good so well displayed by those brave boys who had confronted the elephant and his accomplices, had wrested their wounded companions from their clutches, and had carried them to safety under the Madonna's mantle. He therefore continued to accept applicants to the Salesian Society and to admit to triennial vows those who had satisfactorily completed their probationary period. The mere fact that he accepted them will be their imperishable honor. Some did not take vows or left after their expiration, but nearly all, as diocesan priests or as public school teachers, persevered in their mission of saving and educating the young. Their names are recorded in the minutes of three chapter meetings of the Salesian Society, which we here report:

On January 12, 1863, after the customary prayer, the Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales formally admitted the following applicants proposed by the Reverend Don Bosco, director: John Lagorio, John Baptist Finino, Dominic Bongiovanni, Steven Chicco, John Baptist Nasi, Felix Alessio, Francis Cuffia, Louis Delu, John Ravetti, John Pellegrini, Chiaffredo Ricchiardi.

On January 18, 1863, the Reverend Don Bosco, director, summoned all the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales for the religious

profession of five applicants. Vested in surplice, Don Bosco asked the bystanders to kneel. He then recited the *Veni, Creator* alternatively with them. There followed the appropriate versicles and prayer, the Litany of Our Lady and a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria,* and versicles and prayers to St. Francis de Sales. Afterward, kneeling between two professed members, Father Alasonatti and Father Rua, and before a picture of the Madonna flanked by two lighted candles, Bartholomew Fusero pronounced his vows clearly and distinctly in Don Bosco's presence and signed his name in the register of the professed. The same ceremony was successively repeated by the clerics Anthony Rovetto, Joseph Mignone, Peter Racca, and Alexander Fabre.

On February 8, 1863, the Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met and, after the customary invocation to the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the rules, admitted the following applicants: Joseph Fagnano, August Croserio, Dominic Belmonte, Joseph Morielli, Angelo Nasi, and Vincent Buratti.

CHAPTER 35

Apostolate of the Press

DON Bosco's concern for his boys' eternal salvation and the growth of the Society of St. Francis de Sales was matched by his zeal in writing and in spreading wholesome publications to the utmost of his abilities.

During this year, 1863, he found time for a third edition of his *Storia Sacra,*[1] a bible history textbook which met the requirements of the Department of Education. . . .[2] Other editions followed later, with revisions and additions that brought out Don Bosco's love for this branch of knowledge.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was gladdened by some happy developments, such as the bishops' unanimous support of the Holy Father's wishes, the superb loyalty of the German clergy and laity to the Holy See—a loyalty which in time would produce a strong political party and multiple legislation favorable to the Church, and, finally, a generous response of the world to the Peter's Pence appeal. Under these circumstances, the Oratory press published Pius IX's allocution and a statement of the bishops on the canonization of the Japanese Martyrs.[3]

At about this time Don Bosco was reprinting his *Storia d'Italia*[4] and promoting its sale in Turin also through other publishers and booksellers—Paravia, Marietti, and Moglia. *L'Armonia* announced the reprint in an article of April 5.[5] Don Bosco was busy with other writings, too, as we shall soon see, but the task of the moment was the March issue of *Letture*

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 307–12. [Editor]
[2] We are omitting an outline of the contents and appendices. [Editor]
[3] We are omitting a brief announcement in *L'Armonia,* March 5, 1863. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 322–31; Vol. VI, pp. 156f, 657–61. [Editor]
[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Cattoliche entitled *Four Popular Dialogues on Current Religious Errors.* . . .

As in previous years, he again published a list of past issues to boost its sales. At the same time he sent a promotional circular to ten cardinals, eighty-five bishops, and sixty diocesan officials throughout Italy. We have the draft of this letter with Don Bosco's corrections in his own hand. He also provided complimentary subscriptions for distinguished benefactors, bishops, and cardinals. . . . The bishops promptly responded to his appeal. Several such replies are in our archives.

CHAPTER 36

The Church of Mary, Help of Christians

SINCE word had already gotten around that he intended to build a new church in Our Lady's honor, Don Bosco one day asked the boys around him to suggest a name for it. Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and Our Lady of the Rosary were the first choices. He listened and then revealed his own choice: Help of Christians. Other statements of his convinced the boys that this title was intended to revive faith among the people and that the Church would triumph in the struggle then raging.

"One day," says Canon Anfossi, "while I stood with him on the street alongside the house, I asked him where he intended to build the new church. He pointed to a nearby field almost opposite the Church of St. Francis de Sales and traced the contours of the church with a sweep of his hand. Note that, at this time, Via della Giardiniera separated the Oratory from that field. 'How will you have access to the Oratory?' I asked.

" 'The street we are on now will be closed,' he replied,[1] 'and Via Cottolengo will be extended. We shall enter from there.'

" 'Will the new church be large?'

" 'Certainly! Many will flock here to invoke the Blessed Virgin.'

"As I kept pestering him about the funds he would need, he replied, 'The Madonna Herself wants the church. She will provide the means.' "

"I have no money," John Villa heard him tell the boys, "but I am sure that Mary will help me build Her church." This was fulfilled to the letter. The church was built and within a short time became a foremost Catholic shrine.

Clearly Don Bosco was determined to realize his grand project of a church in Valdocco in honor of Mary, Help of Christians.

[1] This came to pass in 1865. [Editor]

He had seen it in a dream seventeen years earlier,[2] but the meadow of that dream was no longer his, for he had sold it to the Rosminians eight years before, on April 10, 1854,[3] in hope of building a printshop on it.[4] Later, there had been talk about a lodging for the Rosminians, but after Father Rosmini's death, this plan too had been dropped. Don Bosco was now determined to get that property back, but Father Angelo Savio, the economer, and others thought that the church should occupy a more prominent, accessible place. They suggested a choice property of the Filippi family at the end of Corso Valdocco.[5]

"And yet," Don Bosco told us personally years later, "[in my dream] I saw the church standing on the very spot where SS. Solutor, Adventor, and Octavius were martyred. I also saw the future U-shaped Oratory with the church at its center. However, I did not mention this to Father Savio, and I let him contact the Filippi family."

Negotiations were started. The contract was verbally agreed upon and witnessed, and the date was set for the signing. Then the Filippi family suddenly changed their mind and refused to sell. The Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

> These days [the first half of January 1863] revealed Don Bosco's full serenity in adverse circumstances and his eagerness to be at peace with all. "Patience!" he exclaimed. "The Lord will find some other way." His co-workers advised him to go to court, for the Filippis could not deny that they had given their word, but Don Bosco replied: "No. Just tell them that, though I regret their change of mind, I still want to be friends with them."
>
> When I asked him a few days later what he thought of this setback, he remarked, "We have always had difficulties. The devil has managed to give us trouble again, but the Lord will help us." Indeed, it was so. It never dawned on those involved in this deal that they were instruments of Divine Providence.

The need of a large tract of land near the Oratory forced Father Savio to approach the Rosminians. [The value of the

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 232ff. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. V, pp. 30, 174. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 31. [Editor]
[5] We are omitting a few real estate details. [Editor]

land had severely depreciated, but their price was so unreasonably high that Father Savio called off the negotiations.][6] All we have narrated so far took place within the first half of January 1863.

This year, the novena in honor of St. Francis de Sales began on the 23rd because, as in the past, the feast had been postponed to the following Sunday, February 1. Don Bosco prepared and explained the nosegays:

Novena Nosegays in Honor of St. Francis de Sales, 1863

1. No more sins. I will make an act of contrition and resolve to avoid sinful occasions.
2. I shall rise promptly from bed at the sound of the bell.
3. I shall carry out all my duties promptly and willingly, even if they are not to my liking.
4. I shall be prompt to carry out all orders.
5. I shall give good example in church to make up for past bad example.
6. I shall forgive all insults and say an Our Father for those who hurt me.
7. I shall review my past life and put my conscience in order as though I were to die.
8. In imitation of St. Francis de Sales, I shall avoid bad companions and associate with good ones.
9. I shall say the Hail Holy Queen three times to obtain Mary's protection at the hour of death.

Nosegay for the Feast Day

Confession and Communion in honor of St. Francis to obtain the grace of final perseverance.

During this novena, the bishops' replies to Don Bosco's appeal for *Letture Cattoliche* began pouring in. The Bonetti chronicle has this entry:

Saturday, January 31 [1863]. This afternoon, after hearing confessions from five to nine-thirty, Don Bosco had supper in his room. While he was eating, he asked one of several clerics around him to read a complimentary letter from the bishop of Spoleto who, among other

[6] We have condensed some unimportant details. [Editor]

things, wrote that, although he had not met Don Bosco personally, he had heard high praise of him and his great priestly zeal for God's glory. Father Francesia—who nearly always hovers about him—asked smilingly, "Don't you feel proud at such praise?"

"Well," he replied, "I am used to hearing all sorts of things. Praise and blame mean the same to me. When I get a flattering letter, I sometimes contrast it with an insulting one and tell myself, *How different are men's judgments. Let them say what they like. In God's sight I am only what I am.*"

This same evening, as the conversation shifted to the new church Don Bosco was planning to build, someone remarked, "You must be quite brave. You have no money, and yet you plan to build a church in this materialistic day and age. This is really tempting Divine Providence. Aren't you afraid that you may have to stop halfway through?"

"When we plan something," he replied, "we should first see whether it will give glory to God. If that is the case, we should go ahead fearlessly because we shall succeed." He said many other things too which revealed his vast unlimited trust in God, all the more remarkable when we consider that he was undertaking a tremendous project as his health kept steadily worsening.

The Bonetti chronicle continues:

On February 1, feast of St. Francis de Sales, while conversing with a few clerics and lay members, Don Bosco happened to speak on the topic of death. To our great sorrow, he assured us that he would soon leave us. "I have but two more years to live," he stated. On other occasions, also, he often voiced St. Paul's words, "I am already being poured out in sacrifice, and the time of my deliverance is at hand." [2 Tim. 4, 6] We begged him to plead with Our Lord, at least for our sake, for another twenty years and asked him what his boys should do to obtain this grace.

He answered that we should help him fight the enemy of souls. "If you don't help me," he added, "I shall wear myself out all the quicker because I am determined not to give up, regardless of the cost. Therefore, help me to fight sin. When I see the devil hide himself in some part of the house to lead boys into sin, I feel so hurt that I wonder whether there can be a more excruciating torture than the one I'm going through. When I see God offended, I can't hold back even against an army." Then, seeing his faithful sons grieve (some of them were about to be ordained), he concluded, "Pray to the good Lord. I do hope to be with you all at your First Mass."

The news soon spread in the house and stirred the boys to do their utmost to prolong the life of their father and teacher. It was a wholesome, visible proof of Don Bosco's power and moral authority over the Oratory boys.

At the "Good Night" closing the feast, Don Bosco announced a spectacular victory to be gained over the enemy of souls. "What we are really after is to force the devil to sing God's praises," he said.

That day he decidedly took the first step toward the building of the new church. Although he had not as yet even the land to build on, he sent out a large number of circulars [7] to benefactors, to civil authorities, and to friends in Turin and other Italian cities. These circulars and countless handwritten letters kept people informed of his new, great project.

In the past, his former pupils, knowing his financial difficulties and seeing his continued efforts at expansion, sometimes thought that he was biting off more than he could chew and would someday come to a standstill for lack of funds. Now they were simply flabbergasted! Many in Turin—clergymen included—thought him imprudent in constantly launching new projects. "As long as you are alive," one wrote to him, "your name will sustain your works. But when you're gone, they will fall or come to a standstill."

Many other people, on the other hand—like Father Matthew Picco, professor of rhetoric—had absolute faith in him. Knowing Don Bosco intimately, Father Picco heartily respected him and believed him to be a most extraordinary man. He particularly marveled to see him succeed in seemingly impossible things. Whenever he heard of a vast new project, for example the new church, he would exclaim, "Oh, no! And yet if Don Bosco says so, it must be so!"

He was right. Don Bosco's work was God's. As [Dominic] Cardinal Agostini, patriarch of Venice, remarked to Father Rua, "God works his wonders only through His saints."

The Rosminians had meanwhile decided to sell their land at Valdocco since it had become only a tax burden. They advertised its steep sale price, but there were no takers. Since their procurator and others were firmly set against selling it to Don Bosco because they resented Father Savio's refusal to accept their con-

[7] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

ditions, Don Bosco had to act through a distinguished friend of his, Mr. Francis Tortone. The latter negotiated with the Rosminians in his own name, though really intending to hand the property over to Don Bosco. His price and terms were readily agreed upon. On the day chosen for signing the contract, Mr. Tortone and the Rosminian agent met in Chevalier Turvano's office. Unexpectedly Don Bosco showed up. The Rosminian agent protested that the latter was not the party he had intended to deal with and that his client would not sell the property to him.

"I am buying this land," protested Mr. Tortone, "and I can give it to anyone I like."

The agent replied that under the circumstances he was not empowered to act without further instructions.

"Then get them," replied Mr. Tortone.

By now the transaction had become public knowledge and the Rosminians did not wish to appear hostile to Don Bosco. A refusal to sign the contract would have shown pettiness on their part and brought on unfavorable comments. Therefore they instructed their agent to sign the contract on Mr. Tortone's terms.

By a deed dated February 11, 1863, Father Peter Bertetti, Rosmini's successor, sold Don Bosco some 15,000 square feet of land in Valdocco [8] for 1,558 lire and 40 centesimi, and thus it again became Don Bosco's property.

Meanwhile, replies to his circulars testified not only to the writers' Marian devotion, but also to their trust in Don Bosco's prayers.

"Don Bosco," declared Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio, "had the reputation of being able to obtain favors from Mary for those who sought his prayers. It was a well-founded trust. As far as I can remember, during my eight years at the Oratory and on other occasions when I had contact with him, I came to realize that he had complete confidence in the Madonna and that with Her help he could obtain what seemed humanly impossible. Our Lady was always his treasurer, his defense, and his help, both as regards those who had recourse to Her through him and as regards his works."

[8] *See* Vol. V, p. 30. [Editor]

CHAPTER 37

Loyalty to the Pope

DON Bosco must indeed have felt quite happy to have the meadow he had seen in a dream [many years before] [1] once again in his possession. After so many frustrating negotiations, Our Lady's promise was proving true; Her heavenly design was about to be carried out. Indeed, to all appearances, the devil had been forced to sing God's praises.

Once this transaction was completed, Don Bosco turned to other matters he cherished. Since Marquis and Marchioness Landi were leaving for Rome, he asked them to deliver two letters: one to Baron [Feliciano] Ricci [des Ferres], the other to Pius IX. The letter to the baron [2] was a request to purchase and ship to Turin Moroni's work,[3] which Don Bosco needed as a reference tool for *Letture Cattoliche,* and as a valuable addition to the Oratory library which he was in the process of building up so as to match those of other religious institutes. Through his friends and his own personal sacrifices, he succeeded, with the result that his priests and clerics had at hand abundant research facilities for their studies. In fact, within a few years the Oratory library collection rose to over thirty thousand volumes, not counting many works in foreign languages and some rare, antique books. Though the library was just beginning to build up in 1863, it already had a substantial collection. Don Bosco looked upon every new acquisition as a treasure, as we see in this other letter of his to Baron Ricci:

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 232ff. [Editor]

[2] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[3] Gaetano Moroni (Rome, 1802–1883) authored the monumental 103-volume *Dizionario di Erudizione Storico-Ecclesiastica* and its six-volume Index. [Editor]

Turin, April 1863

Dear Baron:

I have finally received your crate of books after its many stops en route to Turin. The contents were just as you listed them. I took out and forwarded those which had to be sent to others.

Many thanks for the Moroni volumes, which I intend to keep, because they are a bargain and I need this reference work. Thanks for the trouble you took. I shall refund you the cost. We have already paid shipping charges and customs here in Turin.

May the Holy Virgin accompany you and your wife and grant your whole family a safe return home.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

With the books came a note from a friend:

Rome, Collegio Romano, March 21, 1863

Reverend Father:

Please accept this small token of my esteem and veneration. In return, please say a Hail Mary for me to the Blessed Virgin, seat and teacher of true wisdom.

Your humble servant,
Fr. Antonio Angelini, S.J.

P.S. I am enclosing two bundles of books. Regards from Protasi.

Marquis [Alphonse] Landi had meanwhile given Don Bosco's other letter—handwritten by John Cagliero—to the Holy Father. From it emerged Don Bosco's profound respect, filial love, and close union with the Vicar of Christ, along with his lively sense of belonging to the Church and making his own her life, sorrows, and triumphs:

Turin, February 13, 1863

Most Holy Father,

Graciously allow me—a humble, loving son of Holy Mother Church—the joy of expressing my filial homage and love for you through Marquis [Alphonse] Landi, a zealous Catholic.

Let me first thank you for myself, my co-workers, and my boys, for many previous spiritual favors which have strongly spurred us on to pray and work for God's glory and the good of souls according to our humble means.

Religion and its sacred ministers have fared badly in our country for the last two years in the wake of continued Protestant handouts, government threats and repression, and the defection of several shepherds. A further evil—lack of Christian education in primary and secondary schools—has produced two more ill effects: a mania for worldly, irreligious books and the rejection of basic religious tenets. As a result, priestly and religious vocations have noticeably declined, and the few who feel called are derided. Impious publications still flood the country, but less successfully than before because Catholics have put forth greater efforts to spread wholesome books and magazines.

Yet, in the midst of such afflictions we have reason to be glad. Respect and veneration for Your Holiness have stood their ground among the enemies of our faith and have greatly increased among the faithful, thanks to your irreproachable life, good works, and firmness. *Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam.*

The death and exile of several bishops have shaken the less fervent, but they have also brought the clergy closer together, turning their thoughts to the center of truth, the Vicar of Christ. Here in Piedmont the clergy is of one mind with the episcopate and with Rome, but—regretfully—in other provinces many priests have disgraced themselves. Our only consolation amid such grief is the bishops' prudence and firmness in preventing more from falling and in reforming quite a few. It may sound strange, but it is true that at this juncture the bishops are seemingly doing more good from exile or prison than they would do if they were residing in their dioceses. Their actions proclaim and defend the principle of divine authority resting in the visible head of the Church, the basic tenet of our holy Catholic faith.

Regardless of the repeated plunder of sacred places and persons, divine worship has not yet suffered. Many churches are under repair or construction; in Turin alone four new parish churches are being built—one of them in honor of Mary, Help of Christians.

On a previous occasion Your Holiness graciously listened to my report on the festive oratories.[4] I now add a bit more. There are five oratories most gratifyingly and regularly attended by over three thousand boys eager to hear the Word of God and receive the sacraments. The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales also has a hospice and an

[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 559, 576. [Editor]

elementary and secondary school. On Sundays boys flock there from all parts of town. Of seven hundred boarders, five hundred and fifty wish to become priests. Every year a number of past pupils are ordained and sent to exercise the sacred ministry in various villages and towns. Our boys, Holy Father, ever pray for your health and the triumph of the Church. A sizable number receive Holy Communion daily. Morning and evening prayers are offered to the Immaculate Virgin and frequent visits are daily paid to the Blessed Sacrament to beg God mercifully to mitigate the terrible scourges which for some years now have fallen upon our land and to grant peace to the Church and to mankind.

Unfortunately, we still have to go *per ignem et aquam.*[5] This ordeal, once remote, is now at hand. May Your Holiness follow divine inspiration to proclaim far and wide devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy, mankind's two anchors of salvation. I assure you, many are praying that the Blessed Virgin will sustain you in this time of trial and that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will keep you from harm.

Grateful for the consolation of reaching Your Holiness through this letter, I beg your gracious forbearance if my love has imposed upon you. Finally, I implore your blessing, as a further token of your kindness, on our priests, clerics, lay members, and boys who humbly join me in my request. On behalf of all, I gladly offer my deep homage to you.

Your humble, loving son,
Fr. John Bosco

This letter shows Don Bosco's satisfaction over the growth of Catholic publications. He himself had written the April issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *The Pontificate of St. Caius, Pope and Martyr.* This issue also described the martyrdom of several other contemporary Christian heroes.

At about the same time, the Immaculata Press of Modena published the second edition of [Joseph] Chantrel's *Popular History of the Popes* translated by A. Somazzi and sought Don Bosco's aid in promoting its sale. Don Bosco had read the first edition of this work. He obliged [6] but also recommended that in a future edition inaccuracies be corrected and important gaps filled.

[5] A reference to the dream *Hiking to Heaven* (Vol. VI, p. 511). [Editor]
[6] This sentence is a condensation of Don Bosco's reply. [Editor]

On another occasion, a teacher asked Don Bosco's opinion on bible histories translated from foreign languages. In his written reply, Don Bosco stressed the need of caution in choosing such works because most of them, besides other flaws, lacked the reserve which is so necessary in juvenile books.[7]

A bible history textbook (he wrote) must be: truthful, moral, reserved.

1. *Truthful.* Here, the Word of God is at stake. What is not part of Holy Scripture must be omitted or clearly so identified, lest man's word be taken as God's.

2. *Moral.* The narrative must be a safe doctrinal and practical guide. A bible history containing erroneous expressions—real or apparent—is not suited to youngsters.

3. *Reserved.* Holy Scripture contains episodes which, revealed prematurely, may taint a child's candor and excite his passions. A book intended for children must consider this danger and either omit or wisely cover up what could be an occasion of scandal at their tender age.

[7] What follows is an extract from Don Bosco's letter. [Editor]

CHAPTER 38

A Threat Averted (Continued)

FROM our account of the early months of 1863 we could conclude that, though very busy, Don Bosco was nevertheless unworried about the future of his Oratory secondary school. The superintendent of schools sent him two questionnaires [1] [at the end of January] requesting information such as was sought of all secondary schools in the province. His reply, dated February 4, sheds light on the Oratory's scholastic setup of that year. After a brief respectful reference to the superintendent, Don Bosco went on to supply the requested information:

Staff – Director: Father Matthew Picco
Arithmetic and Geography: Father Angelo Savio
1st Year: Father Victor Alasonatti
2nd Year: Cleric John Baptist Anfossi
3rd Year: Cleric Celestine Durando
4th Year: Cleric Francis Cerruti
5th Year: Father John Francesia

Pupils – 1st Year: 90 4th Year: 40
2nd Year: 53 5th Year: 64
3rd Year: 94

Note – These teachers offer their services free of charge. They are licensed to teach during this school year by a rescript issued by your office last December.

Though this administrative decision of school authorities removed the proximate danger of shutting down the Oratory school, Don Bosco used all prudent means to make the danger ever more remote. He therefore again took steps to win the authorities' support for his teachers' certification. Though he knew that

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Chevalier [Stephen] Gatti of the Department of Education was ill disposed toward him and ran a haphazard office, he called on him at the beginning of 1863 for a reply to his petition of November 11, 1862.[2]

"My dear Don Bosco," Gatti replied, "I did my best to help you, but we can't get around the law. Your present teachers can neither be certified nor admitted to examinations."

"Why not?" Don Bosco asked.

"They have not attended regular courses at the university."

"They certainly have. Records of their four years' attendance are here in your office."

"True, they attended, but only as auditors, not as matriculating students."

"But, formerly, regular attendance was enough for admission to examinations; this can be easily proven. If certain fees are mandatory, I am ready to pay them."

"It's too late now. The examples you may cite are exceptions and cannot be invoked to bypass the law."

"This is unbelievable! Some time ago, you yourself, speaking for the Department of Education, directed my teachers to take certification tests so as to be allowed to teach, and now you tell me that they are not permitted to do so. Excuse me, but you are contradicting yourself!"

"When the Department of Education gave those instructions, the matter had not been thoroughly examined. It has now been ascertained that to be admitted to examinations, one must not only have attended the lectures but also have been duly matriculated."

"If that's how things stand, Chevalier, please give me a true friend's advice. What should I do now?"

"Find yourself certified teachers for the next four years and register your present teachers immediately at the university. It's the only way you can save your school."

"Where will I find four certified teachers now? And how could I pay them?"

"That's your problem!"

"What do you suggest?"

[2] *See* p. 187. [Editor]

"Close the school."

"I believe that I can keep it open this school year. Next year, we'll see."

"By whose authority can you keep it open even this school year?"

"The superintendent's!"

"Do you really think he can authorize what the minister cannot? The superintendent has no business meddling in this matter."

"Yet he authorized my present teachers up to the end of this school year."

"Impossible! Have you anything in writing?"

"Yes, here is a copy of his statement."

"He can't do that," Gatti exclaimed as he read the document. "He can't! It's beyond his competence. I'll write to him at once and reprimand him for exceeding his authority. He's an ignoramus and must be put in his place."

"I don't know the extent of his or your jurisdiction," Don Bosco rejoined, "but I do know that all school matters in the province of Turin are referred to the superintendent. I won't worry. Anyway, should you decide to countermand his decree, I'll appreciate your informing me about it."

Gatti's indignation gave Don Bosco good reason to fear an unpleasant surprise, and so he immediately called on the superintendent to tell him what had happened. Selmi flew into a rage. "So I'm an ignoramus!" he exclaimed. "Why, that idiot had to take his examinations over and over again, and he got his professor's diploma only through political favoritism. He climbed to his present position by bootlicking and now he dares to call others ignoramuses! Let's just forget all this. Don't worry, Don Bosco. Go home without a fear. In approving your teachers, I did my duty and acted within my powers. If anyone countermands my decision, I'll step in and clear up the trouble."

Unlike Herod and Pilate, enemies who became friends, Gatti and Selmi became enemies. Their feud, which Don Bosco had neither foreseen nor desired, proved providential for the Oratory. As the saying goes, "When two dogs strive for a bone, the third runs away with it." Gatti wrote several indignant letters to Selmi, who repaid him in his own coin. While the two quarreled, the Oratory secondary school kept going.

As regards his teachers' admission to exams, Don Bosco received a negative reply from the Department of Education on the basis of the same futile arguments verbally advanced by Gatti, who most probably had dictated the answer, though it did not bear his signature. Furthermore, totally to crush Don Bosco's hopes and justify his refusal, Gatti sought and obtained a favorable opinion of the Superior Council of Education which was totally subservient to him. However, Don Bosco did not give up, and hopefully he appealed to Minister Amari.[3] His appeal, backed also by Minister Peruzzi, fared no better than the first. On March 23, the Minister of the Interior informed Don Bosco that his teachers could not be admitted to the certification exams.[4]

The cold, calculated courtesy with which Don Bosco's requests were consistently rejected was exasperating, particularly since Gatti acted very affably with Don Bosco, lavishly praising the Oratory secondary school to the sky; but he was firm in demanding that its teachers be certified. Don Bosco was clearly between the anvil and the hammer. Unless his teachers took the examinations, the school would have to be closed; on the other hand, the Department of Education—through Chevalier Gatti—refused to admit them to the examinations.

Patiently Don Bosco went from the university, to the superintendent's office, to the Department of Education, and to the Department of the Interior. He even made countless calls on the highest government officials. All were determined to see his school closed at any cost, but Don Bosco was equally determined to keep it open. "Take heart," he would say from time to time to his coworkers. "Have no fear. God's mercy is infinite!"

[3] We are omitting this appeal. [Editor]
[4] We are omitting this notification. [Editor]

CHAPTER 39

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

DON Bosco's serene, undoubting self-confidence filtered down to all his co-workers. For reasons unknown to us, but probably because of Don Bosco's unusual absence from the Oratory during the last days of the carnival season, the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death had not been made as thoroughly as usual. On his return, therefore, on Ash Wednesday [February 18, 1863] Don Bosco scheduled the artisans' Exercise for a Happy Death for the First Sunday of Lent, February 22.

The Bonetti chronicle reads: "February 18 [1863]. After urging the artisans to make the Exercise for a Happy Death well, Don Bosco added, 'Do so, especially because one of you will have no other chance. I could mention his name but I will not. Let each of you prepare himself well.' Now we shall wait and see if he has guessed right, as on other occasions."

Don Bosco did guess right. The Oratory necrology has this entry: "John Baptist Negro of Frassinetto Po, fifteen, died at home on March 23 [1863]."

The students' Exercise for a Happy Death had been set for Thursday, March 5. Don Bosco announced it on March 1, the Second Sunday of Lent, as we gather from the Ruffino chronicle: "March 1. At the 'Good Night' Don Bosco notified the students that one of them would make only one more Exercise for a Happy Death." The necrology has this entry: "Joseph Scaglietti of Camagna, thirteen, died at home on April 3 [1863]."

While the boys awaited the fulfillment of Don Bosco's prediction, he went about his own work as though the Oratory's future was not threatened. The Bonetti chronicle goes on very placidly:

March 1 [1863]. Today, in a talk to all the clerics, Don Bosco spoke of the interest we should take in the welfare of young people;

he very warmly urged us to seek out preferably the more unpopular lads and not to shy away from them. "They too have souls to be saved at all cost," he concluded.

Alone with him in his room one evening, I commented on the success of his *Storia d'Italia* and then remarked, "Father Cafasso was right in advising you to write the history of Italy rather than a manual on the manner of hearing boys' confessions, as you had planned."

"True, I followed his advice," Don Bosco replied, "but this manual too is necessary. Sadly I find that many youngsters' confessions do not come up to theological standards. In most cases, boys ignore sins committed between the ages of eight and twelve. Unless a confessor takes the trouble to look into that, youngsters gloss over them and keep building on shaky foundations."

The Ruffino chronicle adds:

March 5 [1863]. Today, the Salesians met in conference. After the reading of a few articles of the rules, Don Bosco was asked whether one might, upon joining the congregation, retain the ownership of things he brought with him. "If he did not hand them over to the Society," Don Bosco replied, "he may; if he did, he needs his superior's permission, which is seldom given, in order to forestall friction in the house."

Someone else asked whether a priest might offer a Mass for a relative's intention without a stipend. The answer was negative, unless the priest had his superior's permission.

It was then brought up that some confreres, by going to the morning Lenten sermons in town, were late for the noon meal and inconvenienced the kitchen staff. "If this inconvenienced me, I wouldn't mind, but since it bothers the kitchen staff, I cannot allow it because their work is already heavy enough."

Saturday, March 7. Last night Don Bosco heard confessions for some four hours until about ten o'clock. Then, while eating supper, he entertained the few clerics and priests around him, as usual, with edifying and informative topics. In his conversation, he happened to mention a youth who impulsively had left the Oratory and was now in Tuscany. Don Bosco went on to say that the boy, regretting his imprudent step, was now sorry and distressed at having left the one who could safeguard him from the dangers of the world. "I foresaw it all," Don Bosco added. "To keep him at the Oratory I let him have all he wanted. I did all I could to dissuade him, but he insisted on leaving. Now, in regret, he tells me what I had long foreseen."

Sunday, March 8. Don Bosco's zeal shows up in all he does. First he heard confessions from daybreak to nine; then, at ten, though he was hoarse, he preached to the boys, continuing his masterful narration of the lives of the popes. He spoke until ten forty-five. Then he retired to a room adjacent to the pulpit and sat down, exhausted. After a few minutes, he walked to his room without complaint. Dead tired, but determined to keep working, he lay on his bed and began correcting galley proofs. At eleven-thirty a knock at the door made him get up to let an old man in for confession. Don Bosco was quite moved and, sitting on his very low bed, he readily heard and comforted him.

That evening, he had a few of his priests—Angelo Savio, Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Francesia, Bartholomew Fusero, and Joseph Bongiovanni—send a petition [1] to the Holy See for permission to celebrate Mass one hour before dawn and one hour after noon for a just reason, and also to bless rosaries, crosses, medals, pictures, and so on. Father Victor Alasonatti's name was included in the last request. This petition was instrumental in bringing Don Bosco one of his most cherished consolations, an autograph of Pius IX which is now the precious possession of Count Aleramo Bosco of Ruffino.

Meanwhile Don Bosco had been taking necessary steps to have a young cleric of his—Peter Leggero—admitted to sacred orders. The chancery's reply follows:

Turin, March 9, 1863

Very Reverend Father:

The vicar general, after carefully studying Leggero's case and the epileptic history of relatives on his mother's side, has decided not to petition the Holy See in order to avoid a clear-cut negative answer in regard to ordination. You will have to find some gentle way of persuading this cleric to consider some other suitable career. I very much regret this measure, but I feel that I must concur with the vicar general's opinion.

May I also remind you about assigning *two* of your most experienced clerics to serve at the cathedral during Holy Week as in previous years.

Likewise, on behalf of the Convent of the Good Shepherd, I ask you

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

to assign *two,* possibly *three* clerics for Holy Week services there. (In the past you always sent two.) Since the convent services will take place early in the morning, these same clerics might later help out also in some other church.

I also wish to remind you that the spiritual retreat for all diocesan clerics will begin Wednesday evening. Please see to it that as many of your clerics as possible attend, since school will be closed for just that reason.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. Alexander Vogliotti, *Provicar General*

P.S. I will contribute a few dozen bricks to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians as soon as construction starts.

We have quoted this letter because it recalls one of the many swift cures obtained through Don Bosco's blessing. The cleric Peter Leggero had transferred from the Bra seminary to the Oratory toward the end of 1861. Stricken with epilepsy on account of the great fright he experienced at a thunderbolt, he was forced to give up studying after several epileptic fits. Still, he was quite confident that, with God's help, he would recover and resume his studies. When he called on Don Bosco, the latter welcomed him, saying, "Let us both make a novena. You'll see that the Blessed Virgin Mary will grant us this grace." He then blessed him. From that moment, the good cleric began to improve. Within a short time he was completely cured and for a whole year suffered no relapse.

Convinced that the Madonna had granted him a permanent cure, Don Bosco succeeded in obtaining the chancery's permission for the cleric to resume his theological studies. Then, despite the provicar's negative reply, foreseeing this young man's priestly ministry, Don Bosco spared no pains and at last had the joy of seeing him ordained. Leggero became a devout, learned priest. At first he was pastor of Candiolo (Torino). Later, Leo XIII wished to make him a bishop but relented when Father Leggero begged not to receive that honor and its grave responsibility. Finally, in 1887 he became a cathedral canon in Turin and shared the choir with Canon Vogliotti himself. "I witnessed this cure myself," Canon John Baptist Anfossi declared, "and Father

Leggero confirmed it, telling me that his recovery was a true miracle of Don Bosco, who had been a second father to him."

At about this time [the spring of 1863], Don Bosco showed his goodness, prudence, and justice by not tolerating lack of respect for authority. It so happened that some boys ridiculed an unpopular young cleric; he gave them a sound whacking, to the great shock of the community, unaccustomed to such violent measures. That evening the boys restlessly waited for what Don Bosco would say at the "Good Night." After having privately admonished the young cleric, he began by saying that they all knew his displeasure on learning that anyone had been struck or even only excessively punished, contrary to his clear directives. He then went on to remark that their disrespect and ridicule had so exasperated the young cleric that it was too much to expect that—even if wrong—he should put up with it. Such restraint would have called for near heroism. Besides, what some boys had said and done was downright insubordination, and under other circumstances it would not have gone unpunished. Still he deemed it best to settle the matter amicably. Such lack of respect and striking were never again to occur. He paused a moment, smiled and went on, "You are so very dear to me that for your sake I'd do even the impossible. . . . I am sorry you were beaten . . . but I can't undo that." Everyone burst out laughing and resentment vanished. One might say that justice and peace walked hand in hand that day.

We have mentioned this incident—slight in itself—to stress once more how these hundreds of witnesses of Don Bosco's words and actions were alert, fearless, intolerant of abuse, and conscious of the respect due to them. The Oratory could be run only by a convincing authoritative word.

Meanwhile, at Mirabello, Don Bosco's large boarding school or junior seminary for the Casale diocese was taking shape. Excavations had begun in the fall of 1862 and the foundations had already been laid. In March 1863 Joshua Buzzetti,[2] the contractor, began erecting the walls, hoping to complete the building by August. The cost had been estimated at over a hundred thousand lire, but Don Bosco fully trusted Divine Providence. The Provera family saw to some of the expenses and Countess Callori gave him

[2] *See* Vol. V, p. 298. [Editor]

substantial assistance. While in that area, Don Bosco went to Asti to seek financial aid for that diocese's boys and clerics studying at the Oratory. He spoke very briefly with Monsignor Sossi, vicar capitular, to whom he later wrote in these terms:

Turin, March 30, 1863

Dear Father:

I wanted to talk to you [the day I was in Asti], but since you were about to leave for Turin just when I called on you, I had to limit myself to just a few words. I also called several times on Father Magnone, but unfortunately he was not at home. I am therefore putting down the gist of the matter in writing.

In your letter of October 1861, you contributed the entire fee of forty lire for the cleric F . . . and twenty-five lire for each of the two P . . . brothers.

Last fall—I do not recall now whether by letter or by word—full fees were also paid for them. As regards Preda, everything was done as reported by Father Magnone. Then, too, the pastor of Tigliole wrote to tell me that, after he spoke with you, you offered to contribute one hundred lire yearly for Dominic Gay of Tigliole, a second year Latin student in our school.

In regard to the above-mentioned students, I believe we agreed in our brief conversation that the fees should remain unchanged this year. I could hardly establish new rates in mid-year. In the future, the Asti seminary will do what it can, and I will do my utmost within the limits of my perennially depleted funds.

In addition to these boys, I have thirty-two other promising youngsters from Asti, most of whom are here gratis; a few pay token fees, none the entire fee. I had planned to enlist your aid for these good lads, but I changed my mind when you mentioned the seminary's financial straits. I merely suggest that some aid be given to Louis Prete of Agliano, a second year rhetoric student who is most eager to don the cassock as soon as possible. In the past, his family paid something toward his keep, but this year, unable to keep up their payments, they came to take him home. I wrote to you twice about this boy, asking your aid, but apparently the letters did not reach you. This one at least, I think, will get to you.

The next school year, 1863–64, with a junior seminary of your own, you will be able to arrange things otherwise, and I too will see what I can do, but meanwhile, if Father Magnone can pay the bill I sent to

him through Canon Ballario, I'd be greatly obliged, since I am at the moment in very sore straits.

May God grant you health and grace.

Respectfully and affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco

As we can see, for three years the Oratory functioned also as a junior seminary for the Asti diocese.

CHAPTER 40

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

AT Don Bosco's festive oratories, Lenten catechism classes began on February 25 and continued in full swing till Palm Sunday, March 29 [1863]. Some days later, Wednesday, April 1, after fulfilling their Easter duty, a large number of Oratory pupils went home on an eight-day recess. For some years now, Holy Week services had been held regularly at the Oratory's own Church of St. Francis de Sales. Except for Maundy Thursday, when Don Bosco himself said Mass and performed the Washing of Feet, all services were conducted by the devout and fervent Father [Victor] Alasonatti. Don Bosco punctually attended them all.

On Holy Saturday, worn out by hours of hearing the festive oratory boys' confessions in the sacristy, Don Bosco fainted. On regaining consciousness, he sipped some milk and, after a brief rest in his room on doctor's orders, resumed work. "Why don't you take a break, for a change?" his pupils insisted.

"How can I rest," he replied, "when the devil never does?"

He nevertheless used to remark to his young clerics, "There is a limit to what a man can do. Nobody should overwork himself lest he be prematurely worn out and become useless and be done for, just when he ought to be at the peak of his powers." Willy-nilly, however, though his pupils' concern at times brought him some relief, his actions contradicted his words. We have already mentioned [1] how, in past years, on noticing a pupil in pain, Don Bosco would pray and obtain the ailment's transfer to himself. Now, as it happened, his pupils would do the same for him. The Bonetti chronicle reads:

[1] *See* Vol. V, pp. 10ff. [Editor]

On the evening of April 9 [1863], while speaking about his improved health, Don Bosco remarked: "The boys' prayers are powerful. One youngster, for instance, can instantly have my ailment transferred to himself, while I in turn beg Dominic Savio to cure him, and in a short while we are both well again."

"Some Oratory boys and clerics too are so virtuous," he continued, "that if they go on this way, they will outdo St. Aloysius himself. Almost daily I see things in this house which defy belief. Yet God is pleased to have them happen in our midst."

In the same chronicle John Bonetti adds:

That privileged youngster [mentioned above] is a very good friend of mine. Noticing an occasional weakness in his health, I one day mentioned it to Don Bosco. "I am afraid," I said, "that you will soon lose this boy. He is young but already in such poor health that he can't last long." That evening I tried to hearten my good friend. "I'll be all right by tomorrow," he replied. "Don Bosco told me so." He was correct. The next day he was back in school. Though the day before he could hardly swallow liquids, now he was eating regularly. As I knew far better than others the bad shape he had been in, I was quite astonished, but just then I had no inkling at all that he was taking on Don Bosco's ailments. One evening, as I sat with Don Bosco in his room, I asked him how he felt, since the day before he had been ailing badly, and he replied that he was much better. "So-and-so takes on my pains," he added. Then I began to understand the sudden ups-and-downs of Don Bosco's health and that of my young friend, and I was convinced that God occasionally plays such games with those who love Him.

John Baptist Francesia testifies to a similar episode. One morning Don Bosco's eyes were aching, but by early afternoon the trouble was totally gone. When asked about such a rapid recovery, he answered that his eye trouble had passed on to someone else who had prayed for his relief.

Father Anthony Sala, who was anxious to experience such a phenomenon, often told us of what had happened to him on a stay in Rome with Don Bosco. The latter was to speak at a very important meeting one morning, but an atrocious headache made the appointment simply unthinkable. Seeing him in such a state,

Father Sala exclaimed, "Don Bosco, if my prayers could rid you of your headache and pass it on to me, I'd gladly accept it!"

"You have my sympathy, dear Father," Don Bosco answered. "I'll take you at your word. You may have my headache until the meeting is over." Instantly Father Sala got a splitting headache which ceased only on Don Bosco's return. Such also was the experience of others on various occasions. We now return to the Bonetti chronicle:

That same Thursday, April 9 [1863], while the boys were returning from their Easter vacation, Don Bosco was presiding at a meeting of the Immaculate Conception Sodality. Toward its close he took the floor and, among other things, gave two recommendations to help youngsters entrusted to our care:

"1. Be on hand when your boy comes back from his Easter vacation to greet him and renew your friendship. Give him a word of counsel if he needs it, especially in the first few days. Then, too, on holidays and during the mid-week recess on Thursday, spend all the time you can with him. In a word, whenever you see that he needs advice, look for him and kindly correct him in private.

"2. I suggest, too, that you take your charge along to confession with you. Tell him, for example, 'I'm going to confession, but I don't want to go alone. Will you come with me?' In most cases he will, and thus he will have a chance to speak to a confessor. Even if he is not ready for absolution, he will at least get some good advice."

In closing, Don Bosco stated that he saw this sodality as his honor guard, and that just as the emperors of old felt safe and strong as long as their guard was alert and mighty, he also hoped he could use us to rout God's enemies and safeguard His throne in our house.

About this time some distinguished laymen and priests returned from Rome where, thanks to Don Bosco, they had been able to attend Holy Week services in St. Peter's. Cardinal Marini wrote to Don Bosco about one of them, who was still in Rome:

Rome, April 18, 1863

Very Reverend Father,

The people you recommend are as dear to me as your very self. I was most delighted to greet Canon Davicino, who served as my trainbearer the better to enjoy Holy Week services.

I hope to introduce him to the Holy Father next Monday. Thank you for this opportunity to meet such a worthy priest.

Congratulations for the continuing success of your true apostolate of charity in Turin. Since I cannot contribute otherwise, I pray that God may always bless you. The Holy Father spoke very warmly of you. When I mentioned Canon Davicino to him as having been my train-bearer, the Holy Father called him "Don Bosco's friend." I am always delighted to be of service to you when I can.

Your affectionate servant and friend,
P. Cardinal Marini

Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, no longer a member of the Institute of Charity,[2] often came to the Oratory to give the Sunday sermons. At Don Bosco's insistence, he also gave weekly lessons in sacred eloquence to clerics and priests for two months. His lectures were very helpful, mostly because of his clear, precise presentation. At times, he enjoyed religious polemics. During his stay in England, he had made an in-depth study of contemporary Protestantism; he had observed the intimate relation of rebellion to heresy and studied the current trends and moral evils which plagued society. With Don Bosco's consent, Oratory clerics and priests—John Baptist Anfossi and Dominic Bongiovanni among them—often called on him for guidance in theology and for confession.

Canon Gastaldi warmly favored Don Bosco and his apostolate. To please him, he authored the May-June issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Biographical Highlights of Father John Vianney, "Curé d'Ars."* [3] The Appendix contained reflections on Christian doctrine which the curé had expressed in his catechism classes and sermons.

John Bonetti wrote of Canon Gastaldi:

The canon was one of those great admirers of Don Bosco who are never properly praised. During the week after Low Sunday, he happened to be with a group of priests and laymen who spoke rather disparagingly of Don Bosco and his undertakings. "I'd like to add a word," he remarked, after they had had their say. "I have known

[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 98f. [Editor]

[3] Father John Vianney (1786–1859) was canonized by Pius XI in 1925. [Editor]

Don Bosco and his Oratory for some time, and I go there often. I have listened carefully to your words and frankly must say that what you have stated is totally false. Either you know nothing of Don Bosco and his work or you are downright defamers. How can you be so mean as to criticize a man who sacrifices himself for youngsters? Try to do as much yourselves!"

When some of the clerics learned of this, they informed Don Bosco that people were speaking ill of him. "I am not surprised," he answered quietly. "Is there any saintlier man than Canon Anglesio?[4] Even the sternest theologian can find no fault in him. Yet I often have to listen to some very vicious criticism of him. He is called swell-headed, rigid, heartless, and so on. We cannot please everybody. The wisest thing is to do one's best and expect no reward except from God."

Living by such a principle, he himself did all the good he could. In April 1863, Dominic Ruffino made this entry in his chronicle:

Don Bosco has a heap of extra expenses this year, what with new buildings at the Oratory—including a new church whose cornerstone will soon be laid—and the Mirabello school now under construction. One would think that he should stop looking for other ways to spend money. Yet he manages to contribute to other causes—for example, the parish church of Father Arpino under construction in Borgo San Salvario. This project is meant to care for the spiritual needs of countless people of Turin's dense population. Without the church, they would face serious spiritual dangers. Such a motive is more than enough to make Don Bosco overlook his own needs to contribute all he can—two hundred lire, and many lottery tickets.

The following letter to Marquis [Dominic] Fassati testifies to Don Bosco's own straitened circumstances:

Turin, April 18, 1863

Dear Marquis:

Here is a wonderful chance to earn a jubilee indulgence. By ten tomorrow morning I must pay our baker three thousand lire. Just now, I haven't a cent. I appeal to your charity. Please do what you can in this extraordinary need of mine. It's literally a matter of feeding the

[4] The rector of Cottolengo's Little House of Divine Providence. [Editor]

hungry. Sometime today I shall call on you to pick up whatever the Lord and the Holy Virgin will inspire you to offer.

God bless you, Marquis, you and your marchioness and Azelia, and grant all of you health, grace, and a handsome recompense in the land of the blessed. Amen.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The Oratory's annual retreat was scheduled to start the day after Don Bosco wrote this letter and others to many benefactors. The Ruffino chronicle gives us the following information:

The retreat began on Sunday evening, April 19 [1863]. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco urged strict silence outside of recreation periods. He forbade noisy games, including soccer, but allowed *barra rotta.*[5] He invited each boy to write him a note stating what he planned to avoid and what he intended to do. "I shall save these notes as a souvenir of the retreat," he added, "and they will also remind those who fail to keep their promises. I want you to know that I still have notes dating as far back as 1845, and I read them over now and then.

"Finally, I strongly urge you to keep to the schedule, especially for church services. Do your very best to please the preachers. They have come to help you and are willing to assist us even in a material way. They must see that you are well-mannered. Greet them on the playground and in the corridors—cheerfully, not with somber faces. I am quite proud, you know, and want people to say that my boys are good and polite. Don't let me down. Try to be on your best behavior!

"As for what you should do, follow the preachers' instructions and pay attention to their sermons. I must warn you that Canon Gastaldi especially may question you about his sermons during recreation periods. I wouldn't like you to cut a poor figure."

The spiritual retreat was a very fervent one.[6] One pupil kept his resolution to observe total silence. We have a memento of this retreat in a note written in 1863 by a fine lad who is now a priest:

"At the time of the 1863 spiritual retreat I was a Latin I student After hearing my confession, Don Bosco told me to forget the past, not to worry about it, and to leave all responsibility to him, but, somehow, I kept thinking that my sins had not been forgiven. The

[5] A sort of cops-and-robbers game. [Editor]
[6] For its schedule *see* Appendix 4. [Editor]

following night a smiling beautiful Lady in peasant garb appeared to me in a dream. Seeing me depressed, She said: 'From the moment you promised to devote your whole life to Me, all your sins were forgiven. Don't worry anymore about the past. Just try to keep your promise always. Fear no more.' Then She vanished. I woke up. It was only a dream, but it deeply impressed and comforted me, confirming Don Bosco's counsel."

The Ruffino chronicle continues:

On April 20 Don Bosco was in the dining room, near the kitchen, with a number of boys and clerics swarming around him, avidly listening to his witty, wholesome conversation. Suddenly switching topics, he smiled at them and remarked, "How happy I am to think of the great things you will do for the Church!"

"Will any of us become famous?" he was asked.

He looked about, gazing fixedly at each, and then said: "Listen carefully. Two of you will become famous in learning and piety, two in crime." Noticing their astonishment, he added, "Ten years from now you will verify what I have told you, and then you will say: 'Don Bosco once told us about it!' By that time you'll know who became famous."

The boys felt dejected on being told that two of them would become notorious criminals. Joachim Berto–then a Latin I student–was nearly in tears as he drew closer to Don Bosco and whispered, "Am I one of the bad ones?" Clasping the boy's head against his heart with warm affection, Don Bosco smilingly whispered back, "By no means! On the contrary, I expect great things from you."

After recording this incident, Ruffino added:

Those present were: Joseph Bongiovanni of Turin, Dominic and James Ruffino, Steven Chicco of Sommariva, Peter Racca of Volvera, Simon Lupotto of Cambiano, August Costa of Pinerolo, John Costa of La Spezia, Julius Barberis of Mathi, Cottino (artisan), Joachim Berto, Oddone Ternavasio of Bra, Selvatico Buratto, Joseph Pittaluga of Tortona, William Gorelli, Ecclesia of None, [John] Tamietti, Baccolla, [Joseph] Sandrone, Philip Patarchi of Rome, Martina, August Croserio, and [Peter] Gallo of Chivasso.

The Ruffino chronicle then goes on:

On April 23 [1863], at the close of the spiritual retreat, Don Bosco gave the following "Good Night":

"Last evening a fiery globe appeared over our house. Many asked me what it meant. Of old, fire falling upon a person was regarded as a sign of punishment. I do not want to think that the Lord intends to punish us. If I am to see any meaning in it, it is this: that several of you have not made a good retreat. The fiery globe may mean that the Lord intends to give them a little more time to reform.

"I must tell you another thing: during this retreat an extraordinary thing happened to me which has occurred only once before—I found I could read your hearts as easily as a book. I could spot all your sins and problems clearly and distinctly. It would have been just as easy for me to tell you your sins as to hear you tell me, with this sole difference: that if I let *you* confess them, you would have done it haphazardly, whereas I could have listed them quite clearly and in order. Furthermore, after you finished your confession, I could have made suggestions which would really meet all your needs. Once the retreat ended, this phenomenon ceased. I tried to read your minds again tonight, but I could not. It was like being in total darkness.

"Someone may well ask: 'Does Don Bosco still remember what he saw in each heart?' My recollection is vague, like having read a book but once. I therefore exhort each one to try to remember my admonitions or counsels in confession during the retreat and to do your best to practice them. This strange occurrence consoled me greatly, but it also made me grieve because many boys who I hoped would come to confession did not show up. I sent for them, but they could not be found. Others whom I urged to come promised to do so but did not keep their word. I do not mean to imply that all of them made a bad retreat. Far from it! But had they come to confession, I would have been able to do more for their spiritual well-being."

To confirm what Don Bosco said, I, Dominic Ruffino, can testify that one boy confided to me that he had gone to confession to Don Bosco, intending only to make a normal confession, but that Don Bosco had told him he would do better to make a general one. The boy replied that he was willing but not just then, because he wasn't ready for it. "It's no problem," Don Bosco rejoined. "What you won't say, I will." Without further ado, Don Bosco recited all the boy's sins unerringly.

Another lad too told me that he felt very ashamed to confess a certain sin and that Don Bosco not only disclosed it to him but even added certain details which no one could have possibly known.

The Ruffino chronicle continues:

April 25 [1863]. I asked Don Bosco whether he could read hearts only during confession or whether he could do so also at other times. "At all times," he replied, "even outside of confessions."

During these days, Don Bosco sent this note to the son of Chevalier Xavier Provana of Collegno:

Turin, April 23, 1863

First Communion Souvenirs

1. Don't be idle. Carry out your duties diligently.
2. Obey your elders, especially your father.
3. Be devout in church, loving at home, respectful to all.
4. Go to confession and Communion often.

Fr. John Bosco

After the feast of St. Joseph's Patronage, Don Bosco had to ask for prayers for two deceased Oratory pupils: Paul Cucco of Chivasso, eighteen, who died in the Cottolengo Hospital on April 27, and Joseph Damasco, twenty, who passed away at home in Villafaletto during the same month.

From the Chapter minutes we gather that at the beginning of May, several pupils asked to be admitted to the Salesian Society. "On May 8, 1863, Joseph Gallo, Baracco, John Anthony Birocco, Andrew Pelazza, and John Tamietti were admitted to [the practice of the rules of] the Salesian Society."

CHAPTER 41

A Threat Averted (Continued)

WE have already mentioned [1] Don Bosco's determination to keep his resident secondary school open at any cost. God, he felt, was on his side. In fact, at the height of his controversy with the Department of Education, he undauntedly set about erecting a three-story addition to the Oratory some forty-five feet high, one hundred and twenty feet long, and thirty-two feet wide.[2] Half the entire length of the main floor was partitioned into rooms and the other half into porticoes. During recreation periods, the boys eagerly lugged bricks and tiles up the scaffolding. Work went on throughout the year and was completed at the beginning of 1864.

Don Bosco had these four inscriptions painted on the portico walls:

I. *Ne tradas bestiis animas confitentes Tibi et animas pauperum Tuorum ne obliviscaris in finem.*

Deliver not up to beasts the souls that confess to You; be not forever unmindful of the lives of Your afflicted ones. (Ps. 73, 19)

II. *Praeoccupemus faciem Eius in confessione et in psalmis iubilemus Ei.*

Let us greet Him with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to Him. (Ps. 94, 2)

III. *Qui abscondit scelera sua non dirigetur; qui autem confessus fuerit et reliquerit ea, misericordiam consequetur.*

He who conceals his sins shall not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them obtains mercy. (Prov. 28, 13)

IV. *Non confundaris confiteri peccata tua et ne subiicias te omni homini pro peccato.*

[1] *See* p. 237. [Editor]

[2] We have condensed unimportant construction details. [Editor]

Be not ashamed to confess your sins, but submit not yourself to every man for sin. (Sir. 4, 31)

As construction went briskly forward, Don Bosco, having only the March 23 communication of the Minister of the Interior to go by, realized that the only way he could keep his secondary school open at that hostile time was by meeting the state requirements. When he tried to register his clerics at the University of Turin, he was told that they would first have to take comprehensive college examinations. Difficulties cropped up one after another, all calculated to aggravate Don Bosco and force him to desist. This time, though, he found another—and a legal—way out. The Oratory's secondary school teachers had completed their philosophy courses in the seminary under instructors certified by the University of Turin. According to old school legislation—or at least its time-honored interpretation—a seminary philosophy examination was presumed equivalent to a comprehensive college examination. In fact, several priests had been admitted to the university on the strength of this interpretation. Hoping thus to shorten—as much as legally possible—his clerics' attendance at the university, Don Bosco had his young teachers petition the university rector to give them the benefit of the provisions of this legislation.[3] To their petition he added a statement to the effect that these young men were contributing their services gratis on behalf of indigent students. The request was rejected.

Hercules Ricotti, rector of the University of Turin and professor of modern history and art criticism, was one of those whom Don Bosco had called on. An historian warmly favored by liberals and the author of a history of Europe and one of Italy, he had read Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* for junior high schools but had attributed its golden, simple style and presentation—highly praised by Tommaseo [4]—to meager talent and scanty education. His misconception was the result of his anticlerical bias. Furthermore, he took personal offense at certain critical remarks allegedly made

[3] We are omitting the text of their petition and other pertinent correspondence. [Editor]

[4] Niccolò Tommaseo (1802–1874) authored several dictionaries and various writings on moral and political philosophy, literary criticism, poetry, biography, and history. [Editor]

by Don Bosco about his writings. Don Bosco had often called on him at the university and at his home, but always in vain. At this juncture he made one last attempt and called on Ricotti at the university. He was expecting to be told, as usual, that the rector was busy and could not receive him. However, the unexpected happened. Ricotti chanced to walk out of his office in search of a clerk. Quickly Don Bosco stood in front of the door. Ricotti was soon back. He knew Don Bosco, for he had spoken with him several times in the past, but now he pretended not to recognize him.

"May I have a word with you?" Don Bosco asked.

"Who are you?"

"I am Don Bosco."

"Yes, yes, Don Bosco, the priest who spoke so unflatteringly of me and discredited my *History of Europe.*"

"You are quite mistaken, sir. I have never discredited your work."

"Indeed you have! You even claimed that my history is full of lies. Let's be frank and lay our cards on the table. Admit your statement." He ushered Don Bosco into his office and bade him sit down. Then, moving his chair close to him, he went on: "Isn't it true that you freely disparaged my work?"

"I assure you," Don Bosco replied, "that I have never said or written a word against it."

"Well, then, let me rephrase my question: Do you approve or disapprove of my *History of Europe?*"

"I cannot approve of it!"

"Well! That's all I wanted to know! And will you tell me why?"

"Because you openly fly into the face of truth. I'll come straight to specifics. You claim that Leo X fraudulently succeeded in becoming pope, that he was a hypocrite and an idler and still was called 'the Great' by his courtiers, and that his century is named after him despite no merit of his own. Well, have you read Voit? He is a Protestant, and yet states that Leo X greatly honored his pontificate by many splendid and noteworthy achievements and that he was more deserving of his age than anyone else, so that it was only fair and logical that it be named after him. Voit exalts and praises him admirably. Now, Professor, whom am I to

side with—you, a Catholic who strongly discredits such a famous pope, or some other historian who, having all the reasons possible to discredit him, praises and exalts him to the skies?"

Ricotti was quite at a loss for a reply. He tried to justify his position but finally had to admit that Don Bosco was right. He then highly praised Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia,* claiming that it could never be adequately appreciated. "Busy as you are," he asked, "how could you conceive such a difficult work and so admirably bring it to completion?"

Don Bosco had not called on Ricotti to hear flattering praises which he sensed were insincere, and so he lost no time in shifting the conversation to the topics he had most at heart—the threatened shutdown of his secondary school, the refusal to let his teachers take certification examinations, and his need of qualified instructors. Ricotti listened quite sympathetically and promised support, stating that Don Bosco's providential work for homeless boys deserved his favor.

Don Bosco hoped to gain Ricotti's backing, but it was slow in coming because the latter did not consider the seminary's philosophy examination to be equivalent to a college comprehensive exam, and he would not allow abridged courses. But just as every obstacle seemed insurmountable, Bartholomew Prieri, dean of the philosophy and literature faculty and professor of Greek literature, intervened, asking Ricotti to dispense Don Bosco's teachers from the comprehensive college exam in view of their previous attendance at the university. His prestige was such that authorities hostile to the Oratory had to cease their unjust demands. The result was that Don Bosco's teachers were informed they could enter the university as long as they passed the entrance examination.[5]

[5] This last paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 42

Noteworthy Details

CONTROVERSY about the Oratory secondary school had somewhat abated by the beginning of May. The Oratory chronicles have no records of nosegays, conferences, or incidents recalling Don Bosco's and his pupils' devotion to their heavenly Mother during this month so lovingly dedicated to Her. All we have is a few letters, written or received by Don Bosco during this month, which highlight one or another of his virtues, amiable though ordinary, and always quite important for good social relations.

Knowing his extensive connections, very many people came to him for recommendations and advice. Courteous and cordial—traits that made him so amiable—he never turned down a request. Often enough, through his whole life, he volunteered his own services to one and all. Recording every incident would be tedious.[1]

A virtue of Don Bosco, not adequately known, was his calm in business matters. Some letters of his, which we have already quoted, bear this out.[2] His calm was not ruffled even when he was defrauded or kept waiting for long overdue payments while he himself stood in grave financial straits. Though he kept himself totally detached from money, he stood for his rights when justice demanded that he guard his boys from harm. Year after year, considerable sums turned out to be uncollectable, and even token board and tuition fees went unpaid—occasionally because of family misfortunes, at other times through sheer bad faith. Even in such a case he did not dismiss boys if their conduct was exemplary. Now and then he took in youngsters recommended by city associa-

[1] We are omitting a letter from Canon Charles Barraja of Nice to whom Don Bosco had recommended the count of Ciriè (Lanzo). [Editor]

[2] *See* pp. 97f. *See* also Vol. VI, pp. 90f. [Editor]

tions, even though he foresaw vexing negotiations, financial wranglings, burdensome accountability, loose agreements, misgivings, and unkept pledges. His inexhaustible goodness endured it all. Sometimes even diocesan officials who had entrusted their seminarians' education to him found that they could not meet their financial obligations because of the hard times, heavy taxes, confiscation of church property, and urgent diocesan needs. Regardless of his own pressing expenses that he had to meet, his patient generosity was truly astounding. We see this in a letter of his to Canon [Anthony] Sossi, vicar capitular of the Asti diocese:

Turin, May 4, 1863

My dear Canon:

I am in dire financial need. You would be doing me a favor and an act of charity if you could settle your account of 1862 and maybe that of this first semester. If you find the latter too much, please try to pay the older debt at least.

I am very sorry to have to bother you. If I knew I could speak with Canon Magnone, I would come straight to Asti. But it is unlikely I can find him or even reach him by letter, so I must write directly to you.

Courage, my dear Canon! We are in the thick of battle. We must pray, hope, and keep going forward!

Father Alasonatti, Chevalier Oreglia, and all our household want to be remembered to you.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

At this time he was scheduling the July, August, September, and October issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* respectively entitled: *The Life and Institute of St. Angela Merici,* by Joseph Frassinetti, . . . *Anthony, the Good Father of a Family,* by Father Peter Bazetti, . . . *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament,* by Father Huguet, . . . and *A Biographical Sketch of the Saintly Cleric Ezio Gherardi of Lucca.* . . . *L'Armonia* publicized this last booklet in an article of October 6 [1863].

While these booklets were going to press at the Oratory, Don Bosco was readying others which past experience told him would

meet his subscribers' favor. To this end, he wrote to the cleric Frattini, who was in charge of the "Tommasini"—young seminarians at the Cottolengo Institute:

Turin, May 12, 1863

My dear Frattini:

Baronio [3] is the main source of my *Lives of the Popes.* The series has now reached the Fourth Century. I have looked in the Convitto library for Vol. III of his *Annales* but the Cottolengo Institute now has it. I wish you to know I still have Vol. II of the set. Would you kindly ask your good superior to favor me and the popes for whose glory I try to write by lending me Vol. III? I shall take good care of it, but will need it until I cover the period of the volume.

God bless you, our esteemed Father Anglesio, and the whole Cottolengo Institute. Amen.

Affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Government officials to whom Don Bosco had sent appeals in February [4] concerning his newly planned church and complimentary copies of his *Storia d'Italia* sent their replies.[5] Some promised help; others apologized for their inability to do so. Though he did not always reach the goal of his fund-raising appeals, he managed to keep his standing in official circles as a symbol of public charity. Even negative replies might one day serve as recommendations. Occasionally, too, his humble insistence in the name of charity brought immediate tangible results. For example, the fund drive for his new church netted a six thousand lire subsidy from the royal court, payable in two installments.[6]

Yet, while Don Bosco had promises of help, a Jewish synagogue was rising on donated city land near the Victor Emmanuel theater, and Protestant churches were being built with the government's full cooperation. Minister Pisanelli, of the Department of

[3] Cesare Cardinal Baronio (1538–1607), Vatican librarian, was an outstanding Italian ecclesiastical historian. He authored the 12-volume *Annales Ecclesiastici a Christo Nato ad Annum 1198.* [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 227. [Editor]

[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[6] This last sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Cults, a follower of Tanucci,[7] persistently persecuted all of Italy's clergy who were faithful to church laws and discipline. Threats, house searches, and jail terms were inflicted upon priests for refusing to sing the *Te Deum* or the *Oremus pro rege* at Holy Week services, or for denying absolution or religious burial to the unworthy. Likewise, priests were penalized for sermons which were maligned by ill-intentioned hearers. On the other hand, ecclesiastical benefices and appointments were offered to those despicable priests who had been suspended for signing the Passaglia [8] petition to the Pope. Bishops were threatened with criminal proceedings if they should dare use canonical penalties against rebel priests. The archbishops of Spoleto and Urbino were actually jailed. Obviously, the Church's enemies wanted to create a schism. We will also remark that between 1861 and 1863 the government expelled some fourteen thousand monks and nuns from eight hundred and three monasteries and convents and seized their possessions; it also confiscated one hundred and four collegiate church properties. Sicily alone was spared this plunder because of the government's fear of a violent rebellion of the people.

[7] Bernard Tanucci (1698–1783), statesman and jurist, was minister and regent during the minority (1759–1767) of Ferdinand I, king of Naples. To strengthen the monarchy, he opposed the nobility and the clergy, reducing the number of bishops, curtailing their jurisdiction, shutting down monasteries, and collaborating with other rulers to suppress the Jesuits. He was dismissed from office in 1776. [Editor]

[8] *See* p. 110f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 43

A Threat Averted (Continued)

IN 1860, while the house searches were going on,[1] a high official had heard Don Bosco speak of civic rights and school legislation and had remarked, "You know more about these things than a lawyer! Have you studied law?"

"No, I just boned up on it a little," Don Bosco replied. He fully trusted in God, but left nothing to chance. Thus, also in 1863, he concentrated on things that mattered. As we have seen,[2] in his latest wrangle with the Department of Education he had devoted time to studying his rights and the means of safeguarding them, and that too had influenced the superintendent of schools to approve the Oratory's teachers and have them finally admitted to the University of Turin without being obliged to take a comprehensive college examination.

Such victories of Don Bosco seem to have nettled Chevalier Gatti. Hoping to get even, at least once, he managed to induce the Department of Education to authorize an inspection of the Oratory secondary school. Toward the end of May [1863], at nine in the morning, Mr. Ferri, professor of philosophy and inspector of academic secondary schools, called on Don Bosco and, after introducing himself and showing his credentials, informed him of the purpose of his call.

After a comment on the propriety of repeated inspections of the premises of a law-abiding citizen who charitably gave a free education to several hundred needy youngsters, Don Bosco added, "I defer to authority and am willing to overlook this inequity. Go on with your task. I recommend only that the pupils be not asked inopportune questions or intimidated." Mr. Ferri promised to oblige.

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 310, 331f. [Editor]
[2] *See* Chapters 38 and 41. [Editor]

A report of the inspector's full questioning and the boys' answers in each of the five secondary school grades would be too lengthy. We shall give just a brief account. Professor Ferri, though courteous to Don Bosco and to teachers and pupils, plainly showed that the aim of his inspection was not to examine but to uncover, not to evaluate the Oratory's education but to catch the pupils off guard, not to ascertain the staff's qualifications but their political leanings and beliefs. Bypassing Latin literature, the inspector chose topics better suited to his craftiness. In the upper grades he dwelt on Dante Alighieri, in the lower grades on Italian geography. In some classes he even called a few of the boys to the desk and pushed his inquiry into matters of conscience.

In Rhetoric I and II, he spent both morning and afternoon sessions on Dante's *Inferno,* choosing three cantos and stanzas where Dante–for political and personal reasons–unjustly inveighs against the popes, particularly Boniface VIII, whom he blamed for his exile from Florence. The inspector inquired into the origin of Guelphs and Ghibellines, their viewpoints, and their contemporary counterparts in Italy. He also asked to which party Dante had belonged, what he thought of the popes' temporal power, whether the popes had benefited or harmed Italy, and similar wily questions. Seemingly, he was trying to trick the boys into an answer which might give him the pretext to qualify the education imparted at the Oratory as hostile to present government policies. But, thanks to God and the prudent conduct of both teachers and pupils, his hopes were dashed.

In the lower grades, however, his questions on Italian geography gave him reason to rejoice. In mentioning the regions of northern Italy, a freshman, through a slip of the tongue, used the old terminology "Lombardo-Veneto" as that area was called when it was part of the Austrian empire. The inspector displayed great surprise and disapproval. "What!" he exclaimed. "Don't you know that in 1859 Lombardy was severed from Veneto and now is part of the kingdom of Italy? Do you care so little about your fatherland's glories?" When the teacher remarked that the error was due to force of habit and not to ignorance, the inspector seemed to accept his explanation, but then, lacking other evidence, he reported this trivial incident, to the Oratory's damage.

One thing impressed him no end—perhaps despite himself: the silence, discipline, and perfect order in each classroom. Latin III, in particular, with one hundred twenty-four pupils or more, convinced him that such orderliness was neither momentary nor feigned, but genuine and sound. As he closed his visit to this classroom, the teacher—Celestine Durando, a cleric—courteously offered to escort him to the next room, but Professor Ferri tried to excuse him, lest even his momentary absence from the classroom give so many lively boys an opportunity for some mischief. "No danger of that, Professor," the teacher replied. "No one will speak or move about."

"That's hard to believe," the inspector rejoined. "How can a hundred and thirty pupils sit still when left to themselves?" But he did allow the teacher to accompany him part of the way. "Let's go back now," he said, "and take a look." He tiptoed back, put his ear to the door, and peeked through the keyhole. The boys were all sitting still and silent as though the teacher were there. "I'd never have believed it," the inspector whispered to Durando. "This is unheard of, and it does credit to you and to your pupils."

What was a marvel for the school inspector was normal routine in all the Oratory classes because the pupils had learned to be good not out of deference to men, but in deference to God; not because of rewards or punishments, but because of their conscience.

The inspection lasted two entire days. On taking leave of Don Bosco, Professor Ferri showed himself quite pleased and gave him to understand that his report would be highly favorable. Apart from this, Don Bosco had every reason to expect such a report because the pupils' answers had been satisfactory and Professor Ferri had the reputation of being a fair, honest man, who would not intentionally wrong anyone. But his actions did not match his fair words. A few days later, to his shock and sorrow, Don Bosco heard through a friend that the inspector was about to send the Minister of Education a very unfavorable report whose gist was that disorder, immorality, and political subversion were the rule at the Oratory. "I beg to point out to Your Excellency," Professor Ferri wrote among other things, "that at the Oratory there is such hostility toward the government that in its vast complex not one portrait of our august sovereign is to be found."

Upon hearing this allegation, someone immediately declared, "Chevalier Gatti must have had a hand in this." This was by no means a wild supposition because, apart from what Gatti had already done to harm the Oratory,[3] there was the additional fact that one of his intimates often reproached him and sought to persuade him to be fair and just. This person assured Don Bosco that whenever Gatti had a chance to hurt any institution of priests or nuns, he boasted as though he had done something heroic and exhilarating.

No matter who was mainly responsible for such false accusations, as soon as Don Bosco heard of the report, he tried to forestall its consequences by defusing the bomb before it exploded, as he himself put it. He sought an audience with Michael Amari, Minister of Education, to whom the report was to be submitted. With difficulty he managed to get an appointment one evening in June.

"What can I do for you?" the minister asked.

"I am continually harassed by inspections," Don Bosco replied, "and I cannot learn the reason. Will you please tell me why? I have always been loyal to my king. If I have done something wrong, I would very much like to be informed so that I can guard against it in the future."

"And who are you, may I ask?"

"I am Father John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales whose purpose is to shelter needy youngsters, give them a sound moral and intellectual formation, and enable them to earn an honest living."

"I am glad to meet you and congratulate you on your noble work. However, I must warn you not to stray from your praiseworthy goals. I have been told that your philanthropic institution has become a haven for reactionaries and that even you refuse to follow the directives of school authorities. Therefore an inspection was authorized. I trust that the inspector was courteous to you and to your pupils, as instructed."

"I do not know what instructions you gave, but I can assure you that the inquiry was directed to the boys' minds. They were asked questions which were closer to politics than to curriculum; some pupils were even interrogated on matters of confession. Three

[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 348–59. [Editor]

years ago Chevalier Gatti did the same thing and was censured by Minister Mamiani himself."

"Certainly this was not the mandate of either Chevalier Gatti or Professor Ferri. Their report is due. I expect that I'll get the information I need."

At this point he rang the bell and sent for the two gentlemen. They came in shortly, one after the other, and at the minister's invitation took a seat close to him. In the office twilight, they did not notice Don Bosco.

"How did you make out on your visit to the Oratory?" the minister asked Professor Ferri.

"Just as expected, Your Excellency. From the report I shall be privileged to submit, Your Excellency will be able to form a clear idea of the bad spirit pervading that institute."

"Through Chevalier Gatti I asked you to examine the teachers' qualifications and the curriculum. What are your findings on these two points?"

"Hardly satisfactory, Your Excellency. Suffice it to say that nowhere did I see even a single picture of our sovereign."

"But what about the teachers' qualifications and the curriculum?" the minister insisted, somewhat vexed by Professor Ferri's evasive tactics.

"Well, Don Bosco managed to wrest a decree of approval from the superintendent of schools for this current year."

"In that case isn't he legally within his rights?"

"This matter is now being argued by mail with the school superintendent. The decree issued to Don Bosco seems illegal."

"If it only seems illegal, it has not yet been proven to be so. In that case, we have no right to bother him. Yet, Don Bosco has complained of indiscreet questioning that was quite beside the point. I am not pleased to hear that."

"We can assure Your Excellency that it is not true," Professor Ferri retorted.

"Don Bosco is right here," the minister went on. "Let's hear him. We want to get to the truth. Woe to liars!" he added forcefully. "Woe to liars. They will never deceive me!"

One may well imagine Ferri's and Gatti's bewilderment at hearing the minister's resolute words and on finding themselves face to

face with Don Bosco. It is no exaggeration to say that Ferri became as red as a lobster for his shameful duplicity in exalting the Oratory school in Don Bosco's presence and then defaming him before the minister. In turn, Gatti began to shiver for fear that his intrigues against the Oratory and many other similar institutes would come to light. Totally unprepared for this confrontation, he asked to be excused briefly to attend to urgent business and did not return, leaving his colleague to face the music. What followed clearly shows how easily God confounds the proud and powerful. Poor Gatti was so bewildered that instead of heading for the office door he went to the closet and opened it.

"Not that way, Chevalier," the minister smiled. "That's the closet!" And he himself went to the office door to open it for him. Retracing his steps, Gatti tried to avoid passing close to Don Bosco, but in so doing he tripped and almost fell flat on his face.

The minister then sat down and Don Bosco, at his invitation, gave his side of the story. "Your Excellency," he said, "I thank you for allowing me to speak up. I am not here to accuse anybody, but only to defend myself and my pupils. These boys were indiscreetly and craftily grilled; contemptible insinuations were made against their superiors in words better left unsaid. Such methods are dishonest and unconstitutional; if known, they would provoke public indignation. Furthermore, in my presence and in that of several staff members, Professor Ferri stated that our school could be held up as a model for learning, morality, and discipline, and that he found nothing to criticize. He even said that he wished the public schools were run as well as ours. Then he states the exact opposite to Your Excellency. He asserts that not a single picture of our king is to be found in my institution, and yet he saw three of them in three different places."

"Yes, but they are very poor pictures," Professor Ferri retorted.

"I can't help that," Don Bosco replied. "That's the artist's fault! I'd like better ones, too. But it is dishonest to conceal the truth and misrepresent facts to public authorities to the damage of those who dedicate themselves to help their fellow men, particularly needy youngsters. This is a conspiracy against truth and justice, an oppression of the innocent, a willful deception of the government."

Don Bosco's frankness, added to the contradictions and quibblings of the two officials, made the minister realize how things really stood. "Enough," he interjected. "I can very well see that my orders were disregarded and that attempts were made to deceive me. This I shall never tolerate. Professor, you may go now. We shall discuss this matter later on."

After the inspector had left, the minister went on: "I never would have thought that I would be so badly served. Now I know what kind of people I have here. But, switching to other matters, please explain the many unfavorable rumors I hear of you and your institution. Trust me fully; confide in me as a friend. You have my word that no harm will come to you. Rather, if need be, I shall give you opportune advice."

"I am most thankful, Your Excellency, for your kindness and courtesy. Trust begets trust. From what you have just heard from those two gentlemen, you may know what to think of all the other allegations. Bad will and ignorance have heaped lies upon lies, and these were publicized far and wide by an anticlerical press. A few government officials picked them up as gospel truth, and gradually a false opinion was formed harmful to me, and even more to my boys whom some would love to drive away from me. This is the origin, the basis of all these hostile rumors. Until now calumny has been and still is the main weapon used against me. I say so quite openly, without fear of rebuttal. I have lived here many years and challenge anyone to cite one word or deed of mine deserving censure. Should that be the case, I'd gladly accept severe punishment for it. I must regretfully add that I have been unfairly dealt with by those who, at the very least, should have respected me and left me in peace, if not rewarded me. I do not mean the cabinet ministers or Your Excellency, but minor officials who are anxious to appear zealous and to further their careers or who, out of spite or sordid gain, abuse their position to harass law-abiding citizens even at the risk of compromising the highest authorities."

Minister Amari was quite impressed. Seemingly, Don Bosco's inner nature voiced its grief whenever he was under stress. In such cases he spoke so soothingly and warmly that he won over his listener.

"I like your candor," the minister remarked, "and again I as-

sure you that your trust will not go unrewarded. But didn't you publish a history of Italy which allegedly upholds principles and slogans unsuited to our times?"

"*Storia d'Italia,*[4] to which Your Excellency refers, was written with the best of intentions. I sent one of the first copies to John Lanza, who was then Minister of Education. He had it reviewed, found that he preferred it to all others then in use, praised it, and gave its lowly author a thousand-lire award. Soon after it was chosen as an award to be given to public school pupils. It was also examined and praised by experts in the field, among them Niccolò Tommaseo. I fail to see how a book which cabinet ministers accepted and praised so highly could be looked upon as dangerous to the state."

"I read some of it and must admit that I found none of the drawbacks that were supposed to be in it. I did notice, though, a chapter in favor of papal temporal power."

"I traced the history of this power, its growth, and the advantages that accrued to Italy. I dare anyone to disprove that. I wrote not a word against the present state of things."

"Quite true, but since that first edition, radical changes have taken place and ideas have taken on new color. I should think that if chicken is served, it should not always be served the same way. Don't you think so?"

"I have no objection regarding variety in serving chicken, but this is no way to treat history. History is unchangeable. What is true cannot be portrayed as false; white cannot be presented as black. Historical facts must be narrated as they occurred, unaltered and uncamouflaged; otherwise history—manipulated to suit the narrator's whims—is no longer a dependable, truthful teacher, but a make-believe, a contradiction, a conspiracy against truth."

"Right! While human opinions may change, events handed down by genuine, factual history are immutable. Still, I suggest that you go over your work and revise whatever may too openly clash with current thinking, so as not to offend some people's sensibilities. Do you follow me?"

"Certainly, Your Excellency. If you would kindly condescend to

[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 323–31. [Editor]

point out whatever needs revision, I assure you that I shall treasure your suggestions in a later edition."

"Then we agree. Have no worry, for no one will harass you any longer. If any problem should arise in regard to your school, come straight to me. As long as I am Minister of Education, you will have my support and protection."

"Thank you for your great benevolence, Your Excellency," Don Bosco replied. "Since I cannot do more, I shall pray and have my boys pray that God will reward you with a long, happy life and in due time a holy death."

"Good-bye, dear Father," concluded the minister with a parting handshake.

CHAPTER 44

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

So outstanding was Don Bosco's dauntless fortitude in spite of a lifelong series of rebuffs—as our narration shows—that even people outside his immediate circle admired him. "I still remember," Father Francis Cerruti wrote, "how Father Matthew Picco, my rhetoric professor, once proposed Don Bosco to us as a model of fortitude in a lecture on ancient Rome. Other distinguished people paid him similar compliments. For example, Alfani's *Battaglie e Vittorie* [Battles and Victories] has a chapter extolling Don Bosco as a model of fortitude and character."

Indeed, he would never let himself be overcome or swayed by the opinions of the moment. From the very beginning of his apostolate, he had planned his course of action, and he followed it through in times of liberal foolhardiness and even unavoidable upheavals.

As for his mission, he used to say: "Whenever I am faced with difficulties, even grave ones, I do what a hiker does in finding his trail blocked. If I cannot shove the obstacle out of the way, I either go over or around it. In some cases, I even temporarily lay that project aside so as not to lose time, and I tackle something else until things settle down and difficulties are smoothed away."

Such constancy, exercised for God's glory, is to be found only in saints. Don Bosco succeeded in his endeavors because his spirit of self-sacrifices banished all fears of discomfort, toil, or humiliation. He was not frightened when timorous men would have had good reason to be so.

In those very days [June 1863], a deplorable event took place in Turin. St. Primitivus' School, a flourishing boarding and day school run by the Christian Brothers, was closed down by order of Minister Amari. His decree appeared in the June 16 issue of

the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*. No reason was given except that the step had been approved by both local and state boards of education. For some years, all sorts of maneuvers had been underway to destroy the Christian Brothers' work in Turin. Several house searches had only more brilliantly shown their worth and integrity. Their expertise in Christian education—liberal or technical—was such as to draw on them the hatred of the Church's enemies. When other measures failed, they resorted to the well-tested, effective means of mud-slinging. Though hundreds of parents of students rallied to their defense, a court trial ended in a verdict of guilty.

What had brought on the attack? The school's success—a thorn to the self-appointed pacesetters of *Gazzetta del Popolo,* and an intolerable affront to the would-be monopolizers of education. In Issue 164, *Il Diritto,* after lauding the measures taken against St. Primitivus' School, continued: "If we must make a start toward conquering Rome, let us begin by wresting our children's minds and hearts from it. We demand the suppression of religious teaching orders." Actually, such men wanted to banish the Church from the field of education, lest children be brought up in the Catholic faith. *Il Diritto's* arguments applied equally to priests and religious.

Though he had foiled his adversaries' latest attempts, Don Bosco, in order to better cement his cordial relations with Minister [Michael] Amari and Minister [Ubaldino] Peruzzi—to whom he had also appealed—sent letters to both. We only have unedited drafts of these two documents.[1]

The letter to Peruzzi, Minister of the Interior, rebutted accusations against the Oratory clerics' course of studies, the alleged lack of the king's picture in classrooms, and certain statements or topics in Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia.*[2] The revisions which Don Bosco had already made and was ready to make in his history of Italy did not depart an iota from his religious principles and his attachment to the Roman Pontiff. We have already seen that he gladly suffered very heavy [financial] loss rather than eliminate certain paragraphs of *Storia d'Italia's* first edition.[3] He would never yield to any such pressure. His determination came

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. V, p. 329. [Editor]

out quite clearly in his conversation with Minister Amari, as well as in the above-mentioned letter he sent to him.

These letters and, above all, his conversation with the minister not only averted the threat; they actually vindicated the whole Oratory as well as its secondary school. Minister Amari, convinced that Don Bosco wanted only to help needy youngsters and that the government had nothing to fear from him, safeguarded Don Bosco from his slanders. As for Gatti, he began to realize the truth of the proverb: "The pitcher which goes to the well often, will get broken in the end." He realized that if, on that particular day, he had so lost his bearings as not to find his way out of the minister's office, he would probably fare worse on some future occasion. He therefore somewhat tempered his unjust, cowardly warfare against the Oratory.

When asked about these incidents, Don Bosco often commented, "God is great, God is good, God is all-powerful. He often permits us to suffer in order to bring about greater good and manifest His mercy and power. House searches and inspections gave us plenty of trouble, but in the end they turned to our benefit. Good came of evil."

And so it was indeed. Civil authorities lost some of their suspicion, and though they did not always befriend him, they did allow him sufficient freedom to carry out his charitable mission.

An advantage by no means negligible was the good reputation that the Oratory increasingly enjoyed. Seeing him as greatly harassed as other excellent institutions, good people increased their esteem for him, and bad persons, or those who had opposed him, dropped their animosity when they realized that he deserved their sympathy. After all, neither the anticlerical press nor the very painstaking police searchers had uncovered incriminating matter.

Thus, thanks to God, Don Bosco was able to continue sheltering thousands of boys who looked upon him not only as a man of God, but also as a man of learning and counsel who would shape a promising future for them. Echoing all his companions, Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio wrote:

> Don Bosco was particularly well versed in Latin literature. In his conversations with us he would on occasion recite verses from Horace, Ovid, and Virgil, even when his mind was preoccupied by a host of

things by no means poetic. In talking with him, his clerics—several of them brilliant and very studious—found that he kept up-to-date in everything: music, arithmetic, grammar, Italian and Latin poetry, ecclesiastical and civil history, and moral and dogmatic theology. To us, he was a master of true Christian living, just as he was master and judge in our youthful literary and scientific discussions. Even in those subjects which seemed outside his field, he was able to hold his own, thanks to his many talents and singular insight. It never occurred to us to regard him as an amateur or to look down upon him.

Don Bosco's competence in geography helped secure a splendid position for an Oratory boy named Marchisio. In July 1863, the Department of Communications published a new postal map of Italy, eight maps of Italian provinces, and a timetable of mail pickups and deliveries patiently drawn up by Marchisio in the course of several years. Don Bosco had advised him to undertake this project and had encouraged him to bring it to completion. Marchisio often came to the Oratory to work under Don Bosco's guidance. Later on he was appointed postmaster in Rome itself.

The pupils' response to Don Bosco's solicitude for their well-being was apparent in the Christian joy they manifested at Dominic Ruffino's ordination to the priesthood, in the fervent piety with which they celebrated the Six Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius, and in the particular joy they exhibited on the feast of St. John the Baptist, his name day.

On June 23 [1863], the Oratory's fifty-five clerics took their philosophy and theology examinations at the Turin seminary. Seven earned an *egregie* (above excellent); twenty-eight, an *optime* (excellent); eleven, a *fere optime* (almost excellent); and only one, a *bene* (good). Four were absent and four were sick. But Don Bosco had an even greater satisfaction in store. On July 6, Francis Cerruti, Celestine Durando, John Baptist Anfossi, and Father John Baptist Francesia took the university entrance examination. They were blazing a new path for the Oratory boys for whom they had gladly submitted to considerable toil. Some professors pitied them as victims of an ideal—generous victims, but, nevertheless, victims. It was rumored that Don Bosco had too high an opinion of their talents, while their cultural level was really about that of junior high school. The two strongly biased commissions which had been especially appointed soon had to rectify their

opinions. Thank God, all the clerics passed their exams with distinction. The cleric Cerruti was the first one to be examined. His answers, bespeaking a broad yet deep knowledge, astonished the examiners. One of the commissions was chaired by the renowned pedagogist, Father Rayneri.[4] Spotting Professor Vallauri [5] in the audience, Rayneri walked over to him. (Vallauri had been kept out of the examining commissions to which he rightfully belonged because he was considered too favorable to Don Bosco.) Animatedly, Rayneri asked the professor to his great surprise, "What grade should I give Don Bosco's clerics?"

"Oh, come!" Vallauri replied. "Didn't you examine them yourself?"

"Yes, but the trouble is that they know their material. That fact is indisputable."

"It's not news to me!" the famous Latin scholar replied. "They are the best!"

All four clerics scored very high; Francesia and Cerruti even earned a *cum laude*. As they left the examination room, these good sons of Don Bosco were given a spontaneous ovation and congratulations by their many university fellow students. Don Bosco was heartened. In those days he had been deeply concerned about his sons who shared his toilsome and humbly glorious mission. This examination created some stir also outside the university, while faculty members kept discussing it with great admiration. Professor Prieri, chairman of the second examining commission, was so enthused by this magnificent display of learning that, as he came out of the examination hall with one of Don Bosco's clerics, he exclaimed, "Yes, indeed, you really study at Don Bosco's! But believe me, not all your enemies are at this university. You have them elsewhere too . . . and they're very powerful indeed. . . ." As he was speaking, the poet Prati passed by. "Come here, John," Professor Prieri told him. "It's a pity you weren't at the university this morning. You could have witnessed this young man's splendid examination. Let me tell you that at Don Bosco's they really study!"

[4] Giovanni Antonio Rayneri (1810–1867) joined the faculty of the University of Turin in 1847. His main works are *Primi Principii di Metodica* [A Primer of Methodology] and *Della Pedagogia* [Pedagogy], a first attempt in Italy at systematizing pedagogy. [Editor]

[5] *See* p. 213. [Editor]

CHAPTER 45

The Church of Mary, Help of Christians

THOUGH the Mirabello school building was now completed and construction of additional classrooms at the Oratory was well advanced, Don Bosco's ever present, main concern, despite other tasks and worries, was the erection of a magnificent church in Valdocco to Mary, Help of Christians. At the beginning of 1863 he had asked a committee of architects—all friends of his—to draw up plans, but though several meetings were held to examine them, no agreement was reached. Each architect stubbornly held to his own design. Discussions dragged on for months to no avail. As time passed, Don Bosco became concerned. One day, one architect—a close friend of his—who seemed to favor this delay, suggested that Don Bosco should not risk too much in this undertaking. "I agree with you," was the answer, "but I also feel that time is running out and that God wants this church to be built, and by me!"

One day, brooking no further delay and without disclosing his intentions, he sent for the talented architect Anthony Spezia and asked him to design the new church, specifying that it had to be large enough to accommodate vast crowds. Years before, as a new graduate, Spezia had met Don Bosco in Valdocco and at his request had appraised the Pinardi house.[1] "I'll be needing you again," Don Bosco then told him. "Wait and see." The time came twelve years later. At no cost, the architect drew up a handsome design of Don Bosco's vast project in the form of a Latin cross covering an area of some twelve thousand square feet.

Two low belfries flanked a jutting façade. The main entrance was through an atrium supporting the choir loft. A majestic dome with sixteen large windows capped the nearly two hundred and thirty-foot-high structure. The main altar, behind which ran a

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 167f. [Editor]

narrow passageway, was flanked on both sides by a sacristy opening on a spacious, imposing sanctuary. Each arm of the cross ended in a large altar; two other altars were located in small chapels midway in the lower stem of the cross.

Don Bosco was delighted with the design. "Without my telling the architect my particular wishes," he remarked, "he designed a chapel in the exact spot which the Blessed Virgin had pointed out to me." [2] This particular altar, in fact, was dedicated to the holy martyrs of Turin [Adventor, Octavius, and Solutor].

One of his closest co-workers still had misgivings and cautioned him against starting so vast an undertaking without funds. "Have no fear," came the quick response. "Once we get started, God will help and money will come by itself."

When Don Bosco went to City Hall for initial legal steps, he not only met with approval and encouragement but also obtained a verbal promise that the city would contribute thirty thousand lire, the usual subsidy for constructing a new parish church. He then brought the city building commission a sketch of the church. One official, noting the title "Mary, Help of Christians," shook his head, remarking that it was unpopular, inopportune, and smacking of bigotry. "Why such a title?"

"Sir," Don Bosco replied, "your many duties may have kept you from studying its origin. It recalls the Italian and Spanish victory at Lepanto against the Turks [in 1571] and the liberation of Vienna [in 1683] under the leadership of our own Prince Eugene of Savoy."

"True, but we see nothing relevant in it today."

"Can you suggest a better title?"

"Certainly—Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or of the Rosary, or of Peace!"

"I suppose we can come to some agreement!"

"You're quite right. Change that name. 'Help of Christians' doesn't sound very good. It's rather odd . . . besides, it might suggest . . . anyway, there are so many titles to choose from!"

"Of course, any glorious title befits Our Lady. They all suit Her. We can never extol Her enough. We'll think it over."

"Good! Do that!"

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 233, 268. [Editor]

Approval of the project was deferred until complete, detailed plans could be submitted, since the rough sketch which Don Bosco had hastily presented to expedite matters was too inadequate. Meanwhile, the title "Mary, Help of Christians" sounded to some as a challenge to the maxims and triumphs of the revolution. A new banner seemed about to be unfurled in the Church's camp.

Don Bosco, realizing that there was more to it than had been said, let a few weeks go by and then, when the plans were ready, again submitted them to the building commission. This time no mention was made of the church's title. The commission was very much impressed by the grand design and approved it. "You will need a million lire to build a church like this!" they remarked to him. "You have no money! How will you manage?"

"Let me worry about that," Don Bosco answered. "I'm not asking you for money, but for a building permit."

"What will you name the church?"

"That will be my worry, too! Just give me permission to build on that spot."

Since the plan had been thoroughly approved, a building permit was mailed to Don Bosco who later called on the head architect to thank him. "I didn't think you would be so unyielding about such an awkward title," the latter remarked.

"Look," Don Bosco replied, "since you didn't like it, I left it out of the drawing. I am still free, though, to choose whatever name I think best."

"But this is a trick!"

"Not at all! You didn't want to approve that title and had your way. I want that title and will have my way. We should both feel satisfied."

The architect smiled, and to all appearances he took it in good grace. Don Bosco was within his rights, and the building commission knew it. At all events, the church was named "Mary, Help of Christians." Don Bosco did not yield on that score because the Blessed Virgin Herself had wished that title.

He was thus reviving a Piedmontese glory. Devotion to Mary, Help of Christians had ancient roots in Turin. The city had been one of the first to associate itself to the confraternity founded under that name at Munich, Bavaria, to commemorate the libera-

tion of Vienna. Due to increased membership, another confraternity had to be founded at the Church of St. Francis of Paula, and Pius VI had approved and endowed it with many indulgences and spiritual favors through a rescript dated February 9, 1798. Furthermore, a chapel containing an altar and a very beautiful marble statue had been erected and dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians in the church of Cardinal Maurizio, prince of Savoy, who had died in 1657.

It was therefore fitting that devotion to Mary, Help of Christians should now be proclaimed from Turin and reach the whole world through the wondrous, countless favors which the Blessed Virgin would grant to those who invoked Her under that title.

As soon as Don Bosco received the building permit, he entrusted the construction to Charles Buzzetti and work began. In May, the cost of land and of lumber needed to fence the site on three sides, leaving only an exit on Via della Giardiniera, amounted to four thousand lire.

Don Bosco called Father Angelo Savio, his economer, and bade him to go ahead with the excavations. "But Don Bosco," Father Savio objected, "this is no chapel. It is a huge, costly church. This morning we did not have enough money to buy even postage stamps."

"Never mind," Don Bosco rejoined. "Get started! Did we ever begin anything with money on hand? Let's leave something to Divine Providence!"

Father Savio obeyed. Since the church was to have a basement and this meant excavating and carting away some four thousand cubic yards of soil, only part of the work could be done in 1863. Meanwhile Don Bosco was in difficulties because several wealthy townspeople, who had first promised generous donations, were changing their minds and diverting their contributions to other causes, while others were not going to come through until later. A one thousand lire payment for the first two weeks of excavation was due within days. Divine Providence did something. Don Bosco was suddenly called to the bedside of a woman who had been wracked for three months by fever and a persistent cough. "If I could feel even a little better," she gasped, "I'd make any sacrifice. Just to get out of bed would be a vast relief."

"What would you do for that?" Don Bosco asked her.

"Whatever you say."

"Make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians."

"What prayers must I say?"

"Three *Paters, Aves,* and *Glorias* in honor of the Blessed Sacrament for nine days, and three *Salve Reginas* to the Blessed Virgin."

"Fine! And what work of mercy?"

"If you should truly feel better, make a contribution to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians now being built in Valdocco."

"Most willingly, if during the novena I can leave my bed and walk about my room a little."

On the evening of the last day of the novena, Don Bosco had to have one thousand lire for wages. He again called on the sick woman. A maid met him at the door and joyfully told him that her mistress had recovered completely, had taken two walks, and had been to church to thank God.

While she hurriedly told him all this, the lady herself came to meet him. "I am cured," she exclaimed jubilantly. "I've already gone to church. Here is a little something I promised. There will be more."

Don Bosco took the little package. Back at the Oratory, he found that it contained fifty gold napoleons worth a thousand lire.

From then on, as we shall see, Our Lady granted so many and such varied graces to those who contributed to the construction of Her church in Valdocco that one might well say She built it Herself. *Aedificavit Sibi domum Maria.*

CHAPTER 46

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

THE Blessed Virgin Mary was always uppermost in Don Bosco's heart and mind. One evening, early in July, he told the boys that in a dream he had seen a person (*apparently the Blessed Virgin*) moving among them. She carried a richly embroidered pouch full of paper slips, inviting each of them to pick one. He added that he followed Her and that, as each boy took out a slip, he made a mental note of its contents. He ended his brief talk by saying that all had picked a slip, except one who deliberately stood aloof, and that when he glanced at the unclaimed slip, he read: "Death."

Don Bosco invited all to come and ask him what the message was for each. Amazingly, every one of the seven hundred pupils received a brief saying which unerringly gave a counsel or a warning. Still more amazing, even years later Don Bosco still remembered what he had told each boy. Canon Sebastian Mussetti of Carmagnola, for instance, then a pupil, learned from Don Bosco that his slip of paper had the word "Constancy," and when years later he met Don Bosco again, the latter seriously reminded him "Don't forget: 'Constancy!' " Furthermore, the canon said, a number of boys kept tab on all who went to Don Bosco for their messages and found that only one boy did not go—an upper classman from Ivrea. Canon Mussetti is ready to testify to this under oath, if necessary.

Meanwhile, trusting in his heavenly Mother's protection, Don Bosco kept trying to find some way for extending his teachers' temporary permit which was due to expire with the close of the current school year [1862–63]. True, the university entrance exams of Cerruti, Durando, Francesia, and Anfossi had shown a superb knowledge of literature, but this did not certify them to

teach. He had no time to waste. Calling on Francis Selmi, superintendent of schools, Don Bosco found him still kindly disposed toward the Oratory. When he mentioned his difficulties, Selmi, who had read Professor Ferri's report, warned him not to play into Ferri's hands by substantiating his accusations; he urged him also to revise some statements in his *Storia d'Italia.*

Again Don Bosco assured him that he and his co-workers knew how to be good Catholics and still remain loyal citizens, that he had never plotted with the Pope, bishops, or Jesuits against the government, and that it was sheer fabrication to assert that the above-mentioned would do anything to disgrace their calling. He further declared that it had been his unwavering policy to keep aloof from politics because he believed that a religious superior, teacher, or craftsmaster should be totally concerned with his pupils' intellectual, technical, and moral formation. In his opinion, politics was no food for youngsters.

The superintendent also advised him to stop pushing *Letture Cattoliche* as something unbecoming to an educator. Don Bosco asked why.

"Because these booklets of yours, especially the biographies of some youngsters, are not in tune with today's ideals. Your style and the importance which you attach to these boys' simplicity and tenuous virtues make young readers so highly self-satisfied that they become infatuated with your ideas and envy those who live with you."

"What's wrong with that?" Don Bosco rejoined. "Anyway, if you will take the trouble to examine those books, you will see that they are totally free of politics. However, if you spot errors of grammar or spelling, or lack of clarity, I give you my word that I shall remedy that."

Selmi dropped the matter. In all these gentlemen's dealings politics always reared its head. Of course, they stretched the meaning of politics so as to include some very important religious matters. For Don Bosco, instead, politics was strictly politics. And to think that this was happening in a country where freedom of thought and speech was brazenly vaunted! At the Oratory there was no fuss over freedom. Each boy could hold whatever political opinions he chose, as long as it was not condemned by

the Church and he did not make it a subject of debate or discussion among the boys. Outside the house, circumstances and prudence would in due time suggest when a change of policy should become necessary. But in those days of turmoil, it was just too easy to drop remarks which could plunge a whole institution into trouble.

Amiably firm and most prudent, Don Bosco, on returning to the Oratory, wrote a fairly long letter to Selmi in an attempt to clear up the latter's remaining doubts on his politics, the education imparted to his clerics, his *Storia d'Italia,* the Oratory secondary school curriculum, *Letture Cattoliche,* and the alleged lack of the king's picture at the Oratory. He also pleaded with him to let the Oratory secondary school continue to operate until its teachers—now registered at the university—could take certification exams.[1] He concluded: "Finally, remember we are both public figures: you as a man of authority, I as a man of charity. You do not need me; I need you. Both of us, however, can earn God's blessings and men's gratitude by saving homeless lads from the streets and helping them. May heaven generously bless you and your whole family. Please forgive any inconvenience I have caused you."

Most probably the superintendent's reply was not fully reassuring. It would not be rash to assume that Chevalier Gatti's powerful clique may have tried to dissuade Selmi from favoring Don Bosco; perhaps, too, frenzied newspaper articles against the Christian Brothers made Selmi fear that public opinion might be turned against him. Therefore he bided his time and made no move. Meanwhile, Don Bosco, having perhaps received unsettling news from friends at the ministry, spent two months in painful uncertainty, as we gather from a letter of his to Marchioness Fassati:

Turin, September 3, 1863

Dearest Marchioness:

One thing after another has kept me from replying promptly to the letter which good Azelia wrote to me on your behalf.

Savio may come any time, but not later than October 20. I gave

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Marchisio no definite reply but referred him to you. You can tell him that he may come along with Savio. The same Divine Providence which has so far helped us will provide also for this priestly vocation.

My dear marchioness, if there was ever a time I needed your prayers, it is now. The devil has declared war on the Oratory. It is in danger of being shut down if I do not bring it up to government standards and policies. The Blessed Virgin has assured us that this will not happen, but still God may find us deserving of chastisement and allow this to occur.

For some weeks now I have been living in hope and sorrow. Please add your fervent prayers to ours. Let us put our trust in Divine Providence.

May the Blessed Virgin, on this Her feast day, bestow upon you the rose of charity, upon Azelia the violet of humility, and upon Emmanuel the lily of modesty, and keep us all under Her powerful protection. Amen.

Your grateful, devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I have seen the marquis several times; he is well. He promised to come and have a good dinner with us someday, but so far he has not come.

During this same period Don Bosco had a consoling experience. A few days after writing to the superintendent of schools, he received a letter from Pius IX. Unless we are mistaken, this was a reply to a message of Don Bosco about which some explanation is needed. Pius IX anxiously awaited not only Don Bosco's frequent advice but also his foresight into the revolution's future plans concerning Rome. One Sunday in June [1863], Marquis [Ludwig] Scarampi, returning from Rome, came to the Oratory to teach catechism. (He was one of its most faithful catechists.) After class, when Don Bosco asked for news of the Holy Father, the marquis replied that the Pope had inquired about him, lamenting that he had not heard from him at all in the last two months.

"When are you returning to Rome, Marquis?" Don Bosco interrupted.

"In a couple of weeks."

"Good. I'll have a letter ready for the Holy Father."

The marquis delivered it himself to Pius IX, who immediately read it in his presence. "For heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, turning the letter over in his hands. "I wasn't expecting anything like this!" After a few pensive moments, he folded the paper and said no more.

Impressed by such an exclamation, Marquis Scarampi, on his return to Turin, told Don Bosco of the Pope's reaction, adding that, if he wasn't too indiscreet, he would very much like to know the contents of that letter. "Quite frankly," Don Bosco replied, "I wrote to the Holy Father not to be deceived by this apparent peace, but to prepare himself for a great sacrifice because Rome will fall prey to the revolution."

This prediction—heard also by Father Francesia and Father Cagliero—was all the more remarkable since it seemed highly improbable at this time that the revolutionaries could succeed in their aspirations. They had called a halt to their march, and the Pope tranquilly enjoyed Rome's love and affection while thousands of pilgrims flocked to the city.[2] Here, then, is the Holy Father's reply to Don Bosco:

Beloved son:

Greetings and our apostolic benediction!

We have already received many outstanding proofs of your piety and zeal, but your latest, most obsequious letter delighted us exceedingly. We were happy also to hear that, thanks to generous, zealous people, excellent books are being published to foster Christian piety. We pray that God may bless these beginnings and crown them with the desired results.

Regretfully, your news concerning the relentless warfare waged against the Church was neither new nor unforeseen. As you well know, we must put all our trust in God in whose hands we rest. He never forsakes those who have faith in Him. We place all our hopes in Him. They are all the stronger because they are supported by the intercession of Our Blessed Mother in whom we unlimitedly trust.

[2] We are omitting a description of the conflicting interests of England and France as regards the unification of Italy. [Editor]

While exhorting you to offer fervent prayers for us, as a token of our paternal affection we impart our apostolic blessing upon you and all your co-workers.

Given in Rome near St. Peter's, July 15, 1863, in the 18th year of our Pontificate.

Pope Pius IX

CHAPTER 47

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

DESPITE such a flood of worries and afflictions, Don Bosco remained undaunted, as we gather from this entry in the Ruffino chronicle:

In July, recalling the memorable dream of *The Wheel of Eternity,*[1] Don Bosco declared it to have been a manifestation of God's will to assure us that He kept our Society under His protection.

Don Bosco also said that after his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' he would make a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Oropa's Shrine near Biella and there decide on the Mirabello school personnel.

Since the school was to open in the fall and the top floor was still quite damp, an adjacent farmhouse on the property was renovated for living quarters.

The choice of a staff came first. Father Rua was everybody's choice as director because he was considered best able to duplicate Don Bosco's spirit—in a word, to be the Don Bosco of Mirabello. Secondly, certified teachers had to be found. In agreement with Bishop [Louis Nazari] of Casale, the school was to be publicly known as a junior seminary—a provision which automatically placed it under exclusive ecclesiastical jurisdiction until it could be staffed with certified teachers. There were fears, though, that this expedient would not succeed and that at least two certified teachers had to be on the staff to get state approval. Several clerics and priests were sufficiently well prepared to take certification exams—some even had several years' teaching experience—but they lacked other requisites. The problem was a serious one because for several years no supplementary certification exams had been given. On the other hand, routine procedure for certi-

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 531–44. [Editor]

fication required a four-year literature course at the university. This meant a four-year delay in opening the new school—a most disconcerting setback. But this new foundation was God's work, and His help did not fail. Unexpectedly, news came in July that the scarcity of secondary school teachers made it necessary to give special certification exams in September. Don Bosco saw nought else in this but the intervention of Divine Providence and urged several Oratory clerics to prepare for them. Though they were more or less familiar with the test matter, they were somewhat frightened by having so short a time to prepare—less than two months. But these were the days when, in their love of God and devotion to the Oratory cause, all of them would gladly have risked their lives if they had to. Don Bosco found several clerics who wholeheartedly began to cram for the examinations, in spite of their fatigue from the strain of the school year just ended. One of them took over the coaching. Then, by sharing day by day what each had learned, they managed to be fairly well prepared by the beginning of September. They had followed the example of their good father Don Bosco who, when urged to rest a bit from his unremitting toil, would reply, "Don't leave to tomorrow what can be done today!" or "We must keep working as though we were never to die and live as though we might die at any moment. *Quotidie morior* [I die daily—1 Cor. 15, 31]." "When he saw we were tired and weary," Bishop Cagliero wrote, "he would say, 'Courage! Let's keep working. In heaven we shall rest forever. Should a Salesian die while working for souls, you may say that our Congregation has scored a great triumph. God's blessings will fall abundantly upon it.' "

Father Francis Dalmazzo was present at a conversation which we shall quote from his notes. We must keep in mind, though, that Don Bosco was speaking of work which was absolutely necessary to carry out God's designs:

"Your sons work too hard," a benefactor remarked to Don Bosco.

"That's what we are here for," Don Bosco replied.

"Very well, but a bow long bent will finally weaken. Your men need a rest now and then."

"They will rest in heaven."

"And meanwhile they will exhaust themselves."

"That's a gain, not a loss!"

"But don't you realize that some will ruin their health and die an early death?"

"They will receive their reward all the sooner. One is fortunate to die for so noble a cause."

These words truthfully describe the generosity of his courageous co-workers. He often reminded them of St. Paul's words: "God is not unjust that He should forget your work and the love that you have shown in His name. . . ." [Heb. 6, 10] "Each will receive his own reward according to his labor." [1 Cor. 3, 10]

As he had planned, Don Bosco went to St. Ignatius' Shrine for his spiritual retreat and from there wrote to the cleric John Bonetti in Turin. Some remarks in this letter refer to the cleric's inner conflicts about his vocation:

St. Ignatius' Shrine, July 20, 1863

My dear Bonetti:

Don't worry at all about what you wrote. The devil realizes that you are about to slip away from him for good. That's why he is doing his utmost to deceive you.

Follow my advice and go on serenely. Meanwhile, take heart from this thought of St. Paul: *Si delectat magnitudo praemiorum, non deterreat multitudo laborum.* [If you are delighted at the lavish rewards, do not be deterred by the manifold travails.] [2] *Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit.* [One is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules–2 Tim. 2, 5.] "Be a good soldier of Christ" [*ibid.* 2, 3] and He will crown you. Or say with St. Francis of Assisi: "Such is the joy that I await that every sorrow is delight. Suffering is a pleasure; every anguish is a joy."

Pray for me. I'll do the same for you. I shall do my utmost to make you happy here on earth and in eternity. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also wrote to other clerics and boys, but only one of these letters has reached us:

[2] This quotation is from St. Gregory the Great, *Homilia 37 in Evangelium.* [Editor]

St. Ignatius' Shrine, 1863

My dear Garino:

Your last letter hit the nail on the head. Do as you wrote, and we shall both be happy. As I already told you once before, I need your unlimited trust, which I think you will certainly grant me when you realize how solicitous I always have been and will continue to be for your spiritual and temporal well-being.

Meanwhile, keep these three things in mind: never be idle, shun bad companions, associate with good ones. For you, this is most important. Pray for me.

Yours ever in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

During this year too an event completely defying explanation occurred while Don Bosco was on retreat at St. Ignatius'. Father Rua wrote:

We could say that more than once Don Bosco was endowed with the charism of bilocation. One Sunday, during afternoon church services, two Oratory boys went secretly to bathe in the Dora Riparia River near the arsenal. After splashing about in shallow water, they stretched out on the sand. Suddenly they felt a sharp slap that left a mark on their backs. The smart, coupled with the fact that nobody was around, belatedly reminded them of what had happened the year before in the same locality to three of their companions.[3] Exclaiming, "It must be Don Bosco!" they scrambled into their clothes and raced back to the Oratory as though in flight. Pale with fright, they sneaked through the church door and hid in a dormitory.

According to Father Dalmazzo, this note arrived the following morning from Don Bosco to Father Alasonatti: "Today, Sunday, at this very moment, I see Bastia and Vezzetti making off from the Oratory to go for a swim in the Dora. There they have begun some unseemly conversation. I gave them something they won't easily forget. You, Father Prefect, should call them and question them as to whether they felt or received anything while they rested on the river bank."

Holding this note, Father Alasonatti went to look for the two culprits. "You didn't get away with it," he told them. "Don Bosco

[3] *See* p. 134f. [Editor]

wrote to me about it. Did you particularly like what you got at the river?" The two boys confessed that their backs still smarted.

The cleric Bonetti questioned them too and was convinced of the truth of Don Bosco's letter. The two boys also admitted the same to Peter Enria who knew them well. Father Alasonatti told Vezzetti to pack up because he was being sent home. As the boy was coming down the stairs after leaving the prefect's office, he met a schoolmate, Fiocchi, a close friend of his from his own district, and told him the whole story. Fiocchi asked how Don Bosco could have known about his escapade, since no one at the Oratory could possibly have told him. "It's funny," Vezzetti replied. "There was nobody around, but I received three blows! The third one was the worst!" Ultimately, both boys were readmitted and mended their ways.

"I witnessed this incident," Father Francis Dalmazzo wrote. "I recall something else too which corroborates it. Once Don Bosco asked a boy, 'Don't you recall being slapped by an invisible hand one day?' Quite surprised, the lad admitted it. 'And what were you doing at that moment?' Don Bosco went on.

"The boy turned red as a beet. Don Bosco drew him aside and whispered in his ear. Several schoolmates of mine were with me at this time."

At St. Ignatius' Don Bosco always met old friends and made new ones among the very many who went to confession to him. The result was a lively exchange of letters on spiritual matters which, however, with a few exceptions have all been lost. Among the very few to reach us, one is to a distinguished layman of Asti, Chevalier [Hugh] Grimaldi of Bellino, who regularly made his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius'. There he met Don Bosco and became a close friend of his. He lived at Maretto, in the diocese of Asti, where Father John Ciattino was pastor:

Turin, September 24, 1863

My dear Chevalier:

Please bear with me if I do not reciprocate as promptly as I would like to. I really lack time for writing. You live at Maretto and are close to a holy man. Follow his example and advice and you will be doing God's will.

I read the famous prophecies and had others read them, but I do

not think that publishing them would redound to God's glory. I am not passing judgment on them, but I fail to see the Lord's spirit in them, for He is all charity and patience. I shall forward them to whomever you wish.

Would you like us to try out young Vaianeo? Let's split the monthly board and tuition fees. You provide fifteen lire and I'll do likewise. If he shows good promise, we shall help him to go ahead. In any case, we shall do what Our Lord will show us to be for His greater glory.

We are praying for you, dear Chevalier. Please do likewise for us. Remember us to Father Ciattino, your pastor. May Our Lady of Ransom [4] bless us all here on earth and make us worthy of eternal happiness. Amen.

Fr. John Bosco

[4] Don Bosco wrote this letter on the feast of Our Lady of Ransom. [Editor]

CHAPTER 48

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

AS usual, at the end of July, examinations and awards closed the school year 1862–63. Many pupils were expected to go home and return after summer vacation, while others would leave this peaceful haven to enter a seminary, pursue an art or trade, or take a job. All realized that Don Bosco had prepared them for life. Having been nurtured by him in their physical, intellectual, and moral growth, they now fondly pressed around him in a last farewell. One lad in particular seemed to feel more indebted than the others because Don Bosco had been a father to him over the past three years. We shall speak briefly of this boy because he is typical of hundreds who, rescued by Don Bosco's charity, responded to the education he gave them and lived and died as good Christians.

In the fall of 1860 Don Bosco dropped into a café, known as "La Consolata Café" because of its proximity to the famed Our Lady of Consolation Shrine. As usual, he sat in a back room to read his mail in peace. A thirteen-year-old lad, John Paul Cotella of Cavour (Torino), courteously and graciously waited on customers. He had run away from home that summer because of his parents' relentless severity. He himself described his meeting with Don Bosco to Father Francis Cerruti:

> One evening, my boss told me: "Take a cup of coffee to the priest in the back room."
>
> "Me take coffee to a priest?" I asked, taken aback. In those days, clergymen were disliked as much as now, if not even more. I had read and heard so many bad things about priests that I had formed a terrible opinion of them. Anyway, I entered the back room and asked with ill grace, "What do you want?"
>
> "A cup of coffee, son," he gently replied, looking directly at me, "but on one condition."

"What?"

"That you bring it yourself."

His words and look won me over. I thought, *This priest is not like the others.*

After I brought him coffee, a mysterious force held me there. In a friendly tone he began to ask me about my birthplace, age, and job, and above all why I had run away from home.

"Would you like to come with me?" he then added.

"Where to?"

"To the Oratory. This is no place for you."

"And what will I do there?"

"You can go back to study, if you care to."

"Will I like it there?"

"Of course you will. You'll play, be happy, and have a good time. . . ."

"All right. I'll come."

"When?"

"Today or tomorrow!"

"Come before tonight," Don Bosco replied.

My boss wanted me to stay a few more days, but I left and went to the Oratory that evening. The next day Don Bosco wrote to my parents and told them not to worry about me, but to call on him to talk over board and tuition fees. My mother came and explained family conditions. "All right, then," he said, "you can pay twelve lire monthly and I will put in the rest."

At these words I admired his wonderful charity and prudence. My family was not wealthy, but sufficiently well-off. It would have been wrong for him to accept me gratis because this would have hurt boys needier than myself.

The youngster's parents paid their share for two years and then discontinued payment. The lad, though overly lively, was open, sincere, good-hearted, exemplary in conduct, and quite proficient in studies. At the start of the school year 1862-63—he was now an upperclassman—fearing he might have to interrupt his studies, he confided his worries to Don Bosco. "What difference does it make if your family no longer pays?" he replied. "Am I not here? Be sure that Don Bosco will not let you down." The boy stayed on at the Oratory and Don Bosco saw to it that he had all he needed.

After graduation, Cotella found a job, and as soon as he received his wages, he set aside small sums at his own sacrifice to repay Don Bosco. He was a practicing Catholic, zealously promoted *Letture Cattoliche,* and was among one of the first members of the Alumni Association. He always remained in touch with his former superiors. When he died in 1908, he had at his bedside, at his request, his former teacher Father Francis Cerruti and the revered Father Michael Rua.

While many beloved sons like Cotella were leaving, another lad —truthfully to be called a heavenly flower—came to take their place, Francis Besucco, thirteen, of Argentera, a Piedmont mountain village. His respect and love for his parents, his remarkable piety and innocence, and his scholastic progress distinguished him among all his fellow villagers. Having heard of the Oratory, he earnestly wanted to go there, but, realizing his parents could not even afford a token fee, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin. "Take heart, Francis," a mysterious voice whispered to him one day after Communion. "Your wish will come true!"

Don Bosco described his first meeting with Besucco as follows:

Besucco had been at the Oratory for several days, but I had not yet seen him, nor did I know anything more about him than what I had learned from a letter of his pastor, Father Pepino. One day, while I was playing with the boys, I noticed a freckled, short, and rustic lad dressed as a highland villager. He gaped wide-eyed at what went on in the playground. As our eyes met, he smiled respectfully and came over.

"Who are you?" I asked with a smile.

"Francis Besucco from Argentera."

"How old are you?"

"Almost fourteen."

"Have you come here to study or learn a trade?"

"I'd like to study very much indeed."

"What schooling have you already had?"

"Grammar school at my village."

"Why would you rather study than learn a trade?"

"Because I'd love to become a priest."

"Has anyone suggested that to you?"

"No, I've always wanted to be a priest, and I've always prayed to God to help me become one."

"Have you asked anybody's advice?"

"Yes, my godfather's, on several occasions. My godfather. . . ." Here he looked deeply moved. Tears were starting to well up in his eyes.

"Who is your godfather?"

"The pastor of Argentera. He takes very good care of me. He taught me catechism and other subjects, fed me, and clothed me. He is very kind and has done a lot for me. He taught me for almost two years and wrote to you to take me into the Oratory. I wish I could tell you how good he is and how much he loves me."

Here the boy broke down again. Such appreciation and love gave me a good idea of the boy's character and goodness. I recalled the warm recommendation which his pastor and Lieutenant Eysautier had sent me for him. I said to myself, *If he is given a chance to study, this boy will turn out very well indeed.*

Experience proves that gratitude in children generally points to a happy future, whereas those who easily forget the favors and care lavished upon them will be deaf to advice, suggestions, and moral teachings. Bringing them up will be a difficult task, and success is uncertain. Therefore I said to Francis, "I am very glad you are so fond of your godfather, but don't get upset. Love him in the Lord, pray for him, and if you want to do something which will surely please him, behave well so that I can always give him good news of you. Now, go and play with your companions." Drying his tears, he smiled affectionately and joined the games.

A few days later he came up to me again, somewhat troubled. "What's the matter, son?" I asked.

"All my schoolmates are very good, and I want to be like them, but I don't know how. Will you help me?"

"I'll do all I can. Here are three tips to help you become really good."

"What are they?"

"Cheerfulness, study, and piety. They will make you happy and will benefit your soul."

"Cheerfulness? I'm too cheerful already. If that's all I need to be a good boy, I'll cheerfully play from morning to night. Will that be all right?"

"Not from morning to night, only at the right time."

Believing that he would please God by his games, Francis plunged wholeheartedly into recreation with his seven hundred companions, but his awkwardness often resulted in collisions and tumbles.

"One day," Don Bosco went on, "he came up to me, limping and very thoughtful."

"What's the trouble, Francis?" I asked.

"I'm all bruised," he said.

"What happened?"

"I am not used to the games and I keep losing my balance and I bump my head and arms and legs. Yesterday, I ran into another boy and we both got a bloody nose."

"Too bad," I replied. "Take it easy!"

"But I want to learn all the games because you said that Our Lord is pleased to see us play."

"True, but learn them little by little. They should be a pastime, not a physical risk or hardship."

The first time he came to my room he saw these words on a placard: "Every moment is a treasure."

"I don't quite grasp what that means," he remarked. "How can you earn a treasure every moment?"

"It's easier than you think. Every moment we can increase our knowledge, do a good deed, or make an act of love of God. In His sight, these are treasures to benefit us now and in eternity."

He copied down those words and then said, "Now I understand."

We have mentioned these incidents to stress Don Bosco's delightful familiarity with his pupils. As for Besucco's admirable virtues, they are described in a little biography that Don Bosco wrote: *Il Pastorello delle Alpi* [The Little Shepherd of the Alps]. In a word, Francis Besucco was a very devout lad. He prayed kneeling where Dominic Savio used to pray before the Blessed Virgin's altar. Forbidden bodily penance, he performed the lowliest house chores and gladly helped his companions materially and spiritually. He kept his exterior senses in check, especially his sight; his penance was to do his school work diligently, to be attentive in the classroom and obedient to his superiors, and to be patient with heat, cold, hunger, and thirst. His pleasure was to receive the sacraments and make visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

His fervent love for the Blessed Sacrament was inspired by Don Bosco's moving exhortations and zeal in eliminating obstacles to the frequent reception of the sacraments. This we have narrated many times already.[1] Father Joachim Berto wrote: "During the fall recess, some grades would go out for a walk on Saturdays

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 430; Vol. IV, pp. 310f, 317f; Vol. VI, pp. 171, 194, 651ff. [Editor]

or on the eve of some solemn feast, thus somewhat delaying the boys' confessions. Surprised at not seeing the youngsters coming, Don Bosco would insistently ask why. 'This is foolish,' he would say, somewhat peeved at hearing the reason. 'How can boys be recollected and in the right mood for confession after being out? This is a blunder, a disorder we must correct at all costs.' He would then order those responsible to see to it that it did not occur again."

CHAPTER 49

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

AS he had planned, Don Bosco made a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Oropa's Shrine [1] to ask Our Lady's blessing on his new foundation at Mirabello. He celebrated Mass before Her miraculous image and prayed at great length. Perhaps he heard a reassuring voice in his heart reminding him, quite forcibly, of the scriptural words: *Deriventur fontes tui foras et in plateas aquas tuas divide.* [Let your fountains be conveyed abroad, and in the streets divide your waters—Prov. 5, 16] Indeed the waters of his Christian wisdom and charity were to begin to overflow from the Oratory to Mirabello and then to all parts of the earth.

At Mary's feet Don Bosco also asked for guidance in choosing superiors for the new school, and then he acted as he felt inspired. While enjoying a few days of prayer, he wrote the following letter to the Oratory students:

Our Lady of Oropa Shrine, August 6, 1863

My beloved students:

If you were here, my dear sons, on this mountain, you would certainly feel deeply moved. A vast building encircling an inspiring church makes up the shrine commonly known as Oropa. People keep streaming here to thank the Blessed Virgin for graces they have received, to implore deliverance from physical or spiritual ailments, and to seek perseverance in doing good or the grace of a holy death. Young and old, rich and poor, patricians and peasants, noblemen and workmen flock in numbers to confession and to Communion and then kneel at

[1] A famous and imposing shrine atop a 4,000-foot-high promontory, eight miles from Biella in Piedmont. According to legend, St. Eusebius (283–371), the first bishop of Vercelli, built the original chapel to enshrine Our Lady's statue carved by St. Luke. The richly decorated twelve chapels of the present shrine illustrate the Blessed Virgin's life. The shrine has also a valuable collection of art works and ex-votoes. [Editor]

the feet of a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin to implore Her heavenly aid.

Yet, in the midst of this, sorrow gripped my heart. Why? Because you, my beloved boys, were not here. How I would love to have you all here in order to lead you to Mary's feet, to offer you to Her, to place you under Her powerful protection and turn each of you into a Dominic Savio or St. Aloysius.

To ease my regret, I knelt at Her miraculous altar and promised that on my return to Turin I would do my utmost to instill devotion to Her in your hearts. Entrusting myself to Her, I begged special graces for you. "Mary," I prayed, "bless the Oratory, banish from my boys' hearts even the shadow of sin, enlighten them, and be their seat of true wisdom. Make them all Your children, to be forever Yours, forever devoted to You." I am confident that the Holy Virgin granted my request and that you will cooperate with me that we may all be responsive to Mary's voice and to Our Lord's grace.

May the Holy Virgin's blessing be upon me, upon all the Oratory priests and clerics, upon all our workers, and upon you all. May She help us from heaven. On our part, let us earnestly strive to deserve Her protection now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Your friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

According to the Bonetti and Ruffino chronicles, Don Bosco called on Bishop [John] Losana of Biella. He then returned to Turin, only to leave again for Montemagno where he was to preach a triduum before the feast of the Assumption. He arrived in Asti, where many people awaited him, on the early morning train, and went straight to the parish Church of Santa Maria Nova, where he heard many confessions. He then called on a friend of his, Mr. Cerrato. There, before lunch, he heard a few more confessions and gave a promotional talk on *Letture Cattoliche*. After lunch, he obligingly consented to hear confessions in a neighboring church, with the result that he missed the three o'clock stagecoach for Montemagno, even though its departure had been delayed and he had hurried to catch it. It was now almost four o'clock and Don Bosco was expected in Montemagno that evening to start the triduum. Worriedly he inquired about hiring a carriage. None was immediately available, and Don Bosco was told that

even if he left immediately he would never make it on time for the sermon because the horses would be slowed by a long, steep climb. He was therefore advised to postpone his departure until the following day. Meanwhile another hour went by. Mr. Cerrato, who had been patiently waiting, was glad that Don Bosco could not leave and brought him to a sick man who had heard of Don Bosco's arrival that morning and had anxiously sent a messenger to invite Don Bosco to his home. Don Bosco, however, had declined for lack of time. Hurt by this refusal, the sick man became inconsolable, but Divine Providence came to his assistance. It is hard to describe his joy in welcoming Don Bosco. He wept as though he were a consoling angel. He made his confession, serenely put his affairs in order, and stated that, having seen Don Bosco, he had nothing else to wish for in this world.

That same evening Don Bosco called on Mrs. Pulciani, in whose home he gave a talk on the festive oratories and attended to several matters which awaited him there. Before retiring for the night, he heard several more confessions. The next morning he left for Montemagno, where he was warmly received by the whole village and by the Marquis Fassati family for whom he was always a most cherished guest. Father Michael Rua arrived from Turin on the eve of the feast to help with confessions.

On his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco found a letter from the prefecture of Turin asking him to accept two orphan boys, ten and twelve. There was also another letter from the Department of Transportation recommending the ten-year-old orphan of a railroad employee.[2]

Don Bosco admitted the twelve-year-old boy at a fee of a hundred lire once in a while on condition that his relatives supply bedding and clothes. As he always gladly admitted orphans of railroad personnel, he also took in the ten-year-old orphan of the railroad employee who was brought there by his mother. Meanwhile, considering the transportation of construction material for his new church, he mentioned the matter to the Director General of Railroads, Commendatore Bartholomew Bona, who deeply esteemed and loved him. His request for lower freight rates was granted.

[2] We are omitting these two routine letters. [Editor]

CHAPTER 50

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

AT the beginning of August [1863] at least one hundred new pupils entered the Oratory to take a course preparatory to Latin I because in many villages formal instruction ended with the third grade. Other pupils returned for remedial courses from mid-August to mid-September, or for advanced courses that might enable them to skip a year. What with new arrivals and students who had stayed on for the summer, the number of boys at the Oratory became considerable.

Resuming his little talks to the whole community after night prayers, Don Bosco addressed himself particularly to the new boys, in his anxiety to introduce them to frequent reception of the sacraments.

John Bonetti has left us undated outlines of five talks:

1

We are all in life to take part in a contest and earn a handsome crown. We all want to win. So let's get started. I'll lead and you will follow. First, let us set some ground rules. "Clear terms make long friends," says the proverb. I am not here to make money or a name for myself or to boast of your number. I am here only for your benefit. Mind, therefore, that whatever my worth, I am here every moment of the day and night for you. I have no other goal than your physical, mental, and moral welfare. But if I am to succeed in this, I need your help. Be sure that if you cooperate, the Lord will help too, and we shall achieve great things.

I do not want you to look upon me mainly as your superior but rather as your friend. Don't be afraid of me. Far from it! Trust me fully. It's all I want, all I expect of you, my friends. I tell you quite frankly that I hate punishments. I dislike giving orders and threatening punishments for those who disobey. That is not my way. Even when

someone does wrong, I'd rather correct him kindly. If he mends his ways, everything is settled. Should I have to punish any of you, I would be more severely punished myself because I would be very unhappy. Occasionally a father may get angry at an unruly son and even whip him. Sometimes this is necessary, but even then he is doing the right thing because "he who spares the rod hates his son." [Prov. 13, 24] Still, I could never find it in my heart to strike you or see you beaten. That does not mean I will tolerate disorders—oh no, especially if someone should scandalize his companions. In that case I would have to say: "You cannot stay here!" But there is a way to forestall all that. Let's all be one at heart! Here I am, ready to help you in every way I can. All I expect is your cooperation. Be as honest and frank with me as I am with you. If anyone is in danger of falling, let him allow me to help him. If someone has done wrong, let him not try to hide his wrongdoing but strive to remedy it. If I am told these things directly by you, I shall do my utmost to fix matters so as to secure what is best for you physically and spiritually. I'll be far from condemning those whom God would pardon.

2

I have something very important to tell you. I want you to help me in a matter that I have very much at heart—your eternal salvation. This is not only the main reason—it is the only reason why I am here. Without your help, however, I can do nothing. We must be of one mind in this, and real friendship and confidence must unite us.

Think how lucky you are to have been accepted at the Oratory. At home, if you wanted to go to Mass, you had to walk far or get up very early or wait until very late. Here, instead, you are only a few steps away from the church and can attend Mass daily with no bother. At home, if you wanted to go to confession, you had to wait till Sunday; often you had to walk a long way; at times there was no priest. Here, instead, every Saturday and Sunday, even every day, you always have a priest ready to listen to you. Again, if you wished to receive, there was often no one to give you Communion, or you had to wait or ask a priest; many times, perhaps, there were companions who were only waiting for you to go to Communion to make fun of you. Here, instead, you may receive as often as you wish; no one will laugh at you or watch how often you go. Likewise, if you wished to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, you had to walk in the rain or heat and perhaps find the church locked; your parents might even scold you because they needed

you for some chore. Here no one will forbid you to visit Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin during recreation time to say a *Pater* and *Ave,* and then go back to your games. Here you have good friends, wholesome examples, dependable counselors. Would you have as much at home? Here you have all you could need to foster your spiritual well-being, because your superiors have no other aim than to help you.

You may ask: "What will I get out of all this?" My reply is that not to use these spiritual aids would be like sitting at a table laden with the choicest food and drink and gazing around instead of enjoying the feast.

"Why aren't you eating?" I'd ask you.

"Oh, I'll eat later—tomorrow."

"But this food won't be here tomorrow!"

"Oh, leave me alone. Don't bother me!"

My dear sons, how can you question your practices of piety or doubt that they will do you good? To start with, they will help assure your eternal salvation; they will boost you in your studies. For many years I have been observing that if a boy is faithful to his religious duties, he is also liked by his companions and superiors, he excels in his studies, and he is the joy of his parents and pastor. On the contrary, those who have no use for prayer and piety exasperate their superiors and are unpopular with their companions because they steal, quarrel, and bully. They are a disgrace to their family and are rejected by all. What will become of them when they grow up? After wasting their lives, they will find themselves empty-handed.

3

One warning I must give you: in writing home, tell no lies. There are some, for example, who have the nerve to say that here they starve. The truth is that each one can have all the bread he wants; in fact, bread leftovers—even whole buns—can be found lying around everywhere. Others fail their exams because they do not study and then write home that they have been treated unfairly and that their superiors are unkind. Then there are some unruly ones and loafers whose only concern is to eat and drink. They gripe about everything because nothing can please them. Why act this way, my dear lads? Why tell lies? If your eye is dark and sees things only in dark colors, is that our fault? I am not now defending the house because the house needs no defense. Hundreds of boys are very happy to be here; if someone does not like it, he should know that we do not keep anyone by force. Those who

are dissatisfied with their meals should ask their parents to make other arrangements or to take them home. There is nothing wrong in that. They are free to do whatever they think best; they may stay or go, but they should always act honestly.

But this evening I am not only referring to gripers. I also mean those who in their manner of acting clearly show that the Oratory is no place for them. Listen to this proverb: "The bucket that drops often into the well will lose its hoops." There are boys who try to get away with their mischief but are finally caught by their own deceit. They sneak off during school hours, steal from their companions, indulge in unseemly conversation, and are sure of not being caught because nobody spotted them. Let these fellows know that, even though they may not be seen by a superior, God sees them and shall demand an account of their deeds. Then, too, how can you be sure that your superiors did not see you? You may get away with things once or twice, but no more. There are many eyes around here, and the devil's pots have no lids. Let these boys smarten up while they can and show that they want to stay here. Otherwise, we'll have to let them go.

Let all determine to be more honest. I hide nothing from you. If there is something I don't like, I tell you; if I must admonish you, I do it right away, publicly or privately. I do not keep you in the dark; my heart is on my lips. I wish you to do the same, my dear sons. If there is something you don't like, tell me about it and we shall try to remedy it. If you have done wrong, tell me before others find out, and we shall do our best to set things right. Listen to me and do as I say, and you will see that your stay here will be a pleasant one, and when you go home, you will leave feeling satisfied. You will retain fond memories of us all, and we shall always remain friends.

4

History tells us that a powerful emperor once sent an ambassador to Pope Innocent XI requesting certain favors which were contrary to justice. The ambassador used all his eloquence to convince him that it would be wise to oblige so mighty a prince. The Pope listened in silence. "And, Your Holiness," the ambassador went on, "my sovereign promises to do great things for the Church and to protect her."

"I cannot grant your request," the Pope finally replied.

"Your Holiness, remember that the emperor is immensely rich and can lavishly endow the Church. He will also be generous to you personally."

"The answer is still no."

"He is even prepared to defend you with his armies against your enemies."

"Regretfully I cannot grant his request."

"The emperor may take offense and you may later regret it."

"My answer is still no! Tell your emperor that if I had two souls, I would gladly sacrifice one for him. But I have only one."

A magnificent answer, truly worthy of a pope! I say the same to you, my dear sons. You have but one soul. If we had two, we could sacrifice one to the devil by satisfying our passions. But we have only one! So what must we do? Throw it away to the devil? No! Let us give it to the Lord so that we may be eternally saved. To be able to offer it to God, we must do certain things and avoid others. Let us therefore strive to learn what to do and what not to do. I have already pointed that out for the most part and I hope you will do what I suggested. Whenever the devil asks you to do something against your conscience tell him, "I cannot because I have only one soul!" This is true Christian logic, far superior to the logic of worldly wisdom. Mind, though, that the devil too knows how to argue. He too knows philosophy, theology, history, and geography, and he can present things most appealingly to deceive us. He admits we have only one soul, but then he adds, "Man was born for pleasure. The time to enjoy yourself is especially in your youth. Therefore let us crown ourselves with roses."

"But what will our fate be later?"

"Don't worry about the future," he will reply. "Have fun while you can."

"But if I listen to you now, what will you give me in the life beyond?"

"Oh, let's not talk about that!" What he really means is: "Sin now, and I'll know what to do with you later." That's the way the devil puts his ideas across, and too many people allow themselves to be ruined forever.

Let us, instead, listen to the Lord who rewards us both in this life and in the next. When St. Nazarius, in converting the Genoese, told them about the soul, about faith and heaven, they showed no interest. "Listen," the saint went on, "if you serve the true God, He will repay you one hundred percent." "It's a deal!" they exclaimed. "Here we can hardly get five percent." Without further ado, they became Christians. Let us too, my beloved sons, keep in mind—but in a spiritual sense—this hundredfold return that God promises to us. How fortunate you will be if throughout your lifetime you keep this thought in mind. We have only one soul. If that is saved, it is saved for all eternity; if it is lost, it is lost forever.

5

Don Bosco gave us three mementos:
1. A word of advice: Frequent confession.
2. A friend: Our Lord and everything associated with Him.
3. A thing to remember: Heaven.

Don Bosco reached his boys' hearts because the truths he taught and the grace which accompanied them were enhanced by his thoughtful anxiety to meet their needs. Their ailments, melancholy moods, and discouragement never escaped his eye. To each he sought to give the solace needed. If he received sad news from their families, he himself broke it to the pupils with incomparable tact. Countless times he took on the delicate task of having to tell a boy of the death of a parent. Such was the case of Anthony Sala whose father died suddenly at Monticelli d'Olgiate, his native village, at the end of September [1863]. Young Anthony was then helping out as an assistant doorkeeper. After lunch Don Bosco sent for him to come to the dining room. Sala went immediately. "What can I do for you, Father?" he asked, somewhat surprised.

"I want you to have a cup of coffee with me!" he replied gently, handing him a cup. Little by little, he broke the sad news. As Sala burst into tears, Father Alasonatti comforted him, saying, "You have lost your father, but now you have another one."

Don Bosco then assured him that even if his family could not pay his modest fees, he would keep him gratis until he completed his studies. From home, where he had immediately gone to settle family business, he wrote to Don Bosco: "Believe me, when I think of you, my tears of sorrow instantly change into tears of comfort and joy."

Anthony Sala became a priest and economer general of the Salesian Society. He often recalled Don Bosco's admirable kindness in this time of grief.

Besides jotting down Don Bosco's "Good Nights," John Bonetti took note of important suggestions which he gave his priests and clerics in conferences or informal conversations.

"Be careful," he said, "not to ridicule a boy because of some fault of his, especially in his companions' presence."

"If you must admonish someone, do it privately and most kindly."

"In general, do not wait for several transgressions before you correct anyone. Speak immediately and plainly. Praise those who mend their ways and encourage the slothful."

"To keep peace in the house, be humble and forbearing. Even when a superior admonishes in matters which have been exaggerated or misunderstood or falsely reported, his advice should always be received respectfully as a preventive remedy."

"A superior must be father, doctor, and judge, but he should also be ready to be patient and forget."

He one day urged everyone to observe the rules and neglect none under specious pretext if they wished to draw God's blessings upon the Oratory. To prove his point, he read part of a letter of a Benedictine nun of Santa Maria del Fiore Convent in Florence, written in September. "To safeguard the nuns' health," she wrote, "choir rules were relaxed. From then on their health, especially that of the younger nuns, began to deteriorate. Within the last five years no new vocations have entered, thirteen nuns have died, and several are seriously ill. Quite obviously, relaxing the rules is not pleasing to the Lord."

In September Don Bosco had the added burden of providing for those boys who wished to become priests. These were the apple of his eye, as were also the clerics of the Turin diocese who came to him because they had no place to go during the summer or because their parents were too poor to care for them.

He welcomed them all like a father and provided for their needs for some four months. For their benefit—as well as to dismiss a charge made against him—he wrote to Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, rector of the seminary and pro-vicar of the archdiocese:

Turin, September 2, 1863

Very Reverend Rector:

Enclosed please find a copy of the conduct marks of the young men who wish to don the clerical habit. These marks represent the opinion of all the assembled superiors. If Anthony Ghella did not make too many errors in the exams, I would like to put in a good word for him because of his really exemplary conduct and my moral certainty that he will persevere in his vocation.

Anthony Birocco, Francis Cuffia, and Angelo Nasi of the Ivrea

diocese, and Felix Alessio request incardination in the Turin diocese through this letter. Although poor, they would be no burden at all, since I would gladly keep them here and provide for their needs in exchange for whatever service they can give the Oratory.

I take this occasion to point out that the two ceremonial blunders committed at the cathedral (leaning one's elbow on the altar and not assisting the sacred ministers in removing their copes in the sacristy) are not to be attributed to our Oratory clerics but to two boys of the Chieri seminary who are now in this house. So I have been told. However, I shall not fail to exhort all our clerics and teachers most earnestly to be more careful in what concerns sacred ceremonies.

May the Holy Virgin keep you well.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

His solicitude extended also to seminarians of other dioceses, as we can gather from two other letters to Canon Vogliotti [in October and November on behalf of several young clerics].[1]

The Bonetti and Ruffino chronicles record further acts of charity by Don Bosco:

At this time, directors of boarding schools and hospices often appealed to Don Bosco for teachers and assistants. If he could, he obliged and thus helped those clerics of other dioceses who did not feel called to stay on at the Oratory or who had doubts about their vocation. For instance, he suggested an eighteen-year-old cleric, [Philip] Turletti of Vernante, first year philosophy student, to Canon Dominic Costa who needed an assistant for St. Philip's Boarding School at Chiavari.

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 51

A Threat Averted (Continued)

TIME was drawing near for the newly-scheduled examinations for teachers' certification. Father Michael Rua, Father Bartholomew Fusero, Father Dominic Ruffino, and the clerics John Bonetti and Hyacinth Ballesio had crammed for them intensely. They had also readied all necessary certificates, particularly the one testifying to the excellent result of their philosophy exams at the Turin seminary, which, as we have said,[1] for several years had been accepted as equivalent to a comprehensive college examination. However, the university rector, [Hercules] Ricotti, who was still prejudiced against Don Bosco's work, rejected such a certificate and refused to admit the candidates to exams. Perhaps he and a few others regretted having dispensed Cerruti, Durando, Francesia, and Anfossi from the comprehensive college examination the previous July [and still were piqued at the brilliant results of their university exams].[2] This unexpected refusal dashed all hopes of having certified teachers for the Oratory and the new school at Mirabello.

Time was running out, and there was no way of conforming to Ricotti's demands. Only prayer could remove the impasse, and it did. Some days after Ricotti's refusal to admit the Oratory candidates to exams, Don Bosco learned that he had left for his vacation and that the senior dean, Angelo Serafino, professor of speculative theology, had taken over for the duration. Don Bosco made a new attempt. Level-headed and fair-minded, the dean examined the Oratory students' certificates and found them acceptable. He even remarked, "I know that studies are taken more seriously at the seminary than in some state colleges."

[1] *See* p. 255. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 275. [Editor]

The examinations took place between the 15th and the 20th of September. Of the Oratory candidates, some scored very high, while others did quite well. This was a second triumph for the Oratory, but Don Bosco, realizing that seminary philosophy examinations would no longer be accepted in place of the comprehensive college examination, decided that from then on his pupils would have to take the latter tests. The first ones to do so were Louis Jarach, Placido Perucatti, and Constantius Rinaudo in 1864.

Anticipating other difficulties set up by his adversaries' antagonism, Don Bosco called on Nicomede Bianchi, principal of the Liceo del Carmine, hoping to soften his hostility. As soon as he mentioned that he had come to recommend three of his pupils, the professor made a show of impartiality. Don Bosco replied that all he sought was the protection of the law for his students because he knew that some examiners were prejudiced against them. He hoped that the principal's well-known fairness would dispel the examiners' prejudices; he likewise offered to give all the information considered necessary about the Oratory curriculum and his teachers' qualifications. He concluded by saying that he neither needed nor sought favors because he felt sure that his students could very well do without them.

"If that's how things stand," Bianchi replied, "you have nothing to worry about. Encourage your boys, and I assure you of fair treatment."

The conversation went on for a while, as Bianchi affably inquired about the Oratory. When Don Bosco eventually took his leave, the principal again renewed his promises. However, Don Bosco had misgivings. Indeed, when the cleric [Constantius] Rinaudo submitted a Latin paper, it was rejected. When the board was asked why, the reply was that anything so good must surely have been copied. Don Bosco denied the allegation and saw to it that Rinaudo was admitted to an oral examination. At this session he was again taken to task for his paper as if he had really cheated. Rinaudo remonstrated against this injustice. At his insistent request, the examiners finally decided that he should rewrite the paper in that very room. Rinaudo immediately went to work, treating the same theme from a new angle and bringing

in additional proofs, so that the second paper was better than the first. In astonishment, the examiners had to give him the highest grade. The examinations were very difficult also for Louis Jarach and Placido Perucatti, but they too did well. A little later the same three young men scored brilliantly on their entrance exam to the literature courses. These facts proved to the fair-minded that classical studies were held in great esteem at the Oratory, and the lie was given to certain newspapers and inquisitors.

We will now digress a little to show how earnestly studies were pursued at the Oratory. In the years that followed, other Oratory pupils took comprehensive college examinations and won the examiners' admiration. Moreover, though at that time a secondary school diploma was not required, Don Bosco began sending his best pupils to state schools for their exams. They always scored splendidly. This was testified to by Professor Charles Bacchialoni, principal of St. Francis of Paula secondary school. Later on, when the examination became mandatory for admission to the lyceum, thirty or more Oratory students reported each year to government examiners and often scored higher than all other public or private school pupils in Turin. Professor Antoninus Parato, principal of the Monviso secondary school, now named Massimo d'Azeglio, was very enthusiastic about the Oratory students, who were mostly examined by his own committee of professors. Besides being carefully prepared in all subjects, many Oratory boys, encouraged by their teachers with book awards, had memorized prose and poetry selections from the classics.

In talking about such exams, Professor Parato repeatedly declared to Father Celestine Durando that it was impossible to visualize the very great benefit done to public school students by the Oratory boys through the emulation they had stirred. He added that the Oratory boys had always excelled above the others.[3]

[3] At this point we are omitting a detailed description of the misfortunes that befell Chevalier Stephen Gatti who had so stubbornly harassed Don Bosco. [Editor]

CHAPTER 52

The Salesian School at Mirabello

OPENING the Mirabello school was by no means the least of Don Bosco's preoccupations during this year [1863]. The regulations he had drawn up for both superiors and pupils were basically those in use at the Oratory,[1] though suitably adapted to the character of the new school. He retained all of Part II [Disciplinary Norms] [2] and the chapters dealing with monitors and domestics.[3] For the latter, he added this article: "Let no one refuse menial tasks. Let him remember that God will not ask whether we have filled important positions, but whether we have fulfilled the duties of our state of life. While doing his daily work, one is to recall that both he who does menial chores and he who preaches, hears confessions or performs sublime priestly tasks will receive the same eternal reward, if they have both toiled for God's greater glory."

These regulations were to serve as the basic statutes of all future houses. Don Bosco attached great importance to them. He directed that, as was customary at the Oratory, they should be read at an assembly of students and faculty at the beginning of each school year without omitting the articles dealing with the duties of each superior, including the director. He maintained that the pupils should know that their superiors too were subject to regulations, were doing their duty when exacting obedience, and were not acting arbitrarily in supervising them, reprimanding them, and enforcing necessary obligations. Reading the regulations was meant to make the pupils conscious of their superiors' faithfulness to the school rules, so that teachers might give the example and frankly say, "I obey and so should you!"

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 542–559. [Editor]
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 552–559. [Editor]
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 546f. [Editor]

This directive of Don Bosco was not to everybody's liking, but when we questioned Don Bosco about it later on, he confirmed his personal choice of this public reading, and he enforced this practice at the Oratory as long as he could.

The regulations, however, were to be interpreted in the spirit of the Oratory traditions which set the frequent reception of the sacraments as the basis of education. To keep this principle in its primary position of honor, Don Bosco established that the superior, as spiritual director, should be first in dignity and authority. He was to preach, teach theology,[4] and give the "Good Night." He was also the ordinary confessor of the community and, as such, was to be punctual in fulfilling this duty every morning during Mass, and on the eve of a feast or at the Exercise for a Happy Death. Briefly, he had to emulate Don Bosco's own zeal for the welfare of souls. Outside confessors were to be called in weekly, and more often on certain occasions. Students were entirely free to choose a confessor; though they were given every encouragement and opportunity, they were never forced to receive Holy Communion. At general Communions there was no prescribed order in going to the altar rail, so as not to focus attention on those who did not receive.

The director's duties were fatherly and meant to win the boys' hearts and trust. For no reason at all was he ever to perform even a slightly odious task. Such measures were reserved to the other superiors.

The prefect attended to the administration and [overall] discipline of the entire school, handling the mail and dismissing pupils. To free the director from unpleasant confrontations with parents, only the prefect's office was located near the main entrance.

The catechist was responsible for the boys' moral conduct and their behavior in church. The dormitories and infirmary were likewise under his jurisdiction. All scholastic matters, weekly walks, and school plays were the province of the prefect of studies.

These three superiors met weekly with other faculty members

[4] At this time the clerics had their theology courses on the premises while teaching and supervising the boys. [Editor]

to give conduct marks to the pupils. The director was never to take part in these meetings. All the boys knew this because he stayed with them during such sessions.

This system seemed excellent, as proven by its regular remarkable results—an exceptional, undeniable trust in the director, a gratifying and frequent reception of the sacraments, and numerous religious and priestly vocations. After Don Bosco's death, however, an element which had proved necessary for a firm basis of the Salesian Society was judged no longer opportune by the Holy See.[5] Since the Holy Father's word is Christ's word, his decrees were obeyed.

After drafting the regulations, which remained in manuscript form for many years, Don Bosco set about drawing up and mailing the new school's prospectus to all pastors of the Casale diocese and the surrounding area. Many other Salesian schools modeled their prospectuses upon this one. Then, upon his return from the Oropa shrine, he selected the personnel after most tactfully assessing each one's character and talents and consulting with his chapter—a thing he always did in matters of this sort. His choices proved excellent.

Father Michael Rua was appointed as director, the cleric Francis Provera as prefect, the cleric John Bonetti as catechist, and the cleric Francis Cerruti as prefect of studies. Other staff members were the clerics Paul Albera, Francis Dalmazzo, and Francis Cuffia, and the seminarians Dominic Belmonte, Angelo Nasi, and Felix Alessio.

Don Bosco impressed upon these chosen sons of his that they were particularly to foster priestly vocations. He urged them to be respectful and warm toward the bishop, to lend their services gladly, and to strive to win for him the respect and obedience of the people of his diocese. He also recommended that the pastor's position be fully respected—that he be invited, for instance, to hear confessions or to celebrate Mass, and to be present at special functions, catechetical instructions, assembly programs, and school plays. He also directed them to lend the boys' choir to the

[5] A reference to the fact that with the promulgation of the *Codex Juris Canonici* in 1918, the director ceased to be the ordinary confessor. [Editor]

parish on patronal feasts, if requested, and to make priests available for Mass or hearing confessions. Briefly, they were to be fully cooperative in all matters compatible with proper school routine, avoiding picayune problems. He pointed out that, on arriving at Mirabello, they were to pay their respects to the bishop and the pastor; likewise they were to be respectful to the civil authorities. To Father Rua and his companions he also gave a more important piece of advice which he himself had constantly observed. They were to jot down in a notebook entitled "Experience" all the irregularities, breaches of discipline, and boners occurring in classrooms or dormitories, on weekly walks, in the relations of boys among themselves, of superiors and pupils, of superiors and superiors, of superiors and parents, outsiders, and civil and ecclesiastical authorities. They were also to keep a record of measures taken to remedy disorders on extraordinary feast days, of the reason for any change of timetable, or of church services, school programs, holidays, etc. He urged that they review such notes from time to time, especially if the same trouble were to arise so as not to repeat past errors. He also recommended that they keep a list of guests whom they felt they had to invite to school celebrations or plays.

He also gave very wise norms to Father Rua in particular so that he might properly fulfill his important duties as director, and he promised to send them to him in his own hand in a few weeks. Here is this important document:

Greetings in the Lord from Father John Bosco
to his most beloved son, Father Michael Rua.

Since Divine Providence has wished that a school be opened in Mirabello for the spiritual well-being of its youngsters, I feel it is conducive to God's glory to appoint you as director. Since I cannot always be at your side to tell you or, rather, remind you of what you perhaps have already seen practiced [at the Oratory], I think you will appreciate my jotting down a few suggestions to serve you as a norm of action.

I speak as a loving father who opens his heart to a most dear son. Please accept these suggestions in my own hand as a token of my love for you and as an expression of my fervent desire that you win many souls for the Lord.

I. WITH YOUR OWN SELF

1. Let nothing upset you.

2. I recommend to you to avoid mortification in eating and to take at least six hours' rest each night. This is necessary for your health so that you may look after the welfare of souls.

3. Celebrate Holy Mass and say the Divine Office *pie, devote, attente* [fervently, devoutly, attentively]. Strive to do so yourself and to inculcate the habit in your dependents.

4. Make a short meditation every morning; visit the Blessed Sacrament in the course of the day. For the rest, do as prescribed by our rules.

5. Strive to make people love you rather than fear you. When commanding or correcting, always make those concerned understand that you are prompted by a desire to do them good and not by a whim. Put up with anything if it is a question of avoiding sin. Direct every effort to your boys' spiritual well-being.

6. Think carefully before taking any important decision. When in doubt, always do whatever seems to redound to God's greater glory.

7. When you hear reports of anyone, try to gather all the facts before you pass judgment. You will often hear things which appear to be beams and are merely specks.

II. WITH TEACHERS

1. See that your teachers do not lack needed food and rest. Be mindful of what their work involves. If they fall sick or feel indisposed, get a substitute to cover their classes.

2. Talk to them often either individually or collectively. Find out if they are overworked, if they need books or clothes, if they are troubled physically or morally, or if some of their pupils need admonition or special care. Once you know their needs, do your best to meet them.

3. When conferring with them, urge them to interrogate all of their pupils without any exceptions, to check their homework, to steer clear of intimate friendship with or partiality to any pupil, and to make brief announcements to their classes of any coming celebration, novena, or feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

III. WITH THE ASSISTANTS OR DORMITORY MONITORS

1. What has already been said as regards teachers can mostly apply to the assistants or dormitory monitors.

2. See that they lack nothing to keep up their studies, and that they too are taught and have time to study.

3. Make an effort to confer with them and to hear their opinion on the conduct of the boys in their charge. Instruct them to be punctual at their duties and to take their recreation with the boys.

4. If you see that one of them is becoming too attached to a boy or is even in slight moral danger, prudently move him around or give him another duty. If he becomes a moral danger to companions or pupils, immediately remove him from his job and inform me of it.

5. Periodically call a meeting of teachers, assistants, and monitors and urge them all to do their best to prevent unseemly conversation and to eliminate any book, paper, or picture—pictures especially—and anything else which may endanger the queenly virtue of purity. Let them give good advice and be kind to the boys. If they see that a pupil is morally dangerous, let them report him to you so that all may cooperate in safeguarding morality.

IV. WITH THE DOMESTICS

1. They should not be familiar with the boys. See that they attend Mass daily and receive the sacraments once or twice a month.

2. Be kind in giving orders. Make it clear in all circumstances that you are interested in their spiritual welfare. Do not allow women to enter the boys' dormitories or the kitchen; likewise, they should not deal with anyone in the house except for reasons of charity or necessity.

3. If any disagreements should arise between domestics and pupils or other residents, listen kindly to all concerned, but as a rule give your opinion separately so that the others may not know what is said, unless circumstances suggest otherwise.

4. Appoint a dependable, upright man to supervise the domestic staff. He should especially watch over the diligence and morality of his workers and zealously try to prevent pilferings and foul talk.

V. WITH STUDENTS

1. Never, but never, accept pupils expelled from other boarding schools or boys known to be of loose morals. If, despite all precautions, such a boy should be admitted, assign a reliable companion immediately who is never to leave him alone. Should he offend against morality, he should be warned. On the occasion of a second offense he should immediately be expelled.

2. Do all you can to spend all recreation periods with the boys. Whenever opportune, whisper a kind word—you know what I mean [6] —to whoever needs it. This is the secret for winning hearts.

3. Be readily available for confession, but give everyone full freedom to go to others if they wish. Do your utmost to banish even the shadow of a suspicion that you remember what you heard in confession. Let there be no suggestion at all of partiality toward any boy who prefers one confessor to another.

4. Seek to establish the Immaculate Conception Sodality.[7] Promote it, but do not act as its director. It must appear as the pupils' initiative.

VI. WITH DAY BOYS

1. Let kindness and courtesy be your outstanding traits in dealings with boarders and day students alike.

2. In misunderstandings of a financial nature, conciliate as far as you can, even at the cost of sacrifice, in order to safeguard charity.

3. In spiritual or moral matters, differences of opinion should be settled in a way conducive to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls. Obligations, a point of order, revengeful feelings, self-love, logic, unfair demands, and honor itself must all be sacrificed in such instances.

4. Should the matter be very serious, it is wise to seek time for prayer and the counsel of some devout, prudent person.

Father Rua was to leave for Mirabello after the feast of the Holy Rosary with his good and generous mother who was to take care of the pupils' laundry. Meanwhile, the cleric Francis Provera had been busy during September equipping the school with all the furnishings sent from Turin, making arrangements with suppliers, and registering pupils. The whole town was anxious to welcome Don Bosco, who had decided to visit the school during the autumn outing. Before that, however, he readied the November and December issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* respectively entitled *Short Dialogues on the Commandments of the Church . . .* and *Man Proposes and God Disposes. . . .* This issue was accompanied by *Il Galantuomo, 1864*—the complimentary national

[6] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 212, 230ff. [Editor]
[7] *See* Vol. V, pp. 312ff. [Editor]

almanac for subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche* [8]. . . . Among other topics, it contained monthly reflections to explain doctrines attacked by heretics and irreligious people. It also addressed a solemn appeal to the faithful. It must be noted that at this time Father Joseph Ambrogio, of the diocese of Mondovì, was cutting a sorry figure in public places. Dressed partly as a cleric and partly as a layman, and sporting a long, bristling beard and demented looks, he wandered freely through towns and villages, stirring up the rabble against the Church and slandering the clergy. In some places he was given the rough welcome he deserved and was forced to flee in shame. The carabinieri assigned to protect him had to jail him on several occasions to save him from the wrath of the populace whom he disgusted by his brazen manner and blasphemies. He planned to go to Castelnuovo, but did not dare do so, for no sooner did the townsfolk hear that the apostate was on his way than, joyfully recalling their stand against the Waldensians in 1857,[9] they sent word to him that he had better go elsewhere if he cared for his skin. The hint did not fall on deaf ears. This messenger of Satan changed his mind and carried his absurd invectives elsewhere.

In larger centers, however, this unfortunate priest, urged on by the rabble and supported by anticlericals who daily paid him five lire, had a field day. In Turin, for years the authorities let him rant against papal authority, purgatory, confession, and the Mass. At every solemn religious celebration Father Ambrogio would unfailingly show up. Occasionally, an appeal to the police would silence him and drive him off.

To counteract this renegade's constant blasphemies, *Il Galantuomo* gave a rundown of his life, bringing out that he certainly was not a good priest because for several years he had been suspended by his bishop for serious reasons. It then went on to mention that the errors he taught—the fruit of pride and ignorance—were by no means new and had already been successfully refuted by Catholic writers. It also revealed the utter inanity of his attacks against the Pope and concluded with a magnificent

[8] *See* Vol. IV, p. 449; Vol. V, pp. 87f, 181–88, 393f, 510; Vol. VI, pp. 205ff, 472ff. [Editor]

[9] *See* Vol. V, pp. 413ff. [Editor]

defense of the Catholic priesthood, recalling particularly the admirable charitable works of Canon Joseph Cottolengo.

Such an appeal must have proven bitter to Father Ambrogio's fans. One night a dastardly mob, with whom his activities affiliated him, marched to Valdocco to bombard with stones the dormitory over the Oratory printshop near Via della Giardiniera. Practically all the window panes were smashed at the first attack, though the rock throwing went on for nearly a month. Wire gratings had to be installed for protection.

CHAPTER 53

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

ON October 1 [1863], Marquis Fassati's young son received a letter which Don Bosco had written to him while at Montemagno [for the feast of the Assumption]. It was meant to be delivered on the day of the boy's departure for the [Jesuits'] international boarding school in Mongré [France], where some four hundred lads of the nobility, mostly Italian,[1] received an education befitting their social position:

From your summer home [mid-August, 1863]

Dear Emmanuel:

Before you leave, heed these few words from a friend of your soul. Once at the school wisely chosen for you by your parents, try to carry out these few suggestions:

1. Put your trust in your superiors.
2. Strive to practice your confessor's advice.
3. Avoid idleness and companions who indulge in unseemly talk.
4. Daily ask the Blessed Virgin to let you suffer any evil rather than let you fall into grave sin.

May God bless you and keep you in good health and in His grace until we meet again, God willing, in August 1864.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Early on October 3, some band members and many boys who had been chosen to join the yearly autumn outing left for Becchi. At Chieri they stopped at Chevalier Gonella's and had lunch in his mansion courtyard. Later that day, Don Bosco took thirty more pupils by train from Turin's Porta Nuova station. Senator

[1] After the expulsion of the Jesuits and other religious, Piedmont had no Catholic boarding schools for sons of noble families. [Editor]

[Bartholomew] Bona [Director General of Railroads] had assigned him two third-class coaches gratis for the duration of their excursion [whose last stop was to be Tortona]. The group got off at Villanova d'Asti and walked over the hills to Becchi.

Don Bosco's nephew, Francis, warmly welcomed them. "Now we are your guests," Don Bosco told him after an emotional reference to his [deceased] brother Joseph. "Give a good account of yourself! You are to show us a good time!"

Don Bosco then took a look at the chapel and house and found everything in order. Father Cagliero had preached every morning of the novena, insistently recommending the family rosary. A good number of people had gone to confession and Communion daily. He was also to preach the next day, Sunday, October 4, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, because those good folks were so enthused over him that they would not have it otherwise.

On Monday, the boys were the cherished guests of Father [Anthony] Cinzano, pastor of Castelnuovo, who, with customary generosity, treated them to a good dinner. To honor Don Bosco, he had invited neighboring pastors. On his return to Becchi, Don Bosco wrote as follows to Baron Feliciano Ricci at Cuneo:

Castelnuovo d'Asti, October 5, 1863

My dear Baron:

I received the sixty lire you sent me from Pasquale's guardian. I have given orders to hurry the preparation of the [*Letture Cattoliche*] booklets you asked for and to rush some out to you as soon as possible.

You are quite right: several times I intended to pay you a visit, but was never able to. I shall do so soon, though. Anyway, I have always prayed—and still do—that God will grant you and your dear wife and children good health and other blessings. May the Holy Virgin protect us all and keep us always as Her very own. Amen. Pray for me and my boys.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please forgive my rambling style. My room is swarming with boys.

On the following day, all the boys, nearly a hundred, hiked

some four miles down to the railroad station of Villanova d'Asti where they boarded two coaches for Alessandria. On the way, they got off at Asti for a tour of the town and its cathedral. Mr. Cerrato escorted them and let them use his house to eat their meal.

At Alessandria the band played a number to honor the station master while Don Bosco alighted to pay his respects and make arrangements. Then they continued on to Tortona, their last stop.

The seminary rector, Canon Forlosio, was at the station to welcome Don Bosco on Bishop John Negri's behalf also. There too was John Baptist Anfossi, whom Don Bosco had sent as a summer tutor to Baron Garofoli's sons.

As the band escorted them into the town, quite a few people, despite the late hour, gathered to watch Don Bosco's sons go by. They were lodged at the seminary where, after supper and night prayers, each boy had a room to himself. The next morning, after Mass, Don Bosco sent the boys to tour the city churches while he kept his appointment with the bishop. In the afternoon, he took the boys to see the site of the old fortress, famous for the heroic stand of its garrison against Frederick Barbarossa in 1170.[2] That evening the boys staged a stirring drama in the seminary. Father Cagliero's song "Il Figlio dell'Esule" [The Exile's Son] was very warmly applauded. Among the many spectators was Baron Cavalchini Garofoli who invited Don Bosco and his boys to dinner, hosting them for a few days, during which Don Bosco took them on several side trips.[3]

After supper on Monday [October 12], Don Bosco told the boys that the next day they would start their trip home. At nine, after thanking the bishop, Don Bosco and his boys left for Alessandria. From there they went on to Mirabello where Father Rua had arrived on October 12. The Oratory boys were comfortably lodged in the new school, as yet unoccupied. They remained there a couple of days, being warmly received by the pastor, the Provera family, and the entire population. In return, they entertained the townsfolk with a stage play at the school.

On October 17, they boarded a train at Alessandria and ar-

[2] We are here omitting a short history of the fortress. [Editor]

[3] We are omitting a description of the baron's hospitality, a reference to a prominent relative of his, and the boys' sightseeing trips. [Editor]

rived in Turin around noon. The entire Oratory community, headed by Father [Ignatius] Arrò who had kindled all hearts with holy enthusiasm, was all set to welcome Don Bosco, but he had stopped off in the city to visit a stone-deaf lady who two weeks before had sent for him as he was about to leave for Becchi. He had then given her the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians and by gestures had promised her a complete cure by the time of his return. Things turned out exactly as he had predicted. Gratefully, the good lady paid two weeks' wages for the excavation of the new church.

Don Bosco arrived at the Oratory during the evening study period. He was spotted by a boy looking out the window. "Here comes Don Bosco!" he whispered. The news spread through the study hall like lightning! All eyes turned to the superior in charge. A nod sent everybody scurrying down the stairs, swarming around Don Bosco and shouting hurrahs. Many and many a time have we witnessed such spontaneous outbursts of boundless enthusiasm. The artisans too ran to the doors of their workshops and vied with the students.

Surrounded by such a joyous crowd, Don Bosco reached the porticoes and motioned for silence. "My dear sons," he said, "tomorrow is the feast of the Purity of Our Lady, and we must celebrate it properly. I will check in with Father Prefect and then I'll come down for confessions." Many boys immediately walked into church, the rest returning to the study hall.

On Sunday evening, October 18, [Dominic] Belmonte, [Felix] Alessio, and [Angelo] Nasi solemnly received the clerical habit from Don Bosco. They were soon to report to the new school at Mirabello. Belmonte's mother was present at this moving ceremony. "It was a great consolation," she remarked with emotion to Don Bosco, "but I don't think I'll be here for his First Mass. I greatly fear I won't live that long!" Smilingly Don Bosco replied, "Do not fear! You'll not only be present at his First Mass, but you will even go to confession to him." To both mother and son this prediction seemed strange and downright impossible; yet, on September 18, 1870, Belmonte, while still at Mirabello, was ordained a priest, and his mother, beside herself with joy, was present at her son's First Mass. She experienced the same joy

many other times and had to admit that the first part of Don Bosco's prophecy had come true. The second part, however, seemed much more unlikely because Father Belmonte was always busy far from his home town and seldom saw his parents. Then in 1878, while he was director of the Salesian school at Borgo San Martino, his mother suddenly fell grievously ill. She had been stung by an insect as she was hanging the wash on the terrace, and a malignant tumor developed. Summoned by telegram, Father Belmonte hastened to her bedside. Within two days her condition became critical. She had already received the Last Sacraments but, still wanting to see her confessor, she asked her son to get him. Unfortunately, the pastor was not at home and could not be reached. "Well, then," she said to her son, "you will have to hear me!" She made her confession and passed away shortly afterward. To his astonishment, Father Belmonte recalled the second part of Don Bosco's prediction. It too had been unexpectedly fulfilled, as Father Belmonte himself repeatedly told us. Don Bosco also predicted Father Belmonte's life-span. In 1900 the latter told Father Peter Cogliolo: "I have just another year of life because Don Bosco told me that I would live to be fifty-seven!" Born on September 8, 1843, he did indeed die quite suddenly of meningitis on February 18, 1901.

Around this time Don Bosco predicted various other things. For instance, Father Felix Alessio, one of the young clerics whom Don Bosco had sent to Mirabello, forwarded to us the following information, dated March 2, 1891:

I hasten to inform you of an episode I shall always treasure in my mind and heart concerning the incomparable and saintly Don Bosco. What I state is genuine truth. I am a priest and speak under oath.

In 1863, I was finishing secondary school at the Oratory. Since I was soon to take the clerical habit. I asked my bishop's permission, as Don Bosco had suggested. The bishop refused because he wanted me to remain in his diocese. Likewise, he denied me free board and tuition at the seminary, to which I was entitled, nor would he let me stay on at the Oratory at Don Bosco's expense. Furthermore (and it was Don Bosco himself who told me this one October evening in the clerics' dining room), he began to inveigh against Don Bosco for stealing his seminarians. He even wrote him an indignant letter. In telling me of

this, Don Bosco added, "I forgive him, but God will deprive him of the use of his hands." Indeed, sadly enough, the bishop was stricken with severe gout and died of that disease. I have always seen this incident as a prophecy.

I would like to add that although I had many problems during my priestly training and was urged to quit with offers of a good job, I always refused because in some strange way I felt that those who, like me, had been invested with the clerical habit by Don Bosco should never doff it.

Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio, pastor at Moncalieri, also wrote:

One morning, in my first or second year of philosophy, I was with Don Bosco while he was having coffee. I had never even thought that some day I might leave the Oratory. Yet, as I was chatting with him, he unexpectedly said, "You'll become a pastor and a canon!" The other clerics who were present and I had a good laugh. I recalled those words when his prediction took place by God's will. Even now in 1906, I seem to hear his words.

Let us now resume our narrative. The rest of the staff soon joined Father Rua at Mirabello. Their leave-taking from Don Bosco was quite moving and tearful. The night before their departure, they kept going to Don Bosco's room to speak with him and to say one more good-bye. It was the first time they were leaving the Oratory for a new school which was some considerable distance from him, and it seemed inconceivable to them that they could live without Don Bosco.

The Mirabello school formally opened on October 20, 1863, [Angelo] Nasi taught Latin I; [Francis] Cuffia, Latin II; [John] Bonetti, Latin III; [Francis] Cerruti, Latin IV and V. The second and third elementary grades were taught respectively by [Felix] Alessio and [Francis] Dalmazzo. These young clerics set about their work with admirable zeal. Young though they were, they were imbued—as Don Bosco himself remarked—with an evangelical spirit which, being eternal, prudently moderates a young man's self-sacrificing enthusiasm. Moreover, they were few and Rua was the only priest until Bonetti's ordination in May 1864. Therefore they had to work hard to keep things running smoothly.

Their spirit of sacrifice never waned, though they had to teach several subjects, constantly supervise the boys, and at times even sweep the building. They did all kinds of chores and were always on duty. Only in 1876, as Don Bosco declared, were [personnel] difficulties finally overcome and burdens lightened. The school was so well managed that it soon bore wonderful fruit. When this junior seminary first opened, the Casale major seminary had less than twenty philosophy and theology students. A few years later, thanks to the many priestly vocations from Mirabello, the seminary enrollment soared to a hundred and twenty.

Meanwhile, around mid-October [1863], Don Bosco sent several of the Oratory's best pupils to Mirabello to act as good leaven among their schoolmates. He also sent Father Angelo Savio to investigate other possible construction work. He answered a letter from Father Rua as follows:

Turin, October 28, 1863

My dear Father Rua:

You complain that I have not yet written to you, but I visit you daily.

I am sending you another small group [of boys]. If necessary, I'll send more, as you wish. In such matters, do what you think is best in the Lord. When you write, always let me know how many boys you have and how many have already applied for admission. Try to make more room. Instead of Boido I'm sending you the younger Razzetti boy this coming Friday or Saturday. Today or tomorrow the two Bioglios will also be there; one of them is a giant. Father Cagliero has promised to send what you asked for. I am sorry that Peracchio is sick; make him well soon. If necessary, would you have room for another ten of our boys?

The tailors and shoemakers could be put into one room. If there should be a duplication of the boys' laundry tag numbers, add the letters A, B, C . . .

We are always talking about Mirabello. We are all one in wishing you every heavenly blessing.

Father Savio has just brought some good news. *Deo gratias!* You can raise the number of boys to a hundred. You'll see that, what with those who don't come or will be dismissed or will leave of their own accord, you'll end up with about eighty. As a matter of policy, do not

accept anyone during the course of the year, except in very extraordinary cases. If anyone is there now or is due to arrive shortly, or if anyone comes in later who is unfit for seminary life or is just one too many, let me know at once, or send him over with a note, and we shall accommodate him here, as best fits his case.

I'll see you soon. May all the saints of heaven make saints of all those at Mirabello now and in the future. Amen.

Affectionately yours in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. My regards to the whole Provera family and your mother.

The Ruffino chronicle gives us further information:

At Mirabello, Father Rua resembles Don Bosco in Turin. He is surrounded by boys who are drawn by his kindness and pleasant conversation. At the start of the school year he urged the teachers not to be too demanding at first and to be indulgent in cases of negligence or overenthusiasm. He is always with the boys at play after lunch. Each teacher and assistant has a place of his own in the common study hall. The upper classmen have a drawer with lock and key.

The pupils take their weekly walks together two by two, accompanied by a teacher and an assistant. In the neighboring villages people often ask them in for refreshments, but Father Rua does not allow them to accept such invitations. If they were to accept them all, it would give rise to disorders; if they accepted a few, it could offend some. On Sundays and holy days he preaches twice a day: in the morning on bible history, in the evening on the theological virtues. It is noteworthy that at the "Good Nights" he always expresses himself in a pleasant, witty manner.

The cleric Belmonte has started a choir. Soon they will be ready to sing.

CHAPTER 54

A Dream: A Ghastly Pit

AT the Oratory, too, preparations were being made to open another school year; the new building, particularly, was being readied for occupancy by the secondary school students. As regards the staff, Father Dominic Ruffino was replacing Father Rua as prefect of studies and moderator of the Immaculate Conception Sodality. The St. Aloysius, Blessed Sacrament, and Knights of the Altar sodalities were to be directed by Father Joseph Bongiovanni, who also zealously dedicated himself to pastoral work. His sermons and conferences were praised for their variety and sincerity, which more than compensated for his rather poor delivery. The St. Joseph Sodality was a spiritual boost to the artisans, for whom new and larger workshops were also being readied. The Oratory cabinetmakers and blacksmiths were swamped with work for Mirabello's new school, the Oratory's new building, and, above all, the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. The tailors and shoemakers, now housed in the former doorkeeper's lodge and reception room, were also busy keeping their many companions clothed and shod. Both shops were supervised by Joseph Rossi.

The printshop, managed by Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia, was relocated on the building's main floor along Via della Giardiniera. Three new presses were installed, and two more were under consideration. Though very costly, they were badly needed, since besides publishing *Letture Cattoliche* and, of late, textbooks, Don Bosco was being urged by Catholic writers to print their historical or polemical works in defense of the Church. In those very days the Oratory printshop put out a little pamphlet, *The Dignity of the Catholic Priesthood* by Father John Baptist Fontana, which aimed at fostering priestly vocations and impressing seminarians with the exalted position of the Lord's calling.[1]

[1] We are omitting a brief review in *L'Armonia,* November 11, 1863. [Editor]

Meanwhile, since the seminary and its revenues had been returned to the archdiocese of Turin, the few seminarians who were residing in private homes and the many who were staying at the Oratory returned to the seminary. This caused Don Bosco some inconvenience because a few of them had to be replaced in their duties. On his part, Don Bosco continued sending the Oratory's clerics to the seminary lectures given by the learned and experienced professors we have named elsewhere. Perfect harmony reigned between the diocesan seminarians and Don Bosco's clerics. "I recall," Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio declared, "that we were very respectful and considerate toward the diocesan seminarians because Don Bosco had trained us that way. It should be remembered also that, even in ensuing years, many diocesan clerics were former Oratory pupils."

The efforts Don Bosco had made in September and October to insure the school year's smooth start were hindered by the school authorities' demands for the certification of two teachers.[2]

Father Victor Alasonatti was a great help to Don Bosco as an administrator and disciplinarian. As we have noted elsewhere, Don Bosco did his best to lighten his heavy burden, but the ever rising number of pupils somewhat frustrated his efforts. On his part, Father Alasonatti never spared himself in order to draw God's blessings on the Oratory. Don Bosco had to forbid him all bodily penances and order him, under vow of obedience, to take care of himself, at least so as to be able to keep working for God's glory. Since Father Alasonatti's office doubled as a bedroom and a constant flow of callers made it impossible for him to rest even a little during the day, Don Bosco moved him to a more comfortable and quiet bedroom.

Don Bosco lightened his work by taking on part of the correspondence and interviews with parents and benefactors. The Oratory chronicles narrate that at the end of October 1863 a priest told Don Bosco that a good-hearted man had offered to pay a modest monthly fee if a protégé of his would be admitted, and Don Bosco replied, "The more help I receive, the more I'll be able to do. But money is not everything. We rely on Divine Providence." Some days later, in fact, General [Alessandro] Della

[2] We are omitting these unnecessary details. [Editor]

Rovere, then Secretary of Defense, came to his aid with a supply of clothing and bedding.[3]

Meanwhile, the school year opened under happy auspices with a visit of the archbishop of Sassari who was eager to meet Don Bosco personally. The prelate toured the premises and talked at length with the boys who swarmed around him to kiss his ring. At this time, too, Father James Margotti, a learned and intrepid champion of the Church, who had stopped writing for *L'Armonia* two months earlier and had started his own paper, *Unità Cattolica,* informed Don Bosco that he was placing both his pen and newspaper at his service. Publication of this weekly started on November 1, 1863.

Yet another co-worker, Father Ignatius Arrò of Lanzo, a lawyer, had come at about this time to the Oratory not so much to remain with Don Bosco as to persuade him to open a boarding school in his own native town of Lanzo. His stirring eloquence could be spiritually very fruitful, as was amply demonstrated at a mission he preached with Canon Lawrence Gastaldi in the Asti cathedral. Its success eclipsed anything within the congregation's memory.

[We shall now return to the Oratory chronicle.] After John Bonetti's transfer to Mirabello, Father Ruffino worked alone at this task of chronicler. Others, however, will soon make up for Bonetti's absence from the Oratory. The Ruffino chronicle reads:

October 28, 1863. [Today] the student Sebastian Brunerotto of Lucerne, twenty-four, died at St. Aloysius Hospital.

November 1. Tonight, almost jokingly, Don Bosco narrated this short dream to the boys: "Last night, whether or not influenced by the feasts of All Saints and All Souls, I dreamed that a boy had died and I was escorting his body to the grave. I do not imply that this is an omen that one of you is to die, but it so happens that I have had similar dreams in the past and they came true."

November 3. Don Bosco again spoke of death. "We usually prepare a spiritual fund of prayers for the one among us who will be the first to die," he said. "We must do it now too. I do not mean to say that one of us will soon depart for eternity and benefit by this spiritual treasure, but I don't want to suggest that such an occasion is very far distant,

[3] We are omitting the routine notification. [Editor]

either. So let us stock up a spiritual fund for that person, whoever he may be, that it bear fruit. Those who remain behind will be glad that they are alive, and he who is to die will be glad to have found this spiritual bonus."

November 12. Today we made the Exercise for a Happy Death. Bishop [John] Losana of Biella distributed Holy Communion.

November 13. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco said: "Yesterday morning we made the Exercise for a Happy Death. For the rest of the day I kept thinking of its good results, but now I fear that some of you did not make it well. Let me tell you a dream I had last night.

"I was with you in the playground while you were all playing. Then we all went for a stroll to a meadow where you resumed your pastimes, mostly jumping games. Suddenly I spotted an unguarded pit in the center of the meadow and hastened over to make sure it was safe. As I looked into it, I saw a short, yellow-spotted, mean-looking serpent coiled at the bottom. It seemed as huge as a horse or even an elephant. I leaped back in fright.

"Meanwhile, a good number of you began jumping over the pit. Oddly enough, it never dawned on me to stop you or alert you to the danger. I noticed that while the younger boys were leaping over it nimbly, the older ones, being heavier, often clumsily landed on the very edge. Each time this happened, the serpent would strike out, nip its victim's foot, leg, or other part of his body, and quickly drop out of sight. Unconcerned, these foolhardy lads kept jumping, though they hardly ever went unscathed. As this was going on, a boy, pointing to a companion, said, 'He'll jump once and barely make it. Then he'll jump again, and that will be the end of him.'

"Grieved to see boys lying about wounded in legs, arms, and even hearts, I asked, 'Why did you jump over that pit and keep it up even after you got hurt?'

" 'We're still not too good at jumping,' they replied with a sigh.

" 'Then you shouldn't have jumped!'

" 'We couldn't help it. We're just not too good at it. Besides, we didn't think it was so risky.'

"One boy, in particular, really shook me—the lad who had been pointed out to me. On his second leap he failed and fell into the pit. Moments later he was spewed out, black as coal, though still breathing and able to speak. We all stared at him in terror and kept asking him questions."

The Ruffino chronicle says nothing more. It is utterly silent

about the dream's interpretation and the admonitions—all the more necessary at the start of a new school year—which Don Bosco undoubtedly gave the boys publicly and privately. What are we to say? Can we offer an explanation?

The pit is the one mentioned in Holy Scripture: ". . . a deep ditch . . . a narrow pit . . . [Prov. 23, 27], the pit of destruction. . . ." [Ps. 54, 24] In it lies the demon of impurity, as St. Jerome tells us in his eleventh homily on St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Seemingly, the dream does not point to souls already enslaved by sin, but to those who place themselves in danger of sin. At this point, lightheartedness, fun, and peace of heart begin to fade away. The younger boys jump nimbly and safely over the pit because their passions are still dormant. Blissfully innocent, they are fully engrossed in their games and their guardian angels safeguard their innocence and simplicity. The dream, though, does not say that they kept jumping over the pit. Perhaps they heeded a friend's advice.

The older boys too want to leap, but they are out of practice and not as nimble as their younger companions. Furthermore, they have felt the strain of their first battles against the flesh and are not aware of the serpent's ambush. "Is jumping over that pit really so terribly risky?" they seem to ask. And then the game begins. Their first leap may begin to materialize when they start forming emotional friendships, accepting objectionable books, and nursing strong attachments. Being too free and boisterous, they keep away from good companions and disregard rules or admonitions to which superiors attach serious importance in the safeguarding of their morals.

The first jump ends in a serpent's bite. Some boys escape harm and prudently take no more chances. Others, rashly disregarding a real danger, go back to it. Seemingly, falling into the pit and being tossed out again symbolizes a fall into mortal sin, but with a chance of recovery through the sacraments. Of those who fell and remained in the pit nothing more need be said than: "He who loves danger will perish in it." [Sir. 3, 25]

CHAPTER 55

Special Charisms (Continued)

DON Bosco's words so inspired the Oratory's new students to confide in him that most of them chose him as their regular confessor, particularly to learn and safeguard their vocation. On this point Father Joachim Berto commented as follows:

This happy choice of mine was always my mainstay. From the day I came to the Oratory to the eve of Don Bosco's last illness, I always went to confession to him of my own choice, particularly because he knew me. In my Oratory school days the general consensus was that those who went to confession to Don Bosco were sure to make good confessions because God had given him the gift of reading his penitents' sins on their foreheads or in their consciences should they have forgotten them.

One Sunday morning in 1863, a boy whom I know very well went to confession to Don Bosco and left out something which seemed unimportant to him or which perhaps he had forgotten. When he was through, Don Bosco remarked, "Be sorry also for such and such a sin." It was a specific revelation of a sin he had not confessed, perhaps through negligence, and the youngster realized that Don Bosco could not have known it except through a special charism. So surprised and moved was he that—as he assured me—never did he ever make so tearful a confession or so fervent a Communion as on that occasion.

Another day, after church services, a boy who had been at the Oratory but a short while spotted Don Bosco in the playground and stood staring at him for quite some time. Then, turning to me, he asked with some anxiety, "Who is that priest?"

"Why do you ask?" I replied. "Don't you know him yet?"

"No, but this morning I went to confession to him and he told me all the sins I had committed at home."

"That priest, my boy, is our common father and superior, Don Bosco. He is also the best friend boys can have, especially if they want to be good."

I also recall that during my three years of secondary school at the Oratory, 1862 to 1865, Don Bosco was always surrounded by young students who spent their whole playtime after lunch and after supper with him. From time to time he would fix his gaze on some boy who was probably lost in a daydream and would startle him by soundly tapping him on the face. Then he would laughingly take the lad's head between his hands and whisper, "Don't be upset! I wasn't striking you, but the devil."

As very often happened, once a boy confided to him that he was tormented by lascivious thoughts. "Don't be afraid," Don Bosco whispered to him. "Just stay near me."

"Don't be afraid," he repeated to another boy having the same trouble. "Such thoughts or notions are not [of themselves] sinful. Just watch what you do. Pay no more heed to them than to flies or wasps buzzing about you. These thoughts come from your very vivid imagination. With time you will get rid of this nuisance by a mere act of will."

For this reason the boys found it very easy to accept Don Bosco's orders, exhortations, and even reprimands. The same could not always be said of other superiors. "Look," Don Bosco said another time to a pupil who greatly confided in me, "I wish you would obey blindly!"

"I always do," he replied, "and always will, as long as I know that orders and suggestions come directly from you. But I cannot do the same with other superiors."

"Why not?"

"Because I know that you have supernatural gifts. I have proofs of that. I cannot say as much of my other superiors. Good and saintly though they are, they have no such gifts, as far as I can see. They don't know my inclinations, and they can do me untold harm or make me grossly blunder. I shall obey them as St. Paul says, in a manner 'worthy of thinking beings.' " [Rom. 1, 12]

There were some who did not confide in him, though they could not hide their hearts from him. "Look," sometimes Don Bosco would say to me, "I spot hypocrites as soon as they get close to me. Immediately I feel unexplainably nauseated and uncomfortable despite all the nice things they say. All I have to do is look at a boy's face once to know if he is a slave of impurity. It never fails." As a matter of fact, such boys carefully kept away from him. This charism of his was so well known during my Oratory stay that such boys admitted they avoided Don Bosco because he could read their sins on their foreheads. St. Philip Neri used to tell these lads by their smell; Don Bosco knew them also by sight.

The boys' esteem, love, and respect for Don Bosco guaranteed the Oratory's discipline at all times, especially silence, a thing not easily obtainable from a crowd of lively youngsters. Let us just mention the study hall. It was always looked upon as a sacred place. From the very first days of the Oratory it was a room of solemn, sacred silence. Even in winter, when Don Bosco allowed the boys to have breakfast [1] in the study hall because of the severe cold, silence was always observed out of respect to the place. The youngsters doffed their caps and tiptoed in, we might say. Then they said a Hail Mary with the invocation "Seat of Wisdom," which later was replaced by "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us." Occasionally Don Bosco himself would sit in the common study hall to give good example. Amazingly, no matter who walked in—even important people—no one would stir, look up, or show curiosity. Let us just mention two visits. Both Don Bosco and Peter Enria left us a record of the first one:

One day a Turinese nobleman called at the Oratory with two English gentlemen, one of them a cabinet minister of Queen Victoria. After showing them around, Don Bosco took them to the study hall where some five hundred boys were doing their homework. The visitors were astonished to see such a crowd of youngsters perfectly silent, with only a young cleric to supervise them. They were even more surprised to hear that perhaps in a whole year there was hardly a verbal disturbance or any reason to threaten or punish. "How are such silence and self-restraint possible?" the minister inquired. Then he told his secretary, "Take down what the priest says."

"Sir," Don Bosco replied, "the means we use are not available to you."

"Why not?"

"Because they are secrets known only to Catholics."

"What are they?"

"Frequent confession and Communion and devout, daily attendance at Mass."

"You are quite right. We lack these powerful means of education. Can't we make do with something else?"

"The only alternatives are threats and punishments."

"Quite true! It's either religion or the stick! I will tell this in London."

[1] A very frugal one—a bun. [Editor]

Professor [Francis] Maranzana mentioned the second visit in a published homage to Don Bosco in 1893:

One winter evening, I cannot recall what year, all the boys went back to their chores after their recreation period. Shortly afterward, Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi of Mondovì, an old friend of Don Bosco, knocked at his door and introduced two other prelates who had come from very distant countries. They were anxious to meet Don Bosco and visit his Oratory because his fame had already spread outside Europe. Don Bosco showed them around. Visibly pleased and surprised, they toured the various shops, admiring their order and tidiness. The silence and cheerful looks of the young artisans enchanted them. When these distinguished visitors came to the door of the study hall and saw that huge room full of youngsters bent over their books in deep silence, they stood rooted as though spellbound. Fearing to intrude, they started to turn back. A resolute gesture from Don Bosco, however, made them tiptoe to the assistant's desk. Bishop Ghilardi gazed on the delightful scene and then, raising his hands, exclaimed, "What a wonderful sight! A truly wonderful sight!" Our good father smiled modestly, gratified by such splendid praise of his little urchins. On their part, the youngsters could not figure out why a man who had seen so many schools and institutions should be so surprised. They took his words for nothing more than a gracious encouragement. That exclamation of astonishment was repeated many times by renowned educators. We ourselves, as time went on, learned by experience that Bishop Ghilardi's enthusiasm was well justified.

To take care of these youngsters, Don Bosco kept training new teachers and counselors by organizing the Salesian Society and increasing its membership, as we gather from the minutes of a chapter meeting:

On November 12, 1863, the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met to elect and establish a house chapter for the new school at Mirabello. In accordance with the rules, Father John Bosco, superior and founder, appointed Father Michael Rua as director, the cleric Francis Provera as prefect and economer, and the cleric John Bonetti as catechist. Then the clerics Francis Cerruti and Paul Albera were unanimously elected councilors. Thus the Mirabello house chapter was duly established with director, prefect, catechist, and two councilors.

Don Bosco's choice of a staff for this junior seminary did not add an iota to the status of this boarding school, but the election and establishment of its chapter made it a religious house with a resulting obligation of religious obedience on the part of its members. Don Bosco ordered that Father Rua be officially notified of this important development. [The task was entrusted to Charles Ghivarello.]

Turin, November 13, 1863

May the grace of the Lord be with you.

Dearest Confreres:

The members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met at the Oratory last night to elect and set up a chapter for the new house at Mirabello. I am very glad to inform you of this and believe that you will be equally delighted. In conformity with our rules, our beloved Don Bosco appointed Father Michael Rua as director, our good Francis Provera as prefect and economer, and our dear brother John Bonetti as catechist. Finally our two dear brothers Francis Cerruti and Paul Albera were elected councilors.

I am happy to send you Don Bosco's greetings and those of the [Oratory] chapter and of all the residents of the motherhouse. We ask for your prayers so that we may all form one heart and soul in serving God, who alone will one day be—we hope—our eternal joy. Wishing you every blessing, I am,

Your brother,
Cleric Charles Ghivarello

N.B. Father Director is hereby requested to read this letter publicly to all the assembled confreres.

This matter taken care of, the [vacancies in the] Oratory chapter had to be filled in. The minutes give us the following report:

On November 15, 1863 the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met at the motherhouse in Turin to elect a spiritual director and second councilor, since these former officers have left and are members of the new house chapter at Mirabello. Don Bosco, the superior, after the customary invocation and prayer to the Holy Spirit, appointed Father Dominic Ruffino as spiritual director. He was duly ac-

knowledged by all. Since the councilor is to be elected by the chapter members, a vote was taken. Father John Baptist Francesia received a majority of votes and was duly appointed second councilor.

During the next few weeks the Oratory chapter met again to admit new applicants to the Salesian Society and to allow others to take their triennial vows. The minutes follow:

On November 18, 1863 the chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales met to consider the application of Father Ignatius Arrò of Lanzo Torinese, a lawyer. He was unanimously admitted to a year's probation.

On November 30, after the usual invocation to the Holy Spirit, the aforesaid chapter admitted the cleric [Joseph] Monateri to a year's probation.

On December 13, 1863 the superior of the Society of St. Francis de Sales assembled all the confreres for the religious profession of the clerics Rinaudo Costanzo and [Anthony] Tresso. The ceremony was carried out as prescribed by the rules of the [Salesian] Society.

CHAPTER 56

First Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society

THROUGHOUT these years Don Bosco's thoughts and efforts were always directed to the growth of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. We have already shown [1] how studiously he drafted its rules after he himself had tested them and seen their observance by others. As early as 1846 he had drawn up basic rules which were to become the framework of his future constitutions. But since the task was vast and complex, as his dreams seemed to indicate, he had let things ride, after winning over his first co-workers, in the complete trust that the Lord would see to it that the congregation would gradually evolve and structure itself into a definite form under the test of time and experience. In fact, after forming a homogeneous group neatly united in mutual solidarity, he gradually added with their filial consent whatever rules their life, activities, and needs required. He had inched his way ever closer to his goal, but always with wise prudence. He never wrote a regulation unless he had to, lest it remain a dead letter and hinder progress; however, when a need arose, he unfailingly drafted a regulation. This is obvious from the additions, modifications, and changes he made in the rules before his trip to Rome and after he had consulted Pius IX in 1858.[2] After handing over the constitutions to the Pope, he hoped for the Holy See's speedy tentative approval—a *sine qua non* toward final approval, but the negotiations which had begun in Rome in 1858 had been interrupted by [Francis] Cardinal Gaude's death. Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni, after studying the rules of the Salesian Society, despite the negative opinion of some synodal examiners, had forwarded them with a favorable letter

[1] *See* Vol. V, pp. 457f. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 561, 576, 596f. [Editor]

to his vicar general in Turin for careful review before canonical approval. Divine Providence, however, had summoned the venerable archbishop to his reward, and the vicar capitular who took over the administration of the diocese was slow to render judgment.

Don Bosco's patience under these circumstances was admirable. Unruffled and indefatigable, he steadily went forward as a man who knew his mind. In August 1863, the constitutions of the Salesian Society were again sent to Rome. In reply, Don Bosco was directed to secure letters of recommendation from a number of bishops and especially from his own. Acting on this directive, [in September 1863] he petitioned [3] the vicar capitular of the archdiocese of Turin [for approval of the constitutions of the Salesian Society originally submitted to Archbishop Fransoni]. Then, that same month and the next, he busily sought letters of recommendation from several bishops. His petitions were mainly modeled on his request to the vicar capitular of Turin. He wrote other letters and made personal calls to explain why he sought recommendations. He also submitted copies of the rules for examination.

"As was his custom when important matters were at stake," Father Ruffino wrote, "he put his trust in the boys' prayers. The first letter of recommendation,[4] dated November 27 [1863], was from Bishop [Clement Mazzini] of Cuneo." It came at the beginning of the Immaculate Conception novena, which was always made very devoutly. The Ruffino chronicle treats us to a few details about this:

> At each "Good Night" Don Bosco gave a nosegay. The first was to offer prayers for the souls in purgatory. [A few days before] on November 25, eighteen-year-old Anthony Boriglione, an apprentice shoemaker, had died at Mirabello's junior seminary where Don Bosco had sent him at the end of September to recover his health while keeping himself busy with manual work. Don Bosco publicly stated that Boriglione was not the boy who he had said at the beginning of November would soon die; he added that the latter had already been warned, at least indirectly, to get ready.

[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The second nosegay was to speak Italian [instead of their own dialects]. Another evening the nosegay was to show respect to the clerics [who supervised the boys] by using the polite form of address instead of the familiar one when talking to them. This courtesy was to be extended especially to teachers, dormitory monitors, and the study hall assistant. The only boys not bound by this rule were those who had already formed the habit of familiarly addressing certain clerics who had been fellow schoolmates. This measure was necessary to make the ever increasing number of pupils abandon a familiarity which was no longer compatible with the respect due to the age and status of junior superiors.

At about this time too [December 1863] Don Bosco informed the provicar, Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, of the letter of recommendation he had received from the bishop of Cuneo. The canon invited him to bring it to the chancery and also asked him confidentially for news concerning the Chieri seminary. Don Bosco sent him the bishop's recommendation with this letter of his own:

Turin, December 6, 1863

Dear Reverend Father:

I am forwarding the letter of recommendation which the bishop of Cuneo graciously wrote for the Society of St. Francis de Sales. I meant to bring it personally, but since I find this impossible, I enclose it herewith.

You asked me to let you know whatever I may have heard about the Chieri seminary which could contribute to its moral welfare. To this end, I am enclosing a letter of the cleric Strumia, not because it contains anything serious, but that you may know what spirit animates some of these clerics. I would like this letter and others which may fall into my hands to serve you as a norm, with no harm at all to the writers.

Bellagarda was needed at the seminary and went. I felt gratified, but I cannot help telling you that the refusal to let him remain here places a burden on me. He was the one cleric whom I had requested for myself. After all, nearly all those who recently entered the seminary came from here. Now I shall be forced to appeal to bishops of other dioceses for clerics to supervise my boys. Fortunately, I find these prelates quite cooperative. Since the number of my clerics has dwindled considerably after the departure of those who were assigned to Mirabello

or had to go to the seminary, I trust that you will excuse my few remaining ones from the services they used to give the cathedral in the past few years.

Please accept a complimentary copy of *Storia Sacra* just off our small press. I pray that the Blessed Virgin will obtain lasting health for you from Her Divine Son. Please pray for me too.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

While Don Bosco awaited the return of the letter of recommendation, the provicar informed him, to his utter surprise, that he had not received it. Don Bosco immediately replied as follows:

Turin, December 8, 1863

Dear Reverend Father:

Please be so kind as to look again for that letter from the bishop of Cuneo; otherwise I shall have to search I don't know where. It is not on my desk. Possibly it may have been sent out with some other piece of mail—just where to I don't know. If that is the case, I trust it will be returned to me. Anyway, I am enclosing a copy.

Our clerics will report to classes tomorrow. If those in civilian clothes are not allowed to attend, I will be embarrassed, since it is too late to register them in other schools. However, we shall find a solution to this problem also.

It is always a delight to wish you the best of everything from the Lord.

Very gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

A major preoccupation of Don Bosco this month was to break down Protestant inroads into the Lord's vineyard. Since all the bishops, vicar generals, and vicar capitulars of the province were to gather in Turin to discuss the conditions of their own dioceses, Don Bosco prepared a memorandum [5] [describing Protestant proselytizing and submitted it to them on December 9, 1863]. Father John Cagliero made a copy of it for the Oratory archives with the following note:

[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

December 10, 1863

This memo in Don Bosco's own hand was entrusted to me for delivery to Bishop [Modesto] Contratto of Acqui on the occasion of the conference of bishops, vicar generals, and vicar capitulars of the Turin archdiocese on December 10 and 11, 1863.

Signed: Fr. John Cagliero

Besides the ordinaries of the province, also present were the bishops of Savona, Biella, and Iglesias. The conference was chaired by Bishop Contratto, who became episcopal dean after the recent death of the bishop of Saluzzo. The two main resolutions were to submit a memorandum to the Senate against a bill favoring civil marriage and to form a united front against new government demands concerning seminaries, as proposed by Minister Pisanelli in a circular dated September 13, 1863. The former resolution was acted upon in November 1864.

Don Bosco had completed this memorandum during the Immaculate Conception novena. In those very days a letter from Mirabello brought him new evidence of the esteem in which the school authorities held his co-workers. The Susa superintendent of schools had heard of Father Rua's literary talents and had offered him a professorship in the town's public secondary school. When Father Rua informed Don Bosco of it, the latter, knowing quite well his spiritual son's mind, replied:

Turin, December 10, 1863

My dear Father Rua,

Write to the superintendent that you are most grateful, but inform him that since you accepted the post of director of this junior diocesan seminary which was opened at the local bishop's suggestion, you cannot–for the present at least–accept the honored position he offers to you.

As regards your own glory, take a tip from St. Bernard: *Unde venis, quid agis, quo vadis?* [Where do you come from? What are you doing? Where are you going?] Meditated upon, these questions may still produce great saints, as they have done in the past.

I prayed for you and your sons on the lovely feast of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. I hope that She will keep you all under Her holy, powerful protection.

God bless you, dear Father Rua, your mother, the Provera family, and all your sons. Amen. I shall soon be writing again to tell you all the things I observed in the various visits I made to you in my mind on several days of the week and at different hours of the day. Pray for me and for your friends.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On the following day Don Bosco received a somewhat disappointing reply [6] from the Turin municipal authorities to whom he had applied seven months before for a subsidy toward the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. The well-advanced excavations for the foundations had been suspended for the winter. He had hoped to obtain a subsidy of thirty thousand lire, since it seemed very likely that the church would one day become a parish. [However, since the city policy was to subsidize only parish churches, the subsidy was courteously denied.] [7]

[6] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[7] This last sentence is a condensation of the reply sent to Don Bosco. [Editor]

CHAPTER 57

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

AFTER the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco asked Father Arrò to give the "Good Night" during his absence and then left with Father John Cagliero for his first visit to the Mirabello pupils. He acted on impulse, prompted by love, without notifying Father Rua in advance. It had been snowing heavily, and so, when they arrived at Giarole at nightfall and found no coach at the station, they had to seek lodgings in the village. It was eight o'clock when they knocked at the local rectory.

"Where are you from?" the pastor asked.

"Turin."

"Have you had supper?"

"Not yet."

"Where are you going?"

"Mirabello."

"May you be two of Don Bosco's priests?"

"Yes, we are," Don Bosco answered.

"And here is Don Bosco himself," Father Cagliero added, pointing to him.

The pastor instantly warmed up to them, for he had been anxious to meet Don Bosco. "I was just about to write to you," he said, "to recommend a boy of our village. If you don't mind, I'll send for his father." Meanwhile he had a meal prepared for them. The boy's father dropped in shortly afterward, and the lad, Louis Bussi, was accepted.

The following day the pastor pressed Don Bosco to remain because the roads were bad, but Don Bosco, who longed to pay a visit to the junior seminary, a visit that would be all the more gratifying because unexpected, exclaimed: "A little snow will not scare us!" and set out with Father Cagliero.

At the seminary they were received most enthusiastically. His visit was truly memorable. By a sixth sense which enables youngsters to discern genuine love, they could not bear to part from him. That evening he gave the "Good Night." Since a certain number of boys had come from the Oratory, Don Bosco repeated —especially for their benefit—what he had announced at the Oratory: that one of them would soon be called into eternity and that, therefore, they should all get ready with prayer. The next day, all made the Exercise for a Happy Death and went to Communion.

On Don Bosco's return, the Oratory boys anxiously awaited an account of his trip, as he had given them on other occasions; instead he postponed his narrative to another date. The [Ruffino] chronicle has these entries:

At the "Good Night" Don Bosco said: "I have something to tell you, but I haven't time now. I will only say that it is imperative for the boy who is to die to get ready. Pray!"

December 15. This evening, after giving the nosegays for the Christmas novena, Don Bosco urged the boys to imitate acrobats who, on the tightrope, keep their eyes on the balancing pole. Our balancing pole—he added—is the will to do that what is right.

December 16. Tonight Don Bosco spoke of the great mystery of redemption and paganism. He then went on, giving the etymology of the word "pagan" and commenting on it.[1]

The [Ruffino] chronicle makes no mention of any other "Good Night" during the Christmas novena, though it mentions letters he wrote to get help for his boys. One such letter was addressed to Marchioness Fassati:

Turin, December 22, 1863

Dear Marchioness,

I beg you to forward the enclosed note to Emmanuel, should you write to him during the holidays.

I received Countess Callori's package and thank-you note. I began the novena of Masses yesterday morning and will also tell the boys to pray for this spiritual need.

[1] This sentence is a condensation.

Dear Marchioness, we are in bad shape just now. Several times you hinted at some kind of help. If it is convenient, I shall pass by this evening. Whether you call it subsidy or donation, for us it is always charity which we gratefully receive to buy bread for our poor boys.

May God bless you and your whole family.

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

To the same end he wrote a letter to the Minister of the Interior, informing him that four boys recommended by his department had been accepted, and that a promised subsidy would be gratefully received. Such subsidy was granted.[2]

The chronicle continues:

December 26. Clerics and priests asked Don Bosco to tell them something of the future. He made these predictions:

"Before we keep two more feasts of the Immaculate Conception, Italy's political situation will be settled." He had said the same thing at Tortona in October in the presence of the bishop and several priests. To a question from some whether the time was to be computed from the forthcoming December 8, he had replied, "Three, three."

Don Bosco then went on: "We shall have war, plague, and famine. Possibly, though, by this the Lord may mean other things than we do, but that's the way He spoke." He also said that a solemn *Te Deum* would be sung here on earth.

The Asti vicar general and others sent him prophecies for publication. Don Bosco read them and returned them with a warning to beware of publishing such tales, adding that if they did, he would expose them for what they were.

As a matter of fact, the future of the Veneto region was settled in 1865, and a treaty between Italy and Prussia further proved the accuracy of Don Bosco's prediction.[3]

As for war, plague, and famine, events proved Don Bosco's prediction equally true. War broke out in 1866, and cholera in 1865, 1866, and 1867; famine swept Italy in 1866 and 1867 and was amply described by the contemporary press. A solemn *Te Deum*

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[3] This sentence is a condensation of details of European history. [Editor]

was sung in 1867 at the Vatican at the close of the centennial of the martyrdom of SS. Peter and Paul in the presence of more than five hundred bishops.

The Ruffino chronicle continues:

On December 26, Robert Teresio, a student, died at home (Lombriasco) at the age of nineteen, but his death was not the one predicted by Don Bosco.

December 27. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco told the boys that he wanted to leave them a thought for the closing of the year, but that it would not be the usual *strenna.* He spoke about a visit that King Agesilaus of Athens once paid to a school. As he was about to leave, the pupils begged him for a souvenir. Thereupon the king said, "Take care to learn only those things which will cause you no regrets in your old age."

December 29. News of Louis Prete's death at home in Agliano, on December 5, arrived today. He was about twenty years old and had been sick at home. In announcing the death to the Oratory community, Don Bosco commented, "Is Prete the boy I predicted would die? I do not say that he was or wasn't. All I do say is that in this house the boys always die in twos. I do not imply that it has to be so this time, but only that it has been so in the past. Whenever a boy died, another followed ten or fifteen days later. So let's wait and see if ten, fifteen, or twenty days after Prete's death another boy will die. Tomorrow evening I shall give you the *strenna.* The artisans too will be present. I want to be with you, but I also want to be with them at the same time. Therefore, since I cannot split myself in two, the artisans will come here. Meanwhile, think over this bit of advice: 'Never boast of what you know.' The more one knows, the more he realizes how ignorant he is. Socrates used to say: *Hoc unum scio: me nihil scire.* [One thing I do know is that I know nothing.] So be humble: first, by being convinced that you know nothing; secondly, by never using your knowledge for evil purposes; finally, by knowing what Jesus Crucified teaches us—to forgive injuries received, to forgive our enemies."

December 30. Today Don Bosco wrote this letter to his new pupils at Mirabello:

Turin, December 30, 1863

To My Beloved Sons
in St. Charles Junior Seminary at Mirabello:

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always. Amen. [Rom. 16, 24]

The tokens of filial love which you, my dear sons, gave me when I had the pleasure of visiting you, had made me determined to visit you again during these holidays, but as other duties keep me from doing so, I content myself with this letter which will disclose my fatherly concern for you.

First, I want to thank you for all you did for me, for your greetings and prayers. I also wish to thank you for the love you bear Father Rua and your other superiors. After leaving you, I returned several times in spirit, and so I feel I should tell you what I noticed in general and in particular. (Separately I am writing individual notes.)

I was quite gratified to see a more frequent reception of the sacraments, a more devout deportment in church especially at night prayers, greater charity in bearing with annoyances, and in many of you an honest effort to advance in knowledge and to fight your passions and evil thoughts. I observed all this with warm pleasure. But, if you let me, I must also tell you of many things which grieved me very much indeed.

I noticed several of you strolling into church seemingly unaware that it is a sacred place; too many of you sat totally distracted through sermons and left without a single resolution for your own spiritual good. I saw several mumbling prayers and come to the end of them unaware of having prayed at all; in fact, they mostly said no prayers. I spotted others squabbling or nursing anger and hatred for a long time against their companions when they could not get even with them.

Again, there are quite a number of you who dodge work as if it were a massive stone hanging over your heads. But what grieved me most was to see a few of you trying to introduce foul notions and foul conversation. St. Paul says that certain things are not even to be mentioned among Christians. I know also of some—very few, though—who (must I say it?) receive the sacraments unworthily.

This, my dear sons, is what I observed concerning the state of things at your junior seminary. Do you perhaps think that I am reproaching you? No, I am only writing to warn you, to encourage the good boys to persevere, the lukewarm to warm up to God, and the fallen to rise up again. I have many other things to tell you, but I'll do so on my next visit. However, I'll tell you now what the Lord wants you to do during this year to deserve His blessings:

1. Avoid idleness and be most diligent in your scholastic and religious duties. Idleness is the father of all vices.

2. Go to Communion frequently. If you only knew what a great truth this is! Frequent Communion is the main column sustaining the moral and physical world, preventing it from collapse.

3. Be devoted to Mary Most Holy; frequently call on Her. Never was it known that anyone who trustingly had recourse to Her was not promptly heard.

Believe me, my dear children, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that frequent Communion is a solid column upon which one pole of the world rests; devotion to Our Lady is the column which supports the other pole. Hence, I urge Father Rua and all the superiors, teachers, assistants, and boys to promote, practice, preach, and insist, with all the zeal that Christ's love may arouse, that these three recommendations be never forgotten. I have written them to you for God's greater glory and for the good of your own souls which are so dear to Our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

While assuring you that I will remember you every day in my Holy Mass, I commend myself to your charitable prayers. All the Oratory boys also ask you to pray for them and wish you all heavenly blessings.

May the Holy Virgin keep us always as Her own. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Be at ease about the boy who was to die. He was Louis Prete. But bear in mind that our boys always die in twos. There is another lad who desires to follow him into the land of the blessed.

Fifteen personal notes for young clerics and boys were enclosed with the letter. That same day, Don Bosco had New Year's greetings sent to the Minister of the Interior on behalf of the pupils he had sent to the Oratory.

During the entire month Don Bosco had been busy writing notes of thanks to friends and benefactors. He did not forget [Philip Foccardi] the religious article retailer[4] whom he had met in 1858:

Turin, December 30, 1863

Dear Mr. Foccardi:

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. You may be sure I will keep up my practice of recommending your store to all my friends who visit Rome. Daily I pray for you and your family and most heartily bless you all.

[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 553, 556, 600. [Editor]

Mr. Piola, the bearer of this letter, is a very religious friend of ours and wishes to pay you his respects.

Let us continue in prayer. The Lord is with us and hence we need not fear. Paradise will amply make up for everything. May the Holy Virgin keep us in God's holy fear. Amen.

Please remember me to Father Xavier Bacchi, Canon Bertinelli, and Monsignor Lenti. Tell them, please, that I love them very much in the Lord and ask them to pray for me.

Your friend in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Father Rua is well. He is [busy] preaching, hearing confessions, and directing a school with two hundred boys whom he wishes to turn into as many saints.

In all truth, the boys at Mirabello were not really two hundred that first year, but they were soon to surpass that number, which remained steady and even increased for many years. We make this point lest one may think—as some did—that Don Bosco inflated figures and facts when speaking or writing of his undertakings. He saw the future as already present. He had already foreseen the wondrous things we now see and shall continue to see in the growth of the Salesian Society and in the number of pupils. We are witnesses to this. Still, lest he sound like a prophet, he sometimes jokingly quoted a veteran school director who would exclaim, "If you have about a hundred pupils and say that you have a hundred, people will think that you have only fifty. Therefore, tell them that you have one hundred and fifty, and people will believe that you have a hundred."

We have finally come to the last day of the year—December 31, 1863. The Ruffino chronicle has this entry:

Tonight Don Bosco gave the yearly *strenna* to the artisans and students. He spoke thus:

"These days are marked by visits and the exchange of greetings. One year is ending and another is beginning. This fact makes us reflect that in the year which just passed we lost many friends, and that in the new one about to begin we know not what will become of us or how many other friends will leave us for eternity. This uncertainty is at the bottom of the restlessness that we see in the world.

"There will be grave upheavals in the world this year. I do not mean that they will affect our house, but they will surely affect the world, be they plagues, war, or other crises. Leaving that to the Lord, let us come instead to what concerns us directly. Last year I told you that quite certainly not all of us would still be living tonight—and so it is. Just think how many companions of yours have gone into eternity! During the past year we often said the rosary or the *De profundis* for one or another of them. We are still saying it now at the beginning of 1864. And, no doubt, many of us will not be around in 1865.

"As the new year begins, what shall I ask of you or promise you or suggest to you? As for a request, I can only restate the goal of this house which you see displayed in my room: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.* All I ask of you is your soul, your spiritual well-being.

"What can I promise you? I promise and give you all that I am and all that I have. All my thoughts and deeds are for you. I live for you and am even ready to die for you.

"What can I suggest to you? Listen carefully. Picture to yourselves a huge globe hanging at its poles from two columns. On one is written *Regina mundi* [Queen of the world] and on the other *Panis vitae* [Bread of life]. Notice, however, that the pole supported by the column *Regina mundi* is a little apart from it, while the other is closely linked to the column *Panis vitae.* People are walking in every direction on this globe. But those who are nearest the two columns enjoy a very brilliant light, while those in the middle of the globe, being farthest from them, are shrouded in darkness. Now I would like someone to explain what this means. For example, let so-and-so tell me! (*After a few somewhat garbled answers, Don Bosco went on:*)

"The globe symbolizes the world; the two columns symbolize the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. It is they who really sustain the world. Were it not for the Blessed Virgin and the Blessed Sacrament, the world would now be in ruins. Those who want to walk in the light—that is, along the way to heaven—must draw closer to these two sources of light or at least to one of them. Those who walk away from them move in darkness and in the shadow of death. [Luke 1, 79] This is what I suggest that you practice and urge others to practice in your own example, advice, and sermons. Be mindful that by devotion to the Blessed Sacrament I mean Communion, visits, short invocations, attendance at Mass, etc.

"If you want me to tell what to avoid, I say 'idleness.' Meanwhile, I want you always to look after your soul. To priests and clerics and assistants I recommend zeal and patience."

He was asked what the globe closely linked to one column at one pole and a little apart from the other meant. His reply was that one column held the world up by its own power, whereas the other only supported it.

Several asked for a personal *strenna* as he had given in previous years. He said he would not, adding: "I want all of you to help put into practice the general *strenna.*"

Thus ended the year 1863. Though he declined to give individual *strenne,* several boys told him of their own, as in the past. He was very pleased. Only one of them has reached us. It was Caesar Chiala's,[5] who, as we have already said, helped him with *Letture Cattoliche.* It was not a warning, but the description and acceptance of a rule of conduct observed by Don Bosco: *Interroga libenter et audi tacens verba sanctorum: nec displiceant tibi parabolae seniorum; sine causa enim non proferuntur.* [Willingly inquire after and hear with silence the words of the saints; and be pleased with the parables of the ancients, for they are not spoken without cause—*Imitation of Christ,* Book I, Chapter 5]

[5] *See* Vol. V, p. 521. [Editor]

CHAPTER 58

An Enviable Death

BY the beginning of 1864 the Society of St. Francis de Sales had increased to sixty-one members, nine of them priests. Among its new recruits were eight clerics, nine students, and four coadjutors. One priest and six clerics made their triennial vows.

For this chosen band of Salesians and for their pupils the new year was to be, as always, one of study and work, for this was the spirit which Don Bosco had infused into them. Witness this entry in the Ruffino chronicle: "Friday, January 1, 1864. School all day, ending at three-thirty [instead of four]. At 7:15 spiritual reading and Benediction. This is the timetable for all suppressed feast days."

Understandably, New Year's Day was to have been observed very solemnly, but the longer recreation periods occasioned by the feasts that preceded and followed it distracted [1] the boys from their studies. The more diligent ones, on completing their regular assignments, kept pressing their teachers for additional work. Later, on feast days they were granted an extra study period before Community Mass. For many years, the time between rising and Mass at 7:30 had been spent in tidying up and in going to church for confession. This same freedom was theirs during this additional study period. Such enthusiasm for study is clearly brought out in the Ruffino chronicle:

Singing classes have been discontinued this winter not only because of the very severe cold, but also because the gaslight failed. Love of study, however, has not abated. If a boy asks permission to get up early in the morning to study, Don Bosco usually grants it, but not before

[1] A reference to the feasts of the Epiphany (January 6) and of St. Francis de Sales (January 29). [Editor]

four. On February 4, since the clerics had to prepare for seminary examinations, the boys were sent out on a walk. There was some griping because this arrangement was contrary to custom and the pupils too had to get ready for exams.

Don Bosco's forceful example stimulated the boys to fulfill their duties. For him every moment was a treasure. At about this time he was overseeing the mailing of the January-February issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Papal Authority,* a catechetical instruction by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. . . .

During these days too he received a letter of recommendation [of the Salesian Society] from the bishop of Acqui. Since the Turin vicar capitular was late in sending it, though he had promised to do so, Don Bosco wrote and begged him to expedite matters.[2] He was also anxious to have these letters because the number of applicants to the Salesian Society was constantly on the increase, as we can see from the minutes of a chapter meeting:

On January 8, 1864 the following were admitted [as postulants] to the Society of St. Francis de Sales: Julius Barberis, Michael Bertinetti, John Baptist Bertocchio, William Garelli, Alphonse Finocchio, Francis Lambruschini, Simon Lupotto, Joseph Manassero, Lawrence Marengo, Francis Paglia, Louis Rostagno, and Dominic Vota.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's prediction of December 29: "Let's wait and see if ten, fifteen, or even twenty days after Prete's death another boy will die" was being fulfilled.

On January 3 [1864], Francis Besucco contracted severe bronchitis as a result of not having covered himself adequately in bed during the cold spell in a spirit of penance. His illness lasted but seven days—days of exemplary, patient, Christian resignation. He could breathe only with difficulty, while a persistent headache tormented him. Medicines brought no relief. On the fourth day of his illness, the doctor began to fear for Besucco's life. "My dear Francis," Don Bosco said to him to prepare him gradually for the end, "would you like to go to heaven?"

"Who wouldn't? But I must earn it."

[2] This last sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

"If you could choose between getting well again and going to heaven, what would your choice be?"

"I'd like to go on living for God, but I would much rather go to Him. But who can promise me heaven after all the sins I have committed?"

"I asked you because I took it for granted that you were sure of going to heaven. If that isn't so, I don't want you to leave us just now."

"How could I ever deserve heaven?"

"On the merits of Our Lord's passion and death."

"Do you think I'll go to heaven?"

"Of course you will when the Lord calls you."

"Then I accept," Besucco replied. Glancing at the bystanders and rubbing his hands gleefully, he went on, "I choose heaven. I want to go. Don't talk to me about anything else but heaven."

"I'm glad to see you so anxious to go to heaven," Don Bosco went on, "but I want you to be ready to do God's holy will. . . ."

"Yes, yes," he broke in. "Let His holy will be done in everything in heaven and on earth."

In his little biography of Besucco, *The Little Shepherd of the Alps,*[3] Don Bosco wrote:

On the evening of the fifth day I asked him if he had a message for anyone. "Yes," he replied. "Tell everybody to pray for me so I need spend only a short time in purgatory."

"What shall I say to your companions?"

"Tell them to flee from scandal, and always to strive for good confessions."

"And to the clerics?"

"Tell them to give the boys good example and good advice whenever they need it."

"And to your superiors?"

"I thank them for having been so good to me. Tell them to keep working for the salvation of souls. When I'm in heaven, I'll pray for them."

"And what do you have to say to me?"

The boy was deeply moved by my question. Looking steadily at me he went on: "Please help me to save my soul. I have prayed long for the

[3] *See* Chapter 67. [Editor]

favor of dying in your arms. Please do me this act of charity. Stay with me to the end."

I assured him that I would not leave him in health or sickness, particularly at the point of death. Then he brightened up and his only thoughts were to prepare himself for the Last Sacraments.

After receiving Holy Viaticum he made a long thanksgiving, and then, calling the bystanders closer, he requested them to talk to him of nothing but heaven. When asked if he needed anything, he merely replied, "Let us pray."

In *The Little Shepherd of the Alps,* Don Bosco adds:

After a while, seeing that he was quite at ease, I asked him if he had any message for his pastor. This perturbed him. "I owe much to my pastor," he said. "He did all he could to help me save my soul. Please tell him I haven't forgotten what he taught me. I won't see him anymore on this earth, but I hope to go to heaven and pray to the Blessed Virgin to help him make all my companions good so that one day I may meet him and all his parishioners in paradise." At this point he became choked with emotion.

When he had somewhat regained his calm, I asked him if he would like to see his parents. "I know I won't see them again," he replied, "because they are too far away and can't afford the trip, and in addition my father is working far from home. Please let them know that I die resigned, happy, and content. Tell them too to pray for me. I hope to go to heaven. I shall await them all there. Tell my mother. . . ." He could not go on.

Some hours later I asked, "Have you a message for your mother?"

"Tell her that God heard her prayers. Several times she said to me, 'My little Francis, I wish you a long life, but I'd rather that you die a thousand times than become God's enemy through sin.' I trust that my sins have been forgiven, that I am God's friend, and that soon I may enjoy Him forever and ever. O God, bless my mother, make her resigned to my death, and grant me the grace to see her and all my family in heaven, so that together we may enjoy Your glory!"

He would have gone on talking, but I urged him to keep quiet and rest. On the evening of January 8 his condition worsened and we decided to give him Extreme Unction. When asked if he wished to receive the sacrament, he answered, "Oh yes, with all my heart!"

"Is your conscience perhaps still bothered?"

"Yes! Something keeps bothering me deeply."

"What is it? Do you want to say it in confession?"

"It has always been on my mind when I was well, but I would never have believed it could upset me so at this point."

"Tell me."

"You can't imagine how much I regret that I have not loved God as He deserves."

"Don't worry about that. As long as we are in this world, we'll never be able to love God as He deserves. We only need do our best. Only in heaven can we love Him as we should. There we shall see Him as He really is; we shall know Him and enjoy His goodness, His glory, and His love. You are fortunate indeed because you will soon experience this unspeakable joy! Now get ready for Extreme Unction which will take away all remains of sin and even restore your health, if it is good for your soul. . . ."

During the sacrament, he insisted on reciting the *Confiteor* and the other ritual prayers, uttering a short invocation at each anointing. At the end he looked so tired and his pulse became so weak that we feared he was about to breathe his last, but moments later he rallied a little. Within the hearing of many bystanders he said to Don Bosco, "I have prayed much to the Blessed Virgin to let me die on a day sacred to Her. I hope it will be so!"

The following day, Saturday, January 9, was Besucco's last day on earth. He remained conscious until about ten-thirty in the evening when he approached his last moments. Abruptly, he moved his hands from under the coverlets and tried to raise them up. Don Bosco brought them down again to rest on the bed. Once more Besucco raised them with a radiant face, steadily gazing at a seemingly most consoling sight. Thinking that he might wish to hold the crucifix, Don Bosco put it into his hands. Besucco kissed it, put it on the bed, and again lifted up his arms as in a burst of joy. At that moment his face seemed livelier and ruddier than when he was well. Its beauty and radiance was such as to eclipse the infirmary lights.

Astounded and amazed, the ten bystanders kept their eyes riveted upon Besucco's face in deep silence. Their wonder increased when the lad, raising his head a bit and stretching out his arms as far as he could, as though trying to clasp the hands of a beloved friend, began to sing in a joyful, resonant voice:

Lodate Maria, o lingue fedeli [Praise Mary, ye faithful tongues]. He then made several attempts to raise himself up and succeeded. Devoutly clasping his hands, he again began to sing, *O Gesù, d'amore acceso, non Vi avessi mai offeso!* [O Loving Jesus, would that I had never offended You!] He looked like an angel.

To break the spell which enthralled those present, Don Bosco said, "I believe that at this very moment our Besucco is receiving an extraordinary grace from Our Lord, or from His Heavenly Mother to whom he was so devoted during his lifetime. She may be here to take his soul to heaven."

Besucco continued his song, but his words were now broken and intermittent, as though he were replying to some loving questions. Then he slowly fell back on the pillow, his marvelous radiance vanished, and the infirmary lights reappeared. His face seemed normal but without sign of life. Very soon, however, realizing that the prayers had ceased and that no one was prompting him with short invocations, he turned to Don Bosco. "Help me," he said. "Let's pray."

At eleven o'clock he again tried to speak, but could only whisper, "The crucifix." He wanted the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence at the hour of death, a favor he had requested many times. Father Alasonatti blessed him and began reading the *Proficiscere,* while others knelt in prayer. At eleven-fifteen, looking intently at Don Bosco, Francis tried to smile and then turned his eyes heavenward in a gesture of farewell. A few moments later, his soul flew gloriously up, as we have every reason to hope, to enjoy heaven's splendors.

Everyone's grief at the loss of so dear a schoolmate can hardly be described. Prayers were then and there said for the repose of his soul. The next morning, Sunday, all the boys offered their Communions, rosaries, Holy Mass, and the practices of piety of that day for Besucco's eternal rest. During recreation periods his schoolmates paid their last respects to his body. His features had become so handsome and so ruddy that he seemed alive. All declared that he looked like an angel, and they vied with one another in trying to get something that had belonged to him to keep as a precious relic.

At the "Good Night" Don Bosco spoke of Besucco's virtues,

as with deep emotion he repeated the boy's last words: "You can't imagine how much I regret that I have not loved God as He deserves." The effect on the boys was indescribable. The Ruffino chronicle goes on:

After the boys had gone to their rest, the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales held a general meeting. Don Bosco read an article of the constitutions on the purpose of the Society, and then went on to speak very movingly of the bond of charity which should unite all the members. He illustrated his talk with the simile of Ezekiel's chariot drawn by an eagle and a bull harnessed together, explaining that those who have a fiery temperament and feel the urge to race ahead should brake themselves to help their slower companions, whereas the cold and placid should bestir themselves and make an effort to pull harder. Asking for mutual support, he also spoke of the mutual charity which should join superiors and subjects.

On Monday, January 11, the boys sang a requiem Mass for Besucco and many went to Communion for the repose of his soul. Afterward, his classmates escorted the coffin to the parish church and to the cemetery. His cherished remains were interred in grave 147 in the western lot. After the boys' return, Don Bosco confidentially told a few that an artisan would die this same month and that two other Oratory boys would die within the next three months.

CHAPTER 59

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

DON Bosco was now completely exhausted; worse still, he was hemorrhaging from the mouth and had stomach pains. Nevertheless he cheerfully kept hearing confessions, which became even more numerous in the wake of his predictions. Likewise, he kept up his paternal admonitions in short talks to the community after night prayers. The [Ruffino] chronicle has this entry:

On January 11 [1864], the day of Besucco's burial, Don Bosco spoke to the boys at the "Good Night" as follows: "Besucco has used up the little spiritual fund we managed to accumulate. Now we must put aside more prayers for others. Am I trying to say that someone else is going to die? Exactly! One of you wants to finish the carnival season in heaven. Some are not too happy about my announcing these things and would prefer me to tell only the person involved so that he could prepare himself and the rest could be at ease. But no, I would be shirking my duty if I did not speak up. Sometimes I know that someone is to die but do not know who it is; at other times I know his identity but have reasons for not disclosing it."

Don Bosco gave other talks this month. The Ruffino chronicle records only a few, without, however, indicating the date.

1

In Turin, a teacher one day took his pupils out [into the countryside]. Along the way they met a herdsman leading cattle to pasture. One boy eyed the animals with the remark, "Aren't they lucky! No school, no homework, no lessons to worry about! We, instead . . . heaven help us if we don't toe the line!" He kept up his griping as though dumb animals were really better off than he. That boy is now a man and holds a responsible position in Turin. Since he attained it

only through his wealth, he often blunders so grossly that he can't keep from blushing at having made such a fool of himself.

I have told you this to show you what sad results you can expect if you chafe at regulations which help you acquire the knowledge you will need for your position in life. I'd like to ask you, too, if some of you aren't feeling the same way. May there not be among you someone who chafes at discipline and stays here grudgingly? I hope not, because I think that all of you like orderliness and want to do your duty. If there should be such a boy, then it would indeed serve him right to be led to pasture rather than to school. Therefore, make good use of your time so that later you can hold your head up high and be respected by your peers and be at ease at the point of death. Let your conduct give glory to God and joy to your parents and superiors. A lazy, unruly boy will be unfortunate too and a burden to his parents, superiors, and himself.

2

I need a permission from you, but it has to come from one and all—permission, for once, to let me give you a haircut. Your regular barber cannot do what I have in mind. If I were not to take this step, your hair would grow so long and tangled that it could no longer be clipped and would become a rope to drag you to the precipice. As you know, history tells us that when the Carthaginians were stripped of their weapons by the Romans, they cut their women's long hair and turned it into bowstrings. "What am I driving at?" you ask. Well, St. Teresa says that the soul too has hairs which, if not clipped, will turn into a rope. These hairs are the failings which we all have. At first they are tiny hairs, but if they are not corrected as soon as they become noticeable, they grow so strong that the devil can use them as ropes to drag you to perdition. If you let faults grow so strong, what can you do then? Can you cut a rope with scissors? Let me give you examples. A boy has an urge to smoke and does so on the sly. This is a tiny hair just starting to grow. If he listens to me and becomes convinced that smoking is harmful, if he resists the urge, that little hair has been clipped. But if he keeps up his habit of hiding his fault from his superiors, he will someday encounter a devil who will use that urge as a rope to haul him to perdition, not to mention the harm that his health will suffer in the meantime. Take another lad who likes to drink and tries to keep his trunk well supplied for an occasional sip. This is another hair. If he will let himself be guided by those who love him, he will understand that

such drinking, unsuitable to a well-brought-up boy, will stir his blood. That hair will then be clipped. But if he disregards this good advice and persists in his ways, he will become heated, get into trouble, and sometimes even become half-tipsy and fall into temptation. The rope is formed. Some other lad finds his happiness in eating, and so he stuffs himself with salami, fruit, and cheese at all hours. Of course, he keeps himself well stocked by writing to his parents. This too is a hair. If this boy will obey his superiors and eat moderately when he should, he will not get sick, but if he lets his appetite get the best of him, his full stomach won't let him study; little by little, he will hate school and will idle about. Idleness, the father of vices, is another rope. Some other youngster may occasionally yield to human respect as regards deportment in church, the Sign of the Cross, or frequent reception of the sacraments. He should realize that God knows what goes on inside his mind, and that this fear of what people may think will make him neglect his Sunday obligation and the observance of vigils after he leaves the Oratory. Here again is a rope, and what a rope it is! I could give you more examples. We always start with some little thing, but little things have a way of growing bigger and bigger. At first it is a lie and then a false accusation against others to clear oneself. The hair of disobedience gradually becomes the rope of foul conversation. Therefore, willingly cooperate with me in correcting your little faults. If you let me clip these tiny hairs, the devil will have no hold to drag you down with him.

3

This evening I will be very brief. Remember the precept that St. John the Evangelist used to give his disciples: "Love one another." Since it is not a mere exhortation, but a command, it would be sinful to do otherwise. Therefore, do away with insults, quarrels, envy, revenge, mockery, or bad will. Be good to one another. This will prove that you love each other like brothers.

What a wonderful earthly paradise this house of ours would be, how many acts of virtue the angels would admire, how many more blessings God would bestow upon us, and how happy the Blessed Virgin would be if we all resolved to be pleasant, helpful, understanding, and forgiving for the sake of charity. How fine it would be if everyone were to try to imitate Magone and Besucco in fostering God's love among his schoolmates and in drawing the unwary away from the danger of sin. Everybody can prevent foul conversation as Savio did; everybody can

in a kindly way cool the tempers of quarrelers and fighters. Why not make friends with some of the most careless fellows and bring them to confession or to a visit to the Blessed Sacrament? This is what made Savio and Besucco so dear to everyone. They used to pick a schoolmate to lead to God, and then they would set out to win him over. How? By patiently going over lessons with him, by lending him their own gloves when his fingers were stiff with cold, by putting their own coat about him outdoors, or by giving him something to eat with his dry bread. These are little trivial things, but they meant a great deal. With such little things quarrels were prevented, good advice was willingly received, grumbling ceased, and reminders to keep house rules were willingly accepted. Trivial things, indeed, but they can save many a boy who may otherwise go astray. Little things, but wonderful reflections of a kind, lovely, and holy soul. What a paradise the Oratory would be if everyone were to imitate Savio and Besucco! I would then be sure of success in making saints out of you all. This is my sole desire.

4

I'd like you to learn how to make honey as the bees do. Do you know how they go about it? First of all, they do not act independently, each on its own, but as a team under the direction of a queen bee whom they all obey in every detail. Secondly, they go from flower to flower to extract nectar, and only nectar.

Now let's see what this means for you. Honey is an image of all good things which stem from piety, diligence, and cheerfulness. These three things will bring you immeasurable joy, sweet as honey. But you must imitate the bees. First, obey the queen, which in your case means the house rules and your superiors. Without obedience, there is chaos and discontent, and nothing will be right. Secondly, the fact of there being so many of you together is a great help toward producing this honey of cheerfulness, piety, and diligence. This is the advantage of being here at the Oratory. Your number alone makes your games more joyful, chases melancholy from your hearts, encourages many of you to bear the burden of schoolwork, and arouses competition and the sharing of knowledge. The good example of many helps us also spiritually without our even being aware of it. You must also imitate the bees in choosing only what is good and discarding the rest. Each of you must find what is best in his companions and then try to imitate them in that. From one schoolmate you may learn to be humble and not brag so much about yourselves. From another who is very diligent or devout and recollected in church you may learn to be diligent, devout,

and recollected yourselves. Likewise, some other companion of yours may be self-denying, reserved in speech, candid, and so on. What must be done is to say determinedly: I want to make that virtue my own.

There is also another way of making honey. Get a small notebook and write your little secrets in it—suggestions from your director or teacher, impressions from sermons, examples which are more easily imitable, and important maxims from books that you yourself have read or were read aloud in the dining room, dormitory, or church. By this means you will soon have a rich store of honey, that is to say, of worthwhile knowledge, good works, and holy joy stemming from the peace within your heart.

These words came straight from a heart overflowing with indescribable love for those souls whom Divine Providence had entrusted to him. Instances of this love are countless, but we will limit ourselves to one which we find in the Ruffino chronicle for this period: "When I [Ruffino] handed him the half-year proceeds of my ecclesiastical benefice, he gave me back fifty lire for my parents, stating that he would do so every time. I had not asked him for anything, though one day, when he inquired about my family's financial condition, I replied that they were somewhat in need."

Dear Don Bosco! So much concern for others and so little for himself! For instance, he always insisted on eating the ordinary food of the community and would not allow anything better for himself. On this point Canon John Baptist Anfossi has this to say:

Though heedless of himself, Don Bosco was lovingly concerned about his co-workers. While teaching at the Oratory, I attended the university, and when I would return at noon, somewhat tired, I found it hard to swallow the polenta which sometimes replaced the soup. Don Bosco, no less tired than I, ate it himself, but seeing my reluctance to eat it, he would tell the waiter to bring me broth or soup.

When other teachers complained for the same reason, Don Bosco, recognizing their need, instructed the cook to serve them broth, but only to them, lest abuses should creep in. Meanwhile, he himself, by keeping to that fare, fell sick and had to go to bed, but he did not change his ways.

Along with sickness came other troubles and worries for Don

Bosco. Since the Mirabello junior seminary had been approved by the bishop [of Casale] and was under his jurisdiction, Don Bosco had neither sought the authorization of the Alessandria school superintendent nor informed him of its opening. The government policy in regard to junior seminaries was to give bishops a free hand in discipline and curriculum and not to require certified teachers, though it reserved the right of periodic inspections on health provisions and the observance of national customs and traditions. It so happened that the superintendent of schools, Chevalier Ambrose Damasio, one day encountered a group of pupils at San Salvatore [a small town in the province of Alessandria]. Upon inquiring what school they belonged to, he came to learn of the Mirabello junior seminary and promptly sought explanations from Father Rua, who in turn notified Don Bosco. Father Ruffino's reply on Don Bosco's behalf follows:

Turin, January 16, 1864

My dear confrere:

Don Bosco cannot answer personally because he has been in bed for the last three days with a stomach ailment. He is better now, and I think he will be up again tomorrow.

He is of the opinion that the bishop himself should write to the school superintendent stating that if [in the matter of certified teachers] no steps are taken against long-existing seminaries, it means that there are no laws requiring it. Anyway, if the superintendent is of the opinion that a bishop may not open a minor seminary, then he should say so. In that case the bishop will have to appeal to higher authorities to receive as a favor what has been denied by law. In this case, please beg the superintendent to speak benevolently of the school, should he be consulted about it.

Don Bosco is on good terms with the Alessandria inspector, and last Wednesday he wrote to him about elementary schools. He has also asked him to find out what the superintendent wants. The inspector's reply should be in any day. As soon as he can, Don Bosco will also write to the bishop of Casale.

Francis Besucco died a few days ago. The circumstances of his death were so edifying that Don Bosco has given thought to writing his biography.

The cleric Do is very ill; he has already received the Last Sacraments and may not have long to live.

Father Dominic Ruffino

The school superintendent had opinions of his own and refused to recognize the Mirabello school as a junior seminary. Father Rua had a hard time arguing with him, but he never took a step without first consulting Don Bosco, who wrote to him as follows:

Turin, February 5, 1864

Dear Father Rua:

It's a good idea for you to call on the superintendent with Count Radicati. The gist of your words should be this: that you regret having inconvenienced him and thank him for his kindness; that the bishop regards the Mirabello junior seminary as a continuation of the one which was closed or rather occupied by the military authorities of Casale; that there were many difficulties for its opening but that charity came to our aid; that the bishop asked Don Bosco for personnel and that Don Bosco supplied them at no charge and still lends their services free.

The Lord Himself will tell you what else to say. I have talked with A . . . and I think he will do better. You handled this problem well. I have already written to Father [Joseph] Crova about the things you mentioned.

I hope that I can pay you a visit in the first half of Lent. Tell your boys that I want them to be very happy that day. May God bless you, the prefect, teachers, assistants, and all the boys. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

We will conclude by saying that the lengthy negotiations with the Alessandria school authorities were successful. Later on, unfortunately, another superintendent—Professor Joachim Rho, a former schoolmate of Don Bosco at Chieri—refused to recognize the Mirabello school as a junior seminary and inexorably forced it to hire certified teachers. Other troubles and harm came Don Bosco's way at the very beginning also from the tax assessors, who imposed and maintained a heavy income tax on the modest fees paid by the students. But we shall in due time elaborate on these troubles which Don Bosco patiently bore.

CHAPTER 60

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

ON January 18 [1864], Marchioness Juliette Colbert of Barolo–better known as "Marchioness Barolo" [1]–died at her Turin residence, mourned by the entire city which had so benefited by her charity. Her last words were, "God's will be done now and forever!"

She had been Don Bosco's first benefactress.[2] A letter from Silvio Pellico [dated December 23, 1845 but] delivered to us only recently shows her great concern for Don Bosco during his early stay at the Rifugio [3] and her efforts to induce him to take as long a rest as necessary with full pay.[4] Their cordial relationship ended for the reasons we have cited in previous volumes.[5] For several years they had not met, nor had the Oratory received financial help from the marchioness, though she had invested her colossal fortune in works of charity.

Don Bosco was nevertheless grateful to her and sent the Oratory boys to the Rifugio to sing the Month's Mind Mass offered by Father Cagliero. Furthermore, both before her death and as long as he himself lived, Don Bosco continued his benevolence toward the nuns who were conducting the marchioness' institutions.[6]

On January 19 Don Bosco received the letter of recommendation of the bishop of Susa, but the one he eagerly awaited had not yet come. The vicar capitular of Turin, finding himself faced with

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 182ff. [Editor]

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 177, 194f, 276, 364. [Editor]

[3] An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *Ibid.*, pp. 184f. [Editor]

[4] For a similar generous offer *see ibid.*, p. 357. This last sentence is a condensation of the letter by Silvio Pellico, the marchioness' secretary. [Editor]

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 357ff. [Editor]

[6] We are omitting a letter from one of the nuns revealing the cordial relationship between them and Don Bosco. [Editor]

a problem which for obvious reasons deeply concerned the entire diocese, could not bring himself to oblige. There was another reason too: some of his respected priestly advisers looked askance at the Salesian Society. However, since some time before he had asked Canon Vogliotti to sell him a strip of land in Valdocco owned by the seminary and had received no reply, Don Bosco wrote to him again on January 26, urging him to come to an agreement. He took this occasion, too, to remind him of the letter of recommendation for the Salesian Society.[7]

During these days he received an encouraging letter from a great friend [who later became bishop of Fossano]:

Praised be Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

Rome, January 21, 1864

Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

I have just come from a lengthy audience with the Holy Father. He is quite well and has asked me to send you the blessing which I had requested for you and all your spiritual sons.

I also send you a hundred thousand good wishes and beg you to pray for me. If I can do anything for you, let me know before Lent. I'll do my very best to oblige.

Father Oreglia, in whose room I am hurriedly writing this note, asks to be remembered to you with his brother, the chevalier.

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Emilian Manacorda

The Pope's blessing and the hope of obtaining the prized approval of the Salesian Society further encouraged Don Bosco to go forward in constructing his new church. Work was scheduled to be resumed as soon as the weather allowed. Meanwhile, he busied himself seeking funds. Count [Louis] Cibrario, reminded by him, fulfilled a long-standing promise by getting him a subsidy of two hundred and fifty lire from the Knights of St. Maurice and Lazarus.[8] Don Bosco also petitioned once more—but unsuccess-

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[8] An order established by Emmanuel Philibert in 1434 through the merger of the military order of St. Maurice and the hospitalers' order of St. Lazarus. [Editor]

fully—the Turin municipal authorities for the routine subsidy grant to new parish churches under construction. It was a mere attempt with little chance of success, because actually his hopes were set upon the charity of the faithful.[9] Canon Lawrence Gastaldi was among the first to make him a generous offer:

Turin, February 28, 1864

Very Reverend Father and dearest friend:

My promise of a twenty-year, interest-free loan of five thousand lire toward the construction of a public church near the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales still stands. But what would you say if instead I offered you an outright donation of two thousand lire by June, providing that by that date work is already started on the foundations? Please let me have your reply by Friday, March 6, toward seven in the evening.

Respectfully and affectionately yours,
Canon Lawrence Gastaldi

While seeking funds, Don Bosco also kept trying to curtail expenses. On the strength of a promise which Commendatore [Bartholomew] Bona, the director general of railroads, had made to him some time before, he appealed to him for the free freighting of some two thousand tons of stone.[10] His hopes were also based on the fact that the Departments of Transportation and of Public Works regularly sent him orphans.

Don Bosco's preoccupations with his new church in no way disrupted the Oratory's ordinary, fine routine. While he was awaiting episcopal recommendations and construction funds, the boys were anxiously looking forward to the fulfillment of his predictions. On January 11 [1864], he had said that an artisan would die that month and two other pupils within the next three months. He had also told them that the artisan would end his carnival season in heaven.[11] Then, on January 29, he disclosed to the Oratory infirmarian [the names and] the time within which the two

[9] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[10] We are omitting the text of this appeal. [Editor]
[11] *See* p. 363. [Editor]

other pupils would die. This is confirmed by a valuable document in our possession:

Memorandum

Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, January 30, 1864

Following are the exact words which the Very Reverend Don Bosco, my superior and spiritual guide, told me the evening of January 29 [1864], before he retired: "Dear Mancardi, take note of this: before the end of next Lent, two artisans will go to heaven. They are Tarditi and Palo. Be alert!"

Ignatius Mancardi, *Infirmarian*

This memorandum, addressed to "Rev. Father Alasonatti, Prefect," was sealed and delivered to the prefect's office that same day. Confidentially informed of its contents, Father Victor Alasonatti wrote on the envelope: "Predictions by Don Bosco to be opened after Easter 1864."

The first proof of Don Bosco's veracity came that day. The Oratory records state: "January 30 [1864]. Stephen Cavaglià of Santena, eighteen, died today at the Cottolengo Hospital." The last day of the carnival season fell on February 9. We shall now draw from the Ruffino chronicle in minute detail:

February 1 [1864]. Regular classes throughout the week.

February 2. Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin. Blessing of candles.

February 3. St. Blaise. Blessing of throats.

February 4. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco said: "Let us close the carnival season with a triple celebration: two for us and one for others. The first celebration should be a material one with something extra at meals. We'll leave that to Father Savio. The second one should be spiritual—atoning to God for sins committed during these days. St. Gertrude once saw Our Lord with St. John the Evangelist writing at His side. When she asked what the Apostle was writing, she was told that he was recording the good deeds performed by devout Christians during this same period. The third celebration should be on behalf of the souls in purgatory through indulgences gained for them. One more thing

I must say, though I'd rather not. There are some among you (I use the plural) who want to go to heaven before Easter!"

Previously, but privately, he had also said, "Up to now death has taken its toll only from the students; now it will be the artisans' turn." He then added, "I am speaking of those who want to go to heaven before Easter."

February 5. Don Bosco wrote [to Father Rua] at Mirabello concerning the problem raised by the Alessandria school superintendent.

February 6. Twenty-seven clerics took their examinations at the seminary with the following results: one, *cum laude* (with praise); three, *peroptime* (above excellent); fifteen, *optime* (excellent); six, *fere optime* (almost excellent); two, *bene* (good). The boys' keen interest in the success of their teachers' and assistants' examinations by praying for them defies description.

During the last ten days of the carnival season the Oratory provided its own entertainment:

On February 7, Quinquagesima Sunday, the boys staged *St. Eustace,* a sacred drama in verse by Monsignor Allegro. It was a grand success. As Don Bosco wished, the whole performance ended at nine-thirty.

This excellent play had been produced only once before, in the Albenga seminary, and had since been forgotten. But Don Bosco won for it undying, well-deserved fame by having it staged several times, even in his other schools, and by making it available to the public through various printings. The audience at the Oratory's evening performances was drawn from the cream of Turin society and of neighboring towns. The guest list prepared at Don Bosco's request in 1864 for a Latin comedy and for other plays staged on the principal festivities carries two hundred and forty-five names and addresses. The guests were bishops and clergymen, noblemen, educators, government officials, bankers, professors, attorneys, doctors, notaries, judges, and Catholic journalists. The invitation included the whole family. Noteworthy among the guests were former Oratory co-workers, such as Father [Hyacinth] Carpano,[12] rector of the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains, Father John

[12] This zealous priest, ordained in 1844, came from a rather wealthy family. He selflessly worked for poor boys and was greatly liked by them. He proved a godsend to Don Bosco. *See* Vol. II, pp. 271f, 334, 389, 411; Vol. III, p. 472. [Editor]

Turchi,[13] professor at Valsalice, and Father John Baptist Grassino,[14] rector of the Giaveno seminary.

This list was kept updated at each mailing lest anyone be forgotten. Thus the Oratory boys enjoyed the carnival season with the leading members of Turin's society. The Ruffino chronicle goes on:

February 8. Rising was at six. Morning classes began a half hour later [than usual] at nine-thirty; the afternoon session was from two-thirty to four. There was no Exercise for a Happy Death because the previous one was made a short while before. Don Bosco, however, heard confessions in the evening. At the "Good Night," after urging all to receive Communion the next day, he added, "Let each one strive to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Not a long one; a four- or five-minute visit will do. I do not want you to miss your recreation." There was no singing class after supper. At first Don Bosco had said that there would be, but he called it off when he learned that several teachers were missing. He was anxious that on this evening the boys should all be together and not scattered throughout the playground.

February 9. Last day of the carnival season. After Mass there was an hour-and-a-half recreation period. At dinner we had soup, main dish, dessert, and wine. Right after, there was the piñata game, one for each grade, to make everybody happy. The names of those who were to break the piñatas were drawn by lot. At three we had church services: Vespers, a dialogued catechetical instruction between Father Borel and Father Cagliero, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The evening's stage play ended at nine. At supper the boys had soup, main dish, and wine. Night prayers were said in the dining room.

February 10, Ash Wednesday. The boys received their ashes. Holiday.

February 11, Thursday. Regular classes. Those who are to teach the day boys catechism during Lent eat half an hour earlier and then go to their classrooms. Resident students leave their classrooms at a quarter after twelve, fifteen minutes later than usual. During Lent, Latin I and II students have two additional weekly catechism classes.

[13] *See* p. 10. *See also* Vol. IV, pp. 199f; Vol. V, p. 80; Vol. VI, pp. 35, 257, 356, 506, 539, 573. [Editor]

[14] Father Grassino was a great help to Don Bosco from 1849 on at the Oratory itself, at the Guardian Angel festive oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, and at the Giaveno junior seminary where, unfortunately, a rift finally developed. *See* Vol. III, p. 396; Vol. IV, pp. 11, 23, 235; Vol. VI, pp. 419, 427, 590ff. *See also* pp. 86–90 of this volume. [Editor]

CHAPTER 61

First Steps toward Approval of the Salesian Society (Continued)

EARLY in February Don Bosco gave his attention to an important task he cherished, as we gather from the [Ruffino] chronicle: "February 9 [1864]. Today Don Bosco had a copy made of the rules of the [Salesian] Society to forward them to the Pope for approval." This was another step forward, but the last one would be taken only in 1875 when his Association of Salesian Cooperators would be put on a firm basis.[1] Meanwhile, the bishops of Mondovì, Casale, Cuneo, Acqui, and Susa also sent in letters of recommendation for the Salesian Society. Forced by necessity, Don Bosco again wrote to Canon Vogliotti:

Turin, February 10, 1864

Very Reverend Father,

Next Friday morning I am sure that I can safely forward important papers to the Holy Father. The only thing I am missing is the letter of recommendation [for the Salesian Society] which you gave me reason to expect. If you would give it to me, you would be doing me a double favor—the letter itself and its timeliness. Please forgive me for again bothering you.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The canon's reply enclosed the long-awaited recommendation.[2] Most gratified, Don Bosco assembled his chapter on February 11 to brief them on the success of his efforts and to consider several applications of pupils who wished to join the Salesian Congregation. The chapter minutes read as follows:

[1] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 60–77. [Editor]
[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

At its meeting of February 11, 1864, the Chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales accepted Bernard Ansaldi, Henry Bonetti, Felix Cerruti, John Grassi, and Peter Norza as postulants.

The next day, Don Bosco handed to a special messenger the bishops' letters of recommendation, a copy of the Salesian Society's rules with additional clarifications, and an explanatory letter to the Holy Father.[3]

At Rome, the envoy, acting as instructed, handed the documents to [James] Cardinal Antonelli with a letter from Don Bosco begging him graciously to submit those documents to the Pope. With the letter, Don Bosco also sent a memorandum concerning the Salesian Society to present to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The cardinal obliged, as he kindly informed Don Bosco in his letter of February 19, 1864.[4]

With customary graciousness, the Pope gave this matter his prompt attention and forwarded the papers to [Angelo] Cardinal Quaglia, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. In turn, the cardinal passed them on to the prosecretary, who on February 18, 1864 entrusted them to Father Angelo Savini, official consultor, for examination. The latter gave his written opinion on April 6, 1864, suggesting that he found Don Bosco's request for approval of the Salesian Society somewhat premature, considering that the Society was of recent origin and as yet had no adequate set of rules. He also made several recommendations.[5]

[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[5] The last two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 62

An Unforeseen Controversy (Continued)

WHILE the documents which Don Bosco had sent to Rome for the Salesian Society's preliminary approval were on their way, two important pieces of mail reached him from Rome. The first one, dated March 9, 1864, was from Father Angelo M., a Capuchin, and had to do with the "Concettini." This order of men —subject to the superior general of the Capuchins—had been founded under Pius IX for the care of indigent sick. After expressing his delight on learning of the institution founded by Don Bosco in Turin for the education of needy boys and orphans, the Capuchin priest went on to say that he would be most grateful if Don Bosco would tell him of possible vocations for the "Concettini" among his Oratory boys.

The second letter may be seen as a harbinger of Don Bosco's future mission in Rome. The Society of Diocesan Priests of St. Paul the Apostle, based at the Church of Santa Maria della Pace in Rome, officially granted Don Bosco a charter of affiliation with the Association of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on March 20, 1864, empowering him to enroll Catholics of all nations and conferring upon them all the spiritual benefits and indulgences which the Holy See had granted to the association's members.

At this time, Don Bosco was concerned with another problem—*Letture Cattoliche*—just as much as with his Congregation's approval. The publication's ownership was still a matter of dispute since Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea and Father Valinotti [his agent] had rejected Don Bosco's claims and uncompromisingly —though in good faith—contested his rights. On his part, Don Bosco, with habitual calm, unhurriedly sought to persuade the bishop of the validity of his arguments. On any count, he resolutely intended to reclaim what was rightfully his own.

We have already said [1] that in July 1862, after conferring with

[1] *See* pp. 96f. [Editor]

the bishop, Don Bosco arranged to have the printing done at the Oratory, though not exclusively for the time being. However, the former printshop, when needed, was to receive the manuscripts directly from him. Protests of course had been made, but he had soothed feelings by allowing the bishop's representative to retain administrative powers.

For the past two years the Oratory press had done the printing almost entirely at Don Bosco's expense. When he forwarded bills to Father Valinotti, the canon's usual reply was that he had no money on hand because he had had to clear up some of the large debts to the former printer, repay loans, and meet other incidental expenses.

Don Bosco patiently put up with this situation, while Joseph Buzzetti pored over the books. He found that from 1853 to 1857 the records were so jumbled that he could not make head or tail of the income, and that, on the debit side, a large sum was still due to the De Agostini Press for two full years' printing of *Letture Cattoliche*. From 1857 to 1864 the bookkeeping showed improvement. Buzzetti promptly reported his findings to Don Bosco and to Father Cagliero. Such poor accounting was due to negligence, ineptitude, and other reasons we need not now investigate, rather than to dishonesty.

In view of this state of affairs, and of the fact that Father Valinotti's debt to the Oratory printshop kept increasing, Don Bosco, seeing that he was running in the red, asked that the books be audited. The bishop of Ivrea took offense and absolutely refused to comply, arguing that no such affront should be leveled at his representative. Don Bosco was not accusing anybody; he only wanted his printshop to be paid for labor and material. He therefore reiterated his request, adding that if his right of ownership were not recognized and his just demands satisfied, he would refuse his collaboration and the use of his printshop. The other party countered that since Don Bosco had unilaterally taken it upon himself to have *Letture Cattoliche* printed at the Oratory, he would risk a lawsuit. When Don Bosco accepted the challenge for the sake of his boys' welfare, his opponents calmed down.

The controversy had been conducted on both sides verbally

through representatives rather than by letter. The bishop's secretary, Father Gallenga, Don Bosco's very close friend, tried to act as an intermediary between the two parties, but the bishop rejected any compromise which could in any way even slightly impair what he considered to be his proprietary rights. Canon [Angelo] Pinoli, the vicar general, was also very close to Don Bosco, but he naturally had to follow his bishop's instructions.

With matters at a standstill and the printshop sorely in need of money to continue printing *Letture Cattoliche,* Don Bosco, rather than initiate a demeaning and annoying lawsuit, decided on a drastic step. He postponed to a future date the problem of ownership and let the bishop's manager in Turin close up unfinished business without insisting on an audit—which would in any event have to be made at the main office [in Ivrea]. Then, without publicizing his measure or its reasons, he went through with his plan of a new start for *Letture Cattoliche* with exclusive Oratory management and production, beginning with the March issue, which opened the new year of publication. He gave advance notice of this decision to Bishop Moreno. The first issue under new management, entitled *Louise and Pauline*—a dialogue between a young Catholic lady and a Protestant maiden—was mailed out at the end of February. Its front cover carried this announcement:

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Distributors and subscribers are hereby notified that:

1. Effective immediately, all subscriptions, payments, inquiries, and correspondence concerning *Letture Cattoliche* are to be addressed exclusively to: *Letture Cattoliche,* Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, Turin (Valdocco).

2. *Letture Cattoliche,* now in its twelfth year of publication, will keep the same subscription rate and editorial policies. We also promise interesting articles, regular publication, and punctual mailing.

A review of the March issue was published in *Unità Cattolica* on March 23.[2] Two days later, Don Bosco issued a circular[3] to all subscribers and distributors, including those in France, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany.

[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The April issue, entitled *The Pontificates of St. Marcellinus and St. Marcellus, Martyrs,* again carried the important March notice on its front cover. . . . Thus after two years of patient negotiations with Bishop Moreno of Ivrea and Father Valinotti, his agent, Don Bosco finally gained full control of *Letture Cattoliche* whose management he entrusted to his own Salesians. Though he was now the *de facto* owner of *Letture Cattoliche,* the *de iure* dispute went on for three more years, until the original administrations' accounts were finally liquidated.

As Don Bosco was achieving this most important victory, he still had to provide for the sustenance of his community. Two letters of his [dated respectively March 15 and May 1864] [4] to Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres at Cuneo inform us that at this time several matters were keeping him quite busy—the acquisition of a farm by an outright gift, the sale of lottery tickets on behalf of a kindergarten, the procurement of a loan, and, finally, the sale to the state of two small homes he had inherited in the neighborhood of the Dora River, where an arsenal was to be constructed.

From time to time we bring these matters to our readers' attention to point out Don Bosco's earnest activity also in material affairs.[5]

[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[5] At this point we are omitting a letter from Don Bosco to the Ministry of Grace and Justice for a subsidy to the diocesan clerics residing at the Oratory. [Editor]

CHAPTER 63

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

WE can best verify the fulfillment of some of Don Bosco's predictions and still catch glimpses of the Oratory boys and of that hallowed home's events through February and March [1864] by following our faithful guide—the Ruffino chronicle:

At the "Good Night" on February 17, Don Bosco said, "Tomorrow we start St. Joseph's month [1] and I want all of you to put yourselves under his protection. If you pray earnestly to him, he will obtain any spiritual or temporal favor you need. An efficacious devotion recommended by St. Theresa to honor this great patriarch, the spouse of Mary and foster father of Jesus, is to dedicate to him the month of March, during which his feast is kept. I wish we could all do something as a group. As a start, I would suggest a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* in his honor either before or after your daily visit, I hope, to the Blessed Sacrament. If you care to do more, offer your Communions for that soul in purgatory who was most devoted to St. Joseph in this world. Say, too, some short invocations in his honor, for instance, in the study hall, 'St. Joseph, help me to make good use of my time during class work'; in temptation, 'St. Joseph, pray for me'; upon rising in the morning, 'Jesus, Joseph, and Mary, help me in my last hour.' And don't forget that he is the patron saint of diligent pupils. Pray for help in your exams."

February 24. Rising at 5:30. The assistants had their supper as usual at 7:30. Singing class was from 8:35 to 9:10.

During this last evening period, the Oratory took on an aspect all its own. Out on the dimly lighted playgrounds, often covered with snow or shrouded in fog, music could be heard on all sides —gay symphonies from the band, squeaks from beginners, rat-a-

[1] It was customary to start it on February 18 and close it with the celebration of the feast on March 19. [Editor]

tats from drummers, new polyphonic Masses or Vespers from the choirboys, and solfeggios from beginning choristers. Different groups were drilled in Gregorian chant under Father Alasonatti's direction. Scales, antiphons, and psalms could be heard separately or simultaneously, blended in an indescribable medley of sound. It reminded me of Holy Scripture: "All these, under their father's hand, were distributed to sing in the temple of the Lord, with cymbals and psalteries and harps, for the service of the house of the Lord." [1 Chronicles 25, 6]

February 25. Don Bosco said publicly: "For a few more days we shall keep saying a *Pater* for a sick companion of yours and then we shall switch to *De Profundis.* After a short while, we shall resume the *Pater,* and then the *De Profundis.*"

February 27. Peter Palo of Lagnasco, sixteen, died at St. Aloysius' Hospital. He had been at the Oratory only four or five months and was in poor health nearly all the time. It must be observed that Don Bosco had said before Lent that not just two but three boys would die before Easter.

The [Oratory] Chapter minutes carry this entry: "This evening, February 27, Joseph Mazzarello, Peter Guidazio, Joseph Dalmazzo, and John Delfino were admitted as postulants into the [Salesian] Society. Don Bosco gave the confreres the heartening news that just nine days after sending the rules to Rome, they had been delivered to Cardinal Antonelli, who then handed them on to the Pope. This augurs well for the approval of the Salesian Society." The chronicle continues:

February 28. Midyear examinations began today. Both rhetoric grades had a test paper instead of the usual class rating quiz. Classes began at 8:45. Professor Matthew Picco assigned the composition themes.

Oral examinations were held in each classroom this day on those subjects which were regularly scheduled. Very many have gone to confession and Communion during these days.

March 1. The Oratory of St. Francis of Sales has become affiliated with the Apostleship of Prayer, an association canonically erected at Le Puy (France) with the aim of praying for the whole Church and

the Supreme Pontiff in particular. Pius IX endowed it with indulgences in 1849 and 1861. Its director sent Don Bosco our certificate directly from Le Puy, where the Blessed Virgin is venerated under the title of "Our Lady of France." The shrine houses a huge statue of the Madonna, cast from the bronze of Russian cannons seized at Sevastopol.

March 6. Fourth Sunday in Lent. The feast of St. Francis de Sales was solemnly kept today. Originally scheduled for January 31, Sexagesima Sunday, it had to be transferred to this day because Don Bosco could not be present.

March 12. Sixteen-year-old Vincent Tarditi of Saluzzo died at the Cottolengo Hospital.

March 14. Louis Do, a twenty-two-year-old cleric and a member of our congregation, died at home in Vigone.

This year Easter fell on March 27. The chapter minutes have this entry: "March 15. Don Bosco summoned a chapter meeting. Secundus Merlone, Anthony Sala, Anthony Ghella, John Gandini, and Joseph Scappini were accepted as postulants." The chronicle continues:

March 22. The Easter holidays started today. The boys going home by train had to check with the Father or Brother appointed for each destination. Shortly before leaving, each pupil received two medals of Our Lady, and just before that the teachers dictated to their pupils these keepsakes from Don Bosco:

Things To Be Done at Home

1. My greetings to your parents, your pastor, and your schoolmaster.
2. Good example.
3. Attendance at church services with a prayerbook.
4. Communion on Easter Sunday.
5. Be back on the Tuesday after Easter. There will be a lira fine for each day's delay.

The boys remaining at the Oratory went for a walk every day except Good Friday.

Don Bosco's vacation, after he had prepared his pupils for their Easter duty on Monday of Holy Week, consisted in hearing the confessions of townspeople and in writing to benefactors between

church services. In the letters he enclosed holy pictures of Our Lady for their children with this autographed message: "May She shower abundant blessings upon you." One of these holy pictures went to the Fassati family, as we gather from this note:

Turin, March 25, 1864

Dear Madame Azelia:

Lest I keep forgetting, I enclose this holy picture in this letter. I hope it will call upon you the blessings of the Holy Father and of Almighty God.

May the Holy Virgin obtain health and grace for you from Her Divine Son. A happy Easter to you and to your father and mother. I ask all of you to pray for me.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The Ruffino chronicle continues:

March 27. Sunday of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, in the presence of several senior members of the congregation, Father Alasonatti opened the sealed letter which Mancardi, the infirmarian, had entrusted to his keeping [on January 30] [2] and read the names of Palo and Tarditi.

Thus reads the chronicle. At this time an Oratory boy was ailing—Joseph Pittaluga, a truly angelic, most fervent, and virtuous altar boy whom Don Bosco equated with Dominic Savio. On this same day, March 27, the Ruffino chronicle gives this information:

A month ago, Don Bosco asked Pittaluga: "Would you like to go to heaven?"

"Would I!" he exclaimed.

"But there is one catch," Don Bosco went on. "You'll first have to do a little penance." Some days later, Pittaluga had to take to bed on account of sciatic pains which he had never felt before.

This evening [March 27], in the course of a conversation, Don Bosco mentioned Pittaluga's sudden ailment and then remarked: "I

[2] *See* p. 373. [Editor]

have a feeling that this boy will not return to the Oratory. (*Pittaluga was about to return home to Tortona.*) His leg seems to be improving because the infection is coming to a head, but I am afraid that he will not recover."

Again, another boy—Siravegna—was in excellent health when he came to the Oratory, but nearly every time Don Bosco came across him, he would say: "Siravegna! Ask God to grant you good health!"

The boy, feeling fine, would always counter, "I don't need that grace!" Yet it was not long before a sudden ailment forced him to bed.

Thus reads the chronicle. On March 29, the pupils who had gone home returned to the Oratory—all except two, Francis Vicini and Paul Aiachini. Don Bosco had foreseen their deaths too. Both of these very fine boys were close friends of Father Dominic Tomatis, who was then a classmate of theirs and is now a Salesian missionary in Chile.[3]

One Saturday evening, all three left the study hall for confession and met Don Bosco as he was coming in from town. Resting a hand on Vicini's head, Don Bosco asked, "Are you a friend of Don Bosco?"

"Of course," Vicini replied.

"You want to go to heaven, don't you? All right, you have my permission."

"And you," he went on, resting his hand on Aiachini's head, "are you also Don Bosco's friend?"

"You bet!" Aiachini answered.

"You too want to go to heaven, don't you? Well, I'll let you go too."

He then turned to Tomatis. "How about you?" he asked. "Are you too Don Bosco's friend? After all, we two will have a lot of munching to do together."

Then, addressing all three, he asked, "Where are you going?"

"To confession!"

"All right, I'll just go up to my room for a minute and I'll be right down."

to recover, but on the evening of March 31 Celestine Durando

After the semester exams, Aiachini fell sick and was sent home

[3] Father Dominic Tomatis died in Santiago, Chile, on October 8, 1912 at the age of sixty-three. [Editor]

announced, "Your schoolmate, [Paul] Aiachini, died a saintly death." The following letter had given Don Bosco the sad news:

Orti, March 30, 1864

Very Reverend Father,

Death makes my hand shake as I write these lines.

Paul Anthony Aiachini, a lively pupil of yours, died peacefully in Christ at half past ten last night at Castelferro, where he had been taken six days ago in the hope that his native air might do him good. There, typhoid fever and galloping consumption quickly wore him down. God, His Creator, hastened to snatch him from this sinful world, but also from the love and hope of his parents and relatives.

How often did my dear nephew lament, "If I had known I was to die, I would never have left the Oratory, so that I could have the comfort of dying in Don Bosco's arms. He is truly a saint!" This, Reverend Father, somewhat sweetens my sorrow.

Dear Father, help the soul of this trusting lad by offering Mass for him. . . . I now close as tears are blinding me.

Yours sorrowfully,
Julius Aiachini

Distressed by his friend's death, Tomatis anxiously awaited Vicini's return, but in vain. Meanwhile, unknowingly following Divine Providence's plans, he was readying himself to do a lot of munching with Don Bosco. Having no intention of becoming a priest, he neglected Latin so badly that he failed, though he scored excellently in all other subjects. His uncle, Father Tomatis, a Jesuit, scolded him and made him realize the importance of Latin for all sorts of professions. Impressed, the very talented boy studied the entire Latin grammar in one month and passed his final exam under Father Celestine Durando with flying colors.

On returning to the Oratory in the fall, he was astonished not to find his friend Vicini. What could have happened? When Vicini told his father that he wanted to become a priest, the man declared that he would never allow it. Moreover, he did not let the boy return to the Oratory. Grieved by this decision, the unhappy lad began to waste away so rapidly as to move people to pity. After a careful checkup, the doctor told the lad's father, "There

is nothing physically wrong with him. His vital organs are quite sound. His illness is not physical. You must find out what the matter is."

The man understood. "Rather than see you pine away like this," he told his son, "I prefer that you go back to the Oratory."

Within days the boy was quite his old self again. But then his father began to stall, hoping to bend the boy's will. The lad said nothing for a time. When he renewed his request to return to the Oratory because he wanted to become a priest, his father countered sullenly, "Don't you see how you disgrace our family?" The youngster kept silent and shortly afterward relapsed into his former illness. "I tell you again," the doctor cautioned the father, "your son's illness is not physical. Only you can find a way to save his life." The fondly loving father finally yielded. He went to his son's bedside and again promised to let him follow his vocation. Better, he gave him permission then and there. "Too late," the boy whispered. "Call the pastor. I think I am dying. All I ask is that, as soon as I am dead, you write to the Oratory so that my schoolmates may pray for me."

Not believing that his son was critically ill, the man delayed until evening. By that time things looked so bad that he hastily called a priest. Vicini died peacefully, comforted by the Last Sacraments as he prayed.

At the "Good Night" one November evening, Tomatis heard Father Francesia tell of Vicini's edifying death and ask for prayers for his soul. At these words, as in a flash, Tomatis recalled Don Bosco's two predictions which he narrated to us and we faithfully reported. Other things too we might say, but we'll do so in due course. For the moment we shall only add that during the early part of this year, Francis Vicini witnessed an astonishing incident. One morning Don Bosco said Mass after the Community Mass. He did notice the empty ciborium on the altar, but thinking that there would be no more Communions, he began his Mass. At Communion time, two or three boys (including Vicini) went up to the altar rail. Glancing at them, Don Bosco took the Benediction host, broke it into three or four pieces over the paten and then began to give Communion to the boys. Vicini was first in line; next to him knelt Joseph Sandrone. Both Sandrone and the

torchbearer were surprised when ten or twelve other boys came up to the altar rail. Don Bosco again broke the particles of the Host and continued giving Communion. Amazingly, these pieces were as large as the first. The boys talked about this among themselves, but so accustomed were they to regarding Don Bosco as a man of wonders that they did not make much of it.

CHAPTER 64

Two Dreams: Fierce Crows and A Healing Salve

FOR over a month, the Ruffino chronicle tells us, Don Bosco suffered from a persistent eye ailment which forced him to wear dark glasses. Still, he kept working and urging his priests and young clerics to do likewise. "Courage," he said. "Let's work wholeheartedly for youth. Let us do all we can for God's glory and the welfare of souls. Up there a great reward awaits us, the same as promised to Abraham, 'I am . . . your reward exceeding great.' [Gen. 15, 1] At times we may feel tired, exhausted, or overwhelmed by ailments, but we must take heart because up there we shall rest forever."

And he would raise his right hand toward heaven in a gesture of full trust in the Lord. We now quote from the chronicle:

His co-workers often discussed with him the field of activities which Divine Providence would probably entrust to them. On one such occasion, on April 3 [1864], the conversation shifted to the possibility of one day conducting a boarding school for the sons of noble families. "Oh no," Don Bosco interrupted. "Not as long as I live! Never, if I can help it! If it were only a matter of administration, we might consider it. Not otherwise. It would ruin us just as it has ruined many illustrious religious orders who started out with the poor and ended up with the rich. The outcome was that they ran into envy, jealousy, and attempts to supplant them. Wealth and hobnobbing with the rich are common temptations. If we keep working for poor boys we shall be left in peace, if for no other reason than that some will put up with us in pity and others will perhaps praise us. No one will covet our possessions. They wouldn't care for our rags."

On April 4, Don Bosco notified the boys that their [annual] spiritual retreat would start on April 11. The gist of his talk was this: "To make a good retreat, you must be prepared. Unless you start making definite plans now, your retreat will be only a flash in the pan. 'I will catch up on

my sleep,' one may say, or 'I'll do my best to have a good time reading some interesting book or munching on something,' or 'I'll use my time to review some subject.' Others may say, 'I want to reap some spiritual fruit and think about my vocation.' This is the smart thing to do. What can we say of the others? What can we tell them? My dear boys, this retreat may very well be your last! Think of that!"

The retreat schedule was posted on April 11.[1] It was the last time the artisans made their retreat with the students. Increased enrollment [thereafter] necessitated scheduling two separate retreats. The preacher was Father [Ignatius] Arrò.

Don Bosco spent endless hours in the confessional. "In this ministry," Bishop Cagliero states, "his kindness to young and old alike was exceptional, unwavering, and admirable. Nearly all of us went to him for confession because of his ever benign, patient gentleness and charity. He was more indulgent than severe and encouraged us to trust in God's mercy, while he inspired His holy fear in our hearts."

The Ruffino chronicle continues:

At this time there was a boy at the Oratory named P . . . who would have nothing to do with sacraments or prayers. He was there by force. One day Don Bosco took him aside. "Why is it there is always a fierce dog snarling and snapping at you?" he asked him.

"I don't see any dog."

"I do! Tell me, how does your conscience feel?" The boy hung his head.

"Take heart," Don Bosco went on. "Come with me and everything will be all right." The youngster became Don Bosco's friend and is now determined to do good.

At the spiritual retreat's close on the evening of April 13, Don Bosco expressed his regret that some boys had not used it for the good of their souls. "During these few days," he said, "I saw all the sins of each of you as clearly as if they were written in front of me. There was some confusion only when a few, in making their general confession, tried to tell me their sins instead of answering my questions. This was a singular grace the Lord gave me during these few days for your own good. Now, most probably, the few who did not follow my advice will ask me whether I can still read their conscience, and the answer, unfortunately, is no. They have lost their chance!"

On April 14, Don Bosco gave the "Good Night" to the students and

[1] *See* Appendix 5. [Editor]

on the following night to the artisans. To each group he narrated two dreams which, he said, had astounded him. The first dream came before the retreat, the second after. He spoke as follows:

"On the night of Saturday, April 2, Low Sunday [2] eve, I seemed to be standing on the balcony watching you at play. Suddenly a vast white sheet hovered over the entire playground. Then came an enormous flock of crows which fluttered about over the sheet until they found an opening at its edges, dove under it, and flew into the boys' faces, plucking their eyes, ripping their tongues, and pecking at their foreheads and hearts! What a pitiful sight! Incredibly, though—I could not believe it—nobody cried or wailed. Everyone seemed to be numb and no one even bothered to defend himself. *Am I dreaming,* I wondered. *I must be. How else could these boys let themselves be butchered like this without even a whimper?* Soon, though, I heard a chorus of cries and screams, wailing and whimpering, as the wounded began to crawl away from the others. I did not know what to make of all this. *Perhaps,* I thought, *since it is Low Sunday, the Lord wants to show us that He will shield us with His grace. These crows may be demons.* My musing was suddenly broken off as some noise woke me up. It was daylight, and someone was knocking at my door.

"I was surprised on Monday when not as many as usual went to Communion. There were less Communions on Tuesday and very few on Wednesday when, halfway through the Mass, confessions were over. I decided to say nothing though, because I hoped that, with the spiritual retreat about to start, matters would be put right.

"Last night, April 14, I had another dream. I had been hearing confessions through the day, and so, as usual, I kept thinking of your spiritual welfare. I went to bed but could not sleep and just dozed for a few hours. Finally, when I did fall asleep, I seemed once again to be standing on the balcony watching you at play. I could spot those who had been hurt by the crows. Suddenly two personages appeared; one was holding a small jar of ointment, the other a wiping cloth. They immediately began caring for the wounded. As soon as the ointment touched the wounds, the boys were instantly cured. Several, though, refused to be treated and crawled farther back as the two personages got closer to them. What displeased me most was that there were quite a few of these boys. I made a point to jot their names down because I knew them all, but, as I was writing, I woke up. Since in my dream I had been writing their names, they were still clear in my mind. As a matter of fact, they are clear now, though I may possibly

[2] Now renamed Second Sunday of Easter. [Editor]

have forgotten some—very few, I am sure. Gradually I shall speak with those boys—as I have already done with some—and shall try to persuade them to have their wounds treated.

"Make what you wish of this dream. I am sure that no spiritual harm will come to you if you believe it fully. But please don't let it out of the Oratory. I am quite open with you, but I want you to keep these things to yourselves."

Meanwhile, as work on the new church had been resumed at the beginning of March, the excavations were completed, and the next step was to lay the foundations. At this point, it was found that the alluvial soil could not support so heavy a structure. Deeper excavations had to be made and piles sunk along the perimeter of the church. Though the additional expense was considerable, work went on steadily. On April 5 [1864], Don Bosco sent out an appeal which, at his request, was published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on April 12. *Unità Cattolica* summarized it in its issue of April 13.[3]

By the end of April, excavations and most of the pile driving were completed. Since everything was ready for the masonry work to start, Charles Buzzetti, the general contractor, invited Don Bosco to lay the cornerstone. In the presence of his fellow priests, confreres, and numerous people. Don Bosco performed the simple ceremony and then turned to Buzzetti to express his satisfaction. "I want to advance you something on this big job," he said. "It may not be much but it's all I have." Then he took out a small purse and emptied it into Buzzetti's hands. The latter—like the rest of the bystanders—was expecting a generous handful of gold coins. Imagine their bewilderment on seeing just eight miserable *soldi*. "Don't worry," Don Bosco similingly added. "The Madonna Herself will provide the funds. I am only Her instrument, Her treasurer." Then, turning to the bystanders, he concluded, "You will see!"

After looking over the plans, Marquis Fassati remarked to Don Bosco, "I wouldn't have the courage to tackle a project like this!" Since the outlay was estimated at over half a million lire, level-headed people kept asking how much cash he actually had on hand and what other sources of income he could count on. "I've

[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

thoroughly searched my desk," he would reply, "but I found only eight *soldi.*"

He believed that two hundred thousand lire would be quite sufficient, little anticipating that the total cost would be close to a million. Excavations and foundations had already cost him thirty-five thousand lire. This project was much discussed in town and drew crowds to Valdocco. All wanted to see for themselves, but not all were optimistic. "How will Don Bosco manage?" they asked.

"He will pile debts upon debts," some replied.

"Pius IX will send him money!" another declared.

"Maybe he found a treasure!" someone else exclaimed.

"He'll go bankrupt!" most of them concluded.

Everyone had an opinion. Undaunted, Don Bosco kept the work going. Masonry had barely been started when he received a letter from Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi, dated May 5, 1864, suggesting architectural modifications. The canon wrote again on May 7 from Bologna, where he had begun a mission in the cathedral, insisting that his suggestions be followed. Don Bosco obliged in part.[4] This matter settled, he sent out a circular and pledges to nearly every town and village of northern and central Italy.[5] We still have in our possession letters from pastors and other priests who promptly mailed in donations and pledges. For certain benefactors, he had used titles and deeply moving phrases such as: "Mary, Help of Christians begs Her faithful servant so-and-so to help Her build Her church."

To devoted and charitable ladies who had agreed to distribute circulars, he sent this note:

"Mary, Help of Christians begs Her devotee to do all she can to distribute the accompanying circulars and pledges and to collect the pledged funds. Our Heavenly Mother will be no less generous toward Her daughters now working in Her honor and will one day reward them in heaven."

Pius IX was among the first to send in a contribution. When Don Bosco acquainted him with the need of a church at Valdocco to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary and of his decision to go ahead, the Pope generously sent him five hundred lire, remarking that

[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

"Mary, Help of Christians was certainly a title that would please the august Queen of Heaven." He also granted a special blessing to all contributors, adding: "May our small but heartfelt offering find more generous imitators. May the Holy Virgin multiply Her blessings upon all who contribute to building the Lord's house. Let all strive to promote the glory of the Mother of God here on earth and thus increase the number of those who will one day surround Her in heavenly glory."

Unità Cattolica publicized Pius IX's donation in its issue of May 1, 1864.[6]

On June 21, 1864 Don Bosco was notified that another contribution of five hundred lire had been assigned to him from the government to benefit his festive oratories.[7]

Meanwhile the May issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Delightful Contemporary Experiences* by Father John Bosco was off the press . . . and the June issue, *The Gold Hunter,* was being readied . . .

[6] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 65

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

TURIN'S authorities were doing their utmost for popular education and kept a close watch over the progress of both public and private schools. On April 10, 1864, they asked Don Bosco to furnish statistics on the Oratory elementary school.[1] His reply, dated April 20, gives us detailed information on the Oratory setup. Father Dominic Ruffino of Giaveno, who taught the upper grades, was also principal of the grammar school department, which held day, evening, and Sunday sessions.

The day pupils, ninety in number, were divided into two sections, one taught by James Miglietti of Occhieppo. Evening pupils numbered a hundred and five in three grades; Sunday pupils totaled a hundred and eighty-five in four grades.

In addition there were four evening singing classes, conducted by Father John Cagliero, with a combined total of eighty-three pupils, and six classes in Gregorian chant with a hundred and sixty-one pupils. Finally, thirty boys were learning instrumental music under the direction of Francis Massa of Turin, a member of the National Guard band. They were supervised by Joseph Buzzetti.

After his courteous reply to the city authorities, Don Bosco had to absent himself for a few days, at the beginning of May, while the Oratory boys opened Mary's month with their customary devotions: spiritual reading, nosegays, and short invocations. The rosary continued to be said in the morning; Benediction was held at seven in the evening. We draw our information from the [Ruffino] chronicle, which goes on to record the highlights of this month. We now quote [from the chronicle]:

[1] We are omitting the official letter. [Editor]

On his return, Don Bosco resumed giving the "Good Nights" whenever he could. Here is one of them:

"I wonder if you are all keeping Mary's month properly. If the Blessed Virgin could speak through that statue, She would say that most of you truly love Her and fervently honor Her during this month. By far, these boys outnumber the less fervent. There are some who do something for Our Lady, but not much: all aflame one day, ice-cold the next. Alternately they offer Her nosegays and transgressions, prayer and irreverence, such as chattering and disturbing others in church. They are trying to serve two masters. There are some too who do nothing at all to honor Her. They don't swear because nobody is making them angry; they don't fight because they have nobody to fight with; they don't play in church, but neither do they pray. Again, there are others even more blameworthy. They not only do little or nothing at all in Mary's honor, but what they do is bad. They have no qualms about wriggling out of their prayers, about criticizing superiors, house rules, or anything else they don't like with companions of their own kind; they have no scruples about disobeying. To Her devotees the Blessed Virgin offers encouragement and a handsome reward. To those who do little She says: 'Do more! Are you afraid I shall not repay you generously?' To those who are doing nothing at all She says, 'Don't be so sluggish. Keep doing good and you'll be happy.' To the last group She says not a word, but, turning to Her Divine Son, tearfully begs His mercy for them."

On Sunday, May 8 [1864], Don Bosco called a full meeting of the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales. It was an important one because Don Bosco revealed something he had never before mentioned.

"I have summoned you all tonight," he said, "to tell you something about the origin and growth of our Society. Let me first say that I expect each of you to keep this confidential." He then told us how, as a young boy and later as a seminarian, he had looked after boys, realizing even then how much they needed help and how pliable they become when they see that someone cares for them. He described the beginnings of the festive oratories at St. Francis of Assisi Church, his chaplaincy at the Rifugio, his dismissal, the dreams (he called them visitations) concerning the Pinardi shed, his migrations to the Dora Mills, to the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains, to the Moretta house, to the Filippi meadow, and finally to permanent quarters in the Pinardi shed.[2]

[2] For all these places *see* the Index of Volume II under "Festive Oratory." [Editor]

He described how God had struck all who had opposed his undertakings.[3] He made known two dreams in which he had seen priests, clerics, and boys whom Providence would send to him. The first dream concerned the Church [of Mary, Help of Christians], bearing on its façade the inscription *Hic domus Mea; inde exibit gloria Mea.*[4] The second was about the rose-entwined pergola.[5] He brought out all the initial difficulties which he had overcome with God's help. He told us also how Archbishop Fransoni had exhorted him to insure the continuation of festive oratories [after his death] and how Pius IX himself had given him the basis of our Society[6] in 1858. "I told the Pope all that I have now revealed to you," he concluded. "No one else has ever known of it. You may remark, 'These things redound to Don Bosco's glory!' Not in the least! My only concern is that I shall have to give the strictest account about how I carried out God's will. Every step I took was in conformity with the design that the Lord revealed to me. All I have done so far had no other aim. This is the reason why I never let myself be cowered in the face of opposition, harassment, and frightening difficulties. The Lord was always with us."

This revelation deeply impressed all and engendered tremendous enthusiasm. The following day Don Bosco sounded a serious warning to the happy-go-lucky boys to put some sense into their heads. He spoke as follows:

"The school year is two-thirds gone, and I want what's left of it to be spent well. I think it advisable, therefore, to let you know what we intend to do to forestall surprise. I tell you everything because I want you to do the same with me. As is customary here, your teachers and superiors, except Don Bosco, will hold a meeting this month. 'Why?' you ask. To express their opinion about those who are unfit to stay here and who consequently will not be readmitted next fall. I hope there won't be any among you. 'Who would be considered unfit to stay?' you may wonder. I'll tell you. First, those who have done something serious, like disobeying, stealing, or some such wrongdoing. Occasionally, you may think that we are too forbearing with certain boys, too indulgent, too easy. Be patient; payday will come. If superiors sometimes bide their time, they do so because of parents, benefactors, or even the boy's own good.

"Equally unfit to remain here are those who give scandal by word and action and those who show they no longer wish to stay at the Oratory.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 225f, 262f. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 190f. [Editor]
[5] *See* Vol. III, pp. 25ff. [Editor]
[6] *See* Vol. V, p. 561. [Editor]

And who are the ones who don't like it here? Those who forever gripe about superiors' decisions, house rules, food, or the Oratory in general and those who sneak away from superiors, who do not care to study, or who cause damage. These boys are unfit to stay or return next year. We don't want anybody to stay here by force. Those who are here should be here because they want to be. They must prove this outwardly by showing themselves satisfied with their superiors' decisions. If Don Bosco were here to make money, he naturally would keep gripers and wrongdoers. But we do not seek money, and so I want you to be good, or at least to try to be good. We want you to be happy. As I say, I hope it won't be your lot to go home for the summer and receive a letter telling your parents to find another school for you. I do not want my words to worry you unduly. I just want to warn you. If anyone's conscience tells him that he deserves such treatment, let him straighten himself out and change radically for the better. Let him do his best and pray to Our Lady. Who knows? Such lads may yet spare themselves this shameful step."

[Thus reads the chronicle.] On May 10 a boy called on Don Bosco with a note of recommendation: "Count Cibrario heartily endorses the bearer's request. He is really deserving of the consideration you grant in truly needy cases. Count [Louis] Cibrario."

The count always treated Don Bosco with friendly, confident trust. Don Bosco did indeed admit the boy. He could not refuse a benefactor who had come to his aid on so many occasions, and who willingly used his good offices on Don Bosco's behalf with the king and civil authorities.

On May 14, 1864, *Unità Cattolica* praised a Latin play staged by the Oratory boys two days before.[7] The following evening, the chronicle tells us, Don Bosco spoke thus at the "Good Night:"

Early last spring [1863] in a town not far from Bologna a nine-year-old boy fell critically ill with typhoid fever. Neither doctors nor medicines could help him; he could not swallow. At most he had but a few hours to live. His parents, who loved nothing in the whole world as much as this child, were in despair at the thought of losing him. Suddenly a thought, surely inspired by the Blessed Virgin, flashed before the child's mother, who was a singularly pious, devout woman. She had read

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

what the illustrious archbishop of Spoleto—a prisoner for the past eight months because of his faith—had written of Mary's miraculous image venerated near that city. Immediately she realized that only Our Lady could save her dear child. With complete faith she went to his bedside and told him, "Promise Our Lady of Spoleto that you will visit Her shrine if She will cure you." With great effort the boy whispered his promise and immediately fell into a delirium. All he raved about was his trip to Our Lady's little shrine. He either wanted his clothes or thought that he was already on his way, or that he was venerating the sacred image at the shrine. Abruptly he became silent and lay motionless, seemingly dead. Then he shook himself as from a deep sleep, smiled, and looked about. Within two days he rallied so fast that he fully recovered. Overjoyed, his parents took him to the shrine to fulfill his promise. Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.

The chronicle continues:

May 21 [1864]. Today Charles Ghivarello, John Boggero, John Bonetti, and John Baptist Anfossi were ordained by Bishop Balma in the Vincentians' church in Turin. Celestine Durando was also ordained in Mondovì by Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi.

As work on the new church's foundations was in progress, Our Lady, Help of Christians continued to shower graces upon Her devotees. Among them was Countess [Felicity] Cravosio who wrote to Father Michael Rua in 1891 to describe Our Lady's cure of a severe nose hemorrhage in 1864.[8]

In May of this year [1864] one of the Oratory pupils had run away after committing a serious offense. Since he had not been reaccepted when his father brought him back, the boy's pastor interceded for him and induced the superiors to give him another chance. It was on this occasion that Don Bosco gave his boys one of those rare talks of his which convincingly justified the superiors' punitive measures, placed the blame where it belonged, and inspired a healthy fear in the other pupils of anything which would disgrace a well-brought-up Catholic boy:

"Twelve years ago," he began, "a fine boy left home to further his education in Turin. Sick at heart at his leaving, his mother sadly

[8] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

feared that her son might stray from the right path. The youth tried to allay her fears by promising that he would never forget her admonitions. When he returned home some time later, he was met with warm displays of affection, but he was no longer what he used to be. Bad companions and harmful books had corrupted him. His mother was only too soon aware of this. He was no longer obedient or wary of moral danger, and no longer received the sacraments. In her sorrow the grieving mother tried to correct him, but to no avail. He returned to his studies and his friends, leaving his mother to grieve and weep. She often wrote to him and lovingly warned him, but it was all in vain. In her distress she fell seriously ill. The news did shake the boy a little, but he soon went back to his old ways. On his return home, he felt sure that his mother would recover, but one night he was suddenly awakened by his sister's cry, 'Hurry! Mother is dying!' He dressed and dashed to his mother's bedside but she was already unconscious. His heart was moved. The thought that he had caused her such unhappiness and perhaps her death gripped and overwhelmed him. 'Mama, mama,' he cried, gazing at her through his tears and grasping her hand. 'Please forgive me. Tell me you forgive me.'

"He looked at her intently for some time; then he turned to the bystanders and asked distressedly, 'Did she say anything? Did she speak?' No one said a word because his mother's sole answer had been a death gasp. 'Mama,' he again implored in deeper agony, 'just say that you forgive me.' At that very moment his mother expired. The wretched youth was crushed by a tremendous weight. The thought that he had hastened her death haunted him constantly. He tried to distract himself with journeys and entertainment, but his dying mother's sad look was engraved on his mind. For the past six years he has not ceased complaining that he is haunted by it.

"We have a boy among us who will certainly be the death of his father. That poor man! You should have seen him this morning, begging us to be merciful to his son who had to be sent home because he could no longer stay here. His father came to my office and almost flung himself on his knees, imploring that his son be forgiven and readmitted. The boy was present, but stood impassive and uncaring, as if he were not involved. Witnessing the man's intense grief and his son's utter indifference, I realized that the scandal the boy had given was such that it should not be condoned. Still, tears rose to my eyes as I had to send father and son to Father Prefect. The lad's father kept begging everyone—teachers, assistants, even the doorkeeper—for help.

"My dear boys, remember that causing your parents to grieve is a

terrible thing. God's curse will fall upon those who make them weep.

"When that poor father got home, he implored his pastor so earnestly that he persuaded him to intercede. Thanks to him, the boy was readmitted on condition that he atone for the scandal given by taking his punishment and mending his ways. Can we hope that there has been a change of heart in him? Unless the Lord grants him that grace, this lad will run away again as soon as he gets a chance. Everyone was moved by his father's tears; he alone remained untouched. He may well be his father's death and his own ruin. Poor boy! We pity him. Let us pray that the Lord will soften his heart. His whole trouble began when he unluckily associated with bad companions who set him on the road to destruction. Only God's grace can change him. So, tomorrow and the day after, let some of you receive Communion for this misguided companion. The Lord may accept your charitable efforts and convert him. It would be a wonderful achievement for you."

CHAPTER 66

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

WE continue to draw from the Ruffino chronicle:

June 1 [1864]. The daily schedule has been revised. Rising is still at five and the morning schedule remains the same, but the afternoon now calls for a classroom study period from two to three; classes end at four forty-five; usual evening study, five-thirty to seven-thirty, followed by an optional reading period; singing classes, eight-fifteen to eight thirty-seven. Sunday rising is at five forty-five; Community Mass at seven-thirty; second Mass and sermon by Don Bosco at nine; study period at eleven. There is no study period between Benediction and supper.

Don Bosco generally lets us rise earlier to study, but not before four. He also readily gives other reasonable permissions but will not allow any change in the timetable without his knowledge, nor any transgression of house rules or neglect of directives meant to safeguard morals. He never omits to admonish or reprimand transgressors but does so very calmly. If he is upset, he refrains from reprimanding. Once he spent a whole night mulling over a letter of reprimand. In the morning, when he was about to write it, he thought, *I'm angry. This letter would not come from me but from my anger. This is no time to write.* So he let it go and busied himself with something else. During the day he often tried to write that letter but gave up. By evening he still had not written it; he realized that it was wise not to do so. He told me [Father Ruffino] why he had not written it.

June 2. Don Bosco's eyes have been bothering him for some months now. He has no hope for a speedy recovery, but has made it clear that he will not pray for a cure. The boys are praying, but there is no sign of improvement.

On Tuesday, June 7, Don Bosco told several people (and asked the priest who was giving the "Good Night" to say it publicly) that he wanted to put Besucco to a test. "If I am healed within three days," he

said, "it will mean that Besucco has gone straight to heaven; if not, then I'll have one reason less for my belief." Many felt that the test was somewhat rash and tempting God. Since the time limit was short, all anxiously awaited the outcome. Don Bosco had promised, or rather hinted, "If I give the 'Good Night' myself this Friday, it will mean that I obtained the favor."

On Wednesday, June 8, his eyes hurt worse; on Thursday they were still bad, but at noon on Friday there was some improvement. From two that afternoon till evening, he could read and write without spectacles. After supper, he came down for the "Good Night." All were instantly moved. "He's cured, he's cured," they whispered. He mounted the platform, greeted by general applause, and told us that he had obtained the grace he had asked for. As a proof, he looked straight into the gaslight—something he had been unable to do for a long time. The only trace of his ailment was a slight exterior inflammation. That night, however, he could not sleep, and the next day, Saturday, the first of the novena to Our Lady of Consolation, his eyes again gave him some trouble. The next day he felt fine again. On Sunday Don Bosco ended his sermon by saying, "I want to stress one thing this morning. I have read of how many people die and have myself seen many die, but I have never yet seen anyone who regretted at that moment that he had done too much good or who felt happy that he had led an evil life. The reason is obvious, and you should never forget it, my dear sons. Evil may please momentarily, but it leaves us nothing but remorse. On the contrary, the good we do, not only gladdens us then and there, but also gives us a lifelong feeling of contentment. Which of the two will please us more at the moment of death? Fear or, at least, worry of God's dreadful punishments will worsen the distressing remembrance of evil done; our good deeds, instead, will assure us of a heavenly reward. Therefore, do not let the devil deceive you. Smart though he is, he can still blunder terribly. After leading us into sin, he tries to make us see its hideousness, hoping to dishearten and discourage us from rising again. Dear boys, turn the tables on him. Have you lost heart? Make a good confession and you will instantly regain the glory that you lost as God's children. Your sin will never again be held against you. Have you lost God's grace? One word to your confessor will help you regain it. Tell the devil: 'If sin now makes me ashamed, disgusted, and remorseful, how will I feel at the point of death? What will happen to me if I appear like this at God's judgment seat?' "

That evening Father Arrò said at the "Good Night": "Today is the second day of the novena which recalls the finding of Our Lady of

Consolation's miraculous image. For tomorrow I suggest this nosegay: Three Hail Mary's for the grace of complete trust in your superiors."

Around this time Don Bosco gave a proof of his affection for Father James Bellìa who as a boy had helped him in the Oratory's early days and had been one of his first four clerics.[1] Bellìa's mother died on June 10 and was buried in Pettinengo (Biella). She had regularly gone to Don Bosco for confession and had helped him in his projects. Don Bosco agreed to draft her epitaph.[2]

June 13. At the "Good Night," Don Bosco spoke about Our Lady of Consolation's novena:

"I have something very important to tell you. I wonder if any of you can give me a reason for what I am going to say. Ever since the devil sneaked in among us in the guise of an unclean animal, I have noticed a considerable decrease in the reception of the sacraments. A certain coldness in the house—which is not yet general—is fast becoming so. In past years, this novena was marked by great fervor, but this year nothing suggests any special effort to honor Mary. Is there no way to rekindle this fire? I don't mean in the dormitories or in study hall, but in your hearts. Might Don Bosco have the secret to kindle it again? Yes, I do, and it never fails. But first I must be able to reach everyone's heart—as already I do with many—in order to remove one thought and put in another. The thought I would like to implant is this: 'Son, you have but one soul!' The thought I would like to root out is: 'Don't expect to save your soul by living in sin!' If I could reach your hearts, I am sure that I would succeed in kindling a tiny fire of God's love, hatred of sin, and a desire to receive the sacraments. Such a fire could reform the whole house in general and each of you in particular. Tomorrow I would like each of you to pause for a moment and ask yourself: *What have I done so far for my soul? Just now how do I stand in God's sight? Were I to die, where would I go? What are my plans for the future?* This is tomorrow's nosegay: 'Think these things over for a few moments in church after meditation or spiritual reading.' "

June 14. Don Bosco announced that the Exercise for a Happy Death would be held this coming Thursday. He then added: "We have many reasons for doing it well: to obtain good health from God, help to pass examinations. . . . Then, too, one of us will not be able to make it again. Who? It may be I, it may be one of you! At all events, it will be one of us! You are wondering. I could tell you, but not just now.

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 102, 385, 435; Vol. IV, pp. 10, 161, 410. [Editor]
[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

I will only say that you will know in good time. When that happens, you will say, 'I never thought he would be the one to die!' "

On June 15, after hearing confessions for several hours both in the morning and in the afternoon, Don Bosco spoke to the boys as follows: "The day before yesterday I gave you something to think about. Really, we should meditate on that all the time. If we were to remind ourselves that we have but one soul and that, if we lose it, it would be lost forever, do you think that a boy would keep his conscience in sin? I know that boys are generally thoughtless, that at times they do wrong with inconceivable lightmindedness and then sleep for a long time upon a horrible monster which could tear them to pieces at any moment. Is there anything to alert us to this danger? Yes, the thought of death! I shall have to die one day. Soon or late? Will it be a slow death or a quick one? Will it be this year, this month, today, tonight? What will happen to my soul in that fatal hour? If I lose it, it will be lost forever. Tomorrow we shall make what we call the 'Exercise for a Happy Death.' We have so many reasons to make it well! Since we could not have it last month, let's make it more earnestly now.

"We are making the novena of Our Lady of Consolation. Let us win Her protection by putting ourselves in God's grace. We need God's help if we want health of mind and body and success in our exams. To obtain these favors, let us go to Mary, but let us remember that to deserve Her intercession, we must show that we are Her true sons who hate sin and keep it at a distance! She will generously grant us temporal and spiritual favors; She will be our guide, our teacher, our mother. All God's gifts come to us through Her.

"Once, St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi saw all Our Lady's devotees in a boat piloted by the Queen of Angels. The wind howled and the sea raged, but the little bark sailed serenely along. Another saint had a vision of two ladders extending to heaven, one red, the other white. On the top rung of the first ladder stood Our Lord; on that of the second, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Many tried to climb the red ladder, only to fall off after three or four rungs. Repeated tries fared no better. No one could make it to the top. They were advised to try the other ladder; they did and quickly climbed to the top. Remember, it is almost impossible to reach Jesus without Mary's mediation. Therefore, entrust everything to Her, especially your soul. Do what I say: obey promptly, cheerfully, fully. Let your superior's will, his mind, and his sentiments be your own. Let's be one in heart and mind to love Mary and save our souls."

The Exercise for a Happy Death was held on Thursday morning, June

16. As customary there was a little extra at breakfast. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco spoke thus:

"This morning you made the Exercise for a Happy Death. As long as you were in church I was happy, but my happiness ended the moment you came out. Several of you were sporting snouts like swine. This means that these boys either did not make the Exercise for a Happy Death or made it badly. What I am driving at is this: those whose conscience bothers them should set things right during this novena of Our Lady of Consolation. You know that this is my advice at every novena. Those whose consciences are in order should thank God and pray for holy perseverance because only 'he that shall persevere unto the end shall be saved.' [Matt. 10, 22] A great saint said, 'A reward is promised to all who begin but is given only to those who persevere!'

"Another thing: feel entirely free in your personal devotions. I earnestly wish that you would stop making fun of companions who visit the Blessed Sacrament or pray before and after study periods and so on. You may have your own opinion on these matters, but do not despise others or make fun of them lest God punish you. Be careful not to give nicknames. . . ."

As he was about to retire for the night, he said to me [Father Ruffino]: "Tell so-and-so that he must translate these words correctly: *Lupus rapax* [a ravenous wolf], and this other fellow: *Olim angelus, nunc sus.* [Once an angel, now a pig.]

Don Bosco continued giving the "Good Nights" on the following evenings:

June 17, 1864

I address myself to those who revere, love, and frequent the sacrament of Penance. It is a fine thing to do. Outside the Oratory you will often meet people who do not value this sacrament as you do. Don't be surprised! Suppose a drunkard has fallen asleep on the edge of a cliff and you shout into his ears that he is in danger of falling over. Do you think he'll listen? You'll never get through to him because he is drunk and can't understand his danger. It's the same with many people. They are drunk with sin or worldly cares and cannot see the dangers besetting their soul. To help them see, one would have to tear these people away for a while from their daily tasks and cares and give them medicine to free them from attachment to pet sins. In other words, they should hear the Word of God. If they did, they too would see that confession is a marvelous thing and they would realize how necessary this sacrament is to ward off dangers from their souls. Indeed,

what is lovelier or more consoling than confession? What greater help could the Lord have given us? As long as we have a mortal sin on our conscience and don't confess it, we are doomed to hell. It won't do to say: "I don't have to go to confession; I'll do that when I'm old." In the meantime we may be hanging over the horrible abyss of hell, and it is God's sheer mercy that holds us up. Were we to persist in offending Him, He might become indignant and let us plunge into perdition.

June 18

You might like to ask how often you should receive Communion. Listen. When the Israelites were in the desert, they ate the manna which daily fell from heaven. Now, the Gospel tells us that the manna was a symbol of the Eucharist. We should therefore partake of it every day, as long as we are here on earth. The forty years spent by the Jews in the desert are but a symbol of life. When we too reach the Promised Land—heaven—we shall no longer need manna because then we shall see God and possess Him for all eternity.

The early Christians received Communion daily. The few who could not had to leave at a certain point of the Mass. During the first three centuries, no one attended Mass without receiving as well. Later, the Council of Trent made known the Church's wish that all the faithful attending Mass should receive the Eucharist. And indeed, if bodily food is needed daily, how can we survive without spiritual food? This is what both Tertullian and St. Augustine said. "But," you will ask, "*must* we receive daily?" No, there is no such law. Our Lord desires it, but does not command it. Still, considering the proper preparation and thanksgiving you should make, I'd like to give you a piece of advice quite suitable to your age, condition, and devotion. It is to talk this over with your confessor and do all he tells you. My personal wish is that you go to Communion daily. Do I mean a "spiritual" Communion? No! The Council of Trent says: *Sacramentaliter!* In conclusion, this is my advice: If you cannot receive sacramentally, do so spiritually.

But before letting you go to bed, I would like to rid you of a false notion quite common among the young—that one has to be a saint to receive often. This is a lie, a fraud. Communion is not primarily for saints but for those who *want* to become saints. It's the sick and the weak who need medicine and food. How happy I would be if I could kindle in your hearts that same fire which Our Lord brought to this earth. *Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur?* [I came to cast fire on earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?—Luke 12, 49]

June 19

Tomorrow is the feast of Our Lady of Consolation and I wish you to entrust the outcome of your examinations to Her. I must stress that, since our school has been legally approved, this year's exams will be carried out as required by law. Therefore, no one is to look for favors. There will be no undue severity, but no leniency either. Examiners will be fathers, but judges too. There will be even less chance of leniency in matters of conduct. Therefore ask the Blessed Virgin to help in your exams. Personally, I hope that you will all be promoted so that you can enjoy your summer vacation to your own delight and your parents' as well.

I will now give you a nosegay. Ask the Blessed Virgin for the grace to receive Communion frequently and worthily. I do not say that you must all receive Communion tomorrow—no, only that you prepare to receive worthily. Try to imagine that the Blessed Virgin Herself will give you the Sacred Host. No one would dare to strike at the heart of Jesus while He is in Mary's hands.

June 20

Tomorow is the feast of St. Aloysius. Though we shall externally celebrate it at a later date, tomorrow is the anniversary of his death [and entrance into heaven]. Undoubtedly when we keep the external feast, we shall ask him for favors, but should we need some special grace on the day he left this earth, I'd like you to ask for this one—detachment from the things of earth.

It may not seem so important to you because boys are generally not very attached to money; if you have a *soldo,* you spend it on cherries. Yet this grace has much to do with you too. By "detachment from things of earth" I mean detachment from questionable people, from unlawful pleasures, from too sentimental friendships, and from foods and beverages which can occasion gluttony. I mean even detachment from clothes lest they make you show off and look like vain, silly dandies. It would indeed hurt you to be attached to such things. Therefore, ask St. Aloysius for this grace. How nicely the hymn *Infensus hostis* describes his detachment from worldly vanities. Ask him to detach you a little from these things and lift you up. I wish you would imitate fledgling birds as they prepare to leave the nest. They perch at its edge, flap their little wings, and try to rise. They test their own strength. Do the same; flap your wings and try to rise to heaven. Don't try it from the top of a tree; you might plunge to the ground. No, start with little things, with those things that are necessary for your eternal salvation.

I want you to make use of two spiritual wings—devotion to the Blessed Virgin and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. These two wings, these two devotions, you may be sure, will soon help you raise yourselves toward heaven. When birds fly off, they go upward, not downward. Do the same. Beware of flying downward—that is, don't practice these two devotions with worldly aims, such as to win your superiors' esteem or fool your companions. How happy I would be if I could kindle in you a spark of this great love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Look, my words may sound ridiculous, but no matter. To achieve this goal of mine, I would be willing to crawl and lick the ground from here to Superga. It is absurd, but still I'd be ready to do it. My tongue would be in shreds, but it wouldn't really matter because I would then have so many young saints.

June 21

One thing I have very much at heart is that you try to love each another and despise no one. Let everyone without exception share your company and games. Do away with some dislikes which you can't explain yourselves. Perhaps you look down on some companion of yours because of his manners, clothes, mediocre intelligence, unpleasant looks, or uninteresting conversation, but don't you know that God bestows His gifts as He wills? Is it that boy's fault if God gave him less than He gave you? You are being unfair to him. This happens pretty often. If such a boy comes around, we make ourselves scarce and leave him there in shame. If he is by himself, no one goes near him. Is this charity? Listen, well-mannered Christian boys have a duty to welcome all and to be courteous to all. Be polite, therefore, and do not take off when such a companion approaches. Be considerate and let him join your company or game. There is only one exception to this, and I want you to keep it clearly in mind. I have said that you should welcome everyone, but now I say: If you know that a companion of yours habitually indulges in foul talk and tries to lead you into sin, run away from him when he tries to come near. Leave him alone if he is alone. You need not be courteous or kind to him, just as you are not obliged to go close to someone stricken with the plague. This is the thought I leave you tonight: Be cordial and courteous to all, except to those who indulge in foul conversation.

At the "Good Night" on June 22, the day before the eve of St. John the Baptist's feast, Father Arrò, speaking of the gratitude the boys owed to Don Bosco, stressed two things:

1. Gratitude should not be restricted to material benefits, just as charity is not restricted to feeding the hungry. It should be shown for intellectual and spiritual benefits as well.

2. Gratitude should not stop at people we are directly indebted to, but must be shown to God whom they represent, because through them God bestows His favors on us.

He went on to say: "All who follow God's inspirations resemble in many ways the saints they are named after. This must be a particular blessing from these saints. Therefore, I exhort you to be worthy of this blessing by loving your patron saint, by praying to him, and by striving to imitate his virtues."

The Oratory kept the name day of its benefactor and father, Don Bosco, with the usual enthusiasm. At the "Good Night" on June 25, he addressed the community as follows:

Something happened here in Turin last March to show us the vanity of this world's goods. A woman had a son who was her joy and treasure, a handsome young man of twenty-eight, studious and good-hearted. But he did good mainly to gain men's praises. He eagerly sought the Cross of SS. Maurice and Lazarus. Through his insistent requests and the recommendation of friends, he finally won an award and immediately wrote to his mother—no less ambitious than himself—to give her the good news. She promptly traveled to Turin from her country village to share the happy moment of her son's decoration. But unfortunately things turned out quite differently. The official notification was to be delivered to him on Monday in Holy Week, but three days before, the unfortunate woman had a fatal stroke. He, in turn, received the long-awaited official letter, but before the actual conferral of the decoration he caught pneumonia and died within a few days. *Sic transit gloria mundi.* [Thus does worldly glory slip away.]

June 27

I'd like to talk to you every night so as to give you advice to help you also when you go home for vacation. Once a man came from a distance to ask Father Cafasso what he should do to overcome his evil inclinations. Father Cafasso's answer was quite brief: "Subdue them." The man went away satisfied. I decided to put this advice to the test and always found it quite effective. Some people think that they can pacify evil passions by giving in to them. This is a mistake. If a man has

the dropsy, the more he drinks the thirstier he becomes. Our evil inclinations are like snarling dogs. Nothing will satisfy them. The more one panders to them, the more they demand. An alcoholic may think that he will satisfy his craving by getting drunk, but it will only make his craving all the stronger. Do you want to control overindulgence? Fast! Do you want to overcome laziness? Work! Do you want to banish evil thoughts? Control your sight, taste, and hearing. Give up certain kinds of talk and books. This is the only way you will still your passions, be victorious, and enjoy peace of mind.

On June 29, the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, the Oratory solemnly celebrated also the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga with the traditional procession.

CHAPTER 67

Another Heartwarming Biography

DURING this year [1864] Don Bosco spent many afternoons at the Convitto Ecclesiastico discussing moral theology with his good friend Father John Baptist Bertagna, and readying issues of *Letture Cattoliche.* Toward the end of June, besides the two biographies already mentioned,[1] he finished writing a brief life of [Francis] Besucco, *The Little Shepherd of the Alps,* putting his own fatherly heart into this description of his beloved pupil's virtues. The booklet's frontispiece carried the boy's photograph with his last words as a caption: "I die with the regret that I have not loved God as He deserves."

After telling how Francis had written to a friend of his to urge him to go to confession weekly, Don Bosco went on:

While I highly praise Besucco for this, I most heartily urge everyone, especially youngsters, not to put off choosing a regular confessor, and not to change him unnecessarily. Always going to different confessors, as some do, is an error; similarly, it is unwise to have one confessor for certain sins and another for more serious ones. Those who do so are within their rights, but they will never have a sure, knowing guide. Would one go to a different doctor each time he is sick? A new doctor could hardly diagnose his illness and prescribe a proper remedy. Should this little book be read by educators, I would strongly make three suggestions:

1. Let them zealously inculcate frequent confession as the mainstay of youth's stability, and make it as easy as possible for their pupils to receive this sacrament.

2. Let them stress the importance of choosing a regular confessor and not changing him without necessity. Let them also provide enough confessors to choose from and make it clear not only that everyone is perfectly free to change his confessor, but also that it is a thousand times better to do so than conceal a [mortal] sin.

[1] *See* pp. 381, 395. [Editor]

3. Let educators frequently remind their pupils of the great seal of confession. Let them clearly state that the confessor is bound by a fourfold seal: natural, civil, ecclesiastical, and divine, and that for no reason whatsoever, regardless of the cost—even death—may he reveal what he has heard in confession or use the information for his own purposes. Likewise, let them explain that a priest may not think about what he has heard in confession, that he will not be surprised at anything the penitent may say, and that he will not lessen his affection or esteem for him, but rather that he will esteem the penitent even more for his sincerity and trust. As a doctor is glad to discover a patient's ailment because he can then prescribe the proper remedy, so too will the confessor rejoice because, as a spiritual physician, he will be able to heal our spiritual wounds by absolving us in God's name.

I am convinced that if these matters are properly stressed and explained, our young people will greatly benefit morally. The evidence clearly indicates what a wonderful boost to morals the Catholic Church possesses in the sacrament of Penance.

Besucco's biography—like that of [Louis] Comollo,[2] [Dominic] Savio,[3] and [Michael] Magone [4]—was a great success. It was purposely low-priced to make it accessible to as many young people as possible. On this score, Father Dominic Ruffino left us the following report: "One day Don Bosco reprimanded the [Oratory] printshop manager for the price he had set on Besucco's biography. The manager countered that it had been priced as all other *Letture Cattoliche* booklets. 'All I want,' Don Bosco rejoined, 'is that we spread wholesome publications. Money is secondary. We still haven't understood each other. You know that Don Bosco needs money and you want to help, but I realize the need for good books and care little for money.' "

Hardly had he finished this biography than he received two circulars from the superintendent of schools in Turin. The first, dated June 3, 1864, was a questionnaire on the physical education program which had been recently mandated in all schools. The Oratory had only parallel bars, see-saws, swings, and some other such things, but the active running games, so popular with the pupils and so much more wholesome, amply made up for

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 155f; Vol. V, pp. 1f. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 76–80. [Editor]
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 597. [Editor]

scanty playground equipment. Financially unable to provide more, Don Bosco tried to obtain athletic equipment from the government. He did not succeed on that occasion, but, as we shall see, he eventually did get what he wanted.[5]

The second circular, dated June 10, 1864, directed all private schools to submit an overall report by the end of July. Such report would in turn be forwarded to the Department of Education not later than August 10. This directive raised suspicions about impending plans against church-affiliated schools.[6] In fact, the anticlerical press was then advocating the suppression of teaching religious orders, while Minister Pisanelli constantly kept taking hostile measures against the Church. For instance, overstepping his authority, he had attempted to secularize seminaries [in January 1863] and had actually closed one at Caltanisetta; then [in June] he had forbidden religious orders to accept novices. Suspicion among Catholics was heightened when, on July 20, Minister [Michael] Amari ordered the shutdown of two secondary schools affiliated with the Bergamo seminary, while harassment of two diocesan boarding schools in the same province went on unabated to force a closure. Furthermore, on September 13, Minister Pisanelli sent a circular to bishops demanding a detailed scholastic and financial report on their seminaries and on the number of ordinations within the last ten years. He also required a history of each seminary from its foundation to the present. Such outrageous demands came to naught when the cabinet fell on September 23.

The Church had again been attacked on April 28 when General Della Rovere, Secretary of Defense, submitted a bill to the Chamber of Deputies calling for the abolition of the clerical draft exemption. It was passed on July 8, but since the Senate adjourned on the 16th, discussion on that bill was postponed to the next session.[7]

[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[6] These three sentences are a condensation. [Editor]
[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 68

Gleanings from Oratory Life (Continued)

THE wheel [Don Bosco had seen in his dream on the night of May 1, 1861] [1] was beginning to turn. For some months now, both the pastor and the city officials of Lanzo had been negotiating with Don Bosco for a boys' school.

At the summit of a hill cut off from other Alpine spurs by two rivers, where three valleys meet, stood an ancient Capuchin monastery which at the beginning of the 19th century had been closed down by the French government. When Napoleon I fell, the Lanzo municipal authorities confiscated the property and used it for a day and boarding school which flourished for some fifty years. Eventually a decline in enrollment forced the school to close down. In 1864 plans were made to reopen it. Father Frederick Albert, the saintly apostle of those valleys and actually of all Piedmont, was the first to suggest Don Bosco. He was grieved to see his young parishioners steadily drifting away from their faith, and he realized that he could only stem the tide and bring them back to the sacraments through a mandatory religious instruction given in school and supplemented by Sunday instructions. He had already made several calls at the Oratory to discuss this all-important matter. Father Arrò had supported his insistent request, and Don Bosco finally promised that he would accept the obligation. Meanwhile Father Albert contacted the municipal authorities and persuaded them to study the project. After lengthy discussions a basic agreement was reached and a contract drawn up.[2]

After the feast of St. Aloysius, Don Bosco went to Lanzo and looked over the premises, accompanied by Father Frederick Albert and the mayor, Mr. Paul Tessiore. Father Angelo Savio had checked the school building some time before, and his report had

[1] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 530–44. [Editor]
[2] We are omitting its details. [Editor]

not been very encouraging. Save for a few bedrooms and the classrooms, the abandoned structure needed repairs. Don Bosco, however, being very anxious to open another house even at a sacrifice, did not withdraw his offer. On his part, the mayor promised to make some repairs, while the pastor undertook to add three small rooms by making some alterations on one side of the roof above the vestibule. Then and there Don Bosco was satisfied. In 1851, as we have already narrated,[3] he had climbed that summit with Joseph Brosio, and after viewing the gorgeous panorama he had exclaimed, "What a fine location for a boarding school!"

On June 30 [1864], at a special town council meeting, the contract was signed by Don Bosco, the mayor of Lanzo, and two council members and was then forwarded to the prefecture for approval.[4] Don Bosco returned to the Oratory.

On the evening of July 4, the Chapter met and admitted Spirito Rossi and Stephen Orsi as postulants. At about this time too Don Bosco gave his Salesians a conference, which Father Ruffino summarized in his chronicle as follows:

Obedience is not only the sum total of spiritual perfection; it is also the easiest, safest, surest, and quickest way of growing in holiness and gaining heaven itself. St. Teresa was so convinced of this that she used to say that, should all the angels unanimously tell her to do one thing while her superior ordered her to do the opposite, she would unhesitatingly follow the latter. "God Himself," she said, "through Holy Scripture, tells us to obey our superiors and thus remove all danger of self-deception." St. Aloysius is said never to have transgressed even the least school regulation, having personally admitted that he had never disobeyed his superior's slightest directive or order. Can we say as much? The reason why obedience is not scrupulously carried out is because its great worth is unknown.

Listen to this incident in St. Dositheus' life. A noble, conscientious youth who greatly feared God's rigorous judgment at the end of life, he became a religious to prepare himself for death. Poor health would not let him follow community routine, such as rising at midnight for Matins or subsisting on the common fare. He decided to make up for these deficiencies by most promptly and diligently carrying out the most

[3] *See* Vol. IV, p. 189. [Editor]
[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

menial monastery chores that the superior entrusted to him. At his death five years later, Our Lord revealed to the abbot that Dositheus had received the same reward given to the hermits St. Anthony and St. Paul. When the abbot disclosed this to his monks, they were skeptical. "How could a man," they asked, "who never fasted, and who was reared in gentle comfort, receive the same heavenly reward as those who for fifty, sixty and more years had borne the austerities, penances, privations, and rigors of religious life? What have we gained over Dositheus with all our toil and hardships while he had an easy time looking after guests?" Through the abbot the Lord replied, "You do not know the true worth of genuine obedience. Within a short time, through this virtue, Dositheus earned more heavenly merits than those who sacrificed and toiled hard."

This monk's obedience was total: mind, will, and action. He was of one mind with his superior, willing what the superior willed; he carried out his commands promptly, cheerfully, and exactly. It was this perfect obedience which earned him such a splendid reward. We can now realize how much we lose each time we choose to follow our own whims, or every time we transgress a rule, neglect our duties, grumble, criticize, or disapprove of a superior's judgment.

[Thus reads the Ruffino chronicle.] During this latter part of the school year, Don Bosco gave similar admonitions and advice to his pupils. Of his several "Good Nights" the Ruffino chronicle records only this one:

Some time ago the bishop of Saluzzo kindly admonished a man, but this wretch took it so badly that he decided to revenge himself by poisoning the bishop. One day, at a solemn celebration, this man invited the bishop to dinner. During the meal, the butler coaxed the prelate to taste a choice wine, saying that it was extraordinary. "Indeed it is," the bishop exclaimed after sipping it. "I don't remember ever having tasted anything like it." On hearing this, the other guests too asked to sample it. The butler, however, had gotten rid of the bottle, as instructed, right after serving the bishop, and did not oblige. The guests were deeply offended. They did not know how lucky they actually were. Shortly afterward the bishop was seized by abdominal pains and died.

On reading this, I thought that it was a fine illustration of what happens to youngsters. Heaven help them if they always got what they want. How often they would get themselves poisoned. This applies

particularly to modesty. Some youngsters like to stay around certain companions or stick to certain friendships, regardless of their superiors' disapproval. I'll give you an example. Someone, already tainted with evil, hints at something bad. Sure enough, the simple ones get a hazy idea of what it is all about and, fired with curiosity, start asking questions. The answers they get from those who do the devil's work will hurt them. These foolish fellows have taken up the poison. Had they only remembered what Dominic Savio did, had they followed his example, they would not have been so tricked. Once, when Dominic was invited for a swim, he replied, "I'll ask my parents first."

"Don't!" his companions replied. "They won't let you."

"Then I won't go with you," he countered.

My sons, heed what your superiors forbid you. If you suspect that they would disapprove of what you are about to do, don't do it. If you come across a book, think: *Would Don Bosco let me read it?* Your conscience will tell you. If a companion slips you a note, ask yourselves: *What would my superiors think of me?* Tear it up instantly or, better still, hand it over to the superior in charge. This will show your good will. Never answer such notes. If you notice a group of boys guardedly whispering and keeping a sharp lookout for superiors, shun them like the plague. Poison and death are in their midst. Remember, this poison need not cause eternal death instantly, but it is always deadly. One may rise again by a good confession, but the poison's after-effects are horrible: remorse, spiritual boredom, weakness, new evil inclinations, deplorable weakness of relapsing into sin, bitter memories, fear of God's punishments, greater difficulty in doing one's duty, occasionally disgrace and ill repute among companions. Think of this before getting into such trouble. Abide by what your superiors tell you without trying to hunt out the reasons. If they forbid something, just say: *That's poison and death. I do not want to die.*

Meanwhile Don Bosco directed his attention to the boys' final examinations, perhaps checking their scholastic achievements against those of public school students. A reply from the school superintendent to a letter from Don Bosco dated July 10 reveals the latter's intentions:

Turin, July 13, 1864

Regretfully I cannot oblige because Circular 149 of the Department of Education states that the test papers you request are to be made available only to public schools and to certified private schools.

Thank you for your invitation to attend the awards ceremony of your institute. I plan to be present unless hindered by other duties.

Francis Selmi, *Superintendent of Schools*

In the margin of this note Don Bosco wrote: "Send a reminder the day before."

Two days later, Friday, July 15, Louis Vallino of Turin, fifteen, died at St. Maurice Hospital at four in the morning, thus fulfilling Don Bosco's prediction of June 14.[5] Vallino had not been able to make another Exercise for a Happy Death. A loose sheet from the Ruffino chronicle seems to allude to Vallino without identifying him. It describes what we have often heard from Joseph Buzzetti and John Bonetti. It reads as follows:

The boy felt that he was the one Don Bosco meant. He was taken to the hospital, but his condition worsened; his head developed a strange swelling and he became delirious. Neither doctors nor nuns could grasp the sense of his words, though it was clear that he was fully aware he was dying. He kept calling for Don Bosco, begging help and pardon. When Don Bosco learned of his condition, he hastened to the hospital. On being told by the nuns of the lad's delirium, Don Bosco replied, "I know what the matter is. Let me talk to him. You'll see that he will calm down." Hearing Don Bosco's voice, the boy sat up. "Don Bosco," he pleaded, "don't tell me my sentence!"

"Hush," Don Bosco replied, "I came to see you because I care for you and want you to live. Do you hear? Now tell me, would you like to make your confession?"

"Oh yes! I want nothing else! Just don't tell me my sentence!"

"There is no sentence, my lad. Cheer up." Then he whispered something to the boy which instantly reassured and calmed him. He then heard his confession and had the Last Sacraments administered to him. The youngster received them devoutly and peacefully expired.

As it would soon be time for the annual spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine, Don Bosco did some research [6] on the history of Lanzo and of the more important villages of its valleys to guide

[5] *See* p. 405. [Editor]

[6] We are omitting his succinct historical notes that presuppose a good knowledge of medieval Italian history. [Editor]

the future director of the forthcoming Salesian school. He drew his information mostly from Casalis.[7]

On Monday, July 18, he left for Lanzo, after instructing Father Arrò to give the "Good Night" to the boys. He took along Father Dominic Ruffino, whom he had appointed director of the Lanzo Salesian school. Before leaving, Father Ruffino wrote a few lines to his friend [Francis] Rebuffo:

I don't know whether I should be happy or sad about going to St. Ignatius' Shrine. Certainly when I consider how much I need a little seclusion to tidy up my spiritual affairs which up to now have been so much neglected and ill-managed, I cannot help but thank God and Don Bosco for giving me this opportunity. Still, when I realize that I must leave the Oratory, my friends, and you, and that this brief absence may be a prelude to a more permanent one, I am more deeply touched than when I left home and my brothers and sisters. How much closer are spiritual ties! I knew it before but now feel it personally. Dear Rebuffo, we shall be separated a few days physically, but never spiritually.[8]

While on retreat, Don Bosco did not forget his boys, and he wrote them a letter to describe his adventures on his trip. He addressed it to Father Arrò and asked him to read it to students and artisans together, if he thought it advisable:

St. Ignatius' Shrine, July 22, 1864

My dear boys,

I thought you might like me to tell you something about my trip from Turin to St. Ignatius' where, thank God, I now am. Last Monday I got to the coach stop at four. I had reserved a seat on the upper deck to avoid getting sick, but it was already taken. What could I do? Father Arrò stood up for my rights, but with little success. Finally a passenger on the upper deck pompously—and generously—said to me: "Listen, I'll let you have my seat, not because I'm good-hearted, for I'm not, but for a suitable tip!"

"It's a deal!" I replied. "Here's your tip!"

I took my seat and the coach left. First we had sunshine, then wind

[7] Goffredo Casalis compiled a renowned geographical, historical, statistical, and commercial dictionary of over twenty volumes. [Editor]

[8] At this point we are omitting the author's description of improvements at the retreat house and changes of personnel. [Editor]

and dust, and, just as I was telling my fellow passengers that two years before, on that very day, I had been treated to a magnificent storm all the way from Caselle to Lanzo,[9] lo and behold, thunder and lightning broke out and pouring rain deluged us as we rode into Caselle. Since I was the only one among the eight passengers on the upper deck to have an umbrella, everybody snuggled up to me affectionately, as you do, my dear sons, when at playtime I have some little things to give you. We had been quite talkative even before the rain started, but now that we were huddled together we became more so. With me were two doctors, two lawyers, a writer, and two other people. We first talked about Egyptian, Persian, Greek, and Italian history, but all they were after was Don Bosco's *Bible History*. To tell you frankly, when I cornered them, I found they had very garbled notions and knew nothing at all of history. Notwithstanding their noisy arguments, in the end they had to shut up. The conversation then turned to philosophy and theology. My opponents tried to defend Spinoza's pantheism and Manes' dualism, but they soon found themselves in hot water and, as a diversion, began to rant and rave against God's existence. I thought it best to let them steam themselves out before rebutting them. When they calmed down, I told them the joke about the hen and the poultry dealer. "Tell me," I asked one of the doctors, "which came first, the egg or the hen?"

"The hen, of course, and she began laying eggs."

"Where did the hen come from?"

"From an egg."

"And who laid the first egg to produce the first hen?"

The doctor was stumped. "Why don't you help him out?" I asked his colleagues. No one volunteered. "Well," I insisted, "which came first, the egg or the hen?"

At this the doctor lost his temper. "To the devil with egg or hen," he cried. "I don't want to hear about them anymore."

We all had a good laugh. Then one passenger remarked, "I'd entrust both hen and egg to better hands than the devil's. I'd give them to a cook to serve us a meal after all this rain. As for you, doctor, no matter what you say, you'll have to end up agreeing that either the hen or the egg had to be created by God. We may likewise argue from father to son, but we will end up with a man created by God, Adam, the first man." This ended our discussion. We then introduced ourselves and for the rest of the trip talked about the Oratory.

I had planned to spend the night in Lanzo, but since Father John

[9] *See* p. 134. [Editor]

Baptist Bertagna and Mr. Felix, a contractor, intended to go on to St. Ignatius' and the rain had relented, I went along with them. At eight o'clock we set out to climb that lofty hill. Shortly afterward it became quite dark and we got lost in a maze of rocks and crags. As we were deliberating, the clouds rolled away and the moon shone out. We resumed our climb along the rocky trail and finally reached the summit at ten. Nothing untoward occurred except that we lost Mr. Felix on the way and did not find him again until we reached the summit. We were tired and bruised. Imagine our surprise when we found the retreat house shut tight. We had to knock, pound, and nearly batter the door down before somebody got up to let us in. We were served a good supper, which of course, hungry as we were, we thoroughly enjoyed. Then sleep got the best of us, for it was already midnight. And with this I say "Good Night" to you too.

Tomorrow I hope to write to you about more important matters. Pray for me, my dear sons, and I shall do the same for you. May the Holy Virgin ever keep us as Her very own. Receive Communion either spiritually or sacramentally for my intention. Amen.

Affectionately yours in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

It appears that Don Bosco did not write the second letter, as promised, because there is no allusion to it in any document. Perhaps his priestly duties kept him busy for the next few days. Father Arrò had the artisans join the students for night prayers and read Don Bosco's letter aloud to all of them. It must be noted that for some years now the two groups were saying their night prayers separately and were called together only on special occasions.

At the close of the retreat, Don Bosco left St. Ignatius' Shrine and, as he had promised, stopped at Lanzo to settle some matters with the mayor and wind up negotiations with the higher school authorities. By this time a reply had come from the prefecture [10] authorizing the financial part of the contract with Don Bosco.

It was agreed that all required documents would be sent to the competent school authorities and that Don Bosco would submit the teachers' certificates. Since there were no pupils in the upper

[10] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

grades yet, the Lanzo authorities approved only the three secondary school teachers. Upon his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco had a prospectus printed and distributed. It resembled somewhat the one of Mirabello. Meanwhile, Father Ruffino, prefect of studies, scheduled the Oratory's final examinations. The school year closed with the awarding of prizes, attended by many distinguished guests. Count Cibrario had been invited, but on July 29 he excused himself with this note: "A thousand thanks to the gracious Don Bosco. Regretfully, my health keeps me from accepting your courteous invitation. Count Louis Cibrario."

CHAPTER 69

First Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society (Continued)

GREAT joy came to Don Bosco on July 23, 1864. After careful study and consultation, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars issued, with the Pope's approval, a *decretum laudis* [decree of praise] on behalf of the Salesian Congregation, thus sanctioning its existence and spirit. Approval of its constitutions, however, was deferred to a more opportune time. Furthermore, in view of the exceptional times, Don Bosco was named superior general for life, while his successor's term of office was set at twelve years.

This decree,[1] together with the customary introductory letter, was sent to the vicar capitular of Turin who then forwarded it to Don Bosco. Enclosed with the decree were thirteen observations [2] concerning the constitutions. Upon receipt of this long-desired document, Don Bosco wrote as follows to [Angelo] Cardinal Quaglia:

Turin, August 25, 1864

Your Eminence:

I was very happy to receive the decree of approval of the Society of St. Francis de Sales which you so kindly and graciously sent to me. I heartily thank you but, realizing my inadequacy, I join with all the members of this Society and the boys in this house in invoking daily blessings upon you, that you may work for God and his holy Church for many more years.

Meanwhile I shall go on to carry out the observations concerning our Society's constitutions. Later I shall again appeal to your proven kindness to graciously conclude the task so well begun under your kindly guidance.

Another favor I ask of you. On my behalf and that of all the

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

members of the Salesian Society, please express our deepest, sincerest gratitude to the Holy Father. I assure you that our hearts go out entirely to a father who so dearly loves us in the Lord.

The bearer of this letter is Father Emil Manacorda, a lawyer and zealous supporter of this house. He is a person of means, extremely devoted to the Holy Father, and anxious to devote his life to the service of the Church. Should you ever need his services, he is wholeheartedly available. Lastly, in your goodness, let your blessing be upon me and the boys of this house. I deem it an honor to kiss your sacred robe.

Most humbly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

With this decree the Salesian Society took a giant step forward. However, Don Bosco still had to study how he could best adapt the thirteen observations made on the constitutions to the needs of the times and to the difficulties which the government would certainly cause him from the very nature of this new congregation. Seemingly, the Sacred Congregation did not intend to make those amendments mandatory because its pro-secretary, Monsignor [Stanislaus] Svegliati, had pointed out separately that some observations, particularly the one dealing with dismissorial letters, had been made because the Salesian Congregation had not yet been definitely approved. Don Bosco had also been asked to try to incorporate them fittingly. Besides, these amendments would have to be tested to see how they would hold up in practice.

Very carefully Don Bosco drew up a memorandum [3] to be submitted later to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Its purpose was to point out respectfully the several grave difficulties which would arise by carrying out some of the Holy See's observations. He therefore pleaded that there be retained in the constitutions—or, better yet, that the Salesian Congregation be granted—the faculty to dispense from triennial vows and to issue dimissorial letters. He also sought limited dispensation from the requirement of asking the Holy See's permission for alienations of property and loans, as well as the grant of faculties to the local bishop to authorize new Salesian foundations.[4]

[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[4] We are omitting other minor details. [Editor]

CHAPTER 70

Special Charisms (Continued)

LETTER writing used up whatever remained of Don Bosco's time after many, weighty tasks. His letters often dealt with matters of the spiritual life. Countless people—many of them well-educated—were convinced that he had special charisms. His wise counseling and his frequent revelation of carefully hidden secrets were such as to strengthen this belief throughout his whole life. Few of these letters remain because most of them were treasured by his correspondents and those he received were nearly all destroyed. From the few we have we shall quote passages complimentary to Don Bosco.

On July 30, 1864, Countess Isabella Gerini wrote to him from Florence:

I am quite overwhelmed by your great charity toward me, and cannot adequately thank you.

I am utterly amazed and deeply admire God's infinite mercy in having so wonderfully enlightened you even before I disclosed my thoughts, fears, and doubts to you in order to receive the spiritual advice that I so badly needed.

I thank God for His great goodness. I am immeasurably grateful to you too for having obtained such a favor for me from God. . . . I treasure your letter and will abide by it as a rule of life. . . .

Another noble lady, Mrs. Caroline S . . . wrote the following from Venice on August 11, 1864:

The kind welcome you gave me when I was privileged to call on you in Turin encourages me to write these few lines and beg that you do something for this poor soul of mine. . . . I would like to pour my poor heart out to you, but I find that I cannot in a letter. I hope that the Lord will show you my spiritual misery

and inspire you to take over its cure. I so want to serve and love Jesus, but. . . . I say no more, convinced that you already read my heart and understand my condition.

People came to consult him even from Rome. It was during this same month that Don Bosco made the acquaintance of Marquis Angelo Vitelleschi who made his first visit to Turin with his wife and son. They called on Don Bosco and made their confession to him. From that day a deep friendship blossomed between Don Bosco and this family. In 1865, asking Don Bosco for prayers for his family, the marquis wrote, "We are expecting the marchioness of Villarios who plans to spend a few months in Rome. I keep hoping that someday you too will come to Rome. How glad we would be! I fear, though, that it will not be now."

In writing to Father Rua on February 4, 1888, the marquis stated: "We have always received tokens of kindness and charity from Don Bosco. I treasure several letters of his. One has particularly convinced me that he was an extraordinary man, truly beloved of God."

Sister Magdalen Veronica wrote to Don Bosco from a convent in Turin as follows:

I feel it would be wrong if I did not thank you for your great kindness on the occasion of my religious profession. . . . As you gave me the holy veil, you enjoined me to bring it before God's judgment seat without blemish. Please help me to keep it spotless. To this end, please inspect the pine tree which you planted and see whether some little branch may have sprouted to prevent it from soaring heavenward. I shall try to lay out a flower garden about it that may breathe forth a fragrant perfume of roses and violets. . . . I shall also endeavor to imitate the sunflower.

Undoubtedly she was repeating what Don Bosco had said at the sacred ceremony.

Here we will digress to remark that Don Bosco had at heart the spiritual welfare not only of the sisters at the Rifugio but also of other nuns who worked for the rehabilitation or schooling of girls. For instance, Don Bosco provided a priest for daily Mass at St. Peter's Home, where girls newly released from prison found

temporary shelter. Founded by Father [Peter] Merla, who, as we have seen, had helped Don Bosco with the festive oratory boys in 1846,[1] this particular mission was now directed by Father [John] Vola, assisted by several Vincentian Sisters from the Cottolengo Institute.

Don Bosco also provided for the daily Mass, two Sunday Masses, and the girls' confessions at the Good Shepherd Convent which had no chaplain because of a regrettable decision of the Charitable Works Committee. He also provided the altar boys.

We now resume our narration. Besides hearing from strangers, Don Bosco received many letters from his pupils who were on vacation. He always acknowledged these letters, in which the boys sought his advice, told of their doings, and gave him messages from their pastors, parents, benefactors, or persons who wished to be remembered in his prayers. A few samples follow:

"A poor mother pleads that you kindly bless her, as she has suffered a long time."

"A good woman asks that for God's sake you bless her and all her family. She particularly begs you to bless her eyes, as her sight is failing and she constantly lives in fear of becoming blind and never again seeing her children who are away from home."

"My mother begs you to pray that she may lead all her family to heaven."

There is a charming request too from a Latin I student: "Please bless me, my parents, my brother, my sisters, all my relatives, our cattle, and the farm."

Don Bosco prayed, blessed, and seemingly also kept an eye on his pupils even from afar. Once, for instance, when he was absent from the Oratory, a boy obtained Father Alasonatti's permission to spend a few days with relatives. However, a snare was being set for him, and the poor boy was at first quite unaware of it. One particularly hot day, as he was dozing at the foot of a tree, a booming thundering roar made him jump to his feet. Realizing that his morals were in danger, he at once set out for the Oratory. Meanwhile Don Bosco had returned and anxiously inquired about him with startling alarm and impatience. As soon as the youngster reached the Oratory, he presented himself to Don

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 330f. [Editor]

Bosco. Immediately Don Bosco regained his serenity. Looking at the lad with that singularly penetrating glance of his, he very emphatically exclaimed, "Good!"

"Don Bosco, if you only knew. . . ."

"I know it all," Don Bosco replied. "I prayed for you."

Throughout his life this pupil—now a scholarly old priest in a religious order—was convinced that Don Bosco had known of his danger through supernatural enlightenment. He often told us about the incident we have just described. He is one of those whose successful future Don Bosco contemplated in his dream, *The Wheel of Eternity*.[2]

At the beginning of August, new pupils—they numbered nearly a hundred each year—arrived at the Oratory for preparatory courses. They had to be instructed in the house routine, obedience, good manners, and sound Christian piety. Don Bosco performed this task through his frequent "Good Nights." The Ruffino chronicle reports two such talks of Don Bosco in August:

1

When new boys arrive at the Oratory, I usually tell them what Pythagoras (a famous ancient Greek philosopher) used to demand from his disciples. Whenever a new pupil applied for admission, he required that the lad first give him a confidential detailed account—a sort of confession—of his past life. Mind you, Pythagoras was a pagan philosopher who tried to help his fellow man with the great knowledge he had acquired. He insisted on this manifestation of one's past life and told them why. "If I do not know what my pupils have done in the past," he used to say, "I cannot give them the proper remedy." After a boy had been accepted, he still wanted the pupil to be totally open-hearted with him. "If I do not know their inner mind," he added, "I cannot meet their needs and help them as much as I want."

I give you the same advice, my sons. Some people think that to start a new life it is enough to open one's heart to a spiritual director and make a general confession. That is fine, but it is not enough. . . . Besides remedying the past, we must also provide for the future with firm resolution. . . . To make steady progress you must reveal your habitual failings, the occasions which usually lead you into sin, and your dominant evil inclinations. You must attentively

[2] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 530–44. [Editor]

and faithfully carry out the advice you are given; you must keep your heart open and fully trusting; you must manifest your needs, temptations, and dangers as they rise, so that your director may guide you with a steady hand.

Of course, there is no better start than a good confession. . . . When you disclose all your past life, you not only acquaint your confessor with the state of your soul, but you achieve something far more important—you remove all doubts about your past confessions. You may then say, *I have no worries about the past. I can look more cheerfully to the future.* You can indeed count on Our Lord's help in all circumstances because you are His sons by grace.

2

This evening I have something particularly important to urge to you. It is the advice given to boys by St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, and St. Sebastian Valfré. Well-mannered people also stress it, while good Christians recommend it as a means to avoid sin: "Keep your hands off one another." It may seem a trivial thing, yet it is most important because the devil very cunningly takes advantage of it to tempt you.

Does this mean that we must never on any occasion lay hands on anyone? Let's be sensible! If someone is sick or has fallen, we not only may but must use our hands to help him. Likewise, boys may shake hands on returning from their vacation. I have no objections to that. I will not even object if two boys, on their way to the dormitory after night prayers, wish each other good night by touching hands as they pass by. What I object to is putting one's arms about another's shoulders, walking arm-in-arm three and four together in unseemly fashion, jumping on one another's back, or rolling on the ground. All this violates good manners and good morals.

The devil is both pupil and master. He has been a pupil for centuries and is getting smarter every day. He is a teacher too because no one can match his consummate malice. He makes use of what I have described to lead us to evil. As a pupil, he well knows the evils which result from these bad manners because he has seen countless examples; as a teacher, he cleverly injects evil where there is none. For instance, he can successively turn a simple uncouth gesture into a trap, a temptation, or a fall. When one falls, he is done for. I'll say nothing more. Just take my word for it—or, rather, abide by what saints and educators have told us.

Someone may ask, *How about Don Bosco?* I did say that there may be exceptions dictated by necessity or other good reasons. In my case, if I sometimes did not tap a boy on the cheek [3] or shake hands or place my hand on his head, I would not be able to show him that I care for him. If I didn't do that, a boy might take offense and feel hurt. He might wonder, *Why doesn't Don Bosco like me anymore? Did I do something wrong?* As you can see, what would generally look unseemly is at times necessary and proper for me. I also have another reason which prompts me to act in this manner. Often a boy flees from me as the devil flees from holy water. Occasionally, hard luck—or, rather, good luck —makes me corner him on the stairs. I take him by the hand and hold it tight as I whisper a word. Very often that is enough to make him turn over a new leaf. On the other hand, if upon meeting we simply greet each other and keep our distance, that boy, alert and vexed at our encounter, may slip off without my being able to speak to him. If I hold his hand, he cannot run away from me. What I say of myself applies to all superiors. Is that clear now? Will you now follow my advice? Let's see. I hope you do. Good night, my dear sons.

Don Bosco's anxious care for his boys went hand-in-hand with his zeal in spreading *Letture Cattoliche* and safeguarding the faithful from heretical influences, especially in the Pinerolo district where the Waldensians were quite strong.[4] The Oratory printshop was busily turning out the September-October issue entitled *St. Athanasius the Great, Bishop of Alexandria and Doctor of the Church* . . . and the November issue *Adventures of Two Orphans*. . . .

After supervising the printing of both booklets, Don Bosco got ready to go to Montemagno for the feast of the Assumption at Marchioness Fassati's invitation. His reply to her daughter follows:

Turin, August 8, 1864

Dear Madame Azelia,

I received the letter which you so kindly wrote to me also on

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 237f. [Editor]
[4] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

your mother's behalf. God willing, Father Rua, another priest, and I will be at Montemagno this Saturday evening. Father Arrò may not be able to join us because he will have his own work here at the Oratory.

I wrote to the bishop [of Casale] about this trip and invited him to come over. I did it merely as a gesture of courtesy, without mentioning any special solemnity. I doubt that he will come. Should he accept, I shall immediately inform the marquis and marchioness.

Please pray for me and my boys. On my part I shall ask God to grant you health, fear of the Lord, and perseverance in doing good. Please give my humble respects to your father and mother.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

In another letter to the marchioness' daughter he told her that Father Rua would arrive on the evening of the 13th from Mirabello, while he himself with another priest might get in earlier.[5]

Father Michael Rua left Mirabello on the appointed day and found that Don Bosco and Father Cagliero had already arrived. At this time the villagers had been sorely discouraged by a three-month scorching drought which, notwithstanding public and private prayers, threatened to wipe out the entire crop.

In his first sermon Don Bosco told the congregation, "Come to the services during this triduum, make your peace with God by a good confession, prepare yourselves for a general Communion on the feast of the Assumption, and I promise you a plentiful rain in the Madonna's name." His stirring exhortation went straight to their hearts. In a flush of oratory, relying on Our Lady's goodness, he had only intended to give them a forceful inducement, not a binding promise, but the Madonna had spoken through him.

When Don Bosco returned to the sacristy, he noticed that the bystanders were staring at him with surprise and emotion. "You were wonderful," the pastor exclaimed. "You surely have courage!"

"Why courage?"

"Courage to tell them publicly that it will unfailingly rain on the day of the feast!"

[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

"Did I say that?"

"You certainly did. I quote: 'In the Madonna's name, I promise you that if you will all make a good confession, you will have your rain.' "

"Oh, no, you must have misunderstood. I don't recall having said that."

"Ask anyone. You will hear no other version."

The pastor was right. The villagers were so convinced of it that everyone resolutely set about putting his conscience in order. There were long lines at the confessionals from early morning to late evening. Father Rua and especially Father Cagliero still recall how exhausted they were during those days.

There were comments and laughter over the prediction in the neighboring villages, especially at Grana where a public dance had been scheduled to celebrate Don Bosco's forthcoming fiasco. During the triduum the sun burned on as strongly as ever. As Don Bosco went to and from church, the villagers kept asking him, "What about the rain?"

"Get rid of your sins," he would reply.

On Monday, August 15, the feast of the Assumption, so many people flocked to Communion that its like had not been seen for years—but the sky had never seemed so clear! Don Bosco lunched with Marquis Fassati but excused himself before the other guests had finished. He was rather worried over the excessive talk that his prediction had caused. He could also hear the distant sound of the music at Grana. In Montemagno itself some disbelievers had even organized a hostile demonstration against him.

The vesper bell rang and afternoon services began. From his window Don Bosco looked up at the sky; it remained inexorably clear. The heat was intolerable, and he wondered what to say from the pulpit if the Madonna failed him. What follows was described to us by Louis Porta, now a Salesian priest:

While walking to church, Marquis Fassati and I were talking about the promised rain. It was but a ten-minute walk from his residence, and yet we were both dripping with perspiration. We reached the sacristy toward the end of Vespers at the same moment as Don Bosco did. "This time you goofed," the marquis

remarked. "You promised rain, and we have anything but that!" Don Bosco said nothing.

"John," he told the sacristan, "take a look at the sky from behind Baron Garofoli's mansion and see if there is any chance of rain." The sacristan soon returned.

"The sky is as clear as a mirror," he said, "all but for a tiny cloud, hardly as big as a slipper, in the direction of Biella." *(Was it perhaps like the little cloud of Carmel at the time of Elias?)*

"Good," Don Bosco said. "Hand me a stole." As he was about to step into the pulpit, a few men among the many in the sacristy pressed about him. "What if the rain doesn't come?"

"Then it will mean that we do not deserve it."

When the *Magnificat* ended, Don Bosco entered the pulpit, saying in his heart to Mary: *It is not my honor which is at stake now, but Yours. What will the scoffers say if these good villagers' hopes are dashed, after they did their best to please You?*

The church was jammed, and all eyes were riveted on him. After Don Bosco recited an introductory Hail Mary, the sunshine seemed to dim somewhat. Then, as he began his talk, a prolonged roll of thunder sent a ripple of joy through the congregation. For a moment he stood silent, most deeply moved. The thunder rolled on, and then a violent downpour beat steadily against the windows. How eloquently words tumbled from Don Bosco's heart as the rain continued to pour unabatedly. His was a hymn of thanks to Mary and of praise to Her devotees. He wept and so did his congregation.

After Benediction, people lingered in the church and vestibule while the downpour continued with no letup. Everyone recognized it as a miracle. At Grana, instead, a frightening hailstorm completely destroyed the crops. Remarkably, not a single hailstone fell in any other area in the vicinity.

A few months later we ourselves heard of this from the assistant pastor, Father Marchisio, and other witnesses.

Don Bosco returned to the Oratory in time to be present at the last moments of Joseph Morielli of Prasco, a very virtuous young Salesian cleric who died on August 21 at the age of twenty-four. Uncomplaining and always cheerful, he had edified his companions by his virtues, his admirable self-denial, and his humility. He was also a brilliant student and liked to take care of the artisans.

The first symptom of his illness had been the loss of a most retentive memory. When he asked Don Bosco to bless him, the latter replied, "Dear Morielli, there is only one thing you must not forget–heaven! The rest is not that important." The good cleric's last words to Don Bosco were, "Tell my companions that I shall await them in heaven."

In the course of this year seven youths had already been summoned into eternity, and others were shortly to follow, as we shall see. In some years the Oratory's death rate was fairly high, though not higher than elsewhere, as confirmed by statistics. In most cases, these deaths were a source of consolation, as Don Bosco, other [Salesian] priests, and we ourselves experienced. Quite fittingly we could apply the words of Wisdom: "The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. . . . He who pleased God was beloved; he who lived among sinners was transported, snatched away lest wickedness pervert his mind, or deceit beguile his soul. . . . Having become perfect in a short while, he reached the fullness of a long career. His soul was pleasing to the Lord; therefore He sped him out of the midst of wickedness. But the people saw and did not understand nor did they take this into account: that God's grace and mercy are with His elect. The just man dead condemns the sinful who live, and youth, swiftly completed, condemns the many years of the wicked man grown old." [Wis. 4, 7–16]

CHAPTER 71

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

THE love and esteem that Don Bosco's work for youth engendered throughout all Italy is attested by the many letters and testimonials in our archives. We quote from one written by Father Joseph Apollonio, a Venetian priest who later became bishop of Adria and Treviso:

Venice, September 3, 1864

My dear Don Bosco,

How happy I was the other day when some persons beloved of God brought me your greetings. However, I felt a thorn of grief on hearing that you expect to live but a few more years. No, dear Don Bosco, do not leave us. I know that even though you may not be necessary (and this applies to all of us), you still are extremely useful, especially today. Though my prayers are of little worth, I am going to beseech the Lord not to hearken to you, if you want to die soon. And as for you, you too should pray as St. Martin did: "O Lord, if You still need me for Your people, I do not shirk labor." You have done much good during these years, but you can still do much more. Don't let afflictions and troubles dishearten you. I can imagine the extent of your suffering. I too, you know, try to cheer myself all I can, though I often feel that I can take it no longer. Dear Jesus, what sorry times You have placed us in! The bloody persecutions harassing the bride of Christ for three centuries were nothing compared to what she now undergoes. How horribly minds and hearts have been corrupted. But I feel confident, even certain, that within a few years—a few months, perhaps—things will return to normal, at least outwardly. Of course, this will amount to little if people do not change their attitudes. Their minds are so poisoned—morally, religiously, and socially—that nothing short of a miracle—a first-class miracle—can straighten things out in a decade or

so. My dear Father, I can't even begin to tell you how much this hurts me, even physically. Yet I find strength in my need to do my very best in discharging the many thorny duties assigned to me by my superiors. And then, to tell the truth, it's not all thorns. The Blessed Virgin and Her divine Son temper our sufferings with gentle comfort. But, now, my chatter is taking up too much of your time. Coming to ourselves, let me tell you, dear Don Bosco, that you are very often in my thoughts and that frequently during the past few days I have prayed for you, though unworthily. Please pray for me too. . . . I do not dare ask even for only a few lines in response, though you know how happy this would make me. God bless you and your work and crown it with ever greater success.

Devotedly and gratefully yours,
Fr. Joseph Apollonio

Canon Lawrence Gastaldi held Don Bosco in similar esteem. In September of this year he was making his retreat at the Vincentians' house with Father [John] Giacomelli [1] who told us the following: "Canon Gastaldi knows the Oratory quite well because he is frequently invited to preach and hear confessions. One evening, while telling me of Don Bosco's work, he praised it to the sky and concluded by applying to Don Bosco Holy Scripture's tribute to David: 'The Lord was with him.' " [1 Kings 18, 14]

The retreat had to end one day earlier than scheduled because foul-mouthed Father [Joseph] Ambrogio [2] and a mob of hoodlums were staging a long, disgusting demonstration in front of the Vincentians' retreat house.

This agitator, who was in the pay of heretics and anticlericals, had already staged similar disgusting demonstrations in front of other religious institutions, and he kept spouting sacrilege, ridicule, and invective in public squares and in the areas of churches, loudly applauded by cheering squads of tavern-goers.

One day, followed by a curious crowd, he went to Valdocco and began ranting before the Oratory gate, vilely inveighing against Don Bosco until he ran out of breath. The rabble clamored,

[1] A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. He was a great help to him, especially during the early years of the Oratory. For further information *see* the Indexes of Volumes III and IV. [Editor]

[2] *See* pp. 320f. [Editor]

guffawed, shouted anticlerical insults, and even booed the orator when his eloquence did not measure up to their standards. The Oratory residents totally ignored him.

When Don Bosco came back and heard of the incident, he remarked, "Why didn't you station the band right at the gate and drown him out with a deafening march?"

He himself, though, did silence Father Ambrogio with a pamphlet entitled *Who Is Father Ambrogio?* in which he portrayed the apostate's unpriestly, immoral life and urged the faithful to avoid and disregard him. Thousands of copies were immediately spread throughout Piedmont, and several reprints were made in later years. As we can see, Don Bosco was ever ready to combat heresy and unmask its spokesmen.

At the same time he kept striving with equal dedication to develop and consolidate his schools, having resolved in due course to make them beacons to enlighten the youth of the cities and towns where they would be opened in conjunction with festive oratories. His teachers enthusiastically seconded his plans. Father John Francesia and the cleric Francis Cerruti passed their first year literature exams with flying colors and immediately applied for admission to the third year. They were accepted on condition that they take the second year exams. Here too they succeeded brilliantly. Meanwhile, the clerics Peter Barberis, John Tamagnone, and Joseph Fagnano had been certified to teach third grade in secondary schools. Then, on October 10, the clerics of the Mirabello junior seminary took their certification exams in Alessandria. Paul Albera, Gabriel Momo, and Francis Dalmazzo were certified for upper elementary grades, and Angelo Nasi, Francis Cuffia, and Dominic Belmonte for the lower grades.

Don Bosco kept encouraging his clerics to take these exams and not be reluctant to devote themselves to this necessary, noble mission. To Father [John] Bonetti, the Latin III teacher in the Mirabello junior seminary who wished to take up theological studies, he wrote as follows:

Turin, September 29, 1864

My dear Bonetti:

Continue as we have agreed and you will be doing God's will. We'll see to it that you have a chance to pursue your studies.

Trust the Lord. I shall pray for you. Do likewise for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Shortly before, he had sent to the school authorities the names and diplomas of teachers whom he was assigning to Lanzo. Finally, on September 14, 1864 he was authorized to open that school,[3] his third. Foreseeing many other Salesian boarding schools, hospices, trade and technical schools, he sent for prospectuses from various institutions. A few of these prospectuses we found in his desk.[4] Above all he kept himself informed on elementary and secondary school legislation and curricula. He studied the interpretation of various articles and their lenient application in certain cases. His teachers' certification was an expensive matter, and Don Bosco was aware that some would eventually leave him after obtaining a diploma. To overcome the ever multiplying obstacles facing his schools, he also counted on equivalent qualifications, on the good will of school superintendents, and on temporary substitute teachers. In short, he sought to reconcile the law with his own obligation to carry out his mission.

Determined that his houses should function smoothly in every department, he often consulted experts: outstanding educators, renowned physicians, and prominent lawyers. We read in Holy Scripture: "A wise man by hearing . . . will advance in learning; an intelligent man will gain sound guidance." [Prov. 1, 5]

Peaceful pursuits, however, were blocked at this time by serious, deplorable outbreaks in Turin brought on by the treaty of September 15, 1864 between Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel II. It was practically a sellout of Rome and the Papal States to Italy. What actually set Turin in revolt was a clause which made the treaty binding only on condition of the king's transferring the capital from Turin to some other city. When this news spread, the Turin populace was heartily distressed and indignant at their diminished prestige and at the callous *de facto* denial of the enormous sacrifices that Turin and Piedmont had made in the

[3] We are omitting the routine notification. [Editor]
[4] This last sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

cause of Italian unification. For these and other political reasons, Mazzini's agents incited the mob to revolt. On Wednesday, September 21, gun shops were raided and bloody skirmishes resulting in a number of deaths broke out with police and carabinieri. Soon the army had to move in twenty-eight thousand troops to quell the disturbances. They promptly surrounded the city and set up artillery units to bombard it. The government was determined to quench resistance in blood.[5]

That evening, September 21, Don Bosco gathered all the boys in the portico for night prayers and, before sending them to bed, told them to pray for the city and their benefactors, exhorting them to entrust themselves with faith to their merciful heavenly patroness, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The following day, September 22, passed rather quietly till evening. At about nine, however, a noisy mob gathered in Piazza San Carlo. New outbreaks triggered violent military and police reaction which left twenty-six dead and nearly two hundred wounded, according to official statistics. At this news, Victor Emmanuel II demanded the resignation of his entire cabinet. Additional military reinforcements and the jailing of agitators had meanwhile restored some order in the city. Turin's fate, however, remained unchanged; shortly afterward, Florence was proclaimed Italy's capital. As Cesare Cantù [6] put it: "Turin, cruelly and unceremoniously cast aside, again became a provincial town as it had been at the time of King Arduin. Like Parma, Modena, and Naples, Turin too was made to suffer the pangs of dethronement."

But the person who was going to suffer most was the Pope.[7]

[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[6] Cesare Cantù (1804–1895) is known especially for his voluminous *Storia Universale* and *Storia degli Italiani*. [Editor]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 72

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

THE Turin uprising caused the Oratory some anxiety, especially among the young artisans who had parents or relatives in the city. To allay their fears Don Bosco urged them to place themselves and their families under Mary's unfailing protection, bolstering their trust with reports of outstanding favors recently granted by Her. Acquainting them with these and other instances of Her goodness and power was a duty that he highly cherished.[1] However, words alone did not suffice him in promoting devotion and love for the Queen of heaven and earth. His deeds were more effective, especially his building a new church in Her honor at Valdocco. Work kept progressing most satisfactorily. On January 26, 1864, Don Bosco had requested Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata, the vicar capitular, to sell him a piece of land needed for the church, and the reply had been favorable. Later, he sought the mayor's permission to erect the new church's façade on a stretch of Via Cottolengo, which then ran irregularly and was, mostly, a dirt road through fields. He also successfully petitioned the mayor for a better water supply system for the Oratory because of the demands of the construction work.[2]

Meanwhile he kept searching for new ways to get more pledges for the new church. Several pastors had publicly exhorted their people to pledge contributions, and Don Bosco himself had been able to conduct a vigorous promotion by mail. He now sent out another circular, and in September he wrote to Prince Tommaso, duke of Genoa, and to Prince Eugenio of Savoy.[3]

As Father Emilian Manacorda was about to go to Rome, he asked him to take several letters. On Don Bosco's advice,[4] this

[1] We are omitting one such description. [Editor]
[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[3] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. V, pp. 77, 380. [Editor]

young priest [the future bishop of Fossano] was just beginning his diplomatic career; later he obtained doctorates in theology and canon law and was appointed abbreviator of papal letters. Among the letters Don Bosco had given him, there was one for the Pope and one for Father Joseph Oreglia. Father Manacorda also volunteered to collect pledges for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, to obtain permission for Don Bosco to read certain prohibited books, and to sound out officials of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on dimissorial letters [5] [for Don Bosco's ordinands].

Don Bosco learned of Father Manacorda's arrival in Rome in a letter from Father Oreglia, dated September 20, 1864.[6] On September 25, Father Manacorda himself wrote to tell Don Bosco that since he had not yet been able to speak to the Holy Father, he would try to have Don Bosco's letters delivered to him by someone else, unless he obtained an audience that forthcoming week. He also informed him that Father Tosi, an official of the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office, had volunteered to get permission for Don Bosco's clerics to read certain prohibited books, but that the good priest had gone on vacation and had not as yet returned. Finally, Father Manacorda assured Don Bosco that he was doing his best to obtain pledges for his new church.[7]

Contributions began to pour in from Rome too. Don Bosco accepted them humbly and gratefully, generously repaying his benefactors in due time both spiritually and materially in Our Lady's name. We cannot adequately describe his love for them. His heartfelt gratitude was one reason why so many people were so generous toward him. He regarded their interests, their joys, and their sorrows as his own. We can see this in the following letter [to Pio Galleani, count of Agliano]:

Turin, September 28, 1864

My dear Count:

After Father Tortone [8] told me that you were looking for a

[5] Letters authorizing the ordination of the bearer. [Editor]
[6] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[8] Father Cajetan Tortone was the Holy See's *chargé d'affaires* in Turin. [Editor]

tutor for your sons, also so dear to me, I thought of a priest who, in my opinion, is thoroughly qualified. At the moment, though, he is away and will not return till mid-October. I'll have to wait till then before giving you a definite reply. I thought I'd let you know so that you wouldn't worry.

Several times already, my dear count, I have shared your family troubles and prayed that God would assist and guide you in all things to His greater glory. Do not be upset; be patient. Our paradise is not here on earth; our happiness should not depend on fleeting material goods. I know that in your heart you are thinking: *I shall no longer be able to do charity as I used to.* True, but the Lord will reward your good will just the same.

May the merciful God shower abundant blessings upon you, your countess, and your growing family, and enrich you all with His holy fear.

Please remember me and my boys in your devout prayers. I shall be happy to help you in any way I can.

Gratefully and affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco [9]

[9] We are omitting two other letters to Count Galleani about his boys' prospective tutor. [Editor]

CHAPTER 73

The 1864 Yearly Outing

THE itinerary of the fall outing had already been decided upon and was to include Castelnuovo, Genoa, Mornese, Ovada, and Acqui before returning to Turin. When Father Dominic Pestarino,[1] who had put himself entirely in Don Bosco's hands, had invited him to bring his boys to Mornese, Don Bosco had mused, *Why not also go to Genoa, where we have so many friends?* Father John Cagliero had been there that very year on business on Don Bosco's behalf and had been hosted by Father Francis Montebruno,[2] founder of the Collegio degli Artigianelli, a young artisans' boarding school. On his return, Father Cagliero told Don Bosco that the archbishop would welcome his visit and be happy to host his boys in the seminary. Thanks to this offer, Don Bosco was able to announce to them, "This year you'll take in the sea!"

On September 25, the first day of the novena in honor of Our Lady of the Rosary, a small group of youngsters set out for Becchi where Father Cagliero was preaching and spending long hours in the confessional. Then, on Saturday, October 1, about eighty more boys joined them after a brief stop at the Chieri seminary where the rector, Canon Emmanuel Cavalià, treated them to refreshments. Tired from constantly talking to his pupils, Don Bosco retired to his room to take care of his mail. That same evening he wrote to Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti to inform him, among other things, that Father [Dominic] Ruffino, the director of the new Salesian school at Lanzo, would present himself for an examination in moral theology in order to receive faculties for confessions. He also told the canon where he could get information on the pamphlet exposing Father [Joseph] Ambrogio.[3] Per-

[1] *See* pp. 173ff. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. V, pp. 397f, 401, 500, 527, 604. [Editor]
[3] *See* p. 439. [Editor]

haps the printers had forgotten to submit it to the diocesan censor.[4] There had also been some criticism of its contents. Moreover, some people were of the opinion that it would have been better to ignore Father Ambrogio and let him continue to demean himself by his constant association with the rabble; after all, the errors he preached were by no means new and had already been convincingly refuted countless times. These critics may have feared unpleasant reaction to the publication.

On October 2, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the priests of Castelnuovo and another Oratory priest heard confessions, and very many of the faithful went to Communion. Don Bosco too heard confessions and gave spiritual direction to many old friends of his. Noteworthy is the lifelong confidence he knew how to inspire in those who dealt with him. "When I went to Chieri and to Castelnuovo," he remarked in his last years, "those who many years before had come to my festive oratory or had been pupils at Valdocco would walk even four or five miles to see me and make their devotions. What is more, when the Oratory boys were home on vacation, they would come even twenty or thirty miles to Becchi on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary to make their confessions to me. You may think that I'm exaggerating, but it is the truth. And many boys did this, not just a few."

That Sunday, Father Cinzano, the pastor, sang the Mass; the choir and orchestra were stationed in the courtyard. Toward three that afternoon, a large crowd gathered in the yard for sermon and Benediction. They enjoyed the singing. Later there were fireworks and other amusements.

On Monday, October 3, Don Bosco and his boys set out early for their yearly picnic to Castelnuovo as guests of Father Cinzano. Then, well stocked with provisions, the happy brigade marched to the railroad station of Villanova d'Asti. In Turin at noon of that same day, the last contingent of boys who were to take part in this outing boarded two third-class railroad coaches which Commendatore [Bartholomew] Bona, the director general of railroads, had kindly put at their disposal for the entire trip. In the group were Luciano, Bersano, Father [Joseph] Lazzero, Father [John Baptist] Francesia, and [Charles] Gastini who would delight their hosts with songs, music, and poetry and make the trip

[4] We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

all the merrier. At Villanova d'Asti they exchanged cheers with their companions who were lined up on the platform with their band, eager to board the train with Don Bosco.

At eight-thirty they got to Genoa, where several priests were waiting for them at the station. They received another warm welcome at the seminary entrance, on the other side of town, from Father John Baptist Bernardis, doctor of laws and rector of the seminary, from Father Angelo Fulle, bursar and local agent for *Letture Cattoliche,* and from Father Rebuffo, the distinguished professor of rhetoric. A good supper was ready, and each boy had a cubicle of his own in which to sleep, since the seminarians were home on vacation.

The next day, Tuesday, October 4, after Mass in the lovely seminary chapel, Don Bosco personally led the boys on a tour of the harbor and lighthouse. Father [Joseph] Frassinetti, prior of St. Sabina, on whom Don Bosco had made a courtesy call, went along with them. They admired the palace of the famous Prince Andrea Doria, built by Emperor Charles V, and the forest of masts of hundreds of boats along the waterfront. They also strolled along the vast marble terrace, now demolished, overlooking the piers, and visited several churches.

After lunch at the seminary, several members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society led the brigade to a pier where about a dozen boats were waiting to take them aboard a large warship for a tour. Don Bosco joined them at the pier after making a courtesy call on the archbishop who welcomed him most cordially. Then, toward six, the Oratory boys staged a three-act comedy in the seminary auditorium to a large audience, composed mostly of priests. The archbishop also attended.[5]

On Wednesday, October 5, they heard Mass in the Dominican Church of Santa Maria di Castello, at the invitation of the pastor, the brother of Venerable Joseph Cottolengo.[6] Afterward they visited the cathedral and other sights while Don Bosco called on various people, particularly Father Francis Montebruno, to discuss a merger of their institutions. A few days later, Father Montebruno sent him the following letter:

[5] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[6] Now St. Joseph Cottolengo. [Editor]

Genoa, October 12, 1864

Dear Father in Christ Jesus:

I again ask you for a copy of your regulations, especially as regards the doorkeeper, because I really do need to draw up some rules for this highly important office. I enclose a copy of the section of our regulations dealing with vicars, of whom I have already spoken to you. If you have any comments, please feel free to tell me as a father. I trust that the Lord, for whom I intend to work, shall provide the necessary personnel.

According to our rules, I should appoint a successor. Please tell me whether it's fitting that, in my private testament, I appoint you or one of your confreres to this office. I would appreciate a prompt, most confidential reply on this matter, as I like to have everything ready for any possible eventuality.

Please pray for me and also that everything may proceed according to Our Lord's will.

Yours devotedly,
Fr. Francis Montebruno

Don Bosco asked Father Alasonatti to read the rules concerning vicars and to report to him. That evening there was a repeat stage performance with new songs, and again the archbishop attended with great pleasure.

On Thursday, October 6, the boys made a trip to Pegli on a visit to the famous Villa Pallavicini, a great tourist attraction planned and built at the cost of millions of lire by Marquis Ignatius Pallavicini who took them on the tour himself. In the visitors' book Don Bosco wrote: "God grant in due time the heavenly paradise to this munificent gentleman who has created this earthly paradise and so kindly helped us enjoy such splendid marvels." Before leaving they were treated to a generous repast which the marquis himself insisted on serving. Finally, the band played various selections. There followed Benediction, and then all left for Genoa. The marquis himself walked Don Bosco to the station and gave him a substantial donation.

That evening Don Bosco took leave of the archbishop, who had already generously reimbursed the seminary for any expense incurred by their hundred guests.[7]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 74

The 1864 Yearly Outing (Continued)

AT half past four on Friday morning, October 7, the Oratory boys boarded the train for Serravalle Scrivia where they arrived about eight. Father [Dominic] Pestarino met them and took them to a nearby hilltop Franciscan church and monastery for Mass and breakfast. Then, toward ten, they set out for the little town of Gavi. Along the way they met Canon Cajetan Alimonda, who was then already a renowned preacher of Genoa. He was vacationing at Gavi and knew Don Bosco only by reputation. Father Pestarino introduced him, and all three continued toward town. "It's still a long way to Mornese," the canon remarked, "and both you and your boys need food. Be my guests." Soon enough they were at the town outskirts. Led by the band playing a march, the boys marched to the canon's residence where, with the cooperation of several families and Father Jerome Denegri, the pastor of St. James' Church, they were served a substantial meal. Afterward, they followed the band to the parish church where, at the canon's invitation, Don Bosco gave a short sermon to the large congregation. Solemn Benediction closed the ceremony.

As dusk set in, Don Bosco thanked the canon for his hospitality and started with his boys on a two-hour uphill march. Father Pestarino loaned Don Bosco his own horse and provided a few donkeys for the less hardy boys.

In his eagerness to talk to Don Bosco once more, Canon Alimonda went after them and caught up with Father Cagliero who was prodding the stragglers. Together they went up to the Madonna della Guardia Shrine hoping to find him, but he was not there. Giving up his quest, the canon remarked to Father Cagliero: "I'll meet this providential man again! Only mountains can't move!"

Half a mile from Mornese, several boys in their Sunday best

were awaiting Don Bosco, but he arrived only after dark. All the townsfolk, led by their pastor, Father Valle, and by Father Dominic Pestarino who had gone ahead of the boys, came out to meet him with oil lamps and candles, while church bells rang and firecrackers lit up the sky. Don Bosco dismounted and walked the rest of the way. As the band filled the air with harmonies, everyone knelt along Don Bosco's path, seeking his blessing. They followed him into church for Benediction and night prayers. Then, after supper, everybody retired for the night, the boys lodging at a farm whose inner yard had several sheds for sleeping, eating, and playing.

On Saturday, October 8, Don Bosco said Mass at dawn. Every morning during his stay the church was packed as on solemn feast days. This particular morning the boys could not even get near him, because as soon as he returned to the sacristy, a large crowd of men waiting to go to confession kept him busy until after ten. When he was through with confessions, Father Pestarino introduced to him a number of young girls who were looked after by a parish sodality, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. We have already mentioned this sodality founded by Miss [Angela] Maccagno,[1] a teacher. She was present with the older members, among them Mary Mazzarello,[2] whom the Lord destined to be the first mother general of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Father Pestarino had eagerly insisted that Don Bosco visit Mornese, particularly to bless this girls' sodality, which he now warmly urged him to adopt as his own spiritual family. Noting their excellent spirit, their piety, and their mutual charity, as well as the great deal of good they were doing for Mornese's girls, Don Bosco consented and gave them his blessing.

[1] *See* pp. 174f. [Editor]

[2] Mary Mazzarello (1837–1881), the oldest of seven children, grew up in a hardworking, devout, peasant family. At fifteen she consecrated her life to God by a perpetual vow of purity. In 1855 she was among the first to join the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. Until she was twenty-three, she worked on the farm; then, stricken by typhoid fever contracted in assisting the sick, she came very near to death, but recovered. In 1864 she met Don Bosco who quickly realized her worth and founded his hopes on her for a congregation of sisters to give girls a thorough Christian education. His dream was realized in 1872 when Mary Mazzarello became co-foundress and first mother general of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. She held this office till her death in 1881. Her cause of beatification was introduced in 1925; she was declared blessed in 1938 and a saint in 1951. [Editor]

That same morning he received a visit from Father Raymond Olivieri, pastor of the nearby village of Lerma, who had hastened to Mornese after saying Mass to pay his respects to his long-standing friend, Don Bosco. At his request, Don Bosco altered his itinerary and took all his boys to Lerma on Monday.

Father Pestarino had meanwhile invited Don Bosco to dinner with friends. The Oratory boys' meal was to be looked after by the village schoolteacher, Francis Bodrato, about forty, who had offered his services. During the meal Bodrato stood behind Don Bosco's chair. Used to being with young people, he admired the pupils' warm familiarity with their superior and their respect and prompt obedience. This was true of both students and artisans. He observed too how affable Don Bosco was with them. Noticing the powerful sway of charity and realizing that he had much to learn from this method of education, he asked Don Bosco for an interview which was granted immediately. He was determined to learn Don Bosco's secret in bending to his will such a crowd of boys naturally intolerant of discipline.

"Religion and reason," Don Bosco replied, "are the two springs of my method of education. An educator should realize that all these fine lads, or nearly all, are smart enough to sense the good done to them and are innately open to sentiments of gratitude. With God's help, we must strive to make them grasp the main tenets of our faith which, based entirely on love, reminds us of God's infinite love for mankind. We must seek to strike in their hearts a chord of gratitude which we owe Him in return for the benefits He so generously showers upon us. We must do our best to convince them through simple reasoning that gratitude to God means carrying out His will and obeying His commandments, especially those which stress observance of the duties of our state of life. Believe me, if our efforts succeed, we have accomplished the greater part of our educational task. In this educational method, religion—like a bit in a fiery steed's mouth—thoroughly controls the youngster, while reason—like a bridle—steers his course. The secret of my method of education is summed up in two words: religion and reason—religion, genuine and sincere, to control one's actions; reason, to apply moral principles to one's activities rightly."

After a moment's reflection, Bodrato smiled. "Father," he re-

plied, "your simile of bit and bridle illustrates the power of religion and reason in governing one's actions. Well and good, but I feel that you have left out a third means which a horse trainer always uses—the whip."

"My good friend," Don Bosco countered, "I'd like to point out that the whip—that is, a salutary threat of punishment—is nowhere excluded from my method of education. Remember that many and frightful are the punishments which our religion threatens for those who disregard and dare to break God's commandments. If these severe, fearful punishments are frequently recalled, they will bring about wholesome results, both exteriorly and interiorly, since they reach even most secret thoughts. To impress even more this truth on young minds, let the educator insistently promote the sincere practice of religion and the frequent reception of the sacraments. I am sure that with God's help we will then more easily succeed in turning very many boys, even the most stubborn, into good Christians. Besides, once youngsters are convinced that the educator sincerely seeks their well-being, a certain coolness on his part in showing displeasure at their lack of appreciation will often enough suffice as an effective punishment. Believe me, sir, this is probably the easiest and certainly the most effective method of education. Being based on religion, it will have God's blessing. To give you a tangible proof of this, I'll dare to invite you to the Oratory for a few days to see its application, and I trust that you will assure me at the end of your stay that I was right in saying that this is the most practical, effective method of education."

The invitation, extended partly in jest and partly in earnest, deeply impressed Francis Bodrato who, as a close friend of Father Pestarino, had already decided in his heart to join the Salesian Society.

That afternoon the Oratory boys hiked to Parodi where the pastor had invited them for refreshments.[3] They returned very late to Mornese and did not have the pleasure of seeing Don Bosco, as he was hearing confessions in the church. Don Bosco had stayed in the village all day. During these days he had long talks with Father Pestarino. He accepted him into the Salesian

[3] At this point we are omitting repetitious details. [Editor]

Society, as the good priest so ardently desired, but he wanted him to remain in Mornese to direct the Daughters of Mary Immaculate as long as the Lord might give him life, promising his own advice and material help.

Father Pestarino also told Don Bosco of his desire to erect a memorial of some kind in Mornese to remind his fellow villagers even after his death of his love for them. He had already come to an agreement with the town authorities and was ready to donate his considerable holdings. Now he obtained Don Bosco's consent to build a large boarding school for boys to second his people's wishes. They in turn volunteered to haul construction material to the site on Sundays, while Father Pestarino promised—and kept his word—to treat them generously to food and drink and to provide hay for their mares and oxen. Don Bosco assured him that he would return to Mornese to dedicate the new school.

Sunday, October 9, was the feast of Our Lady's Maternity and was observed with great solemnity. Don Bosco offered the Mass, served by two young altar boys, at which the townsfolk went to Communion in a body. Father Pestarino, who had begun hearing confessions the night before, continued through the night and was still at his task at nine in the morning, as Don Bosco noticed. He zealously underwent these hardships several times a year, besides giving a few hours daily, morning and evening, to this sacred ministry.

Don Bosco had just come in from church and was having a cup of coffee when Father Pestarino asked him to step out and meet some callers. On opening the door he was greeted by a resounding *Viva Don Bosco.* The entire village—two rows of children in front, parents at the rear—stood in Father Pestarino's yard and adjacent vineyard, all holding gifts of eggs, butter, choice grapes, chickens, fruit, cheese, large wine jugs, and baskets of vintage bottles; one even had a whole *brenta* of wine.[4] Don Bosco walked through the lines, thanking them and addressing a kind word to each. Then, returning to the stoop, he expressed his gratitude for their kindness in spite of having hardly known him.

[4] A wooden conical container with straps for carrying on one's back. Its capacity was different in various regions. In Piedmont it measured slightly over twelve gallons. [Editor]

"Your charity overwhelms me," he concluded. "I realize that you honor me because I am God's minister. This shows your faith. May the Lord preserve it forever in your hearts, for faith alone can make us happy in this life and in the next."

He was about to withdraw when a cry arose from all sides, "Give us your blessing!"

"Yes!" he replied. "I wholeheartedly bless you, your families, and your fields. May God grant you abundant crops to your heart's content. In turn, pray for me and my boys that one fine day we may all form one happy family in heaven!" Many swarmed about him to kiss his hand.

Toward noon, after solemn high Mass, the Oratory boys gave a rousing welcome to Father Alasonatti who, though in poor health, had come from Turin to discuss some important matter with Don Bosco. They consulted privately for a short while and then Father Alasonatti left.

At the first peal of vesper bells, the church was packed tight with people. Don Bosco spoke, as if inspired, on the effectiveness of Our Lady's protection, narrating many examples which left their mark on his listeners. "Only saints can preach like that," all remarked.

Afterward the Oratory band played in the square to the villagers' delight. Houses were lit up and balloons soared into the air. The boys also gave a brief but stirring stage performance, after which the villagers went home for their usual recitation of the rosary.

That day Don Bosco wrote to Marchioness Fassati to let her know of the date of his return to Turin, but at the insistence of friends he had to change his plans:

Mornese, October 9, 1864

Dear Marchioness:

I am on an outing with my boys and shall not return to Turin until the 14th. Although our schools open later, I fear that it is otherwise at Mongré and that therefore I shall not find my dear Emmanuel at my return. If my guess is right, and I may still see him by returning a few days earlier, please let me know. I shall come instantly.

You can reach me at the Acqui seminary, where all my brigade and I will arrive the day after tomorrow. I had meant to see you

at Montemagno, but the riots in Turin made me decide not to leave just then.

I am at Mornese, in the Acqui diocese, a village which resembles a community of persons consecrated to God in piety, charity, and zeal. At my Mass this morning, about a thousand people received Communion.

Please accept my respects and gratitude and extend them to the marquis, to Azelia, and to Emmanuel. Please tell Emmanuel that I always remember him in my Masses and that he is not to forget what I recommended to him at Montemagno.[5]

If your parents are with you, please remember me to them. God grant you health and grace and keep you all on the path to heaven.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On Monday, October 10, Don Bosco hiked with his boys to Lerma, where they were awaited by the pastor, Father Raymond Olivieri, and four Oratory pupils who were home on vacation.[6] As soon as they could sight Lerma on its hilly summit, they heard a roar of firecrackers together with church bells and strains of the village band. The Oratory band lined up and replied with a selection of its own. The exchange continued till the Oratory boys entered the village, where the pastor and all the people warmly welcomed them. Don Bosco greeted the pastor and addressed a few words of thanks to the local musicians. Then all marched triumphantly into the village.

Both Oratory and village musicians were invited to a splendid dinner offered by the pastor. Later they made the rounds of the village, playing selections for various notables. Benediction followed, and then Don Bosco and the Oratory boys took their leave after a warm exchange of good wishes.[7]

Don Bosco again walked the long way back to Mornese, accompanied by a young priest [8] who had been introduced to him

[5] *See* p. 322. [Editor]

[6] At this point we are omitting the description of a castle along the way. [Editor]

[7] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[8] This young priest was Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, the author of these memoirs. [Editor]

there by his friend, the pastor. He had the good fortune of being alone with Don Bosco. Amiably Don Bosco again asked his name and birthplace and then added, "How about coming to Turin with me?"

"Why not?" the young priest replied, as if charmed by Don Bosco's amiability. Don Bosco said nothing more.

At dinner in Lerma, the pastor had seated this young priest at Don Bosco's side, and the latter had given him descriptions of the Oratory and suggested what should be done to safeguard youth from the many dangers lurking about them. Quite impressed by it all, the priest had remarked, "If it's all right with you, I'd very much like to come to Turin with you."

"Why?"

"To help you in whatever little way I can."

"No," Don Bosco countered. "God's works do not need man's help."

"I'll just come and do whatever you tell me."

"Come only with the intention of doing your own soul some good."

"Very well," the priest answered.

For an hour and a half along the way, he confided his past life and future plans to Don Bosco. The young priest never forgot this walk.

The following day, Tuesday, October 11, Don Bosco set out after lunch with all his boys for Capriata amid the applause of the Mornese villagers. He had accepted ten Mornese boys for either the Oratory or Lanzo. At a certain point where the road forked toward Gavi and Montaldeo, the young priest, who had to go to Serravalle Scrivia, took his leave of Don Bosco. "Will you come to Turin, then?" Don Bosco asked with a charming smile.

"I surely will," was the reply. "Count me in as one of your sons. Within a week I shall be with you."

CHAPTER 75

The 1864 Yearly Outing (Continued)

THE Oratory boys marched over rolling, fruitful hills to Capriata, accompanied part of the way by Don Bosco. At this large village they received a warm welcome from several vacationing Mirabello pupils who knew Don Bosco, and from six or seven other boys who had been newly accepted for the junior seminary. At the pastor's invitation they went to church for solemn Benediction, and after supper they staged a play for the villagers.[1]

The following day, Wednesday, October 12, they went on to Ovada, where Don Bosco was expected by Father Tito Borgatta, a wealthy priest who had known Don Bosco and his work for many years. Father Borgatta hosted the boys in an inn which he rented for two days. Though they marched into town to the music of the band, they were received with cold, almost hostile looks because of the many priests and clerics accompanying them. After the boys had been cared for, Father Borgatta asked Don Bosco and his priests to stay at his rectory.

The boys had Benediction in the magnificent parish church. Later, at the mayor's invitation, they staged a play for the people and were warmly applauded. . . .

After breakfast the next day they were to go on to Acqui, but, before leaving, Don Bosco wished to give a prudent, brotherly warning to Father Borgatta, who had been so generous to them all. True, this priest used his wealth to help the poor, but he was involved in too many business enterprises. He had set up a very profitable bank, opened a large bakery, and built an exclusive girls' boarding school staffed by nuns who had brought a large dowry into the order which he himself had founded. Father Pestarino and other friends had warned him not to get too involved in finances, but in vain. Discussing these matters with him in a

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. Here and there in this chapter we shall omit repetitious details. Such omissions will be indicated by dots. [Editor]

friendly way, Don Bosco told him not to forget that the world hates [priests and] religious in general, and that if it cannot get at them today, it will do so tomorrow; a priest, therefore, should look after spiritual matters and leave worldly pursuits to the laity. Reminding him of St. Paul's words: "No one serving as God's soldier entangles himself in worldly affairs" [2 Tim. 2, 4], he ended by urging him to change his ways lest he come to a bad end. Father Borgatta merely smiled because his fortune seemed so secure, but it would appear that Don Bosco's words were prophetic. A partner, whom Father Borgatta fully trusted, betrayed him. Bankruptcy, disgrace, and ruin followed.

On Thursday, October 13, after Mass and breakfast, the Oratory boys left for Acqui with the band at the head of the march. At Cremolino they made an unscheduled stop at the invitation of Marquis Serra, whose castle stood atop a hill near the main highway, where they were treated royally. Then, after another stop at Prasco, they proceeded to Acqui, where they arrived at the seminary at nine that evening, warmly welcomed by superiors and seminarians.[2] Here Don Bosco found a letter awaiting him:

Rome, October 8, 1864

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

Yesterday at seven the Holy Father graciously received me privately for about three quarters of an hour, affably discussing many things. *Deo gratias.*

I asked his blessing for you who are so dear to me, for your priests, and for all the boys who are fortunate enough to receive a Christian education in your schools. I also asked in your name that the privileges granted to the Oratory on the feast of its patron, St. Francis de Sales, be extended to the Mirabello junior seminary on the feast of St. Charles. Graciously and paternally the Holy Father granted the requests and asked me to inform you and delegate you to give that blessing to all your beloved, saintly family which, to his delightful surprise, he learned numbers already over seven hundred. He read your entire letter and was greatly consoled, stating that he always remembers you with fondness. He added that he still cherished a little box containing the offerings sent by your boys [in 1849].[3]

[2] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. III, pp. 358–63, 367f. [Editor]

I told him of the church you are building, and he expressed great interest, suggesting a lottery. I replied that I had already contacted the principal newspapers of Rome on that score but that I was awaiting your answer on the matter. The Holy Father then said, "Good! Help that saintly man. Meanwhile, let me give you two little things." He handed me two charming little mementos which, though not of intrinsic value, will spur others to follow his example and aid God's works. He then added, "If there is no lottery, Don Bosco will let you keep one of these articles as a memento of me. Even if you should want to give it to him as a gift, he will ask you to keep it because he is so fond of you." The memento I would like to keep is a little gold cross.

We then spoke at length about the Oratory, and I told him everything that you had instructed me to say.

So, my very dear Don Bosco, shall we go ahead with the lottery? I think so. Even if it doesn't bring us much, it will always help. The Holy Father's blessing, so warmly granted, and his example will certainly bear fruit.

Please tell me what you think of my suggestion. You can count on my best efforts and interest.

Father Emilian Manacorda

On Friday, October 14, Don Bosco paid his respects to Bishop [Modesto] Contratto, a Capuchin, and, at his express wish, introduced his pupils to him. The bishop talked cordially with them. Lunch was served at the seminary, but the bishop invited Don Bosco and his priests to eat with him. That evening a stage performance was given in the seminary auditorium at which the bishop was present. The program was the same as at Ovada.

A little incident occurred at this time which went unnoticed but is quite characteristic of Don Bosco. Some time before, he had asked a young diocesan cleric to join the staff of the new school at Lanzo. Musically inclined and talented, but rather unbending, this cleric declined because he did not want to leave the Oratory. Don Bosco took no offense and took him along on the outing. As they were about to leave Becchi for Villanova, Don Bosco invited the cleric to walk with him, but the young man managed to excuse himself. At Genoa, Mornese, and Ovada Don Bosco in vain tried to corner him; the cleric, afraid to be asked to go to Lanzo, successfully managed to avoid him. Finally,

while all the boys were talking to the bishop in his residence, the young man unexpectedly found Don Bosco at his side. "Now then, what's your answer?" Don Bosco asked, taking his hand. Caught unawares, the cleric stammered, "I'll tell you this evening or when we are back in Turin."

After the stage performance, the cleric went to the dormitory and surprised Don Bosco in the act of making the cleric's bed which the latter had left unmade since morning. Don Bosco bade him good night and retired to his room next to the dormitory. Moved at such solicitude on Don Bosco's part, the cleric cried himself to sleep. The next morning he went to Don Bosco's door and listened. Hearing him pacing the room, he knocked. "Send me wherever you wish," he said. "I won't object!" Thus Don Bosco overcame the cleric's reluctance and won ever more to himself a young man who was to do a great amount of good in the foreign missions.

On Sunday, October 15, there was a solemn funeral Mass in the seminary chapel for the deceased members of a church association. The choir sang the requiem Mass composed by Father Cagliero, and Don Bosco delivered a moving address before the exequies. After lunch, the bishop, who had been present at the whole service, invited the boys to his summer residence at Strevi where he stayed with them and had refreshments served. His kindness overwhelmed them. On Sunday, October 16, the feast of the Blessed Virgin's Purification, the boys sang a solemn high Mass in the cathedral.

During their three happy days at Acqui, the Oratory boys visited the beautiful five-nave cathedral, the city churches, the ancient sulphur springs, the Roman aqueduct ruins, the mud baths, and the ancient castle of the Monferrato [4] rulers, while Don Bosco interviewed new pupils for the Oratory, Mirabello, or Lanzo and promoted *Letture Cattoliche*. When he entered the sacristy to prepare for Mass on those mornings, he found not only his own boys waiting for confession but seminarians as well, several of whom discovered that Don Bosco could read their hearts. During the day he interviewed those who wished to discuss their vocation with him.

That Sunday evening, October 16, after he had taken leave of

[4] A hilly region of Piedmont renowned for its wines. [Editor]

the bishop, Don Bosco announced that all would return to Turin on the next day. After commenting on their trip and their benefactors' great generosity, Don Bosco concluded, "Everything fades away, but not our gratitude. We shall always pray that God will abundantly bless those who have been so good to us."

The next morning, October 17, the band played a farewell piece for the seminarians and led the way to the railroad station where, before boarding the train, they played a symphony to the applause of crowding bystanders. Waving and shouting *Viva Acqui,* the boys said good-bye to the city. At Alessandria their two coaches were hitched to the train from Genoa; the station master greeted Don Bosco and then waved the train off. At Asti Don Bosco got off to spend a few days calling on benefactors. The Oratory group reached Turin in the early afternoon.

This was the last, longest, and most exciting outing of the whole decade.[5] All had done inestimable good because God manifested Himself in Don Bosco. During those outings he accepted boys into the Oratory who are now zealous priests, he led sinners back to God, he restored peace in families or made them resigned to life's hardships, he made anticlericals come to know and respect priests, and by his zealous preaching he brought many communities back to God.

But from now on Don Bosco would have to give up this extraordinary mission of his. Increasing work would no longer permit him to absent himself from the Oratory for so long a period or in that manner. He would have to limit himself to sending a group of choirboys and the brass band to Becchi—and no further—for the yearly feast of Our Lady of the Rosary at which he too would take part.

When Don Bosco returned to the Oratory from Asti he found a papal brief, dated October 13, 1864, acknowledging receipt of his letter of August 25,[6] congratulating him on the growth of his congregation, and urging that he continue working for the spiritual welfare of youth.[7]

Several other letters were also there from Father Emilian Mana-

[5] For previous outings *see* Vol. IV, pp. 445ff; Vol. V, pp. 223ff; Vol. VI, pp. 27–31, 143–54, 436,–43, 608–14. *See also* pp. 158–70, 322–25. [Editor]

[6] *See* pp. 425f. [Editor]

[7] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

corda, to whom Don Bosco had entrusted several errands in Rome. The first concerned fund-raising for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, for which Father Manacorda suggested a lottery; the second was about dimissorial letters for Don Bosco's clerics; the third was a dispensation from reciting the Divine Office. Pius IX had already dispensed Don Bosco orally on condition that, if possible, he say at least part of it daily, but Don Bosco wanted proof in writing. At intervals Father Manacorda gave him other news that he was awaiting.[8]

For the greater tranquillity of his own conscience, Don Bosco gladly accepted written permission to say a brief prayer in place of the Divine Office. He did try, however, to recite it totally or at least partially whenever he could. He always kept his breviary on his desk and carried it with him in traveling. Even when his ailments increased and his sight grew dimmer, he made it a point to recite it in part daily. When in his last years this became absolutely impossible, he asked others what the office for the day was and sometimes had the lessons read aloud to him, as Bishop Cagliero, Father Rua, and Father Berto have testified.

Immediately after his return Don Bosco set about expressing his thanks to all who had so generously welcomed and hosted his pupils. He wrote letters to all of them and sent them complimentary copies of his own books. He, of course, received acknowledgments, but only one has reached us. It came from Mr. Joseph Canale, the gentleman who had escorted the Oratory group on a sightseeing tour in and around Genoa.[9]

[8] We are omitting these letters. [Editor]
[9] This last sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 76

Noteworthy Details (Continued)

IN 1864–65 the Oratory students numbered three hundred and fifty, as we find in a note of Don Bosco to the superintendent of schools, but the boys' total exceeded seven hundred. These youngsters hailed from all parts of Italy, including Sicily, and filled every corner of the Oratory. They were eager to study or learn a trade, and they put their whole heart in their work. Don Bosco's co-workers often voiced their fears about ever mounting expenses, but he countered by saying that the Oratory had a drinking fountain which kept spouting gold coins and that he had therefore never refused to accept needy boys for financial reasons.

He proved this with facts. When, for instance, toward nine o'clock of the evening of October 18, several clerics around him begged him to tell them something interesting, he agreed to show them how Divine Providence that previous winter had come to his aid. "One day," he said, "when my funds were at their lowest, the baker came up to me with an overdue bill. Momentarily disconcerted, I said, 'Come tomorrow and I'll pay you in full.' The words slipped out almost before I realized it, but I instantly felt a surge of trust in Divine Providence. The next day dawned, and I had not a single *soldo*. I went to the church to say Mass, worrying about my debt. As I was going to the altar, a young man walked into the sacristy, handed a priest an envelope addressed to me, and left. The sealed envelope was given to me after Mass. In it I found three one-thousand-lire bills—the exact amount I owed. Remember, I had not told anyone of my pressing need, nor was I acquainted with the young man who brought the money. Divine Providence is truly marvelous, as you can see."

As a faithful servant, Don Bosco administered the treasury of Divine Providence so that the needy would receive help and those who he thought did not qualify would not be offended. He received

at least ten times as many applications as there were vacancies, and yet he acknowledged all requests, expressing deep respect for the writers and their suggestions, and promising to do all he could to oblige as soon as possible.

He was equally courteous in replying to people who ignored the Oratory's admission requirements. He was quite aware that many people did not really care whether a boy was admitted or not and that they only wanted to get rid of a nuisance, while others again only wished to make a show of patronage or influence. Don Bosco kindly found ways to persuade such people to wait for an opening and to trust in Divine Providence. However, if he foresaw that people who wrote to him would be offended by a refusal, he often went out of his way to help his boys.

At times he asked his patrons for a favor when they could easily afford it. For instance, when he accepted a boy recommended by the deputy Amilcare Marazio, he requested the deputy to get him a subsidy from the Ministry of Grace and Justice for the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. However, if a boy evidently needed help, he immediately accepted him and so amiably notified the person recommending him that he won another friend.[1]

Don Bosco's greatest concern, however, was for his clerics. On the evening of October 19, after prayers, he invested several boys with the clerical habit, in the presence of all the Oratory community. Among them was Francis Bodrato,[2] a widower who, after settling his affairs and entrusting his two sons to Don Bosco, had chosen to become a Salesian.

Don Bosco's intuition in recognizing which of his pupils were called to the priesthood is confirmed by those who had already become his most reliable assistants at the Oratory. During those very days they were diligently studying for seminary examinations, and that diligence was well rewarded. On November 3, with the exception of four who obtained only a *bene* (good), the rest scored *optime* or *fere optime* (excellent or almost excellent). Sixteen were studying theology and six were studying philosophy. The seemingly diminished number in comparison with the pre-

[1] We are omitting one such letter. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 451f. [Editor]

vious year was due to the fact that some were now staffing the two new schools at Mirabello and Lanzo. Five more had entered the seminary. Don Bosco did not forget them. In fact, he wrote a recommendation for one of them to the rector, Canon Vogliotti:

Turin, October 22, 1864

Dear Reverend Father:

The cleric, Francis Sargiotto, is applying through me for free board at the seminary. I recommend him because I have always known him to be a young man of good will and excellent conduct. His father was and is unable to contribute anything. All I can do is to recommend him. In your wisdom, do what you think is best for God's greater glory.

May heaven's blessings be upon you.

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

At this time too he had looked after the Oratory staff and assigned teachers as follows:

Latin I, Father Celestine Durando.

Latin II, Father John Baptist Francesia.

Latin III, Cleric Peter Barberis.

Latin IV, Father Victor Alasonatti.

Latin V, Cleric John Tamagnone.

Father Angelo Savio taught mathematics. Don Bosco submitted this list to the school superintendent, as the latter had requested on November 26. No objections were raised.

Don Bosco was also at work on several issues of *Letture Cattoliche* which he had authored for the most part. The December issue, entitled *Two Secret Gems,* announced the opening of a religious bookstore at the Oratory. Meanwhile *Il Galantuomo,* the 1865 national almanac, was also being readied for mailing to all *Letture Cattoliche* subscribers. . . .

CHAPTER 77

A Dream: Ten Hills

FATHER Dominic Ruffino's transfer to Lanzo as director [of its new Salesian school] made it impossible for him to continue his [Oratory] chronicle, but at this very time we ourselves, unaware of Father Ruffino's and Father Bonetti's work, felt inspired and privileged to carry it on for nearly two years. We have witnessed all that we are committing to paper. We begin by reporting a short talk given by Don Bosco [to his young clerics] on October 18, 1864:

Each of you should work as if you yourself were the director of this house: admonishing, giving good advice, and inspiring the boys with love of the Eucharist. All these things are essential to the smooth running of this house.

Dauntlessly but humbly let us fulfill our duties. The Pope wrote: *Deo bene adiuvante* [with God's help]. We therefore have nothing to fear. If our work is approved by God, it will succeed. As individuals we are nothing but instruments. We must work for God with no earthly motive. Even if many should abandon us, we mustn't worry. It is God from whom we must expect help. Let us strive to be faithful to Him. To overcome temptations, use a means I have long found to be quite powerful: kiss Our Lady's medal. If circumstances suggest otherwise, say, "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I offer You my heart and my soul." Should the temptation persist, kiss the medal again or repeat your prayer. You will win.

These admonitions were addressed particularly to the clerics.

To the boys, instead, he used to give, at the start of the school year, an exhortation which brought the first consoling fruits of their education to their parents. Thus, on October 19, he reminded them of their loving parents, of their efforts and financial sacrifices in order to rear them and give them a good education,

and of the respect, obedience, and love they owed them because of God's commandment. He then urged each boy to write a fine little letter to his parents, telling them how much he loved them and asking pardon for any sorrow he might have caused them.

A few days later [October 22] he told them an impressive dream. We read in the Book of Daniel that four noble youths, brought as slaves from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nabuchodonosor, remained faithful to God's laws, and for this reason "to these young men God gave knowledge and proficiency in all literature and science, and to Daniel the understanding of visions and dreams." [Dan. 1, 17] By God's grace, Daniel could tell whether dreams were supernatural or not and what message they carried from God. To a great extent at least, for the same reason, the Lord granted this grace also to Don Bosco in the dreams which we have already narrated [1] and obviously—in our opinion—also in the dream we are about to relate. It came to him the night of October 21, and he narrated it the following night. [Surprisingly] C . . . B. . . , a boy from Casale Monferrato, had the same dream, during which he seemed to be with Don Bosco, talking to him. In the morning the boy was so deeply impressed that he went to tell it all to his teacher, who urged him to report to Don Bosco. The youngster met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs to look for the boy and tell him the very same dream. [Here is the dream:]

Don Bosco seemed to be in a vast valley swarming with thousands and thousands of boys—so many, in fact, that their number surpassed belief. Among them he could see all past and present pupils; the rest, perhaps, were yet to come. Scattered among them were priests and clerics then at the Oratory.

A lofty bank blocked one end of the valley. As Don Bosco wondered what to do with all those boys, a voice said to him: "Do you see that bank? Well, both you and the boys must reach its summit."

At Don Bosco's word, all those youngsters dashed toward the bank. The priests too ran up the slope, pushing boys ahead, lifting up those who fell, and hoisting on their shoulders those who were too tired to

[1] *See* the Indexes of this and other volumes under "Dreams of St. John Bosco." [Editor]

climb further. Father Rua, his sleeves rolled up, kept working hardest of all, gripping two boys at a time and literally hurling them up to the top of the bank where they landed on their feet and merrily scampered about. Meanwhile Father Cagliero and Father Francesia ran back and forth encouraging the youngsters to climb.

It didn't take long for all of them to make it to the top. "Now what shall we do?" Don Bosco asked.

"You must all climb each of the ten hills before you," the voice replied.

"Impossible! So many young, frail boys will never make it!"

"Those who can't will be carried," the voice countered.

At this very moment, at the far end of the bank, appeared a gorgeous, triangular-shaped wagon, too beautiful for words. Its three wheels swiveled in all directions. Three shafts rose from its corners and joined to support a richly embroidered banner, carrying in large letters the inscription *Innocentia* [Innocence]. A wide band of rich material was draped about the wagon, bearing the legend: *Adiutorio Dei Altissimi, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.* [With the help of the Most High, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.]

Glittering with gold and gems, the wagon came to a stop in the boys' midst. At a given order, five hundred of the smaller ones climbed into it. Among the untold thousands, only these few hundred were still innocent.

As Don Bosco kept wondering which way to go, a wide, level road strewn with thorns opened before him. Suddenly there also appeared six white-clad former pupils who had died at the Oratory. Holding aloft another splendid banner with the inscription *Poenitentia* [Penance], they placed themselves at the head of the multitude which was to walk the whole way. As the signal to move was given, many priests seized the wagon's prow and led the way, followed by the six white-clad boys and the rest of the multitude. The lads in the wagon began singing *Laudate pueri Dominum* [Praise the Lord, you children—Ps. 112, 1] with indescribable sweetness.

Don Bosco kept going forward, enthralled by their heavenly melody, but, on an impulse, he turned to find out if the boys were following. To his deep regret he noticed that many had stayed behind in the valley, while many others had turned back. Heartbroken, he wanted to retrace his steps to persuade those boys to follow him and to help them along, but he was absolutely forbidden to do so. "Those poor boys will be lost!" he protested.

"So much the worse for them," he was told. "They too received the call but refused to follow you. They saw the road they had to travel. They had their chance."

Don Bosco insisted, pleaded, and begged, but in vain.

"You too must obey," he was told. He had to walk on.

He was still smarting with this pain when he became aware of another sad fact: a large number of those riding in the wagon had gradually fallen off, so that a mere hundred and fifty still stood under the banner of innocence. His heart was aching with unbearable grief. He hoped that it was only a dream and made every effort to awake, but unfortunately it was all too real. He clapped his hands and heard their sound; he groaned and heard his sighs resound through the room; he wanted to banish this horrible vision and could not.

"My dear boys," he exclaimed at this point of his narration, "I recognized those of you who stayed behind in the valley and those who turned back or fell from the wagon. I saw you all. You can be sure that I will do my utmost to save you. Many of you whom I urged to go to confession did not accept my invitation. For heaven's sake, save your souls."

Many of those who had fallen off the wagon joined those who were walking. Meanwhile the singing in the wagon continued, and it was so sweet that it gradually abated Don Bosco's sorrow. Seven hills had already been climbed. As the boys reached the eighth, they found themselves in a wonderful village where they stopped for a brief rest. The houses were indescribably beautiful and luxurious.

In telling the boys of this village, Don Bosco remarked, "I could repeat what St. Teresa said about heavenly things—to speak of them is to belittle them. They are just too beautiful for words. I shall only say that the doorposts of these houses seemed to be made of gold, crystal, and diamonds all at once. They were a most wonderful, satisfying, pleasing sight. The fields were dotted with trees laden simultaneously with blossoms, buds, and fruit. It was out of this world!" The boys scattered all over, eager to see everything and to taste the fruit.

(It was in this village that the boy from Casale met Don Bosco and talked at length with him. Both of them remembered quite vividly the details of their conversation. The two dreams had been a singular coincidence.)

Here another surprise awaited Don Bosco. His boys suddenly looked like old men: toothless, wrinkled, white-haired, bent over, lame, leaning on canes. He was stunned, but the voice said, "Don't be

surprised. It's been years and years since you left that valley. The music made your trip seem so short. If you want proof, look at yourself in the mirror and you will see that I am telling the truth." Don Bosco was handed a mirror. He himself had grown old, with his face deeply lined and his few remaining teeth decayed.

The march resumed. Now and then the boys asked to be allowed to stop and look at the novelties around them, but he kept urging them on. "We are neither hungry nor thirsty," he said. "We have no need to stop. Let's keep going!"

Far away, on the tenth hill, arose a light which grew increasingly larger and brighter, as though pouring from a gigantic doorway. Singing resumed, so enchanting that its like may possibly be heard and enjoyed only in paradise. It is simply indescribable because it did not come from instruments or human throats. Don Bosco was so overjoyed that he awoke, only to find himself in bed.

He then explained his dream thus: "The valley is this world; the bank symbolizes the obstacles we have to surmount in detaching ourselves from it; the wagon is self-evident. The youngsters on foot were those who lost their innocence but repented of their sins." He also added that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments whose observance leads to eternal life. He concluded by saying that he was ready to tell some boys confidentially what they had been doing in the dream: whether they had remained in the valley or fallen off the wagon.

When he came down from the stand, a pupil, Anthony Ferraris, approached him and told him within our hearing that, the night before, he had dreamed that he was with his mother and that when the latter had asked him whether he would be coming home next Easter, he had replied that by then he would be in paradise. He then whispered something else in Don Bosco's ear. Anthony Ferraris died on March 16, 1865.[2]

We jotted down Don Bosco's dream that very evening, October 22, 1864, and added this note: "We are sure that in explaining the dream Don Bosco tried to cover up what is most mystifying, at least in some instances. The explanation that the ten hills symbolized the Ten Commandments does not convince us. We rather believe that the eighth hill on which Don Bosco called a halt and

[2] More details will be narrated in Vol. VIII. [Editor]

saw himself as an old man symbolizes the end of his life in the seventies. The future will tell."

The future is now past; facts have borne out our belief. The dream revealed Don Bosco's life-span. For comparative purposes, let us match this dream with that of *The Wheel of Eternity*,[3] which we came to learn only years later. In that dream each turn of the wheel symbolized a decade, and this also seems to be the case in the trek from hill to hill. Each hill stands for a decade, and the ten hills represent a century, man's maximum life-span. In his life's first decade, Don Bosco, as a young boy, begins his mission among his companions at Becchi and starts on his journey; he climbs seven hills—seven decades—and reaches the age of seventy; he climbs the eighth hill and goes no farther. He sees beautiful buildings and meadows, symbols of the Salesian Society which, through God's infinite goodness, has grown and borne fruit. He has still a long way to go on the eighth hill and therefore sets out again, but he does not reach the ninth because he wakes up. Thus he did not live out his eighth decade; he died at the age of seventy-two years and five months.

What do our readers think of this interpretation? On the following evening, Don Bosco asked us our opinion of the dream. We replied that it did not concern only the boys, but showed also the worldwide spread of the Salesian Society.

"What do you mean?" a confrere countered. "We already have schools at Mirabello and Lanzo, and we'll have a few more in Piedmont. What else do you want?"

"No," we insisted. "This dream portends far greater things." Don Bosco smiled and nodded approval.

After All Saints' Day, Don Bosco went to Mirabello for the feast of St. Charles Borromeo, the patron saint of the Salesian junior seminary. The bishop of Casale was also present. He always took part in such celebrations, besides presiding over the annual philosophy and theology examinations of the young clerics there. It was a most remarkable celebration. Don Bosco enthused the pupils by telling them of his dream and prepared them for a general Communion. He also interviewed each member of the staff to become acquainted with their needs and difficulties. Necessity had forced

[3] *See* Vol. VI, pp. 530–44. [Editor]

him to switch teachers around and to transfer the cleric Francis Provera, the prefect, to Lanzo in the same capacity. Father John Bonetti was to take on his office in Mirabello.

Having settled matters, Don Bosco got ready to leave. It was hard then—and thereafter too—for the pupils to let him go. Many were in tears, and each one still had something to whisper to him. It was equally hard for him to leave, but he promised to return.

Back in Turin, he immediately wrote to Father Bonetti, whom he had found upset over some misunderstanding, a common enough case in communities. Father Bonetti also was in poor shape healthwise because of a persistent cough and found his duties as prefect quite heavy:

Turin [November] 1864

My dear Bonetti:

As soon as you get this letter, go straight to Father Rua and tell him frankly to cheer you up. Forget about your breviary until Easter; in other words, you are forbidden to recite it. Say your Mass slowly so as not to tire yourself. You are also forbidden to fast or practice self-denial in food. The Lord is preparing work for you, but He does not want you to start it until you are perfectly recovered, especially as regards your cough. Do this and you will be doing God's will. You can make up for everything with short invocations, offering your pains to the Lord and giving good example.

I almost forgot something. Get yourself a mattress and fix up your bed just as a genuine lazybones would like it. Keep well covered, both in and out of bed. Amen.

God bless you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

In another letter to Countess [Charlotte] Callori he mentioned the feast of St. Charles at the Mirabello junior seminary whose opening had been made possible by her generous contributions. She had visited the school and conveyed her impressions to Don Bosco by letter. She had also brought to his attention Father Bonetti's poor health, wondering whether it might not be advisable to recall him to the Oratory. Moreover, Father Bonetti had

been entrusted with compiling a prayerbook [for adults] which the countess wished to see published as soon as possible. Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, December 13, 1864

My dear Countess:

By now you may have received the bundles of pledges [for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians] which you so kindly requested. If not, they must at least be at Casale by now.

Father Cagliero knows what is expected of him without having to be told. He knows how important the sermon is at Vignale and will go there well prepared and well intentioned.

I have given thought to Father Bonetti at Mirabello, but I believe he would be far less rested here than there. The school year is well started and his tasks are now considerably lighter. He has assured me that before the month's end he will send me at least a substantial part of the prayerbook. By the way, what will you call it? You are anxious to see it off the press, and so am I. Surprisingly, many important persons have also asked me for such a book without knowing that it is in preparation. I hope that printing can begin next February.

When you write to Don Bosco, never say: "I am afraid of saying too much. . . ." or "It is presumptuous for me to speak so. . . ." Your chiding, admonition, and advice will always be received with filial respect and gratitude.

Father Rua was very pleased by your visit, but was somewhat embarrassed at being caught unawares, with the whole place topsy-turvy. St. Charles' feast was celebrated very devoutly and beautifully. The bishop was very pleased with it, and your truffles did you honor.

I shall be at Casale Thursday evening and shall stay on till Friday evening. You may still be at Vignale, but I shall nevertheless drop by your house for news of the family.

God bless you, dear countess, together with your charming family, especially the count. Pray for me too.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The book the countess was interested in was *Il Cattolico Prov-*

veduto, an adults' prayerbook which Don Bosco had compiled years before and set aside to await an opportunity to have it printed.[4] The countess had one day called on him and remarked, "You have published a wonderful prayerbook for boys, but adults need something more. Why don't you compile one for them?"

That was all Don Bosco was waiting for, and he instantly seized the opportunity. "I have just such a prayerbook," he replied, "but I can't afford to print it. If someone would provide funds, the problem would be solved."

"Go ahead then. I'll take care of that!"

"But this is by no means a small expense!"

"Is it beyond my means?"

"Oh no!"

"Then count on me. Send me the bill."

The cost amounted to three thousand lire.

[4] *See* Vol. IV, p. 367. [Editor]

CHAPTER 78

The Salesian School at Lanzo

DON Bosco was planning to visit soon the new [Salesian] school at Lanzo where Father Dominic Ruffino, director, and Francis Provera, prefect, had been living since mid-October. Among the teachers, Peter Guidazio,[1] Francis Bodrato,[2] Joseph Fagnano,[3] Nicholas Cibrario,[4] James Costamagna,[5] and Anthony Sala[6] were to make a fine name for themselves.

The town authorities had been in no great hurry to make nec-

[1] Guidazio entered the Oratory in 1862 at the age of twenty-two. His six years in Lanzo revealed his educational talents. Ordained a priest in 1874, he was appointed prefect of studies at the Oratory. Later he successively held important offices and greatly contributed to the spread of Salesian schools in Sicily where he died in 1902 at Randazzo. [Editor]

[2] Bodrato (*see* pp. 451f) came to Don Bosco as a widower in 1864 and took his first vows as a Salesian in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alassio, Borgo San Martino, and the Oratory. In 1876 he led the second group of missionaries to Argentina; two years later, Don Bosco appointed him provincial. He died at Buenos Aires, August 4, 1880. [Editor]

[3] Fagnano came to the Oratory at the age of fifteen as a seminarian for the Asti diocese. (*See* Vol. VI, p. 434) Shortly afterward he returned home, joined the army, and served as an orderly in the Asti military hospital. After his discharge, he returned to the Oratory, took his first vows in 1864, and was ordained in 1868. In 1875 he took part in the first missionary expedition to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego (*see* Vol. XI, p. 349); years later the Holy See appointed him Prefect Apostolic of that area. He died in Santiago, Chile on September 18, 1916. [Editor]

[4] Cibrario made his first vows as a Salesian in 1867 as a priest. In 1873 he became a member of the Oratory house chapter, but shortly afterward was successively appointed director of Salesian houses in Bordighera, Ventimiglia, and Vallecrosia. At Vallecrosia, particularly, he labored very zealously for many years and was greatly admired for his personal piety. He died on December 10, 1917. [Editor]

[5] Costamagna entered the Oratory at the age of twelve in 1858. He became a Salesian in 1867 and was ordained in 1868. He led the third group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina in 1877, opened the first Salesian house in Talca, Chile in 1887, and was consecrated bishop and appointed first Vicar Apostolic of Mendez and Gualaguiza, Ecuador in 1895. He died at Bernal (Argentina) on September 9, 1921. [Editor]

[6] Sala entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven, after giving up the management of his family's silk mill. He took vows as a Salesian in 1865

essary repairs to the building, as we gather from Anthony Sala's description of what they found upon arrival:

We went to open this school—formerly a lycée under the French—with only one priest, Father [Dominic] Ruffino, director. We expected to find most of the buildings in good condition, since we assumed that our main concern was to take in students. All we found instead was an empty building and—what is worse—a few walls more than half ruined. We did not know where to have our meals because we had neither table nor chairs. Making the best of a bad situation, we picked up a door which was lying about and set it on two trestles as a table. Having no cook, we volunteered our kitchen helper Givone who fed us rice and meat for the first few days from the only pot we had. The windows had no panes; some lacked frames. The first night we made do with towels and blankets nailed to the jambs to keep out the inclement October weather. We had no beds because through an oversight they had not been shipped. Father Albert, the pastor, took as many of us as he could into his rectory; the others had to sleep on straw for a few nights until beds arrived from Turin. Meanwhile Father Ruffino and we clerics were up to our necks trying to put the place in order, sweeping, dusting, setting up desks, and fixing up the kitchen. The cleric Guidazio, who had been a good carpenter before joining our Society, made window frames and fixed doors. Several of us went to work in the vegetable garden, partially clearing it of weeds, thistles, and acacias which made it look like a jungle. In addition, we had to set up the furniture sent from the Oratory. Since several pupils had already arrived, we also had the problem of supervising and teaching. To make matters worse, the village boys, perhaps egged on by others, were openly hostile to us. They pelted us with rocks and disturbed our Sunday services with shouts and blows on the outer church door. We were also concerned about some of our boarders who were rejects from other schools.

Such were the beginnings of a boarding school which in a few years, thanks to the additions made by Don Bosco, was to enroll

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and was ordained a priest in 1869. In 1875 he was appointed councilor to the Superior Chapter, and in 1880 he became economer general of the Salesian Society, a post to which he was re-elected in 1886 and 1892. He died in Turin on May 21, 1895. [Editor]

over two hundred pupils. It had been placed under the patronage of St. Philip Neri and had been readied to house fifty boys. There were few boarders but very many day pupils from town. Father Ruffino's report to Don Bosco follows:

[No date]

Beloved Father,

We have but one wish: to see you soon. All the boys are awaiting you with open arms. To date, our pupils number twenty-eight, but thirty-seven more have already been accepted. Nearly all are elementary and Latin I pupils. Latin I and II have two students each; rhetoric has one. We also have two boys from other boarding schools. . . .

The assistant pastor comes every Saturday for confessions. Our first grade teacher proved unable to control his pupils, very many of whom are from town and extremely unruly. After trying all means in vain, we decided to entrust this grade, at least for a while, to Bodrato, who is better able with his experience to keep order.

Please pray to the Lord for me that my work may not prove useless. If you delay your visit by a few more days, you may hopefully find all the boys here.

Your ever devoted son,
Fr. Dominic Ruffino

Don Bosco did pay a visit to Lanzo. His arrival and departure were marked by moving demonstrations of affection from his Salesians and boys. As at Mirabello, his love brought peace and spiritual consolation. Bishop Costamagna and Monsignor Fagnano still recall his fruitful visit. Don Bosco, too, was greatly consoled by his clerics' spirit of sacrifice.[7]

Providing life's necessities to his boys was a constant preoccupation of his. To this end, he never bypassed even the slightest chance to obtain help, no matter how little. He left no stone unturned: visits, journeys, letters, hunts for benefactors, personal discomfort, abasement, criticism, and rejection. In these endeavors too his heroic virtue sustained him because he was not seeking

[7] We are omitting a letter of Father Ruffino to a fellow priest telling the latter that he had indeed spoken to Don Bosco on the occasion of his recent visit about a boy whom the priest had recommended. [Editor]

things for himself but for the poor, whom the Gospel calls members of Jesus Christ.[8]

In October he managed to get some used army clothing. Gratefully he called on Minister Petitti on December 3 [1864] to thank him for his charity and for having exempted a few clerics from military service. As a matter of fact, Don Bosco always, or nearly always, found support at the Defense Department.

After thanking him for former favors, Don Bosco added, "Your Excellency, I have another request." Then he held out a memorandum describing his need for more clothing. Smilingly the minister asked how many boys he had at the Oratory.

"About eight hundred," Don Bosco answered.

"Then you must need more than fifty assistants."

"Not at all! I have very few, and they are enough!"

"Then you must keep very strict discipline."

"There are no fixed punishments. If a rare need arises to punish someone, it is done as circumstances dictate."

"Do you abruptly expel culprits?"

"Not at all. If anyone is guilty of a moral offense, he generally goes away of his own accord because he realizes that he doesn't belong there. On the whole, duty and honor have a strong sway over our boys."

The minister had been about to sign a document. Putting down his pen, he asked, "Are any of your boys in the army?"

"Quite a number," he replied. "Very many play in the band too. I also know of many lieutenants and of two captains who have distinguished themselves."

The minister then inquired about the Oratory curriculum and was quite satisfied, especially at hearing that literature was highly regarded. He promised to continue helping the Oratory and to visit it as soon as possible.

Don Bosco got home in time for supper and told the priests and clerics around him about the minister's warm reception and his promise of a new allocation of army clothing. In fact, a few days later Don Bosco was notified to pick it up.

Thus the Oratory's objectives, Don Bosco's calm, serene ways,

[8] At this point we are omitting a detailed description of an unsuccessful effort by Don Bosco to obtain blankets. [Editor]

his candid presentation of his boys' needs, and their good conduct and liveliness won for him the benevolence of all. The whole world loves a good man. In fact, some time previously, when he had called on Minister Raffaele Conforti, known as "the Red," the latter not only cordially welcomed him but pressed him to have lunch with him.

Nevertheless, it must not be imagined that Don Bosco could breathe tranquilly because of these courteous gestures. The Ministry of the Interior kept a watchful eye upon him. During the years 1864, 1865, and 1866, a middle-aged, close-mouthed detective had been detailed to watch him. After striking up a friendly relationship with Don Bosco, this man went about the Oratory like one of the house, shrewdly observing everything and making notes. However, he never saw, heard, or had reason to suspect anything that could endanger the government or national aspirations. On his part, he was never overcurious, nor did he quiz pupils. Alerted to this man's mission by another government official, Don Bosco let the detective spy to his heart's content, treating him as a friend whenever he met him, and sometimes inviting him to dinner. The detective was honest and never submitted false reports.

CHAPTER 79

Fatherly Suggestions

DON Bosco's visits to Mirabello and Lanzo delayed the Oratory's Exercise for a Happy Death, usually made at the beginning of each month. On his return, therefore, at the "Good Night" on November 15, he announced that it would be held on Thursday the 17th. He added that one of them would be summoned into eternity before the end of the year, and he exhorted them to prepare themselves so as to have no reason to fear death, should it surprise them.

The boys took his exhortation to heart. Meanwhile, the Oratory's wholesome diversions kept them cheerful. On the feast of St. Cecilia, for instance, a two-act play authored by Don Bosco so pleased the audience and the actors that Don Bosco decided to publish it as the January issue of *Letture Cattoliche* under the title *The Fortune House*. . . . The brilliant success of this and other Latin and Italian plays amply shows the Oratory boys' intellectual progress under Don Bosco's guidance. We now add the counsels and exhortations which he gave on five consecutive "Good Nights":

November 24

My dear boys, I'm going to give you tips on doing well in your studies—one tip a night.

The first means for learning is fear of God. *Initium sapientiae timor Domini.* Do you really want to learn and succeed splendidly in your studies? Fear the Lord and beware of offending Him because "wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins." [Wis. 1, 4] Human wisdom proceeds from Divine Wisdom. Then, too, what satisfaction can one get out of his studies if his heart is swayed by passions? How can he overcome scholastic difficulties without God's help? "All wisdom comes from the Lord," says Holy

Scripture. [Sir. 1, 1] One mortal sin so gravely offends God that not all the angels and men together can ever properly atone for it. How could God be expected to help in their studies those who insult Him so grievously? Genuine scholars like St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Francis de Sales never offended God. Experience proves continually that those who succeed in their studies are those who avoid sin. True, there are evil men who excel in intelligence and learning. They may have earned these great gifts from God by a good life in their youth and later misused them. However, most of them are not truly learned men because their minds are full of errors which they pass on to others. If the Lord has permitted an evil person—though His foe—to become learned, he will suffer all the more, for by misusing these gifts he will call upon himself greater punishment and malediction.

November 25

Another means to acquire knowledge is never to lose a moment of time. Time, my dear sons, is precious. Devote to your studies all the time you are assigned for them. Do not look for excuses to skip classes. It is a sorry sight to see boys pretending to be sick or trying to extort permission to wriggle out of this duty. Likewise, do not read for leisure when you should be studying or doing your homework.

Check your imagination, too. A boy may appear lost in his books while actually he is not. His mind is miles away. He is smiling because he is thinking about winning games or perhaps about tidbits in his locker, a book he wants to buy, tricks or pranks he has in mind, and so on. I hope that nobody will be thinking of offending God. Resolve, therefore, not to waste time.

November 26

A third means to acquire knowledge is to grasp well whatever you are studying before going on to something else. Memorize whatever you study. Cicero said very wisely: *Tantum scimus quantum memoriae mandamus.* [We know as much as we memorize.] Study each day in such a way as to impress your assignment firmly in your mind. I say "each day" because otherwise you'll have to do twice as much the next day to keep pace. If you neglect this for a whole week, you will have to catch up on seven lessons, besides doing daily assignments which already take up your whole time. This is why many have mental gaps and confused ideas, with the result that during the last few

months of the school year they are so afraid of failing that they have to overstrain themselves to catch up. The diligent student, instead, can safely count on his treasure of knowledge without any fear on examination day.

November 27

A fourth means to acquire knowledge is to eat only at appointed times. Gluttony kills more people than the sword. Do you want to learn? Then do not live to eat, but eat to live. Take a light breakfast and a light afternoon snack. Do not stuff yourselves. If you have tidbits in your locker, do not let gluttony tempt you to eat them all at once. Do not gorge yourselves up to your ears; leave some for the next day and you will feel better. I am not telling you this for my own good. I know very well that if you eat one roll less at breakfast, you will eat three at lunch. When your stomach is overloaded, your minds get foggy, you feel listless and sleepy, and you cannot pay attention to your teachers or concentrate on your lessons. And if you make an effort to apply yourselves, it's even worse. You'll get a headache that will knock you out for a few days. Sometimes you may even get a bad stomach-ache.

November 28

A fifth means to acquire knowledge is to associate with diligent students. This is the best way to make progress in your studies. During recreation periods, mingle with the clerics or your more learned classmates and ask them to clarify something you are studying, like geography, the classics, grammar, or history. It's amazing how much you can learn by just talking about your homework and lessons. Do the same on your weekly walks, instead of wasting your time with some foolish companions who, far from helping you, may even cause you to forget what you have learned. Idle and trivial conversation is not only utterly useless, but it also makes one light-minded and half-hearted. If you want to become learned, associate with those who are learned.

On November 29, the first day of the Immaculate Conception novena, instead of giving the first of the nosegays he himself had prepared, Don Bosco announced that John Baptist Saracco of Alba, sixteen, had died on November 26 at Lingotto, a Turin

suburb. His death fulfilled Don Bosco's prediction [of November 15]. His account of this sad event was substantially as follows:

Last year Saracco's conduct was very good. He frequented the sacraments and kept close to me all the time. When he returned from his summer vacation, however, he was a quite different boy. He no longer went to confession and Communion and dodged me even when I asked his companions to fetch him for me. His health too began to weaken. At times he was so faint that he had to be excused from school, but there were no signs of anything serious.

Meanwhile, I had announced the day of the Exercise for a Happy Death and had said that one of you would be called to eternity. On hearing this, Saracco asked a worthless friend of his whether he planned to go to confession. God be praised, the boy said yes, and so Saracco went to confession and Communion too. Had he asked some other boy and the latter said no, he might well have neglected to clear his conscience.

Eight days later, since he could not attend classes, he came to see me for the first time during this school year. As he walked into my room, fidgety and red-faced, I asked what he wanted. "I came for permission to go home," he answered.

"Will you come back?"

He replied that he hoped to, but he did not seem to mean it.

"My dear Saracco," I told him, taking his hand, "you may go home. May the Lord bless you. But before you leave, go to confession. You'll be glad that you did."

"I'll go this Sunday in my parish church," he countered.

"Why not now? Then you can go home with a peaceful mind. Here is a kneeler. You'll be through in no time."

"I'm not ready."

"Then get ready. Here is *The Companion of Youth.*" [1]

"I don't feel like it."

"Do me this favor," I insisted. "If you don't want to make your confession to me, go to another priest in the house."

"No, I'll wait till Sunday."

Saracco was not to see that day. He left and went to stay with some relatives until his father could come for him. But as soon as he got there, he felt a sharp pain in his side and became so sick that he had to go to bed. He ate a little light soup. Though no one thought it serious, the doctor was sent for, and he too did not take

[1] A boys' prayerbook compiled by Don Bosco. *See* Vol. III, pp. 6–18. [Editor]

a dim view of the case, simply writing out a prescription. Suddenly the pain spread virulently to his throat. Aware of his dangerous condition, Saracco asked for a priest, kissed the crucifix, and recommended himself with short invocations to the Blessed Virgin. How he wished that I could be at his side then! How deeply he regretted not having listened to me!

The priest was not at home. When he was found and taken to Saracco's bedside it was too late; by then the poor boy had lost his speech. The priest absolved him and gave him the Last Anointing. In that last moment he seemed to regain a moment's consciousness. He had left the Oratory on Thursday, and by Saturday he was dead without having been able to go to confession. When his father arrived on Monday to take him home, Saracco was already buried.

Don Bosco concluded by exhorting the boys to offer their good deeds on the next day in suffrage of Saracco's soul and to close each decade of the rosary with the *Requiem*. He then warned all that at the Oratory boys died in pairs. One boy's death was a warning that another would follow. All should therefore prepare themselves because soon, before the year's end, another boy would die and perhaps be unable to make the December Exercise for a Happy Death. He ended with a special warning to those boys who only rarely received the sacraments, carelessly plodding through life.

Later, alone with his priests, he exclaimed, "How I wish I could have prepared Saracco! But he wouldn't cooperate." Don Bosco knew that Saracco was to die. Poor boy, may the Lord have been merciful to you!

As he went up the stairs to his room, Don Bosco turned to a priest who was kissing his hand in farewell and said to him, *Esto paratus* [Be prepared].

Don Bosco saved for the next day the nosegay he had planned to give on November 29. "Yesterday," he said, "our thoughts were on death; let's now turn to the living. Tomorrow's nosegay will be: 'Hear or serve Mass with special devotion.' " Then, talking to the teachers, he asked them to assign for Saturday's lesson the manner of serving Mass, so that it might be performed with deserving dignity. He stressed that they should require their pupils to know the responses perfectly by heart. He then publicly urged Father Cagliero, the catechist, to make sure that the boys followed the

rubrics exactly in serving Mass. He went on to urge that Father Francesia, the prefect of studies, in agreement with the catechist, should always have two altar boys on duty, starting with Rhetoric II students down to Latin I, as long as there were Masses to be served. The clerics, too, were to take turns—one at a time—to help priests with their vestments, to fold surplices and albs, and to set missal markers.

He concluded by exhorting the boys to learn the responses and ceremonies well, so as to serve the august sacrifice of the altar devoutly. The following night he suggested a sixth means for acquiring knowledge:

December 1

When the bell rings in this hall, it means that a superior wishes to talk to you. Therefore, all must become silent. Just imagine me placing my hand over your mouths.

Now let's continue with the means to acquire knowledge. The sixth means is moderate recreation. When it's time to play, play, and you will gather new strength for your school work when you return to your classrooms. Don't turn playtime into study time; otherwise you will be mentally tired and make no headway when the schedule calls for study.

Avoid also being overactive in your games. Some boys race about so wildly that one would think they are trying to kill themselves. They keep bumping into and knocking over companions, get bloody noses and bruises, enjoy fistfights, and return to their classrooms all perspired and exhausted. Their heads are still spinning, since they are still thinking of their games. I'll say nothing about those who yell so loudly that they give themselves a headache.

Some too stroll about and stand in groups, talking of nothing but outings, celebrations, snacks, dinners, and holidays. They are so taken up with these things that even during classtime that's all they think about. As for those who indulge in improper conversation, I can only say that true progress is impossible without the holy fear of God.

In conclusion, be moderate even when you play. I don't mean that you shouldn't play. Jump and have fun, but don't overdo it. When I am not too busy with visitors, I play with you and have fun but I don't break my neck. So, then, the sixth means for acquiring knowledge is moderate recreation. Now, here is tomorrow's nosegay: "Play moderately, as well-bred students should."

On the next two nights, the Immaculate Conception novena prompted him to mention a most important topic, while suggesting a further way to acquire knowledge:

December 2

My dear boys, have you ever noticed what happens when turkeys are let out of the roost? Some fly out, others dash out, and still others saunter out half-heartedly and stand still, looking about and behind as though sorry to have come out. Then there are some which don't go out but rather waddle to the feeding bowl to see if there is anything left. This, my boys, is happening right here during this novena in honor of Our Beloved Heavenly Mother. During the past few days, among both students and artisans, some flew along the path of salvation; others dashed with great zest, and there is every good reason to hope that their racing will end only at heaven's gates; others emerged from their former wretched state, but only half-heartedly and almost regretfully. To them I say: My dear sons, do not be like the dog which returns to its vomit, as Scripture says. After having his fill, a dog sniffs about for a herb which, if chewed, will provoke vomit. This herb may symbolize boys in whose company, as you know from past experience, you will easily lose God's grace. Therefore, keep away from them! It may also symbolize certain books whose sad effects upon your souls you well know. Hand those over to your superiors.

Finally, there are some unfortunate youngsters who lack the courage to fight against their passions and keep wallowing in the mud of their own abasement. Let them know that their path leads to eternal damnation. You may wonder why I say these things or suggest certain nosegays during Our Lady's novenas. I do so because novenas in honor of Our Heavenly Mother are providential days of salvation. Heaven help those who do not take advantage of them. I hope—in fact I am sure—that ninety-five percent of my boys will make the best of so many graces and be welcomed by Our Heavenly Mother into heaven. But as for those who refuse them, let them know that the eternal fires of hell will be their lot unless they reform.

When the Lord calls me to His judgment seat for a most strict account of everything I did, He will ask me, "Did you tell your sons that My Heavenly Mother's novenas are providential days of grace? Did you tell them that whoever does not take advantage of them commits an unpardonable offense against Mary and that I shall avenge

it most severely?" I trust that the Supreme Judge will find my answer satisfactory. But if I have to render a most strict account for not telling you what the Lord wanted you to know, no less rigorous shall your account be if you have not listened to me. The boys who carry out my recommendations and love their Heavenly Mother have a ready answer to give God, but those who spurn this grace and disregard all I say had better have an explanation ready, assuming that they can make one up. Do you remember what happened to that obstinate, godless Pharaoh? God sent Moses and Aaron to inform him of His will, but their message only hardened his heart to such a degree that even the most dreadful punishments could not convert him. Do you know how Pharaoh ended? He died stricken by God's hand, drowned in the Red Sea. Good night.

December 4

My dear sons, the Immaculate Conception novena is now drawing to an end, and I would like these last three days to be consecrated to Mary in a special manner. In honor of God's good Mother I want you all to avoid anything contrary to the Sixth Commandment and to do your utmost to adorn your soul with the virtue of modesty. Mary is immaculate and hates whatever is contrary to purity. An impure boy will never be loved by Mary, nor will he ever make progress. During these three days, instead of the usual meditation, we shall have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament after the Community Mass. I was even thinking about a sermonette but then thought it best not to take time from your studies. In this regard, I'd like to suggest another means for acquiring knowledge, namely, "Strive to overcome the difficulties you meet with in studying the classics."

Do not lose heart when you encounter problems. What did you come to the Oratory for? To study! It's only natural that you have to learn things which you do not yet know. Learning always requires effort, the degree of which depends on one's intelligence. Therefore take heart and don't give up. It is a mistake to skirt difficulties or to skip what you don't understand and go on to something else. Tackle the obstacle until you have overcome it. To succeed in this, have recourse first of all to Jesus and Mary by a devout short prayer. Your difficulties will disappear. Never forget, my beloved boys, that this is a most effective way to overcome them. God alone is the source and giver of knowledge; He grants it to whomever He wishes and as He wishes. You admit this every day when you say the invocation:

"Seat of Wisdom, pray for us." Indeed, She is the Seat of Wisdom. Then, too, ask your teachers; they will be glad to help you and to give you all the explanations you need.

I'll even say this: not only should you strive constantly to overcome difficulties, but you should be glad to confront them, because this sharpens your mind and you will feel delighted when you succeed in understanding what previously was beyond your grasp. It is no boast to learn what is easy. Besides, one never forgets what he found hard to learn. Therefore, take heart. Good night.

The chronicle continues: "Today, December 4, Bishop Modesto [Contratto] of Acqui came to the Oratory for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. During this year a great number of prelates called on Don Bosco."

Father Daniele Comboni, the renowned missionary of Niger who was on his way to Paris from Rome, where he had submitted a plan to Pius IX for the conversion of Africa, stopped off at the Oratory. He aroused great enthusiasm among the boys who listened intently to his talks on his mission and felt the first stirrings of an ardent desire to join him. Highly impressed by everything he saw, he too began to admire Don Bosco's work and to intensely love his many spiritual sons. What mainly aroused his interest in the Salesians was the following incident, which he considered astonishing. At the Oratory one morning he came upon a priest who was still moved by his talk the night before. Finding him so well disposed, he invited him to go with him to Africa. Unhesitatingly the priest replied, "If my superior allows me, Father, I will take my breviary and with his blessing will be ready to leave immediately."

"Is there anything you may need to take care of?"

"My father, mother, and sister are still living, but if I were to go home and tell them that I was going to the missions, they would raise a thousand difficulties. Therefore it would be better for me to leave immediately."

Father Comboni never forgot the firm, prompt resolve of that priest and often mentioned it as a good omen for the Oratory, a thing it should be justly proud of. When he later heard that this same priest had gone to America, he repeatedly remarked, "If I had only had him, what a lot of good he could have done!"

CHAPTER 80

Fatherly Suggestions (Continued)

WHILE Don Bosco kept offering his boys effective means to succeed in their studies, the coming feast of the Immaculate Conception prompted him to digress into another topic, as he had shortly before promised them—finding one's vocation. At the same time, however, he exhorted them to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary by receiving the sacraments and meditating upon eternity. To this end he reminded them of the recent, almost sudden death of a companion of theirs:

December 5

The eighth means to acquire knowledge is to devote oneself wholly to one's school duties. No one can master a subject by just skimming through books. When St. Thomas Aquinas was asked how he managed to learn so much, he answered, "By sticking to one book."

Keep clearly in mind that extracurricular subjects are to be put aside. If a Latin student tries to study English and French at the same time, what language will he know at the end of the year? Of itself, Latin takes up even a bright student's whole time. Then there are those who read a lot in various subjects but do not realize that so much reading will only confuse them. There also are many who indulge in leisure reading at the expense of their scholastic duties.

"How, then, are we to relax after we are through with homework and lessons?" you will ask. Well, if you have free time, why not review some lessons or points of grammar or the like which you couldn't previously go deeply into? In short, do not waste your time on stories.

However much I do not want to belittle good reading, you should always bear two rules in mind: first, no leisure reading until you are through with your homework and lessons; second, no leisure reading without first asking the advice of either your teacher or some other

competent person, lest you waste time on worthless, cheap, or even dangerous books which can corrupt you intellectually and morally.

I have something else to say. I promised to tell you about how you can discover your vocation. This evening I shall only touch briefly on it, postponing a lengthier explanation to some other occasion. Many of you will become priests; very many others will remain in the world. Not all who say "I want to be a priest" or "I don't want to be a priest" will actually become or not become priests. Not at all! God often calls to His service boys who never gave it a thought; just as often, boys who thought they were called to the priesthood and had already donned the cassock changed their minds. Therefore, while we still have time, let us ask the Lord to show us the path we are to follow. The first means to make sure of our vocation is that suggested by St. Peter: "Brethren, strive even more by good works to make your calling and election sure." [2 Pet. 1, 10] Lead a life which is full of good works, a life in God's holy fear. Let everything we do be for His greater glory. The Lord will then let us know His will in our regard, the path we are to follow, the career we are to choose.

The following evening, December 6, Don Bosco spoke again of Saracco's death, insisting once more on the grave need of always being ready for that great step and of receiving the sacraments often:

Saracco died on Saturday, plaintively pleading for a priest in vain. The following day he was taken to his grave. Deeply concerned, I inquired whether he had made the Exercise for a Happy Death. To my great comfort I was told that he had. Let us hope that he had no grave sin on his conscience. Certainly we can feel confident that his genuine desire to make a confession before dying may have restored God's grace to him.

My dear sons, make hay while the sun shines. Let us do good while we have time. We all have to undertake a long journey. "Man shall go into the house of his eternity," says Holy Scripture. [Eccles. 12, 5] Let us therefore prepare for it. Saracco put it off till Sunday, but Sunday did not dawn for him. Let us take this occasion of the feast of the Immaculate Conception to put our conscience in order by a good confession and Communion. My dear sons, how can we be sure that God will wait for us if we take our sweet time in going to con-

fession? On December 8, then, let us honor Mary by making sure of heaven.

During these months, a strange thing kept recurring. Don Bosco revealed that every now and then the priest [saying the Community Mass] would skip some boy at the altar rail at Communion time. When the boy would later ask him in the playground why he had not given him Communion, the priest would reply, "How dare you go to Communion with sin on your soul? Don't you see how black and hideous your soul is?" The priest knew this by the tongue's color at that moment. Several times he apprised Don Bosco so that he could repair the harm done by bad confessions.

December 8, 1864 signaled a great triumph for the Church. On that day Pope Pius IX issued an encyclical [*Quanta Cura*] and a syllabus of condemned modern errors. Both were gratefully received by the episcopate and by the faithful, but were violently attacked by the Church's enemies.[1]

Meanwhile the Oratory boys paid their tributes of love to the Blessed Virgin on Her feast day. At successive "Good Nights" Don Bosco spoke again of vocation:

December 10

I have said that the first means to discover our vocation is to do good. The second is suggested by St. Paul: "He [the candidate] must have a good reputation with those who are outside." [1 Tim. 3, 7] Who are these outsiders who must testify for us? Our parents, our pastor, our fellow townsmen, and the director of our school. In our case, I don't mean just myself, but all your superiors.

A boy's conduct soon enough shows his calling, and those living with him can pass judgment. Some boys' devout behavior in church and their reserved and affable manners prompt people to say, "What a fine priest he'll make!" Of some other boys, the comment might be, "He will turn out to be a brave soldier," or "He'll make a fine baker." You laugh, but listen to this about some of the lazybones we have here at the Oratory. At both dinner and supper you can eat all the bread you want; at breakfast and at four in the afternoon you get a large roll, larger than you get at other schools. And yet some boys put aside five or six more rolls at dinner and supper as if they

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

were afraid of dying of hunger. Don't you think that all this points out clearly that these boys' vocation is to be bakers? And do you want to know why they hoard bread? I'll tell you. They are trying to skip school because they haven't done their assignments. Therefore they play sick. To prove it, they go without breakfast. But when they are in the dormitory, they happily munch on the bread they stored up the day before. Is this something to boast of?

Let us carefully and diligently carry out even the most trifling duties if we wish the Lord to show us the path He wants us to follow.

There may be a boy in some village who has told practically everybody that he wants to be a priest. And yet he studies very little, goes to church as rarely as possible and not so devoutly either, likes to play a lot, associates with questionable friends, and often lets slip unseemly words. People will say, "What a bad priest he'll make!" Such a boy may come to the Oratory because his parents, without first consulting their pastor, send him here. God save us! Look at his grades. Whether it be church, classroom, study hall, dining room, or dormitory, his rating is just "fair." All together these grades will never add up to "excellent." Never!

My dear boys, always be on your good behavior so that your superiors may frankly tell you what they think of your vocation. Pay attention to what I now tell you because you will not find these things in books, or if they are there you cannot get them. Trust your superiors and consult them! We are happy to help you all we can. There are boys who never in the whole year go to their superiors or give their vocation a thought. Then, come summer, they ask their pastor whether they should become priests or choose another profession. "What does Don Bosco say?" the pastor asks. "Nothing," they reply. How can one tell them anything if they make themselves scarce all the time? And so they go on studying to become priests without considering whether God has called them to that state. What can possibly become of them, deprived as they will be of necessary graces?

Lastly, I'll tell you whom you should ask for advice. First, your parents. Unfortunately, parents are not always good counselors because they are not always guided by what is best for their son's spiritual welfare but, rather, by worldly considerations. If there is any chance for him to get a wealthy parish, they push him on; if not, they persuade him to follow some other path, and sometimes they even resolutely oppose his priestly calling.

But if your parents live their faith, they are your best counselors because they have known you intimately for years and their advice

can be naught but good and well-founded. Regardless, always consult them in this matter. Generally, if you ask their advice properly, you will get it. The next time I shall tell you who can advise you about your inner dispositions.

December 12

Two nights ago I spoke about the testimony of outsiders. Now I shall tell you of the only one who can judge our inner dispositions—our confessor. To him we must fully open our hearts. If we do so, he will be able to tell us what the Lord wishes of us. Once we have chosen a confessor, we must go to him steadily, because unless he knows us thoroughly, he cannot advise us on our vocation. Therefore, don't have two confessors: one for weekdays and one for Sundays, one for more grievous—or seemingly more grievous—sins and one for lesser ones. In that case, your confessor may think you are a little angel instead of a little devil. His advice will be way off, and you will be directed into a state of life that God never intended for you. It would be even worse to go to a different confessor each time, as some boys do, to try them out. Frankly, my dear boys, I wish you would choose a confessor and go to him regularly if you want to know what the Lord asks of you. We have few outside confessors, but you have many to choose from right here in the house.

This rule does not apply to the artisans.[2] Their vocation has already been decided: they are going to be blacksmiths, carpenters, printers, and the like. For you students, instead, whose vocation is still uncertain, it is quite another matter. Still, I do not mean to say that one commits a sin in changing confessors. Far from it! Rather, I want to stress that should you unfortunately commit a grievous sin and be afraid to tell your regular confessor, then, sooner than make a sacrilegious confession, go to another confessor or even change your confessor every time. It is better to remain uncertain about one's vocation than to commit a sacrilege by concealing a [mortal] sin in confession. In such a case, though, before deciding on his vocation at the end of the school year, such a boy should make a good general confession. The priest will listen to him in all charity, help him over his shame, and point out his true vocation. Keep in mind that the chief judge of your vocation is your confessor. If your parents, pastor, and even school director should tell you to become a priest, even if you feel inclined that way, but your confessor tells you other-

[2] This was the name given to the Oratory boys learning a trade. [Editor]

wise, disregard what all the others say and abide by his decision. This is the one you must follow.

In the lay state also there are many choices. Here too follow the advice of one who knows your interior state. For instance, your confessor may tell you that you are not cut out to be a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or soldier, and that you therefore should choose some other profession. Your confessor is experienced and knows more about these things than you do. He may also give you suggestions to help you follow your vocation. Naturally, should you want to be a lawyer but not have the means, he will not be able to supply them. Yet he can often at least show you how to reach your goal.

The next few "Good Nights" forewarned the boys against the danger of scandal-mongers and also noted the last moments and death of a lay Salesian which fulfilled Don Bosco's prediction of some weeks before. He also spoke of praying for the souls in purgatory, the Christmas novena, a suggestion to acquire knowledge, and the thought of death. We now return to the chronicle:

December 13 [1864]. Tonight the bell announced that Holy Viaticum was being taken to John Lagorio, the Salesian brother in charge of the linen room. The boys assembled in church to beg the Blessed Virgin to grant the patient the graces he needed.

Right after Benediction, Don Bosco stood at the altar and told us, "My dear sons, this evening one of our brothers received Holy Viaticum. He has little hope of recovery. He may still linger on for some time or pass away at any moment. Therefore I urge you to pray that God will give him strength and resignation in his sufferings and the grace of a holy death. Starting tomorrow morning, we shall recite a *Pater* and *Ave* for him. These prayers may soon have to be changed into *Requiems*.

"At a moment like this, let us think of a most important duty—putting our health to God's service and glory. Health is God's great gift, and we must spend it entirely for Him. Our eyes should see only for God, our feet walk only for Him, our hands labor for Him alone, our heart throb for Him alone; in short, our entire body should serve God while we still have time. Then, when He shall take our health and we shall near our last day, our conscience will not reproach us for having misused it."

The next evening, December 14, Don Bosco stepped up to his usual stand and spoke with extreme emotion:

I have bad news for you tonight, my dear children. You already know, but it bears repeating, that during important novenas some boys return home. They are not expelled. They leave of their own accord; to be more exact, the Madonna Herself rids us of them. Rather than stay any longer, a few whom we would have kept out of compassion leaped over the wall and ran away. The sad thing about it is that they felt they had to go, that they could no longer stay with us because they had offended good morals. As long as they live, they will never forget why they left the Oratory. Their hearts will bleed at the mere thought, and they will be forced to say, "I alone brought this on myself." At home people will ask them: "Why did you leave the Oratory?" What can they reply? Nothing. However, they will feel on their souls the heavy weight of their only possible answer, "I left because I committed the most shameful of sins!" They will remember that they had to break off their studies, that they could not reach their goals, that their hopes were suddenly dashed. Why? They alone are to blame. If they chance upon some former schoolmate when they are grown up, the painful thorn will again stab their hearts as they face the witness of their guilt and shame. If this recollection is so painful while they are still strong and healthy, how will they feel when their strength will ebb, when they will be bedridden and will fully realize how terribly hideous was their misdeed? "I alone am to blame for my misery," they will have to exclaim—and this from a human standpoint. How many recent incidents I could mention if I could do so decently! How frightfully God punishes those who violate purity! I'll just tell of a case which happened in Turin last night. A boy died suddenly during the night in the act of sinning. Where is his soul now? His friends went to call him at dawn and found him dead. They all saw how he had died. I will tell you no more because these things are too horrible and revolting.

My dear sons, help each other to cultivate the lovely virtue of purity. Resolve among yourselves never to do, say, or look at the least thing which may taint this charming virtue. If you see a companion in danger of falling, hurry to his aid, protect him from certain companions, warn him, pray for him—in a word, save him. You will find merit with God and Mary. More than that, if you notice that a companion tries to corrupt others, take action against him, snatch the victim from his talons, and sound the alarm. What would you do if a wolf, breaking into your sheepfold, began to tear your lambs to pieces and you were not

strong enough to fight and save them? You would call for help; you would cry, "Wolf! Wolf!" Do the same against those hellish wolves who seek to ruin your companions' souls. Shout it to your companions. If that is not enough, shout it out to your superiors. They will know how to handle the wolves.

The further bad news I must give you is that our brother John Lagorio is drawing ever closer to his last hour. He is perfectly resigned; indeed he has no other desire than to fly to heaven and be rid of so much physical and spiritual pain. We have good reason to believe that when the Lord summons him, he will go straight to heaven. He is a very virtuous man; some other day I will tell you more about him. At any rate, let us pray that his passing may be happy. In going to bed tonight do your best to keep strict silence on the stairs and in the dormitory. Before falling asleep, say a Hail, Holy Queen to Our Lady to help him in his last moments. Perhaps tomorrow, instead of reciting a *Pater, Ave,* and *Gloria* for him, we may have to end up with a *Requiem.* Good night.

December 15

Our brother, John Lagorio, passed into eternity at about two this morning. When he came to the Oratory two years ago, he was already suffering from the illness of which he died, but until yesterday he hoped that he might recover. Last night, though, he realized that death was at hand. He repeated in a feeble voice what he had already confided to me on other occasions: "Tell the boys to pray for me that I may soon see God. Tell them that in heaven I shall continually ask the Blessed Virgin to intercede for them and obtain for them from God all the graces they need." I promised that I would convey his message to you and asked him to greet Mary on our behalf as soon as he got to heaven, and to beg Her to help us all so that one day we may all be united to praise and thank Her. He assured me that he would do so. Let us pray for him, then, so that if he may still need to be purified of some blemish, he may soon be freed from the pains of purgatory. As you know, the Lord said that with what measure we measure it shall be measured to us, and that if we have been merciful to others, He will be merciful to us. St. Augustine wrote that when we pray for the souls in purgatory, besides relieving their sufferings we are preparing a shorter purgatory for ourselves. If we pray for the dead now, the Lord will one day inspire others to pray for us. We are bound to pray for all the holy souls, but much more for one who walked the same ground with

us, prayed with us in the same church, and ate the same bread—one who was our brother. Tomorrow morning we shall sing a requiem Mass and say the rosary for him. We shall likewise offer all the good works of the house and also all our Communions for the repose of his soul. Those who may not be able to receive should make a spiritual Communion, which is also acceptable to God for the souls in purgatory. Since it is raining and it would not be wise for health reasons to let you all go to the cemetery, Father Prefect will appoint a few to escort the hearse to the grave.

December 16

The Christmas novena began today. You know how important these novenas are to me.

Let me tell you something else too. There is a lot of bread wasted in this house. Leftovers are everywhere: beneath the beds, on the stairs, in the playground and classrooms, and so on. I would do anything to avoid this waste because bread is God's gift and I am only too aware of how important this basic staple of life is and what it takes to provide it. Therefore, when you have leftover bread you intend to throw away for any reason, please bring it to me. I'll use it as I think best.

Lastly, here is tomorrow's nosegay: "Kiss the Child Jesus when you receive Him sacramentally or spiritually."

December 18

Tonight I'll point out the best way to acquire knowledge: "Always trust in the Blessed Virgin's protection." Since She is the Seat of Wisdom, say a Hail Mary and the invocation "Seat of Wisdom, pray for us" before you start on your homework and lessons.

Now I must give you some bad news. A carpenter you may have seen some time ago working about the house died today. This morning he opened his shop as usual and assigned his employees their work. At noon he suffered a fatal stroke. It's a sad thing to tell you during such a joyful novena, but what can you do? Life reminds us instinctively of death, but death will come even without our thinking of it. Innocent III was a great, saintly Pope, but he so feared death that he never wanted to hear of it. If he was present at a sermon or at a reading, the preacher or reader had to omit that topic. Also, if he read a book, he would skip all references to death. On this Pope's sarcophagus, the sculptor engraved his image as he lay on his deathbed, with death itself

under the bed, its skull emerging, its fleshless hand outstretched to seize him. The Pope, terrified at the hideous sight, tries to keep out of its reach but cannot.

Many people in this world do not want to think of death. My sons, keep in mind that, whether we think of it or not, death is unavoidable.

Let me now give you a nosegay: "Let us ask Jesus to come and steal something from us—your hearts and mine." It would be too great a misfortune for me if all your hearts were full of God's love, while mine was as cold as ice.

CHAPTER 81

Fatherly Suggestions (Continued)

AT this time Don Bosco was receiving many replies to his Christmas and New Year greetings. Some came from noble families and revealed the appreciation, reverence, and trust that they felt for him. Two such letters were from Marquis Ignatius Pallavicini and Countess Alessandrina of Camburzano.[1] The latter, dated December 26, 1864, informed him that a cousin of hers was anxious to meet him and would soon be calling on him.

After Christmas, Don Bosco left Turin for two days, going to Vercelli, and, it would appear, also stopping for a few hours at Casale, where he had been unable to go earlier because of Lagorio's death on December 15. As on other occasions, he talked at length with Canon Peter Degaudenzi [2] who became bishop of Vigevano in 1871.

Upon his return from Vercelli, Don Bosco resumed his "Good Nights" to the Oratory community:

December 27

I regret that tonight I must tell you something which does not do much credit to some of you. For some time we have had complaints about pilfering: books, stationery, money, fruit, neckties, and so on. Last year we had that problem but managed to catch the culprits: some were abruptly dismissed, others decided to leave because things had become unpleasant for them. Let our little thieves give up their trade, or they too will be caught and have to face the same penalty. I ask you all to be on the lookout for them. Here are some ways you can spot them. Look for those who are forever munching on something, especially those brazen ones who have the nerve to eat salami in front

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[2] We are omitting his letter to Father Rua in 1888 showing how highly he regarded Don Bosco. [Editor]

of their companions on days of abstinence and those who float about during school hours or linger in dormitories on the slightest pretext. They are prime suspects; you have every right to suspect them. Some may be innocent, but the evidence is seemingly against them. These pilferings sadden me because they offend God. Still, on the other hand it's good for disobedient boys to learn for themselves what it means not to deposit their money with Father Prefect, despite repeated warnings. If they want to be stubborn, so much the worse for them!

But to the little thieves I say that many of those people who eventually were eternally lost for sins of this sort began by pilfering little things until they formed a habit which they could no longer shake off. A book today, two *soldi* tomorrow, some stationery or a few postage stamps some other time—little by little, almost unnoticeably, these petty thefts can add up to something substantial. And, mind you, when the total amount stolen is substantial, one must make restitution, even if he is not aware of having committed a mortal sin.

On this score I will add that those who filch bread from the pantry even though they may have all the bread they want at lunch and supper, and those who damage chairs, windows, or the like, especially if they do it deliberately, are also to consider themselves thieves. They too are bound to make restitution.

I already know who some of these little thieves are, and I am warning them now to put an end to it and give back what they have stolen. If they want me to help them, let them come and tell me privately, and I promise to put everything right quietly, without punishments, but if they do not care to change their ways and are caught, they must know that I shall not hesitate to shame them publicly.

Now, leaving these unpleasant things aside, let me tell you something cheerful which happened to me today as I was returning from Vercelli. On boarding the train, I found a man in my compartment who was raving against confession. "By God," he exclaimed as soon as he saw me, "tell us something about confession!"

"All right," I replied, taking a seat, "do you know who invented confession?"

"Sure, the Council of Trent."

"And could you tell me more or less when this council was held?"

"At St. Bernard's time," he replied.

"And when did St. Bernard live?"

"At the time of St. Augustine."

At this display of erudition everybody burst out laughing. "Look," I continued, "the Council of Trent was held about three hundred years ago, St. Bernard died some six hundred years ago, and St. Augustine

fourteen hundred years ago. For your information, Jesus Christ Himself instituted this great sacrament approximately eighteen hundred and fifty years ago."

My opponent was momentarily stunned, but then went on: "To tell you quite frankly I don't like to go to confession."

"Fine! I'll teach you how to do without it."

"That's wonderful! No priest ever taught me that! What should I do?"

"Never commit sin!"

"I never do!"

"Congratulations, but may I point out that at the very start of our conversation you used God's name in vain?"

"True. I forgot that."

"Now, if you were to let me question you, you would see that you do have something on your conscience."

"Go ahead, question me!"

"Not in public. You wouldn't like it and our fellow passengers would be embarrassed."

"Have no fear. I won't take it amiss."

"No, I will not question you publicly, but I'll whisper what I want to tell you in your ear."

"Agreed!"

"You are right," he remarked loudly when I was through telling him, "but you must know that I come from Palermo."

"So what? Is Palermo any different from other cities? Isn't the Lord in Palermo too?"

Again he fell silent and then switched the conversation to other topics.[3]

My dear sons, there is a lesson to be drawn from this incident. If you are with someone who is running down religion, don't try to argue unless you are well versed in it, but if they ask your opinion, don't let yourself be embarrassed or overawed. Calmly and courteously, ask them questions as though seeking instruction from them. Generally, these irreligious people are ignorant and can easily become confused when the tables are turned on them.

December 28

Three more days and 1864 will be gone, never to return. If we did not begin this year well, let us at least end it well. If we began it well, let us end it superlatively. Let us sanctify these days to make up for the

[3] At this point we are omitting some unimportant details. [Editor]

sins committed in the course of the year. I am not suggesting extraordinary prayers or church services at the expense of school work. I urge you, instead, to carry out your practices of piety more fervently and diligently.

This evening I want to teach you to fear the Lord by telling you an incident that happened a few weeks ago. It will show you that one cannot serve God and the devil at once, and that God deeply loathes those who think that they can please the world and serve Him at one and the same time. A prominent man here in Turin tried to do just that. He attended Mass every Sunday, often came to hear my sermons, and, in my presence, always spoke very highly of religion. With others, however, he criticized and mocked the Pope, priests, and religion. One day an acquaintance of his, hearing him talk that way, said, "You are speaking ill of priests and religion. Beware lest some day you be deprived of both." He only laughed at this warning, but, unhappily, it turned out to be a prediction.

One evening, as he was heartily blasting the Pope, his temporal power, the clergy, and the like, he suddenly became thirsty. He abruptly gulped a glass of water but, unsatisfied, drank several more in succession. Still feeling thirsty, he excused himself, got into his carriage, and went home. His doctor, immediately summoned, prescribed a refreshing drink. He took it and went to bed. Seeing him so flustered, his servants offered to stay with him, but he declined. They retired to their quarters, after agreeing among themselves to take turns in watching. Toward two in the morning, the servant on duty heard a thud in the master's room. He dashed in and, to his sorrow, found his master on the floor, his tongue blackened and hanging out of his mouth, and his eyes with a glazed stare. The servant called to him if he wanted to be helped back into bed. The master made no answer but by signs made him understand that he could not speak. The servant helped him back into bed and sent for a priest, but the sick man had lost his speech. His tongue and mouth kept swelling, choking him to death. Did he repent? We hope so! But how terrible are God's judgments!

My sons, learn from this incident to speak respectfully of the Pope, of priests, and of religion. Woe to him who berates them! The Lord Himself has said, "Touch not My anointed and do no evil to My prophets." [1 Chronicles 16, 22] If you don't want to speak of them, keep silent, but if you do, always speak well of them because God unfailingly punishes their revilers. Experience shows that such people always come to a bad end.

December 29

Two more days and the year will be over. Let us sanctify these two days which we shall never see again. Many of you boys and several of your teachers too often ask me what I mean when I tell someone, "Courage, son!" I'll tell you. If I use the word "Courage" only once, it means that the devil is on the hunt to ruin him. When I raise my finger as I say "Courage," it means that the devil already has that boy in his power, and that he should strive to break free. My dear sons, sometimes I say it only for fun, but usually I mean it, because if you could see what I see, and what I have already seen about some of you, you would scream in fear. From now on I shall be careful never to say "Courage" for fun, but you had better be alert. Whenever I say to you "Courage, my son!" it will mean that I see the devil hovering near you or in your soul. Be prompt then to fight him.

But to the boys who keep away from me, seemingly afraid, I want to say, "My boys, why do you run away?" To you I should say "Courage, my sons!" not just four times but fifteen times because it would take that much for you to get out of the danger you are in.

There is another phrase I use now and then. When I say to someone "My son, shall we talk about your soul?" I am hinting that his conscience is fouled up, that a confession may have been bad, or that trouble is brewing. Bear this in mind.

My dear sons, I beg of you to mind my words and to use the extraordinary means the Lord offers you. I say this because I care for you and because what I tell you is true.

We have no account of anything about Don Bosco on December 29 or 30, except a letter of his to a monsignor attached to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and another to Father Bonetti at Mirabello:

Turin, December 29, 1864

Very Reverend Monsignor:

A good priest, a friend of mine who has already suffered imprisonment for the good cause, is coming to Rome. All he needs is a few suggestions for enjoying Rome's main wonders and benefiting by his visit.

By now I think Father Mentasti [4] will have given you the twenty-five

[4] Father Mentasti had journeyed to Rome with Don Bosco and the cleric Rua in 1858. *See* Vol. V, pp. 525, 531f. [Editor]

lire you advanced for my poor clerics' dispensations and rescripts. This is my third attempt to clear my debt. I wanted to improve my reputation by paying promptly, but I did not succeed, perhaps because you do not like money and therefore my money was not anxious to enter your home, which, I believe, must be full of heavenly gold and virtue. At any rate, I am grateful to you and wish you heaven's best. Should anything else be needed, Father Piola, the bearer of this letter, is authorized to get it and pay for it.

Count and Countess Bosco of Ruffino very much appreciated your Christian greetings and asked me to thank you and reciprocate a hundredfold.

I recommend myself and my boys to your devout prayers. May God grant you a long and happy life.

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Turin, December 30, 1864

My dear Bonetti,

I am enclosing a few pages by Canon Ghemone. I was glad to get your letter. Courage! Direct your efforts at maintaining unity of purpose among your faculty so that all may strive for one thing: to save many souls, their own included. God bless you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's advice to Father Bonetti was the *strenna* which Don Bosco was offering all Salesians: "Save many souls, your own included." [On December 31] after commemorating those who had died during the year—Lawrence Marenco, a sixteen-year-old postulant among them—he quoted and commented upon these words of Isaiah to Jerusalem: *Et erit fides in temporibus suis, divitiae salutis, sapientia et scientia; timor Domini ipse est thesaurus eius.* [And there shall be faith in her times, riches of salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is her treasure—Isaiah 33, 6]

Thus ended the year 1864.[5]

[5] We are here omitting some reflections of the author of these memoirs about a laudatory magazine article on Don Bosco. [Editor]

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

A REPORT BY THE GUARDIAN ANGEL FESTIVE ORATORY

(See p. 11, footnote 5)

Dearest Brethren:

The St. Vincent de Paul Chapter of the Guardian Angel Festive Oratory is too small and unimportant to dare take part in this assembly of sizable chapters of the festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Joseph. However, since we have been graciously taken notice of and invited, we feel encouraged to submit our brief report for 1861.

Really, our achievements are neither many nor outstanding. Still, we must be grateful to God who seems to have designed to use us for doing some good regardless of our poor zeal and small number.

The ten members of our chapter care for a score of young charges. Our meetings this past year, regularly held on Sundays, always numbered at least eight members. We had our usual collections which, despite the condition of our wallets—mostly full of air but otherwise lean—netted us twenty-four lire and forty-eight *centesimi;* with last year's balance of five lire and sixty *centesimi,* this raised our total to thirty lire and eight *centesimi.* As this could never provide prizes for our young charges, the Central Council helped us with ten lire. Eight more lire were collected at our general assembly of the affiliated chapters, and this helped us to keep our promises to our young charges; every so often they had presented their Sunday attendance cards properly filled, and so they could justly and respectfully claim their prizes. Their ragged clothing and footwear—toes sticking out of their worn-out shoes—allowed for no delay. The cost of prizes—clothes and footwear exclusively—amounted to forty-one lire and eighty *centesimi.* Our members are few, but their attendance and efforts to help their young charges and keep the festive oratory running smoothly are consoling.

This past year has taught us that to grow more fervent and faithful in attending meetings, we must receive the sacraments as often as possible. Thank God, our young charges have responded to our efforts, and so they too, in general, kept coming to the Oratory with greater regularity, receiving the sacraments more often, and improving their conduct. In passing we should mention that a few of our boys were hurt by bad books which circulate everywhere. Unsuspectingly they had begun to

read some which had come into their hands, but members of our chapter found out about this and promptly destroyed them, supplying good ones in their place.

Since there was some hesitation at times regarding the number of merits to be awarded to our young charges, we decided at one meeting that teaching catechism and supervising the boys in church should be the task of chapter members only, so as better to check attendance and good conduct. During such catechism lessons we came to learn that one of our charges was wholly ignorant not only of the truths of faith, but even of the simplest things, such as morning and night prayers. When asked whether his mother taught him his prayers, he replied simply that his mother had no time. Not satisfied with this answer, his mentor called at the boy's home one Sunday to learn the truth. From what the lad's mother told him, he could see that she really did lack the time. The mentor would have loved to teach the boy himself, but he could not bring him in during the week to have him repeat his prayers. Another solution was sought: we inquired at the boy's place of work whether some generous person would help the lad to learn his prayers. A kind elderly woman volunteered, but as soon as the mother found out that another woman was performing this truly motherly duty for her son, she felt offended. "Good heavens!" she protested. "I worry about my children's temporal needs all day long. Why shouldn't I think of their spiritual needs as well? After all, I shall have to account to God for their education." With this thought in mind, she called on the good woman and thanked her for her solicitude for her son. By rising a bit earlier each morning and retiring a few minutes later at night, she found time to teach her son his prayers, and he mastered them in a few months.

Another episode greatly edified us and made us realize how much parents appreciate what we do for their children. Last year we had a small fire at Our Lady's altar in our chapel at a time when hardly anyone was around. Fortunately, one member, anxious to spend all the time he could at the Oratory, happened to come by just in time. Spotting smoke rising through the roof, he called for help and managed to extinguish the fire and prevent further damage. However, damage amounting to some thirty lire—no small matter for us—had already been done. An appeal was made at Mass on the next two Sundays and all the boys contributed generously according to their means. Several weeks later, one of the boys' mothers called on the oratory director and, movingly and joyfully, gave him a scudo [1]—the fruit of her savings.

[1] A silver coin approximately equivalent to a United States silver dollar. It was used until the 19th century. [Editor]

Since she was so happy that our chapter members had taken an interest in her son for some years and the latter kept improving his conduct, she felt that she had to disregard all privations and contribute something to honor Our Lady. Father hesitated to accept her offering, but she insisted, asking only that the money be used toward a crown for Mary's statue if possible. Her wish was granted. With the addition of another small sum, a modest but rather pretty crown was purchased to adorn the head of the Immaculate Virgin on the feast day of Her Immaculate Conception.

I fear that I may have taxed your patience, so I shall conclude by requesting your prayers. We want them and we need them. We take this opportunity to ask the chapter members of the festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales and of St. Joseph, as well as all the honorable gentlemen who have kindly honored us with their presence and always spur us to the practice of charity by their inspiring example, to pray for us to St. Vincent de Paul. May he increase our membership and fill us all with holy zeal to meet the urgent spiritual needs of the young in our particular area of Turin. Confident of your prayers, we wish you God's blessings and Our Lady's protection in all you do for your own and your neighbors' spiritual welfare.

Appendix 2

A SACRED POEM BY SILVIO PELLICO

(See p. 31, footnote 6)

A me venite, o figli
(Cosí Maria risponde)
Chi tante preci effonde
Respingere io non so.

Intorno a me stringetevi
Siatemi sempre accanto,
Vi coprirò col manto,
Difesa a voi sarò.

Appendix 3

A SACRED POEM

(See p. 31, footnote 7)

Alma ambasciata, calmati,
Labbro fedel tel dice;
Tu vita avrai felice
Se ascolti i detti miei.
Pace goder se brami
Al rio piacer fa guerra,
E tosto e cielo e terra,
Costanti amici avrai.
Di gran saper non curati;
Cerca la scienza fida,
Quella che al ciel ti guida;
Sol questa è un vero ben.

Religion sostengati
Nei dubbi della vita;
Se al ciel domandi aïta
Sicura avrai mercè.
Quando dei giorni l'ultimo
Verrà e in polve avvolto
Il corpo andrà sepolto,
Nè uom più pensa a te,
Allor pieno di giubilo,
Perchè fu giusto e pio,
Lo spirto andrà con Dio
Godendo il vero ben.

Appendix 4

RETREAT SCHEDULE, APRIL 1863

(See p. 250, footnote 6)

Morning

5:30—Rising.
6:00—Prayers, Prime, *Veni Creator,* Meditation, *Miserere,* Mass, Tierce, Breakfast.
9:30—Sext, Instruction, Hymn: *Lodate Maria,* Retirement.
11:30—Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Chaplet in Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, None, Examination of Conscience, *Regina Coeli.*
12:00—Lunch, Recreation.

Afternoon

2:00—Litany of the Saint, Retirement and Private Spiritual Reading.
3:15—Vespers and Compline, Instruction, Hymn: *Su, figli cantate,* Snack and Recreation.
5:30—Matins and Lauds, Meditation, *Miserere,* Rosary, Reflection, *Regina Coeli.*

GOD * SOUL * ETERNITY

Appendix 5

RETREAT SCHEDULE, APRIL 1864

(See Chapter 64, footnote 1)

Morning

5:30—Rising.
6:00—Prayers, Prime, *Veni Creator,* Meditation, *Miserere,* Mass, Tierce, Breakfast.
9:30—Sext, Instruction, Hymn, Private Reflection. (Students in the study hall; artisans in the parlor.)
11:30—Visit to the Blessed Sacrament, Chaplet in Honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, None, Examination of Conscience, *Regina Coeli.*
12:00—Dinner and Recreation.

Afternoon

2:00—Litany of the Saints, Private Spiritual Reading.
3:15—Vespers and Compline, Instruction, Hymn, Snack and Recreation.
5:30—Matins and Lauds, Meditation, *Miserere,* Rosary, Meditation, *Regina Coeli.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Keep strict silence, except during recreation.
2. Participate in the services.
3. Realize how great is the grace of a retreat.

GOD * SOUL * ETERNITY

Et haec omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam.

Fr. John Bosco, *Director*

Index

ABBREVIATIONS

D.B.	Don Bosco
D.S.	Dominic Savio
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.N.	Good Night
I.C.	Immaculate Conception
I.C.S.	Immaculate Conception Sodality
L.C.	Letture Cattoliche
M.H. of C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Congregation

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