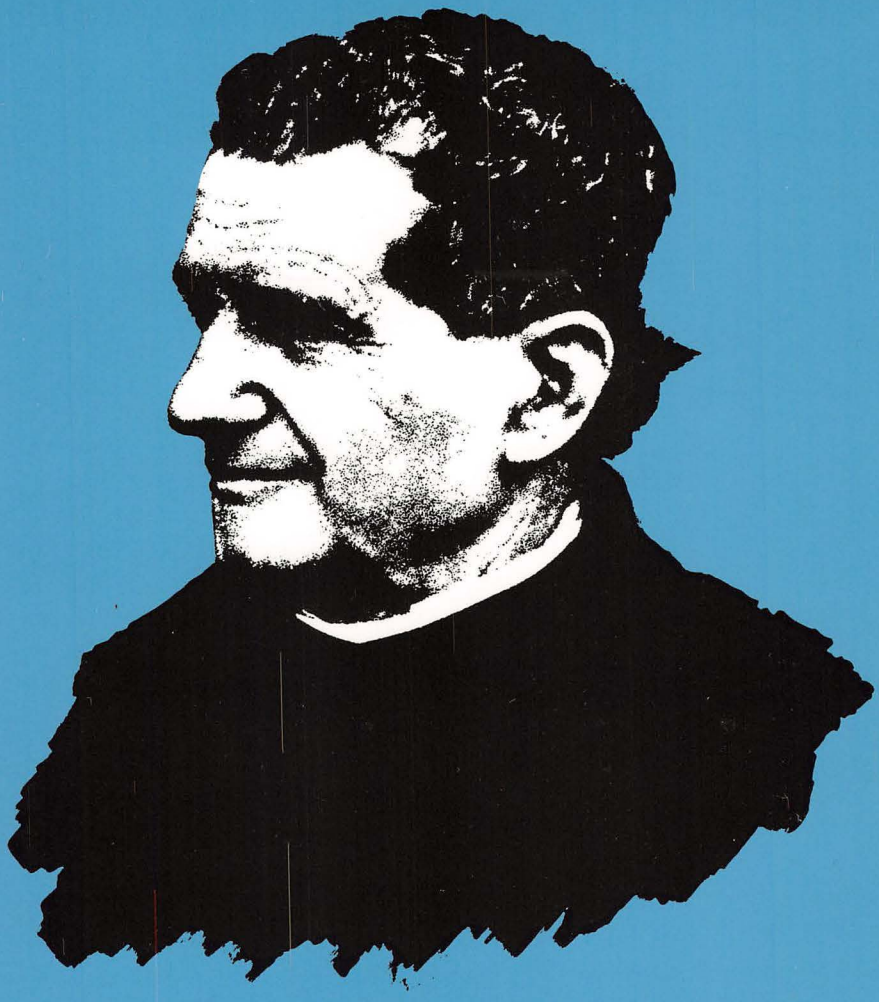


VOLUME XII - 1876

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



FATHER EUGENIO CERIA

FATHER EUGENIO CERIA (1870-1957) already enjoyed the reputation of a distinguished scholar, author, and editor when in 1929 Father Philip Rinaldi, Superior General, asked him to continue the publication of the **Biographical Memoirs,** the monumental work begun by Father John Baptist Lemoyne. Father Ceria's qualifications had been enhanced by his personal contact with Don Bosco during his formative years as a novice and a student of Philosophy at San Benigno Canavese and Valsalice. **Don Bosco con Dio,** published in 1930 and now considered his masterpiece, is a penetrating and inspiring study of his spiritual father.

By systematic and persevering effort Father Ceria brought the **Biographical Memoirs** to completion in 1939, his contribution being Volumes XI-XIX. Other works followed. While compiling the **Annali della Società Salesiana** in four large volumes (1941-51), he published biographies of St. Mary Mazzarello, the Venerable Father Michael Rua, the Servants of God Father Andrew Beltrami and Father Philip Rinaldi, and many other outstanding Salesians. Though advanced in age, he undertook the collection and editing of the **Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco,** in four volumes, two of which were published before his death, which occurred on January 21, 1957 at the age of 86.

The Salesian Society

1987

Membership	17,644
Countries	92
Provinces	77
Houses	1,572
Bishops	63
Archbishops	19
Cardinals	5

The Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians

1987

Membership	17,202
Countries	70
Provinces	77
Houses	1,506

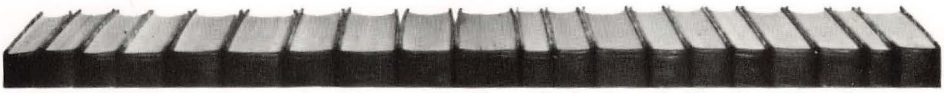
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THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco

by

REV. EUGENIO CERIA, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

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

Volume XII
1876

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Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

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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 Fondly Dedicated

to

THE VERY REVEREND EGIDIO VIGANÒ

Rector Major of the Salesian Society

Who

By Word, Deed and Spirited Leadership

Has Redirected the Salesian Family to

Don Bosco's Ideals of Christian Education

Expressed in His System of

Reason, Religion, and Kindness

Editor's Preface

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.*

Fortunately, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given

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

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 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,[2] 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 fellow Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio de 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. He concerned himself principally with 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

[2]All the documents in the archives at the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy are now being microfilmed and stored in the Don Bosco College Library in Newton, New Jersey.

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.

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 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

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

Author's Preface

This volume, like the preceding one, covers but one year in the life of St. John Bosco—1876. The narrative is structured as in Volume XI, that is, the material is arranged by topic, each chapter containing a wealth of detail and Don Bosco's own words being quoted verbatim whether passed on to us in his own writings or in those of others.

Should these pages come to the attention of readers who may have reliable knowledge, direct or indirect, of Don Bosco's deeds or sayings, or who may perchance possess writings of his as yet unpublished, regardless of the year they pertain to, I request such persons to inform me and give me details. Even things insignificant and unimportant in themselves or to our eyes may well acquire significance when joined to other facts, or they may at least be helpful in view of future studies about our saint. Care must be taken not to allow any recollection of him to be blurred by time.

Regardless of who will compile these biographical memoirs in years to come, they will certainly remain the chief source of information for any serious study of Don Bosco. Hence the student or historian must faithfully abide by the diction formulated centuries ago by Cicero and quoted by Leo XIII: *Nihil falsi dicere audeat, nihil veri non audeat* (Dare he not say any falsehood or conceal any truth). The second part of this rule obliges us to mention certain delicate matters which we would prefer at least to have kept in the shadows, if not entirely in the dark. Unfortunately, the deeds of certain persons in authority, worthy no doubt of the deepest respect, are so closely entwined with Don Bosco's activities that it is impossible to unravel them. Therefore let whoever reads these pages for edification view the events herein described with much impartiality, placing their immediate contingency in the context of God's sublime plans as they unfold through the study of subsequent events. In this regard we who were not Don Bosco's contemporaries are fortunate. Time, an impartial judge, usually puts things in proper perspective. After half a

century, we can more readily judge where stood the right and where the wrong in events which bred conflict and caused prolonged undue grief when they actually happened.

From the standpoint of ordinary Christian living such occurrences are the exception, but they are quite normal for saints. In fact, Benedict XIV declares that those charged with evaluating candidates for sainthood must attach great importance to finding out whether or not the candidate has suffered harassment and endured it in charity;[1] this is also in perfect accord with the doctrine of St. Antoninus of Siena.[2] History has confirmed what Rodriguez wrote of canonized saints. They suffered from more afflictions than we, he said, for saints are generally more sorely tried by God than we, but they always maintained an even temper, kept a cheerful countenance, and ever displayed a certain serenity and joyfulness both within and without, as though every day in their eyes were Easter.[3] Moreover, growing up against heavy odds renders one strong and fit to withstand the ceaseless attacks of men and their times. It is not surprising, therefore, that such was the case with Don Bosco and his work. Most edifying will it be for us to discover what kind of a person Don Bosco was in the midst of life's contrarieties, and it will be of no little instruction to learn how great religious congregations achieve enduring stability.

A professional scholar may brand as superficial the insertion of direct conversation or dialogue in our narrative. But the nature of our work does not demand overly severe strictures. Having made this general observation, however, we must add that direct words are quoted from a chronicle of Father Julius Barberis, who, full of veneration and love for his spiritual father, diligently collected over a period of time even the saint's familiar conversations. The brief dialogues, on the other hand, have another raison d'être. When narrating things which had happened to him, Don Bosco would ordinarily quote conversations in the form of a dialogue as his memory best served him. Father Lemoyne and others who heard him, and took notes of what he said, in turn followed the same style. Therefore it is not inappropriate for them to appear literally transcribed, although they could have been presented differently and in a mode more acceptable to scholarly minds. Whoever will

[1] *De Servorum Dei Beatificatione*, Chapter 40.
[2] *Summa theol.*, p. iii, tit. 12, c. 8, #1.
[3] *Exercise of Perfection* etc., p. i, tr. VIII, c. 4, #2.

carry on this work will have to say *Debitor sum*—I am indebted—to both the learned and the unlearned.

Torino, 1930 Fr. Eugenio Ceria
Feast of the Immaculate Conception

EDITOR'S NOTE

As with Volumes VI through X, we have omitted 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.

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

New Rochelle, N.Y.
March 25, 1980
Feast of the Annunciation of the Lord

Acknowledgments

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Reverends August Bosio, S.D.B., John J. Malloy, S.D.B. and Salvatore Isgro, S.D.B., Provincials emeriti of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsors of this project, and to the Very Reverend Dominic DeBlase, S.D.B., their successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Vice-Provincial of the New Rochelle Province, for his valuable editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular the Reverends Joseph Bajorek, S.D.B., Lucien M. Trudel, S.D.B., and Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City. Finally we wish to pay tribute to the late Rev. Chester Wisniewski, S.D.B., member of our Editorial Board, for his many contributions to the success of this work during the past seventeen years. May he rest in peace with God whom he faithfully served in the Salesian Congregation.

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

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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 prevention 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

Don Bosco's Words at the Start of 1876

WE may quite suitably begin this volume by recording what Don Bosco said or wrote on several occasions in January 1876 as he opened his heart to his Salesians and missionaries, to the Oratory community, and to the pupils and staff members of his other schools. Listeners and readers alike perhaps never suspected the sharp pains and vexing worries that his pleasant calm concealed. We have already mentioned the opposition to his Sons of Mary Program[1] and to his Association of [Salesian] Cooperators;[2] this opposition intensified in 1876. There were also the unremitting efforts to meet the endless daily needs, the worries caused by the growth and expansion of his works, and finally the bitter vexations stemming from misunderstandings that kept cropping up under various guises. These thorns, which relentlessly pierced his heart, have come to light, at least in part, from documentary sources. Yet they never kept him from being all things to all men with no apparent effort or momentary lapse. In his daily routine and priestly ministry, in community and personal dealings, his sons always saw him as their Don Bosco, their selfsame Don Bosco, their beloved Don Bosco. Let us now see him as he opened his heart to each group.

1. To the Salesians at Large

Don Bosco's communications to his dear Salesians, private, public, or by letter, were usually expressive of his confidence.

On January 1, during a familiar conversation with a few of them

[1] *See* Vol. XI, Chapter 3. [Editor]
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 66–76. [Editor]

on the current state of the Congregation, Don Bosco surveyed past, present and future, as any businessman would at an annual stockholders' meeting, to show how God was making it ever clearer that He wanted the existence of the Salesian Congregation. Father Julius Barberis,[1] who was there, jotted down his words in continuance of his little chronicle.

In the past, Don Bosco said, several of the more hostile government ministers had encouraged and aided him to advance his plans. Count Camillo Benso of Cavour[2] delighted in hosting him at dinner and enjoyed hearing him talk about his festive oratories and other plans.[3] From time to time Rattazzi[4] would drop in at the Oratory; so deeply did he revere Don Bosco that in speaking he would refer to him as a great man. Furthermore, he personally advised him on how he could avoid harassment from city authorities. Vigliani, the Minister of Grace and Justice, would write to him for advice on various matters, and when Don Bosco was in Rome he would receive him most courteously. Don Bosco could have said the same of many others who, though prominently active in secret [anticlerical] societies, still stood up for the Salesians. Was this not an unusual situation?

Don Bosco then went on:

Even more wonderful is our increase in strength while other congregations are dying away. They have no novices, new members quit, and very few persevere. In contrast—and nowadays this is unheard-of—we have about a hundred healthy, very happy novices who seem very promising.

More still, all those who are growing up in our Salesian Society possess an extraordinarily good spirit, and they have such love and enthusiasm for work that I do not believe anyone can beat them. Each of our young clerics teaches, supervises, pursues studies, escorts boys on their weekly walks, and tutors and prepares them for confession and Communion.

[1] Julius Barberis (1847–1927) entered the Oratory in 1861, made his first vows in 1865, and was ordained a priest in 1870. In 1873 he earned a degree in theology at the University of Turin. The following year he was appointed novice master—the first to hold this office in the Salesian Society. After twenty-five years in this position, he was made provincial, and finally, in 1910, he was elected catechist general or spiritual director of the whole Society. He died in that office in 1927. [Editor]

[2] Camillo Benso (1810–1861), count of Cavour, was the soul of the Italian Risorgimento. He was also one of the most clever and successful statesmen of nineteenth-century Europe. [Editor]

[3] *See* Vol. III, p. 289; Vol. IV, pp. 73ff. [Editor]

[4] Urbano Rattazzi (1808–1873), Minister of Justice and Cults in 1853–54, later became Minister of the Interior and Prime Minister. [Editor]

When I think of this I am truly astonished, and all I can do is keep repeating, "By the Lord has this been done; it is wonderful in our eyes." [Ps. 117, 23]

If the present is a criterion for the future, our imagination runs riot. In but a few years, despite countless difficulties, with only youthful members, the Oratory has progressed to the point where it now has more than eight hundred boys; we have opened ten houses, so flourishing that in Italy none other can measure up to them. We have spread abroad with a new foundation in France and two in [South] America. What will our future be? Bear in mind that it is only during the last seven years that we have forged ahead with some security after our Society's approval in 1869. In fact, our constitutions were definitively approved less than two years ago. Hence, what can we look forward to twenty or thirty years from now? I believe that we shall fling a net so wide that it shall cover not only Italy, but Europe as well, and eventually almost the whole world.

The important thing is that we do not make ourselves unfit for these heavenly favors and graces. As long as we retain our genuine spirit, our Congregation will proceed full sail.

The crowds of young clerics that people saw moving in and out of the Oratory gave rise to the saying that it was a seminarians' factory. Even Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata would tell parents who sought advice about a boy's vocation: "Send him to Don Bosco for a few months, and if he has no vocation, he will soon get one." This, however, should not make us think that Don Bosco easily disregarded the precautions demanded by prudence and the Church. Just the day before, a couple had called on him with their son, saying that Monsignor Zappata had sent them. "He wanted to become a priest," they told him. "He made so many promises. Now he doesn't even want to hear about it. We are so disappointed." With that they berated the unlucky youngster, but Don Bosco reprimanded them in the boy's presence. "A vocation is not something we impose on others," he protested. "If he feels called to the priesthood, he will think it over and pray and will be able to decide for himself what you now desire for him. But if he feels no inclination for this state of life, he must not be pushed into it." Later he spoke privately to the boy, and the lad gave him well-grounded hopes that he would follow his priestly vocation.

Again, on January 7, Don Bosco talked with his co-workers on his favorite subject—foreign missions. His accomplishments in this field were nothing compared to his plans for the future. He eagerly

looked forward to the conversion of Patagonia. In vain had the Jesuits and other missionaries attempted that task, only to be torn to pieces by the natives.

Don Bosco said:

> But, who knows, with due precautions, and benefiting by others' experience, we may succeed. We may have to open a school in a town or outpost closest to the natives and, offering a residence for local youngsters, try to study at close range the character and customs of neighboring tribes. It would be a giant step forward—not too difficult either—to attract some Indian lads into our schools. I hear that natives do go into town to trade. I believe that we could open the way by treating them nicely, making them feel welcome, and giving them presents. Later, if we could persuade a native youngster to stay in one of our schools for a few months and get him to lead others, this would do the trick. But we must be cautious not to rush things. First we must pave the way, showing, so to speak, that we are not particularly interested in them while we establish ourselves in border towns and make ourselves known and loved through vocal and instrumental music and the exchange of goods and gifts. As a start, a priest may visit their locale and spend some days there, making slow but sure headway. Should the Lord see fit that some of us suffer martyrdom, should we be afraid?

Actually, this is the plan followed since 1879 with well-known [gratifying] results by our school in Patagónes and since 1880 in Viedma. True, our first attempts and stratagems were unsuccessful; there were casualties too, but they resulted from natural causes and were not to be blamed on the savages. Really, they do not deserve to be called savages, as if they were cannibals; they are aborigines, uncivilized, but jealous of their independence under the rule of humane chieftains.

For quite some time Don Bosco had cherished the thought of establishing missions in India and Australia. Undismayed by the difficulties of the English language, he felt that his sons could manage it through practice rather than theory. For a few months they were to master a vocabulary of common words; then they were to practice conversation in gradual steps; finally they were to perfect their pronunciation under a teacher. Substantially, it was the Berlitz method which later became so popular. He had no intention at that time of opening a boarding school in England. Englishmen had dropped in at the Oratory, but none had stayed

on. Years later, some did. The first boarding school on "the isle of saints" was opened at Battersea, a London suburb, immediately after Don Bosco's death, but negotiations had been going on for quite some time.

His talk on learning languages to prepare oneself for work in foreign missions led him to reveal a plan which at that time all considered to be quite feasible because of their boundless trust in him and which now proves his farsightedness. He spoke thus:

> I foresee that soon we shall have language courses here at the Oratory for the missions. We could proceed this way: all those desiring to work in the foreign missions would add to their curriculum the study of the Spanish, French or English languages and customs in that order during their first, second or third year of secondary schooling. These languages could also be taught as electives in philosophy and theology. Thus, I hope, we might achieve our goal with little trouble.

As we can see, Don Bosco's hopes were realized on even a vaster scale, proportionate to the extent of mission apostolate which the Church entrusted to the Salesian Congregation. The three original groups at the Oratory [boys, postulants and clerics] have mushroomed into a chain of large juniorates where young clerical or lay postulants for the foreign missions are trained specifically for the territories to which they have been assigned.

We shall now pass on to a talk on chastity that Don Bosco gave at the Oratory to all his young clerics, both postulants and professed. Of the two slightly different versions of this talk we prefer that recorded by the cleric [Caesar] Peloso[5] as the better of the two.

> Our membership seems to keep growing. If I see more of you every time I come here, I pity the poor devil. First, let us thank God for having allowed us to see the end of 1875, and, as we hope, for having started the new year in His holy grace. Let us also look forward to spending this year happily.
>
> The last time I talked to you, I said something about your vocation, and I suggested a few means to help you keep it.[6] Today I will dwell on how to safeguard the fruit of this vocation.
>
> When one consecrates himself to the Lord, he offers Him all his

[5] *See* Vol. XI, p. 270. [Author]
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 475–487. [Author]

tendencies and inclinations and particularly all his virtues. But these we cannot always retain or easily safeguard. This is particularly true of chastity, which is the foundation and hub of all virtues.

I do not now intend to describe the beauty of this virtue. Neither years of lengthy lectures nor thousands of heavy tomes can tell of examples of this virtue found in Holy Scripture or narrate the countless miracles performed by Our Lord to safeguard it among His devoted ones.

Neither do I intend to speak to you about fast or abstinence or the mortification of the senses, practices which so effectively preserve and strengthen this virtue. No, you can read about these things in the lives of the saints, and you will hear about them in future conferences. But you will say: *Don Bosco is here because he wants to talk to his clerics, whom he loves like the apple of his eye. What will he tell us?*

I will tell you that, especially for a priest and consequently for a young cleric who has consecrated his entire life and virginity to the Lord, chastity is a most precious gem or pearl. At your stage of life, there are some little things you should know which highly contribute to safeguarding such a lovely virtue. Without it, a priest or a cleric is utterly nothing; with it he is all and holds all treasures in his hands.

So let us talk of these little things, so helpful and so handy. What are they? We will look at them one by one and you will see their usefulness.

1. To start with, let me say that the exact fulfillment of one's duties will vastly contribute to the preservation of chastity. I am not referring to your specific duties, such as studying, supervising, teaching catechism and so on, but rather to what our roles demand from each of us—punctuality in all things: at meals, prayer, night rest, etc.

2. Be in the playground during recreation, but be on guard lest this time turn into idle diversion or griping about rules or superiors. Let it be genuine recreation, relaxation of mind and heart after a whole morning's work. After such a recreation, your body too will be refreshed, and each of you will be ready for studying, praying or teaching.

You might ask: *But what has recreation to do with chastity?* I answer that it most effectively helps to safeguard it. Some of you are already supervising the boys or shall very soon do so. You may at times notice that some healthy boy looks troubled, keeps to himself, and, when questioned, mumbles nonsense. People who are experienced and can fathom the most hidden recesses of the human heart know that immodest thoughts occupy his mind. They know that if such a boy is not carefully watched, he is likely to seek out some hiding place to read obscene books; they realize that his chastity is in extreme peril.

How does this come about? Through idleness during recreation. Isolated from others, he lets his mind wander to fancies he had never heeded before. The more he thinks of those things the more he likes them,

and then it is but a short step to act them out. St. Philip Neri who was thoroughly versed in this virtue always told boys: "Shout, and make all the noise you want, but do not commit sin."

His boys carried out his advice with great zest, but at times a lay brother would tear out of his quarters to scold them for their racket as they dashed through the corridors and knocked things over. "You rascals," he would shriek, "is this the way to behave, breaking everything in sight?" But they ignored him and carried on as before with deafening noise. They had their director's permission, and that was all that mattered to them. Seeing that they had no intention to obey him, the lay brother would go to St. Philip Neri and indignantly say, "I want you to come and scold those scamps. Can't you see they're tearing the house down?"

St. Philip Neri would call them over and say: "Listen, my sons. Stay still if you can and don't scream too loudly." The boys would scatter for new and noisier games, while the poor brother would withdraw discomfited and muttering. Were it not for the fact that St. Philip Neri constantly and earnestly told his confreres, "Never let boys be idle during recreation," the brother would have used forceful means to end that rumpus. I say the same thing to you now. I like to see you run and laugh and have fun. Of course, I don't suggest that you go out now and play *barra rotta*,[7] because the ground is covered with snow.

As soon as the recreation period is over, promptly go to your other tasks—study, for instance. Never neglect it. It is your duty to use every spare moment to increase your knowledge. If it is time for a snack, I urge you to take it, if you need it. When it is time for church, you should go devoutly and give good example, and then return to your studies again. In a word, do everything at the set time, and do it well. Above all, keep all the house rules.

3. Is this enough? Yes, if the timetable is faithfully followed—in its entirety. I have always recommended, and still recommend, and will continue to recommend that after night prayers you do your utmost not to linger in conversation with others. After night prayers go to bed promptly.

Those who have to supervise the dormitory should do so with reserve, not stopping to chat with their partner, if they have one. It would be worse to say "Good night" to one boy or a cleric, because one word leads to another and the conversation drags on. Chatting after night prayers is not only against the house rules but is felt by all to be a dangerous thing. Let us keep all rules, especially those concerning the night rest.

I recall Vergil saying in the fourth book of his *Georgics* that bees all start their work at a certain hour and finish together at another.

[7] A running and dodging game. [Editor]

It is essential that this rule [of rest] be kept faithfully. I cannot elaborate now, but what I can and must tell you is that most recent transgressions were mainly due to the fact that some broke this rule and indulged in conversation [after night prayers]. They gave the boys bad example. Some did worse by inviting their friends for a drink in their own cubicles—a thing which is absolutely forbidden. Each is to stay in his own cubicle, and keep out of anybody else's, unless real necessity demands otherwise.

On those occasions some wrote letters and made plans which, though not totally contrary to the virtue of chastity, were still an obstacle to it and caused serious heartaches, not only to me but also to themselves, since some were forced to leave as a result. Why? Because instead of going to bed at the right time, they stayed up to chat. In the case of some we were not sure, but the facts were indisputable as regards others. Their reputation was ruined, and they had to leave the Oratory because they were unable to safeguard this virtue.

4. Furthermore, some who go to bed late are also late to rise at 5:30 the next morning.

Well, they think, *I can sleep another fifteen minutes because I can dress, wash and make my bed in time.* Fifteen minutes later they reason, *Oh, I'll snooze for just another five minutes. After all, what's the difference?* And so they doze or lie lazily for another five minutes, stretching the time out to ten or more. *Now, how can I get away with this? I know! In one of his works Cicero says that smart people may tell lies.*[8] *Besides, lies do not hurt. I'll say I'm sick.*

My dear boys, acting this way only gives the body more than is good for it. How much feed do farmers give to colts and ponies? Just enough to keep them healthy; otherwise they become unmanageable, snap their halters, and kick back.

We must do the same with the body. It behaves like a horse or mule. Overfed, it becomes stubborn and rebellious, as Scripture says, "[He] grew fat and frisky. [Deut. 32, 15] The devil, "like a roaring lion, goes about seeking someone to devour." [1 Pet. 5, 8] He circles about us hoping to find something in which to sink his teeth. Besides the noonday devil who assails those who nap through an afternoon, there is the morning devil described by the Book of Tobias.

This devil lures the soul away from prayer too. When two people pray, the Lord is in their midst and the Immaculate Lamb gathers their devout prayers to present them to the Eternal Father, obtaining favors, comfort,

[8] Perhaps he is jokingly alluding to *De oratione* II, 67–68 in which Cicero mentions words or sayings by which witty people sidestep the truth. As a matter of fact, Cicero condemns lying in several of his writings. [Author]

and the richest rewards for them. Not so those who welcome this devil by lying lazily in bed. Because of sloth they do not join their companions at prayer, and they suffer the grievous loss of favors they might have received from God.

Furthermore, they accustom their body to being lazier. Their constant complaint for more sleep exposes them to the devil's attacks when he really doesn't need their help. These lazy fellows are actually looking for trouble. And when temptations arise, will they be able to resist? Will they remain chaste? That will be hardly possible, I assure you. If they resist and do not fall into sin, I would say it's a miracle.

But does God always work such miracles? Believe me, no. He will, if necessary, when one has not placed himself into an occasion of sin and without that help clearly cannot be snatched from the devil's clutches. Some may say, "I have always been slow to rise and I never fell." In that case I ask, "You mean you never consented to bad thoughts, desires or deeds?" If they insist that they did not, then I say quite openly, "If you are telling me the truth, the Lord has performed a great miracle to save you."

I could prove this with many examples, but time limits me to one. I learned of it yesterday evening in a letter I got from a former cleric who left the Oratory for such a failing. I meant to bring it and read it to you, but I forgot. Still here is the gist of it. He wrote:

One evening, after night prayers, you strongly cautioned the boys to be on guard against the morning devil, that is, not to linger in bed after the bell and bask in pleasant laziness.

Unwilling to believe you and follow your advice, I said to myself: *Don Bosco is using this trick to make us get up on time.* So I kept indulging my laziness. Meanwhile, during those few minutes the devil arose and, hovering around me, aroused not evil but unbecoming images in my mind. Soon he made me think of something slightly immodest; this thought grew worse and more irresistible. Then I passed on to enjoyment, consent and finally deed.

After leaving the Oratory, I attended two other seminaries, always bothered by the same thoughts and by the same morning devil until I finally resolved to follow your advice and began to feel somewhat more tranquil. When I made up my mind to rise promptly, I found it a bit difficult, but I fully succeeded in defeating the devil on the second morning. Unfortunately, now I have lost my vocation and God only knows how I shall make out in the world.

Don Bosco, you may cite me as an example to your clerics; tell my name if you wish, for I believe that there are still some who know me. Tell them that my problems came about because I was unwilling to leave my bed in the morning and start and spend the day in a holy manner.

How many similar tragic examples I could tell you! But let me continue on this topic of the morning devil to draw other conclusions and point out what disgraceful things can happen to those who let themselves be slaves of this wretched laziness. Let's single out one of these lazy fellows. After soothing his conscience with Cicero's saying, after much stretching and yawning, he finally crawls out of bed. But one failure calls for another. *I should go to Mass now,* he says, *but if I do, I won't be able to study my lesson, so I'd better go to the study hall and attend a later Mass, if I can.*

On his way to the study hall, he gets another bright idea. *How about breakfast? I'm starved! I'll skip church today and pray better tomorrow.*

On his way to breakfast he meets somebody.

"How are you?" the latter asks.

"Fine."

"Where are you going?"

"Breakfast."

"How about Mass?"

"It's too late now."

"Today is Thursday. Doesn't our house rule say we should go to Communion?"

"Right, but now I haven't got time (*or better, I haven't the will*); I'll go tomorrow."

Well, when evening comes, ask this fellow how he spent the day. If he is honest, he will certainly reply that he spent it badly because he started it in a lazy way.

5. This kind of devil can be cast out only by prayer and fasting. [Mark 9, 28] Now look, don't think I mean that these failings can be overcome only by prolonged fasting. Far from it. I am not saying that you should fast; all I recommend is temperance.

Be on guard especially against wine. The amount you get at meals is so little that it cannot harm you; in fact it will do you good. Besides, it is not barbera[9] from Asti. Nevertheless, imprint deeply into your minds that wine and chastity do not go together. Temperance is what you need, and some of you need it badly.

It is very distressing to find liqueurs, wines, brandy, food, pastries and tidbits in some lockers and drawers. My dear clerics, at breakfast you can have all [the coffee and] milk and bread you want. At both dinner and supper you are served adequate wholesome meals. What else do you want? Eating between meals is plain gluttony and does your stomach no good. No wonder that these people later feel sick and have to go to the infirmary. When asked what bothers them, all they can mumble is, "My stomach."

[9] A choice, heady wine from the Asti district in northern Italy. [Editor]

"What's wrong with it?"

"I have a stomachache."

I would merely tell them, "If you had not overeaten at meals and between meals, you would have no trouble now."

Here's something that happened within the last few days. While everybody was in bed, one fellow—who, I believe, may have already left—sneaked off to his cubicle with a friend for a late snack. They feasted on chicken and wine, then ate and drank some more. Finally, after chatting to their hearts' content, they went to bed with a full stomach, risking a stroke or other trouble.

I do not know how chastity fared under those circumstances. I can only say that if it did not suffer, it was because of God's special grace. Besides, it is strictly forbidden to invite anyone into your own cubicle. What of obedience? What of the rules? What becomes of them?

6. Another thing that is hardly helpful to chastity is friendship—not genuine, fraternal friendship, but that peculiar kind which singles one out more than others. Some individuals, attracted by a physical or spiritual trait of a companion or pupil, strive to win his friendship with food, candy, books, a holy picture or similar trifles. This way they strike up friendships which are exclusive and infatuating. Then come meaningful glances, clasping hands, kisses, endearing notes, gifts, and requests for one thing or another. Without realizing it, both friends find themselves ensnared.

Youngsters who formerly looked very promising are no longer at the Oratory, or, if they are still here, they conduct themselves quite differently. When some were warned to break up these exclusive friendships, they could not understand why they should. They saw nothing wrong, but in the meantime they became ever colder to their companions, their superiors, and even God.

These things did not happen centuries ago; they happened in our times and are still happening today. I could tell you about many youngsters who were ruined by such exclusive friendships, so I urge you to be friends with all or with none. For instance, you may leave the dining room for the playground and meet a friend or pupil and walk along with him, which is the thing to do. If one or more companions or pupils join you, they should be as welcome as the first. Being in the company of one whom you hold dearer than others, even if it is because he is better and more diligent, does not entitle you to treat others differently. You must be like an impartial father or teacher to all.

Frankly, let me tell you that I have no favorites. I love equally the foremost and the humblest among you. You are all my sons, and I would gladly give my life for each one of you, because, as St. Paul said, you are and must strive to be "my joy and my crown." [Phil. 4, 1]

7. There is another means by which to fight this enemy of chastity, this demon. . . . I hate to say it, but since it is between us, let me give you a good suggestion. When going to the restroom, get out as soon as you are through, because that's the place—a most unsavory one—where this demon begins his assaults. By leaving at once you stand to gain because you are safeguarding yourself from the danger of losing the virtue of purity; if you linger, the devil will do his utmost against the one who is alone. Your imagination will flare up, often with most baleful consequences. If, in the former case, we fought temptation against purity with temperance and fasting, we should now resort to prayer.

8. At night, try to form this wholesome habit: as you are about to get into bed, whisper a prayer, and the devil will leave you alone.

"But," you may object, "I fall asleep immediately."

"Wonderful! You are fortunate, and that's just what I desire."

But some may say, "At times it takes me hours to fall asleep."

"Then pray, and keep praying."

"But I don't feel like it."

"Pray, nevertheless; try because the Lord, seeing your trust and humility, will give you the strength you need to withstand and overcome those serious temptations."

Some time ago, Professor [Vincent] Garelli, now a school superintendent, called on me and said in this regard, "Guess what I do to forestall the assaults of the ugly night demon."

"I have no idea," I replied. "Tell me."

"It's very simple. As soon as I am in bed, I begin to count from one to a thousand. I must admit that I never get farther than fifty; in fact, I don't remember even getting that far. I immediately fall asleep and wake up the next morning with a tranquil mind."

Other people have a fine habit of mentally reciting stanzas from Dante or Vergil or some other scholastic material they have been studying. I fully approve of these means and commend their use because they tire the mind and help one to sleep.

I could say much more on this topic, but this is enough. These are fatherly suggestions I give you in our family intimacy, not a lecture. I ask you not to broadcast to the boys what I have told you. Let it rather be imprinted in your hearts as a norm of conduct. Nor would I like you to report my words indiscriminately—not that it would matter to me if people should know.

As you see, these are trivial things, but they are very important and most beneficial if practiced. Above all, be always mindful of the practices of piety proper to our Congregation, for your efforts toward sanctity depend on them.

During Mass I shall pray that you may preserve the virtue of chastity

and consecrate it by vow one day to the Blessed Virgin. During Communion, ask for this grace for yourselves, your companions, your superiors, and me too, lest I preach in vain to others and unfortunately possess it not myself. In short, let us warmly ask for it for each other, and the good God will grant it to us.

Two days after this talk, Don Bosco sent a fatherly message to all his Salesians, expressing the hope that they would consider it "as written to each personally."

Before reporting on this circular, let us look at the 1876 Salesian Directory. It listed one hundred and twelve perpetually professed members, seventy-nine in triennial vows, eighty-four novices and fifty-five postulants. Of the professed, sixty were priests. The directory also listed four new houses at Nice, Bordighera (Vallecrosia), San Nicolás de los Arroyos, and Buenos Aires. By the end of that year several other houses were opened. Contrarieties, far from clipping the wings of his zeal, seemed to strengthen them for higher flights, as Don Bosco himself very eloquently admitted in 1880. That year the Vatican Secretary of State sent him a "complaint" from the archbishop of Turin. In a routine report to his procurator in Rome, Don Bosco commented on this matter: "Whenever they throw an obstacle in our path, I respond by opening a new house."[10]

At about this time [1875], amid these troubles, he instituted at the Oratory a crash course dubbed "the school of fire,"[11] forerunner of the Sons of Mary Program in the Salesian boys' home at Sampierdarena, an initiative that produced abundant priestly and religious vocations.

This too goes to show how certain he was of his specific mission, one which kept proving its worth on a wider scale year after year, and whose expansion could not be stopped by opposition. We can imagine his friends' delight when the annual directory, *The Catholic Hierarchy and the Papal Household*, listed Don Bosco's "beloved name" and followed it for the first time with the title "Superior General"[12]—something that must necessarily have had the consent of the Secretariat of Bishops and Regulars.[13]

[10] Letter to Father Francis Dalmazzo, Turin, July 21, 1880. [Author]
[11] *See* Vol. XI, p. 44. [Editor]
[12] Letter from Monsignor Fratejacci to Don Bosco, January 16, 1876. [Author]
[13] Letter from Monsignor Fratejacci to Don Bosco, December 24, 1875. [Author]

We now come to the New Year's Day circular which brought each Salesian the encouraging and admonishing words of their holy founder.

Turin, January 1, 1876

My dearest sons in Jesus Christ:

After completing my visit to our houses, I feel that I must dwell a while with you, my dearest sons, on matters that may promote God's greater glory and the well-being of our Congregation.

First, I am delighted that I can assure you of my full satisfaction with the material and moral progress I saw, both in internal administration and external relations. Everybody is hard at work, our constitutions are observed, discipline is maintained, the sacraments are received frequently, piety is fostered, and care is taken of those who fortunately give signs of the priestly call.

For all this let us be thankful to God, whose goodness and mercy we must credit for the little good that we are able to accomplish.

I am deeply comforted, too, in assuring you that our Society is ever growing. In the past year alone several new houses were opened; others we shall open this very year. Personnel is increasing in numbers and quality; no sooner are some ready to take on an office than Divine Providence gives them a chance to go to work.

What shall I say of widespread requests we receive to open new houses? There are millions of humans in Italy, France, England and the Americas. In South America, Brazil and Argentina are particularly in need. Then think of Algeria, Nigeria, Egypt, Palestine, India, Japan, China, Australia, and so on; think of the millions of people lost in the darkness of error lifting up their voices from the brink of perdition, crying out to heaven: "Lord, send missionaries to bring us the light of truth and show us the path which leads to salvation."

As you know, several of our confreres have already heeded these touching cries and have sailed for Argentina. Once there, they will pass over to the savage tribes of Patagonia. Well, in all their letters written on their voyage and at their mission centers, they constantly repeated, "Keep sending us workers!"

Among other things, they remarked that the archdiocese of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil has two million people, with very few priests and only five seminarians.

My dear sons, I am deeply grieved by the thought that at this moment an abundant harvest awaits us everywhere and we are forced to let it go because we lack manpower.

Let us not lose heart, however. For the time being, we shall strive

through work, prayer and the practice of virtue to train a militia for Jesus Christ. We shall endeavor to achieve this especially by fostering religious vocations; if need be, at the right time we shall offer ourselves to God for such sacrifices as He may deign to demand for our own or our neighbor's salvation.

Meanwhile, wishing to suggest suitable means to promote religious vocations and effective ways to preserve the spirit of piety among our confreres and boys, let me recommend a few things which experience has taught me are most necessary.

1. In every house, especially in St. Philip Neri's School at Lanzo, let every effort be made to promote the Altar Boys' Society and the sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Aloysius, Mary, Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception.

Let no one be shy about talking them up, boosting them, fostering them, and explaining their objectives, origin, indulgences and other advantages. I believe that these associations deserve to be called the key to piety, the safeguard of morality, and the mainstay of priestly and religious vocations.

2. Beware of emotional relationships and friendships, whether they be carried on orally or in writing or through the exchange of books and gifts. Handclasps, fondling, kissing, and strolling arm-in-arm or with one's arm around the other's shoulder are all rigorously forbidden, not only among yourselves and between you and your pupils, but among the pupils as well. Let us bear well in mind St. Jerome's words: "Affection for none, or equal affection for all."

3. Flee worldliness. Ties to a world which we have abandoned, but which continues to entice us, bring only heartaches and chaos. Many young people seemed models of virtue in their communities, but on a visit to home and friends they quickly lost their good intentions, and, on returning, they could no longer adjust to community life, with some even losing their vocation.

So, never go home except for grave reasons and with the necessary permission. If feasible, ask your superior for a confrere to go with you.

Do not accept to run errands, make recommendations or transact business for others; such things have proven ruinous to vocations and morals.

4. After night prayers go to bed immediately. Lingering on to stroll, chat or finish up some work can harm one's spiritual and physical health. Thank God, nothing happened in our houses, but I know that in certain places there were deplorable disorders which can be traced to conversations being carried on after night prayers.

Punctuality in going to bed should be matched by punctuality in rising in the morning, and I intend to lay equal stress on this point. Believe me,

my friends, experience has proved the sad truth that lazing in bed in the morning is always a hazard, while rising punctually, besides starting the day well, steadily gives good example to all. Incidentally, I cannot omit a warm recommendation that all superiors see to it that everyone, especially our coadjutors and domestic staff, be given time each morning to attend Holy Mass, receive Communion, and go regularly to confession, as our constitutions prescribe.

This letter is addressed to all in general, but I would like everyone to read it as addressed personally to him. Each word I would wish repeated a thousand times so that you may never forget it

I pray that your affection, the earnest fulfillment of duties, and, above all, your following the advice of your spiritual father and friend in the Lord will give me joy as you carry out not only my exhortations, but also anything else in them which will spur you to promote God's greater glory and that of our Congregation.

Relying on your good will and hoping to see you soon, I pray that God will bless you all and grant you steady good health and the precious grace of persevering in doing good. Lastly, pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ.
Fr. John Bosco

2. At the Oratory

We only have two of Don Bosco's "Good Nights" to the Oratory boys, both noteworthy for content and attitude. In the first, that of January 7 [1876], exceptionally cold weather prompted him to suggest the best protective measures; then he passed on to news of the missionaries; finally, with truly natural ease, he broke forth into an inspiring talk on the Blessed Sacrament and the missionary spirit.

Take heed, my dear sons. I will give you some wholesome suggestions which you can carry out to your own great benefit. Do not bundle up when you are in the study hall, dining room, visitors' lobby or other heated areas. When you go outside, be sure to wear a scarf about your neck and briefly cover your nose and mouth lest the sudden cold air harm you.

Do the same in going in and out of the dormitory. On rising in the morning, wait a while before going out of the room, lest the cold air seep through the pores of your skin which were opened up by the warmth of

your bed. When you leave the room, cover up properly. Likewise, when in bed make sure that your blankets come up to your neck; if your shoulders and throat are uncovered, it would be of little help even to have a mattress on top of you.[1] I suggest that you keep some clothes on if you haven't got enough blankets. In that case let us know and we shall promptly supply blankets, as we have already done for many of you. Do not keep silent and freeze; you will only get sick.

I have seen some of you wearing only summer clothes, and when I asked why, you said that you had no winter garments. If that is the case, tell us so that we can supply you with warm clothing as we already have been doing. These are mere details, but if you neglect them, you may catch a bad cold that you can't get rid of. Please follow my advice because I want you to enjoy good spiritual health. I said "spiritual" because through it you will also be well physically. God takes good care of His children.

As you already know, we have heard from our missionaries since they reached Rio de Janeiro, the first sight of land after leaving St. Vincent, the last of the Cape Verde Islands. They gave us much news. In a rough crossing of eleven days they saw nothing but sky and water; all were more or less seasick. I'll give you the rest of the news tomorrow night. Their letter, dated December 8, arrived on Wednesday, January 5, nearly a month later. They assured us that they would write again from Buenos Aires, and that letter is probably now on its way. Assuming that they wrote it about December 13, we should receive it, God willing, about the middle of this month, just a week from today.

As I said before, we shall print these letters so that you may send them home if you wish. In due time we shall gather them into booklet form along with other writings about this mission, and I think that they will make pleasant reading.

Father Cagliero thanks you for your prayers and Communions because to them he attributes his safe voyage and all the good things that happened to them. He also says that on the feast of the Immaculate Conception he offered Holy Mass especially for you and all the members of our Congregation. He asks you to keep up your prayers, so offer a Communion for him and for his brother missionaries. Do it at your convenience, not necessarily tomorrow or the day after. If you may be unable to receive, make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and ask Our Lord to help our missionaries and reward them for their great sacrifices. How great indeed they are to take a long, risky voyage in order to win souls to God, giving up their friends, parents, and relatives—in a word, everything—to follow the Lord's footsteps and bring the Gospel to far-off

[1] At this time there was no heating in the dormitories. [Editor]

lands! We too make great financial sacrifices for this goal. Therefore I most urgently exhort you to offer your Communion and visit to the Blessed Sacrament for our success.

What joy it is to receive Our Divine Redeemer into our hearts, that same God from whom we must draw the strength and constancy needed every moment of our lives. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament dwells in the tabernacles of our churches and is the source of all blessings and favors. Believe me, my dear sons, if one is devoted to the Blessed Sacrament, receiving frequently and visiting Jesus in the tabernacle, he has a sure guarantee of eternal salvation.

Father Cagliero tells us something else that I must not keep from you. The missionaries called on the bishop of Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil, who welcomed them warmly and, among other things, lamented that he has only five seminarians and no priests in over forty parishes. Worse still, he can get no priests, even from other lands, to go to Brazil and administer the sacraments to the faithful. For his vast diocese alone he would need no less than five hundred hard-working Salesians. Thus you see how scarce priests are in those regions.

Don't forget what I said about caring for your health. Good night.

In his second "Good Night" Don Bosco took advantage of the novena to St. Francis de Sales to give some helpful advice on the frequent reception of the sacraments, to offer food for thought on the subject of a vocation, and to exhort them to be kind to their companions and patient in enduring the winter cold.

Tomorrow is the first day in the novena honoring St. Francis de Sales. It would have started today had we planned to keep the feast on Saturday, January 29. Since we decided to keep it on Sunday, January 30, we shall start it tomorrow. St. Francis de Sales is our patron saint, the namesake of the Oratory. That's why we call it "The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales." We ought to celebrate this feast with all possible solemnity and devotion. Let each one strive to draw full personal spiritual profit from it.

As for all other novenas, I again strongly ask that each one keep his conscience free of sin so as to be able to receive Communion daily. However, as regards frequent reception of the Eucharist, each of you should consult his confessor and do as he says. But the thing that you must never forget is to keep your conscience always in such condition that you may receive Communion daily.

Now I must mention something which has repeatedly been pointed out to you. Often you so crowd into the sacristy that one can hardly get

through. Some are there not to go to confession, but only to get warm. There is nothing wrong with that if you are freezing, but, honestly, such is not the case. I wouldn't blame you if it were that cold in church, but that's not true, and so I cannot praise you for skipping morning prayers. If someone really feels he is freezing, let him tell me or Father Chiala or Father Sala, and he will be given a portable stove.

All jokes aside, I must say that this is no laughing matter. For some time now, many boys, mostly older fellows, would like to make their confession to me, but, finding the sacristy jammed, they walk away, hoping for better luck the next day, or they settle for another confessor. Let us therefore set some norms to ease matters for these boys and make confession more helpful to your souls.

First, do not go to confession more often than once a week. Some, especially the younger ones, would want to go to confession every day. But do as I say, and everyone will have his chance. However, go to confession at least once a month. Generally every ten or twelve days or every two weeks is a good rule. Many say: "We like to go every week." Well, that is quite all right.

Others may remark, "I want to receive Holy Communion frequently, but, a few days after confession, I am no better than before, and I don't dare receive without going to confession again."

I say: "If you cannot keep your conscience clear for a week, then it is better not to go to Communion so often."

"But I want to do better," you may say. "If I could go to confession more often, I could more easily succeed."

"Not really," I reply. "Instead of going to confession two or three times a week, make a firmer resolution, and you will find that this is far more effective than going to confession more often with but little sorrow and without determination to amend your ways. This is why your confessor himself has told you to go to confession less frequently. Prepare yourself better to receive this sacrament properly. There is only one case when I think one should go to confession more often, and that is when the confessor himself, after carefully considering one's spiritual condition, says, "Come to confession every time you fall into this or that sin, so as to overcome your habit or evil passion." When a confessor gives this specific advice for a particular reason, the penitent will doubtless benefit, but, apart from this, go regularly every week or every ten to fifteen days. Then, with your confessor's permission, you may very often go to Holy Communion.

My second suggestion to make going to confession easier for all of you in this: I have no objection if all of you wish to make your confession to me, but it so happens that usually the younger lads are the first ones to crowd around me, so that, when the older boys come, they have a long

wait, and many decide to leave. It is true that little fishes are good, especially if there are many of them, but frankly I am happier when I can catch bigger fish. There is also another reason: the older boys have to think seriously about their vocation and so need more time to talk with me and get my advice. I therefore wish that they always receive priority. True, they have a whole year to decide, but I would be happier if they would not postpone such an important decision to the end of the school year. Such delay could lead to a hasty decision, and perhaps a wrong one made under the pressure of worldly concerns. When pressured, one cannot think calmly, nor does he have the time to consider the matter thoroughly. In fact, I feel that even third or fourth year secondary school students should give thought to their vocation. It is never too soon to plan for the future. Third and fourth year students are old enough to know and be able to discuss their future with good results.

Now what shall I suggest to honor our patron saint? As you know, St. Francis de Sales is the saint of meekness and patience. During this novena I would like all of you to strive to imitate these virtues. Store up a great amount of meekness in your heart so that you may always be inclined to love your companions without getting angry at them and without using an insulting or sarcastic tone of voice. Always do good whenever you can. Never harm anyone in any way. On this score, I would really like you to resolve to show your love for your companions by giving each other good advice and never—as unfortunately it happens in the world—leading each other into evil. At your age especially, nothing is more harmful than evil advice. A youngster may be determined to do good, but a companion comes along and suggests something bad, such as harboring a grudge, disobeying, hiding books and withholding them from superiors' approval, avoiding good companions, or dodging superiors and disregarding their advice. The boy who had good will drifts unaware into evil through his companion's bad advice. On the contrary—and this is true—a companion can do a lot of good with timely, friendly, wholesome advice. Generally, boys are not stubbornly set on doing evil; more often than not, they do it thoughtlessly. If a friendly voice warns them, they will change their minds. Evil will lose and good will triumph. How much good you can do for yourselves and for your companions if, in this novena, you start to follow my advice and continue to do so for the rest of your life!

Lastly, I have to give you a nosegay[2] for tomorrow. This winter is exceptionally cold; as a nosegay I suggest that during this novena you endure cold, dampness and other discomforts without complaint in honor of St. Francis [de Sales]. When you have to suffer illness, insults or other

[2]A virtuous action performed in honor of God, the Blessed Virgin or the saints and offered to them as a spiritual flower. [Editor]

hurts, just say: "I'll offer it up for the love of God." The Lord will be very pleased and through our patron saint's intercession will bless you.

If anyone would like to do something else equally good he may do so, especially if he strives to imitate our saint in observing silence and self-control and in speaking with concern for his companions' feelings.

During these solemn novenas, I ordinarily suggest that you go to Communion during the week more often than usual. Those who cannot receive should offer a spiritual Communion. Likewise, try to visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently. Let each one resolve to be more diligent in doing his work. Good night.

3. The Schools

Before the proliferation of his work made it advisable to send one *strenna*[1] to all his schools, Don Bosco sent his highly-prized New Year's message to each, directly or through the local superior. Only two such *strenne* of 1876 remain, addressed to the staff and pupils at Lanzo and Varazze, respectively. The first reads:

Turin, January 3, 1876

To All My Dear Friends at Lanzo:
Director, Teachers, Pupils and Residents

Take no offense, but I say that you are a band of thieves—yes, thieves, because you have stolen from me all I have, and my very self too.

On my visit, you charmed me with your kind affection and filled my mind with tokens of your piety. I had my poor heart left, but you had already run off with all its love. Now your letter, signed by two hundred most dear, friendly hands, has overwhelmed my heart. I have nothing left but a burning desire to love you in the Lord, to do good to you, and to save all your souls.

Your generous show of love forces me to visit you as soon as possible. I hope for no delay. Then I want all of us really to rejoice in body and soul. Let the world know that we can enjoy life in its goods and in its spirit without offending God.

I thank you most cordially for all you have done for me. Without fail, I shall remember you daily in my holy Mass and ask the good Lord to grant

[1] 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]

you health for your studies, strength to overcome temptation, and that most precious grace of living and dying in God's friendship. On the 15th of this month, the feast of St. Maurice, I shall say Mass for your intentions. On that day, show me your love by receiving Communion and praying that I may join all of you in heaven.

God bless you all.

Your most affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

He expressed his feelings for the boys at Varazze in a letter to their director. Father [John Baptist] Francesia,[2] whom he asked to act as his spokesman.

Turin, January 10, 1876

Dear Father Francesia:

I badly need to see you and have a talk with you. This may not be until the feast of St. Francis de Sales. Meanwhile please send me your personnel report—teachers, assistants and workers: their moral conduct and diligence. We are very short of help here, but if you must have someone, I shall find him.

The cleric Barberis has told me that he would like to practice the piano on a regular basis and asks that I talk to you. I know that if you do not favor the idea, you have your good reasons. Still, by giving permission, you may help him do better in some duties which are really not up to par. At any rate, do as you think best for God's glory.

I intended to write to the pupils, yours and mine alike, to wish all of you a Happy New Year, but I was unable to do so. Let me do it now. Please be my spokesman to our entire dear family at Varazze. Tell them that I love them all in the Lord with all my heart, and that I remember them at Mass day by day and pray for their health, for their progress in school, and for the truest treasure—the holy fear of God.

If they would like to do something very pleasing to me, let them offer their Holy Communion for my intention—better still, for a special need of mine—on the third Thursday of this month.

[2] John Baptist 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 one of the sixteen pupils who joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Society. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He was also the first Salesian to earn academic degrees at the University of Turin. Ordained a priest in 1862, he soon filled critical administrative positions, distinguishing himself by his fatherly kindness. He was a prolific writer and a distinguished Latin and Italian scholar. His last forty years were spent at the Oratory where he died on January 17, 1930. For further details *see* the Index of Volume VI. [Editor]

I have some worries and I decided to write to you just to ease my mind a little. God bless you and your whole community.

Your most affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Today we got news from Marseilles that our missionaries arrived in Buenos Aires on December 13.

We also have a fatherly letter addressed to Father John Bonetti[3] at Borgo San Martino. Though written in mid-February, it fits in quite well here.

Turin, February 14, 1876

Dear Father Bonetti:

I have written to Chevalier Rho,[4] as you suggested, to remind him of his reported promises to me. I will let you see his answer if one comes. I hope all will be well.

In view of your swelling enrollment and its probable increase, see if it would be feasible to pick some ten of the frailer boys and transfer them to Lanzo where we have plenty of room; inform the parents first. Preferably choose boys of this area. Think about it and let me know.

Tell Giulitto I cannot give him what he asks for because he is not naughty enough. My regards to Gallo, Ferrero, Adamo, and all the other confreres. Pray for this poor man who will always remain in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The "worries" mentioned in the letter to Father Francesia were the usual ones—money and opposition. That very day he had gotten word from Rome that several slanderous letters against his

[3] John Bonetti (1838–1891) entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. In 1859, along with other young men, he banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its Superior Chapter. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, apologetic and Salesian publications, chief among them *The History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these *Biographical Memoirs*. In 1866 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]

[4] Joachim Rho was at this time superintendent of schools for the province of Turin and refused to recognize our school at Borgo San Martino and acknowledge its status as a junior seminary. He first met Don Bosco in 1840. *See* Vol. I, p. 373. [Editor]

new Congregation had been sent [to the Holy See]. It was quite disheartening just at the time when Don Bosco was hoping that his second application for privileges[5] would be favorably considered. He was also aware that pressure had been exerted for an investigation of the Oratory's curriculum. The investigation carried out in a low key by a local theologian, Father Negri, did not help matters. He sought information from Father [Mark] Pechenino,[6] Don Bosco's very close friend, who then told him about the whole thing. This penchant for fostering distrust in Rome about Salesians deeply grieved Don Bosco who was already worried enough by financial straits. The Oratory's debt for staple supplies climbed to 70,000 lire—quite a frightening sum in those days—and the time had come to replenish dwindling stocks. Don Bosco's heartaches show clearly enough in this letter to Attorney [Nicholas] Galvagno of Marene, a generous benefactor.[7]

Turin, December 12, 1876

My dear Attorney,

On receiving this letter you will say, "Don Bosco is in a fix and is looking for charity." You are quite right. Here we are in the middle of winter and more than half of my nine hundred boys are still wearing summer clothing. If by God's grace you can help, you would truly be "clothing the naked." Our Savior will consider it as done to Himself and will certainly welcome us warmly at our appearance before His judgment seat.

Although I openly disclose my grave needs, I only ask that you do what you can. I shall daily pray for you that God will grant you and your wife a long and happy life, and that your children may grow up healthy and in the holy fear of God.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

This brief comment on Don Bosco's "worries," which he felt he had to mention for his own ease in his letter to his beloved Father Francesia, help us to better grasp the sense of a brief entry in Father [Julius] Barberis' chronicle: "These days Don Bosco is quite depressed and doesn't feel well." But he immediately adds: "Still,

[5] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 437–448. [Editor]
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 406. [Editor]
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 118f. [Editor]

he thinks of everything, keeps things in line, briefs all concerned, stays at the helm, and gives his opinion and advice." However, he was not without some genuine relief. "It is a great uplift," he confided to Father Barberis, "to see how everyone is acquiring a religious spirit. Yes, things are really going well and will continue to do so as long as there is plenty of work."

4. To the Missionaries

The first of Don Bosco's many communications to his overseas missionaries is found in a brief, concise letter which, if carefully analyzed, while indicative of both lack of time and a deep urge to write, reveals a new world of facts and feelings. From the way he mentions the death of Mother [Magdalene] Galeffi, superioress at Tor de' Specchi, we may infer its probable date as after January 17, when he received Father Cagliero's first letter from Buenos Aires, and not after his learning of the missionaries' arrival in Argentina from the confreres at Marseilles.

Turin, January 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

A most heartfelt greeting to you and to all my dear Salesians sharing their work with you.

Mother Galeffi died on the 13th of this month. Countess Callori, Mamma Corsi, Monsignor Fratejacci and Attorney Menghini are praying for you and send you greetings.

Remember that in October we shall try to send you thirty Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and some ten Salesians. If the need is urgent, a few may be sent before.

In view of the serious scarcity of priests in Brazil, wouldn't it be wise to explore the possibility of opening a house at Rio de Janeiro?

Commendatore Gazzolo is neither writing nor sending news [through others]. Give him my regards.

Tell Mr. Benitez that I am grateful for his kindness toward you. I long to meet him, but if I am not to have this pleasure on earth, I now make an appointment to meet him in heaven. Amen.

God bless you all. Be cheerful in the Lord.

Fr. John Bosco

This great missionary venture to South America had topped all

his other undertakings in the interest it provoked. After the missionaries' departure, Don Bosco had used the photograph which is now the frontispiece of Volume XI[1] for publicity purposes, enclosing it with his Christmas and New Year's greetings. Once the missionaries arrived [at Buenos Aires], *Unità Cattolica* headed a new column "From Turin to Buenos Aires" and from January 20 onward published a series of letters that its avid readers eagerly awaited, passing them on to others and appreciably boosting the paper's circulation.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ocean, the Salesian missionaries were rebuilding the reputation of the Italian clergy which had suffered in some places. This expedition also kindled an extraordinary fervor for foreign missions both in Italy and abroad, so that many Salesians, envying the missionaries, pestered Don Bosco with requests to join them.

We close this chapter by again listening in on Don Bosco's intimate family talk with Father Barberis on January 21. Of this simple, upright, deeply pious priest, Don Bosco once said: "Father Barberis understands me." Whenever he could, Don Bosco chose men of solid virtue for positions of authority rather than intellectuals. He willingly spoke at length with Father Barberis even on confidential matters. After supper that evening he said: "There is so much to do, my dear Father Barberis—so much! Today, as happens every day, I was at my desk from 2:15 to 8:00 this evening and yet could not clear up my work. My desk is still piled with letters to be answered. Nor am I a slow writer. I can handle a lot of mail. I have noticed that, under the pressure of this daily workout, I write so fast that I doubt anyone can beat me. Still, let us do what we can for God's greater glory. What cannot be done will just have to wait."

Here Father Barberis interrupted him, wishing him long life and good health so as to be able to accomplish most of his goals. "At times," Don Bosco replied, "I too think that, were God to let me live to the age of eighty or eighty-five in sound body and mind, I could accomplish a lot of things and attract notice not only in Italy and Europe but throughout the whole world. But let the Lord do as He sees best. I am willing to carry on as long as He wishes. I work as fast as I can because I see that time is running out and that,

[1] We have omitted all photographs in our American edition. [Editor]

regardless of one's length of life, one can never achieve half his goals. I make plans and try to carry them out, improving on them as best I can, but I keep myself ready for departure. When my time comes, I shall go, and whoever will take over will complete what I have not finished. However, until I hear the bell toll, I will not stop."

The fact is that, before dying, Don Bosco did far more than just leave his successor the task of completing unfinished business. So well had he prepared the ground for his successor that new seeds, energized by his spirit, continued to sprout, and they prosper to this very day. As far as we can foresee, no one has reason to fear that this progress will one day grind to a halt.

CHAPTER 2

Two Dreams: On Murmuring; Three Deaths

IN the latter half of January, Don Bosco had a symbolic dream which he mentioned to several Salesians. One of them, Father Barberis, urged him to tell it at a "Good Night" because the boys loved to hear his dreams, which greatly benefited them and made them feel closer to the Oratory.

"True," Don Bosco replied, "these dreams help a lot and the boys are eager to hear them. My only trouble is that I need lungs of steel. Truthfully, these dreams do shake people up because almost always they touch everybody and each one asks in what condition I saw him, what he is to do and how he should understand the different facets of the dream. They pester me day and night. All I need do to urge them to make a general confession is tell them one of my dreams. Well, let's do this. Next Sunday while I give the 'Good Night' to the boys, you ask me some questions and I then will tell my last dream."

On January 23 he mounted the platform after night prayers, his beaming countenance revealing, as always, his joy at being with his sons. When everybody quieted down, Father Barberis raised his hand. "Excuse me, Don Bosco," he said, "may I ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"I heard that recently you had a dream about seeds, sowers, and hens and that you told the cleric Calvi about what you saw. Would you kindly tell us too? We'd like to hear it."

"Aren't you nosy!" Don Bosco replied in mock rebuke that provoked general laughter.

"I won't mind your calling me nosy, so long as you tell us the dream," Father Barberis insisted. "I think all the boys back me up, and I am sure that they are most eager to hear you."

"In that case, I will tell you. I had intended to keep it to myself because of some things which concern some of you personally, things which might even make you uneasy, but since you asked for it, I will narrate it."

"Oh, Don Bosco, if you have a hard knock in store for me, please spare me in public."

"I will tell things just as I saw them and let each one take what pertains to him. Before I begin, just remember that dreams happen during sleep when we have no control over our mind. If you find anything good in this dream, a warning or anything at all, take heed, but do not become ill at ease because of it. I said that I dreamed while I was sleeping because some boys dream while they are awake, much to their teachers' annoyance. [So, let me start.]

I seemed to be in Castelnuovo d'Asti where I was born. Before me stretched a vast field set in a beautiful plain. The field was not ours, and I had no idea who owned it. Many people were working with hoes, spades, rakes and other tools; some were plowing, sowing, harrowing and doing other chores. Scattered foremen supervised the work; I seemed to be one of them. Elsewhere a group of peasants were singing. I gazed in astonishment, unable to figure out where I was. *Why are these people working so hard?* I kept asking myself. Then I answered my own question: *To provide bread for my boys.* It was truly delightful to see these good peasants working so hard and pursuing their tasks with untiring zest and diligence. A few, however, were having fun.

As I took in the scene, I noticed several priests and many clerics of ours, some close to me, others farther away. *I must be dreaming*, I told myself. *My clerics are in Turin, not here at Castelnuovo. But why am I wearing winter clothing? Yesterday the temperature was near freezing, and still these people are sowing wheat.* I clapped my hands and began walking off, saying, *I am not dreaming; this really is a field; that cleric over there is so-and-so; that other one I know too. If I were dreaming, how could I see all this?*

Just then I spotted nearby a kindly old man whose countenance inspired trust. He was watching me and the other people intently. I went up to him. "Tell me, my good man," I said, "what's going on over here? What is this place? Who are these workers? Whose field is this?"

"Fine questions you ask!" the man answered. "A priest, and you don't know these things?"

"Please tell me if this is a dream. I feel I'm dreaming and all I see is just unreal."

"What you see is quite real, and I think you are wide-awake. Don't you realize it? You are talking, laughing and joking."

"People can dream that they are talking, listening and acting as though they were awake," I objected.

"Forget that! You are here in body and soul."

"All right, if I am awake, tell me who owns this field."

"You studied Latin. Which is the first noun of the second declension that you learned in Donatus?[1] Do you remember?"

"Surely, but what does that have to do with my question?"

"A great deal. Now tell me what that noun was."

"Dominus."

"And its genitive?"

"Domini."

"Very good! Therefore this field is *Domini*, of the Lord."

"Ah! Now I see!" I exclaimed.

I was surprised at the old gentleman's explanation. Just then I saw several people carrying bags of wheat grains while a group of peasants sang, *Exiit, qui seminat, seminare semen suum* [The sower went out to sow his seed—Luke 8, 5].

I thought it was a shame to throw good seed into the ground to rot. *Would it not be better*, I wondered, *to grind it into flour for bread or pasta?* But then I thought: *He who sows not, reaps not. Unless the seed is sown and rots, what can one reap?* Meanwhile a large flock of hens were scurrying from all sides to peck at the wheat that was being scattered, while the peasants were singing, *Venerunt aves caeli, sustulerunt frumentum et reliquerunt zizaniam* [The birds came, ate up the wheat and left the cockle].

I looked about me and observed the clerics. One stood with arms folded, totally unconcerned; another was chatting with his companions; others shrugged their shoulders or looked the other way. There were some who laughed at what they saw and unconcernedly went on with their games or chores. No one tried to shoo the hens away. Resentfully I said to each of them, "What's wrong with you? Don't you see those hens eating up all the seeds and destroying the hopes of these good peasants? What kind of harvest are we going to have? Why do you stand there so mum? Why don't you shoo the hens away?"

Their only response was a shrug of the shoulders and a blank stare. Some did not even move. They had been totally unconcerned with what was going on in the field before I shouted at them, and they were paying no attention now.

[1] A widely used elementary Latin grammar named after Aelius Donatus, a Roman grammarian of the mid-fourth century and the author of *Ars Grammatica*, a most popular elementary Latin textbook. [Editor]

"You are a bunch of fools," I went on. "Can't you see that the hens have had their fill? Couldn't you at least clap your hands to scare them off?" As my words were ineffective, I began clapping my own hands, and this prompted some of them to begin chasing the hens away, while I muttered to myself: *Now they chase them away, now that all the wheat has been gobbled up!*

Just then the same choir of peasants sang these words, *Canes muti nescientes latrare* [Dumb dogs unable to bark—Is. 56, 10].

Astounded and exasperated, I faced the kindly old man. "Please tell me what this is all about," I pleaded. "I can't make any sense out of it. What does the seed mean?"

"The seed is the word of God."

"What is the meaning of the hens gobbling it up?"

Changing tone, the old man went on, "If you want a full explanation, here it is. The field is the Lord's vineyard as the Gospel says, but it can also symbolize the heart of man. The farmhands are Gospel workers who sow the word of God, especially by preaching. This word can bear much fruit in people's hearts if they are prepared, but then birds come and pluck it away."

"What do the birds symbolize?"

"They symbolize murmuring. After hearing an inspiring sermon, one lad joins his companions and finds fault with the preacher's gestures, voice, or some word of his. He destroys the good effect of the sermon. Another will point out a physical or intellectual shortcoming of the preacher or ridicule his pronunciation. Again the sermon is made fruitless. The same can be said about good books; finding fault with them destroys the good they can do. Murmuring is all the nastier because it is generally done on the sly; it grows and thrives where we would least expect it. Wheat, even when sown in a poorly tilled field, will take root, grow and bear fruit. When a storm breaks over a freshly sown field, that field becomes soggy, but it still yields a harvest. Even where the seed is not of the finest quality, it will still grow; it may yield less, but yield it will. However, when hens or birds flock and peck at it, the field will yield nothing at all. So it is with sermons, exhortations and good resolutions; if they are followed by distractions or temptations, their good effect will be lessened but not destroyed, but if there is murmuring or backbiting or some similar thing, all is wiped out. Whose duty is it to sound the alarm, take a firm stand, cry out and make sure that murmuring and unbecoming talk are silenced? You know the answer."

"What were those clerics doing?" I asked. "Couldn't they have prevented all that?"

"Of course, but they did not," he went on. "Some just stood there watching; others paid no attention; some were unaware of what was going

on and others did not have the courage to oppose the evil. A few even joined the murmurers and did their share to destroy the word of God. You are a priest. Insist on this point. Preach, exhort, speak out, and never be afraid of saying too much. Make everybody understand that criticizing those who preach, exhort or give good advice is very harmful indeed. Furthermore, being silent and passive when a wrong is being done and one's duty calls for action makes one an accomplice in the evil deeds of others."

Deeply impressed by these words, I kept looking for other failings so as to shame the clerics into doing their duty, but they had already begun shoving the hens away. I took a few steps but tripped over an abandoned rake and woke up.

"Now let's draw a lesson from all this," Don Bosco said. "Father Barberis, what do you think of this dream?"

"I think it's a good reprimand. Let the chips fall where they may."

"It should certainly do us some good," Don Bosco went on. "My dear boys, avoid murmuring because it is a very grave evil. Shun it like the plague and try to make others avoid it too. At times even good advice and excellent deeds are not as effective as is the prevention of murmuring or of harmful talk. Let us bolster our courage and attack these evils openly. There is no greater misfortune than to rob one of the benefit of God's word. One utterance, one smart remark can do just that.

"This dream came several nights ago, but last night I dreamed again and I wish to tell you about it, too. It's only about nine o'clock, and I'll try to be brief."

I found myself somewhere else. I can't remember where. I know I was not in Castelnuovo, but I don't think I was at the Oratory either. Someone dashed over to me. "Don Bosco!" he cried. "Come quickly!"

"Why the hurry? I asked.

"Don't you know what has happened?"

"No! Tell me!"

"So-and-so is very ill. He is dying. Such a fine, lively lad!"

"Are you joking?" I replied. "Just this morning I was talking with him while strolling about the porticoes and now you tell me he is dying!"

"Don Bosco, I am not trying to fool you. I must tell you the truth: that boy needs you very badly. He wants to see you and speak to you one more time. Quickly, or you will be too late."

With no idea of direction, I hurriedly followed the messenger and came to a crowd of people who in tears begged me, "Hurry! His end is near!"

"What happened?" I asked. I was taken to a room where a boy lay in bed, his face sunken and deadly pale. A racking cough and rattle in his throat barely allowed him to speak. "Are you not so-and-so?" I asked him.

"Yes, I am."

"How are you feeling?"

"Very sick."

"What happened? Yesterday and today you were walking happily along the porticoes."

"Yes, but let's hurry. I must make my confession because I have little time."

"Do not be upset. You made your confession only a few days ago."

"I know, and I don't think I have any big sin on my conscience, but I want to be absolved again before I go to my Divine Judge."

While hearing his confession I noticed that he was rapidly failing. Phlegm nearly choked him. *We must hurry*, I thought, *if he is still to receive Holy Viaticum and the Anointing of the Sick. Really, he will not be able to receive Viaticum because it would take too long and his cough would keep him from swallowing. I must get the oil of the sick.*

I left the room and sent someone for it. Meanwhile the boys around me kept asking, "Is he really in danger? Is he really dying, as people are saying?"

"Unfortunately, yes," I replied. "Don't you see how his breathing has become more labored and the phlegm is choking him?"

"Then it would be better to give him Holy Viaticum too, to strengthen him before sending him to Our Lady's arms."

As I busied myself getting things ready I heard someone say, "He is dead!"

I went back into the room and found the boy lying with his eyes wide open, no longer breathing.

"Is he dead?" I asked those who had been caring for him.

"Yes," they answered.

"How did it happen so quickly? Isn't he so-and-so?"

"Yes."

"I can't believe it! Just yesterday he was walking with me along the porticoes."

"Yesterday he was walking and now he is dead," they answered.

"Fortunately he was a good lad," I exclaimed. Then, turning to the boys around me, I went on: "See, he was not even able to receive the Last Sacraments. Let us thank the Lord, though, for giving him time to make his confession. He was a good boy and frequented the sacraments. Let us

hope he has gone to a better life or at least to purgatory. But if this had happened to others, what would their fate have been?"

We then knelt down and recited the *De Profundis.*

I was about to re-enter my room when I saw Ferraris[2] come in great haste.

"Don Bosco," he cried breathlessly, "do you know what happened?"

"Yes, unfortunately I do know? So-and-so is dead."

"That's not what I wanted to tell you. Two others have died."

"What?"

"Yes!" And he named them.

"When? I don't understand."

"Yes, two others died before you could get to them."

"Why didn't you call me?"

"There was no time. Still, can you tell me when the one you mentioned died?"

"Just a few minutes ago."

"Do you know what day this is and what month?"

"Of course! It's January 22, the second day of the novena of St. Francis de Sales."

"No, Don Bosco," Ferraris countered. "Check your calendar." I looked at the calendar and saw May 26.

"Incredible!" I exclaimed. "We are in January, and I am sure because I'm wearing winter clothing. No one dresses like this in May, and we would not have the heat on."

"I can't explain it either, but today is May 26."

"Just yesterday one of our boys died, and it was January."

"You are wrong," Ferraris insisted. "It was Easter time."

"That's even more incredible."

"But it was Easter time! He was far luckier than the other two who died in Mary's month.

"You are confusing me," I told him. "Explain things better. I can't make heads or tails of what you are saying."

"I am not lying. Things are just as I told you. If you want to know more and get a better explanation, take heed!"

He spread out his arms and loudly clapped his hands. The sound woke me up.

"Thank heaven," I said, "that it was only a dream. Was I scared!"

That is the dream I had last night. Make what you want of it. I don't care to give it too much importance. Today I checked out the boys who seemed to be dead in my dream, and I found them alive and well. It is

[2]This was the lay Salesian, John Anthony Ferraris, the Oratory bookstore manager. [Author]

certainly not advisable for me to tell you who they are. Still, I shall keep an eye on them and if necessary give them wholesome advice. I'll prepare them with caution and not make them aware of it. If death should overtake them, it will not find them unprepared. But let no one go about saying, "It could be this one or that one." Let each one keep himself ready.

Don't let this dream frighten you. Its only effect should be that one which Our Divine Savior Himself pointed out in the Gospel: "Be ready, because at an hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming." [Luke 12, 40] My dear boys, the warning the Lord gives us is a grave one. Let us always be ready because, when we least expect it, death may overtake us. The unprepared risk a bad death. I shall do my best to keep myself ready, and you should do the same, so that at whatever hour it may please the Lord to call us, we may be ready to pass into eternal happiness. Good night.

Don Bosco was always listened to in religious silence, but when he narrated these extraordinary things, not a cough or even the slightest shuffling of feet was to be heard from the hundreds of boys present. The deep impression he made lasted for weeks, even months, and radical changes were noticeable in the conduct of certain young scamps. Don Bosco's confessional would also be crowded. It never occurred to anyone that he might have invented these stories to frighten the boys and thus improve their conduct, since his predictions of forthcoming deaths always came true and the states of conscience which he saw in his dreams corresponded to reality.

But was not the fear produced by such gloomy predictions a crushing nightmare? It does not seem so. In a crowd of over eight hundred boys the odds against being one of the doomed ones were too great for any one individual to feel unduly threatened. Besides, the general belief that Don Bosco prepared those who were destined to die without frightening them and that those who did die would certainly go to heaven helped to dissipate fears. Then, too, it is common knowledge that young people quickly change their mood. Momentarily they may be shaken, but they soon shake off their fears. Those who lived through those days have unanimously confirmed this.

After the boys had gone to bed, a few confreres gathered around Don Bosco to learn if one of them would be among those to die. Shaking his head with his usual smile, Don Bosco kept them at

bay, saying, "Do you really expect me to tell you who it is and risk having someone die before his time?"

Realizing that he would not disclose names, they asked him whether his first dream had shown him any clerics among the murmurers. Don Bosco, who had taken a few steps, stopped and, with a sweeping gaze at his questioners, smiled enigmatically, as if to say, "Yes, a few, but only a few, no more!"

They then pressed him to say at least if they had been among the silent observers. Don Bosco dodged the question, merely saying that they were to avoid murmuring and help others to avoid it along with any kind of wrongdoing, especially unbecoming talk. "God help the priest or cleric," he said, "who is supposed to be in charge and sees wrongdoing and does not stop it. I want it to be known and borne well in mind that when I say 'murmuring' I do not mean merely backbiting, but every word and expression that may destroy the wholesome effect of God's word. In conclusion, I insist that it is a serious evil to keep silent in the face of wrongdoing, taking no personal action to stop it or have those in charge do so."

One of the bolder bystanders daringly asked Don Bosco, "How does Father Barberis fit into the dream? You said that there was something in it which concerned him, and Father Barberis himself seemed to expect a reprimand." When Father Barberis seemed to be pleased to have the secret revealed, Don Bosco said, "Well, Father Barberis does not speak enough of this topic; he does not stress it as much as is needed." The latter admitted that for two years he had not specifically dwelt on this topic with his novices. He was therefore quite grateful for the observation and resolved to keep it in mind for the future.

Then all went upstairs and, after kissing Don Bosco's hand, withdrew to their quarters, except Father Barberis who, as usual, saw Don Bosco to his room. Because it was still early and he knew that he was too deeply stirred by his own narrative to sleep, Don Bosco, contrary to his custom, invited Father Barberis to enter, saying: "It's early. Let's walk in my room a bit." For another half-hour they conversed. Among other things, Don Bosco said, "I saw everyone in that dream, and the part that each played. I use this knowledge when hearing confessions or when exhorting publicly or privately as long as I see it has a good effect. Years ago, I paid

no serious attention to these dreams, until I noticed that, generally, they were more effective than a sermon, and in some cases even more effective than a retreat. Now I make use of them, and why not? Holy Scripture says: "Test everything; retain what is good." [1 Thess. 5, 21] I see that these dreams do a lot of good and are liked, so why keep them secret? In fact, I notice that they also help to make many boys fond of our Congregation."

"I too have experienced the benefit and help of these dreams," Father Barberis interrupted. "They are even helpful when told to others. Where people know you, we can say that they are your dreams; where you are unknown, they can be presented as parables. I wish that I could gather them together and present them in the form of parables. Both old and young, great and small would eagerly read them and benefit spiritually."

"Yes, I also firmly feel that they would do a lot of good."

"But I suppose no one has put them down in writing," Father Barberis sighed regretfully.

"I have no time," Don Bosco went on, "and some dreams I no longer remember."

"I remember those concerning the progress of our Congregation and Our Lady's mantle," Father Barberis added.

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Don Bosco, and he mentioned several such dreams. Then his countenance became grave and, almost in a worried tone, he went on, "When I think of the responsibilities of my position, I tremble all over. . . . What a fearful account I shall have to give God for all the favors He bestowed on our Congregation!"

CHAPTER 3

The Annual Conference of St. Francis de Sales

THE feast of St. Francis de Sales, a Saturday, was postponed until Sunday, and, as in previous years, the directors of the various houses arrived during the week for a series of meetings with Don Bosco from Tuesday to Friday. They came on Monday and left on Saturday so as to be back in their own schools for Sunday's homily and confessions.

The records of this period tell us that their presence was comforting and edifying. Outstanding were their unassuming demeanor, their friendliness with the members of the community, their mutual respect, eager acquiescence toward superiors and perfect concord and spirit of mortification, and above all their love and respect for Don Bosco. All were eager to know his wishes so as to comply with them.

We have cited their spirit of mortification. They were given no special menu, except for the day of their arrival, and this was done to honor them and Don Bosco's personal guests at dinner. What we can hardly accept today is that they slept in attic roomettes, some with two in a room since nothing better was available. Besides, each cleaned his own room. The meetings, protracted for hours from morning until night, hardly left them time to visit their families or relatives in town. However, their cheerfulness triumphed over boredom and lightened their labors. Quips, jokes, and hearty laughter, common to brothers who are fond of each other and enjoy being together after several months of separation, eased the tedium of endless meetings. Don Bosco felt really at home in this family circle and enjoyed every moment. The chronicler, praising their jolly spirit, remarks: "In the Mass or in its prayerful preparation they showed both a joy and a seriousness which clearly witness to the love that warms their hearts."

Did they really have important matters to discuss? We recall two

remarks of Don Bosco in 1875. The first one was: "Wisdom and knowledge, foresight and providing." Those first directors, gathered to discuss the internal, private affairs of the Congregation, give us an example of that wise foresight which is the secret of sound government. Don Bosco's second remark is somewhat of a paradox: "In our houses all we need to do is to look after little things; the rest will fall into place of its own accord." How many might be apt to believe the opposite. Yet daily life is but a texture of little things, and into it all the rest falls. Be that as it may, we shall adequately cover each session, as we did in Volume XI, touching on matters proposed, debated or decided. Let the reader focus on his task, and, when bored, he can skip this chapter and go on to the next without losing the thread of the narrative.

Is it not rather odd that the first session, conducted by Father Rua, was concerned with personnel assignment, much as the Superior Council or a provincial council would do today? The reason is that Don Bosco chose to act as a father rather than as an authoritarian. Just as he would sometimes appear to consult individuals on matters he had already thoroughly studied and decided upon, he likewise would submit to consultation measures on which he certainly needed no further enlightenment. In a word, he dealt with his confreres as a father would with his adult sons.

They decided that Father Caesar Chiala,[1] the artisans' catechist[2] at the Oratory, should be replaced for reasons of health. Indeed, so ill was this excellent Salesian that he died within the year. Father Branda,[3] the prefect at Valsalice, was proposed as his replacement, but he was prefect in name only because the director, Father [Francis] Dalmazzo,[4] concentrated all authority in his own hands.

[1] As a young boy, Chiala (1837–1876) had been among the first to attend the Valdocco Festive Oratory. In 1872, after filling responsible positions in the Italian postal services, he made a spiritual retreat at Lanzo and, with Don Bosco's encouragement, decided to become a Salesian. He made his first vows in 1873 and was ordained a priest the following year. He died in 1876. For other details *see* Vol. V, p. 521. [Editor]

[2] The priest in charge of religious activities. [Editor]

[3] John Baptist Branda (1842–1927) entered the Oratory in 1868 at the age of 26, made his first vows in 1869, and was ordained a priest in 1873. After his first assignments at Marassi (Genoa) and Valsalice (Turin), in 1879 he was sent by Don Bosco to open the first Salesian school in Utrera (Spain). In 1883 he opened another at Sarriá (Barcelona) where he remained until 1889. Recalled to Italy by Father Michael Rua, he fulfilled other important duties until the very end of his long exemplary life. He died at the Oratory at the age of 85. [Editor]

[4] Francis 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]

This problem led to a digression in the discussion, and that mushroomed into a main issue. Concerned about keeping legitimate customs, the assembly earnestly called attention to a principle which is still valid today:

> No abuse is to be introduced. A director is not allowed to interpret the rule as he sees fit, assigning whatever powers he wishes to a prefect. When the Superior Council agrees with him that a confrere is to work with him as a prefect, this confrere must really hold the office and wield a prefect's authority. It is true that now, and for as long as Don Bosco lives, we all defer to him, so that he has but to express a wish and we will all vie with each other to carry it out. He can set up, take away, give, increase, lessen and transfer authority to anyone he wishes. However, it is equally true that we must now set a policy to obviate difficulties which may arise when Don Bosco shall no longer be with us.

This observation called forth another of no less import: it was not advisable for a director to take over the duties of a prefect for two reasons. First, because he would be a disciplinarian, with much to lose, especially in his position of confessor;[5] second, because once a director does everything himself, no one knows what he is doing. There was currently no reason to fear wrongdoing, but the future possibility existed if they did not hold firmly to the principle that the prefect should *de facto* exercise the powers given to him by the rule.

Returning to the original topic, they debated at length on the most suitable nominee for the position of prefect at Valsalice, finally choosing Father [John] Marenco, a future bishop and apostolic delegate, and a refined gentleman.

The assembly then passed on to the subject of spiritual retreats which were usually held in our schools toward the close of the school year. This was judged to be a rather unpropitious time, and it was recommended that they be held in mid-March or April. The reasoning went like this: These retreats are a strong means of breaking up certain relationships and unhealthy friendships. During a retreat a boy decides to improve his conduct and makes firm

[5] The Directory of 1875 carries this footnote: "For the smooth running of our Congregation and in order to preserve its unity of spirit, a regular director or confessor is appointed for the members of this Society, as is done in other religious institutes. In Turin: Father John Bosco and his substitute Father Michael Rua. In other houses: the director of each and his substitute, the prefect." [Author]

resolves which will guide him at least for the rest of the school year. If the retreat is held at the end of the year, he has no time to carry out his resolutions. Furthermore, as time passes, evil habits develop deeper roots, and the summer vacation wipes out the little good produced by the word of God. After readily agreeing on a date, they divided the preaching tasks among themselves. Thus the morning session of Tuesday, February 1, came to a close.

In the afternoon session, Father Rua, again presiding, told them of Don Bosco's wish that they consider which clerics might qualify for orders. Each director submitted the names of the qualified candidates in his own house. In regard to minor orders, Father Francis Cerruti[6] felt that it would be wise to be somewhat lenient in granting them to the first and second year theology students. Such a gesture was most apt to cheer and encourage them, besides being in harmony with the spirit of the Church which usually sets long intervals between orders.

As some were admitted to orders, so also some were admitted to religious profession, but on this score the assembly members were on unequal footing: the directors having a consultative vote, the Superior Council members having a deliberative vote.

After this matter had been closed, Father Rua made a recommendation. In those days, directors enjoyed greater freedom of action than now because, as we saw in Volume XI, our Congregation needed time to function perfectly. So it happened that directors dismissed novices, postulants, and even members without first consulting Don Bosco. There was no intention to deny them power of summary action when circumstances demanded it, but they were now at least to inform the Superior Council immediately, not merely citing the dismissal but also specifying the date, the reason and the manner of dismissal. On occasion, when trying to get rid of a lay aspirant, directors found it helpful to send him to the Oratory. This was not to be done without first informing the

[6] Francis 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 1856 he was ordained a priest and 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]

superiors at the motherhouse or at least without giving the individual a letter containing necessary and timely information.

The third topic, like the first two, was another matter altogether. Having taken its place in the world, the Congregation now felt that it had entered into history, a history that had to be not only made, but also written. Don Bosco, who had kept even his childhood scribblings and never destroyed even the least document,[7] eminently recognized the importance of history. We are not surprised therefore to see in the agenda a proposal that the Congregation appoint an historian to gather documentation and organize material to be used in the course of time. Meanwhile the task at the moment was to compile local chronicles. The directors were to record the principal events of their schools, neglecting nothing that Don Bosco might say or do during his frequent visits. If they could not do so, they had to appoint a confrere and give him easy access to information. The first task of each director was to write a brief history of the school, indicating the precise date and conditions of its opening and any other important events, including reasons for the rise or decline of enrollment. Later, they were to record outstanding events as they occurred. Once a book was filled, it was to be diligently transcribed in a ledger which was never to leave the premises, while the original record was to be sent to the motherhouse. How lucky we would be today if all directors had set themselves to this task and diligently kept it up. Neglect set in over the years and carelessness destroyed the little which had been done. Overwork is certainly a valid extenuating circumstance, but it neither relieves nor lessens our disappointment. It certainly does not stop us from voicing a hope that more attention will be given to history. It is no futile pastime for idle folks, but a means of passing on tradition, a teacher of experience, and an incentive to merit praise.

Matters concerning the regulations took over the rest of the session. At the two annual meetings and in other expressly called gatherings, a host of clarifying recommendations had grown up around the regulations, but, not having been cross-referenced, many of them had been lost and were no longer observed. Father Rua had come across them while reviewing the minutes of those meetings and had added them as explanatory riders to the regula-

[7] *See L'Oratorio di Don Bosco* [Don Bosco's Oratory] by Father Fedele Giraudi, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1929, p. 88, footnote. [Author]

tions; grouping them by subject, he now presented them to the assembly's examination. After deleting, adding to, and revising them, the assembly decided to have them printed and sent to all the houses. The minutes of this first session highlight three things: a policy, an addition, and a digression.

Since a number of these clarifying deliberations particularly concerned directors and it seemed indiscreet to make them public, it was decided that these would be available only to directors. There was no intention at all to recreate the ill-famed *Monita Secreta* [Secret Instructions].[8] We should consider them rather like the *Ricordi Confidenziali* [Confidential Recommendations] for directors, which are presently hardly confidential and are known to all. They are personal directives of the kind that do not belong in a body of laws; they concern neither duties nor rights of the director, but they guide and govern his conscience in carrying out his tasks. Briefly, they concern the internal forum,[9] about which the director's subjects have nothing to say. An addition was proposed to the regulation concerning the confreres' mail: a member traveling between any of our schools was not to carry or deliver letters or anything else unless asked to do so by the local director; even in this case he was to deliver such matter not to an individual but to the director or prefect, should either care to see it.

Again, anyone returning to his own school was not to deliver anything unless the superior had first seen it; therefore no confrere was to entrust letters to anyone going to another house, but was to hand them to the prefect for forwarding. The subject of correspondence gave rise to the noteworthy reflection that there was too little letter-writing between confreres and that this should be considered a drawback. Other religious orders fostered frequent correspondence as a powerful means for promoting unity of spirit and forestalling or rectifying disorders.

As usual in such discussions, one readily agrees and is even enthused, but let the attempt be made to put theory into practice and doubts arise, one falters, and differences of opinions begin to show. "How should we go about it? How often are we to write to each other? To whom and how?" All agreed that it was right for

[8] A code of instructions allegedly addressed by Claudius Acquaviva, fifth general of the Society of Jesus, to its various superiors. It laid down methods to be adopted for the increase of the Society's power and influence. [Editor]

[9] The sphere of ecclesiastical authority dealing with matters affecting the private spiritual good of individuals. [Editor]

each member to write to Don Bosco or to the members of the Superior Council at least three times a year, preferably on the feasts of Mary, Help of Christians and of St. Francis de Sales and during the yearly retreats at Lanzo. It was also thought wise to take note of those who wrote in order to spur all to write. But a problem quickly arose: such letters would call for answers, and the members of the Superior Council already had too many things to attend to, with no time for additional burdens such as this. The debate ended with the proposal to refer the matter to Don Bosco, and they adjourned at a late hour.

The following morning's entire session was used to evaluate the explanatory additions to the regulations. It may prove beneficial to know what these first directors—headed by Father Rua who considered it his duty to be Don Bosco's mouthpiece and interpreter—thought of certain practical aspects of Salesian life. Six items seem noteworthy:

1. *Changes in the Timetable.* Originally, choir practice was held after supper;[10] but gradually all our schools moved it to before supper. Since they all knew how much Don Bosco insisted that a timetable, once approved, was to be faithfully and uniformly observed by all, they sought his official approval. The experiment they had made favored its continuation: the boys learned more from their lessons, the teachers found the time more convenient, and things went on in a more orderly manner with less loss of time since the pupils went straight from the study hall to their classrooms. On the contrary, it took much more time and effort to assemble the pupils after supper.[11] Nevertheless, the Oratory superiors did not want to adopt this change in the timetable without Don Bosco's previous approval.

2. *The Monthly Manifestation.* Was it proper to enter into matters of conscience? Today's Code of Canon Law has neatly solved the problem: "All superiors are strictly forbidden to induce their subjects, in any way whatever, to make a manifestation of conscience to them."[12]

[10] Supper was at 8 P.M. [Editor]

[11] After supper at the Oratory, some boys went into the playground, slow learners were assigned to different teachers for coaching, and others went to choir practice. Since they did not form ranks, a certain amount of time was needed for the last two categories to get together. Unavoidably, this curtailed the lessons which had to stop at the prescribed hour. [Author]

[12] Canon 530, #1. [Author]

This question had also been answered negatively once before by our own superiors, but it had been decided then that it was helpful to fathom inclinations and habits; they are not matters for confession, but knowing them does redound to the advantage of subjects inasmuch as it makes it easier to give them duties better suited to their temperament, and it helps superiors to treat them gently or firmly in matters of obedience. As in previous meetings, the directors were strongly urged to receive regularly these monthly manifestations—a most effective means for the good running of our schools.

3. *The Semi-Monthly Conferences.* Some thought them too frequent. Where was one to find material to talk about or discuss at such brief intervals? And where was the time to be found when all confreres could assemble? After night prayers, when they were all tired out and the conference could not be rushed? It was suggested to adopt the solution of some schools where these conferences were held at five in the evening when the boys were in the study hall and could be supervised for a half-hour by a non-Salesian. The Oratory set this half-hour aside for a conference to the novices. Why could not the same arrangement be made in all our schools? Father Rua remarked: "Certainly, a conference at five in the evening will cause some difficulties, and someone will have to supervise the study hall, but the problem does not seem too serious. Just make sure this task is not always given to the same confrere. All should take turns; whoever cannot attend the conference should be briefed by one who had been there. Don Bosco gives great importance to these sessions."

4. *Sacred Rites.* Priests were given a memo to study sacred ceremonies well, for many deplored the haste with which some priests went to and from the altar. Father Rua commented: "This haste is unfortunately quite common among secular priests; here in Turin, the priests of the Congregation of St. Philip Neri are perhaps the only ones who observe the dignity required by the sacredness of the action. Not that all our own priests can be accused of rushing. Apart from the priests of St. Philip Neri, no others carry out the sacred ceremonies with more reverence than we. Still, haste is beginning to show. Let every director urge his priests to observe a devout demeanor in celebrating the sacred rites. Trivial as it may seem, it greatly edifies the faithful and is demanded by the sacredness of the act itself. Our catechists should

keep an eye on this, but just now they are too young—some are not even ordained and have little influence over the priests. For the time being, let the director take care of this and see that, in passages to and from the altar and during the Mass itself, the ceremonies are carried out with real dignity."

A chiding and exhortation was issued to those who mumbled their prayers while going to and from the altar or at their preparation and thanksgiving after Mass or in the Divine Office. How unseemly a way of praying and how annoying to others!

5. *Publications.* An article of the regulations stated: "Nothing may be published without the consent of the Superior Council." This meant that a council member had to be entrusted with granting this permission. He was not to act only on his own; he was to brief the other members and personally review the manuscript or have a competent person do so. However the last word on the matter was left to Don Bosco.

6. *Distribution of Our Publications to Our Houses.* It was then customary to send two complimentary copies of each publication authored by a confrere to all our houses. It was decided that each confrere should continue receiving a copy of *Letture Cattoliche* and that sufficient copies of the *Italian Classics for the Young*[13] and of the *Latin Christian Classics*[14] be made available to teachers.

The statement that Don Bosco would preside at a general session at five in the afternoon brought this meeting to a close. This session held in the Church of St. Francis de Sales, and attended by one hundred and fifty-six Salesians, novices and postulants, was most impressive. Council members and the directors sat in the sanctuary in a semi-circle facing the rest of the assembly, while Don Bosco stood in the center at the foot of the altar. He opened the meeting thus:

My dear confreres, as in past years we are gathered here today on the feast of St. Francis de Sales for a briefing on the physical, material, intellectual and moral state of each house of our Congregation. Each director will speak of his own house, first the director of the oldest house, and others following in order of seniority of their houses; the report on the Oratory will be last. Then I shall close the meeting with an overall

[13] *See* Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195f, 391f. [Editor]
[14] *See* Vol. X, pp. 528, 576ff. [Editor]

view of the Congregation and of this year's many important events. The director of our school at Borgo San Martino will start.

Father John Bonetti reported that his school was just too small to accommodate the great number of applicants. All were well. The confreres had to be kept from overworking; for instance, regular teachers were quite willing to add to their duties by coaching slow learners during the evening study period. Such love of work was rewarded with many religious and priestly vocations from among the members of the thriving sodalities. The excellent results obtained from the boys' municipal school, which had been entrusted to the Salesians, had won the confidence of the people and the local authorities. The boys' enrollment was a hundred and thirty. When the girls' teacher fell sick, our sisters (as the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were then called) had been asked to replace her. From their year-old community on our premises, they walked every day to the girls' municipal school. The people were thrilled and longed to see them permanently entrusted with their girls' schooling. Furthermore, the Salesian sisters greatly helped the well-being of our school by their diligent care of the laundry and by their prayers. In fact, the boys' frequent reception of the sacraments, their moral conduct and their diligence in studies were so remarkable that thanks were indeed due to the Lord. He concluded by recommending his house to his confreres' prayers.

The next director, Father John Baptist Lemoyne, lauded his confreres at Lanzo for their unity of heart and soul; so dedicated were they that he too could truthfully say a vast amount of work was being accomplished at Lanzo. For the past two years all the boys had been in excellent health, due to two precautionary measures: no drinking water after supper and being obliged to play on the porticoes. The boarders numbered two hundred and twenty, the day students one hundred and thirty; the latter attended the municipal school run by us and went to Sunday Mass in a group. The festive oratory boys had no playroom, but Father Albert, the vicar, was planning to use a chapel for this purpose. Three of our priests regularly helped out with Masses in the town churches. Father Lemoyne ended his report by thanking the superiors for his top-notch staff who deserved credit for the school's excellent moral and religious standing.

Speaking of his school at Varazze, Father John Baptist Francesia mentioned the excellent health of his boys, their satisfactory scholastic achievements, their fervent spirit of piety, and their endless activity in recreation. The school was filled to capacity, with one hundred and thirty pupils; many applications were being turned down. The municipal school conducted by the Salesians and the adult night school were both going strong. For boys not attending our school, Mass and catechetical instruction were provided in St. Bartholomew's Oratory, and the day students used the Assumption Chapel. Father Francesia concluded with high praise for his staff and asked for the prayers of all.

Father Francis Cerruti spoke next of the lyceum at Alassio, a municipal school with an attendance of over five hundred; one hundred and sixty were boarders, and they filled the house. He had only praise for both the material and moral condition of the house, but deplored the havoc wrought by the summer vacation among the boys. It was a frightening thing: boys who had been models of piety and moral conduct returned to school hating anything that had to do with church. Realizing that human devices were totally inadequate for the situation, he had resorted to prayer and had personally experienced its effectiveness. During the Immaculate Conception and Christmas novenas he had managed to reawaken their former fervor and to get the sodalities off to a good start. Now, at last, piety was blossoming again through frequent reception of the sacraments. He concluded by saying that the confreres displayed a good spirit, the day students frequented the festive oratory, the boarders were very diligent in their scholastic duties, and prospects for priestly vocations were, as in past years, good. He also hoped that, with his confreres' prayers, the flame of charity and of zeal for the salvation of souls would remain alive in the house of Alassio.

Father Francis Dalmazzo was happy to report that at the Valsalice College[15] enrollment had doubled from thirty to sixty. Yet income could not yet balance expenses because of the hired teachers' high salaries. Study, piety, the frequent reception of the sacraments, the sodalities, and his confreres' zeal and general health were most gratifying. "Thank the Lord," he exclaimed, "who will probably give us priestly vocations this year."

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 170. [Editor]

Father Paul Albera reported that the new wing at Sampierdarena was ready and that the present enrollment of a hundred and twenty would double. All studied and worked with diligence. Health was satisfactory, notwithstanding the school's exposure to constant winds. The good example of the confreres and boys had already brought some lost sheep—meaning anticlericals—back to the fold. The people liked the Salesians. On Sundays a few confreres taught catechism in several churches in town; many neighborhood boys frequented the school and, after a catechism lesson, attended Benediction. The Sons of Mary[16] numbered thirty. "Pray," he concluded, "that our house may bear abundant fruits of Christian charity."

Father James Costamagna, director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Mornese, won his listeners' attention by his description of the rapid progress of this institute, a veritable mustard seed which had grown into a huge tree. The sisters already numbered well over a hundred, and applications were continually pouring in. But this institute needed the Oratory's help to subsist. The good nuns were models of humility and self-sacrifice; obviously, they would be valuable assistants in the mission field too. Unfortunately, their health left much to be desired; two were near death. Nearly all received Communion every day. Thirty-five girls were boarders. The nuns also taught the girls in the municipal school, while a Salesian was in charge of the boys. Bishop [Joseph] Sciandra had recently approved their rule. Father Costamagna ended his report by asking for the prayers of all.

Father Joseph Ronchail, director of the boys' home at Nice, bewailed his difficulties. There were but nine people in his house: five boys, two clerics, the cook and himself. The boys were so few because of restrictive French laws. If one wished to teach a boy a craft or trade, he also had to teach him reading and writing. To be allowed to teach Latin, a foreign priest had to reside in France for two years. No priest was to have more than four pupils. How could one run a school under such conditions? In order to get boys on Sundays for catechetical instruction and to accept a few as boarders, the Salesians appealed to the prefect of the province, a Protestant, who after repeated requests finally granted permission. The authorities feared that our confreres might have political aims

[16] Adult vocations. [Editor]

which secretly favored the underhanded plotting of those who advocated the annexation of Nice to Italy. On this score they were so thoroughly screened that an inspector, finding the boys in the playground and the director bedridden, reported that classes were not being held there. A few days later, however, written authorization came from the prefect of the province; in view of their good work on behalf of the town and their rejection of political activity, the Salesians were allowed to teach and conduct catechetical instruction. "In France," Father Ronchail remarked, "Sunday rest is hardly observed, but children under sixteen are not allowed to work that day. The prefect of the province is inclined to enforce this article of the law more strictly, and both the populace and the authorities are satisfied with us. Some speak ill of our house, others speak well, and still others don't care. Many have promised to help us, but we are to put our hope in the Lord, not in men. We ask for your prayers. Nice deeply needs spiritual assistance."

When Father Ronchail finished, Don Bosco addressed the assembly:

We are running late, and the bell will call us to church in a few minutes, so this evening I shall limit myself to a very important matter and leave the Oratory report for tomorrow night when we shall meet here at the same time. This evening I want to ask that the directors, upon returning to their houses, should teach both confreres and students letter-writing. Regretfully, most letters are written incorrectly, and one who reads or examines them will blame both the writer and the Congregation. Not that this fault is general, but we must check it on time.

Letter-writing is far more important than a first glance may show. People form their opinion of the house solely from letters sent by people who belong to that house or to our Congregation. Generally, praise or blame due to one individual will reflect on the whole house or Congregation, as though we could not teach people how to write even a short letter.

See to it that letters are sound not only in content but also in style; what the writer is trying to say should be well said. Avoid grammatical and writing errors. Handwriting should be legible. If it isn't, it is a real discourtesy. Address and date are to be at the upper right, not between the salutation and text. The salutation and first words of the letter should not be on the same line, but following each other.

I also think it important that you know the titles with which to address people. The salutation should carry that title in full at the upper left of the paper, with the date at the upper right above the salutation. If the date is

at the bottom, it should be in the lower left corner. When writing to persons of rank, the letter is to begin at the middle of the sheet, with the upper half blank. The signature appears at the lower right with some blank space after the end of the letter. The complimentary close is to be put to the left, at the end of the letter. The closing line "I remain" should start a new paragraph.

I consider things of this kind quite important for clerics and our other confreres. I repeat: On returning home, directors are to stress this point also with their students. If punctiliously followed, it will ultimately do a lot of good.

In those few days, directors of the houses and priests of the Oratory tried to corner Don Bosco whenever they could, while he himself used every spare moment to listen to the directors individually and give them needed personal advice. To him this was a heartfelt joy, and it helped to compensate for the many troubles of which our readers are aware.

After supper of the second day of meetings, February 2, several priests, while chatting freely with him, brought up the subject of a historian for our Congregation, a topic under discussion in the previous day's afternoon session. All grasped its importance. Don Bosco elaborated on his views and made noteworthy remarks which Father [Julius] Barberis wrote into his little chronicle. We think it worthwhile to pass them on verbatim:

Here and now, what is most urgent is that each director write a summary history of his own school, from its opening to the present, and then go on to chronicle all important happenings. The history of a school's past should especially detail the date of its opening, development, construction of new buildings, annual enrollment increase, type of student, pupil's good will, frequent reception of the sacraments, and moral standing. It should also record each year how many donned the clerical habit or joined our Congregation. Mention should be made of our relations with the municipal authorities and local citizens. Then notations are to be made on day and evening classes, festive oratory, et cetera, specifying, as far as possible, causes and their consequences, means used to achieve various goals, and obstacles which had to be overcome and how this was achieved.

Year by year we should record these items and include current enrollment, and the date of opening and closing of the school year, with emphasis on number and qualifications of personnel.

Each year, too, the director should have this report clearly transcribed into a large ledger, which is to remain in the school archives, while the original or another copy should be sent to Turin as soon as each notebook is completed. In this way the superiors will be thoroughly acquainted with the functioning of every school and have a good idea of our Congregation's history.

I have already summarily jotted down various items concerning the Oratory from its beginnings until now; in fact, I have detailed many things up to 1854. From that year on we concentrate on the Congregation, and the subject matter becomes considerably vaster and more complex. I see this work as very useful to those who will follow after us and as redounding to God's greater glory. Hence, I shall strive to continue writing. This matter brooks no opposition from Don Bosco or anything else. Since Don Bosco's life is bound up with that of the Congregation, let us speak of him. Many things must be heralded unto God's greater glory, the salvation of souls, and our Congregation's broader expansion, because—let us say it here among ourselves—other religious congregations and orders have had inspirations, visions or supernatural happenings in their beginnings which gave a thrust to their start and secured their establishment, but for the most part they were limited to a single happening or, at best, just a few. With us the story is different. We may say that nothing has happened which was not known in advance. Our Congregation took no step that had not been suggested by some supernatural occurrence, and approved no change, improvement or expansion that was not prompted by God. That is why I think that Don Bosco does not matter in this regard. What do I care if people talk well or ill of these things? What does it matter to me if people judge me one way or another? Let them say what they will and speak as they will. Let them talk. It matters little to me, and I shall be not one whit more or less than what I am now before God. But God's interventions must be made manifest. For instance, we could have recorded everything that has happened even before it occurred, in every detail and with preciseness. In fact, I did write several things for my own guidance and encouragement.

The third day's morning session, with Father Rua presiding, again dealt with the explanatory notes on the regulations. We mention here the six most important items:

1. *Mid-Afternoon Snack for the Clerics.*[17] Were the clerics to be allowed a mid-afternoon snack or should they preferably abstain?

[17] Dinner was at twelve noon and supper at eight in the evening. [Editor]

Don Bosco seemed to be against it, though he had never said it in so many words. In a conference to the novices he had urged them not to eat or drink between meals. "If you are hungry," he had said, "feel free to have a snack, but. . . ." Ultimately the Superior Council left the matter open, with the reservation that there was no need for it since the noon meal was quite adequate and no religious congregation or order had such a custom. Still, there was no unanimitv on this subiect.

2. *Duties of the Catechist.* Here the debate ran riot. It was a touchy subject. Was not the catechist the clerics' director? Was he not second in command of the school? Was not his authority in spiritual affairs equal to the prefect's in material things? On the other hand, our catechists were mostly too young and usually classmates of some clerics; hence they had no seniority. More advisedly, the director should personally be the confreres' catechist. True, this arrangement would be fraught with the likelihood of ill feelings between director and confreres, but the present situation seemed to call for no other solution. In time, with a larger number of mature candidates, this drawback could be eliminated.

3. *Private Rooms.* The regulations forbade entering somebody else's room. Each had to keep his own room neat, except the director and the prefect who were too busy and had to receive visitors in their own rooms. The cleaning, however, had to be done by a lay confrere, and not by a boy. As for the Valsalice College, where domestics made the pupils' beds, clerics were allowed to have a servant tidy up their cubicles in the dormitories so as not to seem inferior to the boys themselves.

4. *Religion Textbooks.* A sound religion textbook was needed for the senior high school and lyceum students. The only current textbook considered suitable was written by Canon Giovannini. That book convincingly refuted current errors and lucidly explained newly defined dogmas.

5. *Clerical Garb.* One article of the regulations stated: "No one may have more than two cassocks, suits or pairs of shoes." Some confreres found this article too restrictive, while others felt that it prevented abuses. It was left untouched.

6. *Directors' Journal.* Another article required the director to keep a journal of his own personal expenses. Was this double bookkeeping? The prefect's general ledger should be enough.

However, Father Rua showed that the director's journal was necessary also for clearing oneself of responsibility in specific areas. With this the meeting was adjourned.

On the previous day [February 2], the feast of Our Lady's Purification, the church services had cut short the general conference. It was resumed during the afternoon of February 3 in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. All professed members, novices and postulants were present.

The first speaker was Father Louis Guanella, the director of St. Aloysius Festive Oratory at Porta Nuova. He reported an attendance of some two hundred and fifty boys, all poor but good-hearted and diligent in attending Sunday services. The St. Aloysius Sodality, small monthly gifts, and an occasional outing proved to be good incentives to draw them and help them to be good. His wish was that the good students and artisans sent from the motherhouse to teach catechism should use simple language to explain the more difficult truths of faith and be ready to answer any objections being raised.

Father Dominic Milanesio, the director of the Valdocco Festive Oratory, launched into a detailed report. His oratory catered to three kinds of boys: students, artisans, and Sunday groups. The students attended day classes, while the artisans came to evening classes. Church services were those which Don Bosco himself used to conduct. Thanks to the zeal and patience of some priests of the motherhouse, between a hundred and fifty and two hundred boys received Communion every Sunday. Special attention was being given to the Altar Boys' Society and the St. Aloysius Sodality. In a special weekly meeting for young catechists, several practical pointers on how to get to know the boys and win them over were clearly explained. He stressed three such hints in particular:

1. Divide the matter into sections, teaching the younger lads only what they strictly had to know. The subject matter for the next age bracket was to be expanded to meet the age and mental level of the students. In this way, by a certain date the entire catechism would be learned.

2. To get silence in church, the catechist should rarely leave his place, and he should speak and admonish softly. A boy who misbehaved was not to be sent out of church or made to kneel, but was to be left in his place and then brought to the director for proper admonition.

3. It had also been found very effective to line the boys up outside the church before letting them go in, with the young catechists waiting in their places for them. Also, to cover up the unavoidable noise, it was good to have the boys sing a sacred song as they went in.

One hundred and twenty boys attended day classes, but not regularly, because parents neglected to send them. However, once attendance records were kept and parents were notified of their children's truancy, they took the matter to heart. Every Saturday some sixty boys went to confession, and five or six received Communion every Sunday.

The artisans attending evening classes were very fine boys; about fifty of them began the school year by receiving Holy Communion. They were taught catechism, reading, writing, arithmetic and singing, and stress was placed on weekly confession. "It may take effort," Father Milanesio said, "but we have found that it does them a great deal of good."

On the principal church solemnities, as many as three hundred boys would receive Communion. Father Milanesio ended his report by warmly thanking the superiors for their financial assistance and asking that they continue to remember him and help him with their prayers.

The final report concerned the residents of the motherhouse—the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. It should have been given by Father Joseph Lazzero[18] who by then had replaced Father Michael Rua as vice-director, but at his own request the Superior Council, at its meeting on January 27, had agreed to have Father Rua continue reporting on the motherhouse.

In brief here is his report, divided into four sections to cover the four groups of people then living at the Oratory.

1. *Members of the Congregation.* Progress was being made in true religious spirit and charity, thanks to better regularity in the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, in daily morning meditation at 5 for some and at 9 for others, in the afternoon spiritual reading, and in regular public reading at dinner and supper.

[18] Joseph Lazzero (1837–1910) entered the Oratory in 1857. In 1859 he was one of the first young clerics to join Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Society. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He made his triennial vows in 1862 and was ordained a priest three years later. In 1870 he made his perpetual profession. In 1874 Don Bosco appointed him to the Superior Chapter and later entrusted him with important tasks. Stricken in 1897, he retired and died after a long illness at Mathi (Turin) on March 7, 1910. [Editor]

2. *Novices.* That year they were living as a separate community with their own playground, dining room, chapel, dormitory, study hall and schedule. They numbered about sixty in all, a record number never before attained. Good results were hoped for. They were ardently zealous for their own and their neighbors' well-being.

3. *Students.* They were very numerous and good. Examinations at the Oratory and elsewhere[19] had been highly satisfactory. Their spirit of piety was evident in their reactions. Our Congregation had achieved its goal: forty of the forty-five senior students had donned the clerical habit, providing a large contingent for the expansion of Salesian work beyond Italy. The sodalities had proved to be an effective help, but the Immaculate Conception occasionally failed to hold regular meetings. This sodality was considered the last step before one entered the Congregation.

4. *Artisans.* Their situation was very encouraging. With better regularity than in previous years, classes were well organized, catechists were very zealous in teaching the basic truths of faith, and assistants[20] were united in fostering piety and mutual charity.

"In conclusion," Father Rua remarked, "we shall reap many excellent fruits, but to do so we must be determined to overcome and renounce our own will. I do not infer that we lack this spirit of sacrifice. I only insist that without it our efforts will be of little avail and of little merit to those making them." As did all the other speakers, he recommended the motherhouse to the prayers of all present.

The house reports having been completed, Don Bosco addressed the assembly. His talk—quite important for several points—follows:

Yesterday's and today's reports on each school, house and festive oratory give us reason to rejoice and thank the Lord over and over again for having blessed our undertakings and fulfilled our desires. All our houses are crammed with boys, good boys too, and our confreres are intensely desirous to benefit them intellectually and morally. I notice a constant improvement in all areas.

However, no mention has been made of several of our houses here in Turin. We have not yet spoken of St. Joseph's Festive Oratory, where some of our confreres, unmindful of the long walk and changing weather,

[19] At the public school *Monviso. See* Vol. XI, p. 202. [Editor]
[20] A Salesian in charge of the boys' supervision. [Editor]

go every Sunday and all through Lent to teach catechism. All runs well, thanks to our confreres' solicitude for those poor boys and the zeal of Mr. [Charles] Occelletti,[21] founder, owner, manager, and catechist who vigilantly supervises the more unruly boys. Our confreres are also active in St. Peter's Oratory in Borgo San Donato and at St. Joseph's Workshop in our own neighborhood.

My evaluation of our Congregation as a whole is that it is making headway both in steadily opening new houses and in deepening its religious spirit. This should encourage us to redouble our efforts and labors, seeing that the Lord has blessed them so much. Thanks to God, we should also be quite pleased with the number of our confreres. According to our Directory, presently being printed, there are exactly three hundred and thirty of us: one hundred and twelve with perpetual vows, and eighty-three with triennial vows, besides a goodly number of novices and several postulants. Furthermore, we have a sister congregation which takes care of girls much as we do for boys. The Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians has over a hundred sisters and is a very great help to us. Our combined membership totals four hundred and fifty religious who, driven by the same spirit, work for God's greater glory and the welfare of souls under the same banner and leadership. Besides their motherhouse at Mornese in the Acqui diocese, the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians have a house at Borgo San Martino and are preparing other foundations elsewhere. Soon they will open a school here in Turin across from the Church of Mary, Help of Christians to look after the material and spiritual needs of the neighborhood girls who often roam the streets all day, hungry because their parents cannot properly feed them. They need moral help, too, because they are open to all kinds of dangers and have no one to guide and teach them. Another house is being set up for these sisters at Alassio, adjacent to our school. We cannot as yet accept girls because their school is not quite completed, but it will certainly be ready in March.

We shall open another house on the 10th of this month at Torrione Valle Crosia, a burgeoning town which sprang up almost overnight (near Bordighera). It was once an area of olive groves, but a short time ago, for reasons of trade, agriculture and leisure, some housing was begun, and soon the area became densely populated. Since no provision had been made for Catholic churches and schools, the Protestants found this development particularly suited to their aims, and so they set up their headquarters there. They opened kindergartens, elementary schools and coeducational boarding schools, enticing children with books and all

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

sorts of prizes and trying to win their parents over. Due to the lack of Catholic schools, and mostly lured by material and scholastic advantages, they entrusted their children's education to the Protestants, with the result that their false doctrines gravely harmed the people, especially the children. It has been most difficult to check that tide of evil, but last year we arranged with the bishop to open a Catholic school and church in that area. Now the school is ready, and in a few days Father [Nicholas] Cibrario, the director, will be leaving with some Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians to open the school. They will teach catechism to the boys and girls, and Father Cibrario will preach God's word to the townsfolk and safeguard them from the poison of Protestant errors. The festive oratory is our main reason for going there.

This year our Congregation took another step forward by crossing to South America, where we were greatly sought after and awaited. The most recent news from our missionaries informs us that they have reached Buenos Aires, where they were received with much respect and love. They have an incalculable amount of work to do there. The field is immense, but we are not deterred by that, and our work is quite fruitful. Our priests preach, hear confessions and incessantly look after the welfare of souls. They serve the Italian Church of Our Lady of Mercy and reside in an adjacent house which is a convenient residence for Salesians traveling to or from Europe. The church is a principal meeting place for the Italian colony; every Sunday at least one Mass has an Italian homily. Here Father [John Baptist] Baccino and Father [Dominic] Belmonte have made their permanent residence, and Father John Cagliero stays there for the time being. Father Cagliero immediately began a spiritual retreat for the people. If it ends as it has started—he writes—it will do an extraordinary amount of good. The other Salesians went with Father Fagnano, their director, further north to San Nicolás, whence we received news yesterday and today. They had a good trip and were warmly welcomed and received. They are now becoming acquainted with the town, arranging for repairs to the very large school which will be entrusted to us, and practicing their Spanish for teaching and preaching. There too we see an immense field and a most abundant spiritual harvest.

As for the opening of new houses, we have many requests from Argentina, Australia, Uruguay, Paraguay, China, India, the South Sea Islands and very many other places. We also have requests from France where we began operations last year with our house at Nice. It is astounding how eagerly we are sought after in Piedmont and in the rest of Italy. Even here in Turin we find new fields of work for God's greater glory. Everywhere we need genuine Salesians, imbued with spirit and ready for self-sacrifice.

This year we also started [in earnest] the Sons of Mary Program.[22] After faltering a bit in its beginning for various reasons, it has now gained new momentum. If it keeps up, as I hope, it will be most beneficial to the Church. So far we have not been able to give these young men a place of their own, but little by little we shall do that too.

We have already spoken of this year's membership and of our various undertakings. Now I must tell you about the spirit which generally animates our mission and about the achievements we are to strive for from now on—in a word, our specific field of work which demands a huge number of willing and hard-working men.

If you seek my true appraisal of our present situation, let me assure you—and I say it with some pride—that I am satisfied. Our membership is growing so steadily that, were it not for my full trust in God, who will let things prosper, I would be frightened—as indeed I am in part—to see the Congregation growing almost too rapidly. I am reassured by the way our members are picking up the true spirit of our Congregation. I see that I have achieved the goal I had set for myself while striving to find men who would be willing to work with me for God's greater glory. Generally, I see in each of our members a truly heroic selflessness, a generous surrender of will, and a truly moving obedience. How quickly, in spite of scanty means, this was achieved! When I mentally compare the present with the past, I am struck dumb. What did we have on this spot thirty-five or so years ago? Absolutely nothing! I used to dash here and there after the more unruly and reckless boys, but they would hear of no order or discipline. They made fun of religion, were most ignorant of it, and blasphemed God's holy name. I felt powerless. These youths were really wild, resorting to stone fights almost daily. What we have now was then but a dream. In this very spot and nearby there were cornfields and vegetable gardens. That was all! A small rickety shack, a shanty doubling as a saloon, stood in the center, ramshackle on the outside and far shabbier in the inside. Worse, it was a brothel! A poor priest, alone, forsaken by all—indeed worse than alone because spurned and harassed—vaguely hoped to do poor boys some good in that very spot. The thought haunted me, and I had no idea how to carry it out. Nevertheless, it kept haunting me and determined every step and action of mine. I wanted to do a lot of good, and I wanted to do it here. That poor priest's hope seemed but a dream then, yet God made it come true and fulfilled that poor priest's desire. How did He do that? I can hardly say how myself. All I know is that God wanted it done. I see churches and schools and crowds of boys, priests and young clerics milling about me.

[22]*See* Vol. XI, pp. 20–59. [Editor]

How did all this come about? I know that it is the fruit of painful sacrifices. I realize that those who followed me had to be stouthearted and persevering, but now we see the fruit borne by all these efforts. Thousands of boys hear the word of God, our constitutions have been approved, our Congregation is established, our membership is notable, and our spirit is strong and even growing stronger. Glory be to God!

At this point I hear a grave objection: "Don Bosco, hopefully everything will turn out well, but meanwhile our financial situation is frightening. We keep building everywhere and our expenses have become staggering. How can we manage to keep going without funds? Where shall we find the money? We run the risk of going bankrupt."

I reply that if I were to look at things solely from a human standpoint and depend only on our present means, I would feel like wrapping a white kerchief about my head and, thus disguised, hide myself in the solitude of the Thebaid Desert, never to let anyone catch sight of me again, because I don't see how we can possibly meet our financial obligations with only human resources. But we are used to looking heavenward and trusting in the unfailing Providence of God. Can we count on it? Past experience easily tells me what I can expect. Divine Providence has helped us in the past, and we trust that it will assist us in the future. Countless other times we have found ourselves in the same predicament; indeed, we might even say that this has been and is our constant situation. I might add that we have even been in worse predicaments. Yet, did Providence ever fail us? Never! We have always met our obligations. Past experience is a guarantee for the future. How have we been able to progress thus far? By a limitless trust in Divine Providence which has never failed us.

Nor will it fail us now. There is only one possibility that Divine Providence may desert us: if we were to render ourselves undeserving by wasting money or relaxing our practice of poverty—in other words, if we should start to stray off the right path by disregarding the obligations of our vocation. But as long as things stay as they are now, as long as we make all possible sacrifices to economize and work strenuously and selflessly, we may be sure that Divine Providence will never fail us. Have no fears. So far we have entrusted all our undertakings to God, and they have been successfully brought to completion.

Nevertheless, while blindly relying on Divine Providence, I most mightily recommend thrift. Let us save all we can in all things: trips, accommodations, stationery, food, and clothes. Let us not waste a single cent, a postage stamp or a sheet of paper. I earnestly urge this upon all, especially assistants and teachers. Let them set the example of thrift, seeing to it that their charges likewise avoid all sorts of damage or waste.

At the same time, let all seek funds from outsiders by well-motivated inducements and exhortations. The Lord says: "Do your share and I will

help you." We must all do our utmost; we can't just take it easy and expect God to help us. God will act after we have generously done our share for His love.

We must also put to good use the donations we receive, not trying to make our own life more comfortable, but rather abiding by St. Jerome's dictum: "Having food and clothing, with these I shall be satisfied. [Cf. 1 Tim. 6, 8]

If we do this, the Lord will never fail us. For example, if we had painstakingly figured out the cost of our missionary expedition to South America and of our base of operation there, we would have had to budget a minimum of a hundred thousand lire just for essentials, and the sum would have tripled with provision for other details and eventualities. But we made no such calculations. We merely said, "What we are doing is for God's greater glory. It is God who wants us to go. It is His will."

We prayed, we sought the Holy Father's blessing, and contributions poured in. Neither the missionaries nor we ourselves lacked for anything. In astonishment we must exclaim: "This is all an extraordinary intervention of Divine Providence, which proves that the Lord wishes to avail Himself of us for His merciful purposes."

Now what can we do to repay such goodness of Divine Providence? Since our Society is established and our constitutions are approved, what we really must do is strive to observe our rules and obey them faithfully. To this end we must first know them well, and that means that we must study them. Each of us must make it his duty to do so. Things are different now from what they used to be when our Congregation—but not as yet the constitutions—was approved and we went about our duties in a traditional family manner. Those days are over. Now we have to abide by our rules, study them thoroughly, understand them, and observe them. Our rules must determine our actions.

Upon returning to their houses, let the directors be most solicitous about making our constitutions better known to their confreres. Let our rules have the full force and supreme authority that really is theirs through the majesty of the law. It is the director's duty to see to it that those rules are learned and understood; let him expound their meaning with charity and love.

At all times, instead of appealing to other authorities, let the director invoke the authority of the rule, saying, "The rule says this," or "The rule deals with this matter in this way," or "You would like to do this but the rule forbids it," or "You would like to leave that out, but the rule calls for it." Let its observance and authority be actively promoted in conferences and in private or public exhortations. This allows the director to govern in a fatherly way, as is our wish. When the director makes it clear that it is the rule and not he who wants things done, forbids or advises, his

confreres will have no reason to grumble or disobey. Briefly, *the sole means of propagating our spirit is the observance of our rule.*

Not even praiseworthy activities should be undertaken against the rule or without regard to it because, in spite of good intentions, if what one engages in is not within the scope of the rule, his undertaking will be individualistic and not the result of a common effort. Now the good which is rightfully expected of religious orders is precisely dependent on this: that they work as a unit. No great goal can be achieved otherwise. If we work but stray from what is strictly required by our rules, even though our intentions are good, we shall end up with each one doing his own thing. This will open the way to laxity, and these individual activities will no longer have God's blessing as they did formerly. In turn this will necessitate a reform, a measure which gravely weakens a Congregation, as has happened to many religious orders, greatly jeopardizing in each instance the salvation of souls. The result will be decline and utter ruin. *The observance of the rule is the only way to keep a congregation alive.*

Among us, let the superior be our all. Let everyone help the rector major, upholding and assisting him in every way; let everyone rally about him as the sole focal point. The rector major has the rule as his guide: let him never stray from it; otherwise, instead of a single focal point there will be two: the rule and his own will. Instead, the rule should almost be embodied in the rector major; the rule and the rector major should be one and the same.

What we have said about the rector major in reference to the whole Congregation applies also to each director in his own house. He must be united to the rector major, and all the members of his house must be united to him. He too must embody the rule. The rule, not he, is to be the symbol of authority. We all know that the rule expresses God's will, and whoever opposes it is opposing his superior and God Himself.

Always talk to your confreres in this manner: "These things have to be done. It is imperative that everyone do his part because the rule calls for it in such-and-such a chapter. Let us all work together because that's what our rule demands." When a director wishes to undertake something, adopt some measure or make a decision, let him use the rule as a shield, never acting of his own will or on his own authority. He should say: "We must go about it in this way because that is what the rule says and calls for." Such a way of acting on the part of directors will be most helpful to the Congregation.

Moreover, let all strive to maintain the interdependence of superior and confreres willingly and not just because the rule so states. Let confreres strive wholeheartedly to surround, assist, uphold and defend their director, rallying closely together about him, almost as though they were

one with him. Let them undertake nothing independently of him, so that they will seem an extension not of him, but of the rule.

I do not mean by this that nothing can be done without the director's consent in each case. For instance, when one who sweeps the dormitories is through with them, he need not ask the director what other floors he should sweep. Also, when a teacher is through with a book, he need not ask the director what other book he should take. So also the cook; he need not ask the director about the day's menu. What I do mean is that everyone should do his work according to the director's instructions and that in all cases, whether usual or special, no one should be guided by his whims but by the ideal of unity.

In ordinary, everyday matters each one knows his duties well enough and does not have to ask his superior, especially since each house has its own norms for each office. Everybody has a copy of the rule, and everyone should strive to do his duty as a good Christian and a good religious.

Now I conclude this conference. We are again about to take leave of each other. So what can Don Bosco tell you that may serve as a good norm for now and for the future? One important thing I will say that will be most helpful to all our houses, something to guide you this year and always: a thought which, if pursued, will make our Society prosper. It can be expressed in one single word: obedience.

Yes, let each confrere in his own sphere of action strive to obey the rule and commands of his superiors. Let each do this personally and encourage his confreres to do likewise. Stress this virtue to your subjects, pupils and everybody else. When this virtue exists in a house or Congregation, everything runs smoothly.

Obedience—a great saint once said—is the essence of religious life. It begets and preserves all other virtues. With obedience we acquire patience, charity and purity, that special reward of humility.

Obedience, therefore, should be the theme of our readings, sermons and most conferences. Let us read and reread carefully the chapter of our rules dealing with obedience; in fact, let us learn it by heart.

Above all our obedience should concentrate on the practices of piety which are its food, support, and balm. The director should also have his confreres read this chapter carefully; let him strive to abide by it himself and see that it is observed by all. Obedience, especially in regard to the practices of piety, is the keystone of our Congregation, its bulwark.

I will not hold you any longer. I need not add anything else, but, in closing, I offer you a weighty thought that may inspire us all to pursue our path generously. If a poor priest, having nothing, really less than nothing, and driven from pillar to post by everybody, was able to bring things to

this present state, if—I repeat—one man alone could do all this with nothing, what can't the Lord expect from three hundred and thirty men, healthy, strong, willing, learned and well provided as we are now? What will you not be able to accomplish with the aid of Divine Providence?

The Lord expects great things from you. I see them clearly and distinctly in all their phases and could tell you of them one by one, even now, or at least mention them, but for the moment I do not think that it is advisable. If someone next year will remind me of what I've said, I shall be able to point out to you the great things that the Lord was pleased to begin this year, in particular one thing that will truly astonish you. God has begun and shall continue His works, and you will all have a hand in them. I mean things which concern the flourishing growth of the Congregation and which will have an important bearing on the welfare of souls and God's glory when I shall already be in eternity. They will benefit the universal Church and bring glory (yes, allow me to use this word) to our Congregation. Truthfully, the wonders for which the Lord intends to avail Himself of us poor Salesians are great indeed. You yourselves will marvel and be astounded to see how much you were able to accomplish in the world's sight for the good of mankind.

It was the Lord who began it all, who directed all things and gave them growth. As the years roll by, He will uphold them and bring them to a successful ending. God is prepared to work all these marvels which will contribute to a wonderful increase in our membership. He asks but one thing of us: that we do not make ourselves undeserving of His goodness and mercy. As long as we remain worthy of His favors by our work, moral conduct and good example, the Lord will make use of us, and you will be astonished at having been able to accomplish so much and be capable of much more. If we work with the spirit and zeal of St. Francis de Sales, the evil forces of the world will have to yield and give way to God's glory and the good of our Society. Our response must be: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4, 13]

Toward the end of his talk Don Bosco appeared very moved, and his delivery became more forceful than usual. His announcement of "great things" for the forthcoming year impressed his hearers. We have a hint of this in a brief chronicle of Father [Joseph] Lazzero who under this date did not limit himself to a hurried, laconic entry such as one usually jots down in a journal. After having written: "February 2, *Third Meeting in the Little Church of St. Francis de Sales:*[23] *Reports from the Directors of*

[23] The first church built by St. John Bosco at the Oratory, *See* Index of Vol. IV under "Church of St. Francis de Sales." [Editor]

Our Houses," he felt the need to add: "Don Bosco ended his talk by predicting that in this year some project will be begun which will one day redound to the glory of our Congregation and will benefit the entire Church." Don Bosco was alluding mainly, as he later stated in various conferences in 1877, to his grandiose concept of the Salesian Cooperators—a concept which, after a slow maturing, was realized in its definitive form that same year. Its destiny was such that at first even his own co-workers were hardly able to properly evaluate its scope.[24]

That he was really alluding to this is confirmed by a confidential remark to Father [Julius] Barberis on February 19. After mentioning the Sons of Mary Program and the much talked-about accelerated courses[25] which were by now fairly well developed, he went on, "Now I am studying another very important project, namely the Salesian Association. I have been busy with it for a long time, but I find it quite difficult to set down anything positive. I've been working on it for some two years. Now I shall put it in writing and make it public before the end of the year. It will take two more years to consolidate it." The way he put it—very important matter, long preparatory studies, public disclosure toward the end of the year—helped us to fathom what he meant during that conference.

But these words also prove how groundless is the belief that the Salesian Cooperators sprang from an idea of Father Guanella while he was a Salesian.[26] As quoted above, in February 1876 Don Bosco stated that he had been thinking about it "for a long time" and working on it "for some two years." In fact the first "Program" for the Salesian Cooperators was drawn in 1874,[27] though an initial draft dates back to 1841, as we have already stated in a previous volume.[28] Father Guanella did not come to the Oratory until 1875. We would not be surprised if Father Guanella himself should have believed this. When mulling over some important project, Don Bosco used to sound out others about it without giving away his plans; on the contrary, he pretended to take into consideration

[24] *See* Vol. XI, Ch. 4. [Author]

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 56ff. [Editor]

[26] Father [Louis] Guanella left the Salesian Congregation to found two other congregations of his own. His cause of beatification was introduced in 1939, and he was beatified on October 25, 1964. [Editor]

[27] *See* Vol. X, pp. 559ff. [Editor]

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 558. [Editor]

their suggestions, leaving them with the impression that they had wondrously enlightened him. It was natural for Don Bosco to confide his designs to a man like Father Guanella and perhaps even ask him to draw up an outline according to his own views, and Father Guanella might logically think that he himself had prompted the idea. Might not have Minister Urbano Rattazzi, after his well-known conversation with Don Bosco,[29] thought that he had been the one to suggest the idea of founding the Salesian Society?

The last meeting on the morning of February 4 was attended by only directors and members of the Superior Council. Its purpose was to listen to our dear father's words. First, however, he was formally assured that, during the meetings chaired by Father Rua, they had read and examined the deliberations taken in the previous annual conference [of St. Francis de Sales] in order to publish them in one volume. Don Bosco gave his consent but requested that they first be submitted to him because he wished to strike out some caustic expressions that had been pointed out to him. "As far as possible," he said, "let us avoid confrontations and proceed one step at a time." He then addressed the assembly as follows:

First, let me tell you two things I have in mind, and then you can brief me on the results of your deliberations of the past few days and also suggest what you think should be done for God's greater glory and the welfare of our Congregation.

The first thing I wish to bring to your attention is my wish that directors see to it that, on my visits to each house, I be given the opportunity to speak with each and every one of the confreres without exception. Make it easy for them by telling them beforehand that I am coming and wish to see each of them. Draw up a schedule for their interview and, speaking in general, tell them that if anyone has something special to confide to me, he should prepare himself to open his heart freely. The main purpose of these visits is to soothe any friction that may exist between the confreres and the director. On these occasions the confreres willingly bare their hearts and make it possible for me to smooth things out. The director can then eliminate the causes of discontent and thus restore charity.

Often a confrere may think that his director dislikes him and harbors a grudge against him, whereas the superior has absolutely nothing against him and doesn't even suspect that the confrere thinks that way. Pent up within oneself, such hostility may last for months. If the confrere is not

[29] *See* Vol. V, pp. 460f. [Editor]

given the opportunity to speak to me during my visit, he will believe that the director engineered it all, and he will become even more depressed. It has happened that in successive visits to some schools, for various reasons I could not talk to some confreres, and later they wrote me pitiable letters, some of them veritable tirades. Yet, what had kept me from talking to them had been totally unintentional.

In our setup the life of a confrere is so rooted in his superior that a glance from him may either cheer or depress him. Therefore, make efforts to be most affable and to show special affection for each of them.

To make my visits more fruitful, I suggest that you give me a list of all the members of the house so that I may check off their names after the interview. It would help me more if you would add a remark or two next to each name, such as: "I suggest you mention this or that to him," or "So-and-so needs to be encouraged about this or that task," or "This one should be held in check in certain matters or needs to be admonished about this fault." I shall strive to act prudently to carry out the director's wishes without involving him in any way, following his suggestions only if I consider them to be for God's greater glory. Thus my visits will be really helpful.

Lest I forget, let me mention another thing. On returning to your schools, tell the confreres that we will have another missionary expedition to South America. Anyone who wants to volunteer should say so, and if anyone has already applied he should renew his application, unless he has changed his mind. Just a note saying "If needed I am willing to go to the missions" will suffice. Thus, the missions will be given personnel that our Congregation considers qualified, while, on the other hand, no one will be obliged to go. Those who have already applied for the missions should reconfirm their decision in these or similar terms: "I am still of the same mind." Many come to the Oratory expressly for this purpose, and it is only fair that their desires be fulfilled. Allavena,[30] for example, upon joining our Congregation, told me expressly, "If you think you can use me for the missions, I shall join your Society, because this is what I really want." It was a blessing that he was so ready to meet such a need because, when an accepted volunteer withdrew at the last moment, Allavena promptly replaced him.

Clerics too can apply, but only if they are truly determined to go. However, we shall always proceed cautiously before interrupting their studies.

I need not exhort you again to constantly foster priestly vocations. As of now, this is the main objective of our Congregation. The unusual scarcity of priests which worsens every year is presently our gravest

[30] James Allavena, a cleric and elementary school teacher, was a member of the first expedition to Argentina. *See* Vol. XI, p. 349. [Editor]

threat. Let me therefore give you suggestions and hints for a successful campaign for priestly vocations. First, seek those who may be inclined to join our Congregation, but do not push anyone into it. If someone wishes to enter the [diocesan] seminary, let him freely do so if he is qualified, and let us hope that he will do well. But what should we say if our advice is sought concerning someone's vocation, and the candidate is undecided and more inclined to enter the seminary than join us? Here is a tip which I think quite wise. If a boy is morally good as long as he stays in our schools, but usually falls into sins of impurity during the summer vacation and then, upon returning to school, puts his conscience in order and stays in God's grace for several months or even the whole year, my advice would definitely be: If you want to become a priest, join us or some other religious order, but not the diocesan clergy; otherwise you'll be making a mistake. The reason is obvious. If he becomes a diocesan seminarian, how will he withstand temptations during the overly long and morally dangerous summer vacations? In a religious order, instead, he would be sheltered and face fewer perils, and, firmly strengthened by spiritual readings, meditation and the sacraments, he might very well keep himself in the state of grace. As a diocesan seminarian, instead, he would incur the fate of many who—as we have seen—don the cassock and within a short time discard it voluntarily or are obliged to do so by their superiors.

In such cases, when a boy makes his confession, tell him quite frankly: "If you like a sheltered life, choose the order you like best: Capuchins, Dominicans, Carthusians or Salesians. As a religious, leading a sheltered life you may do yourself a great deal of good and save many souls. But do not enter a diocesan seminary. You will do better to remain a layman. A good layman can very well assure his eternal salvation."

I am absolutely convinced that three things are necessary for a priestly vocation: a liking for it, intellectual capacity, and good morals. When one is not inclined to it, all efforts are useless, except when this lack of inclination proceeds only from timidity, which is often the case. Under these circumstances you may very well encourage a boy to go ahead. Testing will reveal his intellectual capacity. Good morals are absolutely necessary unless one intends to live in total seclusion. Even then, this may be permitted only if a candidate has led a good moral life whenever not exposed to occasions of sin.

Now let me offer some hints which may greatly help you to foster vocations: Some may seem quite trivial.

1. Encourage requent reception of the sacraments. I will not dwell on this point, because you all know how effective it is and how frequently our pupils receive the sacraments.

2. Show a lot of loving kindness to our boys. Let this loving kindness be a trait of all superiors without exception. It may take the combined

efforts of all to win over one candidate, but a single one of you can turn them all away. How responsive a boy becomes when he is well treated! He entrusts his very heart to his superiors.

3. As regards older boys, especially those who seem inclined to the priesthood, the superior—besides dealing kindly with them—should also show them great trust. For instance, he should take an individual aside and say, "Look, son, I have a job for you (it could be anything, neither important nor necessary). I would like you to copy this page in good penmanship, but nobody must know about it. If you think you can do it in the study hall when the boys are out or without anyone noticing it, go ahead and do it there. Otherwise ask so-and-so to let you do it in some other place and then bring it to me." This may seem insignificant, but the simple fact of calling a boy aside and making him feel important through the aura of secrecy will make such an impact on him that he will be drawn heart and soul to the superior and will be willing to make any sacrifice for him. His heart will belong to the one who was able to win him over. Likewise, you could call a boy and say to him, "During these days I need a big favor from you. Would you be willing to make two really fervent Communions for me?"

When he consents, say: "Which days would you prefer? Pick any day and then tell me so that I may join you in prayer."

"I'll pick these days."

"Good, and after you have made those Communions, come back and, if advisable, I'll tell you the reason."

After this gesture of loving confidence, the boy will already be half won over. When he returns after receiving Communion, he may be told: "Do you know what the favor was which I had so much at heart?"

"No."

"Shall I tell you? I said special prayers and wanted you to join yours to mine to obtain from God the grace that both of us may become saints, so that, united here on earth, we may one day be also united in heaven. Wouldn't you like that? Will you make an effort, a big effort, to make this come true? Courage! I will keep praying, so that what we have started may continue successfully. You will pray for it too, won't you?"

These are little tricks, but they are the instruments which have proven so powerful in our houses. We may say that to them mainly we owe our vocations. Many boys decide to join us after receiving these special signs of trust.

At this point the audience could not help smiling. "It's true," they told one another. "That's how he caught me. We might say that by these means he fortunately tricked us all. . . . Would that we could do likewise!"

After a brief pause, Don Bosco went on:

4. It is also very conducive to this end to carry out reverently the sacred ceremonies [of Holy Mass and other church services]. They are a practical demonstration of the decorum and holiness one needs to advance toward the priesthood to which he may feel called.

5. It is also extremely helpful to encourage youngsters to become altar boys. I believe that the Altar Boys' Society is the nursery of priestly vocations. The sight of a companion gracefully wearing a cassock and surplice at the altar, and reverently carrying out his duties, unfailingly arouses at least a faint desire for the priesthood in other boys. Besides, this may help to break the ice for boys who can't stand the sight of a priest. Even among our pupils there are some who, having heard people at home talk spitefully of priests, scorn them as money-minded. Unfortunately, they may have met some who are like that. Some may even feel hostility toward priests because they have never had close contact with them. Here, instead, seeing that our priests are concerned with the boys' well-being, and noticing that their best schoolmates have the privilege to serve at the altar, they shed their prejudices and form a high opinion of the priestly state. Let me tell you what happened recently. A very good boy, after a few months here at the Oratory, manifested his desire to become a priest. Some time later, when I asked him about it, he bluntly replied, "I no longer want to be a priest."

"Why?" I asked. "You did have a vocation."

"I don't care. I just don't want it anymore," he firmly repeated. I was dumbfounded because his conduct was still excellent. I pleaded that he at least tell me what had made him change his mind. After much hesitation, he said, "So-and-so proved to me that all priests are bad. Their outward appearance is pure hypocrisy." One of his relatives is a canon, and this boy personally heard him say that certain parish priests were leading scandalous lives. "Sooner than become a bad priest," he declared, "never, but never, will I become one. I want to save my soul."

I urged him not to abandon a vocation so easily, and I showed the untruth of what he had heard. "Try to forget it," I went on. "Don't think about it anymore. Instead, spend a few moments before a crucifix or the Blessed Sacrament, and ask yourself: *If I were about to die, what is it that I would wish I had done? What state of life would I wish I had chosen in order to do good and be better able to save my soul?* Think about it and then let me know."

The boy followed my suggestion and reported back, saying, "I want to become a priest, but not a diocesan one. I want to become a religious." That was exactly what I wanted him to say.

6. It will also be very helpful to treat a boy familiarly by taking a walk with him, conversing, laughing, listening to what he has to say, and encouraging him to tell us about his home life, his parents' farm, vineyards, and so on. If, as a result of these friendly contacts, they ask about their vocation, advise them to mention it in confession, because that is the time in which their spiritual condition is better known. Suggest also that they talk it over with me when I come for a visit. "Think it over well," you might tell them. "Let your idea mature and then you will decide. You will see that if you follow Don Bosco's advice, you will be happy for your entire life."

The time to settle such cases is when I visit our schools, especially toward the end of the school year. I always ask them, "What did your director tell you?"

"He advised me to consult you too just to be a little surer, though he knew of no reason why I shouldn't become a priest."

"Good! I'll take it from there and do what I think is best for you."

Another might say, "My director told me 'no' for this reason."

In such a case, should I decide otherwise, I can do so without having the pupil become aware of it. I might tell him: "Well, get rid of whatever your director considers an obstacle to your desire. You can outsmart the devil, can't you? Follow my advice, and you will easily succeed." On this score a director need have no fears. If a different piece of advice is in order, it will be done very prudently.

Let me mention another matter which I consider extremely important in order to get our boys started on the right path. My long experience has convinced me that unfortunately the boys admitted to our schools need to make a general confession, or would at least benefit immensely from it. You may prepare a boy for it in this way:

"Have you made a general confession yet?"

"No."

"Would you like to choose a day for it? Just think for a moment and tell me in all sincerity: Do you think you have nothing to settle with Our Lord if you were to die tonight? Would you feel perfectly safe on that score?"

"No."

"Well then, when would you like to go to confession?"

"Whenever you say."

"In that case I urge you to do so when you are ready to tell me absolutely everything."

Then even when he comes around for confession, ask him, "Are you really ready to open your heart and tell me all, no matter what? Or is there something you prefer not to say?" From his answers, you will know what action to take.

It may seem an exaggeration, but believe me: my opinion is that perhaps half of the boys accepted in our schools need a general confession. And to succeed in this, we must have charity, charity, and more charity. We must learn to draw, almost forcibly, from them what they wouldn't say otherwise.

One last thing: let each director diligently promote in his school the *Italian Classics for the Young*[31] and especially *Letture Cattoliche*[32] [*Catholic Readings*]. It is true that this should have been done at the beginning of the school year when the boys had pocket money, but let this be the norm for the future. Anyway, even now do all you can to push these publications.

This long talk was followed by a very familiar conversation concerning several matters which had been discussed at the sessions. Those present took advantage of this opportunity to seek Don Bosco's opinions.

Thus the matter of giving each confrere a copy of every issue of *Letture Cattoliche* and of the *Italian Classics for the Young* was again brought up. There was no standard policy in this regard. In some schools both publications were given to all confreres and in others only to the teachers; elsewhere some secondary school teachers received *Italian Classics for the Young*, while those teaching the lower grades were given *Letture Cattoliche*. Regrettably, on being transferred to other schools, some confreres would voice odious comparisons, such as: "In my last assignment things were done differently." It was easy to feel that the directors were acting arbitrarily.

How were things to be done? To discontinue the general distribution seemed drastic, but to continue it despite the steady growth of Salesian schools would be too costly for the Congregation. Similarly, giving the *Italian Classics for the Young* to the secondary school teachers and *Letture Cattoliche* to the rest created another problem, since in some schools there were more subscribers to *Italian Classics for the Young* in the elementary grades than in the secondary school, and the grade school teachers, unacquainted with *Italian Classics for the Young*, would not be able to recommend them.

Don Bosco was asked his opinion. He really favored the largest possible distribution; still, his practical mind suggested a gradual

[31] *See* Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195f, 391. [Editor]
[32] *See* Indexes of Volumes III through XI. [Editor]

solution: (1) Where it was customary to give both publications to all the teachers, the practice should be continued, but each copy was to be imprinted with the school or library stamp, thus implying that such books were not personal property and could not be given away to others or taken along when a confrere was transferred. (2) Where it was customary to give a copy to all the confreres—generally the case in the larger houses—it too should be kept up if the confreres said it was necessary for their work. (3) In the future, however, all the houses should gradually introduce the custom of giving freely such publications only to those asking for them for their studies. This would eliminate all bad feeling without excessive expense. As a rule, though, *Italian Classics for the Young* was to be given only to the teachers of Latin or Italian.

It was incidentally noted that while the already very vast readership of *Letture Cattoliche* was constantly increasing, subscriptions to *Italian Classics for the Young* numbered only two thousand, barely enough to justify publication; individual copies, however, sold quite well. For instance a recent issue of Silvio Pellico's[33] unpublished letters, with a press run of three thousand copies, had been sold out within a month. "As long as *Italian Classics for the Young* will have a thousand subscribers," Don Bosco remarked, "it will be worth publishing, because we can always count on the sale of individual copies."

Don Bosco closed the meeting at noon with the customary prayer, wishing the directors a safe return to their schools and entrusting them with many messages for the boys from himself, from the [major] superiors, and from the Oratory boys.

Our archives have a list of eleven beneficial effects of these meetings of directors. Since it consists of remarks certainly influenced, if not personally inspired, by Don Bosco during those meetings, we shall close this chapter with a verbatim report of this document.

[33] Silvio Pellico (1789–1854), an Italian writer and patriot, spent most of his young manhood in Milan where, in 1820, he joined the Carbonari. Arrested by the Austrians who then ruled Lombardy, he was sentenced to twenty years of hard labor in the Spielberg at Brunn. In 1830 he was pardoned and spent the rest of his life in Turin. Up to his imprisonment Pellico had been a lukewarm Christian, but in the distress of prison life he resolved to love God and his fellow men. In 1832 he wrote *Le mie prigioni*, the memoirs of his imprisonment, which soon became the most famous book in the literature of the Risorgimento. The Christian gentleness of this book at first disappointed some Italian patriots, but it proved to be more damaging to Austria than the loss of a battle. Silvio Pellico died in Turin in 1854. [Editor]

These meetings of directors produced the following advantages:

1. They provide a justification of these journeys which may sometimes arouse the confreres' suspicion when some matter has to be settled.
2. The solution of several problems is deferred until this time thus cutting down on traveling expenses.
3. These meetings help the directors to agree on several matters.
4. By their presence the directors testify to the growth of the Congregation.
5. They are a great help to attract candidates to the Congregation and to encourage perseverance.
6. They generate extraordinary brotherliness among the directors, who would otherwise have very little opportunity to know each other.
7. Don Bosco's directives keep us forging ahead with firm unity of spirit.
8. Our rules are explained and better understood.
9. Any creeping irregularity is rectified in unity of action.
10. The directors have a chance to voice any important proposal they may have in mind.
11. Each school report is listened to with keen delight, and discussed by the confreres for the rest of the year.

CHAPTER 4

Salesians Established in Argentina

OUR missionaries landed in Buenos Aires on December 14 [1875]. Making their way from the ship to their temporary quarters they saw again and again that the Argentine capital had anxiously awaited their arrival.

As the ship steamed into port, a deafening salvo frightened them into thinking that they were facing some unknown threat, but their momentary apprehension soon turned into joy. "Do not be afraid," the captain reassured them. "This salvo is only a salute."

When the ship had been anchored, a launch pulled to the ship's side, and Father [Peter] Ceccarelli,[1] who had come to meet the Salesians and escort them to their residence, quickly climbed aboard. Their mutual eagerness to get personally acquainted gave vent to the greatest cordiality. He escorted them to the pier where two hundred Italians, several of them former Oratory pupils, eagerly awaited them. Their welcoming shouts and applause were heard far and wide for a long while. As they rode into town in a coach, many people greeted them respectfully.

When they reached their temporary residence, they were delightfully surprised to find Archbishop Frederick Aneyros waiting to welcome them. The worthy prelate greeted them very warmly, embraced them all, and then, sitting in their midst, asked them about Don Bosco and a thousand other things. He also said that he was most anxious to see them again.

At a suitable hour they returned his visit at the episcopal residence to which the vicar generals and all the chancery officials had also been invited. The archbishop came forward to greet them, introduced them to his assistants, and then personally led them on

[1] Father Peter Ceccarelli had worked hard to bring the Salesians to Argentina. *See* Vol. X, pp. 553-558; Vol. XI, pp. 131f, 135ff. [Editor]

a tour of the residence with pleasant warmth and cordiality. Finally, in the reception hall, he asked them to treat him and the guests to some songs. He repeatedly declared that he envied dioceses which had Salesian houses, and he heartily thanked God for having given him such a blessing. Soon the superiors of all religious communities respectfully and warmly hastened to call on the newly arrived missionaries, while the city's parish priests vied with them in offering their support.

Among the laity who warmly greeted Don Bosco's sons, Mr. Francis Benitez, already known to our readers,[2] deserves special mention. Despite his eighty years, he had come from San Nicolás de los Arroyos with the sole purpose of welcoming them.[3] Unassuming, charitable and most cordial, he assured them of his friendship. On their part, they felt so at ease with him that they began to call him "Father."

The echo of such a genuine, warm welcome reached Don Bosco across the ocean through four letters mailed a few days after the missionaries' arrival. We are not referring to those written by Father Cagliero and others. Father Ceccarelli, remarking that the month-long voyage from November 14 to December 14 coincided with Mary's month as observed in Argentina, declared that the voyage could truthfully be said to "have been wondrously guided by the Blessed Virgin Mary," and he congratulated Don Bosco on the esteem shown to his sons in Argentina. Monsignor Espinosa, the vicar general, told him of the high hopes of the faithful who admired the zeal of his Salesians. The archbishop, quite pleased with the Salesians whom he so admired, gladly told him that he had granted them all the faculties for the exercise of their sacred ministry, and he promised to be "a most loving father, solicitous for the missionaries' spiritual and material welfare." Lastly, Mr. Benitez, who did not know Italian, wrote him a most cordial letter in Latin in which he was fluent, respectfully voicing his thanks. We can imagine Don Bosco's pleasure at these proofs of esteem and love for his Salesians.

The missionaries had regarded Buenos Aires as simply a stopover and planned to go on to San Nicolás soon, but the archbishop decided that some should stay on in the capital to care for the

[2] *See* Vol. X, pp. 552, 556. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 131f. [Editor]

Italian church. There were at least thirty thousand Italians in the capital alone. We may well see this offer as an act of Divine Providence because it gave our Salesians the chance to work for their own countrymen, the chief objective of their mission. Welcoming the offer, they split into two groups and settled down in the best way possible until substantial reinforcements could come from Turin.

Our Lady of Mercy Church, built with the archbishop's permission by a committee of devout Italians with funds from the people, was known as the "Italian Church" until the chancery made it the headquarters of the Confraternity of Our Lady of Mercy, which had originally been established in St. Dominic's Church. Thus the church was named Our Lady of Mercy. Regretfully, it had no resident priest in charge. French, German and English Catholic immigrants had their own priests, but the Italians, who outnumbered all other foreign nationals, could not find a priest of their own to look after their spiritual needs. They were overjoyed when they saw their prayers answered, and they showed their happiness by deciding to send several hundred members to meet the missionaries at the pier, begging them to refuse other commitments and leading them processionally to their church. However, with Father Ceccarelli's prudent advice, they limited themselves to sending only a delegation.

Eager to provide at last for so many souls, the archbishop wrote to Don Bosco about this matter [on December 18, 1875] as follows: "[Your sons] will certainly do a great deal of good not only at San Nicolás, but also here in the capital, where they really should have a house not only because they can make communication with Your Reverence easier, but also because they can do far more good here than at San Nicolás. The Italian community in Buenos Aires numbers thirty thousand, but, regretfully, most of the Italian priests who come here seek wealth and nothing else. Therefore I think it very timely that your sons take over the church offered them by this worthy confraternity. Theirs will be an invaluable service not only to the Italians, but to our own people, too."

Father Cagliero did not stand idly by. He immediately began preaching the Christmas novena in Our Lady of Mercy Church to a vast crowd; the last three days resembled the regular parish missions customary in Italian towns and villages. He was assisted

by Father Baccino[4] who had remained in Buenos Aires with the coadjutor brother [Stephen] Belmonte. The extraordinary number of people crowding the confessionals kept the two Italian priests who were available busy for a whole week after Christmas. By now, Father Cagliero had made a name for himself by his preaching.[5] His doctorate in theology and his renown as a music conductor and composer contributed to increase the general esteem and respect for the Salesian superior.

During a conversation with our confreres, Bishop [Francis] Alberti of La Plata delightfully recalled a childhood episode linked with the arrival of the Salesians in Buenos Aires. A good number of altar boys of Our Lady of Mercy Church used to make such a racket in the sacristy that some confraternity members often tried to frighten them by saying: "Soon the Salesian Fathers will take over, and they'll know how to handle you. They'll tame you. That will be the end of your nonsense." Having this threat drummed into them, the boys soon got the idea that the Salesians were ogres who would resort to heaven knows what punishments. In view of this, it is understandable that these youngsters could hardly share the grown-ups' enthusiasm at the missionaries' arrival on December 14. On that day many Italians went to meet them, and the two church bells resounded with joyous peals, "but to our ears they sounded like our death toll," Bishop Alberti, then nine or ten years old, always recalled.

So what did the youngsters do? The more daring ones plotted to loosen the bell ropes. They climbed up to the belfry and, waiting for the bellringer's break for a rest, they carried out their plan, with nobody being the wiser for it. Meanwhile, the missionaries arrived and were rather surprised not to see any boys around. Of course they were there, hiding behind the grown-ups or crouching in corners. Finally, Father Cagliero spotted a few of them. Amiably

[4] John Baptist Baccino (1843–1877) was accepted by Don Bosco at the Oratory in 1867 at the age of twenty-four. He donned the clerical habit in 1869, was ordained in 1874, and took part in the first Salesian missionary expedition to Argentina. He zealously exercised his priestly ministry among the parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy and died prematurely at the age of thirty-four. He was regarded by all as "the father of the immigrants." [Editor]

[5] The newspaper *El Catolico Argentino* carried an article in its issue of December 25, entitled "Father John Cagliero." It read: "Last Sunday this distinguished priest, superior of the Salesians who recently arrived from Europe, preached in Our Lady of Mercy Church. . . . He is an eloquent preacher, with a facile, vigorous and persuasive delivery. His sermon was about the beneficial influence of religion over the individual, the family and the nation, and it proved how Catholicism is the only source of civilization and progress." [Author]

calling them over, he shook hands with them, gave them religious medals and treated them so kindly that they—little Alberti among them—mustered enough courage to tell the confraternity members, "These priests are really good, and they care about us." This marked the beginning of the festive oratory where the heroic Father Baccino was to perform miracles of charity and zeal among children and young adults, thus fostering the first priestly and religious vocations. Outstanding among these were Bishop Francis Alberti, the excellent parish priest Father Angelo Brasesco, the present director of the Salesian Cooperators, Monsignor Carranza, and Bishop Joseph Orzali of San Juan de Cuyo.

Similarly, a native Argentinian, Sister Emily Mathis of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, retained vivid memories of those days. She was a ten-year-old public school pupil when the first missionaries arrived. After seeing another far more impressive procession in honor of Don Bosco after his beatification, she felt that she had to express her feelings. Recalling those distant memories, she wrote as follows to the rector major, Father Philip Rinaldi:

> We went to a public school, but we listened to the inspiring sermons of Father Cagliero and Father Baccino, made our confessions to them, and gladly attended catechism class with profit. They counseled us well, urging us to be good and teaching us how to avoid the moral dangers surrounding us; they prepared and admitted us to First Communion; they planted the seed of a religious vocation in several of us, and we became humble Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and of Don Bosco. "How good these priests are!" we used to tell each other. "What care they take of our souls! How much they help us! Formerly, no one ever bothered about us at all." Then when, in 1878, the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians arrived and opened a school at Almagro, we rushed there as postulants and novices, and we were the first Argentine girls to become Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Beloved Father, these cherished memories filled our minds and made us weep with joy and gratitude as we walked with our girls behind the image of Blessed Don Bosco.

However, it must not be imagined that the whole Italian colony felt that way. Freemasons, striving for control of the colony, had infiltrated even the confraternity and, aided by their colleagues in Italy, cunningly and tenaciously kept trying to secularize this religious association. But they had to reckon with someone

tougher than they and trained to handle them. Alert to their sectarian activities and backed by chancery officials, Father Cagliero revised the confraternity regulations and bylaws and threw its ledgers into the fire. He did all this publicly. In true fiery Italian style he restored Italy's good name which had been stained that past April by a savage mob hailing from La Boca district. They had hurled a shower of stones against the archbishop and St. Francis Church and set fire to the Salvador Boarding School. To purge the confraternity of undesirable members, Father Cagliero forcefully announced from the pulpit that anyone wishing to belong to it had to submit in person a certificate stating that he had fulfilled his Easter duty. He stressed that this was the only way a person could enter the one and only gate to the fold of Jesus Christ. He then fearlessly supervised the election of the new council, while posters defaced neighboring streets proclaiming, "Death to Cagliero!" The candidate for the chairman's office—Romulus Finocchio, a sterling Catholic who had no fear of freemasons—was attacked with brass knuckles, but he won the election. On January 15, 1876 the archbishop of Buenos Aires wrote to Don Bosco: "The Holy Father's blessing is already bearing fruit because your sons are doing wonders with the Italian colony in this capital, a colony so numerous and yet so short of good Italian priests."

The seven Salesians assigned to San Nicolás de los Arroyos, led by Father Ceccarelli and the revered Mr. Benitez, took leave of their confreres on December 21 and were warmly received by the populace. Five were lodged in Father Ceccarelli's rectory, and the other two stayed with Mr. Benitez since a great deal of work still had to be done before opening the school. Here a little background history is needed. The school at San Nicolás de los Arroyos which the pastor, Father Ceccarelli, had offered to Don Bosco left much to be desired. During negotiations Don Bosco had not been too particular, being anxious to have a base from which he could attain his twofold goal of starting an Indian mission and providing for the schooling and spiritual care of Italian immigrants. San Nicolás seemed to be an ideal location because it was fairly close to the Indians and had a large colony of Italians who had settled there from Liguria. Some sixty or seventy farm families led a patriarchal life, tilling the land they had bought with their savings. They did not mix with the local people, marrying mostly among themselves or sending to Liguria—especially the Polcevera Valley—for their

brides. The foremost families were the Montaldos, Camporas, Lanzas, Pontes and Vigos, names well known and beloved of our confreres for the help they got from these families and for the priestly and religious vocations that blossomed among them.

When the Salesians arrived at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, they were unpleasantly surprised to find that the school they had been promised and given in perpetuity by the local people was nothing else but three or four large unfurnished rooms on the main floor. Knowing that matters would drag on endlessly, Father Fagnano enlisted the settlers' help and that of Father Ceccarelli and got to work providing the bare necessities of life for his confreres while the school opened.

Fortunately the little church was in pretty good shape. The generous Francis Benitez, the foremost and most charitable Salesian cooperator of that region, had built it at his own expense, setting up a beautiful altar of inlaid wood with an impressive wooden statue of the Immaculate Conception which he had imported from Barcelona. The church was crowded each day with Italians; soon, boys too began to show up. Church services were held in the Turin style with solemn high Masses in which farmers' sons did the singing. Sermons were frequent and confessors were available at all hours of the day.

In registering their sons at the school, the immigrants really wished that they could board there, but the school had no such facilities. They offered to loan the money, interest-free if necessary, for additional construction. Father Fagnano, a good administrator with some building knowledge he had picked up at Lanzo and elsewhere, immediately began building a row of porticoes matching the height of the existing structure. Over the whole he erected a large dormitory measuring sixty by fourteen meters. Unfortunately, weak foundations and heavy rains caused some columns to slip and the new addition collapsed. Nevertheless, Father Fagnano did not lose heart, and he had the building ready for the school year 1877–78. Immediately, both well-to-do parents and the less privileged enrolled their sons as boarders or day students. The curriculum and schedule of our schools at Alassio and Lanzo were adopted. An excellent band enlivened festivities, recreation periods and excursions. A large single-page prospectus in four columns advertised the school throughout the whole region. On June 10, Father Ceccarelli wrote to Don Bosco, "The school at San Nicolás

is doing fine. The Salesian Fathers are doing a wonderful job and are highly thought of. Their fame is already spreading throughout South America."[6] On June 2, when Don Bosco was declared "Blessed," our former pupil, Dr. Guido Lavalle, a member of the Supreme Court, recalled his experiences as a Salesian pupil of San Nicolás, vividly portraying his superiors and schoolmates and the life-style of that era.

To complete the history of this school of ours we must add that there was absolutely no gift of land or buildings, and no contract at all with the above-mentioned committee on which our Salesians had relied so much. The same committee which at first had offered a flock of sheep and other provisions for the Salesians' sustenance never gave anything at all. The thirty thousand square meters of land [about seven and a half acres] belonged to the government which only granted its use. The one who constantly helped the Salesians, and who would have done more had he not been crossed, was our cooperator Francis Benitez. When the committee later broke up, its alleged rights over the school passed to the hostile masonic municipal authorities. It may be well to remember these hardships someday.[7]

We shall now go on to the few letters of Don Bosco that have been rescued from the ravages of time. In the first half of February, Don Bosco received five pieces of mail, each containing several letters from Salesians and friends. Those from the confreres were first announced, and then read aloud in public, prompting many to join the missionaries. "On this score," the Oratory chronicle reports, "eighty percent of the Salesians are ready to set out for the missions at Don Bosco's first hint." After some editing by Father Caesar Chiala, these letters were published in *Unità Cattolica*. On February 12, Don Bosco wrote to Father Cagliero:

Turin, February 12, 1876

My dear Father Cagliero:

We have just received your letter and those of the other confreres. We read them with intense enjoyment and hastened to forward them to the

[6]He further added: *Fagnano* is indefatigable, *Tomatis* dauntless, *Cassinis* unflagging, *Allavena* vigorous, *Molinari* tireless, *Gioia* invincible, and *Scavini* undeterred in his intellectual, manual and religious activities." [Author] For details about these missionaries *see* Vol. XI, pp. 348f. [Editor]

[7]Cf. Vergil's *Aeneid*, 1:203: *Haec olim meminisse iuvabit*. [Author]

press. I thank God for His help in getting our work started and pray that He will continue to assist us so that our work may progress and contribute to His greater glory.[8]

I have also heard from Father Fagnano at San Nicolás about their arrival and present work. They say that the school premises are very small, but that the municipality seems willing to enlarge them and put things right. In other letters you have already asked me to send Salesians, Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, gardeners, etc. I am waiting for more specific information before taking any action. We could count on [Father John Baptist] Sammorì who is quite a preacher. People say that he is an outstanding orator. We asked him to preach in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, and everyone agreed that he lived up to his reputation. He might do for Our Lady of Mercy Church. He would not hesitate a moment if he were asked to go. Just now all the Salesians would fly off for Buenos Aires if I would let them.

Father Tomatis wrote to Varazze saying that he does not get on quite well with somebody. This letter, addressed to Father Francesia, made a bad impression both there and here in Turin. Tell him two things: first, that a missionary must obey and suffer for God's glory and be most anxious to keep the vows which consecrated him to the Lord; second, that when he has a complaint, he should tell his superior or immediately write to me for suitable advice.

The day before yesterday (February 10) we opened our two small houses at Ventimiglia with Father Cibrario as director, Father Cerruti as teacher, and Brother Martin as housekeeper. Father Bodrato[9] will serve as sexton.

Our Sons of Mary are increasing and give great hopes. This is *the* undertaking that we should promote with all our strength.

I have received hardly any news of Commendatore Gazzolo. Is there anything wrong?

The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians will come to Valdocco at the beginning of March. Shall we get some ready for America?

Please pay my respects to the archbishop, to Dr. Spinosa, to Father Ceccarelli, and to our father, Mr. Benitez. Tell him that his letter in Latin was read far and wide: by Lanfranchi, Vallauri,[10] and publicly in all our

[8] In translating this sentence we have followed the text published in the *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. III, Letter 1403, Società Editrice Internazionale, 1958, Torino, rather than the one given in this volume. [Editor]

[9] Francis Bodrato (1823-1880) came to Don Bosco as a widower in 1864 and made 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 Salesian missionaries to Argentina, and two years later Don Bosco appointed him provincial. He died at Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880. [Editor]

[10] A contemporary lexicographer, prominent writer and dear friend of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. IV, p. 442; Vol. VI, pp. 191, 596. [Editor]

houses. Everyone was astonished at its charm, style and purity of language. I shall be writing to him very soon. Greetings from the Radicati, Appiani, Fassati, Callori, Corsi, Marengo and Margotti families and a million other friends, including Father Picco,[11] Professor Bonzanino,[12] and Count Roasenda.

Dear Father Cagliero, take care of your health and the health of the other confreres. We are recommending you and your fellow workers to God. Please pray for me too.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please let me know how you are doing financially. The house at Nice is developing splendidly with Father Ronchail as director, Rabagliati as pianist, Peret as teacher, Capellano as cook, and Henry Guelfi as doorkeeper.

Regards from Monsignor Fratejacci, Canon Menghini, our dear Alexander Sigismondi, Chevalier Bersani, Cardinal Antonelli, Cardinal Berardi, etc.

Omnia in nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi. Amen. [Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus—Cf. Col. 3, 17]

The zealous missionary Father [Dominic] Tomatis,[13] who was only a boy when Don Bosco had predicted that they would share many a meal for years to come, had a hard time in putting up with the bad temper of the coadjutor brother [Bartholomew] Molinari. At times the latter was really unbearable; in fact he left the Congregation the following year. Through his forbearing, prudent charity, Don Bosco knew how to win over even unstable individuals and make them docile and quite useful to him. He wanted his sons to imitate his spirit of forbearance. Therefore, not quite satisfied with roundabout advice, he personally wrote to Father Tomatis the following charming letter:

Alassio, March 7, 1876

My dear Father Tomatis:

I was glad to learn that you had a good voyage and are eager to work. Keep it up. A letter you wrote to Varazze disclosed that you do not get along with one of your confreres. Your letter was read to the whole community and left a bad impression.

[11] *See* Vol. IV, p. 465. [Editor]
[12] *Ibid.* [Editor]
[13] *See* Vol. VII, p. 386; Vol. VIII, pp. 212ff. [Editor]

Listen to me, dear Father Tomatis. Since a missionary must be willing to lay down his life for God's greater glory, shall he not be able to bear patiently a confrere, even when the latter has unlikable traits? Listen to St. Paul: "Bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ." [Gal. 6, 2] "Charity is patient, is kind . . . endures all things." [1 Cor. 13, 4–7] "If anyone does not take care of his own and especially of his household . . . he is worse than an unbeliever." [1 Tim. 5, 8]

So, my dear Father, comfort me and do me this favor that I personally ask. Let Molinari become a dear friend of yours from now on, and if you cannot love him because of his faults, then love him for God's sake, love him for my sake. You will do it, won't you? I am very satisfied with you in regard to everything else, and in my daily Mass I always recommend your soul and work to the Lord.

Do not forget to translate my arithmetic book,[14] adding the Argentine weights and measures.

Tell our good Father Ceccarelli that I have not yet received the diocesan catechism, and I wish to have a copy of it (the small one) so that I can insert the Acts of Faith [Hope and Charity] that are used in the diocese into *The Companion of Youth.*[15]

God bless you, dear Father Tomatis. Do not forget to pray for me who always remains

Your dear friend in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The Companion of Youth which had just then been published in French was about to be translated into Spanish as well; only the [requested diocesan] catechism was holding it back. It soon arrived.

We must also comment about a meaningful question in the letter to Father Cagliero. "Is there anything wrong?" Don Bosco had asked, alluding to Gazzolo.[16]

Since we shall have to refer to this gentleman on other occasions, we find it necessary at this point to remind our readers of one frequent fact of life. Even in most important undertakings Divine Providence has often availed itself of men who, far from being motivated by supernatural reasons, were seeking the limelight or trying to further some cause of their own interest. With this in

[14] *The Metric System Simplified. See* Vol. II, pp. 374ff. [Editor]

[15] A boys' prayerbook compiled by Don Bosco and first published in 1847 under the title of *Il Giovane Provveduto. See* Vol. III, pp. 6–18. [Editor]

[16] The Argentine consul at Savona who had temporarily returned to his country. [Editor]

mind, they were unaware that others, spurred by selfless motives, by joining forces with them were putting the latter's talents to good use and steering their ambition to far nobler ends. In the course of our narration, respect for truth may force us to see shadows where everything seemed ablaze with purest light, but this light, which shone on certain nebulas and gave them splendor, was light radiating from our own Don Bosco. It is comforting to believe, though, that Don Bosco's prayers may have obtained heavenly enlightenment at an opportune time for this type of collaborator.

Gazzolo was unhappy. He was annoyed that with so much publicity about the missionaries so little had been said about the part he himself had played. We see this from his letters. A remark of his, in particular, must be challenged here, and not just for history's sake. In one of his letters he quite clearly stated that he had "founded and built" Our Lady of Mercy Church. The truth is that the confraternity had entrusted him with the purchase of the land on which the church was to be built. This transaction was quite profitable to him because, without defrauding the confraternity, he bought enough land for the church and for himself. However, he set aside for the church the far end of the property, keeping for himself two lots with frontage for two houses he intended to build. Eventually, the Salesians bought one of them from his heirs at a very high price.

Fortunately Don Bosco kept receiving far more comforting news from other sources. On January 15, 1876, the vicar general, Monsignor [Anthony] Espinosa, wrote: "Your sons are doing incalculable good here in the city. It is heartening to see them preach and teach catechism. [Until their arrival] the poor Italians had no one to look after them; now they crowd into the church. . . . An urgent need could be met if Mr. Gazzolo would give the Salesians the lot he owns beside the church. Their present residence is too small, and they have no land to build on." Father Ceccarelli too had already sung the praises of the Salesians at San Nicolás in a letter dated December 25, 1875: "Their health is excellent, their earnestness in working for the Lord is beyond words, their will to honor their Congregation is admirable, and their conduct is worthy of missionaries who are going forth to their martyrdom." This last remark should not be considered mere oratorical exaggeration. Father Fagnano, for example, was undertaking long apos-

tolic treks and doing a great deal of good at the cost of severe hardships.[17]

As the fame of the Salesians spread throughout Argentina and spilled into the neighboring republics, requests for Salesian schools kept pouring in, as we shall see in the course of this narrative. Don Bosco, well aware of the need, was already planning a second missionary expedition. On March 30, he asked Father Chiala to reply to Father Cagliero in these terms: "In your letters you tell us of your urgent need of personnel. We are very willing to provide it, but Father Cagliero should state specifically how many men he needs and for what tasks because sometimes he asks for two, then for four, and once even for thirty missionaries. . . . Upon receiving your reply we shall promptly assemble and send the requested personnel."

An idea that flashed through Don Bosco's mind—he manifested it shortly after sending his first missionaries—has been unfairly criticized. He had toyed with the idea of inducing the Italian government to found in southern Argentina a colony totally dependent upon the mother country—an impossible dream, to be sure, but not motivated by politics.

He did not suspect that such a plan was a chimera because he thought in that far-off land there were regions which belonged to no civilized country. Twice, in fact, he broached the subject with this understanding. The first time was on February 5, 1876 when he referred to "those regions of Patagonia which are not yet subject to the Argentine Republic"; the second time was on the 19th of the same month, when he said that many lands were there just for the taking. This same belief of his is contained in a memorandum he sent to the Italian foreign minister, [Louis] Melegari, in which he calls his attention to a region stretching "from the Rio Negro to the Strait of Magellan" in which "there are no settlements, harbors, or governments claiming any rights." He had been led into this error by several badly informed Italian authors and unreliable encyclopedias and maps. It took another forty years for Italian geographical studies to rise to a higher scientific level. Of course, when he discovered that there was no longer a single square foot of land in

[17] We are omitting two short letters of Don Bosco to Father Cagliero, respectively dated February 16 and March 30, 1876, about local news and greetings from benefactors. [Editor]

all that area unclaimed by either Argentina or Chile, he never again mentioned such an undertaking.[18]

After all, he had conceived this idea as the most effective way of achieving his twofold purpose of evangelizing and civilizing the Indians, and of wisely channeling our own [Italian] emigration. He foresaw that emigration would increase year by year; he saw how our poor emigrants were at the mercy of the elements and of greedy exploiters, and in his foresight he felt that the government was wrong in ignoring this problem. But most of all, his heart ached when he read how easily our people, left to themselves, lost their faith. Accustomed to seize every opportunity to do good, he naturally wished to wrest whatever help he could from the Italian government for such noble goals. Thus he should not be discredited, but, rather, highly praised at least for his sterling intentions: *In magnis et voluisse sat est.*[19] "In great undertakings it is enough even to have willed success."

[18] It is worth noting that as late as 1896, Theodore Herzl, in his famous book *L'État juif, Essai d'une solution de la question juive*, did not consider as unattainable the plan of obtaining from the great powers "the sovereignty of a piece of the earth's surface for the Jews, proportionate to their legitimate national needs in Palestine or in Argentina. *See Études*, August 5, 1930, p. 328. [Author]

[19] Cf. Propertius, Liber II, Eleg. X, Verse 6. [Editor]

CHAPTER 5

Visiting the Schools and While at the Oratory

WHEN we visualize Don Bosco departing from the Oratory to visit his schools, we immediately think of this Gospel passage: "The sower went out to sow" [Matt. 13, 3]. How pleasant and helpful it would be to have plentiful information about these providential sowings! Our schools' first directors realized this and unanimously agreed to draw up a chronicle in each house in order to record Don Bosco's actions and words during his visits. What a wealth of episodes and teachings we would now have, had they acted upon that resolution! Making the best of what little we have managed to gather here and there concerning February and March of 1876, we shall fill in the gaps with gleanings from skimpy diaries and the Oratory chronicles.

Summoned to Nice by telegram, Don Bosco took advantage of this trip to visit our schools in Liguria between February 20 and March 11. We will follow him directly to Nice, leaving out a stopover at Sampierdarena, of which we know nothing.

St. Pierre's Hospice [in Nice][1] was on on the verge of a handsome transformation. Restricted as it was to the ground floor and basement of an old textile mill, it could not function properly, let alone prosper. More embarrassing, the neighbors could observe everything that went on from the windows of surrounding buildings. During his visit to Turin [for the annual conference of St. Francis de Sales], Father Joseph Ronchail,[2] the director, spoke to Don Bosco about a "Villa Gautier" near the parade grounds; it was for sale and seemed to suit their needs fully. The building was

[1] *See* Vol. X, p. 575. [Editor]

[2] Joseph Ronchail (1850–1898) first met Don Bosco in 1868. (*See* Vol. IX, pp. 148ff) Convinced that the latter was inspired by God, he went to the Oratory and joined the Salesian Society. He distinguished himself as a hard worker and zealous priest. He was director of the Salesian school at Nice from 1876 to 1887 and in Paris in 1888. He also was acting provincial of northern France and Belgium until his death in 1898. [Editor]

large, the garden could easily be converted into a fine playground, and the location—out of the city but close enough for day students—was ideal, healthy and enchanting. Its price tag, however—one hundred thousand francs—was far beyond Don Bosco's means. Even so, he did not hesitate in the face of a pressing need. On February 3, he directed Father Ronchail to write to several generous citizens of Nice to go ahead with the transaction, assuring him that Divine Providence would not fail them. Coincidentally, Abbot Roetti of Nice, learning that Bishop [Gaspard] Mermillod, the vicar apostolic of Geneva, would pass through Nice on his way from Marseilles to Rome, thought of enlisting his aid. Bishop Mermillod, world-famous for his eloquence and for a three-year-long exile at the hands of a heretical and tyrannical government, was going to Rome to renew his strength at St. Peter's tomb and at the feet of his great successor, Pope Pius IX, as well as to ask that St. Francis de Sales [former bishop of Geneva] be declared a "Doctor of the Church." Father Roetti quickly suggested that the local chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society invite the prelate to make a brief stop at Nice and speak on behalf of Don Bosco's hospice. Attorney [Ernest] Michel, president of the Society, Baron [Amato] Héraud, and a few others agreed to the proposal and contacted Bishop Mermillod. Finally, after an exchange of letters and telegrams, the prelate agreed to address a gathering during a brief stopover between change of trains on the afternoon of February 23.

A select group of fervent Catholics were on hand at the station to greet the worthy prelate. His address, scheduled for three o'clock, was delivered at two in the little Church of St. Francis of Paola which was so crowded that many people had to be turned away. In the sacristy, the bishop asked what he should talk about. He was quite delighted at being told that his conference was to be on behalf of young orphans cared for by the Salesians. In a later comment, he declared that it was indeed fitting for a successor of St. Francis de Sales to preach on behalf of an institution run by a religious order whose patron was the holy bishop of Geneva. Moments later, in the pulpit, he faced a noble, impressive congregation headed by Bishop [John] Sola of Nice, who anxiously waited to hear the word of this illustrious exile.

Bishop Mermillod chose as his theme the scriptural text: *Tibi*

derelictus est pauper, orphano Tu eris adiutor [On You the unfortunate man depends; of the fatherless You are the helper—Ps. 9, 34]. Drawing a parallel between a woman's motherhood and that of the Church, he pointed out that the latter comes to a mother's help when she cannot care for her children. He concluded his talk by stressing the obligation all had to join Mother Church in providing physical, intellectual and spiritual care for orphans, who, if assisted by religion, would in turn become pillars of society. Contrariwise, left to themselves, they would rebel against their condition in life and, rather than see the rich as brothers and benefactors, they would see them as tyrants and would thus incline to communism. He so impressed his hearers that the collection amounted to forty-five hundred francs. French and Italian newspapers reported the event, praising both the speaker and "the admirable priest of Turin whose name *was* already immortal."[3]

The outcome of so much publicity was a stream of formal requests for Salesian foundations from Lyons, Paris and Annecy. More concrete was the prospect of a Salesian house at Marseilles, in the diocese of Aix, whose bishop dispatched a personal representative to Don Bosco to discuss a foundation in his diocese. Don Bosco's answer to all was that he would willingly oblige if he had the personnel; at present, however, he did not have them, but he would see what could be done. Was Don Bosco present at Bishop Mermillod's sermon? He was, of course, but we are told that while the congregation sat enthralled by the account of the wonders of his charity, he peacefully dozed, totally certain that Divine Providence would help him.

He manifested this clear trust on two occasions which make us see ever more clearly that he truly was a man of God. The notary Saietto, who gave his services gratis, reminded Don Bosco that there would be a government fee of more than six thousand francs for the registration of the deed. Since the collection was below that sum, Don Bosco replied that he would settle for a verbal contract. The president of the local chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society frankly told Don Bosco that he considered this decision to be ill-advised and foolhardy. "Man of little faith!" Don Bosco retorted. "You will see that within three months we shall have more

[3]*Semaine Religieuse*, Nice, Sunday, February 27, 1876. [Author]

than eighteen thousand francs and will be able to sign the contract. To start with, write to Pius IX to head the list of contributors. This will prove very effective."

His advice was followed and the Pope promptly sent him two thousand francs through [James] Cardinal Antonelli. Other donations then poured in: one thousand francs from the General Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, another thousand from Bishop Sola of Nice, and a thousand apiece from several members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Finally, another member—the least wealthy but perhaps the most attached to the hospice—sold stock for eight thousand francs and gave the proceeds to Don Bosco. Within three months, eighteen thousand francs were available and the contract was signed.

On yet another occasion Don Bosco showed his full trust in Divine Providence. When the above-mentioned president asked him whether he thought perhaps that the hospice was too expensive for its intended purpose, Don Bosco spiritedly interrupted him. "God operates in grand style," he told him. "Look at the sky and the stars, the oceans and the fishes, and the variety and beauty of things on this earth. Now this hospice is His work too. Do not let us worry about trifles. If we lack funds to buy this beautiful house, God will provide them."

Let us now anticipate the evening of his return to the Oratory, so as to enjoy one of the intimate conversations which Father Barberis was inspired to confide to his humble chronicle, which at times has transmitted to us the living words of Don Bosco.

After supper he was chatting as usual with a few of his priests, mostly commenting on questions and observations. "Were you present at Bishop Mermillod's sermon?" one of them asked.

"Indeed I was. The bishop of Nice made me sit next to him in the sanctuary, surrounded by all the canons and in full view of the congregation."

"Had you already known Bishop Mermillod?"

"Yes, for some time, and we regularly kept in touch by mail. He is very well disposed toward the Oratory. He called on me once, visited the Oratory, and liked it."

"The Church of St. Francis of Paola was small, wasn't it? The collection might otherwise have been more plentiful."

"Yes, the church was small and so crowded that the ushers could not squeeze through the throng and many could not reach the

collection basket. People were saying—I believe they were right—that if the church had been large, we would have netted fifteen thousand francs instead of four thousand. Many later gave what they had been unable to donate in the church. There was a constant flow of people and of letters with contributions ranging from forty to a hundred francs for the establishment of the hospice. We are truly liked in Nice, and that includes civil authorities. Even the prefect of the province, a Protestant, really supports us. A fellow Protestant had called on him to complain that two boys, who had run away from the Protestant hospice, had sought refuge in ours. Asserting that we were infringing on the boys' freedom of conscience by forcing them to become Catholics, he demanded that the prefect rescue both boys from us. But the latter told him, 'They ran away from you because they did not want to stay there. How can we force them to go back? We would be doing violence to them. I cannot forbid Don Bosco to take in two boys who were brought to him by their parents in compliance with the law. Go home. The boys will be as well off there as they were with you.' So the two runaways remained with us."

He then described the new house and the general situation as follows:

When we shall open the house we have newly purchased, we will have a magnificent building adjacent to the parade grounds. The premises cover an area of nine thousand square meters, with playgrounds big enough for a thousand day students. Utilizing all the space as we best know how, we can accommodate one hundred and fifty boarders and still have room for expansion. The building with its white marble staircases and marble floors is even too beautiful. We bought it for ninety thousand francs; immediately someone offered me the same price for just the garden area. Including fees for the legal formalities, which in France are higher than here, our total cost will rise to a hundred thousand francs. But with the donations given to me, other monies I myself sought, and pledges, we shall have all the money we need. The notary public is also doing his utmost to foreclose several mortgages on the house with no charge to us. Both he and our lawyer have already told me that they want no remuneration because they wish to contribute in some way to this foundation. Praised be the Lord! I also got busy and managed to bring things to a point where they can now run smoothly by themselves. I can further say that we have made arrangements to open a second festive oratory in Nice at the church where our Father Guelfi goes to say Mass.

Father Durando[4] remarked very aptly: "The French really understand the best ways of doing good, and when they see that an institution is reliable, they generously support it."

Don Bosco had indeed said that things could move along by themselves, but he did not mean that his assistance was not needed. Two months later he wrote to Father Ronchail, the director, instructing him how to go about finding the necessary means. The letter reveals the principles guiding our founder in giving his undertakings a good start. "Since we have gotten into this," he wrote, "we have to see it through to the end." He was the personification of constancy. Once he reached a decision, he would not falter—no "ifs," "ands" or "buts." "God wills this undertaking," he continued, "and we cannot refuse to go along with it without running counter to His holy will. If we cooperate, we can be sure of a successful outcome." We see the holiness of a man who, on discerning God's will, faces up squarely to what is expected of him and does his utmost to carry out the designs of Divine Providence.

[No date]

Dearest Father Ronchail:

Since we have gotten into this, we have to see it through to the end; hence let us solve the problems of our St. Pierre's Hospice. If our good notary, Mr. Saietto, can get us a loan of sixty thousand francs, the rest of us can find the other thirty thousand for the cash purchase of the "Villa Gautier." Therefore:

1. Tell Attorney Michel and Baron Héraud to search far and wide for contributions. They should concentrate especially on Marchioness Villeneuve, on the Englishman who lives on the floor beneath the baron's apartment, on Count Aspromonte, and on all those who might put in a good word for us in soliciting for the carnival charity fund. Since the mayor has repeatedly shown interest in our work, both as a private citizen and as the chief official of the city—which also would contribute—we had

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

better send him without delay a memo on donating his share to the thirty thousand francs fund which we need for a cash payment on an undertaking that concerns a most deserving section of his people, the destitute boys of Nice. Perhaps Mr. Dellepiane could also come to our aid.

2. Work on Mr. Pirone, Canon Daidero and Canon Bres, and persuade them to make an effort in this exceptional case. Tell Mr. Audoli to set into motion all his patience, charity and purse strings. Perhaps also Father [Felix] Giordano[5] may help us. The bishop will still contribute something more, but I will write him in due time.

3. Meanwhile, let everything be well clarified and a preliminary agreement entered into to set the date for the contract two months hence. Toward the end of this month I will go to Rome, and while there I'll do all I can. Two weeks before the signing of the contract write to me and let me know how much money you still need and I will send it to you, even if I have to take out a loan here in Turin.

God wishes this project and we cannot back out without resisting His holy will. If we cooperate, we can be sure to succeed. No doubt the devil will try to mess things up, but we shall all do our best to outwit him. It would also be advisable to keep the bishop informed of the situation, without, however, soliciting his aid.

My regards to the above-named gentlemen. Let us pray with trust, and Divine Providence will not fail us.

God bless us all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also hastened to tell Father Ronchail of the spiritual favors which the Pope had granted to Salesian benefactors, putting off for later, perhaps from Rome, information on other special favors for more deserving benefactors.[6]

Shortly afterward, Father Ronchail sought counsel in a delicate matter which caused unease in the diocese. It concerned the shrine of Our Lady of the Lake in a remote, lonely site. We have already seen[7] that the bishop wanted to entrust it to the Salesians, but, though the bishop pressed his offer, Don Bosco did not think it opportune to accept.

In brief retrospect: before the French Revolution, when religious were dispossessed, the shrine belonged to the Discalced Carmelites,

[5] An Oblate of Mary Immaculate. *See* Vol. XI, p. 494. [Editor]
[6] We are omitting Don Bosco's undated and unsigned short letter. [Editor]
[7] *See* Vol. XI, p. 401. [Editor]

who returned once the anarchy ended. Later, when the county of Nice was annexed to France, it fell victim to the law of 1855 which confiscated all religious property; thus both shrine and monastery became state property. Now the Carmelites sought to buy it back in order to resume their work, but the diocesan chancery of Nice opposed the move and outbid them. To head the shrine the bishop appointed a diocesan priest, who, ignoring protests from the Carmelites, took up residence in their monastery.

At this stage, Don Bosco was approached. There were serious rifts within the clergy, between the clergy and the laity, and among lay people themselves. "I am neutral," Father Ronchail[8] wrote, "and circumstances force me to be. I am in an uneasy position and do not dare call on anyone in the daytime, since someone or other is ever on the watch to see whom I side with. I go out at night only. It appears silly, but it is a serious matter. The Chamber of Deputies is discussing it too, and who knows how it will end? . . . Even the St. Vincent de Paul Society is divided, and I must walk a tightrope to keep out of trouble. I could use some advice from you." Unable to answer immediately, Don Bosco replied from Rome.

Rome, April 12, 1876

Dearest Father Ronchail:

I received your letter and I am answering from Rome, where I arrived a few days ago.

I am very pleased to learn that Mr. Audoli is beginning to put heart and mind into our little hospice. Be overly nice to him; ask him to tell you what he needs and provide it. Give him my regards and let him know that I will remember him very particularly in my holy Mass as a friend and brother, and that I will ask a special blessing for him when I call on the Holy Father.

As regards the Gautier matter, I totally approve. Keep setting money aside for the contract signing. We will compile a list of all contributors irrespective of amounts donated. Baron [Amatus] Héraud and Attorney [Ernest] Michel will head the list, and, as long as our hospice will last, special prayers will be said for them morning and night.

As regards the shrine of Our Lady of the Lake, the problem becomes ever more complex. Follow these instructions: 1. Never mention it. 2. When others bring it up, pretend to know little about it and to be uninterested. 3. If you really must say something, limit yourself to, "I

[8] Letter to Don Bosco, Nice, March 19, 1876. [Author]

don't read newspapers, I love everyone, I wish everyone well, I need everybody's help, and I am unqualified to pass judgment. If Holy Mother Church makes a statement, I shall immediately agree with it," and so on.

Tell the pastor of St. John of Villafranca that I thank him for all he has done for us and that I hope he will be pleased with what I shall obtain for him once the deal is closed. Say the same to my old and dear colleague, Mr. Dellepiane.

Canon Daidero will receive the medal he has been wanting, plus many spiritual favors, but I beg him to contribute a few bricks for our Villa Gautier.

In regard to Perret,[9] I think we should be quite frank with him. When he comes for his monthly manifestation, clearly tell him your doubts about him. If he denies having any problem, show yourself contented, do not let anything transpire, and we'll see what's to be done.

I shall write you again after my audience with the Holy Father.

Love me in Jesus Christ. Remember me to our dear boys and to your mother, and pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Does Rabagliati play [any instrument]? Do Peracchio and the carpenter Ronchail have any intention of becoming Salesians?

Our revered Father [Louis] Cartier,[10] who spent so much of his life in Nice, believes that Don Bosco's refusal, inspired as it was by his habitual sense of justice, charity and peace, made possible the return of the Carmelites to their shrine.[11] These religious not only regained their rights, but they were also able to re-establish friendly relations with the cathedral chapter and do a great deal of good until the anti-religious law of 1901 drove them away once more from their home.

Don Bosco kept his promise to Father Ronchail to write to him again from Rome after his audience with the Holy Father.

[9] A young cleric wishing to become a Salesian. *See* Vol. XI, p. 375. [Editor]

[10] Louis Cartier (1860-1945) was born at Colomban, France on February 7, 1860. Drawn by Don Bosco's reputation, he went to Turin after his seminary studies and made his novitiate at San Benigno Canavese. Ordained a priest in 1883, he was appointed director and master of novices at Sainte Marguerite, a suburb of Marseille. Three years later, Don Bosco sent him to Nice as director, a post he held till 1923. He distinguished himself for his zeal, untiring work and the construction of a church dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians. He died in Nice on December 29, 1945 and was interred in the crypt of the church he built. [Editor]

[11] Letter to the author of these *Memoirs*, Nice, February 5, 1930. [Author]

Rome, April 22, 1876

My dear Father Ronchail:

Your news was fine. Therefore:

1. When you have the opportunity, let all those who have in some way helped our house know of the Holy Father's blessing for them. Many other special favors have been granted to us and are now being readied for official communication by the Sacred Congregations. I shall make them public as soon as these matters are taken care of.

2. Write to Barale[12] to ship you about fifty handsomely bound hard-cover copies of the French edition of *The Companion of Youth* to be given as gifts to our fund-raisers and benefactors. A printed card, like the enclosed sample, should be inserted in the title page of each copy.

3. Accept the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory and write to us for needed personnel.

4. Give my special regards to Baron Héraud, Audoli and everyone at the hospice.

The Holy Father blesses you all. Pray for me,

Your friend for ever in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. The closing date of the contract is approaching; get money together, but take good care of your health.

Enough about Nice. What follows is put here for lack of a better context. They are five practical norms[13] for the smooth running of a Salesian house. We found them on a small sheet of paper in Don Bosco's own writing with no other indication.

Things Absolutely Necessary

1. Monthly manifestation.

2. The weekly reading of part of the rules or of the chapter deliberations.

3. Assignment of duties. Let the prefect, however, be in charge of discipline and meals.

4. A confrere should be put in charge of the altar boys and of those serving at church functions.

5. Let someone take overall charge of scholastic matters.

[12] The Oratory bookstore manager. [Author]

[13] These were deliberations taken at the meetings of directors with the members of the Superior Chapter. Such meetings were also called "General Chapters." [Author]

After Nice, Don Bosco's most important visit was to Vallecrosia; a better word would be "a dropping in," but its importance lies in the findings and decisions of Don Bosco.

To save time, he wrote to the director of that house on February 2, 1876 and asked him to meet him at the railroad station of Ventimiglia which he would be passing through on his way from Genoa to Nice.[14]

The encounter did take place, as we can easily gather from a phrase in a brief note which summoned the director to another meeting on Don Bosco's return trip.

Nice, February 29, 1876

Dear Father Cibrario:

God willing, I'll arrive by train at Ventimiglia on March 2 around 11 A.M. and will go straight to the bishop to receive his instructions and see what's to be done. If you can, come along. You can better explain the things we must consider.

I enclose a letter which I neglected to give you. May God shower His blessings upon you and all our families at Vallecrosia. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

He also informed Father Rua that he would again return to Ventimiglia on leaving Nice. The letter is undated, but since it refers to the critical condition of a young resident student named Seghesio, who as we gather from the Oratory records died on March 17, the letter certainly belongs to this year and was probably written from Nice on March 2.

Dear Father Rua:

I am leaving for Ventimiglia and hope to be in Turin on the evening of the 11th. I shall write again from Alassio or Sampierdarena.

We have signed the contract for a hundred thousand francs—a trifle—but we are acquiring a beautiful house. Ready some money.

When I come to Turin, we shall talk about St. Secundus' Church.[15] Please send the enclosed note to Father Lemoyne.

[14] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]
[15] This matter will be dealt with in Volume XIII. [Author]

If Seghesio is still alive, give him my best and tell him that I am praying for him. May God bless all of us. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The note for Father Lemoyne is also undated. In it Don Bosco jokingly acknowledges his request to be sent to [South] America. This answer reminds us of another letter in the same tone to Father [John Baptist] Francesia who had also written to Don Bosco asking to be sent to the missions. After allowing some time to elapse, Don Bosco, meeting him one day, remarked, "You know something? I did read that poem of yours . . . ."

Dear Father Lemoyne:

As soon as I received your letter, I immediately sent a special blessing with a prayer to young Martino who at this hour perhaps is already resting in the Lord. May His holy will be done!

As soon as the Argentine Republic will request a good poet, your reverend self will be promptly dispatched.

Give my most cordial greetings to our dear boys and tell them that even when I am in France I never forget them but will daily remember them in my holy Mass. For their part, they must not forget to pray for me, who will always be a friend to you and to them.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. We have bought a magnificent house in Nice for a mere trifle—a hundred thousand francs. Ready some money.

Though absent from the Oratory and beset by countless worries, Don Bosco maintained such perfect calm and serenity that he never forgot the individual needs of his sons, wherever they might be. We have an outstanding confirmation of this in a letter of his from Ventimiglia.

Ventimiglia, March 3, 1876

Dear Father Bonetti:

Tell Villanis to prepare himself [for ordination], and if the bishop of Casale is not available on *Sitientes* Saturday,[16] ask him to state this, and

[16]The Saturday before Passion Sunday in the pre-Vatican II liturgy. [Editor]

we shall send Villanis to Vigevano or to Alessandria with the necessary dimissorials.[17]

I shall write to Rome about Rocca and acquaint you with the answer for your guidance.

As regards the transfer of pupils [to Lanzo], do what you think best. The same applies to Giolitto. If the Riviera or the Lanzo climate is beneficial to him, send him there, but I hope that his time is not up.

Best wishes to you and the others. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. Bosco

From Ventimiglia Don Bosco went on to Vallecrosia where he saw first-hand the pressing need of building a school and church. Enrollment was growing daily. To please everybody, the overworked Salesian sisters were also holding separate evening classes for the older girls who wished to improve their education and learn useful crafts. The girls were deserting the Protestant schools. The Salesians too experienced an increase in the boys' enrollment. Unavoidably, personnel had to be increased.

Father [Nicholas] Cibrario, the director, was held in high esteem also by the bishop, who openly pointed him out to the people, saying, "There goes a holy priest." The three Salesians were doing the work of eight people. This was Don Bosco's usual way of doing things: lacking adequate personnel, he sent just enough people to start the work. God blessed their efforts until Don Bosco could gradually send reinforcements. In the meantime, the pioneers had to make do as best they could, forever hoping for additional help that was slow in coming. Thus they learned the hard way and grew up into real men.

At Vallecrosia people were very eager to see Don Bosco; the Protestants too were curious about him, but Don Bosco was in no hurry to show himself. Since the school overlooked a busy thoroughfare, he went and left in a closed carriage so that very few people could see him. Discreet as he was, he certainly wanted to avoid even the semblance of a provocation. He left with the firm hope that with time the Salesians would save the town from Protestantism. His hope was based on the good will of the populace toward the new school and on the donations that kept pouring in from all over. Spurred by these sentiments, as soon as

[17] Letters authorizing the bearer's ordination. [Editor]

he returned to Turin, he ordered Father Ghivarello to draft a preliminary design for the new building,[18] clearly stating that the main entrance was to be on the side street, next to the Protestant church.

"Oh, Don Bosco," exclaimed Father Barberis who happened to be present and was listening to Don Bosco's instructions, "you really like Protestants! Here in Turin you have been trying for years to get a site adjacent to theirs,[19] and at Bordighera you can't bear to break away from them. You ought to stick close to them also at Pinerolo."

"Yes, indeed," Don Bosco replied. "Incidentally, right now the Protestant church in Rome is for sale and I have already asked someone to start negotiations for its purchase."

It was indeed true that the Protestants had contracted with some construction company for building a church, but once it had been completed, disagreements arose and they refused to accept it. We have no further details on this matter, at least as far as Don Bosco was concerned.

A letter which he wrote to Father Cagliero from Varazze is a precious souvenir of his visit to Vallecrosia.

Varazze, March 12, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

I am enclosing this note for you in a batch of letters for the Oratory. I am visiting our houses on the Riviera; they are doing quite well. Our house near Bordighera is going along excellently. Already one hundred girls and as many boys have been rescued from the Protestant school. On the last two Sundays only four people attended the Protestant church. The whole population flocks to Father Cibrario. Naturally the heretics' fury is directed at Don Bosco who goes about upsetting consciences everywhere. And they are right.

You may have already answered my former letter. At any rate, brief me on the physical, moral and sanitary state of our houses and residents. I shall spend April in Rome, where I hope to do something for Father Ceccarelli. I will write to you from there. Love me in the Lord and pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Give a warm greeting to our confreres.

[18] We are omitting details about its specifications. [Editor]

[19] An allusion to the difficult negotiations for the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as we shall narrate in Volume XIII. Cf. Vol. XI, pp. 463ff. [Author]

We have a record of his visit to Alassio in a letter to Father [Julius] Barberis, who was then finishing up his *Oriental and Greek History*. He had undertaken this task at Don Bosco's request and was now being pressed by him to finish it. On November 20, while chatting as usual with him after supper, Don Bosco had told him: "I want to look over your work chapter by chapter before you pass it on to Professor Lanfranchi for copyediting."

Alassio, March 5, 1876

Dear Father Barberis:

I am glad that several chapters of your manuscript are ready. Give one to Professor Lanfranchi who already knows about this and then keep sending others as soon as they are ready. In the meantime we will start the printing. I am glad you are going to preach a spiritual retreat, but . . . .[20]

As for Chiala, tell Father Rua to give him whatever task seems more necessary. In regard to Veronesi and Soldi, you did the right thing, but we shall have to discuss this too.

My regards to Pioton, Giovanetti and those who have written to me. Their letters gave me joy.

Our harvest grows day by day and increases a hundredfold. Turn out holy and strong workers.

May God bless you, your candidates and my own dear sons. My regards to Father Guanella and our cook Anthony Bruno. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Even at the cost of repeating things already mentioned in the previous volume, we here transcribe an excerpt from the Oratory chronicle about Don Bosco's absence from the Oratory during his trip through Liguria and beyond:

When Don Bosco must absent himself from Turin for a while, he thinks of everything, remembers everything, and keeps every plan and project in motion. He wrote several letters to Father Rua about steps to be taken, to Father Barberis about the novices, and to Father Durando about scholastic matters concerning the Sons of Mary. He keeps sending greetings to one person or the other, as though he were constantly thinking of each and every one personally. He wrote, as he always does, to many Oratory benefactors, inquiring about everything, and sending his regards to many people.

[20] Father Barberis was novice master. [Author]

How much we regret being in the dark about what he said and did during his visits to the other houses in Liguria. The "Good Night" he gave to the Oratory boys on the third evening after his return will make up for it at least in part. As they saw him enter, his beloved boys gave him a most rousing welcome. "Good evening!" he smilingly exclaimed.

"Thank you! Thank you!" they shouted unanimously, bursting into renewed applause.

Even when Don Bosco gave the "Good Night," anyone who had found some lost object would hand it to him before he addressed the assembly so that the owner could come up and claim it. On this occasion a boy handed him a red pencil which he had found in the playground. "Here is a red pencil," Don Bosco exclaimed. "I want at least three lire for it. Any buyers?" After another outburst of laughter, Don Bosco continued:

My dear sons, in the past few days I have visited our boarding schools in Liguria. How much work still needs to be done in each one! We no longer know where to turn to because we are bombarded by requests for reinforcements.

So I keep saying to myself: *If only all our dear boys at the Oratory were already priests, true evangelical workers, capable of great deeds, I could give each one a job to do.* I assure you, my boys, that I would have no problem finding work for you. See how the Lord blesses our efforts. Just over a month ago, you saw Father Cibrario, the cleric Cerruti and the coadjutor brother Martino leave for Bordighera, a Protestant town. What could three people—two, in fact: a priest and a cleric—do? Barely two weeks after our schools opened, I went to see them; nearly a hundred girls were attending the sisters' school, and almost as many boys were attending our own school run by the cleric Cerruti. Formerly, all the boys and girls either attended the Protestant school or stayed at home, learning nothing for lack of a Catholic school. On Sundays they all went to the Protestant church, but now, just two weeks after the opening of our little church, the minister is having a bad time, preaching to only four people and blaming Don Bosco and his priests for emptying the Protestant institutions. Certainly, if things keep up this way, as I hope they will, the Protestants will go bankrupt and will have to pack up and leave. Do you see what two or three evangelical workers can do? Without our schools, and without that little church, not only would many families have gradually become Protestants, but the latter would have been able to establish permanent headquarters in that area. Then heaven knows what time and effort it would have taken to dislodge them. Now we have to

send someone to help Cerruti because he complains that he cannot teach all the boys by himself and that the school should be divided into classes. As work increases, personnel must also increase. Now I have to see whom I can choose to send there.

I tell you all this, my dear sons, to encourage you because I wish you would all become priests and quickly go to work in the Lord's vineyard, but I want true, zealous priests whose only thought is to save souls and prepare for themselves a glorious crown in heaven.

I will also say that on my way back here I saw something which I think worth telling you. I saw a massively rough sea that raged for five days. Never had I seen anything like it before. From shore line to the horizon, one saw only enormous waves as tall as our house plunge down to form vast gulleys of water. Billows surged wildly upon billows and, when two collided, they tossed a white foamy spray high into the air. One would think two or three cannons had been fired at the same time. Had a ship been caught between them, it would have been hurled so high into the air that the sailors would have had time to die up there. (*Laughter*) But there were no ships in sight. On the beach gigantic waves kept breaking thunderously and, far out at sea, one could behold thousands of breakers tipped with dazzling white foam. I was standing some three hundred meters from the shore and yet I often had to step back not to get wet.

This spectacle made one admire God's almighty power. By a mere act of will he can make the sea become so calm and still that one might almost glide over it. But then he can churn it up furiously over limitless expanses, stirring all to terror. If all the senators and deputies of Parliament had gone to the beach and ordered the sea to relent, we would have seen how powerless they are.

But as I gazed upon the sea, another thought flashed through my mind: how alike are the angry waves and a boy's state of conscience tormented by sin. He can never have a peaceful or calm moment. A good boy is serene and happy because his conscience has no fears, whereas a youngster with serious sins on his conscience is forever restless and stormy like the sea. Alternately he feels elated and dejected, like the waves that surge high and plunge down; at other times despair buffets him much as a wave dashes against another, turning it into foam. He becomes so ill-tempered that anyone approaching him realizes that that boy cannot have a clean conscience. Isn't it true that when a boy has a guilty conscience he immediately flies into a rage over a slight offense? Doesn't he reply rudely if he is asked for a favor or give an insolent reply if reprimanded?

If a lad has had the misfortune of making a bad confession or a sacrilegious Communion, you will notice that his conscience is a raging sea. He may play games, but his laughter is forced, his merriment insincere; he feels miserable, withdraws from his companions and lonesomely paces up and down. His friends invite him to join them, but he

shrugs his shoulders. "I don't feel like it," he answers. He goes to the study hall but cannot concentrate because his conscience tells him: "You are not a friend of God." He goes to church but does not pray; he is in no mood to pray because he can't expect to be listened to, for he continually hears those doleful words, "You are not a friend of God." He tries to stifle this voice, and hence he sometimes annoys his companions with his banter and laughter—a forced laughter. He takes his meals to satisfy his gluttony and tries to be merry to drive away every remorseful thought, but meanwhile his heart keeps saying: "If you were to die now while you are eating, you would not go to heaven; hell is waiting for you."

If he walks in the dark, he shivers and does not dare go further. At bedtime he says to himself, "I'll try to fall asleep; at least I'll be rid of these nagging thoughts." But then something flashes into his mind, "What if I don't wake up again? What if I die tonight and enter eternity in enmity with God?" As he goes to bed, he realizes that burning coals will be his bed in hell. If he cannot fall asleep, the remembrance of past sins disturbs him; if he dozes off, he will dream that the devils are ready to drag him to hell; if he wakes up during the night, he seems to hear the Lord saying; "You shall die this very night." As you see, his heart is truly a stormy sea. I am telling you this only to remind you of what Holy Scripture says: "There is no peace for the wicked" [Is. 48, 22].

I was mulling over these things during the last few days, and as I watched the stormy sea, I said to myself: *I will share these thoughts with my boys because they may do them good.*

Always bear in mind that if you wish to lead a serene, happy life, you must strive to keep in God's grace; otherwise your soul will be a restless raging sea. Likewise, if you wish a long life, put yourselves in God's grace without delay and stay that way because sin hastens death, as Holy Scripture tells us: "The sting of death is sin" [1 Cor. 15, 56]. The Holy Spirit tells us too in another passage that the wicked will not live half their allotted time.

I decided to tell you these things because I wanted to increase your zeal in doing your best to purify your conscience, so that you may soon become priests, really good priests. Work is plentiful, and it awaits you.

Let us take heart! During this novena let us all recommend ourselves to St. Joseph, and you will see that at the end of our life he will help us get to heaven to enjoy the Lord for all eternity.

The carnival season ended on February 29, Lent began on March 1, and stage plays gave way to catechism classes.

Among the performances staged in 1876 the most outstanding was *The Hidden Pearl* by [Nicholas] Cardinal Wiseman, presented on Thursday, February 17, at two in the afternoon in honor of the

benefactors of the house. Among the many distinguished guests was the renowned journalist, Father [James] Margotti, editor and publisher of *Unità Cattolica*. The whole student body of Valsalice College was also present. Songs filled in the intervals. The program delighted the audience, and the acting was highly praised.

Usually the large study hall doubled as an auditorium when plays or entertainments were presented, though not always at two in the afternoon. When only a few guests were invited, the boys assembled in their classrooms at 5:30 P.M. and then filed into the study hall at six. By nine everything was over. Supper, a short recreation, night prayers and bedtime closed the day. In 1876 the study hall seemed none too safe and Don Bosco had it duly propped up, but he was determined not to stop stage presentations.

Not knowing if we will have another opportunity, we shall dwell a little longer on dramatics. Don Bosco wanted the actors to be carefully supervised at rehearsals, and he never allowed a special treat for them after the performance. As regards the various program selections, he wanted them to be morally good, simple and short; occasionally he preferred a program of recitations or debates interspersed with singing. Certainly, it is difficult to find material suitable to our schools, but he felt that when a dozen or so plays had been chosen, this repertoire would do for a three-year period, especially if the more popular plays were staged several times during the same season.

Generally speaking, when unpretentious plays are not popular in boarding schools, it is because they are either poorly presented or the pupils' taste has been spoiled by showy productions. Debates lacked variety, but Don Bosco maintained that they could be enhanced with stage settings and costuming.

At the beginning of February Father [Francis] Paglia asked Don Bosco if he would object to the clerics' staging of *Caius Gracchus* simply as an exercise in elocution with no costumes, inasmuch as they had already studied the play as part of their curriculum. Don Bosco rejected the idea and gave several reasons: it seemed unbecoming for seminarians in clerical garb to impersonate women; it was in bad taste for clerics to present an entirely profane play ending in suicide while the boys staged *St. Alexius*, a totally sacred play; lastly, he fully objected to clerics acting on stage.

"If we allowed this," he added, "our archbishop would complain to Rome immediately." However, his disapproval of clerics acting

on stage was confined solely to the Oratory, not to the houses of studies for clerics only. There he always allowed them to present stage plays.

Father Lazzero's skimpy chronicle records a "first" in 1876: the artisans'[21] staging of *The House of Luck* and of a comedy entitled *The Goose*. It was such a success that the young actors repeated their performance time and again.

Our readers perhaps might wish to know what veteran Salesians who knew Don Bosco intimately for years, and who were more qualified than others to mirror his ideas faithfully, thought of theatrical performances. In Father Barberis' brief chronicle we find an entry under February 17, which, stripped of useless verbosity, states:

> Well-chosen plays: 1. Teach morals. 2. Sharpen the actors' mental ability and give them self-confidence. 3. Provide joy to the students by turning their thoughts to the plays for days before and after the performance. In fact, the good feelings aroused by them have influenced several boys to join our Congregation. 4. Are a most powerful means to keep them busy. How many bad thoughts and foul conversations are avoided when the boys' minds are taken up by these stage plays! 5. Attract many boys to our schools because while home for vacation our pupils tell their parents, companions and friends how much fun they have in our houses.

Don Bosco constantly sought ways and means to keep his youngsters' minds occupied with a variety of things that would crowd out all unwholesome thoughts. He used sacred and civil festivities for the same end. They were marked by pomp and ceremony and so timed that hardly had the memory of one faded than expectancy for another approaching feast was aroused. With the same intent, he would speak of exciting events and phenomena, mysterious dreams, and even forthcoming scholastic exams. At times his "Good Nights" would give them food for thought by references to incidents within the Oratory or elsewhere. When the missionaries began departing for [South] America, he had a rich source of news, anecdotes and information to catch their fancy and fire their imagination.

With the older boys he used classical literature to forestall

[21] Pupils learning a trade or craft. [Editor]

boredom, a breeding ground of unwholesome youthful passions. Háving set up a friendly rapport with Monsignor Ciccolini, president of the Arcadia,[22] he came to an agreement with him in 1875 to establish a chapter at the Oratory which would keep in touch with headquarters in Rome. To obtain this privilege a motion had to be made in one of the Arcadia's general assemblies, which were held quite rarely. It seems that no decision was ever taken regarding an Arcadian Chapter at the Oratory, although assemblies featuring poetry and prose declamation under the direction of Father Bertello[23] provided a pleasant and useful diversion for some time.

Another popular diversion for those who liked it was choral music, which engaged a considerable number of boys. Blossoming composers in the house, led by Father Cagliero[24] and by Dogliani,[25] not to mention less important names, fired the others with sheer enthusiasm, and filled the Oratory with music and song. The band was immensely popular with the artisans. As we narrated in the previous volume,[26] these unlucky musicians had given Don

[22] A literary academy named after a region of Greece. It was founded in 1690 to revive a style of poetry similar to the bucolic models and to the Latin elegies. [Editor]

[23] Joseph Bertello (1848-1910) entered the Oratory in 1862, donned the clerical habit in 1865, made his perpetual vows in 1868 and was ordained a priest in 1871. He earned his theology doctorate at the University of Turin in 1873, and on November 27 of that same year he became a member of the Arcadia. In 1879 he earned doctorates in literature and philosophy. From 1881 to 1894 he was director of the Salesian junior seminary of Borgo San Martino, and from 1894 to 1898 he was the provincial in Sicily. In 1898, at the Eighth Salesian General Chapter, he was elected Councilor General of the Salesian Technical Schools. Finally in 1909 he was appointed Economer General of the Salesian Society. He died in Turin on November 20, 1910. [Editor]

[24] John Cagliero (1838-1926) entered the Oratory in 1851. (*See* Vol. IV, pp. 200ff) He was ordained a priest in 1862 and led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego in 1875. (*See* Vol. XI, pp. 348f) He became the first Salesian bishop in 1884 and a cardinal in 1915. He died at Rome in 1926. In June 1964, his remains were brought back to Argentina and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma. For further details *see* the Indexes of Volumes IV, V, VI and XI. *See also* Vol. IX, pp. 125, 128f. [Editor]

[25] Joseph Dogliani (1849-1934) was admitted to the Oratory in 1864 at the age of fourteen as an apprentice cabinet maker, but soon his musical talents were discovered and Don Bosco assigned him to study music under Maestro De Vecchi. He made such rapid progress that as a young Salesian he became the right-hand man of Father Cagliero, and when in 1875 the latter led the first Salesian missionary expedition to South America, Don Bosco appointed him choirmaster at the Oratory. In 1889 he also directed the brass band. Also under his direction, the Oratory choir achieved fame by its impeccable execution of classical sacred music of the most renowned composers. Various cities in Italy and abroad invited the Oratory choir on solemn occasions. Dogliani himself was quite a prolific composer, music teacher, and author. Among his pupils he numbered the famous tenor, Francis Tamagno. Worth noting is the fact that through his teaching and example he anticipated by thirty years Pius X's reform of sacred music. He died at the Oratory on October 22, 1934. [Editor]

[26] *See* Volume XI, p. 427. [Editor]

Bosco a good deal of trouble, so that he had to disband them and expel the more unruly boys. Then they were reorganized to the satisfaction of all. In 1876 he let Dogliani give piano lessons to a group of qualified pupils. In short, wise educator that he was, Don Bosco sought to do away with monotony and boredom which depress youngsters and breed laziness and unhealthy inclinations.

Don Bosco gave his special attention to the seniors. Discontented seniors will spread their discontent through an entire student body. On March 13 he asked their excellent teacher, Father Peter Guidazio,[27] to give him a detailed account of his students as a group and individually. He also asked Father Guidazio about each boy's potential and suggested practical guidance norms suited to individual temperaments so as to attract the best students to the Salesian Congregation. As far back as 1869, in fact, the top students in the senior year of high school were invited to dine with their superiors every Sunday. A short entry in the [Oratory] chronicle records the names of five boys, remembered today, who on one Sunday in March enjoyed this privilege: Bima, Botta, Dompè, Gresino, and Nespoli. Don Bosco enjoyed their company at dinner and firmly held to this custom, even when others raised objections. These boys, incidentally, were not seated next to Don Bosco, a privilege reserved for those boys who had been chosen to represent the apostles at the ceremony of the washing of feet on Holy Thursday. After the meal each boy would thank Don Bosco personally and listen to some words which were usually very effective, especially in regard to their choice of a state of life. Naturally, those chosen looked forward to this privilege, talked about it, made plans, and, years after having left the Oratory, remembered it.

We have already mentioned the semi-weekly and Sunday catechism classes[28] and the first religion examination at the end of Lent. In 1876 a certain amount of solemnity was given to this examination by inviting outstanding priests, particularly the local pastor, to test the pupils.

[27] Peter Guidazio (1841-1902) entered the Oratory in 1862 at the age of twenty-two. Two years later, Don Bosco opened a school at Lanzo, where Guidazio remained for six years and proved his ability as a good teacher. Ordained 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. [Editor]

[28] *See* Vol. X, p. 87. [Editor]

A special Lenten catechism course was set up for young apprentices through the zeal of the Oratory clerics. In 1876 this course, usually held at one in the afternoon, was postponed until eight in the evening, thus increasing attendance. It was heartwarming to see some two hundred apprentices, with begrimed faces and in greasy work clothes, gather every evening around their teachers and after some games go with them into church for a forty-five minute lesson on basic Christian doctrine. Mindless of expense and added work, Don Bosco later offered them the opportunity to make a three-day spiritual retreat to prepare for their Easter duty. The retreat bore abundant fruit. Sixty youngsters, twelve to fourteen, nearly all apprentices employed in the workshops of the Valdocco area, were prepared to receive confirmation in the archbishop's residence. For a number of them this was the occasion of their first confession, and they promised to keep coming to the Oratory. Their devout behavior as they walked to the archbishop's residence and during the church services was admirable.

The most solemn event of this part of the school year was the feast of St. Joseph which had been devoutly celebrated at the Oratory for the past four years. Daily services were held for a month before this feast which at that time was not as yet popular. Don Bosco adapted it especially for the artisans who gradually came to like it. The students also attended the services. Communions at Mass increased by the day; in the evening, before Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the *Te Joseph Celebrent* replaced the traditional *Ave Maris Stella*, and the customary short spiritual reading was about St. Joseph. During the after-school snack many students prayed at the saint's altar, and the artisans did the same after supper. This was not obligatory, but very few stayed away.

They were thus well disposed for the novena which ended with a solemn triduum, sermon and sacred singing. On the last day of the novena Don Bosco told a few priests at supper, "We can really see how St. Joseph loves us. We have received many blessings during this novena. Some people have obtained extraordinary favors after praying to Mary, Help of Christians and St. Joseph. I myself witnessed a few in my own room. Our financial situation was most precarious, but this week I received very substantial donations. Very few weeks have been so rich in favors and alms as this.

Another two or three weeks like this and we would soon settle all our debts. Almost daily a thousand or fifteen hundred lire and even more kept coming in."

St. Joseph's feast stirred the artisans into action. The evening before, new members were formally received into the St. Joseph's Sodality with the added solemnity of songs and instrumental music, speeches and a homily. On the day itself the choir sang a Mass especially composed for the occasion by John Pelazza, a former Oratory pupil, and dedicated to Don Bosco—a beginner's attempt, it is true, but excellently executed. At Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Joseph Dogliani, a youthful maestro, led the choir in his first *Tantum Ergo* which won warm praise from his peers. To be sure, these family musical productions excited everyone's interest—composers, choir and listeners.

In the evening the customary assembly of artisans, teachers, evening school pupils and superiors took place before a brightly lighted altar of St. Joseph. Father Joseph Lazzero, who had been the artisans' director before replacing Father Rua as vice-director of the Oratory, was honored at the same time as a stage curtain was drawn across the altar to reveal a banner inscribed: "Long Live Father Joseph Lazzero, Father Bologna, Father Bertello, Buzzetti and Dogliani. Hurrah for All the Josephs." During an intermission, students of the evening school and of the artisan section praised both St. Joseph and their superior. Of course, these celebrations entailed much effort, but they were worth it, as our chronicle remarks:

> I became convinced that well-prepared religious assemblies can be most delightful, educational and morally uplifting for boys. This particular assembly showed remarkable progress in the artisans, who a short time previously would never have dared to stand up before an audience and read a prayer to St. Joseph, much less to kneel before all, as some did. to ask God's help and pardon through St. Joseph's intercession.

To understand this last observation properly we must remember that Don Bosco would accept a goodly number of street boys or lads in trouble with the law into his artisans' program.

Little was needed to add to this memorable day, but Don Bosco really crowned the event personally. Usually St. Joseph's feast was marked by a conference of Father Rua to the Salesians of the Oratory, but, as he was then visiting our schools and supervising

mid-year theology examinations of our clerics, Don Bosco gladly took his place and spoke to the Salesians, the novices, and the postulants, as well as the Sons of Mary and students of the last two secondary grades who attended. All four groups were formally told of this invitation at their several gatherings for night prayers. Most were extremely delighted, as they considered hearing Don Bosco an enviable treat.

Two hundred and five attended Don Bosco's conference whose theme was the biblical text: "The harvest is rich, but the workers are few" [Lk. 10, 21]. Father Barberis commented: "His message and delivery were very plain, but he spoke with such energy that in the following days several young men asked to join the Salesian Congregation and many more will do so later on. It is surprising how throughout the years Don Bosco keeps thinking up new ways of bringing our Congregation to the boys' attention and instilling into them a desire to join."

The following day, Father Barberis reconstructed Don Bosco's conference from notes he had made during the talk. Though he stated he was more concerned with substance than with words, he still did us a remarkable service, for which we show our appreciation by reporting it in the appendix of this volume.[29]

There is another detail worth mentioning. Contrary to his habit of spending feast days with his Salesians, Don Bosco dined that day at the Artigianelli[30] Institute where St. Joseph's feast was the greatest yearly occasion. The warmest relations bound the Oratory to this institution, whose director, Father [Leonard] Murialdo,[31] considered himself a disciple of Don Bosco. Every Saturday two Salesians went there for confessions. For several years Don Bosco had declined invitations but he felt bound this time to accept. "What a holy man Father Murialdo is!" exclaimed Father Barberis. "He too is trying to found a small religious congregation dedicated to the Christian intellectual education of poor young apprentices and of youngsters of festive oratories." That congregation is now the flourishing Pious Society of St. Joseph.

In the last few evenings of March Don Bosco gave three "Good

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

[30] A well-known arts and trades school in Turin. *See* Vol. III, p. 393. [Editor]

[31] Leonard Murialdo, born of wealthy parents in Turin in 1828, became the poor people's priest like Don Bosco. In 1873 he founded the Pious Society of St. Joseph to look after poor youths. He was also involved in alerting Catholics to their rights and duties as citizens. His last efforts were to further a movement for Christian democracy in Italy. He died in 1900 and was proclaimed a saint by Pope Paul VI on May 3, 1970. [Editor]

Nights." Constructive and brief, these talks, rescued from oblivion, are delightful in their freshness and insight.

On March 26, as the students and Salesians were ending their night prayers, he made his appearance and was greeted with joyful shouts. One boy came up to the stand and handed him two *soldi* he had found in the playground. When silence was restored, Don Bosco announced with mock seriousness: "Ten *centesimi*. They will help pay our debts." When the burst of laughter died down, he went on:

Now let us talk about something that touches us. First, tomorrow afternoon we shall go out for a long pleasant hike. (*General shout of joy*) It is only right: term exams ended last Saturday morning, but rain kept us from going out in the afternoon.

Don't be surprised now, but I still have a most exciting outing to tell you about. It's for everybody—and I mean everybody, from Don Bosco down. We shall leave the Oratory at dawn with our brass band and whatever else may help keep us happy and board the train for Lanzo. (*Applause and prolonged shouts*) But let me finish. The most important thing is coming. We are going out to our school and spend the whole day there. Father Lemoyne, the director, has promised to do his very best to make the day most enjoyable for us with a delightful meal and the clinking of glasses. We shall return to Turin late that evening, and by then you will be glad to hop into bed. We are going to take this trip as soon as the railroad is completed. (*Murmurs*) Work is going on frantically and, hopefully, everything will be ready by mid-June.

This outing, my dearest boys, will give you a break from school work and refresh you physically and mentally, but this must not be its only purpose. Whatever benefits the body must also aim at making it more willing to obey the soul and thus contribute to serving God better. The body must never gain the upper hand over the soul. My dear sons, never let your body rule you. During this remaining half of Lent mortify it and keep it under control. St. Paul tells us what he did: "I treat my body hard and make it obey me . . . ." [1 Cor. 9, 27].

I am not suggesting the hard penances, long fasts and scourgings of many saints—nothing of that sort. Your bodies are still growing and these things can harm you. But if you'd like me to suggest some penances suited to your age, I'd recommend a fast which you all can carry out—master your heart and senses. Make the devil fast by rejecting sin. Check your external senses. Make your eyes fast. They are the windows through which the devil invades your soul. How can we foil his attempts? By closing these windows when danger approaches. Never allow your eyes to

linger on immodest paintings, pictures or photographs. When you see things like these, turn away immediately. Another way to master your eyes is to check your curiosity. Never, but never, read irreligious or immoral books, books which are dangerous for persons your age. As I have already told you time and again, burn these books when they come into your hands. Give them to your superiors. Rid yourselves quickly of this corruption. I have it very much at heart that you carry out scrupulously what I am now trying to impress on you.

You can also mortify your hearing by never stopping to listen to foul talk or to slander against companions or superiors. Force your tongue to fast by forbidding it to utter any word which may cause scandal or hurt other people with curt, degrading remarks. Briefly, never say anything which you would not dare to say in front of a superior. Mortify your sense of taste by not looking for what pleases your palate; eat whatever is served, and don't be one of those who are forever striving for choice food and drink.

Another way to mortify yourselves is to suffer patiently heat or cold or anything else you don't like. Do not say immediately as some do, "I will write home for this or that." Unless you really need something, be patient and wait a while. Think it over. Don't rush. Allow no sullenness, sulking or restlessness. Mortify yourselves by bearing charitably and peacefully your companions' slight faults and the discomforts of your dormitory or classroom. In conclusion, mortify yourselves by not listening, not saying and not doing anything which is not exemplary. This way, even little things will become wholesome acts of penance which you all can do.

They will help you reach the objective of Lenten fasting. They will help you powerfully to overcome your evil inclinations and gain abundant merits. I have one more recommendation. Receive Communion frequently and fervently, and you will be so strengthened by grace that your body will have to obey your soul. Good night.

On March 30 he said he was sorry about a breach of discipline which had occurred during the weekly walk. After mentioning the incident and kindly but firmly pointing out its wrongness, he urged them to follow school rules and their superiors' instructions. The problem was that the boys were not allowed to keep pocket money. In this regard we should recall a wise measure he had taken years before[32] and firmly reinstated in January since his directives were not being properly carried out. He wanted a confrere to open a canteen for the pupils at a certain hour every day so they could buy

[32] *See* Vol. IV, p. 559; Vol. X, pp. 440f. [Editor]

snacks, but only coupons were to be used.[33] He wanted to induce his boys to deposit their money with the prefect and stop money deals among themselves. He also hoped to check the desires of some to purchase things outside the Oratory or to pester their parents for food.

Today, Thursday, you were out for a pleasant walk.[34] I believe you were well-behaved, and I am glad about that. Last Monday, too, you went out and, all in all, it helped you physically and mentally, even if you were drenched by a sudden downpour. However, that walk was spiritually harmful to some of you. To my great regret, I was told that several ignored school rules and left the lines, some to buy fruit, others to purchase wine, and—from what I was told—the latter could hardly keep their balance afterward. Others bought and smoked cigarettes. I do not care to know who these boys are. I will only say: Don't you know that our house rules don't allow you to keep pocket money? What foolishness is this to willfully do what is forbidden? Smart as you are, you should know that these rules were drawn up for your own good.

You may object, "I don't keep money. I let somebody else hold it for me." Whom are you fooling? You let somebody else hold your money for you, and he does the same for you, so that each of you can say when asked that you have no money of your *own* in your possession. Is this honesty?

"I don't give my money to anybody," another may remark. "I hide it at the bottom of my trunk and so I have no money on me. I know that keeping pocket money is forbidden, but even if they search me they won't find any. I take it out of my trunk only when I need it."

Don't you see how foolish this is? It would be better if such a boy said, "Look, I want to keep my pocket money, and since this is forbidden at the Oratory, I will pack up and go home."

"Go ahead," I would reply, "and we shall remain friends." I can't see how these lads can tranquilly go to Communion every day and expect God to listen to their prayers.

"Oh, but keeping your own pocket money is no sin."

I still stand by what I said. I can't see how such boys can go to Communion with such a grave act of disobedience on their conscience. My usual advice is that it would be better if they didn't go. What good does Communion do to one who receives Jesus and practically tells Him he intends to keep offending Him? Keeping pocket money causes the usual breaches of discipline during the weekly walks.

Let it be definitely understood that what I have said on several

[33] *See* Vol. XI, p. 222. [Editor]
[34] Thursdays were a regular mid-week school holiday. [Editor]

occasions still holds: the rules for walks are not changed. Walks are supposed to be outings on foot with no stopovers. You go out, get to your destination, and then return, with no stops anywhere. Let this order be carried out, and one cause of trouble will disappear. A walk is a walk, not a stopover; otherwise, you may as well stay here.

Another thing you must observe is that during weekly walks no one is to leave the lines for any reason at all. This is the first rule on weekly walks. Its faithful observance will eliminate all breaches of discipline. And let me add that your assistants may never allow anyone to leave the lines, no matter for what reason. They don't have this right and never will because of the endless troubles it would create. The assistant's authority is to look after his boys, take them to a chosen point, see to it that nobody bothers them and they bother no one, and maintain order. But never—and I mean *never*—may he presume to allow any boy to stray away from the others. As for you, my dear boys, don't even ask for such permission. You would only make yourself a problem and a pest to your unlucky assistant, who would have a rough time trying to get rid of you. He would not have a moment's peace throughout the entire walk.

So let us get down to basics: the walk is to have neither a stopover nor a breaking of ranks; the assistants may never grant such permission; above all, let no one keep pocket money, for this is the cause of all these headaches.

I said that anyone refusing to deposit his pocket money should not receive the sacraments. Someone will always object, "Is there any commandment of God or the Church forbidding one to keep his own pocket money? We haven't seen one."

Don't be so sure! Doesn't the Holy Spirit tell us: "Obey your superiors and be subject to them" [Heb. 13, 17]? Did not Jesus Christ Himself say, when speaking of superiors: "He who hears you hears Me" [Lk. 10, 16]? I could quote many other scriptural passages, but it would take too long and so I'll put it off to some other time. If your superiors thought it wise to make this rule, they should be obeyed, and it is your strict duty to obey them.

Do you think that rules are the result of a passing fancy? Before making decisions, a superior places himself in God's presence, examines his conscience, and prays for the Lord's enlightenment so that he may know if the decision he intends to make is for the good of his charges. Then, after careful thought, he speaks as the Lord inspires him.

I can't see how some of you do not understand that it is the Lord who selects superiors and gives them the help they need to properly guide their charges. You are not nitwits and should know this. Why do some of you fail to grasp that obedience is most pleasing to God and that he who obeys will never be at fault, whereas the disobedient one will always be wrong?

Always keep this truth firmly impressed in your mind. Often superiors may say something seemingly senseless and unreasonable. Yet they see things in an overall view. Those who listen to them will be fortunate, whereas those who don't will come to a bad end. Sometimes a piece of advice may seem to be unrelated to what has been said before or what has to be done later on. An inexperienced lad will say, "But this has nothing to do with what I asked." Rely on your superiors. Follow their advice trustingly, without asking questions, and you will be happy in the end. They are older and more experienced and learned than you are.

Furthermore, they love you. On this score let me tell you something that happened a few years ago to a student in his fourth year of secondary school. I will speak openly because none of you know him. One day he came to my room. "Please, give me some advice about my vocation," he said. "I am ready to follow it blindly. I shall do whatever you say."

I smiled and gave him an unbelieving look, but he insisted; "I mean it. I am putting myself into your hands. Tell me anything you wish and I will do it."

"Well," I replied, "if you are really in earnest, do this: finish your school year, and sometime during the summer vacation make an application to receive the clerical habit. If it is accepted, you will be invested on the feast of All Saints."

"Where will I study philosophy and theology?"

"Here at the Oratory."

"But my parents and my pastor want me to enter the diocesan seminary."

"No, not that. If that is what they want, forget about becoming a priest. Finish secondary school here or elsewhere but do not become a priest. Choose some other state of life."

The boy bowed his head. "All right," he said. "I'll follow your advice. I said I would obey, and I will."

But the poor lad was so foolish as to relay our conversation to his parents and pastor in writing. When summer vacation came along, he went home and his pastor persuaded him not to return. "What difference does it make if you are here or there?" he told him. "If you can be accepted as a cleric at the Oratory, why shouldn't you be a cleric at the seminary? If your vocation is to be a priest, you can be a priest also outside the Oratory."

So the youth received the cassock during the summer vacation and entered the seminary. His conduct, however, was very bad, and when he returned home the following summer, he took off the cassock. From then on he drove his parents to despair. He had come to the Oratory at the request of his pastor, who also paid his board and tuition, but [on leaving the seminary] the youth became very embittered against him, blaming

him on every meeting and saying, "I am ruined because you did not let me follow Don Bosco's advice. He had told me: 'You will do well in a religious community but not in the midst of worldly attractions. Your past experience shows that here at the Oratory your conduct is fairly good, but when you go home for the summer, your spiritual condition is always bad.' And it was you who did not want me to listen to Don Bosco. Now I am ruined."

This unfortunate young man went from bad to worse and became a public scandal. He started quarreling with his pastor, made his life miserable, and harassed him to the point that he had to resign his parish and even leave town. And that did not end his troubles; that youth still abuses him whenever he gets a chance, repaying his benefactor with base ingratitude. I met this young man only a few days ago. He admitted that by disregarding my advice he had taken the wrong path. I tried to give him spiritual help, but he hung his head and gave no sign that he would do what I suggested. Had this poor fellow stayed here at the Oratory, shielded from moral dangers, he would have persevered in his vocation and led an honorable life.

I didn't tell you this so as to have a pretext to talk about vocations. There will be other occasions for that. I only intended to show you that those who follow their superiors' suggestions and take them as their norm of life will later be all the happier for having done so, whereas those who reject them will always come to a bad end. The reason is that the Lord Himself places superiors in their position and gives them necessary enlightenment for advising and leading their charges to salvation. He, therefore, wants their subjects to obey the directives He Himself transmits through them.

You should never believe that superiors are prompted by their own interests when giving advice. Even if it might seem that they are influenced by some ulterior motive, you can be sure that this is never the case. Do you think they would risk their eternal salvation by giving you selfish advice not in harmony with God's will?

So firmly trust your superiors' advice, and when they give you directives, follow them to the best of your ability. I say again that I do not know and do not want to know who recently disobeyed the house rules because I am sure that, whoever it was, he will resolve not to do it anymore.

You might wish me to tell you something else which I have very much at heart and which kept several of you from getting an "excellent" rating in conduct at the semester exams. The reason was bad books. Some of you got a poor conduct mark because when they handed in a list of books they had, they purposely left out some titles. Bear well in mind never to read books whose morality you doubt without first consulting a compe-

tent person. Bad books, even books unsuited to your age and condition, can hurt you, so don't read them. I know that even after my last warning about this, several of you are still keeping and reading books which are spiritually and physically harmful. Hence, either hand them in to your superiors or burn them immediately.

In conclusion, for your own sake, abide by these three directives: don't stray from your group or stop over anywhere during your weekly walk; don't keep pocket money; hand in bad books. This is my message this evening. Good night.

The third "Good Night" was given on the last day of the month to the artisans only. This little talk is far more important than it would seem at first glance. It aimed at presenting the lay Salesian and inviting generous-hearted artisans to think of possibly joining the Salesian Congregation. Never before had Don Bosco spoken publicly and so plainly on this subject. The conference he gave on the feast of St. Joseph may have been meant to prepare the way, and, at any rate, the impression it made did create a most favorable climate.

Time has passed since our last get-together after night prayers and you have seen many things happen since then, such as the disbanding and reassembling of the brass band. I believe you've been told why this was done. The main, really the only reason was that although some boys were doing very well, many others were not. A good musician is one who brings joy to people as they hear the music which we shall one day enjoy in paradise. But many of the musicians acted as if they wanted the devil to rejoice. Therefore, since I wish all our musicians to continue their symphonies in heaven, I broke up the band to keep its members from ending their musical career with the devil. Hopefully, the brass band has now been better reorganized because I want my musicians to continue their entertaining in heaven.

One thing which badly hurt you and grieved me exceedingly so that I had to expel several boys was my sad discovery that some of you were thieves, chronic complainers and foul-mouthed individuals. I was very, very sorry to dismiss them, mostly because some had no place to go and would have to fend for themselves. But what else were we to do? When a boy no longer heeds his superiors and acts as a ravening wolf among his companions, I cannot let him stay here to harm the rest of you. You know that we do not give in on this point; I cannot tolerate the impairing of your morals. Be on your guard. If any of you have unluckily committed the above-mentioned harms, let them turn a new leaf and keep their mouths shut about their ill-advised misdeeds lest they ruin their own

reputation and risk expulsion. If anyone cannot make up his mind to mend his ways or does not intend to obey the rules, let him say so and look for some other place. We shall even give him whatever certificates he needs. In this way everything will be done peacefully and we shall remain friends as before. On the contrary, if misdeeds are discovered, those responsible for them shall be expelled in disgrace and risk losing any job they might find because we would not give them a good conduct recommendation. Such a statement is a must for gaining employment today.

But I didn't come here tonight to talk about unpleasant things. I also want to tell you that I am most pleased with those of you who frequently come to me, not only in the confessional but in the playground and for private talks. It's quite a change from the time when artisans looked on Don Bosco as if he were a scarecrow and kept clear of him. In those days students would throng about my confessional, especially on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, but, in spite of all my efforts, I could get very few artisans to come or none at all. Things have improved, but, to tell the truth, a few of you let a considerable time go by without showing up. Remember that I am always very glad to see you in church and everywhere else. But don't just come to please me. Come for some good advice.

Another thing I want to tell you is that the day before yesterday and today some of you asked me if they could join the Salesian Congregation. I gave each of them an answer, but since I know that others would like to ask the same question, let me give all of you a quick reply. I think that nearly all of you know our Congregation. It is not just for priests or aspirants to the priesthood; it is also for artisans. It is a Society of priests, clerics and laymen—artisans especially—who wish to work together trying to help one another and others spiritually. So keep in mind that our Congregation numbers quite a few who are lay brothers. Anyone who wants to save his soul is welcome. If some of you really have this desire because you foresee that, after leaving the Oratory, you will suffer spiritual harm and, after a miserable earthly life, risk eternal damnation, you may ask to join the Congregation.

"What do we do for food and clothing?" you may ask. With endless trust in Divine Providence, a most compassionate mother, let me assure you that we will never lack what we need both in sickness and in health, in youth and old age. This is why many have decided to join our Congregation. Outside, they might be abandoned, rejected, helpless and pushed aside in illness or old age, but here they will want for nothing. So if you are looking for a place where you will never lack food, lodging, or clothing, ask to join this Congregation, which will also care for your spiritual needs.

Note also that our Congregation makes no distinction among mem-

bers; all are treated equally, be they lay brothers, clerics or priests. We regard one another as brothers; meals are the same for all. What is served to Don Bosco, Father Lazzero or Father Chiala, your director, is also served to the rest of the members.

You may say: "Don Bosco really wishes us to join. He would be quite pleased if we did." No, my dear friends, let no one join our Society to please me. Far from it! I am not urging you to join. I have said these things so that you may know things as they are and see if this is what you want in life, and for no other reason. I am not pressuring anyone. If you want to join, fine. If not, don't worry.

Another thing: on joining our Congregation, anyone wishing to go to [South] America would have a chance to do so. However, we do not send anyone there against his will, only those who want to go. You know that some companions of yours who were here last year now labor there as missionaries and are doing much good. While they were here, they rated the same as everyone else, but now they rate pretty high. You remember Gioia. Here he was a cobbler; now I understand he has become a famous jack-of-all-trades—he cooks, cobbles and catechizes. You know Scavini, an artisan carpenter. Well, he heads a cabinet-making shop where he trains some twenty boys, and in the short time he has been there he has done wonders. And Belmonte—remember him? We thought he had no special talents when he was here; now we hear great things about him: he is sacristan, musician, catechist, and even housekeeper of our residence in Buenos Aires. I could also mention Molinari, who is now studying music. Last year they were all simple artisans. Now they are respected, honored men in Argentina. Well, anyone who wishes to go has all the opportunities he can use, while the rest can tranquilly stay here.

Before I leave for Rome, I'll have a letter written in your name to the Pope, of whom I shall ask a special blessing for you, my dear artisans. I hope that you will benefit spiritually, materially and healthwise. Above all, may it make you strong in resisting all temptations which so sorely beset boys your age and in defeating the devil. Most particularly I hope that this blessing will give you a firm resolve to overcome all temptations against the virtue of modesty. May you succeed in controlling your thoughts, eyes and tongue and never displease God through them. Take heart and you will see that God, through the blessing of His vicar, will enable you to overcome the devil. What more would you like me to say to you?

At this point he paused, and with a gentle smile he cast a bright glance of indescribable kindness on all the boys who were attentively listening to his words. For a brief instant the tenderest

fatherliness seemed to light up his face. After a moment of silence he continued:

While I am away, pray that I may achieve the aims which take me to Rome. You know that when I go there, it is always for important, grave reasons concerning the Oratory and you. If all goes well, I will return and tell you that you have prayed well and are really good; otherwise I shall have to tell you that you are just so many bunglers. But I do hope that between your prayers and my efforts, things will turn out well, especially if you will add some Communions to your prayers. I really believe that you will earnestly receive Holy Communion so that I may achieve in Rome the things I have set my heart on. Meanwhile, may the Lord grant you health, holiness and perseverance in doing good and may you enjoy a happy life.

Now if you have any errands for me in Rome, I am at your service. If you wish to write the Pope a short letter, I'll bring it to him, but please write neatly and watch your spelling and grammar. The last time I took some letters, the Pope read them and, spotting some grammatical errors and misspellings, remarked, "I can tell that they are artisans. Tell this lad that this word should have two s's and this one two r's."

I will now close. A short time ago you celebrated the feast of St. Joseph and I could not attend the program in his honor. I hear that you are preparing another for the feast of his patronage. By that time I will be back from Rome, and I will be eagerly looking forward to joining you in your celebration.

These talks given before his departure for Rome made such an impression on the boys that they always thought of Don Bosco as bodily present even though he was far away.

He also told two wonderful ladies who treated the Oratory boys as their own children that he would soon be going. He usually called each of them "Mamma" because of their age and saintliness. "My good Mamma," he wrote Countess Callori, "I send you this telegram before leaving for Rome this evening. Address: Torre de' Specchi. Stay: Three weeks. Hope to see you. Happy journey to you and family. Amen." Perhaps this note was an invitation to the noble lady to come to the city for her devotions before his departure. He also sent a note to Mrs. Eurosia Monti through Father [Julius] Barberis: "Dear Mamma, Your son is about to leave for Rome tomorrow morning at 7, but if you let me go away without money, I will not be able to realize my projects." The lady

promptly sent him a reply and three hundred lire. "Madame Monti is a good Mamma," exclaimed Don Bosco when he opened the envelope.

Some time before he had likewise sent two letters to another lady in Rome—Mrs. Matilde Sigismondi—to tell her he would soon arrive. Her husband, Alexander, was a Vatican expediter. This deeply pious lady was quite devoted to Don Bosco; she too was elderly. As we have already seen,[35] Don Bosco found this excellent Roman family cordial and helpful not only for the convenience of their private chapel, but also because of Mr. Sigismondi's experience with Vatican officials. His first letter was prompted by the death of Mrs. Sigismondi's father.

Turin, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
February 5, 1876

Dear Mrs. Sigismondi:

We have often spoken of you and I have several times wanted to let you know that we have not forgotten you in your moment of trial. Singly and as a community we have prayed and do pray for you and your dear husband Alexander. Now that I have a little free time—our endless troubles notwithstanding—I gladly use it to chat with my two benevolent and well-deserving benefactors.

I assure you that I deeply sympathize with you in the painful loss of your father. I ordered special prayers for him who was called to God, for you and for your sister, that God may grant you patience and resignation to His divine will.

We did the same for the unexpected loss of the lamented and revered Mother Galeffi,[36] and we were deeply comforted to know that these dear departed ones received the Last Sacraments and in a holy death returned to God to receive the reward which He prepares for all who die in His holy grace.

In April I shall come to Rome to address the members of the Arcadian Academy on Good Friday. The first door I shall knock at is located at 104 Via Sistina where I have enjoyed myself so many times. As far as possible, I am anxious not to impose on you and your husband. Will you please tell me sincerely if in these days you will be able to offer me your usual hospitality? If you cannot, would you please direct me to some nice family.

[35] For the warm relationship existing between Don Bosco and this family *see* Vol. X, p. 223; Vol. XI, pp. 100, 114, 125, 171. [Editor]

[36] Superioress of a convent in Rome. [Editor]

A friend will be coming to Rome shortly from Turin, and I have asked him to refund to our good Alexander the expenses he incurred for the several rescripts which I duly received.

We are opening two new houses on the tenth of this month and three more next March. As you see, the Lord blesses our humble Congregation. Pray that we may live up to such favors and blessings.

In a recent letter from Argentina our Salesians sent warm regards to you and your husband, and they beg both of you to remember them in your prayers.

Father Berto, Father Lemoyne, Father Bonetti, and others here at the Oratory send their best wishes to your husband and to you. With filial esteem and reverence I pray that God will bless you abundantly.

Most gratefully yours,
Father John Bosco

P.S. Many regards to your sister and our good Louis.

Don Bosco's second letter, a month later, on the occasion of Mrs. Sigismondi's name day, implies that he received a favorable answer to his request for hospitality.[37]

While important business awaited him in Rome, several other problems in Turin and elsewhere needed a solution. "One thing at a time," he told his Salesians in this matter. The afternoon before his departure he wrote over twenty letters, some addressed to France. After supper—his favorite time for conversation—he reached decisions with his department heads on various urgent matters. Then several priests and clerics milled about him. He suggested that Father Cipriano not exceed half an hour in celebrating Mass, except when extra prayers were to be said; he also remarked that ordinarily twenty-two to twenty-five minutes should suffice. He told the cleric Obertiglio, who was seeking permission to visit his parents for a few days, to make arrangements with Father Rua and Father Lazzero. He himself never said no, and Father Rua was most careful to see to it that Don Bosco should never be forced to perform any odious duty. He said other things to other Salesians and then, giving a fond farewell to each one, he tranquilly went up to his room.

[37] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 6

Don Bosco's Trip to Rome

DON Bosco's traveling companion [Father Joachim Berto] kept a very scanty diary on this trip. He may have intended to fill it in at greater leisure or relay his information to others, but nothing came of that. We shall have to draw from Don Bosco's correspondence and talks and shall report them as they have been saved for us by first-hand witnesses. We shall follow a thematic order rather than an order of time. Our material needs no further clarification.

Since Don Bosco was anxious to have his priests visit Rome and the Pope, why did he not change secretaries every trip? He would certainly have done so, except that his volume of work and very limited time forced him to rely continually on one [experienced] secretary. He usually had to prepare memoranda for the Roman Congregations or individual cardinals and this entailed from one to two months of work.

Unbelievably, he invariably dashed off a draft in two or three days, then kept his secretary busy for countless hours in producing well-written copies. At times Don Bosco would finish a draft at ten at night and then find his tireless secretary still at his desk in the early morning hours when he arose to say Mass. This is not to count the many exhausting errands that forced his secretary to make lengthy trips on foot through the city at all hours of the day. No one could surpass Father Berto in such arduous and invaluable help.

A secondary reason for this journey of Don Bosco to Rome was an obligation he had contracted the previous year. Thanks to his Roman admirers, he was named to the Arcadian Academy in 1874 and was given the academic name of Clistene Cassiopeo, formerly held by the late [Ludwig] Cardinal Altieri. To please Monsignor Ciccolini, the Academy president, he had promised to address the

members in the near future, and the opportunity came now. Since the academicians always met formally on Good Friday in the vast Serbatoio Hall to honor Our Lord's Passion, the president suggested that Don Bosco read the opening address of that day, April 14, 1876. Monsignor [John Baptist] Fratejacci, an Academy member, was asked to invite Don Bosco formally. Very gladly he wrote to Don Bosco [on December 5, 1875]: "I ask that you accept this invitation because a visit to Rome at that time will be timely and helpful in many ways. Its thoroughly sacred purpose will also be apropos and praiseworthy." Don Bosco agreed and we shall soon see how a saint performs on such occasions.

[As Monsignor Fratejacci expressed himself in a letter of January 9, 1876] Don Bosco's acceptance of the invitation was seen by all to be a generous, delightful gift. Above all, Don Bosco saw it as a package gift of precious benefits. As founder of a religious Congregation, he felt the growing need to gain access to all doors and win the good will of all kinds of people. He had other very important reasons for going to Rome. Realizing that the Holy See would not grant him privileges en masse, he had to wrest a few at a time. His presence was therefore vital to achieve this goal. We have only to recall the fate of his petitions at the end of 1875.[1] His visit, made not on his own initiative but in response to a formal invitation of the Arcadian Academy, gave him easier access to the curial prelates and justified his journey to his archbishop and to those in Rome who might speculate about his motives. It shielded him, too, from the suspicions of agents who secretly kept tabs on his contacts with government officials.

He arrived in Rome at two in the afternoon of April 5 [1876] and was met by his dear benefactor, Alexander Sigismondi, who took him to his residence in Via Sistina. There he was lodged on the top floor in a comfortable suite which opened on a lovely terrace and offered him a delightful view of the city. He instantly plunged into his work and business visits.

At this point we shall give a sample of Father Berto's diary. The first four days carried these entries:

Thursday, April 6. Mass at home; then to Cardinal Antonelli at about 10; then to Monsignor Macchi, the papal chamberlain, and home again.

[1] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 180ff. [Editor]

Toward 4 P.M. to Monsignor Sbarretti, secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. (Then followed a reference to Cardinal Berardi of which we shall speak later.)

Friday, April 7. Mass at home, then work until dinner time.[2] In the afternoon we called on Father John Batta of Genoa at the Capuchin monastery near Piazza Barberini to discuss the purchase of a house located between St. John Lateran and the Coliseum.

Saturday, April 8. Mass at home, then to Torre de' Specchi, and dinner at home. Toward 4 P.M. we took a coach and went with Mr. Vigliani and Engineer Moglia to inspect the house between St. John Lateran and the Coliseum.

Palm Sunday. Home all day working.

These were mere jottings, as we can see. Don Bosco's business in Rome was not so absorbing as to crowd out all thoughts of his Oratory in Turin. We mention two items. He left for Rome with an unresolved problem still vexing him. At the beginning of Lent two Salesian subdeacons had applied in ample time for ordinations, usually held on Holy Saturday, but the archbishop [of Turin] had replied that ordinations would not be held at that time. He had then been asked to state this in writing so that another bishop might be approached to ordain the two clerics. Lent was passing by, Holy Week drew near, and Don Bosco was ready to leave for Rome, but there was no word from the archbishop. Father Rua was in a perplexing bind; he could insist with the chancery and maybe upset the archbishop, or he could keep waiting and jeopardize the chances of ordination, to Don Bosco's displeasure. Therefore he sought Don Bosco's advice, and on Palm Sunday Don Bosco mailed him the following instructions:

Don Bosco wants the clerics Vota and Veronesi to present themselves for ordination on Holy Saturday. Take care of it. Enclosed are two duly signed dimissorial letters. If you decide to send the clerics to Vigevano, contact the bishop beforehand to learn if he is holding ordinations and make sure you send him a written statement of the archbishop or one of his officials—Father Gaude, for example—that ordinations will not be held in Turin on Holy Saturday. However if you decide to send the clerics to Susa, you will not need a written statement since the bishop already has

[2]Customarily around noontime. [Editor]

it and only needs to be informed in good time. The latter move would be less expensive, but follow your own judgment.[3]

Archbishop Gastaldi's long delayed reply finally came on Good Friday at one in the afternoon. It read:

Moses Veronesi of Bovisio and Michael Vota of Riverolo, candidates for ordination to the diaconate, will not be able to obtain the document they need tomorrow from the archbishop of Turin or a chancery official unless they report to Canon Peyretti or Canon Zanotti today, April 14, for an examination on two treatises other than those required for admission to the subdiaconate and a further treatise on the diaconate. Furthermore, they must submit to the archbishop written proof that they successfully passed the tests.

The two candidates wasted no time in lamenting their fate. They rushed to the chancery to register for the examination, then dashed to find their examiners, took the tests, ran back to the chancery with their grades, picked up a statement that they had passed, brought it to the archbishop, and then ran to the railroad station to board a train for Susa. The saintly bishop's warm fatherly welcome put them at ease, but they noted his astonishment when they handed him the examination report. The right to examine ordinands belonged to the ordaining bishop, not to the ordinary. However, they were ordained, with but one sad side-effect: frail Deacon Vota fell sick and remained in poor health for a year.

It will not be inappropriate at this point to emphasize Don Bosco's unselfishness.

Sending candidates for ordination to another diocese meant incurring expenses by no means slight for him. True, he had a right to a one-thousand-lire annual subsidy from the royal steward's office of vacant benefices, but as this sum had been added to the bishop's revenue, he deferentially chose not to ask for it. Consequently the thousand lire remained in the archbishop's revenues for twenty-eight years.

The second matter to which Don Bosco put his mind while in

[3] Father Berto's expressions clearly show that Don Bosco kept him in the dark about the unpleasant precedent. He was usually tight-lipped about certain situations and said no more than he had to, but certain phrases of his told Father Rua much more than we can now sense. "Don Bosco wants . . . . Take care of it . . . . Follow your own judgment." [Author]

Rome concerned Father Barberis, who was to open the annual retreat to the students of Borgo San Martino on Palm Sunday. Don Bosco gave him two suggestions: first, he was to win the friendship of students in the last two grades of secondary school to discover suitable candidates for the Salesian Congregation, and then he was to inquire if any of the "former novices" of that house might need a boost in fervor and strength to persevere in their vocation. "Former novices" were some novices who had interrupted their novitiate under Father Barberis at the Oratory and were continuing it in another Salesian house under the local director, doing other work with the novitiate studies. There were two clerical and two coadjutor novices at Borgo San Martino. Father Barberis commented on them in his chronicle: "I did what I could, but I found the former novices quite determined to persevere." As for the pupils, he believed that "in few boarding schools over the world" could one find "greater piety, faith and moral purity." As to vocations, he did have something to say. In fact he wrote to Don Bosco, and we will mention the point at a more appropriate place.

On Monday morning of Holy Week Don Bosco requested a papal audience. While awaiting an answer, he began drafting a few petitions for the Holy Father.[4] Mindful of his benefactors, he took advantage of his stay in Rome to obtain spiritual favors from the Pope for his friends in South America and Italy. His first petition was for Mr. Joseph Benitez and Father Peter Ceccarelli. His second petition concerned Commendatore Gazzolo and his "financial sacrifices" although the Argentine consul really had made none. It was at first thought that he had, but that was because he channeled to the missionaries the contributions of other people, especially Father Ceccarelli's, in such a way as to convey the impression that it all came from him. Later, Father Lasagna[5] shrewdly smelled out the trickery and alerted the Salesians. But at

[4] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[5] Louis Lasagna (1850–1895) first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's outings with the Oratory boys. In October, Louis entered the Oratory. (*See* Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f) He received the clerical garb in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial he achieved marked success in the fields of education, social action, agriculture, priestly vocations, and church construction or renovation. In 1893 he was consecrated a bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Indians of Mato Grosso (Brazil). He died in a train wreck at Juiz de Fora (Brazil) on November 6, 1895. [Editor]

the start of this missionary adventure who would ever have suspected that even the consul's pompous uniform and decorations were a hoax? Still, Don Bosco cooled the heels of some angry Salesians and would never let anyone treat the consul with anything less than charity and courtesy. Putting aside our role of historian for a moment, we have to wonder at Divine Providence which never fails to achieve its end despite such frailties. The reference in the second petition to Uruguay indicated that negotiations to open a house in Colón were already well advanced.

In the third petition Don Bosco requested honorific papal titles for Angelo Borgo and John Baptist Conti, distinguished benefactors of our hospice at Sampierdarena.

A fourth petition also concerned the Sampierdarena hospice. Probably Don Bosco left the request in Rome when he departed, but we include it here. He requested permisssion for the parish priests of the archdiocese of Genoa to donate Sunday Mass stipends to the hospice—except Masses said on holy days that had been suppressed—which had already been earmarked for the diocesan seminary. Like the other petitions, this too was granted, but it was addressed to Archbishop [Salvator] Magnasco of Genoa, ostensibly to help the small Chiapeto seminary and to foster priestly vocations. Don Bosco's special intent was the Sons of Mary, whose headquarters were to be in the St. Vincent de Paul Hospice. The archbishop and Don Bosco were in perfect agreement on the matter.

On Tuesday of Holy Week Father [Celestine] Durando and Professor Father [Mark] Pechenino arrived in Rome. Let us retrace our steps a bit. When Father Durando had presented the second volume of his Latin dictionary[6] to Don Bosco, the good father had voiced his delight and remarked, "Now rest a bit. In time you will present a copy to the Holy Father." He kept his promise. Father Pechenino came along to present a copy of his own recently published Greek dictionary,[7] which he had compiled according to moral principles at Don Bosco's own request. It had been printed at the Oratory. They had not accompanied Don Bosco because they had to preside over semester examinations in our secondary schools at Sampierdarena and Varazze and Don

[6] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 407f. [Editor]
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 406. [Editor]

Bosco himself had wanted them to stop off at Lucca and Florence. Father Pechenino stayed at his sister's house and Father Durando was a guest of Mr. [Stephen] Colonna, a Vatican expediter and an old friend of Don Bosco.[8]

Father Durando's first thought was to call on Don Bosco whom he found absorbed in matters concerning our Congregation[9] but not forgetful of the Oratory. In fact, he told Father Durando to request Father Rua to postpone the spiritual retreats of the students and the artisans until his return. In forwarding this request Father Durando verbalized the feelings animating the men formed by Don Bosco. "Speaking frankly," he wrote, "I feel somewhat sad and guilty wherever I go. I can't really enjoy sightseeing, because I feel I am wasting time and money when there is so much work to be done at the Oratory. I find ease only in the thought that this is all Don Bosco's doing. I leave it up to him."[10]

We are also told by Father Durando that Don Bosco requested [and got] for him the vicariate's faculties to hear confessions in Rome. On a set day he would go to the Sigismondi home, and, after making his confession to Don Bosco, would hear, "rather ill at ease,"[11] the latter's confession. In Turin, Don Bosco made his confession on Mondays—his confessional was usually less crowded then—at about eight o'clock, when he and Father Giacomelli would in turn receive the sacrament from each other.

Don Bosco kept working on his address to the Arcadian Academy—a toilsome task, as we can see by its many quotations, heady concepts and extended length. If for no other reason, they awaited his address eagerly because it was most unusual for a Piedmontese, active in the priestly apostolate and unknown to the world of letters but reputed to be a saint, to go to the cultural center of Rome with an original message for an audience accustomed to hear professional renowned scholars.

There is no doubt that he won the good will of his audience mostly by his honesty. His sincerity of language was matched by the sincerity of his theme, "The Seven Last Words of Jesus"—a theme never before chosen by anyone on that occasion, though ideally suited to the sacredness of the hour. It was indeed a logical choice for a soul devoted to God. His development of the theme

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 126. [Editor]
[9] Letter from Father Durando to Father Rua, April 11, 1876. [Author]
[10] *Ibid.* [Author]
[11] Letter to Father Rua, April 18, 1876. [Author]

was unassuming in manner and in its conclusion, where his love for the papacy exceeded all bounds.[12]

His message artlessly and charmingly spoke of the unity of true believers with Peter and his successors. Urging all to "stand firm around the worthy successor of Peter, the noble, courageous Vicar of Jesus Christ, the strong, incomparable Pius IX," he continued:

> In every doubt and peril, let us seek him as an anchor of salvation, an infallible oracle. Let it not be forgotten that this marvelous Pontiff remains the foundation, the focal point of truth, the world's salvation. Whoever gathers with him, builds for heaven; he who scatters, dismembers and totally destroys. "He who does not gather with me scatters." [Lk. 11, 23] Could I be heard at this moment by our consoling angel, Pius IX, I would say: "Holy Father, graciously hear a humble, most loving son. We seek surety that we are on the road to true happiness, and so we come to you, loving father and infallible teacher. Your words will guide our steps and direct our actions. Most reverently shall we accept your thoughts and writings and solicitously bring them to our families and relatives and, within our power, to the whole world. We will share your joys, sorrows and pains. As soldiers glory in dying for their king on a battlefield, so we see the most beautiful day of our lives as that on which we can offer all we have and are for you. Our dying for you will be our dying for God, who crowns this life's momentary sufferings with heaven's eternal joy."

We do not have the original draft of this speech. God only knows what it looked like, but we can visualize it through the drafts of other speeches in our possession. We do have the neatly and patiently transcribed copy of his excellent copyist, Father Berto, edited in spots by Don Bosco himself. His editing brings out one feature: in four places he substitutes the word "Jesus" for "Savior," though he had already used it very frequently.

His address was rated good by pious listeners, disappointing by a few literary amateurs, and worthless by rare evil-intentioned listeners. We give two comments of witnesses. Father Durando writes:[13]

> I attended the Arcadian Academy last night to hear our dear Don Bosco's speech. The hall was brilliantly decorated and illumined. At least

[12]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[13]Letter to Father Rua, April 15, 1876. [Author]

four hundred learned people listened religiously to Don Bosco's simple yet scholarly address, which they most warmly applauded. . . .

Father Berto[14] commented:

The assembly opened at eight in the evening. . . . A select audience had gathered, drawn by the fame of the first speaker. I was courteously escorted to a front seat by the Academy's president. While waiting, I observed, silent and unknown, the audience which was eager to see the new Arcadian in person. As soon as he entered the hall all eyes turned toward him and followed him as he approached the lectern. All were hushed. They listened most attentively and enjoyed his simple, easy way of treating some most difficult concepts. Several times there were cries of "Bravo" and "Well said!" Others, mainly priests, waved to him in appreciation. Repeatedly he was applauded. It was 11:15 when he ended his speech. Many distinguished academicians went up to shake his hand. . . . But it should be noted that amid his many friends and admirers stood also some Pharisees. As in Our Lord's time Pharisees tried to catch Him unawares in His speech to trip Him, these men too came to hear Don Bosco with the hope he would say something for which they could denounce him to the Holy Office. . . . But, alert to this peril, Don Bosco drew his concepts and, as it were, his every word from authoritative sources: the Church Fathers, the Gospels, the Church's statements. As a result, those two evil-minded persons had to admit: "Don Bosco is smarter than we." The conclusion of his speech made a favorable impression on everyone, and at the close of the assembly Monsignor Sanminiatelli, the papal almoner, congratulated him, saying, "You did us an excellent service."

We also know that a few days later, Father [Jerome] Saccheri, a Dominican and the secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, remarked that he had enjoyed the speech, that everyone could learn something from it, and that it should be published. But we also know that some pontificated, "He really said nothing at all! It was stuff for priests, not for us!" A few found it too drawn-out; its reading went beyond forty-five minutes.

When Don Bosco and Father Berto returned home toward midnight, they found a ticket for his private audience with the Pope at seven the following evening. It had been thoughtfully delayed so as to give him time to prepare his address. He had

[14] Letter to Father Bologna, April 20, 1876. [Author]

already made a list of things he wished to tell the Pope and of favors he intended to request. This time the list had but seven items, all worded so concisely as to be hardly intelligible. We will not report them, being content to glean some interesting details from Father Barberis' brief chronicle. On the evening of January 22, when talk turned to Don Bosco's audiences with the Pope, someone remarked that Pius IX always seemed to receive him readily. "I really do my best not to waste time," Don Bosco explained. "One has to know what he wants. Some people spin long yarns and keep repeating themselves until the Pope interrupts, 'In short, what do you want?' I always have a lot of things to ask, but I draw them up into a very concise list. Once I am ushered in, I express myself briefly. If I have a special matter to present, as is often the case, I add: 'Pope so-and-so granted this and that on such and such an occasion with such and such a bull.' He laughingly remarks, 'You are very brief in order not to tire me, but I am even briefer!' Sometimes he glances at my list and asks:

"'What number are you at now?'

"'Twelve.'

"'How many more?'

"'Six.'

"'Good! We are moving along!'

"'I believe that with eighteen important matters to discuss, each requiring time and reflection, someone else would have taken ten minutes just to present them. Well, I took care of the whole thing in ten or twelve minutes. Sometimes, when I am through talking, the Pope asks many questions, and then things naturally go somewhat more slowly. What most pleases the Holy Father is that I never raise objections or pressure him. If he sees fit to grant something, fine! If he sees otherwise, I do not insist. If he asks for simple clarifications, I give them to him. As for anything else, even when I feel that what I am asking for is right, I remain silent if it appears he is scarcely inclined to grant it."

Pius IX could not have received him more benevolently. On seeing him enter he said: "I heard that your speech and delivery were very much liked. I also enjoy reading your missionaries' letters in *Unità Cattolica.*"[15] During their conversation Pius IX

[15] Pius IX daily read the more important items in this paper or had them read to him. [Author]

asked him what he could do for the Salesian Congregation. Don Bosco certainly took advantage of such benevolence, since he needed it badly. We shall learn more about this audience from the talks he gave after his return to Turin. Meanwhile we cherish some details from letters which he wrote on Easter Sunday, the day after his audience.

Two of these letters are addressed to Father Rua; one, rather brief, is personal,[16] while the other, in more detail, is for public reading.

Rome, Easter Sunday, April 16, 1876

Dear Father Rua:

Good news for you and all the Oratory boys. I think you will be pleased to hear about my audience with the Holy Father yesterday at 7 P.M. It lasted an hour. With truly fatherly concern, he read the letters from Marquis Fassati, Father Barberis and his novices, Father Guanella and the Sons of Mary. Then he went on to read all the others, regardless of their length. In the last—Garrone's—he found many errors in grammar and spelling.

"This lad," he remarked jokingly, "had better study Italian a little more before his exams."

He asked whether we have many boys as good as Dominic Savio, and I replied affirmatively.

"Have you many novices?"

"Sixty-one clerical and thirty-five lay."

"This really shows Our Lord's wondrous goodness. How many Sons of Mary?"

"About a hundred in our various houses. Hopefully several will receive the clerical habit next October."

"Are there priestly vocations in your other houses?"

"Yes. At the Oratory they make their decision during the spiritual retreat. I hope to be with them then."

"Do you have applicants from the artisans?"

"We have had some in the past and have some now. Some fine men are already in Argentina, and others are asking to be sent there or to stay at the Oratory."

"In regard to your missionaries, I'd like you to know that I have enjoyed reading their letters and pray that God will grant them an abundant harvest. In these days this is a veritable blessing from God. But how can you meet their requests for ten more Salesians and thirty nuns?"

[16] Omitted in this edition. It contained instructions about things to be done. [Editor]

"Many sisters and Salesians have already volunteered for the vast, uncivilized lands of Patagonia."

"But missionaries are also urgently needed in Australia, India and China, where many mission stations are about to close for lack of personnel. One bishop in Japan has three million souls in his diocese and only six priests. Could you take over one or more missions in those lands?"

"If Your Holiness will bless our students and pray for us, we could hopefully accept some soon. Father Bologna, one of our priests, and several others, who already speak French and Spanish fairly well, are now studying English."

"Fine! I most heartily bless your boys and pray that Our Lord will enlighten them, so that those called to the priesthood may respond and acquire the virtues and knowledge they will need. Hence I grant them all a special plenary indulgence on whatever day they choose to receive confession and Communion."

Then the Pope spoke at length of the Sons of Mary and the novices, as I already told you in a separate letter. He also asked for detailed information on our schools in Nice, Sampierdarena and Ventimiglia, as well as the house we are about to open in Rome. It was a long conversation, which I will share with you upon my return to Turin.

Meanwhile, my dear boys, give me your love and prayers. On the Sunday after Easter I shall offer my Holy Mass for you and would ask you in turn to receive Holy Communion for my intention. You will do so, won't you? Good night, my dear sons. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with you and safeguard you from sin, the one and only evil. Amen.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

During his audience, Don Bosco handed Pius IX, with the above-mentioned petitions, some group letters from the novices, the Sons of Mary, the students and artisans. The last three carried only the signature of the actual writer, but the first bore the signature of each novice and of Father Barberis, who added the title "Director of the Novitiate." This had been Don Bosco's idea because, among other things, the Salesian Congregation had been faulted for not having a novitiate. Hence he wanted the Pope to see for himself the ninety-six names and surnames of the novices along with their novice master's signature. Don Bosco himself had orally outlined the letter and edited Father Barberis' draft. Writing to the

latter he described how he presented the novices' letter to the Holy Father.

[Rome, April 16, 1876]

Dear Father Barberis,

I am the bearer of good tidings, and you are the first to receive them. Yesterday evening at seven, I had an audience with the Holy Father which lasted about an hour. We spoke at length of our Congregation and our dear novices. The Pope read their letter and their signatures from start to finish and asked me about each one's special qualities and which ones excelled in virtue. I did my best to give satisfactory answers. He was quite pleased and remarked that their goodly number is a miracle of God's kindness. Then he said these very words: "They are new olive trees which need to be looked after. These young trees must allow the gardener to lop off roots and prune stray harmful shoots, pull out weeds and destroy bugs. You know what I mean and you will explain it to them in detail. These tender young trees must grow for their own sake and for their Master's by yielding abundant fruit. Sad is the tree that does not bear fruit. It is worthless! May God bless these tender trees and help them bear fruit for His greater glory." Finally, the Holy Father wrote at the bottom of your letter, "May God bless you," etc. . . . I am returning it so you may see that it bears his personal signature.

My special regards to Peloso, Schiapino, Tosello, etc. I'll say more in another letter.

God bless us all!

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I received your letter and approve what you said. I agree that the novices should go out for walks.

A brief digression to clarify the postscript which seems to be repeating itself. This is not so, however. "I approve what you said" answers a question Father Barberis had put to him a few days before Easter, during the spiritual retreat which he was conducting at Borgo San Martino, when he had come to know that practically nothing had been said to the boys about vocation in the entire course of the year. It was his belief that students should be informed on three matters:

1. that one should not decide a vocation by himself, but with the help of a confessor;

2. that upperclassmen should not wait to the end of the school year to reach a decision, but should consider the spiritual retreat as the most opportune time;

3. that the upperclassmen should also discuss their vocation in confession.

Father Barberis also believed that the boys in the upper elementary classes should be informed about vocation since they would soon have to choose between a classical or a technical course of studies. This was the question on which he asked for Don Bosco's opinion. He also urged that he bring it to everyone's attention through a circular. Don Bosco's full approval, concisely summed up with the words "I approve what you said," referred to this matter.

The last of his Easter letters with news of his papal audience was for Countess Corsi, the mother-in-law of Count Cesar Balbo.[17] At a somewhat later date, but dealing with an argument akin to the previous one, he also wrote to Count Eugene De Maistre and to Baroness Ricci.[18]

At the Oratory, letters from Don Bosco, Father Durando and Father Berto were publicly read aloud; confidential matters known only to very few, such as tense relations with distinguished persons, were omitted. These letters still bear checks or brackets marking parts to be omitted in public reading or copying. We can never describe how much these letters influenced and delighted the listeners. Many wrote to Don Bosco or to the Holy Father, while the novices sent thank-you notes to both. In a letter to Don Bosco, Father Barberis remarked: "We are overjoyed. We immediately assembled the novices and read aloud the Holy Father's message to them as contained in your letter. We also reread their own letter to the Pope so as to reaffirm even more strongly the promises they had made therein. In your next audience please thank the Holy Father for us."

Among the new letters sent to Pius IX was one from the members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality, bearing thirty-one signatures. With pleasure we single out the better known members: Alvin Carmagnola, Joseph Gamba, Secondo Marchisio, Joseph Isnardi, Louis Molinari, Francis Piccollo, Charles Peretto, and Bernard Vacchina. All of them (and others too) became

[17] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[18] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Salesians. This shows how fully Don Bosco achieved the goal he was aiming at through this sodality. Father Barberis dwells on this in his chronicle, dated April 23 [1876]:

> We aim especially at the upperclassmen and at those who will soon have to decide on their vocation. Don Bosco regards this sodality as the last step before joining our Congregation, without the members becoming aware of it. Steering the boys through various conferences and sodalities so as to win them over and lead them to a life of virtue—always most kindly, without their knowing it, as if they were doing their own will—is an Oratory secret.

To go on in an orderly manner, we will now group our material into four categories: troubles in Turin, contacts with government officials, requests for new foundations, and spiritual favors from the Holy Father.

Unfortunately, the Turin "troubles" dogged Don Bosco's steps even to Rome. On April 10, Father Berto wrote to Father Rua, "The archbishop of Turin has laden me with work. We build, and he tries to demolish." On the 15th, in a follow-up letter, Father Durando wrote, "The war against our Congregation still rages fiercely, but with God's help and the Pope's support, we shall win." On the 26th Father Berto wrote: "Here in Rome we may say that the hostility of Turin's archbishop is known to all the Sacred Congregations; in fact, the officials are kind enough to warn Don Bosco to be on guard and alert to ward off attacks."

Counted as the "work" presented by these "troubles" to Don Bosco's secretary was very probably having to prepare a formal rebuttal of the charge that Don Bosco had arbitrarily tampered with the authentic text of the rules[19] in several places and had even falsified them. Father Berto also had to gather material to rebut the archbishop's objections against the grant of privileges to the Salesian Society. About this matter we refer the reader to Chapter XXI of Volume XI. At any rate, the following excerpts from a letter[20] of Archbishop Gastaldi to his attorney, who also happened to be Don Bosco's advocate at the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, will suffice.

[19] Letter from Menghini to Don Bosco, February 7, 1876. [Author]
[20] Letter of April 2, 1876. [Author]

I have written to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for information about the privileges which Don Bosco is seeking for his Congregation but have received no reply. I have serious reasons to fear that in asking for them:

1. Don Bosco may have lodged complaints against me;
2. my episcopal jurisdiction may be jeopardized.

I would like to have a reply so as to know what steps to take because I wish to write to the Holy Father about it. Tomorrow Don Bosco is leaving for Rome for that purpose. . . .

In addition to what has already been said, a statement by Monsignor Andrew Scotton proves that Pius IX's support, alluded to by Father Durando, was not imaginary. In a private audience, the Pope spoke at length with him about the Salesian Congregation and the deplorable friction [with Archbishop Gastaldi]. Mentioning among other things the latter's efforts to revive Rosminian philosophy, the Pope remarked: "Yes, the Rosminians do a lot of good, but believe me, my friend, they are not as attached to the Holy See as Don Bosco and his priests."[21]

[On April 3, 1876] Archbishop Gastaldi decided to submit his resignation to the Pope, who replied that he did not recommend that step and advised him to think it over, seek advice and pray before making a decision. In the same letter the archbishop lamented that the Pope did not care for him. "I do not know what I have done to the archbishop of Turin," Pius IX told Monsignor Sbarretti. "I only wrote that he should go a little slower in inflicting suspensions." The selfsame secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars told Father Berto, "The Pope granted Don Bosco the faculty he requested for a limited time—only three years for Italy and five years for abroad—and he did not issue a rescript not just because of the Easter holidays but in order to prevent the archbishop from learning about it. So, use it just as I signed it." The faculty here alluded to was permission to hold ordinations outside appointed times. Even more cautiously, and for the same reason, Don Bosco was later granted the privilege of dispensing with dimissorials. We shall soon return to this topic.

It was at this time that Don Bosco came to know of a generous intervention by Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba to pacify Arch-

[21] Letter from Father Durando to Father Rua, May 2, 1876. [Author]

bishop Gastaldi. The bishop himself was forced to reveal it when he tried to explain why he could not accept Don Bosco's invitation to preach the novena in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. His letter deserves to be known.

Alba, April 28, 1876

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

Most confidentially I must tell you that it would be inopportune and unwise for me to call again on Archbishop Gastaldi to inform him that I will be preaching the novena and give the homily on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. I really wouldn't dare. Hardly a few weeks ago, doubtless overconfidently, I decided to write [to Archbishop Gastaldi] in defense of my dear Don Bosco in order to bring together two great men of God who are at loggerheads because of misunderstandings and lack of communication. The Lord humbled me. I only managed to further upset and bitterly disappoint the very person I wanted to pacify, thus aggravating a situation brought about by ideological differences. "It is good for me that You have humbled me, that I may learn Your justifications." [Ps. 118, 71] Keep this to yourself. Perhaps the bishop of Pavia would do wonderfully well for your novena and feast day. My respects in the Lord.

Yours devotedly,
✠ Eugene, *Bishop*

Under the same date we also have a letter of Attorney Menghini testifying most effectively in Don Bosco's favor. We must here note that Menghini was also representing Archbishop Gastaldi in Rome and hence, in conscience and honor, was bound to further the latter's interests. In a letter of April 28 to the archbishop of Turin concerned with entirely different matters,[22] he stated: "Don Bosco capitalizes on the firm claim that he never wrote anything offensive to his archbishop. It is indeed true that his letters to Rome have been extremely restrained. This has made an excellent impression on some cardinals." In truth, referring to someone who was urging him to take the offensive, Don Bosco once said to Father Francesia, "Don Bosco defends himself but does not offend."

We shall conclude this new series of troubles with another incident concerning ordinations. Father Rua sent the chancery a

[22]The original is with Father Franchelli of Turin. [Author]

list of clerics with the request that they be ordained during the Pentecost ember days. The list was found to lack some information. Father Rua diligently supplied it, but to no avail; the answer was still negative. We can easily imagine how hurt Don Bosco felt because of these refusals.

In April Don Bosco narrated two warning dreams to his secretary, who, as usual, wrote them down. What they hint at is fairly obvious and we feel that they belong here.

During the night of April 7, Father Berto heard Don Bosco cry out in his sleep: "Anthony! Anthony!" The next morning he asked him how he had slept and mentioned having heard him cry out. Don Bosco then told him the dream:

I seemed to be standing near the bottom of a stairway in a very narrow place. Suddenly a hyena barred my way. In that predicament I called to Anthony for help, though he had died many years before. Meanwhile the hyena moved toward me. Not knowing what else to do, I thrust my hand down its throat. I was terrified and no one was coming to my rescue. At last, a shepherd came down from the hills and said: "Help must come from above, but, to obtain it, one needs to descend very low. The lower one goes, the greater will the help be. That beast does not harm anyone who ignores it." Then I woke up.

He dreamed again another night and narrated it as follows:

I seemed to be in my native hamlet and saw the Pope arrive. I could not believe my eyes, and asked: "Holy Father, where is your coach?"

"Never mind! My coach is fidelity, fortitude and meekness."

He was completely exhausted and kept saying, "I am at the end."

"No, no, Holy Father," I replied. "You will not die until the problems of our Congregation have been solved."

Suddenly a carriage materialized out of nowhere. It had no horses. Then mysteriously, a dog, a goat and a sheep appeared and hitched themselves to it. At a certain point, however, they were unable to pull it any further. The Pope was weakening ever more. I regretted that I had not invited him into my house to eat some food and kept saying to myself, *I'll do so as soon as we reach the chaplain's house at Murialdo.* But meantime the coach was at a standstill. So I pulled up a plank which touched the ground at the back of the coach. The Pope saw me and exclaimed, "If the people of Rome ever saw you doing this kind of work, they would have a good laugh." As I kept tugging at it, I woke up.

During his stay in Rome, Don Bosco made little contact with government officials. He called only on [Louis] Melegari, the foreign minister, to ask for his support for present and future Salesian missions. He was warmly welcomed and given handsome promises, but nothing ever came of them. In a memorable meeting with Premier Augustine Depretis at Lanzo a few months later,[23] he took the occasion to bring up the subject again. The premier promised support and assured him that he would so instruct the Italian consuls. He also promised to discuss the matter with his foreign minister and make a personal contribution himself, but once more when Don Bosco formally requested help, all he got was praise and apologies and nothing else.

He also had Father Durando pay a courtesy visit to [Michael] Coppino, the minister of public education, who received him very graciously. Though many people were waiting, the minister kept Father Durando some twenty minutes. He had lofty praise for the Oratory and other Salesian schools, which were well known to him. He commended the dictionaries presented to him, glanced through them, read their Foreword and admired the deluxe edition of Father Durando's two-volume Latin dictionary.

"I was quite pleased with the minister's graciousness," Father Durando wrote, "but I doubt that it really came from the heart." Unfortunately, in those deplorable times of anticlerical sway one could always reasonably expect that promises would never be kept. Still, Don Bosco respected civil authority and demanded that it be respected. He believed that he had much to gain, even if he could only dispel prejudice against himself and his institutions. His conciliatory spirit often enabled him to settle arguments and eliminate obstacles which blocked the Church's beneficial influence in Italy. The age was not yet ready for a full settlement of differences. Rather, the suspicion that he was trying his hand at this issue was causing quite a stir in the two opposite camps, and many good Christians condescendingly smiled at his naiveté even to entertain such an idea.

During his stay in Rome he received several requests to open schools in the city, in its suburbs and in the foreign missions.[24]

For several years Don Bosco had felt the need to establish a

[23] *See* pp. 301ff. [Editor]

[24] We are omitting a passage about the offer to run a boarding school at Ceccano, near Rome. *See* Vol. XI, p. 157. [Editor]

residence in Rome; several attempts had already failed, and other failures were yet to come. One day, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, after talking to him about foreign missions, asked him point-blank, "Why concern yourself with far-off countries instead of providing for Rome?"

"Why doesn't Your Eminence try to find me a place here?" Don Bosco replied. "All I want is a shed for my boys."

"If that is all, I'll find you one," rejoined the cardinal. "I thought you were looking for a large sum of money, but since you need so little, I'll find it."

"Others told me that too, but nothing ever materialized."

"Well, do you doubt my word?"

"I do not doubt your good will, but you have so much to do that you will forget for lack of time."

"Let me take care of it, rest assured," concluded the cardinal.

Things turned out exactly as Don Bosco had predicted; nothing further was said about it. Princess Altieri revived the matter on her own when Don Bosco called on her one day.

"My purse and I will be at your service if you will open a house here in Rome."

"At the beginning or at the end of a month?" Don Bosco asked. "At the beginning your purse is full; at the end it will be empty because Your Highness gives so much to charity."

"All right! You can count on it at the beginning, the middle or the end!"

"In that case, I am satisfied!"

The princess' offer was not an idle one. She affirmed it in writing, reconfirming her good intentions. But Don Bosco, knowing the many charities she already generously supported, realized that he could not count on her for substantial lasting support and gave her an evasive answer. Prince Mario Chigi of Campagnano, too, was just as eager to get him a place in Rome, but all efforts were then and there unsuccessful.

Don Bosco never acted hastily; he moved very cautiously until Divine Providence gave him a very clear sign. Cardinal Franchi, prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, strongly pressured him to accept missions in the Far East. In China alone three apostolic vicariates were vacant and within a few years their number would rise to fifteen. As soon as Don Bosco had enough missionaries, he was to inform the cardinal. He did not

have to worry about finances; the Holy See would take care of that because the Pope was very keen about this project. Don Bosco voiced the hope that he would soon be able to send his sons to the Far East, but, anxious to consolidate and expand the missions he had already accepted, he gave a detailed explanation to the cardinal and to the Pope that his plans called for setting up an apostolic prefecture in Patagonia. This would call for substantial subsidies to help his missionaries penetrate deeper into Indian territory. It would be very helpful—he explained—if a network of homes, boarding schools and hostels were established along the Indian border to attract the native children, make some contact with their parents and chieftains, and train native leaders. The Holy Father took Don Bosco's plans so much to heart that he repeatedly urged Cardinal Franchi to study them and report to him. After long discussions with the cardinal, Don Bosco, realizing that little or nothing of that region was known in Rome, submitted to him a report filled with historical and geographical data. As regards the Far East missions, all he could do was to give a long-standing promise.

Don Bosco's deepest concern was the question of privileges, but he was so cautious and reticent on this matter that we know ever so little about his efforts to achieve his aims. Frustrated in his attempts to obtain the privileges en masse, he left no stone unturned in striving to acquire them piecemeal along with other spiritual favors. Thus he did obtain briefs of approval for the Sons of Mary Program and for the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators. On this score it would be helpful to read again Chapters III and IV of Volume XI. He also obtained for the Rector Major the faculty in perpetuity of allowing his subjects to read forbidden books. But above all, during his audience with Pius IX on May 3, he was dispensed from the obligation of asking for dimissorials for his ordinands from bishops. In a subsequent audience, on November 10, this privilege was extended to anyone wishing to become a Salesian. Most important also was the temporary privilege of having holy orders conferred outside the regular time, since it immeasurably helped him to present his clerics for holy orders without having to tire himself out in removing obstacles. The Pope granted him this on April 21, almost under the counter, so to speak. Don Bosco listed other favors in the following letter to Father Cagliero:

Rome, April 27, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

I am writing from Rome and have a number of things to tell you.

1. The Holy Father expressed great pleasure over our mission in Argentina and, both privately and publicly, praised the ecclesial spirit we have always shown. "I enjoy reading the letters they write from there," he told me. He sends his blessing to all of you and urges that you write to him in any necessity.

2. He has granted us many privileges and spiritual favors: among other things, parochial rights for all our houses and permission for our priests to hear confessions in all our houses, even when they are traveling, if they have any diocesan faculties.

3. I enclose a letter for Mr. Benitez and the blessing of the Holy Father who has bestowed on him the title of *Commendatore*. The brief is now being drafted and will be sent to you on May 15.

4. The letter to Father Ceccarelli acquaints him with all the gracious things the Holy Father has said about him. Just now he is bestowing on him the honorific title of "Private Chamberlain"; in due time it may become "Most Reverend Excellency."

Pretend not to know about these two things; do not give them any publicity, except very vaguely. After receiving the brief for Mr. Benitez and the certificate for Father Ceccarelli, make plans with Father Fagnano.[25] Bring everything in person. Invite the school committee and the friends of both concerned. Have Father Tomatis neatly write a dialogue to be recited by some boys. Two boys should carry the brief bestowing the title of Commendatore and the diploma, each on a salver; you and Father Fagnano will accompany the pupils, however, and personally present the certificates. These things must be given the importance they deserve.[26] I will write again when I send the above-mentioned certificates.

5. The Holy Father spoke at length about the archbishop of Buenos Aires; he sounded very pleased with him, and seems to have something in mind for him. I will write to him about it.

6. The Holy Father offered us three apostolic vicariates in the East Indies, one in China, and one in Australia. I accepted one in the East Indies, but requested at least eighteen months to prepare personnel.

[25] Joseph Fagnano came to the Oratory at the age of fifteen as a seminarian for the Asti diocese. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 433f) 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, pronounced 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]

[26] Everything was done with great solemnity on August 15, with religious services and civil ceremonies. [Author]

Cardinal Franchi assured me that he does not intend to burden us with the expense.

7. It is therefore necessary that you return to Europe. Meanwhile, determine how many Salesians and sisters you need. I'll do my best to send them soon, so that, once things have settled, you may return, open a house in Rome, and take a trip to the East Indies.

8. Regarding the house in Rome, we have indeed decided to open one. Perhaps you will be able to sleep under our own roof when you will arrive. We are making headway step by step.

9. Since our objective is to concentrate on Patagonia, I think you should call on the archbishop in my name (I, too, will write to him) and ask him on behalf of the Holy Father if he thinks it advisable to do so and what would be the best time and procedure. As far as we are concerned, our constant policy is to set up boarding schools and boys' homes along the Indian border. Always bear this in mind.

10. Mrs. Felicita Orselli is dead. Teresa[27] is now living with our nuns at Valdocco; they are doing well. Madame Monti too is dead. Since I was away, they got her to change her last will, according to a letter from Father Rua.

11. In October our sisters will take care of the housekeeping at the Biella seminary; three Salesians will also open a house at Trinità.

12. We have a number of projects in hand which seem like fairy tales or mad stunts in the eyes of the world. And yet, as soon as they are launched, God blesses them and they are a great success. This should spur us to pray, give thanks, hope and keep alert.

13. Let me know how you fare financially, and also whether the things you brought with you proved useful. Did you receive what was sent after your departure?

14. Cardinal Antonelli, Berardi, Sbarretti, Fratejacci, Menghini, Alexander and Matilda Sigismondi, Chevalier Bersani and many others send you their greetings and good wishes. Father Berto is still my faithful secretary; Father Durando and Father Pechenino are also here in Rome and will present copies of their dictionaries to the Holy Father tomorrow evening. They send their respects.

15. What I write to you is also intended for Father Fagnano; tell the others what concerns them.

Remember me to all our friends, to the boys' parents and benefactors. Tell them all of the Holy Father's blessing and of the other spiritual favors about which you will soon receive notice.

16. In the next conference you give to the confreres alone, tell them of

[27] An elderly spinster who with other women used to go to the Oratory to mend the linen. Later on, she went to live with several like-minded women who lodged with the nuns. [Author]

my love for them in Jesus Christ and of my daily prayers. I exhort them to love one another and to do their utmost to preserve peace and avoid all friction or offense.

17. We are always anxious to hear from you. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with us. Amen. Pray for me.

Your friend forever,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. God willing, I'll leave for Turin at the beginning of next month.

On May 3, Father Berto, Father Durando and Father Pechenino accompanied Don Bosco to the Pope's audience; the last two brought along handsomely bound copies of their dictionaries. Father Berto also presented two letters to the Holy Father on behalf of the members of the Blessed Sacrament and the Altar Boys' sodalities. After reading a few lines, the Pope put the letters on his desk, remarking, "It will be easier for me to read them tomorrow in daylight."

Apprised of the purpose of these sodalities, he exclaimed, "Excellent! That's the way to foster piety among youngsters!" He then gave his blessing to Don Bosco's three companions and, after a few more kind words, dismissed them, keeping Don Bosco with him for about an hour.

The third and last audience was on May 11, at one in the afternoon. In the waiting room, Monsignor Sanminiatelli told Don Bosco that the Pope had sent him to the meeting of the Arcadia Academy for a first-hand report on the proceedings. "Your address was excellent. The finale was superb and highly pleasing to the Pope," the monsignor remarked. Pius IX then came in, escorted by Cardinal Franchi and Cardinal Bartolini. Among the several important people present was the archbishop of Barcelona.

"Here is a flower from your garden," the Pope said to Don Bosco, pointing to his secretary.

"Holy Father," Don Bosco replied, "allow me to offer you the homage and congratulations of the Salesian Congregation. Graciously accept our good wishes for a long, healthy life."

"Thank you, and so be it for the success of our plans!" Then, after blessing the bystanders, he slowly moved on. Don Bosco followed him, conversing first with Cardinal Bartolini and then with Cardinal Franchi, who at the Pope's request gave Don Bosco

an appointment for the afternoon in order to examine his proposals for the foreign missions. During that audience Don Bosco presented the above-mentioned report [to Cardinal Franchi], and the latter promised to pass it on to the cardinals for their study so that a final report could be made to the Pope.

After this audience Don Bosco made preparations for his departure.[28] Before following him to Turin we shall narrate what happened at the Oratory during his absence. We see it as both useful and timely to preserve all we can about the early Oratory: useful, because it will always do us good to view ourselves in that environment which drew its life from Don Bosco and in turn supplied him with his first sons; timely, because, should we delay in recording such happenings, it will soon become a trying if not impossible task to retrace them and present them in their true light.

In a chronicle entry dated April 24 [1876] Father Barberis repeats a remark already made elsewhere: "At the Oratory everything is proceeding smoothly, Don Bosco's absence notwithstanding. Not that we are unaware of it. It is just that he has so well organized the Oratory that it can function without him—I mean for some time without his physical presence, but not without his personality, his mind." Let us now see the Oratory in action.

During his absence two religious solemnities were observed—Easter and the Patronage of St. Joseph. In between—and for the first time—the beginning of the month in honor of Mary, Help of Christians was set for April 23. The Oratory boarders fulfilled their Easter duties as in past years, the artisans receiving the sacraments on Holy Tuesday, the students on Wednesday, the clerics and priests on Holy Thursday. A triduum of sermons prepared them without interfering with their regular tasks. The day students did their Easter duties on Holy Saturday, the young apprentices on Easter Sunday, and the first communicants on Easter Monday. The younger boys who were not yet admitted to First Communion made their confession during Easter week. Besides Lenten catechetical instructions, the day boys had their own spiritual retreat with five sermons a day, three of them mandatory. The young apprentices attended them at five-thirty in the morning, at half past twelve in the afternoon and again at eight in the evening;

[28] We are omitting ten short letters of Don Bosco to Father Rua, Father Lemoyne and other Salesians and non-Salesians, giving news of his doings in Rome or dealing with matters concerning each of them personally. [Editor]

the students could attend any one of these three sermons besides two held exclusively for them at nine-thirty in the morning and again at four in the afternoon. Easter Sunday ended with the performance of a stage play, *Christopher Columbus* by Father [John Baptist] Lemoyne.

All this extra work did not free the Oratory priests from their usual duties. "Isn't Don Bosco putting too many irons in the fire?" Marchioness Fassati once asked Father Barberis. We find the latter's answer in Father Barberis' chronicle under the dateline of April 2:

> Yes, we have a lot of things to do and we work tirelessly, almost to exhaustion. And yet, as long as we keep working, Don Bosco sees that everything is going well. It creates an extraordinarily fine spirit among us all and we manage to be useful in many ways. Even the less talented, thrown into action as young clerics, become proficient in countless tasks. This would never happen unless we had such pressing work and such timely opportunities. Furthermore, Don Bosco knows that there is a great deal of work to be done in the Lord's vineyard. Others could do it, but do not. So, rather than leave us idle, he has us pitch in. Many people, even religious, give up some undertaking once they see that they cannot succeed fully. We think this is a mistake. We do not seek worldly praise nor do we worry about what people may say. If we cannot get through the entire alphabet but can manage only the first four letters, why should we neglect this little with the excuse that we cannot go as far as Z?

Don Bosco's policy was to do whatever could be done even if only in part. He never agreed with the dictum, "Either all or nothing!" For this reason he was deeply grieved to see Catholic judges and army officers resign during the anticlerical aberrations of the Third Republic in France. He felt that they should not have abandoned their posts, if for no other reason than at least to curtail evil by averting a total transfer of power to the anticlericals.

Let us now return to Father Barberis' chronicle which occasionally oversteps the bounds of a chronicle to portray real life. His reply to Marchioness Fassati continues as follows:

> Until now, Marchioness, we have worked rather unobtrusively and have quietly stored a vast amount of resources. Don Bosco has now a large and highly motivated family growing up about him. All of us are still young people brought up by Don Bosco, but, year by year, we grow

stronger, more experienced and more numerous. Day by day, Don Bosco trains enough personnel to make it possible to open many houses. . . . True, it takes time to form our clerics, but in their second year of philosophy they start to help us, and, as they become more skilled, learned, pious and prudent, a wider horizon opens up for them and they can fill higher positions. . . .

Nearly all the Oratory boys received Holy Communion on the first day of the month of Mary, Help of Christians, and their fervor grew daily. On such occasions, the spiritual climate that animated the Oratory begot a current which swept up even those who usually shied away from the main stream. Diehards of course there were, but, being very few and well known to their superiors, they were either encouraged and prodded to follow their schoolmates' good example or forced to leave.

The start of Mary's month also opened the summer schedule: rising at five rather than five-thirty, cleanup at one-thirty in the afternoon, study and choir practice at two, Marian devotions at seven-thirty, and no tutoring. Morning Mass was followed by a walk until breakfast time.

Then too there were preparations being made for the solemn feast of Mary, Help of Christians, with more frequent choir rehearsals. It was feared that after Father Cagliero's departure [for Argentina] the choir might stop or begin to decline, but Dogliani took over masterfully. The brass band, too, was once more alive after having been dissolved the previous year by Don Bosco, because of some unruly elements, and reorganized. The new members, thirty strong, were already performing satisfactorily. Incidentally, the disbanding had been done quietly through a gradual elimination of undisciplined members. This allowed a small orchestra of twelve violinists, drawn from the best-behaved older artisans, to be formed. Thus, choir and band rehearsals kept youngsters busy during most of the recreation period, a pleasant diversion at that time of year. Truly, there was no danger that the leaden sky which [Father] Faber[29] styled "the monotony of piety" would weigh over the Oratory.

To prepare the artisans properly for Mary's month, their catechist[30] planned an unusual assembly which he named "Cate-

[29] Frederick William Faber (1814–1863), an Anglican clergyman, became a Roman Catholic in 1845 and three years later joined the Oratory of St. Philip Neri. He is best known for his hymns. [Editor]

[30] The priest in charge of religious activities. [Editor]

chetical Assembly" in the church basement. Father Rua, Father Chiala [the catechist], and other superiors sat on a platform facing the audience. They were flanked on one side by the brass band, craftsmasters, clerics and coadjutor brothers, and on the other by the rest of the boys who also filled the rear. This arrangement left open a rectangular area in the center. At a small table sat Peter Barale, a coadjutor brother, with a box containing catechism questions on cards. Five or six contestants at a time would step into the center and each would have to answer whatever question was picked. After fifteen minutes another group would come up. The questions were picked at random by Barale, and the superiors would individually judge the answers and jot down a mark for each lad. When the contest was over, a musical interlude and poetry declamation allowed the judges to tabulate the results. The assembly closed with the awarding of prizes.

To add one detail: the last boy interrogated asked Barale to tell them a story, as was customary after any catechetical instruction. Barale agreed and briefly gave the highlights of the life of [Venerable] Caesar de Bus[31] with obvious allusions to Father Caesar Chiala. There followed an outburst of applause for the director of the artisans, and, since his health was precarious, poems and speeches in his honor stressed that prayers were being offered to God for his recovery. At the close of the assembly he was presented with a bouquet of artificial flowers whose every petal bore the name of each boy who had received Communion for his recovery. The artisans warmly admired him. In the following days many applied for admission to the Salesian Congregation. Advantage was taken of this happy moment to give them special talks. Aware of his need for good coadjutor brothers, Don Bosco experienced great comfort.

The concern which the Oratory boys felt for any ailing superior was touching, as was the concern of the students too. Father [Peter] Guidazio was quite ill, but, energetic and hard-working, he continued to teach the last grade of secondary school. His grieving pupils vied with each other in offering Communions for him. Every day, during the afternoon snack, all forty of them would gather in

[31] Father Caesar de Bus was born in Cavaillon, France, on February 3, 1544 and died in Avignon on April 15, 1607. Ordained a priest in 1582, he gave himself to preaching and the education of youth. To this end, in 1592 he founded the Doctrinarians and in 1596 the Daughters of Christian Doctrine. Both congregations flourished, especially in France. Pius VII conferred the title "Venerable" on Father de Bus in 1821. [Editor]

the Church of Mary, Help of Christians to recite the chaplet in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for him. Things of this sort occurred every year not only for superiors but also for schoolmates or other needs.

[During Don Bosco's stay in Rome, a boy, a cleric and a young priest had died.][32] While recording these deaths, the chronicle describes the Oratory's funeral services.

> Some two or three years ago we were given permission to conduct our own funeral services. The coffin is put in a suitable room and, at the appointed time, the boys form a double line and, led by the crossbearer who is flanked by two clerics, walk in procession through the spacious Oratory grounds chanting the *Miserere*. It is a moving sight: some eight hundred boys and clerics accompanying their deceased schoolmate with whom, shortly before, they had shared games, classes, meals and almost everything.
>
> The procession ends in the church for the customary funeral rites. The boys then return to their classrooms or workshops, and the body is taken to the cemetery.

In 1877, Father Joseph Vespignani,[33] then a novice, witnessed the above scene and was so deeply impressed that fifty years later he wrote: "The sight of boys and clerics chanting psalms and of the St. Aloysius and Blessed Sacrament sodalities escorting a deceased brother inspired a sense of tender and moving piety. It was a demonstration of genuine Christian and Salesian education."[34]

In mid-May the Oratory celebrated the Patronage of St. Joseph, a feast usually observed with great solemnity especially by the artisans. "We were hoping to have our dear Father with us," the chronicle records, but, since Don Bosco was away, the exterior solemnities were postponed to another Sunday. Still, solemnity was not lacking in the church services. The day was also highlighted by the visit of the presidents general of the St. Vincent de

[32] These deaths were mentioned in two of the letters that were omitted in this edition. *See* footnote 28. [Editor]

[33] Father Vespignani (1854–1932) came to the Oratory in 1876, three months after his priestly ordination, in order to make Don Bosco's acquaintance. He remained there a year, became a Salesian, and in 1877 was sent by Don Bosco to Argentina as novice master. In 1894 he was appointed director and later provincial. In 1922 he was recalled to Turin to sit on the Superior Chapter (now named Superior Council) and remained in office until his saintly death on January 15, 1932. In 1948 his remains were brought to Buenos Aires and entombed in San Carlos Church. As novice master, confessor, writer and founder of nineteen Salesian houses he earned the admiration of all. [Editor]

[34] Giuseppe Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del beato Don Bosco* (1876–1877), p. 60, San Benigno Canavese, Scuola Tipografica Salesiana, 1930. [Author]

Paul chapters in Italy. As Father Lemoyne has already recorded,[35] there flourished at the Oratory a chapter formally affiliated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Paris. Its main purpose was to teach and aid poor boys attending catechism classes. Since its members were resident students, they could not visit the boys in their homes to bring them food or clothing as the statutes required, but they carried out this duty at the Oratory mainly by donating clothes as prizes for regular attendance.

On Sunday, May 7, these gentlemen, who were on an inspection and promotion tour, announced their visit to the Oratory chapter. The group consisted of Father Alfieri, Superior General of the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God and president of the superior council in the former Papal States; Chevalier Rocco Bianchi, president of the superior council of Genoa, known as the "Grandfather" because he had been the first to introduce the St. Vincent de Paul chapters into Italy in 1852; Marquis Bevilacqua, president of the superior council of Bologna; Count Lurani, president of the superior council of Milan; and the presidents of the superior councils of Venice, Florence and Naples. They were led by Mr. Falconnet, president of the superior council of Turin, and by Count Cays, past president of the same council, known as "Papa" because he had been a promoter and special councilor of the St. Vincent de Paul chapters in Piedmont.

The Oratory chapter conducted its meeting at two in the afternoon before these people, who expressed their satisfaction, recommending only that the general statutes be respected within the limits of the Oratory regulations. They were especially pleased to learn that past members of the chapter, who had left the Oratory, had founded chapters elsewhere, and that in San Nicolás de los Arroyos, Father Valentine Cassinis was striving to revive the local chapter. After the meeting, the guests observed the boarders and the day boys who were attending sacred services in their respective churches—Mary, Help of Christians and St. Francis de Sales—and also toured the study hall, workshops and other parts of the house.

Preparations were in full swing for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. A daily report of favors received fostered greater piety. Musicians and choirboys were busily rehearsing while a choir loft was being erected in the church. Buildings were given a face-lifting

[35] *See* Vol. V, pp. 306–311. [Editor]

and recreation periods were very lively. This hustle and bustle, however, did not interfere with studies, the chronicle assures us. The teachers had so motivated their pupils that often enough they had to dampen their enthusiasm. The artisans too were preparing a program in honor of St. Joseph to be given after Don Bosco's return. One evening, a few days before his arrival, a fire broke out in a small factory located some ten feet from the Oratory line. Fanned by the wind, the flames threatened to envelop the Oratory dormitories, but wetting the roofs with two hundred soaked blankets until the firemen arrived averted the peril.[36]

Three days later, Saturday, May 13, Don Bosco took leave of the Sigismondis who had hosted him most cordially during his stay in Rome, and he set out for Turin with stopovers at Migliarino near Pisa to visit Duke Salviatti, and at Genoa and Sampierdarena. From there he left for Turin on May 17.[37]

Father Durando arrived at Turin four days ahead of him. The boys, who were anxiously awaiting Don Bosco, upon spotting Father Durando as they were leaving the church and going to the dining room, thought that Don Bosco had come back with him and burst into shouts of joy. The word spread like wildfire. Breaking ranks, the boys rushed pell-mell to the Oratory gate; in turn, those who were already in the dining room, which was then in the basement, raced upstairs after their schoolmates. The higher their hopes, the deeper their disappointment. But on May 17, at one in the afternoon, it was really Don Bosco returning to his kingdom after a month and twelve days' absence. As he came through the main entrance, a trumpet blast hailed his arrival. The boys, standing in two lines, were supposed to stay still, but who was to hold them back? Beside themselves with joy, they surged toward him en masse. Surrounded by hundreds of youngsters eager to greet him, he managed a smile and a word for each one, taking a good half hour to cross the playground. Meanwhile the musicians stepped up to the porticoes. Don Bosco approached them and, after an affectionate greeting, went to the dining room. There he was besieged by his Salesians, who bombarded him with questions about the Pope, Rome, foreign missions, privileges, indulgences, etc. Calm and unruffled as ever, he talked for over an hour. Then in utter exhaustion he went to his room where,

[36] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[37] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

regardless of a severe headache, he sat at his desk to go through a stack of mail. He kept at it until half past five when, totally worn out, he went to the library and talked with Father Barberis about Patagonia. The latter was soon surprised to realize that Don Bosco knew Patagonia as thoroughly as if he had studied it for years. In fact, he corrected Father Barberis on several points, though the latter had for some time intensely concentrated on that subject. "I am over sixty," Don Bosco remarked, "and until now I hardly knew that Patagonia existed. I would never have believed that sometime I would have to study it in depth." Spreading out two maps of Patagonia and South America, he started to study them but, utterly fatigued, he became dizzy. After pacing up and down a little more, he returned to sit at his desk.

Notwithstanding the lengthiness of this chapter, it would be regrettable to leave out three documents—a "Good Night," a circular and a conference.

On the evening of his arrival, he spoke to the boys after night prayers. First he suggested a nosegay for the novena in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. Then, as they listened with the greatest attention, he told them about his trip to Rome.

[The nosegay for tomorrow is:] "I'll try to find out what has led me into sin and I will avoid it." This means that I will avoid whatever induced me to sin in the past. Spend some time in figuring out what made you lose God's grace and deserve hell in your past life, and then resolve to be on guard and avoid that occasion, whatever it is: a book, a friend, an act of intemperance.

Let me now say a word about my trip. I went to Rome to see the Pope and I stayed there a long time, waiting for you to come down and visit me. Father Durando came, and that was nice of him; but you didn't! Well, enough of that. Let's go on to what I did in Rome. I mentioned several things in my letters and I think you were told about them. The Holy Father granted me two private audiences. The first lasted about an hour, and the second was for three quarters of an hour. Thus I was able to talk with him at length about the Oratory, the Sons of Mary, and you boys, because the Holy Father always asks me about you.

"Are they good?" he inquired.

"Yes, Holy Father!"

"Are there many who are really very virtuous?"

"Your Holiness, they are all very good, but at times some need to be called to order." I just whispered this last remark, so he would not hear it.

"How is their health?" he continued.

"Excellent!"

Then we talked about the missions. He was quite pleased by what I told him and suggested that we push further afield than San Nicolás into the pampas among the Indians whose territory is almost as vast as Europe and still unenlightened by the Gospel. He also offered me a vicariate in India, where there are vast harvests to reap, and other missions as well. "Holy Father," I broke in, "this calls for thousands of missionaries! My boys are good, docile, alert and ready for anything, but they are young and we must wait until they grow up, sport beards and moustaches, and gain knowledge and experience. All are ready to face any danger for the salvation of souls, but we have to wait."

"Then make them grow up quickly," the Holy Father replied.

"The trouble is that the good Lord visits us frequently and calls some to Himself," I rejoined. "This year several have already gone to heaven and others will follow before the end of December."

"Do the dying console you? Do they give you sound hopes for their eternal salvation? Were any of them unwilling to receive the Last Sacraments?"

"Holy Father, boys who regularly and often receive the sacraments are the first to ask for them when they fall sick, and much more so when death draws nigh. When they don't realize it, their superiors kindly call it to their attention. When a sick lad hears his superior's suggestion, he immediately and willingly prepares to receive the sacraments."

He then went on asking many more questions about you and listened attentively as though there were nothing else in the world except the Oratory. "Your boys will be able to do much good in these tragic times," he added. "In the meantime let them pray for the needs of our harassed Church. Tell them to pray that the Lord will give me strength and perseverance to withstand any danger I may have to face as head of Christ's family."

The second time I called on him he again spoke about the missions and our boys and schools. He granted all of you numerous indulgences, which we are to treasure as spiritual favors generously given us by our Holy Father. I shall have a list printed and give you a copy so that you may remember these favors for the rest of your life.

Now putting Rome aside, let me tell you that I am very glad to be back among my children. I missed you and kept counting the days, hours and minutes. I am finally here! What else shall I tell you? There is no need to talk about the pampas and India. Without going so far, let us talk about something closer to us, such as the spiritual retreats which will be held after the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, for the artisans, the students, and anyone else who wishes to attend. I exhort you to make your retreat

carefully, especially the upperclassmen who are about to choose their life's calling. They must give this matter their utmost attention, since this is their main reason for making this retreat. They should pray much to learn the state of life to which God wills to call them. I shall return to this topic and advise you both publicly and privately.

One more thing I'd like to say. Let's have some movement in the dining room. It's quite proper to run about in the playground, but it is just as proper for each of you to enjoy a treat in the dining room. I don't mean to say that you are to go overboard, but there should be something special by way of food and drink, such as the proverb, or rather Holy Scripture, says: "Serve the Lord with gladness." [Ps. 99, 2] We shall rely on Father Lazzero to choose a day for this treat. We shall rejoice the body in what it justly desires, on condition that it readily obey the soul and do what is good for its well-being.

We have begun the novena in honor of Mary, Help of Christians, and I urge you to make it fervently because She has prepared a special gift for each of you. It is yours for the asking.

I have a lot more to tell you about Rome, the Pope and the missions, but I'll do that in other "Good Nights." I know you will like them. Good night.

On May 24 he sent a circular to generous benefactors of our school in Nice. He told them of the spiritual favors and apostolic blessing he had obtained for them from the Holy See as a token of his gratitude.[38]

On the evening of June 4, the feast of Pentecost, at ten o'clock he gave a conference to one hundred and seventy Salesians, novices and postulants in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. The timing was poor, but circumstances so demanded. He had already expressed his intention to schedule conferences at six-thirty in the evening while the boys were in the study hall and needed but one cleric or priest to supervise them. On this day, however, the boys were being supervised by confreres in seven classrooms since the study hall was being used as an auditorium for a Latin comedy entitled *Phasmatonices* or *Larvarum Victor* [The Ghosts' Conqueror]. Thus the conference had to be held at night.

Don Bosco was evidently exhausted, hardly able to speak. His voice was so feeble that his listeners feared it might give way at any moment. His countenance, even more than his whole person, plainly showed utter fatigue.

[38] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

My dear sons—he began—it is good for us to get together from time to time. I love to open my heart to you and give you an opportunity of hearing the voice of a loving friend and father.

Several times, especially before going to Rome and immediately after my return, I wanted to talk to you. Doubtless, it would do us good to get together more often, but either for lack of time or—let me say it—lack of strength on my part, it can't be done. And so, let's just do what we can.

This evening I feel I must disclose to you the real purpose of my trip to Rome and its results. First, let me tell you that we are very well liked in Rome, and that I received a warm welcome. My purpose was to obtain privileges from the Holy See which our Congregation simply must have in order to work effectively for the good of souls. I was given far more than I expected. In fact, I obtained everything I asked for and frankly am astonished. Our Lord not only showers His blessings upon us but nearly smothers us with their abundance.

Let me just mention the more important items:

1. Our directors have faculties not only to keep and read forbidden books, but also permission to allow their subordinates to do the same.
2. Our director may now bless medals, rosaries, and crucifixes to which indulgences are attached.
3. All our priests may impart the papal blessing at the point of death with a plenary indulgence.
4. For a year now we have also enjoyed the faculty of having our own privileged altar.[39]
5. From now on, any of our priests who have diocesan faculties may say Mass, hear confessions and perform all priestly functions in any of our houses without further authorization.
6. The Pope also granted us the privilege of presenting qualified candidates for ordination outside the appointed time without recourse to the Holy See.
7. We have the rights of a parish for all our houses, that is, permission to preach, administer the sacraments, bring Holy Viaticum to the sick, and perform funeral services and all priestly duties for our residents. Briefly, we have been given all the privileges enjoyed by other congregations. The same applies to indulgences.

We also managed to get approval of our Sons of Mary Program and of the Association of Salesian Cooperators whose by-laws are now being printed and will soon be made public. The Holy Father is very favorably disposed toward these undertakings of ours, he loves us dearly, and he seems to take incredible interest in us. I could tell you a great deal more about this. But let this suffice: as soon as I was shown in, the Pope joyfully

[39] This means that attached to it is the privilege of gaining a plenary indulgence in behalf of the person or persons for whom Mass is offered. [Editor]

told me, "I want you to know that I am aware of what your sons are doing. The letters of your missionaries in South America, published in *Unità Cattolica*, are always read to me. I see that your sons do a great deal of good and that delights me."

Then, when I asked him to appoint a cardinal protector for our Congregation to expedite communication with the Holy See—as other congregations have—he smilingly answered, "How many protectors do you want? Aren't you satisfied with one?" meaning: *I want to be your cardinal protector. Isn't that enough?* Before such graciousness, I thanked him with all my heart and said, "Holy Father, I need no other protector."

Next, after a lengthy exchange of views concerning the foreign missions, he offered us twelve apostolic vicariates in India which are about to fold up for lack of personnel. Each of them needs a bishop and priests.

While he was talking, I kept thinking: *Holy Father, my priests are all very young; more experienced men are needed for such a task. However, I wish you to know that if they do not yet measure up in other fields, they are tops at meals.*

Since the Pope kept insisting that I accept one such vicariate, I seriously considered it for a while and then said: "If such is your will, Holy Father, I accept it, but only after twenty months from the day I will receive all pertinent documents."

The Pope agreed and entrusted the matter to Cardinal Franchi, prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, who in turn summoned other cardinals for consultation and ordered that such documents be sent to me as quickly as possible.

Those of you who wish to go to India have twenty months to get ready, but remember that this means twenty months from the delivery of the pertinent documents which won't arrive until September. Thus we have two years to prepare ourselves. The other vicariates will be ready for us as soon as we have the personnel.

Now, turning to our Congregation, I must say that a genuine religious spirit is growing, that our membership is increasing, and that as our zest for work increases, so does the harvest. As soon as one of us is just about able to do something, Divine Providence instantly puts his talents and knowledge to good use. On the contrary, how many there are who after completing their seminary studies don't know what to do or where to turn! How many others undertake some task and are unable to see it through! How many, despite their will to work for God's glory, are diverted from their goal by various considerations! Malicious gossip and calumny render their work fruitless, and at times force them to abandon it or even flee from their field of apostolate. The same can be said of many religious orders. Still, we keep growing and are in demand everywhere.

It's amazing. No obstacles or difficulties block our path. The Lord really wishes to embarrass us with His bounty. I repeat—it's truly amazing.

It is God who wants us to be thus blessed. He Himself seeks to encourage us and point out the way, while we, in turn, must show Him our gratitude by measuring up to all the favors He was kind enough to shower upon us.

While speaking to the Pope about Patagonia, I told him that we could plan a chain of schools for native boys along our side of the border, almost separating it from the rest of the continent. When these boys would become priests, we could send them back to convert their parents, brothers and friends. I also gave him additional information on our own mission field. I told him that several boys have already been admitted to our school at San Nicolás and that some give evidence of a priestly vocation. I also told him that a school is under construction in the last outpost city, near the Patagonian border, right in the midst of savages.[40]

The Holy Father was most delighted to hear this news and, lifting his hands to heaven, exclaimed: "Glory to God! Patagonians will convert their own country, thus eliminating the need of sending missionaries into countries whose language, culture and customs are utterly alien to them. I believe that, once native priests are at hand, the conversion of Patagonia will be assured."

I am only telling you a few things and very briefly too. Were I to limit myself even to the more important items, each of them would require hours and hours of talking, and I cannot do that now.

But before leaving you tonight, let me mention two more things. We are championed by the Holy Father, well liked by everybody, and showered with all kinds of graces, favors and privileges. We may glory in this, but let us bear in mind that Our Lord will make use of us only insofar as we measure up to His expectations and are worthy of His favors. I cannot help but urge you with all my might to be true Salesians. We must bear the fruit of every virtue and adorn our hearts with them. Hence the chief good we must strive for with one mind and heart is to be totally and always united in the bond of perfect obedience. Yes, dear sons, be obedient not only to superiors in whatever they ask of us day by day, but also to our rules. Obey readily, willingly, and cheerfully. Do nothing that may conflict with obedience. May there never be among us anyone who, as St. Paul says, obeys in such a way as to cause his superiors grief. It is my wish that all Salesians be obedient for Our Lord's sake.

One more thing, for which I want your undivided attention. What must

[40] The word "savage" here and elsewhere is to be interpreted with a grain of salt. Not all the natives or even the majority of them lived in a savage state or were non-Christian. This explains how Patagonian boys with a seemingly priestly vocation had been found so quickly. [Author]

distinguish us from all others and be the hallmark of our Congregation is the virtue of chastity. Let us all strive to possess this virtue fully and instill it into the hearts of others. I believe I can apply to this virtue what Holy Scripture says, "In her company all good things came to me." [Wis. 7, 11] Where there is chastity, there too are all the other virtues, because chastity attracts them all. Without chastity all other virtues are non-existent. Chastity must be the pivot upon which all our actions revolve. Let us engrave this deeply into our minds, let us do our utmost to give our boys good example, and may it never happen that a boy is scandalized by any member of our Congregation. May it never come to pass that a Salesian loses the virtue of modesty or that he becomes a stumbling block to others in speech, writings, books or actions. Nowadays sterling modesty and chastity are a must. If you love this virtue, which is so delicate and tender, you will be like angels of God. They love, adore and serve Him. By cherishing this virtue, you will acquire the holy fear of God and peace of heart. You will have no further anguish or pangs of conscience, but only a fervor in things which pertain to God's worship and a readiness to suffer anything for His sake. Possessing this virtue, we can be sure we are walking along the right path; even our most insignificant actions will be pleasing to God. We shall thus earn countless merits and be certain of one day attaining our immortal reward—the full possession of God in our heavenly home.

Let us therefore make every effort to shun any thought which may dim this virtue ever so slightly, any glance or touch of ourselves or others, for, as I again repeat, all other virtues which we may acquire are dependent on chastity. What will help us most to safeguard it jealously is obedience in all things. These two virtues go hand in hand; one who is perfectly obedient can also be sure of possessing the inestimable treasure of purity.

Let us earnestly implore the Lord for it because if He grants us chastity, we shall not need anything else. Simply by keeping chaste we shall obtain every good joy from heaven. Our chastity will be the triumph of our Congregation, the best thanks we can give to God for the many favors He has granted us.

Let us now take a final glance at Father Berto's diary. From it we gather that during his stay in Rome, Don Bosco had *three* audiences with the Pope, paid *ten* visits to cardinals, *nineteen* to other prelates, *thirteen* to religious or religious communities, and *twelve* to lay people in different positions. He also twice looked over a place he planned to purchase but did not, and visited only *two* churches: St. Benedict's and the newly restored St. Andrew *alle Fratte*; finally, he accepted *seven* dinner invitations. Father Berto's skimpy diary gives no clues about his discussions with the

cardinals and other prelates on his visits, which occasionally lasted two or three hours. However, Don Bosco was usually quite reticent about such things. Once he remarked that what he did in Rome would never be fully known. Another time, after his last trip to Paris, he stated that he had had to resolve matters of such importance that any one of them would have justified a journey to the French capital. In his letters or talks he only revealed what was conducive to good and beneficial effects.

What he said and the fatherly manner in which he spoke on June 4 had a magical effect on all his hearers and filled them with enthusiasm.

Distinguished visitors called on Don Bosco as soon as they learned that he had returned. Some were not mere courtesy visits; this we can surmise since they were witnessed by confreres. On the 18th, Monsignor Durio, a canon from Novara, a man of letters with a reputation for liberal views, showed up toward the end of dinner. As was usual with any visitor arriving at that hour, he was taken to the dining room and later spent some time pacing the porticoes with Don Bosco. Shortly afterward, the bishop of Susa arrived and remained closeted with Don Bosco for three hours. They must have discussed important matters because Don Bosco was generally very quick to dispatch business, whether decisions were to be made or advice given. On this occasion, despite his promise to visit someone in town and attend to other affairs, he had to omit both that evening.

On the 19th, right after dinner, Professor Bacchialoni of the Royal University, a close friend of Don Bosco, called on him. During Don Bosco's absence, Mrs. Eurosia Monti, a generous-hearted woman, had died, leaving a substantial share of her wealth to the Oratory and appointing Bacchialoni as executor of her will. One would have expected Don Bosco to be anxious to listen to him. Instead, over coffee and with others present, he began talking about Patagonia and how pleased the Pope was with our mission. He dwelt at length upon its geography, location, natural resources, the history of its discovery, attempts at evangelization, its natives, culture and customs, and his own plans. He went on for almost an hour, with great wealth of detail as though he had done nothing in his life but indulge in Patagonian studies. We may assume that Professor Bacchialoni expected him to be concerned about the will, especially because of some last-minute surprises about which

Don Bosco had been told. If we are correct in this assumption, then the professor had ample opportunity, had he not been already convinced of it, to observe how detached Don Bosco was from the material goods of this world.

The chronicler pays no heed to this, but compensates with this remark: "It is a wonder how Don Bosco, once he is bent on doing something, goes at it as if he had nothing else to do, whereas he really is quite busy. He concentrates on just one thing at a time, goes deeply into it, explores all facets, seeks professional advice and abides by it. Even while relaxing he talks of nothing else—in part to make his views clear to others and make the conversation lively and instructive. . . . Yet, once he is back at his desk, he completely drops the matter he was dwelling on and tranquilly goes on to other business."

When the after-dinner conversation was over, Don Bosco was left alone with the professor who was allowed finally to discuss the matter he had come for. The chronicler again remarks: "Don Bosco keeps all things under his control. None of his priests, except Father Rua to a certain degree, ever has a hand in any business."

At six that evening he left the Oratory for the first time since his return to call on Countess Callori, who was convalescing, but he did not go alone. As he usually did when he wanted to talk at leisure with confreres, he took with him Pelazza, the coadjutor brother in charge of the printshop, and Barale, the bookstore manager. As they walked along, he discussed publishing matters with them. Little by little he thus re-established those indispensable individual contacts of his at the Oratory as confessor, father and friend, which had been interrupted by his absence.

CHAPTER 7

Novena and Feast of Mary, Help of Christians

THE novena in honor of Mary, Help of Christians was preached in 1876 by Father Fogliano, a very devout priest of Biella who was greatly admired by Don Bosco. Wondering why Don Bosco thought so highly of him, we inquired of the late Father Caracciolo, superior of the Oratorians[1] in Turin. All we did was mention Father Fogliano and he immediately exclaimed: "How I remember him! As a boy I loved to hear his sermons because he could say things so clearly and explain them with stories. He was a great story-teller and, like Don Bosco, spoke very calmly. This was precisely Don Bosco's kind of preaching style."

One day, remarking about Father Fogliano's sermons, Don Bosco expressed his pleasure that they always included favors obtained by people through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. He added that, while in Rome, he had one day stopped in a church just as a priest was concluding a homily with the account of a favor received from Our Lady, which Don Bosco had published in his pamphlet *Favors Obtained Through Mary, Help of Christians*. The priest mentioned Don Bosco by name. "Here in Turin," Father Barberis remarked, "we hardly mention events which we could call unique to us, but I think they should be widely publicized. We have a treasure and we keep it in hiding."

Unfortunately this was not so. That pamphlet stirred up the storm already described in Volume XI.[2]

One day a renowned doctor who had no faith called on Don Bosco. "I hear that you cure all kinds of ills," he said.

"No," Don Bosco replied.

"People have even given me the names of your patients and their ailments."

"They misled you. True, people do come to me for spiritual and

[1] A congregation founded by St. Philip Neri. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 420-426. [Editor]

temporal favors for themselves or friends through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. They make triduums and novenas, promising to do something if the favor is obtained, but in these cases the favor is obtained not through me, but through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians."

"Well, cure me too, and I shall believe in these miracles."

"What's your illness?"

"Epilepsy."

For a year, the doctor said, the seizures had become so frequent that he dared not go out alone. No medication worked. Feeling his strength ebbing away, he had finally come to Don Bosco in the hope of a cure.

"Do as all the others have done," Don Bosco said. "Kneel down, pray with me, prepare yourself to cleanse your soul with confession and Communion, and you will see that the Madonna will grant your prayer."

"Ask me anything else. I cannot do that."

"Why not?"

"Because I would be a hypocrite. I don't believe in God, in Our Lady, in prayers or miracles."

Don Bosco was startled. Yet with God's help he managed to persuade the faithless doctor to kneel and make the Sign of the Cross. "I am surprised that I can still make it after forty years," he exclaimed, rising to his feet. He also promised to prepare himself for confession.

He kept his word, too. Immediately after his confession he felt that he was cured. In fact, even though, according to his friends, the attacks had been so frequent and so violent that all feared serious consequences, he never again suffered epileptic seizures. Some time later, he returned to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, received Holy Communion, and made no secret of his joy at having been converted from skepticism to belief.

The evening before the triduum, after an extremely long session of hearing confessions, Don Bosco took a very late supper which, the chronicle says, was mostly "a bowl of soup and half a glass of wine." Later he chatted with confreres about the coming feast and about Patagonia.

The first day of the triduum, a Sunday, was marked by a double celebration, the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, which had been postponed, and Don Bosco's return from Rome. A special

dinner, served in the library, was attended by the Oratory craftsmasters and distinguished guests, among whom were Professors [Mark] Pechenino, [Anthony] Terreno, [Joseph] Allievo, [Vincent] Lanfranchi and [Charles] Bacchialoni. "These family dinners are very helpful," the chronicle notes. They were held fairly frequently because they helped to draw prominent priests and laymen to the Oratory. The latter received a special invitation when it came to choosing writers for the series *Italian Classics for the Young*.[3] The dinners, neither lavish nor scrimpy, were a delight.

That same evening Don Bosco attended the artisans' assembly honoring St. Joseph, which also had been postponed till his return. He was so pleased that in his closing remarks he paid them a rare compliment: "It would be nice if these assemblies could be held every day. I'd like to attend them all. I can't tell you how happy I am. Prepare more and invite me!" He then told Father Lazzero to save the better numbers for future use.[4]

The Church situation in Italy kept worsening. The faithful intensified their pleas to the Blessed Virgin for Her powerful assistance. In 1876 [Constantine] Cardinal Patrizi, the Pope's vicar, in a special letter, urged the faithful to make a fervent triduum in preparation for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, in the Church of *Santa Maria sopra Minerva*.[5]

The annual feast of Mary, Help of Christians, was growing in popularity throughout Turin and was matched by increasing faith and piety. During the triduum flocks of people streamed into the sacristy to ask Don Bosco for his blessing, but he reminded them that he gave not his blessing but that of Mary, Help of Christians. Some came to thank Her for graces received; others came to implore favors, and the favors were many. Two issues of *Letture Cattoliche*, published respectively in 1877 and 1878, describe fifty-nine such favors received in 1876, but, doubtless, many others were not listed.

We will narrate one such favor in which Don Bosco had a share. During the month of May, eighty-two-year-old Mr. Mazzucco of Turin fell so seriously ill that his case was declared hopeless. In her grief, his daughter Marcellina visited the Church of Mary, Help of Christians to pray and to ask Don Bosco to bless her father. Don

[3] *See* Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195f, 391f. [Editor]
[4] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Bosco was glad to oblige, and, as she left, he said: "I bless you for your father. Starting now, up to the feast of Corpus Christi, say three times the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, and a Hail, Holy Queen to Our Lady. I assure you that She will answer your prayers."

The daughter returned home joyfully, but, noticing no improvement, she came back to Don Bosco in grief. "We are not through praying," Don Bosco reminded her. "The novena before the feast of Corpus Christi is just beginning today. So let us pray with fervor and hope. Have faith and confidence in Our Lady." He was right. The elderly man found that he was perfectly healed on the morning of the feast of Corpus Christi.

The finances of the Oratory were, as usual, very strained. For a month and a half Don Bosco had sent no appeals for aid either in Turin or in Rome. In Rome he either had no time or thought it wiser not to ask. Yet it was he who had to provide. He began to go out again on the day before the vigil of the feast. Baron [Charles] Bianco of Barbania came to fetch him with his coach at ten in the morning. He was a fine gentleman—tall, athletic, jovial and frank, an outstanding member of Piedmontese nobility and Don Bosco's loyal friend. That morning he certainly did more than give Don Bosco a ride, for Don Bosco returned late that evening and he was not empty-handed.

Who could describe the Oratory's growing excitement as the great feast approached? Rehearsals kept busy choir, band and altar boys. Students wrote addresses on envelopes to be used for mailing invitations; others gave the buildings a thorough cleaning, decorated the church and set up various booths. Father Rua held meetings with the Oratory faculty to forestall disorder. The meetings were also attended by coadjutor brothers who had been entrusted with special responsibilities.[6]

On the vigil of the feast, the boys' excitement reached a frenzied pitch. There was to be a curtailed school day, but the dismissal came even sooner because of the arrival of Salesian directors or delegates and other visitors, such as Monsignor [Joseph] Masnini, secretary of the bishop of Casale, and [John Baptist] Gazzolo [Italy's consul in Buenos Aires] who had just returned from Argentina. The presence of so many diocesan priests, in addition to

[6]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

the news that several Swiss pilgrims had arrived exclusively to pray in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, prompted our chronicler to record: "It would be no surprise if within a few years this church were to be a center of vast pilgrimages."

Don Bosco interviewed a great many callers until one in the afternoon. A telegram from Genoa had informed him that two noble ladies would arrive at two and would dine at the Oratory. He calmly and kindly waited for them.

He heard confessions till very late that evening, when he went in to supper. Consul Gazzolo was waiting for him. He had read the letter of Salesian missionaries in *Unità Cattolica* and other papers with bruised feelings, and he needed to express himself, since he felt that too little had been said about him. True, he had unburdened himself to Father Francesia, but he was still upset. At first sight Don Bosco immediately took off his biretta and cordially hugged him with unusual warmth. He asked him to sit by his side, heaped compliments upon him, and gave him full credit for his missionary endeavor. Though he was thoroughly exhausted, he kept talking to him for over an hour. Don Bosco would never let anyone leave him with even the slightest hurt.

Masses and Communions began very early on the morning of the feast and continued until about ten. The students of the Valsalice College were present at the Community Mass. The Oratory chronicle reports that the "music was much less brassy than in previous years and much more refined." The choir, reorganized by Father Cagliero, did itself honor even in the conductor's absence, so well had he trained the youngsters and prepared Brother Dogliani to take his place. The program notes remarked: "The composer of the hymn *Saepe dum Christi* intended to put to music the Christians' victory at Lepanto through the assistance of Mary, Help of Christians." Indeed, that intensely dramatic composition was called by everyone "The Battle of Lepanto." Such was the sacred music of those times. The hymn was repeated on May 25, the feast of the Ascension, at which even more people took part with no less an attendance at Holy Communion.

As soon as Don Bosco finished his Mass, he was surrounded by some fifty people who sought his blessing and kept him there for an hour and a half. Then, wearied by the strain of the previous day, he

felt thoroughly drained of strength, hardly able to talk, but he kept going in his serious and serene way. Observing him closely during those days, one could not help but express admiration to see how actively he shared in the conversation, keeping the talk lively and joyful and, more important, steering frivolous topics to serious thoughts. He was a past master in the art of guiding conversation his own way. Anecdotes seemed to flow spontaneously in response to others' remarks, but, in all reality, they had been artfully chosen by him beforehand to impress his listeners deeply. One was not aware of this. Here too he was still the old magician, wielding secret power to draw and move his audience as he willed in order to do them good.

That solemn feast, however, had dark clouds of its own. The celebrant of the solemn high Mass that morning had been Monsignor Masnini. Archbishop Gastaldi had been invited but had declined and had even refused permission to invite another bishop in his place. The people had no idea that anything was amiss. In fact, they did not even notice the absence of a bishop, because the monsignor's scarlet robes and the *bugia*[7] carried alongside the missal gave the impression that he was a bishop. But the matter was not ignored. Like a bolt out of the blue came an order forbidding the monsignor to officiate at Evening Prayer. That was followed the next day by this letter to "The Prefect of Don Bosco's Oratory":

> His Excellency the Archbishop has instructed me to inform you of his acute displeasure that a non-diocesan priest was allowed to celebrate a solemn high Mass yesterday in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and furthermore was allowed to use episcopal appurtenances without the archbishop's explicit permission, notwithstanding the fact that this is contrary to diocesan practice, regardless of the solemnity of the services. In view of this policy, several diocesan priests who have been honored with the title of "monsignor" and accompanying privileges never use them, precisely because they do not have their archbishop's permission. Therefore His Excellency reminds you and your confreres that "obedience is better than sacrifice" [1 Sam. 15, 22] and hopes that from now on he will have no further cause for complaints in this matter.

In all truth, we must add that Monsignor Joseph Masnini had

[7] A low candlestick with a short handle formerly used at a bishop's Mass. [Editor]

respectfully called at the chancery three times but had been denied an audience with the archbishop.[8]

This letter was followed up on June 2 by a ruling keeping Don Bosco "from allowing any newly ordained Salesian priest residing in any Salesian house to celebrate his first Mass or any subsequent Mass in any parish of the Turin archdiocese for at least fifteen days after his ordination."

In the midst of this harassment, Archbishop Gastaldi was asked by the bishop of Sant'Agata dei Goti in southern Italy to pass on to Don Bosco an expression of the esteem he had for him. The prelate had heard from the bishop of Castellamare "about a *Handbook of Church History* by the distinguished Father John Bosco." Now knowing "this zealous priest's" address, the prelate was asking Don Bosco's ordinary to place an order on his behalf for twenty copies. He also said that he intended to promote that book among his young priests. Archbishop Gastaldi promptly obliged through his secretary.

The fervent piety which kindled all hearts during the novena of Mary, Help of Christians had also a helpful influence on a twenty-year-old young man, a Calvinist, who, while studying in Switzerland, had been directed to the Oratory by a friend. Moved by the people's devotion to Our Lady and similarly inflamed, he asked for baptism which he received on June 4, 1876.[9]

Once routine was re-established, Father Rua called a regular meeting of all who had taken any part in running the festivities to ascertain if any disorder had occurred and what measures should be taken to forestall them in the future. A concise report was drawn up to be read in May of the following year. This detail should be enough to silence onlookers who, seeing things done in new ways, blustered about disorderliness. There was hustle and bustle, yes, but always under the careful gaze of level-headed, zealous and well-loved superiors who directed the action and controlled the feverish tone to obviate disorders.

We shall single out the third and fourth remark entered in those minutes:

[8] A few days later, on June 8, 1876, Monsignor Masnini wrote to Archbishop Gastaldi and gave his side of the story. [Author]

[9] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

3. Find a way to supervise the boys in church by classes; on the eve of a feast a superior should plan the seating.
4. It is Don Bosco's wish that pilgrims be admitted into the sacristy and apse, so as to fill every part of the church.

One thing more. Father Bonetti, who came from Borgo San Martino, renowned for its strawberries, sent Don Bosco a basket of this fragrant fruit, then in season, for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. This started a tradition which continues to this very day [1931]. Don Bosco thanked him by mail and used the letter to jot down a kind word to everyone.[10]

[10]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 8

Casual Encounters and Timely Comments

FAITHFUL to the chronological method of narration of Don Bosco's first biographer [Father John Baptist Lemoyne], we now present random gleanings of encounters Don Bosco had with various people between February and June of 1876 which deserve to be mentioned in a rather detailed biography such as ours.

Among Don Bosco's admirable conversational talents were his extraordinary skill in steering a conversation to spiritual matters and his candor and ease in speaking his mind about certain somewhat unpalatable truths without arousing the usually attendant animosity.

He gave eloquent proof of this talent on February 19. Once a year he used to dine with two elderly spinsters named Bonnie who lived in Turin. On this occasion he brought along Father Rua and Father Barberis. When dinner was nearly over, some distant relatives of the two sisters arrived, a Mr. and Mrs. Tovaglia. Though childless and very wealthy they never gave to charity and nourished an ill-concealed aversion toward religious duties. Naturally they were at odds with the two sisters in matters of religion. They were ushered into the living room and soon enough Don Bosco and his companions joined them. After a few pleasantries, Don Bosco mentioned a certain Mr. Turletti who was well known to Mr. Tovaglia and remarked that he was a truly fine gentleman.

"Yes, indeed," Tovaglia exclaimed. "Nowadays it's hard to find a family like his."

"It's heartwarming indeed to meet such upright, devout people. He attends Mass and other church services and receives the sacraments, notwithstanding his manifold occupations."

"And at home he is quite amiable, too," Tovaglia went on. "He is a perfect gentleman, ever willing to help."

"Yes indeed," Don Bosco added. "Furthermore, despite the fact that he has a large family and is not wealthy, he scrupulously

carries out Our Lord's exhortation, 'Give that which remains as alms.' [Luke 11, 41] As soon as he can spare some money, he brings it to me. He did the same thing when he lived in Florence. 'Don Bosco,' he would say, 'winter is coming and your boys will need socks. Buy a few dozen.' At other times he would give me money to buy shirts and sweaters. Once, fearing that he was doing too much at his family's expense, I urged him not to be over-generous. 'My dear Don Bosco,' he replied, 'do you want to be the only one aside from your Salesians to gain heaven? If I didn't help others, how could I put into practice Our Lord's words: "Give to the poor what you do not need"?' I pointed out that this was only a counsel, not a command. 'Counsel or command,' he replied, 'I know that one should take seriously what Our Lord said, "It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." [Matt. 19, 24] I want to save my soul, and therefore I must detach myself from material things. For I do indeed see that those who are always concerned about themselves never have anything left over for others. The richer one is, the more he feels the need for higher living standards. These imaginary needs are mere excuses to cover up one's attachment to wealth.' In the face of such observations I could say no more because I could see that he was truly a well-instructed Catholic and a generous-hearted man."

"Quite true! When he was a boy, he was studying to become a priest. I even believe he donned the clerical habit."

"I did not know that, but I have always known him to be a devout man, selfless and well-educated."

The conversation then turned to the zealous, hard-working Salesian missionaries in Argentina where good priests were very scarce, and to the necessity to send reinforcements to save those souls. "Of course this is a very costly enterprise," Don Bosco added.

"Then, too, we can hardly spare good priests," Miss Bonnie interjected.

"That's true," Don Bosco went on, "but with financial help we can start training a larger number of young candidates for the missions. Right now we have to send a new contingent to South America, but we are still reeling from the expense of the first expedition which cost us over thirty-six thousand lire. You certainly realize that for a poor priest who relies entirely on public

charity this is a crushing burden. Fortunately, when Divine Providence wants something done, it inspires someone to help and somehow it is done. We are all in God's hands."

The conversation then turned to the recent suicide of a certain Mr. Monti. Tovaglia commented that the unwillingness to bear life's difficulties was a mark of great cowardice. "That's bound to happen," someone remarked, "when religion is absent from one's life." As the talk continued on the subject of death, Mrs. Tovaglia became uncomfortable and remarked that the less said about it the better, adding that when it happened, it happened, but there was no need to be unduly preoccupied.

"That's true," Don Bosco said. "I still recall the advice that the late Father Cafasso, a most exemplary priest here in Turin, used to give frequently. The gist was that we should be ever ready for death, but shouldn't fear it. If one has a clear conscience, either because he has not committed any sins or has already confessed them and atoned for them, why should he fear death? Only those who lead a bad life and never or very seldom receive the sacraments have reason to fear death. They fear it because their conscience reproaches them. The Gospel repeatedly warns us to be ready for it: 'Be on guard, therefore, because the Son of Man will come when you least expect him.'" [Luke 12, 40]

As he took his leave, Don Bosco graciously invited Mr. and Mrs. Tovaglia to visit the Oratory, which they had never seen. Most likely this couple who never went to church remembered for a long time this encounter with Don Bosco.

Whenever Don Bosco met newcomers at the Oratory, he did not limit himself to returning their greetings, but would immediately engage them in conversation, injecting spiritual thoughts, inviting them to join his Congregation, or else encouraging them to make spiritual progress. In March a thirty-year-old waiter, who had been at the Oratory only a few weeks, served him coffee.

"What's your name?" Don Bosco asked him.

"Pesce."

"Where do you come from?"

"A village near Mondovì."

"What was your job before you came to the Oratory?"

"I was a waiter in the boarding school at Mondovì. I have a recommendation from the mayor and Canon Ighina."

"Read it to me."

The man read the letter fairly well. Then Don Bosco went on: "Did you come here to stay, or just for a while until you find a better job?"

"Frankly, I'd like to stay, but. . . ."

"Do you thing this isn't the place for you?"

"It's a nice place but I'd rather be sent to some other school. I don't think that Turin is the place for me."

"What kind of work would you like to do?"

"What I am doing now or something similar."

"If this is all you want, there is no problem. There's one more thing I'd like to know: Are you here to make money or would you be satisfied if we provide for your material and spiritual needs? If you are looking for money, you are in the wrong place."

"Money is not that important to me. I am alone."

"Well, then, if you wish to feel secure about your future needs in health or sickness, and if you want a good deal in this life and the next, you may stay here. I willingly give you this job and you can be at peace. But you will have to say to yourself, *'I really want to save my soul.'* What do you say? Do you want to have a joyful time in this world and in the next?"

"Yes, I do. . . ."

"Well, here comes Father Barberis. Talk it over with him. I'll be happy if I can do some good for you."

Rarely would house members pass him without hearing some cheering word. One evening he successively met six of them and had a word for each. The first one was Father Joseph Monateri. "Well," Don Bosco said, "I know you want to astonish me with the wondrous miracles you are going to work. Isn't that so?" He next chanced upon a young cleric named Podestà, a name meaning "power." Making a pun on his name and patting him, he smilingly paraphrased two scriptural verses: "The powers tremble. He holds power and sovereignty." To Francis Ghigliotto, another young cleric, he remarked, "You still haven't made to me the confession of your future. Pick a day for telling me all you plan to do from now on."

Further along he met Brother Joseph Rossi and said: "Oh, here comes Count Rossi, my great friend."

"You really love to joke," exclaimed Rossi.

"Don't you prefer that to a rap on the head?"

To a cleric named Bodrati who was to teach a crash course to adult postulants he said: "Get ready. I'll get you so many students that you will be astounded. With your masterly hand, turn them into choice vines for the Lord."

To another cleric he remarked: "Leave it to me. We must send help to Father Cagliero. You will convert Patagonia."

Those who have not been privileged to know Don Bosco cannot possibly imagine how much people loved to be treated in this way.

But what really revealed Don Bosco's charming personality was his way of dealing with people who did not see eye to eye with him on certain things. He did not argue; rather, he listened attentively and with an open mind, leaving the impression that there was no real disagreement between them. But when decisions had to be taken, he firmly proceeded to do what was feasible and not what was desirable. In these matters he did not yield an inch; he used his head, not somebody else's. He welcomed suggestions and advice as means to better understand problems, their inherent difficulties, and the ways to overcome them. This was evident in his long talks with Consul Gazzolo. Don Bosco would stress to him the need to evangelize Patagonia as Pius IX had recommended, but that was not the consul's goal. What the latter continually insisted upon was that Don Bosco should concentrate on opening a huge complex like the Turin Oratory in Buenos Aires and service the Italian national church. Don Bosco made no attempt whatever to dissuade him from his goals. He just let him talk on and on, occasionally making some observation or airing a doubt without contradicting him. When it was time to act, however, he slowly carried out his well-defined plans.

Let us now follow Don Bosco on a brief trip he took on May 31 with Father Barberis to Villafranca d'Asti to visit Father Stephen Messidonio, a former Oratory pupil who was seriously ill. The encounters he had on this trip were routine, but with Don Bosco even the routine was not just routine.

He left at eight in the morning after hearing confessions until the last minute. He didn't even have time for a cup of coffee. Upon boarding the train he met an old friend of his, Father Bartholomew Dassano, the assistant pastor at Cambiano, and immediately engaged him in a conversation. He also invited him to a Latin play that was to be staged the following day at the Oratory, but the

good priest excused himself because of some sick calls he had to attend to. Congratulating him on his solicitude for the sick, Don Bosco recalled what Father Louis Guala,[1] the founder of the Convitto Ecclesiastico,[2] had often recommended: "If a priest wishes to see his confessional besieged by penitents, let him take great care of the sick; the charitable assistance given to even one patient will draw an entire family to his confessional."

The conversation then veered to comforting the bereaved families, evoking a sorrowful comment from Father Dassano. "My family will soon be extinct," he said. "The only ones left are myself and my brother who is the superior of a missionary institute at Chieri. Once we are gone, the Dassanos will be gone too. We do not even have a nephew to whom we could leave our small estate."

"If you want heirs and are really worried about not having one," Don Bosco replied smilingly, "I can get you as many as you wish, and your estate would certainly be put to good use. Only a short time ago Baron Catella was confiding to me his regret at having no one to whom to leave his fortune. 'Let me take care of that,' I told him. 'Within a few days you will see your estate yield a hundredfold. We shall turn it into bread, bed linens and clothing for our boys.' Take a guess at how much I had to spend recently just for bed sheets for all the Oratory residents. You would be surprised!"

"Six or eight hundred lire?" Father Dassano ventured to say, thinking he was stating a high figure.

"Father, a single bed sheet costs about eight lire. Buy enough of them for eight hundred boys, and your bill will run over twelve thousand lire. Then provide other items such as pants, sweaters, and shirts, and you'll see what it will add up to."

Don Bosco had a talent for making wealthy people realize the Oratory's financial needs. He would talk of blankets, clothing, and food, according to the people's interests and circumstances. Simple arithmetic brought home to them how great were Don Bosco's financial needs. However, he avoided pressure or explicit requests. He generally took a cue from what was being said and gradually steered the conversation to the Oratory's needs in such a way that his remarks seemed to be its logical conclusion.

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 31ff. [Editor]

[2] 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 ibid.*, pp. 31ff, 54–61 [Editor]

After Father Dassano got off the train and he was left alone with Father Barberis, Don Bosco settled down to edit the latter's manuscript of a book on ancient history which Father Barberis had given him the day before. Now and then he would point out to him stilted expressions, untenable assumptions and other flaws.

Finally they reached Villafranca. There one could see how much Don Bosco was revered and loved by the local clergy who were waiting for him with the deepest respect. The pastor in particular, who was over sixty, was delighted and talked profusely about Don Bosco, the Oratory and the Salesian work in Buenos Aires, showing himself to be well informed and a sincere admirer. Also present were the assistant pastor and the public school teacher, both exemplary priests. The whole group paid a visit to Father Messidonio, and all enjoyed Don Bosco's interesting and lively conversation until four o'clock. He acquainted them with the Sons of Mary program, a most opportune topic with priests who could send him promising candidates for the priesthood. Through a fortunate coincidence, one of the pastor's helpers who had already been discharged from the army manifested to Don Bosco his ardent desire to become a priest. Don Bosco listened and encouraged him, but he shied away from an instant decision. The pastor mentioned two other adult parishioners as potential vocations, but again Don Bosco deferred his decision to a more propitious time. The reason was that at this time the relocation of the Sons of Mary to our house in Sampierdarena was still under study.

Don Bosco then spoke of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, explaining their purpose, manner of life, and constant progress. A young lady who had heard about them and felt inclined to join them was immediately accepted, while a few others, two school girls among them, expressed the wish to go to Mornese.

While they were dining, a man whose son wanted to be enrolled at the Oratory called on Don Bosco with his boy. Relying on the recommendations of the youngster's pastor and teacher, Don Bosco accepted him on the spot.

Until now he had said nothing about the Association of Salesian Cooperators, which was uppermost in his mind at this time. Imperceptibly he steered the conversation to it, pointing out how much the Holy Father had this association at heart. He briefed

them on its goals, emphasized the spiritual favors recently bestowed on it and informed them of other favors granted to him by Pius IX during his recent trip to Rome. Here Don Bosco's talent to make people appreciate things came to the fore. In Rome, as usual, he had requested special indulgences—among others, a plenary indulgence for all the Oratory benefactors, lay and clerical, whenever they received Communion or celebrated Mass. So now, turning to the pastor who amply deserved to be recognized as a benefactor, he told him that he had requested a plenary indulgence for him from the Pope whenever he celebrated Mass. He did the same with Father Messidonio, adding that he had also obtained for him and his family another indulgence to be gained at the point of death. Understandably this news impressed both priests most favorably. What Don Bosco had asked for collectively, he presented to each individual as something personal. His rationale was that whatever is granted to all is likewise granted to each of them.

Poor Father Messidonio, hopelessly bedridden, was wasting away with terminal tuberculosis. When Don Bosco took leave of him, the latter made a supreme effort to get up, determined to go with Don Bosco to Turin and become a Salesian, as he had decided to do quite some time before. With perfect aplomb, Don Bosco put him at ease. "As of this moment," he replied, "I enroll you as a Salesian, and as soon as I get back to Turin, I will formally register you among our confreres. As soon as you can get up, even though you may not be fully recovered, you may come to the Oratory where we shall receive you with open arms. Just send us word a few hours before to give us time to get your room ready. Do this: as soon as you can stand on your feet, move about a little and try to walk as far as the railroad station by yourself. If you can do that—it's only a kilometer—that's enough for me. I'll be waiting for you." Don Bosco and all those present knew that only a miracle could restore this poor priest's health, but Don Bosco was very glad to be able to boost his morale. To comfort him even more, he assured him that he and his boys would pray for him.

Back on the train, a severe headache prevented him from doing any work, but rather than idle the time away, he began chatting with Father Barberis about his novices, the upperclassmen, their intellectual talents and fitness for the Salesian Congregation, the present and future Salesian schools and the way to draw pupils to

our Congregation. On this point he aptly remarked: "Presently our boys are just like sons, true members of our family. They feel that they belong to our Congregation. They talk about 'our church and our schools at Lanzo, Alassio and Nice.' Anything concerning the Salesians they call 'ours.' As long as we will boost our foreign missions, schools and other religious matters, they will take a personal, hearty interest in them. Constantly hearing that we are needed in this or that place and that we are sent for from all parts—Italy, France, England and America—they feel as if they owned the world." The conversation ended by pointing out the distinctive spirit of the Salesian Society—energetic activity, shunning of confrontations, and judicious abandonment of fruitless fields of labor in favor of fruitful ones.

Father Barberis enjoyed listening to Don Bosco and treasured his words, but the latter's headache grew no better. When they arrived in Turin, Don Bosco invited him to a cafe for a cup of coffee. Later Father Barberis recorded this in his chronicle: "This shows the spirit of our Congregation—no dainties or luxuries, but no qualms about having or getting what is needed." While sipping coffee, Don Bosco chatted about the Oratory artisans, remarking, "I believe that now their moral conduct is so good that no other boarding school or even a seminary could boast of better boarders. When I was a seminarian—and all of us were young adults—things weren't that good."

After leaving the cafe, he turned to another topic—the signs of a priestly or religious vocation. He again restated things that he was fond of repeating privately and publicly: "The signs that tell us if a boy is suited for our Congregation, if we should advise him to enter it or not, and if we can expect him to persevere are his great candor in confession, his fidelity in going to the same confessor, and his promptness in confessing to him upon returning from his summer vacation or as soon as his confessor comes back after a prolonged absence. These are excellent indications that he will persevere in our Congregation.

"Here is another practical rule. It does happen that a boy may manage to stay in God's grace while at the Oratory, but he will fall into grievous sins when he goes home. Then, upon his return to school, he straightens out his conscience and does well throughout the year, only to fall again during the next vacation. In such a case

I would frankly tell him that he could become a priest if he enters our Congregation but that he should not choose this state of life if he intends to be a diocesan priest. And why? If he falls so easily into grievous sins during the brief summer vacation, how will he fare when he will be entirely on his own? Nor should one object: 'But then he will be stronger.' I retort that the dangers will also be greater. Experience has shown me that boys who cannot remain in God's grace during their vacation time will not remain good priests outside a religious order."

On the way to the Oratory Don Bosco met two priests. He first chanced upon Father [Bartholomew] Giuganino, the assistant pastor at St. Charles Church in Turin and a former Oratory student. Realizing that they were going to discuss confidential matters, Father Barberis discreetly trailed behind them, thumbing through a book. As he passed in front of the Artigianelli Institute, its director, Father [Leonard] Murialdo,[3] joined him and accompanied him to the Oratory, discussing the Mole Antonelliana[4] [the Antonelli Tower] or Jewish synagogue, whose construction had been interrupted because of a split in the Jewish community over the financing of the project. For lack of a better solution, a decision had been reached to sell the tower. The municipal authorities finally decided to complete its exterior at public expense; then they tentatively approached Don Bosco as a potential buyer. This was the topic he was now discussing with Father Murialdo. In September [Alexander] Antonelli, the architect, called on Don Bosco and formally offered to act as intermediary between him and the chairman of the Jewish administrative board which had set a tentative price of two hundred and fifty thousand lire. The architect thought that it was a fair price. Don Bosco sent competent people to inspect the premises, but after studying the matter from every angle, he concluded that the tower was not adaptable for a church, and he definitively declined the offer.

The encounters which best reveal and make us admire certain

[3]Now St. Leonard Murialdo. Born in Turin in 1828 of wealthy parents, he became the priest of the poor, like Don Bosco. In 1873 he founded the Pious Society of St. Joseph to look after poor youths. He was also quite active in awakening Catholics to their civil rights and duties. His last efforts were given to further the movement for a Christian democracy in Italy. He was proclaimed a saint by Pope Paul VI on May 3, 1970. [Editor]

[4]The Mole Antonelliana, now fully completed, houses the Risorgimento Museum. It is the highest brick edifice in Europe, its summit being 510 feet above the ground. The slim pointed dome rises upon a hall with three galleries, one above the other. [Editor]

characteristic traits of Don Bosco are those in which he found himself face to face with people who ideologically were poles apart from him. Such an encounter took place with a Mr. Provera at San Salvatore, in the Monferrato wine country. One day Don Bosco was walking through the village conversing with the pastor and several notables. As they were commenting on the goodness of the villagers, their deep reverence for Don Bosco and their intense desire to have a Salesian school there, one of them said to Don Bosco, "There is just one man who is against you. He is also the richest man in this village and for years he has not set foot into a church. It's Mr. Provera, who is probably a Freemason." These words had scarcely been uttered when, behold, Mr. Provera himself was seen coming from the opposite direction. "There is the priest hater," someone remarked. Don Bosco said nothing, but when Mr. Provera was close enough, he saluted him. The man stopped, shook hands and exchanged pleasantries with him.

"Are you Chavalier Provera?" Don Bosco asked.

"Yes."

"Among us Salesians your name is well known and honored. It reminds us of a saintly priest by the same name who helped us so much in Turin, edifying us all by his virtues. Are you perhaps related to the Provera family of Mirabello?"

"Yes, I am. My grandfather came here from Mirabello."

The conversation went on for several more minutes with such warmth that the man invited Don Bosco to his house for some refreshments. Those about him hastened to say: "Oh no, he can't right now because he is expected by several people," but Don Bosco, excusing himself from his zealous friends, accompanied Mr. Provera to his house and spent time with him, entertaining him with several amusing incidents. As he took his leave, he frankly told him that he wished to continue their friendship, and he added: "Mr. Provera, from this moment I want to put myself under your protection. I find you so well disposed toward me that I venture to ask you a favor. I came to San Salvatore to see if I could find a building suitable for a school. I wish to place this school under your protection because I need your help."

"But of course I'll help you," the man answered, charmed by Don Bosco's amiability. "I'll be delighted. I want to be equally frank with you: take a good close look at this house, and if you

think it serves your purpose, I will turn it over to you immediately."

Don Bosco thanked him, apologized for not being able to accept so gracious an offer then and there, and departed, leaving the man happy over their meeting.

CHAPTER 9

Missionaries and Missions

DON Bosco had two objectives in sending his missionaries. One was to provide for the spiritual needs of Italian emigrants; the other was to endeavor to reach the Indians of the pampas and Patagonia. The first objective was already being attained quite well, but nothing had as yet been done for the second, and Don Bosco gave his fullest attention to it. Meanwhile, other proposals kept coming in from other places which seemed to fit into his plans. They showed him the high esteem felt for the first Salesians to set foot on Latin American soil.

The archbishop of Buenos Aires wanted to give the Salesians a parish at Carmen de Patagónes, a southern outpost of his vast diocese bordering on northern Patagonia, which might serve as a center to draw the Indians of the Rio Negro

Mr. Anthony Oneto, a Genoese, who ran the trading post for a Welsh colony, was negotiating with Father Cagliero to have two Salesians set up residence there and devote themselves to the care of the Chubut Indians. We have a lengthy letter dated March 1, 1876 in which this gentleman describes the colony and its environs. Among other things he writes:

> At the mouth of the river, i.e., at the foot of the Cordilleras, are fertile lands occupied by Pampas Indians. Toward mid-February, forty-one members of that tribe came here with their chieftain (*cachique*), whose name is Foiel, to sell guanaco furs. They are a half-civilized people, in no way, I would think, inclined to bloody violence. I told the *cachique* of the Argentine government's good intent toward them, and I asked whether he would welcome Catholic missionaries into his territory. He said that he would. This is a large tribe, ready to give up its nomad existence. It was a thirteen days' journey to come to this colony. At twenty miles per day, that would amount to two hundred and sixty miles. Thus they do not live

really in the foothills of the Cordilleras as they say. Many speak Spanish and, relatively speaking, they eat well.

Some fifty or sixty miles from here is a nomad tribe of the Patagonian pampas. Their leader, named Ciquecian, is a very good man. Much could be done if his sympathy were won over. He is charitable and has already supplied the Welsh colony with food. Have two of your priests come here and they will do wonders. Chubut will be won over to the Catholic faith and to civilization by the descendants of Columbus. With boldness and faith we shall conquer.

The government is well disposed. The president's wife is a fervent Catholic, as is the honorable Mr. Juan Dillon, the commissioner general of immigration. The immigration laws themselves say in Article 103: "The executive authority will use all possible means to establish settlements among the native tribes, setting up missions so as to accustom them gradually to civilization, assisting them in the most suitable ways and allotting a hundred hectares to each family as soon as the natives show an inclination to work."

In short, as you can see, everything is ready. It is the right moment, too, for you to make your debut as a new Congregation, and to show in deeds that the Society of St. Francis de Sales, within a few years, under the leadership of the charitable Don Bosco, can save for civilization the tribes along the banks of the Deseado, Chubut and Negro Rivers.

Religiously the colonists were Protestants, divided into four denominations with four ministers for eight hundred members. Mr. Oneto volunteered his help to facilitate negotiations for the Salesian mission.

The Argentine govenment itself was planning a colony near Santa Cruz, toward the southern border of Patagonia, where the missionaries, subsidized by the government, would gather the natives of that area and civilize them. On July 3, Father Cagliero wrote to Don Bosco from Buenos Aires:

All these Indians can be easily tamed, but they are very suspicious and therefore capable of merciless slaughter. Be that as it may, ready some personnel for Patagonia and tell the volunteers to start strengthening themselves with patience, learning, wisdom and courage. In dealing with these Indians, one must proceed cautiously lest in one day he destroy the labors of many years. If a missionary tries to induce them to submit to Buenos Aires or exerts pressure on them through threats, he will be killed.

To be of benefit to any tribe, one must win the chief's friendship with gifts, kindness and religion, and put him in contact with good Christians. Then, later on, one can safely talk to him of the government, but only in terms of benefits to be gained, not of submission. Divine Providence will do the rest.

The archbishop also wanted the missionaries to set up a much needed missionary station in Dolores, south of Buenos Aires and beyond the Salado River. The most prominent citizens of that town warmly supported such a foundation. At first it was erroneously believed that Dolores was "the last civilized outpost bordering on Patagonia,"[1] but Patagonia was really quite far from there. This error explains Don Bosco's insistence that Father Cagliero speedily establish a missionary station there. From Cordoba, too, the heart of the republic, urgent requests were being made for the opening of a Salesian school. How much Mr. Poulson, a university professor at Cordoba, did and said to win Father Cagliero's coveted permission! However, the Salesians went to Cordoba only in 1905. This will explain Don Bosco's letter to Father Cagliero:

May 30, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

I have not received the briefs[2] from Rome. I have only that of Father Ceccarelli, which I am sending you with the brief for Mr. Benitez. It should arrive any day.

I am sending you an account of all that the Holy Father asked me in his eagerness to begin endeavors for the evangelization of Patagonia and the pampas. He desires to take a direct hand in it, saying that no expense is to be spared for a school or hospice to be opened at Dolores in the near future.

Commendatore Gazzolo is drawing up his own report to the Holy See, entirely based on the project I am enclosing. Keep Father Fagnano updated on everything so that we may all proceed in accord and nothing be changed unilaterally. Once I get Rome's decision, I will notify you of it immediately.

Commendatore Gazzolo has repaid me the two hundred gold francs you gave him, plus two thousand more. He would like to settle the matter of Our Lady of Mercy Church as soon as possible, and he is ready to sell

[1]Barberis, *La Repubblica Argentina e la Patagonia* [The Argentine Republic and Patagonia], p. 114. Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1877. [Author]

[2]For papal honorific titles. [Author]

his land for whatever offer I make. Let me know right away how much it is worth per square meter.

He stresses the need of another missionary expedition. I am thinking of preparing five priests, three coadjutor brothers who are certified teachers, and four more coadjutors to take care of the kitchen, sacristy, general maintenance and gardening.

Two of the priests will go to Our Lady of Mercy Church, two will go to St. Nicolás, and one will be available for any need. Father Bazzani[3] will represent the Salesians with the civil authorities while Father Bodrato will look after the confreres. What do you say?

We celebrated the feast of Mary, Help of Christians very devoutly. There were huge crowds and many graces. Mendoza's wine crowned our efforts, and there was prolonged applause for our Salesian missionaries. An address of commendation was unanimously approved, and Father Chiala will send it. Everyone tells me that Father Sammorì will make an excellent preacher anywhere.

More news another time. The new expedition will be set for the end of next September. After its arrival, you could return to Valdocco for . . . (sic)

Mr. Gazzolo assures me that the president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society will put eighty thousand francs at your disposal for a home for poor young apprentices. Tell me what you think of it.

He also tells me that you are very tired, and not too well. Take care of yourself and the others. At any rate, pocket the puppets[4] and I will arrange to send someone immediately to replace you.

Greetings to all our beloved sons. Believe me always in Jesus Christ to be

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The dream of setting up an Italian colony in a free territory having vanished—for no free territories existed save in the imagination of ill-informed European writers—Don Bosco now concentrated on finding a permanent center from which to direct the evangelization of the pampas and of Patagonia, especially through the establishment of an apostolic prefecture. The reader will recall that this was the purpose of his memorandum in May to Cardinal Franchi, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propaga-

[3]Father Richard Bazzani of Modena, the chaplain in the hospital at San Nicolás founded by Msgr. Ceccarelli, had returned to Italy a few months previously. Don Bosco hoped that he and Father Bodrato would head the new expedition. [Author]

[4]A humorous Piedmontese expression, meaning "Pack up!" [Author]

tion of the Faith. That memorandum was the "project" enclosed in Don Bosco's letter.

As for the report to which Gazzolo merely added his signature, we find nothing new worth mentioning. However, we must say that it was most helpful because it was an *official* report on our activities in Argentina and made the Pope aware of how thoroughly everything had been done, and it favorably disposed him toward further developments. Our readers should not take too seriously the "gift" of two hundred gold francs made by Father Cagliero to Gazzolo, nor Gazzolo's repayment to Don Bosco. This is just a polite way of informing him that the Argentine consul had refunded the expenses of his journey which Father Cagliero had advanced to him. How that happened we do not know.

We are better informed about the two parcels of land adjacent to Our Lady of Mercy Church. To give Don Bosco an idea of their value, Father Cagliero had them appraised by a competent broker who estimated their worth at about eighteen thousand Italian lire. Gazzolo turned his nose up at this offer and raised the price to at least forty thousand. All the reasons he adduced for his decision Father Cagliero easily demolished in no time. No agreement was ever reached.

Father Cagliero's written statement to Don Bosco that, after making all his recommendations, he had almost forgotten Buenos Aires in his anxiety for Patagonia was a slight exaggeration. In fact, he was busy planning a trade school there, similar to the one at the Oratory.[5]

The tireless Father Cagliero also reached out to another project. On their arrival in Buenos Aires, the Salesians were horrified at the appalling spectacle presented by one neighborhood, known as "La Boca," settled by Italians from Liguria. They were blamed for an anticlerical demonstration which had singled out the Jesuits and burned down their renowned Salvador School.[6] In preaching to the Italians in the Church of Our Lady of Mercy, Father Cagliero thundered against the shame cast upon Italy, but in his apostolic spirit he did more: he decided to see for himself the ill-famed "La Boca." He filled his pockets with medals of Mary, Help of Christians, with which he had generously provided himself in Turin, and all alone he walked through the fields which at that time

[5]We are omitting a brief description of the origin of this trade school. [Editor]
[6]*See* Vol. XI, p. 133. [Editor]

cut off that neighborhood from the city. He immediately spotted swarms of urchins and young toughs around the wooden shacks. They seemed to find it almost too good to be true to have come upon a hapless priest and have some fun at his expense. However, they were stopped in their tracks when he spoke kindly to them in their Genoese dialect and drew closer with smiles and greetings. Seizing the opportunity, he took out a fistful of medals and flung them as far as he could, while the boys, thinking they were coins, dashed pell-mell after them. Then he turned and hurriedly walked through the waterfront scattering medals along the way. The youngsters picked up the medals, took them home and showed them to their mothers, grandmothers, sisters and brothers. The cottages and playgrounds buzzed with talk of nothing else but "the medal priest," but he had disappeared after that one brief appearance.

The next day Father Cagliero called on the archbishop. "I took an enjoyable walk yesterday," he told him. "I went to 'La Boca' and walked all through it."

"You were very imprudent," the archbishop replied. "I have never been there myself, nor do I allow any of my priests to go there, for there would undoubtedly be trouble. They might even be stoned."

"Yet I'd like to go back and see the effect of my first visit. I did some sowing and I'd like to reap what I planted."

"Don't do that! Don't expose yourself to danger!"

Unperturbed, Father Cagliero left. Two or three days later he went back to "La Boca" by the same route. Spotting him, the youngsters ran to him, shouting in Genoese: "The medal priest! The medal priest!" Then Don Bosco's first experiences were re-enacted. "Who is the best boy?" Father Cagliero asked them. "Who is the worst? . . . Can you make the Sign of the Cross? . . . Can you say the Hail Mary?" The youngsters vied with one another to show that they did know something. Many were already wearing the medals around their necks and asked for more to take home. Father Cagliero listened, gave out more medals and told them funny stories. His second visit was truly a mini-triumph. Men and women came out of their dwellings to take a look at the priest who had won over the hearts of these urchins and was now promising them a huge playground with lots of games, music and fun.

When the archbishop learned from Father Cagliero what had

happened at "La Boca," he was elated and surprised. In an outburst of enthusiasm he exclaimed, "Since you are so resolved to go to 'La Boca,' I will give you that parish. So far we have never managed to conduct services there." Father Cagliero thanked him. "It was to help these Italians and their children that Don Bosco sent us here," he said. "In the name of our founder and father, I thank Your Excellency and shall inform Don Bosco of the prize gift you have given us."

The archbishop kept his word. In due time Father Bodrato, who was to lead the second missionary expedition and stay on as superior of the mission after Father Cagliero's departure, took over the parish of St. John the Evangelist at "La Boca," performing a prodigious transformation there, as we shall later narrate. Such were the titanic workers whom the school of St. John Bosco gave to the first Salesian foundations. Many of them were widely renowned, while others were silent laborers. All of them are equally worthy of eternal remembrance and generous emulation.

Don Bosco's fatherly words came from time to time to encourage Father Cagliero and keep him duly informed. On June 29, 1876, he wrote:

My dear Father Cagliero:

1. I will start by giving you news of your family. Your mother and brother came to see me, and they are anxious to go to America. They are delighted to hear of your mission and are all well. One of your little nephews had some trouble with his eyes, but he has recovered perfectly after a month's treatment by Dr. Speirani.

2. Yesterday morning our dear Father Chiala breathed his last in the Lord at Feletto, leaving us in bitter sorrow. It was a tragedy for our Congregation. True, we had long expected it, but we are all deeply grieved. Two days ago, the day before his death, his mother was with him, and he was up and around. His lungs worked as long as they could.

3. I enclose the two [papal] briefs for Mr. Benitez and Father Ceccarelli. If you can, present them with solemn ceremony as I told you in my letter from Rome. The archbishop already knows about them, but it is proper that you mention it to him yourself. Notify also the local Catholic newspapers.

4. Marquis Spinola, the Italian minister at Buenos Aires, will bring you a skull cap with this letter. He is a good and devout Catholic, and you may speak to him with confidence. He is eager to help as much as he can,

particularly in opening schools for the Italians. Tell him of our work in Buenos Aires and San Nicolás, and make relevant proposals. He is authorized by the government to allocate funds where needed. Insist first that he help defray transportation costs and find premises for our schools and homes. I think you ought to inform the archbishop too that if necessary he can rely on the marquis' honesty and Catholicity.

5. The Holy Father is most anxious to see us implement our plans for the pampas and Patagonia. I think it would be most opportune to open a house at Dolores, another at Cordoba, and a third one in some locality even closer to the natives.

This week I shall write to the bishop of Concepción, Chile, to arrange for other foundations there. What the Lord wants of us now is houses and boarding schools for the poor and homes for the savages or semi-savages, if we can attract them to us. Then there must be a strong thrust to foster vocations.

6. I am readying a dozen Salesians. At least five of them are priests: Father Sammorì, Father Fassio, Father Bodrato who will be in charge, and two others. Is there any hope of getting at least the transportation costs for most of them?

7. We already have a hundred and fifty sisters. We have to hold two spiritual retreats for them. They will help us out at Biella and in other places. Such growth is amazing.

This year no less then seventy-five will don the cassock in our Congregation. We will have two hundred new recruits.

I am awaiting news of our house in Buenos Aires, the [festive] oratories, and the boarding school at Montevideo.

Give Father Baccino, Father Belmonte and the others my news; right now I do not have time to write to them personally.

I am longing for your return.

God bless us all. Believe me always in Jesus Christ to be

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Prepare a novitiate for America. I have already taken steps for it in Rome. I do not believe that we shall encounter any difficulties.

Don Bosco was right in thinking that he would encounter no difficulties in Rome to open up a novitiate. A special house for novices did not as yet exist, nor could one be improvised, but the example of the new missionaries was exciting ever greater interest in their style of religious life, and requests were pouring in from

young men wishing to become Salesians. Could one expect these postulants to go to Europe for their novitiate? Would these precious buds of vocation be allowed to wither? That is why Don Bosco was seeking permission to open a novitiate without specifying any particular house. What he wanted most was Rome's permission which would allow him to do his best until something better could be found. For a while he would keep going as he had been doing for many years at the Oratory in virtue of the exceptional faculties granted to him as a founder by Pius IX. Our revered Father Cartier told us that in his day the novitiate very simply meant going to confession to Don Bosco and talking to him every now and then. Certainly it is no ordinary novice master who can train religious as competently as Don Bosco, for he was gifted not only with rare formative talents, but also with special charisms. Canonical formalities went into effect later when the bases were solidly set and Don Bosco's spirit, well defined and understood, was at work through his first sons. His petition[7] to the Pope explained, as mentioned above, why he needed to establish a novitiate in Argentina.

On July 13, a few days after mailing this petition, Don Bosco wrote again to Father Cagliero, for his mind and heart were always centered on his missionaries and the missions, present and future. After informing him that he had written to the Holy Father, he told him that he was readying twenty Salesians who would leave for Argentina, probably in October. He also urged him to do his best to gather poor boys, especially native Patagonians, and, if possible, to send some to the Oratory.[8]

A prompt, favorable reply to Don Bosco's petition to open a novitiate in Argentina proved how pleased the Holy See had been at this request. On July 6, after conferring with the Pope, Cardinal Franchi, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, granted him the "faculty to found another novitiate . . . in the Argentine Republic with the previous consent of the local ordinary." In the letter notifying Don Bosco, the usual terms for a definitive canonical institution were added. He was overjoyed. In sending Father Cagliero the happy news, he quickly drafted a letter which speaks eloquently of his multiple concerns for the missions and the missionaries.

[7]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[8]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor

Turin, August 1, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

I received your last letter which was read and reread. Your letters, which are generally published in all the newspapers, do a lot of good for our Salesians and for all readers.

When you will give a talk to our confreres, earnestly recommend that they never neglect the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death. This is the key to all.

I am putting together another expedition of twenty brave men for the New World. If you need more, I will send them, hoping you will be pleased with them, but you must let me know when they should leave. . . .

All in all, always bear in mind that God wishes us to direct our efforts toward the natives of the pampas and of Patagonia and toward poor, destitute boys.

I have not yet received an answer from your archbishop. Cardinal Franchi is anxiously awaiting it, but there is no hurry.

I am sending you a few copies of a brochure about *The Salesian Cooperators* which we have just published. After reading it, bring a copy to your archbishop and tell him that I would like to enroll him among our Salesian Cooperators as the first one after the Holy Father, but that I will do so only with his permission.

After the archbishop's name, I would like to place that of his vicar general, then those of Dr. Spinoza, Carranza, Msgr. Ceccarelli, Mr. Benitez, etc. If you need more copies, let me know. . . .

We have full permission from Rome to open a novitiate and scholasticate anywhere in America with the consent of the ordinary, as you can see from the enclosed decree. . . .

Dear Father Cagliero, we have so much to do. You will hear from others about other matters. Give my warm regards to Father Baccino. Tell him that I am very happy with him and that he is to keep going.

Father Bazzani is with me as I write. He sends you his regards and awaits orders to lead his fellow Salesians to America.

I think that at least one of the confreres in San Nicolás who knows Spanish well might be transferred to Montevideo for the school we plan to open there.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Give my regards to all our confreres and friends. If the opportunity ever comes to send about a dozen natives of the pampas or of Patagonia or neighboring regions to Europe, do so.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

With the letter was a brief note communicating the Holy Father's blessing[9] to the first Salesian foundation in Uruguay named after him.

The stopover made by the first Salesian missionaries at Montevideo under the leadership of Father Cagliero had borne fruit. Church authorities in the capital had been impressed by the information he had given them about his Congregation. Their favorable opinion of the Salesians was confirmed by what they heard of their schools in Buenos Aires and San Nicolás, and so in the early months of 1876 the chancery of Montevideo had already begun taking steps to bring Don Bosco's sons to that city.

Recently severed from the Argentine republic, Uruguay was about to become an independent state. The Church's hierarchy was represented by an apostolic vicar, Bishop [Jacinto] Vera, a very zealous prelate who was tirelessly working to revive the Catholic faith by building hospitals, retreat houses and schools. The total lack of Catholic boarding schools for youth was sorely felt, and it was hoped that this problem could be solved through the Salesians. The opportunity came when a magnificently located building which appeared made to order was put on sale. It seemed truly a godsend in order to stem the rising danger that Protestantism would be first in the field because of its abundant funds.

In 1868 the Guerra brothers—Cornelius, Adolf and Alexander—founded a settlement known as Villa Colón (Columbus City). Later in 1873 this district and neighboring lands passed into the hands of a water company named Lezica, Lemis & Fynn of Montevideo, but the political uprisings of 1875 in Uruguay so badly damaged the corporation that its shareholders sold out and the company was dissolved. Mr. Fynn, then, on behalf of his partners, contacted Bishop Vera and his secretary, Father Raphael Yeregui, the brother of the future first archbishop of Montevideo, and offered the church of St. Rose of Lima and its adjacent school building to Father Cagliero on condition that the Salesians agree to service the church for the local population and run a secondary school and lyceum according to their method of education. The transfer of buildings and land was legally signed on May 24, 1876. Consequently, Don Bosco had to find ten Salesians to send to Uruguay with the forthcoming second missionary expedition.

[9]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

As in other undertakings, he never said "Enough!" when missionary work was at stake; rather, he expanded his plans as soon as a new endeavor took shape and promised to be lasting. Hence, he now began to look beyond the Cordilleras, seeking a foothold for the evangelization of the Indians. In July 1876 he wrote a letter to the bishop of Concepción, Chile, seeking advice and assistance in his plans. He did not address him personally because he did not even know his name, and he wrote in Latin because he did not know Spanish. After introducing himself and his Congregation, he explained his plans for contacting the Indians. He asked if there might be a chance of success, where he could best start, what was the government's attitude toward such an undertaking, and whether, he, the bishop might give him a recommendation. We do not know the outcome of this letter, but the reply could not have been encouraging, since the Capuchins were already ministering to the Indians of the Cordilleras. Eventually the first Salesian house in Chile was established in Concepción in 1887, while Don Bosco was still living.

It was now possible to move on to the dedication of the school at San Nicolás on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation. The city authorities also formally attended the ceremony. The archbishop celebrated Mass and wept with joy at seeing so many lads receive Holy Communion. Nothing like this had ever happened there before. Father Cagliero had come earlier and prepared an astounding musical program. The festivities went on for two days amid vast popular rejoicing. The religious ceremony on March 25 was followed by a civil reception on March 26. It was a grand event presided over by the archbishop, who was surrounded by the city's foremost citizens. The entertainment consisted of songs and recitations. A serious note was struck in the formal addresses, such as that of Father Dominic Tomatis, who had been introduced by Mr. [Francis] Benitez, then eighty years old, and the most influential member of the committee which had brought the Salesians to San Nicolás.[10] There was also a speech by Msgr. [Peter] Ceccarelli, the driving force behind the whole undertaking. After other speeches by prominent people, the archbishop gave a concluding address. He commended the people of Los Arroyos for having built a temple of learning and Christian formation for their young

[10]This charming old man, who so loved the Salesians, felt a profound veneration for Don Bosco and wrote another letter to him in Latin at the beginning of April. [Author]

people. Thanking the Salesians, he styled them his "advance troops in good deeds and in the work of evangelization." The lads who had delighted the archbishop in those two days won the people over to him as they escorted him to the harbor of the Paraná River, shouting their hurrahs.

The Salesians of San Nicolás did not restrict their activity to the school and town. From the very beginning, Father [Joseph] Fagnano and his confreres had been deeply moved by the religious abandonment endured by so many Italians scattered all over the boundless countryside. In the few rounds they made of the families they quickly gauged the moral misery of so many poor souls. On June 1 they began a mission among the ranches. They visited them periodically at enormous sacrifice to bring them the comfort of their priestly ministry.

A particularly impressive event reawakened a slumbering faith in the town and countryside. One of Don Bosco's outstanding recommendations to his missionaries was: "Regardless of the grave predicament in which you may find yourselves, always appeal to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians. You can be sure that you will not be disappointed." The confreres at San Nicolás recalled these words at the right moment. The local farmlands were often plagued by a frightening incursion of locusts which would swarm upon them in black clouds, destroying a whole year's crop in a few moments and threatening ultimate destruction. This had happened for three consecutive years, reducing the people to extreme poverty. Again in 1876 the news came that neighboring areas had been devastated, and a general panic ensued. Urging the people to trust in the protection of Mary, Help of Christians, the Salesians announced a solemn triduum in the parish. Some skeptics mocked their faith, but the people—Italians especially—flocked to the church in great numbers. Three days later the locusts came. In a half hour the city and countryside were darkened as swarms of locusts settled on trees, meadows, streets and houses. Their numbers far exceeded those of past years, making it seem likely that within two days they would not leave a single leaf on any tree or a single blade of grass in the entire territory. The skeptics became more and more contemptuous, but the faithful redoubled their prayers and made solemn promises.

The following day the sinister army unexpectedly took flight to

some other area, but a huge rear guard remained behind to wreak havoc on the crops. Unexpectedly a furious downpour and bitterly cold winds drove them away during the night. The damage was minimal, and the crops regained their vigor. In fact, the harvest was exceptional. In no time a collection for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians produced fifty thousand pesos, so grateful were the devout faithful. This event left an indelible impression on all.

As the name day of Don Bosco drew near, both Salesians and pupils of San Nicolás sent him affectionate letters and received this reply:

Turin, July 1876

My dearest sons:

I was most happy to receive your greetings and good wishes, and I thank God for having sent Father Fagnano and the other Salesians to you to open your school where I hope you will learn a holy reverence for God together with knowledge. Your superiors tell me that you are all very good, and this is of great comfort to me. Continue on the path of virtue, and you will always enjoy peace of mind, the good will of your fellow men and the blessings of the Lord.

Now I have some good news for you. While at Rome I spoke at length about you to the Pope who was most pleased to hear of your good conduct. He then said to me, "I gladly send my apostolic blessing to your pupils at San Nicolás, both boarders and day, with a plenary indulgence at the moment of death and another to be acquired on the day of their choice. I extend this blessing to their parents and relatives."

Ask your superiors to explain all this to you, and then you can inform your families.

May God bless you all, my dear sons. Enjoy yourselves but do not offend God, go to Holy Communion often, and write to me occasionally. Pray for me, too, who will always remain in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

"For the last two weeks Don Bosco has talked of nothing but foreign missions and Patagonia," Father Barberis wrote in his chronicle on August 12. Don Bosco was trying to solve the mission problems in every single detail. He was already planning a native clergy—something we today recognize as most essential—when he

stood on the very threshold of his missionary activity. Already then he had set as a high-priority goal the creation of a native clergy, and he believed that he could attain it in seven years. He longed for the day when native priests would go forth among their unfortunate brothers and sisters. It would be a red-letter day for the history of the missions. Opening schools along the Patagonian border for the training of native vocations seemed to him a far better way to achieve this goal, rather than throwing his Salesians to the lions, so to speak. He foresaw that eventually this would become a general practice. Certainly no individual priest could accomplish this, but a religious congregation could. He cited the example of Msgr. [Daniel] Comboni who in vain was striving to train singlehandedly a native clergy in the heart of Africa.[11] Under these circumstances, those who are charged with the formation of potential vocations go about it the wrong way or lack motivation or capability. Often one must have recourse to outsiders at considerable expense. For the training of one priest Don Bosco felt that it was necessary to have fifty boys in a junior seminary and provide for all their needs. No private individual could do this. "But we can," he said. "I saw it in a dream. We know that a missionary who gathers a goodly group of young men about him will make progress and do much good."

Don Bosco's best hopes for the successful future of his missions was linked to his Salesians' preference for poor youngsters. "One who starts out on this road," he declared, "will not go backward." He then mentioned some religious congregations who once had made their China missions a major topic of conversation because of the vast amount of good they had done, but he was positive that, had they gone a step further—that is, had they really reached the people by teaching poor youth—they would never have retreated from their apostolate.

As in every other enterprise, so in the missions, Don Bosco did not separate reliance on human means from a most absolute confidence in divine assistance. These are his own words recorded by Father Barberis in those days:

> Let us hope in the Lord. We are conducting this enterprise as we have all others. Let all our trust be placed in God, and let us hope for

[11] *See* Vol. VII, p. 488; Vol. IX, pp. 331f, 431. [Editor]

everything from Him. At the same time, however, let us do our very best. Let no means be neglected, no effort spared, no holy stratagem omitted, no expense barred to guarantee success. We must have recourse to every human means of security to protect our lives from the hands of savages. True, death by martyrdom is a blessing, for one flies directly to heaven. However, there remain thousands of souls who might have converted had one taken better precautions. It is also true that the blood of martyrs is the seed of new Christians, but this means that, when there is no way out, we must be ready to give our lives a thousand times rather than renege on our faith, without fearing that with our death the good cause will suffer. In such cases the Lord will provide, and we should not hesitate.

Don Bosco also discussed these matters with his boys. In fact, fourteen years earlier, when describing in a homily the cunning of St. Athanasius to evade his persecutors, he had concluded, "I would like all of you to become saints of this kind. Yes, my boys, strive to become saints in all earnestness, but such saints who, when they see good to be done, know how to find the means to do it, who are not afraid of persecution, and who spare no effort—wise saints who prudently seek for all the means they need to carry out their intent."

CHAPTER 10

The Spirit of Mornese

ST. John Bosco used to call upon his Salesians to bless Divine Providence, whose hand, despite many serious difficulties, he could see strengthening and wondrously nurturing the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.[1]

The most visible proof of this divine intervention lay in the fact that although there was no source of income, daily bread to feed so many mouths was never lacking. Humanly speaking, such a large family could never have survived without adequate finances to afford them some security. In other women's institutes, the postulants' dowries help meet the novices' support, but here ninety percent of the girls who sought to enter the Congregation had no means at all. Quite a few in fact entered without even a personal wardrobe. Yet they were taken in, and all went well. Thus was the promise of the Lord manifestly fulfilled that those who seek solely God's kingdom and His justice will also be given what they need for their earthly existence.

In connection with this we have some beautiful words of Don Bosco. One day at Borgo San Martino, meeting Mother Petronilla who was vicar general and in charge of financial matters, he asked her if she had any postulants. "Dear Father, postulants do come," she answered, "but all, or nearly all, come empty-handed. How can we support them?" Don Bosco raised his eyes, as he usually did when about to answer or give counsel, and uttered these inspiring words: "If you only knew the grandeur of a vocation! Let us never reject anyone because of poverty. If we have concern for vocations, Divine Providence will have concern for us. Sometimes we will have to strain, but God will never forsake us. Tell those at Mornese, tell everyone, that vocations, even in poverty, enrich an institute."

[1] Chronicle of Father Barberis, March 28, 1876. [Author]

Nor did the increasing number of sisters weaken their spirit, for poor living, hard work and fervent prayer were always the three dominant characteristics of the community. Daughters of wealthy families, even of the nobility, were not lacking in those painful beginnings. They were by preference sent to school to prepare for state examinations and obtain teacher certification, but also they lived in common with the others, not exempt from common duties and affectionately obeying Mother Mazzarello, a peasant girl who, although ignorant of book learning, still achieved wonders in her plain humble goodness. Full of God's Spirit, she practiced and taught her daughters a simple but sound ascetism. Here is one small example. She used to say: "As long as you are vain in your conversations, you will never have real piety. Do not envy those who heave sighs and shed tears in church before the Lord and yet cannot make even a small sacrifice or put their hand to a humble task. Do you know whom you should rather envy? Those who in genuine humility adjust to all things and do not mind being treated like a kitchen broom." Humility, mortification, and love of sacrifice: are not these the heart of sound religious asceticism?

We have a testimonial worth a hundred more concerning the spirit of Mornese. In 1876 Monsignor Andrew Scotton gave a spiritual retreat to women in the Mornese convent. Before leaving, he felt that he had to retract some former words of his. Three years earlier, on a visit to the convent, he had felt that any kind of success would be most unlikely there. Disturbed by his misgivings, he had told Don Bosco of his shaky hopes for the future, and Don Bosco had only remarked, "Let's see what Our Lady will do about it." Three years later, having personally witnessed the moral stature of the woman who had once seemed to him incompetent to rule, and having seen as well the goodly number of sisters and especially their spirit, he reversed his judgment and expressed his conviction that Don Bosco's reply had been a glimpse into the future.

Our readers will recall that, while staying at Ovada in August 1875, Don Bosco had given the rules[2] a definitive form and submitted them to the chancery of Acqui for canonical evaluation. Having won a favorable opinion from the bishop's officials, he sent him a formal petition for diocesan approval of the institute.

[2] *See* Vol. XI, p. 341. [Editor]

[no date]

Most Reverend Bishop:

You are aware that an institute, known as the Mary, Help of Christians School, was founded at Mornese by the zealous Father Dominic Pestarino, of blessed memory, for girls of poor families and for destitute and homeless girls in order to train them in moral uprightness, learning and religion, under the guidance of sisters known as Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Your Excellency graciously took the new institute under your patronage, and on August 5, 1872, after kindly reading and duly commenting upon its rules, you conducted the first clothing and profession ceremony. Shortly afterward you granted the institute several favors and precious privileges, in view of which it became a regularly constituted moral body within the Church.

Your interest and support were like a mustard seed that has grown prodigiously. The sisters now number more than one hundred and have been entrusted with teaching the girls in the public school of Mornese. Adjoining the institute is a boarding school for middle-class girls, of which I enclose a prospectus.

A second house has been opened at Borgo San Martino and another at Alassio;[3] a fourth will be opened this year at Lanzo not far from Turin, and many requests are pouring in for new houses to be set up in other places.

However, this institute will certainly not be truly established until it receives ecclesiastical approval which determines for institutes a certain path that leads them to God's greater glory. Hoping to obtain this outstanding favor, I now respectfully send Your Excellency the rules of the Institute of Mary, Help of Christians as they have been practiced over several years, requesting that you study them and suggest those modifications which you may consider proper in your wiser judgment. If you judge it best in the Lord, I request your diocesan approval for this institute and its constitutions. All the sisters and their director, Father James Costamagna, join me in requesting this signal favor. It will be an added reason for our undying gratitude to you. We assure you of our daily individual and community prayers to the God of mercy and His august Mother, the Help of Christians, that He may grant Your Excellency a long, happy life and allow you to see the abundant harvest of that institute which you have so graciously blessed, enriched with spiritual favors, and by your patronage practically founded and sustained to this day.

[3] This house was almost ready in Alassio, so that it might already be considered as in existence. [Author]

In deepest gratitude, I am honored to remain,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco
Fr. James Costamagna
Sister Maria Mazzarello, *Superior*

To say that Father Pestarino started an institute known as the Mary, Help of Christians School is a concise way of speaking and psychologically an act of humility. The phrase should be understood and construed to read that Father Pestarino had begun a work which supplied Don Bosco with the basic elements to found a religious institute named after Mary, Help of Christians for the Christian education of girls throughout the world. Neither the name nor the purpose would ever have occurred to good Father Pestarino had not God granted him that meeting with Don Bosco.[4] Likewise, if one offers land and materials to others to erect a building of their own design and for their own purpose, he may rightfully be considered as the initiator of a project which arises later. We are not to be surprised that Don Bosco stayed out of the picture and stressed only the contribution of this worthy Mornese priest, for this is the style of saints. We add a further reason: to win diocesan approval more quickly, he thought it more opportune to identify the institute as a work arising not only within the diocese but also by the initiative of one of its priests. At any rate, the episcopal decree of approval, dated January 23 [1876], restores the proper perspective. The second paragraph, which gives the background and must be based on real facts, ascribes to Don Bosco the founding of the sisterhood in these words: ". . . the proposal conceived by the Reverend John Bosco, a priest of Turin and superior of the Pious Salesian Society: namely, of instituting in this diocese, at Mornese, the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. . . ."[5]

At the August clothing ceremony held after the ladies' retreat, a final alteration was made in the sisters' habit.[6]

[4] *See* Vol. X, p. 254. [Editor]

[5] ". . . *de proposito* ab Admo. Reverendo D. Sacerdote Joanne Bosco Taurinensi, Piae Societatis Salesianae Superiore, *concepto* instituendi nempe in hac dioecesi . . . loco Moronisii, Congregationem Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis. . . ." [Author]

[6] We are omitting the details. [Editor]

Seventeen postulants received the habit from Father Rua, representing Don Bosco who had to remain in Turin. In addition to this ceremony, Father Rua heard confessions and gave a talk on Don Bosco's concept of the institute's internal and external life in which he also mentioned the acceptance of a proposal by the bishop of Biella and voiced his opinion about certain transfers. Finally he acquainted himself with the community's religious life and gave particular attention to its financial situation, looking over the bookkeeping, the kitchen and laundry operation, the care of the vineyard, and the progress made in the school and workshop. He offered detailed suggestions for overcoming major difficulties and encouraged them to endure their rigorous poverty gladly. Their frugal meals must have deeply impressed him because, when they brought him a glass of *zabaglione*[7] one day, he gracefully excused himself from eating it. In fact he looked unhappy whenever the good sisters offered him something extra or special. Before leaving he visited a nun who was critically ill with typhus. He consoled her by admitting her to final profession and giving her the Anointing of the Sick. He returned to Turin with Monsignor Scotton and Father Ascanio Savio, who had preached the ladies' retreat.

In 1876 a group made up of twenty-nine sisters, novices and postulants left Mornese in six contingents to found that many new branches of their community. Mother Mazzarello gave the same instructions to all: observe the rules, maintain your spirit, and win the hearts of young girls in order to bring them to the Lord.

The first contingent of three left for Vallecrosia on February 9. They felt as though they were going to the ends of the earth; worse, they were concerned about going into the very jaws of Protestantism. The community had been very impressed by Father Costamagna's decision to have three days of Eucharistic adoration, somewhat like the Forty Hours' devotion—something utterly novel to their institute—to implore God's special graces on these "missionaries." Mother Mazzarello and her vicar insisted on accompanying them along the snow-covered road as far as Gavi, where they joined in a final prayer at Our Lady's shrine before saying a tearful goodbye. Father Costamagna accompanied the trio to Sampierdarena, where he entrusted them to Father Ci-

[7] A mixture of egg yolk, sugar and wine beaten over hot water until thick and served warm or cold in a glass. [Editor]

brario, the director of Vallecrosia, who would go with them to their destination.

Their anxieties were eased by the fatherly reception they received from Bishop Biale of Ventimiglia, who invited them to have lunch with him and then escorted them to their new home. On Sunday, February 13, the vicar general, Canon Viale, blessed the temporary chapel in which they began their festive oratory. The school opened on February 14.

The oratory had neither a garden nor a playground, and so the sisters did what they knew Mother Mazzarello had done before becoming a nun at Mornese. They gathered the girls about them, taught them a little catechism, and then took them for a walk, stopping at any suitable spot to sing and play. They then brought them back to the chapel for Sunday services and dismissed them at dusk after giving out some small gifts. Such were the lowly beginnings of what is today the imposing school of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, at Vallecrosia.

On March 29 seven sisters escorted by Father Rua arrived at Valdocco, where they were to take up residence in the well-known house which Don Bosco had bought for them near the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.[8] The previous day the archbishop had issued a formal decree in which, acceding to Don Bosco's petition of the previous year, and relying on the judgment of Bishop Sciandra of Acqui who had approved them in his own diocese, he allowed the sisters to take up residence at Valdocco, although he knew nothing definite about them. The document also stated that permission did not mean approval of the Congregation in his diocese. On that he decided to reserve judgment until he got to know them better.

The chronicle of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians tells us that the nuns selected for Valdocco were the envy of their religious sisters because they were fortunate enough to work so close to Don Bosco. Father Rua's mother met them at the railroad station in Turin, and Don Bosco himself introduced them to the well-deserving Countess Callori who (as has been narrated in the preceding volume)[9] had greatly helped him to eject the devil from the house chosen to be the residence of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. The good lady served

[8] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 342ff. [Editor]
[9] *See ibid.*, p. 344. [Editor]

lunch herself in Don Bosco's presence and then escorted them to their home. It was so humble an abode that it did not even have a kitchen, and they had to depend on the Oratory kitchen. The sisters who now [1931] reside at the generalate may look at several old buildings standing across the square of Mary, Help of Christians and exclaim: "That is our Bethlehem!"

From a spiritual standpoint, they fared pretty well. On March 30 the local pastor blessed their private chapel with the archbishop's express permission. He had graciously subdelegated Don Bosco, but the latter preferred that the orders of his ecclesiastical superior be followed to the very letter. Father Rua became the sisters' regular confessor, while Don Bosco helped them in a fatherly way by giving them several monthly conferences.

No sooner did they take up residence than they settled down to work. They began a festive oratory immediately, as well as a free school, some homemaking activities, and daily and Sunday catechetical instruction. Don Bosco showed them how to attract girls by stopping to talk to them and by giving them little gifts such as holy pictures, candy or fruit in order to win them over and get them to attend the festive oratory. He insisted that the sisters stress two items for which the girls were to be grateful to those who had provided these facilities: first, the name St. Angela Merici, honoring Mrs. Angela Bianco who had so generously responded to his appeal the year before; second, St. Charles Borromeo whose picture was venerated in the chapel and recalled Countess Charlotte Callori.

Biella was the third site of the sisters. On one of his trips during this year Don Bosco had met Bishop Basil Leto of Biella. Hearing that he needed sisters for the housekeeping of his seminary, he had told him, "I will send you my nuns."

"You have nuns?"

"Yes, Bishop, and I think that they will suit your purpose."

Then and there Don Bosco decided to open a house in Biella. Seven sisters left Mornese on September 7. The bishop personally met them at the station. In fatherly fashion he had concerned himself with their residence, making sure it was hygienically sound, cheerful and well equipped. He wanted them to have their own private chapel, although the residence was but a few steps from the cathedral. When the bishop heard that the sisters were hunting for

a picture of their beloved Mary, Help of Christians, he commissioned a young artist in town to produce a canvas of Our Lady as the sisters described it to him. For some time the sisters at Biella were the only ones in their Congregation not directly cared for by the Salesians, since the genuine fatherly concern of the bishop more than sufficed. In March 1877, Mother Mazzarello paid them a visit. The bishop had the highest praises for the community, but the good superioress went away with a pang in her heart. Her daughters, she felt, were too comfortable. They had loads of work, of course, but their food and home had something of the well-to-do about them which clashed with Mornese's spirit of poverty.

No sooner were the sisters settled in Biella than Alassio came up. Seven sisters, escorted by Father Costamagna, went there on October 12. They found cramped, unsuitable quarters with no conveniences—there was not even a kitchen table. They understood that urgent need had not permitted more thoughtful preparations. Still, their willingness was severely put to the test from the very beginning. On November 8 three sisters opened a house at Lu Monferrato. Joseph Rota and his wife, Mary Ribaldone, considered themselves very lucky to have gotten the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians—after endless insistence with Don Bosco—to go to their village and take charge of the kindergarten, open homemaking classes and conduct a festive oratory. They offered their fullest help.

The opening of the sisters' house at Lanzo in December was more modest than elsewhere. Only two sisters went, and they had to lodge at the home of a benefactress until September of the following year when the sisters managed to set up a regular community in a residence of their own. Their closeness to Turin, where they went nearly every week, made the two sisters' loneliness more bearable. Since Lanzo was in the archdiocese of Turin, Don Bosco was quick to request Archbishop Gastaldi's permission in a letter dated September 10, 1876.[10] Since the sisters actually went to Lanzo, they must have received the archbishop's approval, although we possess no document to that effect.

Once these houses were founded, Mother Mazzarello, in writing to Father Cagliero, listed the new foundations and added this pleasant remark: "I was forgetting the house we have in paradise,

[10] We are omitting Don Bosco's petition. [Editor]

which is always open. Its director does not listen to either superiors or house councils. He takes whomever He wishes. He has already taken seven." The records of those days show that such a high death rate in the span of a single year did not dismay the sisters. They spoke only of the good example their deceased sisters had given them in life and of their edifying last moments.

In the summer of 1876 the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians did very well in an apostolate which went beyond the normal work of their institute: they took care of boys and girls who were victims of smallpox at Sestri Levante on the Ligurian shore. Mother Mazzarello accepted the task only after consulting Don Bosco. From the beginning of June to the end of September, seven sisters were assigned to this work of mercy. On their part it was a Christian and charitable mission, but the administrators saw it only as philanthropic. They were quite courteous, but averse to religion.

Unabashedly the sisters taught the youngsters catechism, had them say their morning and evening prayers, encouraged them to sing sacred hymns, and took them to Mass and Communion. The animating soul of this activity was Sister Henrietta Sorbone, a wise, brave and knowledgeable woman. How mischievous both the boys and the girls were in the beginning! However, after they recovered from their illness, they were new youngsters even from a moral point of view. The administrators were highly satisfied with the sisters' ministry, and the sisters returned home to Mornese, quite pleased with their achievement.

For several months in 1876 a series of extraordinary phenomena disturbed the peace of the convent at Mornese. A rather strange postulant, Agostina Simbeni, who had come from Rome and was said to be the daughter of a Siberian political exile, was recommended to the sisters by Don Bosco on the word of a very influential person. She boasted of her personal acquaintance with prelates and stated that she had even drunk coffee from the Pope's own cup. She was soft-spoken and pleasant, with a slender figure and blond hair. Though not overly pretty, she charmed everybody. Seemingly intelligent and healthy she was loved by all the sisters, and several believed her to be a saint. Even Father Costamagna, the director, credited her with supernatural charisms. However, Mother Mazzarello observed and kept silence, for her inborn

common sense and spiritual insight made her wary. Her misgivings were confirmed by the pastor of Rosignano, Monsignor Bonelli, who felt uneasy with some of the young woman's ways. When he was told of the director's favorable opinion, he answered, "He still lacks the experience of age, and then, too, he has always lived in a saintly environment."

The sisters' archives contain a long report by our own Father Michael Fassio, then teaching in Mornese's public school, about most extraordinary events. Agostina manifested inmost secrets of conscience, knew what had happened in far-off places, often seemed rapt in ecstasy, and, levitating, sang like an angel in Italian and French. Struck by a mysterious illness and hovering on the very verge of death, she recovered instantaneously. [According to her] a little girl, whom she called her daughter, would appear to her and reveal all manners of secrets. Finally she foretold that great upheavals would take place in Rome within the year on account of a war that inevitably would break out. When word of the prediction reached the Oratory, it stirred indescribable excitement. The visionary herself even wrote to Don Bosco, offering as a proof that within three days she herself, then in perfect health, would suddenly die, and she asked Don Bosco to assist her in her last moments. The entire community was highly perturbed.

Don Bosco did nothing. When Father Costamagna asked whether he should assist her at death, he replied that he was to do nothing. Three days passed, but Agostina did not die. The reason she adduced was that Don Bosco failed to come to her when she had important messages for him. She therefore insisted on being taken to Don Bosco without delay. She was so persistent that she was escorted to Borgo San Martino, where Don Bosco was then staying. Without wasting words he told her in the presence of many bystanders, "It's hard to believe that a young woman like you could harbor so much malice and pride. Go! God never reveals Himself to one as disobedient as you." Then he turned to those who had brought her. "Take her home," he ordered, "and don't let her ever come to see me or go to any of our houses."

Agostina wanted to explain, apologize and make new predictions, but Don Bosco refused to listen. She then asked for money to go to Rome and see the Pope. When she obstinately kept asking, Don Bosco ordered that she be given a railway ticket, but no cash.

Hearing this, Agostina stubbornly refused to go, and she had to be taken away by force. She was given a ticket to Rome, but, on reaching Sampierdarena, she managed to return to Mornese, left again, and then came back, until at last she left for good, and no further word was heard of her. Was this a devilish plot or a trick to ruin the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians? There was certainly the danger of mass hallucination which could have caused irreparable damage. Despite a few moments of hesitation, Mother Mazzarello showed an overall healthy insight, and Don Bosco ended the matter by resolute action.

Speaking of such cases, Don Bosco used to say, "One must be careful. There are really clever impostors whose many tricks and ruses can deceive the most prudent person. One would think that the devil has taken possession of them himself and taught them all his tricks. Their cunning is matchless. If they find themselves cornered on one side, they retort with a thousand ready-made excuses to make them look even holier; if they are caught in a lie, they manage to wriggle out of it and appear to be the most truthful people in the world. Learned persons, even priests, cannot find an effective weapon against them. One can rely on experience, which shows us that impostors have always existed and still exist, and that there is no mischief, no trick, which they will not practice once they have forsaken God and abandoned themselves to the devil. Hence, when such persons arise and show themselves to be proud or unruly or untruthful, no trust must be placed in them, nor are they to be given attention, even if they perform miracles. There is no deception which we should not reasonably expect from them."[11]

As these things were going on, Our Lady gave undoubted proof of Her motherly protection over Her daughters of Mornese. On the first day of the triduum of Mary, Help of Christians, Sister Theresa Laurentoni, who had been ill for a long time, was attending church services in a wheelchair near the chapel door. Sister Agnes Ricci stood beside her. When the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, Sister Theresa was thrown into spasms and blood flushed to her face. Frightened, Sister Agnes called Mother Mazzarello who, facing Sister Theresa, said to her firmly, "Get up, go upstairs and put on

[11] We are omitting a similar case that took place in 1880 in an undisclosed locality. [Editor]

your habit." Unassisted, Sister Theresa rose to her feet and went out of the chapel. When she returned a few minutes later, she was as spry and joyful as ever. On July 8 Mother Mazzarello wrote to Father Cagliero, "Sister Theresa Laurentoni is perfectly well again." So fully did she recover that she was appointed superioress in Turin where she lived until 1920. She was born in 1857 at Massignano di Fermo, the daughter of a colonel in the papal army.

After the house was freed of diabolic harassment, another battle broke out against it from outside sources. The grim hostility of the people of Mornese against the community's objectives did not abate. This time the municipal authorities took part. The immediate cause of the dispute was trivial. Everything seemed to increase the disgust of right-minded people and to hasten the sisters' departure from the place which had first brought them together and helped them shape and launch their future expansion.

A certain Mr. Pastore of the Mornese village council—a former pupil of the Oratory, unfortunately—was eager to get some position or other in the village and asked for Don Bosco's assistance. The latter did what he could, but to no avail, with the result that the man became angry as though it had been Don Bosco's fault, and he made an issue of the matter with the village officials, asking for the dismissal of both the Salesian priest and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who were teaching in the local public school. His request met no serious opposition in the council. They were well-meaning people, but they could not quite see that it would be to the advantage of the Salesians and the sisters to pull out not only from the school, but also from the village. Nor could they see how much material and moral harm this would cause the village. Father [Francis] Bodrato, the economer general of the Salesian Congregation and of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, was sent to Mornese by Don Bosco, and he managed to restore sanity. He made it very clear, however, that a repetition of this ill-advised motion would give Don Bosco reason to pull out completely from Mornese and relocate in Gavi, Serravalle or Novi which offered far better opportunities for expansion. Considering the present uncomfortable and unsuitable location, there was no need to further aggravate matters; thus the villagers had better not add the proverbial grain of sand to tip the scales and prompt Don Bosco to move to a better place.

After hearing Father Bodrato's report, Don Bosco decided to take preliminary measures. He had Father Bodrato write to Attorney Traverso, a very friendly and influential man, to consult him about a relocation. In the meantime the rumor had spread that the sisters might leave Mornese. Hearing of it, Mr. Traverso, a member of the village council of Gavi, anticipated Don Bosco's move and [on July 3, 1876] wrote to him, warmly expressing his approval and offering his assistance if Don Bosco should decide to relocate in Gavi.

While Divine Providence thus paved the way to an eventual solution, the excellent spirit which inspired the first and all succeeding generations kept maturing ever more. It would eventually be called the "spirit of Mornese" and would be considered the Congregation's lasting ideal. Inspired by this spirit, the newly founded houses ran so beautifully that Don Bosco penned these simple, enviable words of praise: "The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians do excellently wherever they go."[12]

[12] Letter to Father Cagliero, October 13, 1876. [Author]

CHAPTER 11

Preparations for the Second Missionary Expedition

THE rapid progress of the Salesian work in South America forced Don Bosco to get a second and larger missionary band together without delay. Father Cagliero had requested at least twenty missionaries. That meant pulling men out from Salesian schools in Italy. The directors, we may well realize, were concerned, since they were already operating with barely sufficient personnel. One day as Don Bosco was traveling between Alassio and Albenga with Father Cerruti, he spoke in glowing terms of the boundless field of work the Lord was offering to the Salesians not only in America, but in Australia and Africa and other lands as well, and he named the location of the many future missionary stations. However, instead of responding enthusiastically, Father Cerruti appeared to be lost in his own thoughts. Don Bosco noticed it.

"Are you following me?" he inquired.

"Well, yes, to some extent, but. . . ."

"I understand. You don't want to think about it, and so you turn a deaf ear."

Don Bosco did not blind himself to the realities of life about him. He made allowances for such moods, and he planned his projects well in advance so that the loss of personnel would be less painfully felt in the affected houses. At the same time, he was consoled by the certainty that he could always rely on the good will and sacrifice which he himself had inspired in his directors. Had they not entered the Oratory as young lads and grown up there? Apropos of this he once remarked: "It is to our great advantage that most of our Salesians came to our schools when they were young boys. Unconsciously, our pupils grow up accustomed to a laborious life, they get to know the inner workings of our Congre-

gation, and they pick up experience in many tasks. They are ready-made assistants and teachers with one spirit and method. No one has to teach them what to do, because they learned as students. They give us greater assurance that we will continue to maintain our spirit with no fear of division or need of reform. When a well-educated and influential adult enters a congregation, unless he is truly a saint and can bend his will to that of his superiors when circumstances so require, he is apt to do more harm than good. It is so hard to rid oneself entirely of the old Adam, especially when this involves not grave vices or singular habits but just those ways of doing things which of themselves are sinless. Through his example he could lead his confreres away from our genuine spirit with untold harm to all. I believe that up to now there has not been a congregation or religious order as fortunate as ours in the choice of suitable candidates. Another thing leads me to hope that our spirit will be safeguarded also in the future and in distant lands. Directors are nominated from those men who have lived for a long time in the Congregation and have come up through the ranks. Many houses will be opened, but quite spontaneously those priests and clerics will be chosen as directors who were sent from here, before those now coming up in those countries will be considered ready for such an office. Those who have lived with us will instill our spirit into others, so that before any of the native-born Americans will occupy positions of authority over their confreres, the Salesian spirit will have become naturalized and taken firm footing in the New World."[1]

Preparations for the second expedition were no less trying than for the first, but they are not as well known. We can conjecture about them by Don Bosco's scant correspondence through the months of August, September and October. He informed Father Cagliero of the preparations around the feast of the Assumption.

Turin, August 18, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

Everything is as usual. We are collecting clothing for our twenty missionaries. Everything has to be ready before their departure. We need transportation funds. A substantial outlay for our house in Nice has left us penniless. However, by hook or by crook, we shall manage.

Some two hundred confreres have volunteered for Patagonia. The

[1] Chronicle of Father Barberis, August 12, 1876. [Author]

Italian and European press, whether Catholic or secular, is publicizing our Patagonian venture. God wills it. May He help us do our share.

I await definite news. Tell our dear confreres that they will always be "my joy and my crown." [Phil. 4:1] May God bless us all.

I have received the archbishop's letter and will write to him of the Holy Father's opinion. Amen.

May God bless us all. Believe me always in Jesus Christ to be

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Cagliero discussed the transportation need with the Montevideo chancery officials. With government assistance, ten fares were obtained for the ten Salesians being sent to Villa Colón (two of them would be coming later). Negotiations were handled by the Montevideo travel office of the Pacific Shipping Company and their agent in Bordeaux with the skillful assistance of the apostolic vicar's secretary, well known to us. The efforts of many good friends in this matter, as in setting up the school, aroused some opposition, but this did not deter them; on the contrary it spurred them on because they were convinced that this was God's work and that contradictions were the seal of His approval.

We see from the letter of the archbishop of Buenos Aires, which Don Bosco intended to answer, that this zealous prelate's benevolence for the Salesians had not abated; indeed, in support of Don Bosco's plans for the Indians, he intended to travel with Father Cagliero to remote Carmen de Patagónes to get first-hand information.

Don Bosco was orderly in his preparations. He publicized the enterprise, called on important people, and appealed to the generosity of wealthy individuals.

At intervals during the month of August, two of Italy's largest Catholic newspapers carried Don Bosco's thoughts on the conversion of Patagonia[2] in lengthy, carefully written articles. Both of them recapitulated all that had already been done and, citing reasons for great hopes in the future, they kept their readers abreast of developments being undertaken and of the means being used. Smaller journals picked up this news from one or the other paper and publicized the missions to all classes of readers. In due

[2] *Osservatore Romano*, August 9; *Unità Cattolica*, August 23. [Author]

time Don Bosco sent the newspapers a copy of a circular[3] he was mailing to people everywhere to appeal to their generosity. He personally spent several days addressing envelopes so that those receiving the circular and recognizing his handwriting would give it greater attention. We have two texts of this circular. The second [dated August 25, 1876] has minor corrections and updates the information found in the first. The first circular announced the departure of twelve missionaries at a cost of over forty thousand lire; in the second, the missionaries number twenty and the expense soars to sixty-six thousand lire. It was his intent this time to draw the Italian government's attention to his project in the hope of moral and material support, but he had no illusions as to the outcome. He admitted quite frankly that it was a useless attempt, considering that letters and verbal communications had so far led to nothing. That did not matter, because he was sure of at least two benefits: first, the government would know what the Salesians were doing and would know that their undertakings were being carried out openly and not underhandedly; second, they would realize that Don Bosco's sole purpose in going to distant shores was to aid Italy and her emigrants. "When they see that our purposes and works are open for all to see, they will be satisfied and seek no further," he said. "This was the aim of our festivities at Lanzo on the occasion of the inauguration of the railroad.[4] I shall always act the same way now and in the future: When the opportunity comes, it is good for us to speak openly and explain our doings to the public because people in high positions nowadays operate in fear and suspicion of everything. When they hear that a religious congregation is at work and do not know what it is up to, they instantly become fearful and stand on guard. They don't have to spy on us because we are wide open; we tell everything to all, even to those who don't want to hear. Certain things, of course, should be known and brought to people's attention because they like to know. Other things should not be overly publicized, lest we hurt the sensitivities of other religious institutes or prompt prudent or touchy persons to frown on our undertakings. But we may as well admit it: we are really a bit too outgoing."

The proper government bureau to contact in reference to the missions was the Foreign Ministry. Don Bosco conferred with the

[3] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[4] This event will be described in Chapter 14. [Editor]

minister through the latter's first secretary, Commendatore Malvano, a Piedmontese Jew who constantly remained extremely well disposed toward Don Bosco. Through him Don Bosco sent Minister Melgari a memorandum [describing what the Salesians were doing in South America on behalf of Italian immigrants and suggesting that the latter could colonize Patagonia].[5]

The secretary delayed the answer, barely hiding the minister's embarrassment. In those days, government officials who did not regard clergymen as unwelcome irritants were most uncommon. The answer stated the minister's opinion that, as for concentrating Italians in any one part of Patagonia, it called for more thought because of Argentina's bitter feud with Chile regarding their respective control of that area. All plans therefore should be deferred to a more propitious time. Meanwhile the minister intended to discuss the matter with him personally at Valdocco as soon as hostilities between Turkey and Serbia[6] would cease and give him a breathing spell in Piedmont. We may here remark that the Utopian idea of founding an Italian colony under the rule of the mother country had to yield to a more realizable project of setting up a community like that of the Welsh in Chubut: Italians helped by their fatherland, but entirely self-governed under Argentine law. Malvano added: "As for a subsidy to help defray the steamer fares of the men you are sending to the institutes you have founded or promoted in America, the minister wishes (as is customary) that a letter be sent to Marquis Spinola, our minister in Buenos Aires, to hear his opinion. We shall await a reply from the marquis who is expected to arrive at his post in the last days of July." Here—"so as not to take too much of your precious time"—he ended the letter. The whole matter ground to a halt, although Don Bosco did make one other attempt on October 12, 1876, two months later, with another letter[7] to the minister's secretary, informing him that the Argentine government had paid eight steamer fares for Don Bosco's missionaries.

Don Bosco was not then aware that the Uruguayan government would pay for another ten passengers. The Italian government

[5] We are omitting the memorandum and Don Bosco's letter to the minister's secretary seeking his good offices. [Editor]

[6] In 1876 Serbia rebelled against Turkey, but the rebellion was crushed. Only through Russian armed intervention did Serbia gain full independence with the signing of the Berlin Treaty in 1878. [Author]

[7] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

gave him a thousand lire—"with sincere regret that nothing more is possible," as Don Bosco stated later.

It was only natural that Don Bosco should also appeal to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. On August 23, 1876 he wrote at length to Cardinal Franchi, its prefect, who had previously requested detailed news of Patagonia. With his letter[8] Don Bosco also enclosed a report compiled by Father Barberis. As we have already said, the Holy See intended to establish an apostolic prefecture in Patagonia to be entrusted to the Salesians.

We do not know what came of this appeal, but we do know that a similar request addressed to the Holy Father was very successful. Through Cardinal Bilio, Pius IX not only expressed deep satisfaction with the new expedition, but also sent him five thousand lire—"a very considerable sum," as the cardinal himself said, considering the enormous expenses then burdening the Pope.[9]

Further information on Don Bosco's moves to prepare personnel and to find needed funds comes to us in two brief letters he wrote to Father Cagliero in the early part of September.

Turin, September 1, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

If you can, please arrange for the tickets to be paid here and for the money to be sent to us. The Argentine general consul has assured us of a substantial discount. He told Father Bazzani that he can get first-class passage for five hundred lire.

We hope to get some funds from the government and from the Pope.

I just received your letter from San Nicolás. I shall set things in motion. Isn't Father Daghero better suited than Father Tamietti? By September 15 I hope to tell you whom I am assigning to Villa Colón.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Lanzo, September 12, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

We are here at Lanzo trying to figure out the personnel for our houses in Italy, Europe and South America. I hope that everything will turn out

[8] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[9] Letter of Cardinal Bilio, October 29, 1876. [Author]

well. To meet your personnel needs we should send you twenty-five Salesians. We have them, but we can't afford the travel expenses. At any rate, by October 1 you will have a list of names and qualifications. As for the sisters, we shall have to wait until April.

Our valuable cleric Vigliotto has flown to heaven; let us pray for him. There is great excitement here about the missions: lawyers, notaries, parish priests, and teachers are asking to become Salesian missionaries.

Make every effort to recruit boys or adults who have lived among the savages. If any of them should want to come to Europe to study or learn a trade, by all means send them.

Later, let me hear about your planned visit to Carmen de Patagónes with the archbishop. Tell him that the Holy Father wishes that more attempts be made to contact the savages, and that he applauds our efforts to open schools along the Patagonian border. He also urges us to do our utmost for the training of a native clergy.

A thousand greetings to our usual friends and benefactors, and to all our sons—Father Baccino, Father Belmonte, etc.

I remain in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The painstaking procedures for the approval of the Association of Salesian Cooperators and the Sons of Mary Program,[10] the opening of new houses by his two religious families, the routine direction of the Salesian Congregation and of the Oratory, the beginning of the new school year, the preparations for the second missionary expedition, and many other concerns absorbed Don Bosco's time and mind, but not to the extent that he could not often cross the ocean mentally in order to convey his fatherly solicitude and love to his first missionaries. We can read this between the lines of his letters which have not been lost with time. In October he wrote to his dear Father Cagliero:

Vignale, October 13, 1876

My dear Father Cagliero:

I am at Vignale. Countess Callori is just recovering from a long illness and sends you her greetings.

We are swiftly making preparations for the missionaries' departure scheduled for November 14, barring any problems. I figure that eight

[10] *See* Vol. XI, Chapters 3 and 4. [Author]

fares will be paid by the Argentine government. I can manage the rest somehow. I have written to the minister for foreign affairs, who has promised me seas and lands. Well, let him keep them and just give us something to traverse them. As soon as I get his answer, I'll let you know.

From the list of personnel which I sent you at the beginning of this month you can start planning how to place them. By November 1 you will have all the necessary details on each of them. I made some substitutions but, on the whole, I hope you will find the list satisfactory. In all there will be more than twenty—probably twenty-three.

We have four priests here who want to join us and go to the missions. They seem to be very enthusiastic. One, Stephen Bourlot, can be sent now; we will see about the others. Four more will come by the feast of All Saints. We shall see.

Cardinal Bilio, through the Holy Father, is asking for Salesian teachers for the seminary at Sabina. The same is true of Cardinal Franchi for Aricia, Cardinal Di Pietro for the junior seminary of Albano, and the municipal authorities of Albano for its grammar school. There has also been a similar request from the Novara diocesan seminary at Miasino. Do you want to know more? This year (including the houses of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who are doing quite well wherever they go), we shall open twenty houses on your continent and ours.

We have bought a magnificent building at Nice where we can accommodate a hundred artisans and as many Sons of Mary.

If you could see with your own eyes what our Congregation is accomplishing, you would be astounded. May God grant that we can meet the challenge.

I received your money order of four thousand gold francs; they will be used as indicated.

The missionaries are learning Spanish. Some are doing very well, others less so, but after a little time in the country, I think they will be able to start teaching.

You will receive copies of the printed letters. Urge the confreres to read them and be informed so that in turn they can inform others.

I had a letter from Mr. Benitez and will reply by the next mail.

Countess Callori is doing quite well but is still unable to write. She asks me to thank you for your two letters. They made her very happy, and she hopes to answer you as soon as her health—or, better, her mind—allows her to do so.

The new pastor at Lanzo will be my fellow seminarian, Monsignor Dalfi, presently the pastor at Casanova. I trust that he will continue to be our good friend.[11]

[11] We are omitting a short letter of Don Bosco to him on this score. [Editor]

Countess Bricherasio has almost finished making a magnificent set of white vestments, part of the wardrobe for the forthcoming expedition.

I have no time to write to anyone else. Pass my news on to the others. Tell them that I love them all in Jesus Christ and that I pray much for them. They are to stand firm like pillars of strength and be as holy as our patron saint.

God bless you all.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Regards and respects to the archbishop.

He sent a fourth letter on the last of the month with a summary listing of eight items between news, communications and instructions.

Turin, October 31, 1876

My dear Father Cagliero:

1. We are still working on preparations for the November 14 departure of our missionaries, with the total number and names as per the list, with slight modifications. When they arrive, you will receive written information on the qualifications and work experience of each one.

2. The deportation of five hundred immigrants is serious. Proceed with care and keep out of it as much as you can. Maybe this set off the uprisings in Buenos Aires.

3. By now you have received my consent about "La Boca" and St. Charles Parish. I can count on three confreres: two for this work and one for Patagonia. They are raring to go. I think they are a perfect choice. Will the archbishop go with you on your visit to Patagónes?

4. I really feel you must return to Europe in 1877 and then take a trip to Ceylon in India to open another very important mission. That place needs a Castelnuovo boy. However, first make sure that all our work in Buenos Aires is firmly established and cared for.

5. We must have premises or part of an existing property for a local novitiate. If and when needed, I have a novice master.

6. In 1877 you will have four clerics who will be ready for ordination. Let me know in time. The Holy Father will grant us a dispensation of twenty-one months from the required age.

7. I received the money order of four thousand and am waiting for that nine thousand.

We are moving along; everybody is busy but our coffers are drained.

8. Yesterday evening (October 30) six Salesians left to take charge of the schools at Ariccia and Magliano. On Sunday, November 5, another six will leave for Albano; then will depart those for Trinità and, next, those for Argentina, who will first go to Rome for the Holy Father's blessing.

I have no more time to write. I will do so later. God bless you all. So far no letter or money order has arrived. I will await instructions. Believe me to be

Yours most affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On July 4, amid clamorous shouts for freedom, very serious rioting had broken out in Buenos Aires to thwart a popular demonstration organized by the city's largest newspapers in favor of the United States. Don Bosco felt that the rioting had been caused by an attempted reprisal against the Argentine government for having deported five hundred foreigners as violaters of the peace. Since most of them were Italians, it was necessary for Father Cagliero to exercise the greatest prudence and not take sides—hence Don Bosco's recommendation.

The idea of a trip to Ceylon come about thus. In August 1876, a certain Father Louis Piccinelli of Bergamo, a missionary in Ceylon, called on Don Bosco at the Oratory. After talking at length about the foreign missions and Ceylon in particular, Don Bosco gave his visitor the firmly founded hope that by 1878 he would send some missionaries there, with the proviso that they were all to be stationed together at one location. Father Piccinelli was not authorized to accept such a proviso. Therefore he wrote to his bishop in Ceylon, who replied that he was very anxious to have a few priests who could teach Latin, Greek, the physical sciences and other subjects in English. In fact, he hoped that he could have them before 1878. They could reside with him in the bishop's house and teach in the large boarding school adjoining his residence in Colombo, which was then directed by the Brothers of Christian Doctrine under his direct supervision. To forestall likely problems, the bishop would gladly begin personal correspondence with Don Bosco. Having thus securely safeguarded Don Bosco's position, Father Piccinelli asked him to confirm his promise without further delay, for, as far as he could see, the matter was settled.

He went a step further and pleaded with Don Bosco to let him

have two missionaries immediately to go with him to Ceylon. He was even willing to wait for them and to defer his departure for several months. They would share his mission, which comprised eight thousand Catholics amid a much vaster population of Mohammedans, Buddhists and Protestants. He wrote, "We shall live together and I will try to adjust to the rules of your Congregation. Naturally you will incur no expenses for the voyage, food, clothing or other necessities. If you wish, I know you can do it. So tell me that you can, and that you want to, and I shall thank the Lord for it."[12] At the top of this letter we read the following words in Don Bosco's handwriting: "Reply: accepted in principle." Since it was not his habit to rush things, he limited his response to a favorable consideration, reserving decisions until he could send Father Cagliero to get first-hand information.

To his most distinguished benefactors Don Bosco did not merely mail a printed circular, but he sent them a personal letter asking for their alms. We have two such letters, addressed to the noble Fassati spouses, on whom he counted whenever he needed any special assistance. Enclosing the first circular, he wrote to the marquis:

Turin, July 16, 1876

Dear Marquis:

The cleric Bonora has assured me that you are now feeling better. I thank the Lord and ask Him to preserve you for many a year. I am sending you and your wife the Salesian cooperators' certificate which we spoke of several times. You can thus benefit by the many indulgences and spiritual favors granted by our Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX.

Herein, too, is a copy of my letter begging help for the missionaries whom I am about to send to America. Do what you can, for the good Lord will repay with heaven both those who give their lives for souls and those who come to the aid of these missionaries, who will be twenty in number.

May God grant you and the marchioness good health and a good rest in the country. I hope to see you there soon. I go to Alassio tomorrow on urgent business. Please pray for me. I remain,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He turned to the marchioness some three months later. We

[12]Letter to Don Bosco, October 24, 1876. [Author]

wonder which we should admire more in this letter—the simplicity of this man of God or his self-effacement in pleading for financial assistance as a deed of charity.

Turin, October 21, 1876

Dear Marchioness,

Last year when I brought to your attention the Sons of Mary Program to support personnel for our missions, you graciously answered that neither you nor the marquis would sign a pledge for annual funds, but that, whenever I should be in need, I was to appeal to you both and you would grant whatever your charity inspired.

In sore straits on two counts, I now appeal to you. I still have fifty seminarians dressed in civilian clothes and awaiting God-sent help that they may put on the clerical habit and be allowed to commence their studies during the forthcoming school year.

My other obligation concerns the Argentine mission. I got some clothes for the missionaries but have absolutely no money for transportation. The Argentine government is funding eight missionaries, and I still need fifteen fares amounting to twelve thousand lire. I went around looking for help but was unable to obtain anything. I wrote to the Holy Father who replied that he would help me another time, but that just now it was impossible.

I know that you too have a lot of expenses to meet. Still, I appeal to you as to an anchor of salvation for those benighted souls who live steeped in idolatry and awaiting someone to bring them the light of the Holy Gospel that they may be saved.

I shall not fail to pray for you, and for your husband, that God may grant you both a long and happy life and, in due time, the reward of the just in heaven.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Seemingly the Holy Father changed his mind—with good reason, we venture to guess, since Pius IX sought an important favor from Don Bosco. Eight days after his letter to Marchioness Fassati, Cardinal Bilio wrote to inform him of the Pope's contribution, adding: "However the Holy Father has attached one condition to this offering. While it is a token of his lofty esteem for you, a sign of the trust he puts in you, it will also, I hope, prove more pleasing than his contribution." The condition was that Don Bosco

assume the direction of the Concettini or Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception.[13] We will speak of this matter later.

A benefactor whom he never forgot in critical moments, and to whom he never appealed in vain, was the well-deserving Attorney [Nicholas] Galvagno of Marene.

August 20, 1876

Dear Attorney,

I do not know whether you were sent a circular concerning my missionaries. I am enclosing a copy. Let your charity respond as it will.

The indulgences and spiritual favors of which I have already spoken to you have now been printed.

As soon as someone goes to Marene, I will send you a copy. God bless you and your family. Believe me in Jesus Christ to be

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

He acknowledged the receipt of small offerings with a brief form letter,[14] but when the offering was a large one, or the standing of the donor warranted special consideration, he wrote brief notes, such as the following, in his own hand. This note is addressed to Countess Olympia of Pamparato, née Marchioness Natta of Alfiano, residing in Turin.

Turin, August 22, 1876

Dear Countess:

With sincere gratitude I received your donation of a hundred lire for our missionaries who are getting ready to sail for South America.

I thank you. It is God who will repay you, but I shall not fail to say special prayers for your husband, the count, and your mother, Marchioness Natta, who, they tell me, is not too well.

My regards to everyone.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Lastly, what shall we say of the vestments and linens prepared by communities of nuns? In some convents the sisters worked entire nights to finish the missionaries' wardrobe.

[13] *See* Vol. X, p. 570. [Editor]
[14] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

To their honor and in gratitude, we would like to cite the girls at the *Rifugio*,[15] the Sisters of St. Anne, the *Juliettes*,[16] and the girls at St. Peter's home. It was only right that Don Bosco show them his thankfulness in some way. Some suggested a gift, others a visit. Don Bosco saw to it that appropriate gifts were purchased and sent to them in his name. As for visiting each religious house, how could he if he had to stay home in order to keep up with his work? For a year the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians had been living next to the Oratory, and yet he had not been able to visit them even once.

The missionaries' departure was scheduled for November. Their number had now increased to twenty-three. Eight were to open the Villa Colón boarding school; two, the home for poor Italian boys in Buenos Aires; two, the festive oratories in the same city. Two others were to join the staff of Our Lady of Mercy parish. The rest were assigned as follows: two to the reopened parish church at "La Boca," four to our school in San Nicolás, and three to stand by for an initial attempt to reach the savages living at Carmen de Patagónes near the Patagonian border. With so many things to attend to, Don Bosco was totally exhausted, and yet on November 19 he wrote to Father Cagliero: "No matter what, God is helping us."

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

[16] Orphan girls so named after Juliette Colbert, popularly called "Marchioness Barolo" after her marriage to Marquis Tancredi Falletti of Barolo, a small town in Piedmont. The marchioness founded several charitable institutions in and around Turin—among them, the orphanage for the "Juliettes." *See ibid.*, pp. 183ff. [Editor]

CHAPTER 12

Life at the Oratory

EVERY year death takes its toll of the ever dwindling number of those who have lived during the early days of the Oratory when it was being run by Don Bosco alone. Although, concerning essentials, hearing one means hearing all, it is always a pleasure to listen to detailed accounts of those days from the veterans of the past. Salesians or not, priests or laymen, they all sparkle with a youth beyond their years when they tell of the joy of living in Don Bosco's house. True, they had none of today's conveniences, but who cared? Happiness ruled their days, a happiness tempered by prayer and study, prayer and work, under Don Bosco's fatherly smile and care. Like the sun, his goodness cast its kindly influence into every nook and cranny. No sooner did a newcomer set foot within the Oratory than he almost immediately succumbed to the charm which seemed to fill the air. Let it suffice to cite the evidence of Father [Louis] Cartier, a venerable Salesian of Nice, greatly admired and beloved. Coming to the Oratory without knowing a single word of Italian, he felt lost at first, but once Don Bosco spoke to him, the young man was instantly attracted by his charming manner and the interest he took about his family and everything that was most dear to him. For some time, until he felt more at ease with the language, Father Cartier would go upstairs to Don Bosco's room several times a day. Don Bosco invariably welcomed him like a father and chatted away with him as though he had no more urgent business than to converse with him.

This chapter will recount Oratory life during the three summer months of 1876, a period of the school year when Don Bosco would customarily not absent himself since the spiritual retreats were being held at that time and, soon after, the boys would leave for vacation.

The spiritual retreats were preceded by an impressive theatrical production of a Latin play by the students on June 1. Entitled *Phasmatonices* or *Larvarum Victor* [The Ghosts' Conqueror] and written in Latin in the style of Plautus by the scholarly Bishop Charles Rosini of Pozzuoli, the play concerned the antics of a Roman young man who pretends to be a ghost and foils his unscrupulous guardian's attempts to cheat him of his fortune. The boys' performance of the play in Latin was a huge success. A distinguished audience of college professors and teachers hailed it as an educational triumph which greatly enhanced the Oratory's reputation for learning and study. Leading newspapers carried rave notices, commending the actors' "graceful delivery, ease of gesture, readiness, and precision." By popular demand, a repeat performance was held a week later, attended by Don Bosco and several prominent clergymen and teachers. On both evenings, musical interludes were given between acts, a favorite being Father Cagliero's "The Sailor Lad."[1]

Once school life at the Oratory got back to normal—as today, the distraction was but temporary and brief—the spitirual retreats began. Despite the policy—recently adopted—not to postpone them until the end of the year, it was unavoidable this year because of Don Bosco's long absence and his understandable desire to be present. Fortunately, the cool, wet weather greatly favored the superiors' best efforts and the boys' good will. Within one week—June 11 to 18—the retreats took place for students and artisans alike. Father [Anthony] Belasio, a zealous missionary well known for the freshness of his preaching which reaped wonderful results among simple farm folk and young people, spoke to both groups, giving a total of four conferences a day. To each section he gave a step-by-step explanation of the Holy Mass as the celebrant went through the ceremony. Between sermons he heard confessions, going straight from his pulpit to the apse of the Church of St. Francis de Sales where the retreat conferences were given. The Salesians who knew him testified to his boundless love for Don Bosco. Father Barberis' chronicle records: "An excellent man! I had the chance to know him well. How fond he is of Don Bosco! He is most attached to him and looks up to him as a son to his father. He is thrilled to be listed among the first Salesian Coopera-

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

tors, a new undertaking just begun, in which Don Bosco has placed his highest hopes."

After night prayers on June 11, Don Bosco addressed the students as follows:

Sharing your joy, I greet you in the Lord. Your retreat began this evening. You asked for Father Belasio to conduct it for you, and you have him with you. I know you're glad. Remember that it is a blessing to make a spiritual retreat, since it may gain heaven for us.

It is my wish that many of you will make this retreat for the purpose of choosing your state of life. Some of you are upperclassmen and should give serious thought to your vocation. Others have a year further to go but expect to skip their fifth year, and they too should search for that life to which the Lord calls them. Earnestly beg this favor of the Lord, and He will grant it to you. I leave the rest to Father Belasio who will dwell on this topic, show you how to recognize your vocation, and advise you how to respond to it. Each of you should put himself into the hands of his spiritual director, strive to be recollected, and study himself well. Some aspire to the priesthood, others to another state of life. That road of life to which the Lord calls you He has strewn with many graces to make it easier for you to reach your eternal salvation. The problem is to make the right choice.

I will not tell you how you are to conduct yourselves during this retreat because you will be instructed in the conferences. I will just ask you to keep the rules which will be given to you and to make a special effort to observe silence at the right times, such as in study hall, before Mass and after night prayers.

And now a little thought—or, better, let me tell you something that happened this afternoon. A son of the very wealthy Marchioness Callori, our benefactress, is a professional horse trainer and quite proud of it. Even the wildest broncos have been tamed by him. Whenever he heard that a horse was unable to be tamed, he would immediately buy it. In fact, all the horses he has purchased have been broken in by him. Hearing of a spirited steed at Saluzzo, a wild horse that no one would buy, he went there, bought it and broke it in to his satisfaction. One day at Saluzzo, he harnessed it, got into a carriage, and drove away, using the reins and a light touch of the whip. Suddenly, startled by a sharp crack of the whip, the horse lunged forward and galloped furiously across an open field. Realizing his danger, the young man jumped from the coach, but his leg was caught for a moment in the carriage wheel and instantly broken while he was flung upon the rocky ground. People dashed to his aid and carried him to an inn, where his leg was put in splints so that he could be taken to

Turin. Possibly because the bone had not been set properly or for some other reason, the leg had to be amputated, but even this could not save him. So much time had been wasted in medical consultations and in obtaining the consent of both the young man and his family that gangrene set in and spread throughout his body. At 3:30 this afternoon, after receiving the Last Sacraments, his soul returned to his Maker.

The Callori parents had three boys. One died some time ago of consumption at the age of twenty; the second—twenty-three years old—died today, and the remaining one is in very poor health. The family's grief is boundless, for they had put all their hopes in that son, and today they can find no peace or comfort in his tragic loss.

Their only relief from sorrow is the thought that their son died a good Christian death, leaving the well-founded hope of his soul's eternal salvation. This family is very wealthy, but riches cannot help them in their loss. Once again we realize that riches cannot make us happy. This thought has convinced me more than ever of the truth that religion alone can comfort the soul in tribulation and bring it peace.

We pray that the Lord will look with kindly favor on this family and comfort them in their painful loss. Meanwhile, remember, my dear boys, that riches neither comfort nor fill the human heart. Only religion can do this. I say this so that you may learn not to overvalue the things of this world. Our only real wealth lies in the good works which prepare us for a place in heaven. Good night.

The youth who died so tragically was the young Count Emmanuel Callori, whose name has often recurred in Don Bosco's letters to the youth's pious mother. It was Don Bosco who administered the Last Sacraments to him and, commending his soul to God, closed his eyes.[2] The surviving brother, Count Ranieri, then ailing somewhat, is the father of a large family and today [1931], in his old age, enjoys excellent health.

After the tragic loss of their son, the Calloris made arrangements with Don Bosco for an anniversary Mass to be said in perpetuity in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Seemingly the students made a good retreat because we know

[2]Since June 11 was the last day of the Easter season and Don Bosco did personally assist the Callori youth, it could very well be that his was the death foretold in a dream which Don Bosco narrated on January 23. (*See* Chapter 2) The Oratory chronicle records no deaths during the Easter season, nor does it suggest that Don Bosco assisted other youths in their last moments. In that case, the calendar date of May 26, revealed to Don Bosco, may be the date of the young man's tragic accident. This, however, is a mere assumption. If it is correct, it confirms our opinion that the death in the dream was not to occur at the Oratory. [Editor's condensation of author's footnote]

that Don Bosco was pleased. His deepest concern in a retreat was the matter of one's vocation, and in this instance we have seen it reflected in his "Good Night" of June 11. One might say that vocation was an everyday concern at the Oratory. Father Barberis, who taught religion in the upper grades, touched upon this point when he offered his students two suggestions for their retreat. First, they were to decide on their vocation then, since any delay would be disastrous and cause deep unrest in their lives. Second, consulting anyone but their regular confessor would be foolish, because Don Bosco knew them well and was endowed with very special charisms from the Lord—hence they should seek his counsel. Those were happy days. The outcome was that forty students of the fourth and fifth years decided then and there to join the Salesian Society, while a dozen or so, though inclined to join, remained undecided either for family reasons or because they felt that they needed to consult someone else. Taking into account twenty young men from the Sons of Mary Program and students who might come in from other schools, the superiors could look forward to some eighty new clerics for the coming years. But, as we shall see, the reality even exceeded this hope.

The Congregation was growing rapidly. One reason, Don Bosco felt, was that the Congregation did not wait for people to take the first step toward it. "We go out and look for them," he remarked, "and we don't have to leave our premises to find them. They come to our schools and oratories with no such intention, but they get to like our way of life and ask to stay with us; our only task is to make a choice. If someone will most likely succeed, we keep him; if not, he is free to go elsewhere." From these elements Don Bosco chose the more suitable candidates for his Congregation. "Our Congregation does not aim at reforming a person's way of life, as other religious orders do," he said. "No, we assume that the moral habits of our candidates have already been reformed, or, better still, that our candidates have never led an immoral life."[3]

A very charming incident which occurred about this time confirms all we said in the previous volume about the way that the Oratory boys viewed a religious vocation.[4] An upperclassman, a lively but level-headed fellow, was walking with some schoolmates alongside Don Bosco. Noticing that he seemed lost in thought and

[3] Chronicle of Father Barberis, August 12, 1876. [Author]
[4] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 207, 247–250, 267f. [Editor]

anxious to say something, Don Bosco asked him, "Do you wish to tell me something?"

"Yes, Father."

"What is it?"

"I don't want the others to hear," he replied. Drawing Don Bosco aside, he whispered: "I want to give you a present you will like."

"What is it?"

"Me," he said in grave tones, standing on tip-toe and opening his arms out. "I want to give you myself. From now on, do what you want with me. Keep me with you always."

"You could not have given me a more welcome gift indeed," Don Bosco answered. "And I accept you not for myself, but to offer and to consecrate you entirely to the Lord."

Some years before, this boy had mistakenly thought that the prefect of the house was about to send him home because his widowed mother was slow in paying his modest tuition fee. To ease his fear he had run to Don Bosco. Noticing the boy's anguish, Don Bosco looked kindly upon him and told him in a fatherly manner, "Look, should the prefect send you home, just go out the main door and return through the church and come to see me." Kissing his hand, the boy went away reassured, promising that he would do just as he was told. But, of course, he was never dismissed.

This is the young man mentioned in Father Barberis' precious chronicle, so often quoted, when he recorded the newly accepted novices' brief visit at home just before receiving the clerical habit. "Only [Francis] Piccollo would not hear of going home," he writes, "because although he is fond of good-natured pranks, he really fears that, going home, he may fall into sin. Hence he did not want to go." The school records show that Piccollo ranked first in study and obtained top conduct marks at the end of the school year.

Again, it was to this lad, at the time of his decision, that Don Bosco addressed the following words: "Look, two roads are open to you: that which your family would like you to follow, a worldly profession—law, for example—and that which Don Bosco points out to you. If you choose the world, you can have a fine career and earn a lot of money, but run the risk of not saving your soul. With Don Bosco you will have loads of work to do and much to suffer, but you will become rich in merit for paradise." Father Francis

Piccollo, formerly the provincial in Sicily, experienced the truth of those words over twenty-three years, and in his daily suffering he recalled them to his own comfort.[5]

Father Piccollo had had his share of tempting proposals too. Archbishop Gastaldi had heard people praise him very highly and, through Father Rho, a cousin and fellow townsman, had promised that, if he left Don Bosco, he would not only give him a full scholarship at the seminary, but would also pay for his clothing and books. Piccollo replied that he felt quite happy with Don Bosco and that he would never walk out on the man who had reared and educated him to that day with a father's love. Father Rho's brother, the superintendent of Turin's public schools, also held out a tempting proposal. He had his mother tell Francis, who had been a cleric for several years, that if he would leave Don Bosco, he would give him a teaching position in a public secondary school and, within a couple of years, a professor's certification. Francis' answer was the same. Sarcastically the superintendent remarked to Piccollo's mother, "Very well! Tell your son to stay with Don Bosco; he will become a cardinal."

When Don Bosco learned of the two incidents, he grieved at these attempts to steal his clerics from him, but he also felt great joy at the loyalty of his young sons.

Apropos of vocations and their recruitment, we deem it worthwhile to mention the case of Joseph Mino, a fifth year secondary school student who had done exceedingly well through all his schooling. An excellent singer with a pleasing personality, he had often been exposed to far more tempting situations than the others, having had to attend dinners and entertainments where he won the admiration of all. Yet he had always kept himself morally good and determined to become a priest. When the spiritual retreat was over, Don Bosco remarked to several priests, among them Father Barberis, who recorded his words, "If only Mino would stay here and join our Congregation! I'd love him to stay. I have done all I could for him at great sacrifice, and he has always responded, so that my every word of advice was never in vain. I never let opportunities slip by, even at my own inconvenience, to do all I thought best for him in the Lord. Now that he is graduating from secondary school and is ready to don the clerical habit, I would be

[5] Father Piccollo died in Rome on December 8, 1930, at the age of sixty-nine. [Editor]

thrilled to have him remain with us. But that is not so easy because he is pressured by his parents, his pastor, and the bishop himself to enter the diocesan seminary." In fact, Mino did enter the seminary at Biella, while Don Bosco said and did nothing to restrict his freedom. He was still a young priest when he was fatally stricken by illness shortly after Don Bosco's own death. One of Biella's priests confided that he had come to love Don Bosco when he met Father Mino, whose personal manners were so different from those of others that, he felt, they must have been learned at Don Bosco's school.

About the same time a similar instance took place, but this time Don Bosco acted very differently. A boy took a firm stand against all opposition, and Don Bosco felt that it was not just a question of respecting the lad's freedom but also of having others respect it. The boy was James Gresino, a fifth year student who was seriously determined to remain with Don Bosco, notwithstanding the fact that his uncle came to the Oratory for a transcript of his records so that he could enter the diocesan seminary, and even though his father often threatened to disown him if he did not yield to his family's wishes. The boy's pastor supported the father, and, adding to the pressures, a priest of Turin who had often befriended him kept fanning the troubled flames more than anyone else. Even his older sister, who was quite influential, filled the house with lamentations at the mere mention that her brother intended to join the Salesian Congregation.

The uncle went to Don Bosco for a letter of recommendation so that the boy could qualify for the seminary entrance test. Don Bosco replied that he would not issue the letter. Since Gresino had said he intended to return to the Oratory and not go to the seminary, Don Bosco refused to give a transcript unless the boy told him that he had changed his mind. The uncle insisted, but Don Bosco stood firm. "Let the boy come here himself," he replied. "Let him show me that he has changed his mind, and I will let him have the transcript."

Eventually the boy felt overpowered and gave up the fight. When he called on Don Bosco and told him that he would enter the seminary, he immediately obtained the transcript.

In their youthful inexperience, living among people whose values were materialistic and being separated from anyone who

could have properly advised them, young men often yielded to pressures. Still, not a few withstood all opposition and did return to the Oratory. In 1876 some lads paid dearly for their victory. One boy had to sign away his share of the family inheritance to his brother; another was disowned by his father, while a third boy came back only by escaping from his enraged father who had dragged him back home.

In Gresino's case, his was but a temporary weakness. When he returned home after graduation, he felt sorry that he had yielded and was anxious to go back. Since he had not yet been confirmed, Don Bosco had someone notify him that he could receive the sacrament at the Oratory toward the end of August. His parents could not refuse permission because without confirmation he could not enter the seminary. He went to the Oratory and, once there, absolutely refused to leave. No one could budge him. He received the clerical habit with his companions and to this very day [1931] is an excellent Salesian.[6]

Such episodes in which the Oratory boys showed their affection for Don Bosco and willingly followed in his footsteps were not uncommon. "How many such instances have we seen!" Father Barberis exclaims in his chronicle. In turn, Father Lemoyne reaffirms the same in his personal memoirs. How beneficial it would be if those who lived during those days and are still with us would let us know of such incidents, especially if they themselves were involved.

Let us offer a further remark on this topic of vocations. Don Bosco's fatherly suggestions, even if not opposed, did not always find a docile response in the boys, but in these instances they all, sooner or later, sadly regretted the consequences. We mention three very recent examples. In 1875 Don Bosco suggested to a fourth year boy who was undecided that he don the clerical habit without hesitation, but the boy preferred to wait another year. After his fifth year, he returned home and gave no further thought to becoming a priest. Another boy, one of the best students, was likewise advised by Don Bosco not to wait, but he preferred to do so and entered the fifth year—and what a change took place in him! By November his superiors were already considering dismiss-

[6] Father Gresino died at the Salesian School in Varazze (Italy) on April 17, 1946 at the age of eighty-seven. [Editor]

ing him. A third young man, advised to speed up his studies by enrolling in a crash course because of his age, agreed to do so but, after consulting others, he returned to his regular courses and eventually came to a sorry end. As soon as Don Bosco realized that a youngster refused his advice and sought the counsel of others, he put all hope aside. He still loved him as before, and he did not let him know what he thought of him, but he carefully refrained from advising him any further on that matter.

A few prodigal sons fortunately found their way back to their father's house. Thus, a young man named Coccero called on Don Bosco on the evening of November 19, some eight years after he had unwisely left the Oratory. At the end of his secondary school Don Bosco had told him, "You are not made for the world; what you need is a sheltered life." But the boy replied that he intended to enter the seminary, especially to please his parents. "Do as you wish," Don Bosco advised, "but you will be a priest only if you join a religious order." He entered the seminary and conducted himself properly so that his superiors were satisfied with him. In his fourth year of theology, however, his rector called him one day and told him abruptly that he had no priestly vocation. On returning to his family, the poor fellow felt like a fish out of water. He stayed at home for two years, restless in spirit, until he recalled Don Bosco's advice at his departure from the Oratory. He went to speak with him, pleading to be admitted into the Salesian Congregation. After securing adequate information, Don Bosco accepted him.

"How often that happens!" exclaimed the priests to whom Don Bosco was speaking.

"Why does this take place?" Don Bosco replied. "We can easily understand it on a purely human level. There are guileless, good-natured boys facing a deceitful world. They do not know it at all and believe that everyone is as honest as they. When they experience deceit, they cannot cope with it. Some young people are as little suited to the world as their simplicity is suited to worldly chicanery. They will always feel out of place in the world. Knowing them well, I warn them frankly. Years later they remember my words and act accordingly."

The artisans' spiritual retreat was likewise fruitful. A token of this was the sizable number of applicants to the Salesian Congregation as coadjutor brothers. Since he hoped to strengthen this branch, Don Bosco was delighted.

Throughout Don Bosco's life, joys and sorrows were always intermingled. At this time poor health, his own and that of his helpers, gave him constant anxiety. Ever since his return from Rome, he had not passed one single day without some ailment. The death of Count Callori's son further aggravated his condition because, on returning home drenched with perspiration, he caught a cold which totally debilitated him. On the night of June 14 he had such an acute seizure of colic that he had to leave his bed and rest on the sofa without a moment's relief. Unwilling as he always was to bother anyone at night, he did not call for help. The following night he ran a fever and during the day perspired heavily without respite. Coincidentally three of his priests were ill but did not abandon their posts. Father Barberis kept on teaching his classes—God only knows how, since he could hardly stand, but he did so by sheer will-power because there was no one to take his place. Father Guidazio, though strong and tireless, was so overworked that he collapsed and was ordered by the doctor to take a complete rest. He left his beloved pupils and went to Nizza Monferrato, to the home of Countess Corsi who was like a mother to the Salesians.

Father Chiala, the zealous catechist of the artisans, was the hardest hit. This worthy son of Don Bosco worked to the very limit of his strength. His illness abruptly took such a turn for the worse that he had to go to a little village near Feletto in the Ivrea diocese where his uncle was the pastor. An unpleasant surprise awaited him there. He could not say Mass because of a decree of Bishop Moreno, forbidding the celebration of Mass to any priest who, having been born in the diocese, had established residence elsewhere. It is well known that this bishop had misgivings about Don Bosco and his Congregation. Not long before, the Cuffia brothers,[7] both priests, who had grieved Don Bosco by walking out on him, had caused the bishop some annoyance, with the result that he resorted to this ruling. Though couched in general terms, it had undoubtedly been aimed at Don Bosco's priests. However, Don Bosco asked Father Rua to send Father Chiala the *celebret*[8] he had requested. On this occasion, he substantially declared, "If the bishop will still deny him permission to say Mass, I am afraid that I shall have to write to Rome. A priest is not to be forbidden to say

[7] *See* Vol. X, pp. 550f. [Editor]

[8] A testimonial given to a priest when traveling that he is in good standing, with the accompanying request that he be permitted to say Mass. [Editor]

Mass just because he belongs to a religious congregation. If a bishop has a serious complaint against a priest, he may rightly forbid him to do so, but not because he belongs to a congregation which he dislikes." Shrugging off personal dislikes toward himself, Don Bosco was adamant when the Congregation's rights were at stake.

The artisans' retreat ended on Sunday morning, June 18. That day was to be crowned with a very solemn ceremony. The more the enemy of all good strove to sow seeds of hatred against the Pope, the more Catholics sought occasions to honor him as the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Pope Pius IX was completing the thirtieth year of his pontificate, and so long a reign was more than valid reason to summon the faithful throughout the world to give thanks to Almighty God. The thirty-first year of his reign would start on June 16, but the bishops [of Italy] postponed the celebration to Sunday, June 18, to make it easier for the faithful to take part. In a pastoral letter the archbishop of Turin invited both clergy and people to offer public prayers for the Pope, commenting: "It may be said that God's hand visibly upholds this great Pontiff, whose name will honor one of the most outstanding epochs of Church history. He is a single ray of light piercing the darkness which overshadows our present century, the one and only hope we possess in the evident harassments aimed at the beacon lighting our way in the storm which threatens to overcome us."

The Oratory held a solemn feast with general Communion; the choir sang at the 10 o'clock high Mass. After solemn vespers that evening, Father [Anthony] Belasio preached, enthusing his congregation and impressing the boys with his last words as he prepared to leave them after conducting their retreat.

During his stay at the Oratory, Father Belasio conceived a noble plan. Out of reverence for Don Bosco he attempted a reconciliation between him and the archbishop. In the past Father Belasio had been on friendly terms with the archbishop and felt that he still had easy access to him. He had an interview with the archbishop either before leaving Turin or shortly afterward, but we know that he did not see Don Bosco immediately afterward. In the course of his conversation he realized quite well where the crux of the conflict lay: the archbishop felt that Don Bosco did not adequately respect his authority, and he feared that he, who had been

appointed by the Lord to govern His Church, would appear subservient to Don Bosco's will. Father Belasio felt that he was authorized to confer with Don Bosco on the subject; therefore, after his return to Sartirana where urgent duties probably awaited him, he hastened to call on Don Bosco. He met him at Borgo San Martino and frankly told him all he had heard from the archbishop. Don Bosco felt deeply hurt. "How can such doubts possibly arise between people who seek only God's glory?" he asked. "No, no, no, I would never do anything to upset either the diocese or my archbishop, much less anything that could displease him. I beg you to consider that, as the superior of a fully approved Congregation which is growing rapidly, I must do my best to strengthen it and safeguard its indispensable autonomy, like that of all other religious congregations. Ah, my dear Father Belasio, if someone, maybe you yourself, could somehow make it possible for me to live in perfect harmony with my archbishop—he knows how much I love him—as I do with the other bishops, I would bless the Lord forever." Father Belasio notified Archbishop Gastaldi of his visit to Don Bosco and of their conversation, but the archbishop's reply was not the one they were hoping for.

Meanwhile, at the Oratory the two very important feasts of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and of Don Bosco's name day were drawing near. Although we will not dwell on the usual preparations, we cannot overlook a few minor items which, in the greater framework of history, appear insignificant but are most suitable for these memoirs, whose main purpose is to show our father's life in the midst of his sons.

The Oratory superiors had pretty well set the feast of St. Aloysius on June 25, but Don Bosco did not agree for a special reason. Since June 24 was the feast of St. John the Baptist, a holyday of obligation in Turin, there would be no opportunity for the boys to go to confession on the eve of the feast of St. Aloysius. "This feast is very important for the boys," Don Bosco stated, "and they willingly go to Communion."[9] June 29, St. Peter's feast day, was suggested. "Certainly not," Don Bosco objected. "St. Peter's must be kept as an important celebration to his honor alone, with a proper homily and singing to foster devotion to him. Besides, our church has an altar dedicated to him. Today especially there is

[9]Chronicle of Father Barberis, June 16, 1876. [Author]

greater need to honor St. Peter solemnly, to instruct the faithful about his dignity and to use every opportunity to rally the world about the Holy See." It was finally agreed to keep the feast of St. Aloysius on the first Sunday of July.

But once this date was decided upon, Don Bosco was not finished with the meeting. He had something to say which would be a gentle lesson to his staff. The chronicle reads: "That you do things without telling me I dislike; but I do approve of your planning ahead, discussing the arguments pro and con, and then telling me, 'We would like to do this in such and such a manner for these reasons.' In that case, if I have objections, we can make needed changes since no definite decision has been made—even though I usually accept things as presented. This cuts my efforts to zero, since all I have to do is check for any obstacle or drawback, whereas it is tiring if I must work out an entire project from scratch."

Father Belasio's presence during this conversation gave Don Bosco an opportunity to clarify a very important element of Oratory life for those who wish to understand it thoroughly. As this zealous priest was talking about certain current predictions concerning forthcoming events, Don Bosco—probably also to change the topic—remarked, "From time to time we have had boys here who were granted extraordinary favors in prayer. They would come to me and relate conversations they had with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament or Jesus Crucified or the Blessed Virgin Mary. This year, too, I have seen these extraordinary phenomena among the boys, not once, but often." Father Belasio understood this to mean that these boys revealed future events to Don Bosco, but the latter went on, "No, no, nothing of that sort! For instance, they tell me, 'Father, keep an eye on these boys'—and they name them. 'They are prowling wolves.' They also advise me on the proper running of the house; later I see that it was indeed good advice. There is a priest here too who, when giving Holy Communion, can sense if the person is ill disposed. He is never mistaken. This has happened several times."

Don Bosco had a similar conversation with Father Joseph Vespignani in 1877 as they reminisced about past and present Oratory boys, imitators of Dominic Savio. Father Vespignani also recalls an incident that took place in 1877 when Bishop Peter

Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro, a very zealous prelate, visited the Oratory to consult Don Bosco and rid himself of lingering spiritual anxieties. Not yet fully at ease after listening to Don Bosco, he asked him to send for five of his best boys who modeled themselves on Dominic Savio so that he could refer his doubts to them. Don Bosco agreed. The five boys came, countenances serene, respectful to the bishop and trustful of Don Bosco. "This American bishop," Don Bosco told them, "would like to know what you think of certain matters he will explain. Speak freely with him, as you would with me." He then withdrew, leaving one boy in the room and taking the others outside with him. The prelate manifested his fears to each lad: how the responsibility for the eternal salvation of so many souls weighed heavily upon him, and how he felt powerless because of the wiles of Satan and his satellites and the dearth of good priests. He was terrified by the thought of all those souls plunging into hell every day. Would he have to answer for them to God? Would he be saved himself? We can imagine how those boys felt. When pressed for a response, they said very simply that since he had come all that distance to ask Don Bosco for priests, it was surely a sign that he was taking good care of his people. The bishop asked each boy to pray to Mary, Help of Christians and to Dominic Savio that Don Bosco would send him missionaries. "Would you like to come and help me?" he went on. He did not have to wait for an answer; they replied affirmatively and said that they would ask Don Bosco to train them. "They each assured me I was not to blame," the good prelate told Father Vespignani some years later in Rio de Janeiro, "and they promised to pray that Don Bosco would soon send missionaries to Brazil."[10] This incident reminds us of St. Benedict's rule that abbots should seek counsel of even the youngest monks in serious matters, "for God often reveals mature judgments to young minds."[11]

We will now return to Don Bosco's conversation with his Salesians. As they passed from one topic to another, they came to speak of the excellent health that the Oratory boys enjoyed. It is good to quote his words, partially because certain expressions of his enrich this biography. "Physical activity is the best thing for

[10] Rev. Giuseppe Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco*, pp. 29–30, Tipografia Salesiana, San Benigno Canavese, 1930. [Author]

[11] Caput III, *De adhibendis ad consilium fratribus*. [Author]

health," he maintained. "I was always sickly in the seminary and in my first years of priesthood, but later I became very active and felt stronger. I can still remember once walking more than twenty Piedmontese miles[12] in a single day with Father Giacomelli on a round trip from Avigliana to Turin. Another time I set out from Turin and walked twelve miles to Becchi in six hours, practically non-stop. Now, even when I feel weak and ache all over, I go to visit sick friends who live even as far off as the Po River or at Porta Nuova, and I never take a coach, unless I have to because of pressing duties or lack of time or an urgent appointment. I believe that inactivity is a significant cause of the present day's sagging health. Readily available coaches, buses, and trains have eliminated the need to walk even short distances, while just fifty years ago people thought nothing about taking a walking jaunt from Turin to Lanzo. I don't think that a jolting coach or railway carriage offers us enough exercise to keep healthy. For instance, it's healthy for the feet to perspire, and that requires walking, not sitting down. Walking activates the whole body and toughens it."

After the spiritual retreats, perfect calm and peace reigned in the house. To quote the chronicle, many lads evinced a piety which bordered on the supernatural. This spiritual climate helped the students to prepare for their final exams. The upperclassmen, whom the chronicle credits with "a maturity far beyond their years," even studied at night.

Still, examination fever did not dampen the celebration of Don Bosco's name day, although bad weather did to some extent, but even then adjustments were made. The festivities of the evening before the feast were held in the courtyard, but on the feast of St. John the Baptist itself outdoor celebrations were out of the question. In the morning, the alumni were welcomed by the band and received by Don Bosco in the dining room; their gift was the symbolic flower bouquets which were to adorn the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, a symbol of the feelings of his former sons for their ever beloved father. This year [1876], at the dinner which Don Bosco hosted for them, the alumni thought of arranging for a memorial anniversary Mass for their deceased schoolmates. Their Christian concern arose from the fervent piety which these young men still retained after leaving the Oratory. Don Bosco was so

[12]The Piedmontese mile measured two and a half kilometers. [Author]

pleased that he instantly arranged for a solemn funeral Mass with catafalque and choir. The organizers immediately collected twenty lire and fifty cents as a Mass stipend from their colleagues. If their purses were thin, their hearts were big. The boarders also offered their gifts for church appurtenances: the students one hundred and seven lire, the artisans ninety lire. We have already mentioned the letters which came from America on this occasion. Other items of the celebration were postponed until the evening of June 29, St. Peter's feast day, because of the inclement weather. Between the two dates Don Bosco spoke as follows at the "Good Night" on June 28:

Finally we can have a chat together. You will say, "But we see each other and talk all day long." Yes, we do, but it's always in a hurry. Now we can talk at leisure.

First, I am happy to say that the retreats went pretty well. I was very pleased with your conduct and earnestness, and so was Father Belasio. I was particularly happy to see that many upperclassmen gave serious thought to their vocation and the state of life to which God calls each of us. They took stock of their traits, leanings and physical and intellectual talents in order to find out which walk of life they should follow. Some boys of the lower grades did the same. As of now, many have already decided to become Salesians and later volunteer for Patagonia and other lands. Is the world ours, and do all its roads lie open to us at our very wish? Yes! As you see, everybody wants us. Besides, the Roman Catholic Church is universal and its faith can be taught to all nations. Each one of you can go to lands as distant or as near as your daring and strength allow.

And now about the feast of St. John the Baptist. It was both bright and dark. It was bright because at the start we were able to hold it outdoors, and the decorations, gifts and greetings for my name day were splendid. It was dark because the rain broke up our celebration, and we had to take all our festivities from daylight and open air to the dark indoors where you could hardly read your compositions. But you can be sure that I loved your good wishes and your affection just the same. I was delighted. My thanks to all who offered gifts, shared in the singing and read compositions in my honor on this occasion. Yes, I am really happy because what you did came straight from your hearts; you love me as I, in a fatherly manner, love you. Many did not venture or think it right to read compositions in public. Others lacked the time, but they made up for this with letters. I have read all of them carefully so as not to miss

anything important, and I have sorted out those needing an answer, which I shall give orally or in writing. Your letters said many wonderful things. What I liked best was that they did not stop at words, but expressed worthwhile sentiments. I'd like to answer all who wrote to me, but this would take not just a day's or night's work, but about half a year's, and I don't think you would demand that much of me.

Still, in general, let me answer by saying that, as much as I can and the Oratory finances allow, you will get what you requested. I say this so that you can all be sure I take seriously the letters you write to me. A few of them I shall save in order to carefully go over them and do what is best for those who wrote them.

Next Sunday is the feast of St. Aloysius, when you can gain a plenary indulgence by going to confession and Communion, just as was true last Sunday and also today. This indulgence is available to you and to the festive oratory boys who will receive the sacraments and visit the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on that day. Each one of you should try to earn this rich spiritual treasure and take St. Aloysius, the patron saint of youth, as your model of virtue.

Lastly, regarding the serious and tragic loss suffered by the Oratory a few days ago, I will be brief since you were told of it yesterday evening. I'll just say that Father Caesar Chiala was a hard-working, saintly priest. He labored tirelessly for our Congregation, without wasting a moment, and would gladly have given his life to save anybody's soul. We all admired the meticulous care and ease with which he handled Oratory affairs. An illness of the lungs which he had on entering our Congregation, though it seemed not to be serious, worsened with the years and forced him to leave his office and look after his health. Just a few days ago I had to order him to change climate, to his great regret, and go home for better care, but it was all in vain.

Three days ago he was still up and about. The day before his death he got out of bed, ate a little, and seemed somewhat better. Early yesterday morning toward dawn the Lord called him to Himself. He deserves the prayers of each and all for his sacrifices and his endless work for us. Offer your Communions tomorrow and visit the Blessed Sacrament for his soul, if for any reason he is still in need of purification in purgatory. Our ranks have lost a valiant fighter. He may now enjoy his reward, but he leaves a deep void in our midst. So let us work with a will. Certainly we must safeguard our health so as to win souls for God and merit paradise, but no one should be afraid to die. If the Lord should call us to Himself, it is because He considers us already worthy of heaven, as He did with our Father Chiala.

I forgot something. I meant to tell you of a dream. I'd like to tell you now, but it is already past nine and I'd have to make it short. (At this

there was a general outcry of "Tell us! Tell us!") It is rather complicated and lengthy, and I need to take my time and give you all the details. I've already said a lot tonight, and therefore I'll tell you the dream and nothing else tomorrow night. It will make you laugh a little, and even frighten you a little, because that's what it did to me. Anyway, remember that it is just a dream. So until tomorrow, good night!

In Salesian houses, religious festivities are usually crowned in the evening with a program of prose, poetry and music selections or a stage play to bring the day to a joyous end. Since this had not been done for Don Bosco's name day, it was planned for St. Peter's feast day. The assembly was held in the study hall. No other entertainment pleased Don Bosco as much as this. For the first time he heard the melodious sound of Spanish in the compositions read to him. The numbers were well ordered: first the novices, then the students and, finally, the artisans. There were no lengthy intervals. Between numbers the band played. The printshop apprentices thought up a pleasant surprise, presenting Don Bosco with a poster listing the books he had authored and the approximate number of copies sold. We only have to recall Don Bosco's warm interest in a good press to appreciate his deeply felt gratification. He must have made his own the comment that Pius XI[13] usually makes about any apostolic work: "Always more and always better!"

We have but a sparse outline of Don Bosco's closing remarks. He thanked all—musicians, singers, poets and donors. The praise directed at him should be given, he insisted, to God's aid, to the boys' goodness, and to his priests' cooperation. He went into a description of the boundless field of action which Divine Providence had recently opened to the Salesians and of the vast new field of evangelization about to be opened among the savages of Patagonia, the reign chosen for the establishment of an apostolic prefecture. Then would come India, he said, where millions and millions of people stretched out their arms to the Salesians, awaiting the light of the Gospel from them. Oceania too, he added, presented them with new horizons. Then, urging the boys to be steadfast in their vocation, he started to talk of the salvation of souls with such feeling and earnestness that he filled his listeners

[13]This volume was first published in 1931. Pope Pius XI reigned from 1922 to 1939. [Editor]

with emotion and enthusiasm. His closing words were: "Courage! Next year will have its share of thorns, but there will be roses too. Along with tears, we shall also have joy and laughter."

The boys were not the only ones eagerly waiting to hear Don Bosco's dream. He kept his promise a day late in his "Good Night" of June 30, the feast of Corpus Christi.

I am happy to see you (he began). How many angelic faces I see turned toward me (general laughter). I was afraid that I would frighten you by telling you this dream. If I had an angelic face, I would say "Look at me!" and all your fears would vanish. Unfortunately I am but clay, the same as you. Nevertheless, we are made in God's likeness, and I can say with St. Paul that you are "my joy and my crown." However, do not be surprised if you find a few rough edges in the crown.

But let us get on to the dream. I was rather unwilling to tell you about it lest it frighten you, but then, I thought, a father should keep no secrets from his children, especially if he feels they are concerned and should know what their father thinks and does. So I made up my mind to tell you the dream in every detail. I only beg you not to give it any more importance than you would any other dream. Choose what you like best, whatever helps you most. We all know that people are asleep when they dream (general laughter), but you must also know that I did not have this dream last night. It came two weeks ago, as you were ending your spiritual retreat. I had long prayed to the Lord to show me my sons' state of conscience, how they could be helped to grow stronger spiritually, and how certain bad habits could be uprooted from their hearts. This was my anxious concern, especially during this spiritual retreat.

Thank God, the retreat went very well for both students and artisans. But the Lord did not end His mercy there. He chose to give me the privilege to read into the boys' consciences much as one would read a book. More astounding, I not only saw each one's present condition but also whatever he would undergo in the future. This happened in a way which truly astonished me because never before have I been enabled to see so well, so clearly, so openly into future events and into my boys' consciences. This was the first time. I had also prayed a great deal to the Blessed Virgin Mary that She would favor me by having none of you harbor a demon in his heart, and I trust that this request has also been granted, since I have reason to believe that you all opened your consciences to me. Well, then, lost in these thoughts and pleading with the Lord to let me know what would be helpful and what would be harmful to my dear sons' souls, I got into bed and my dream began.

This preamble began with expressions of innate, deep humility

but ended with an assertion which precludes any doubt about the supernatural nature of the dream—which may well be entitled: *Faith, Our Shield and Our Victory.*

I seemed to be at the Oratory in the midst of my boys, my glory and crown. It was evening. Dusk was just settling, so one could see but dimly. As I was walking from this portico toward the main gate, an unbelievably huge crowd of boys closed in about me, as you do because we are friends. Some had come to say hello, others to tell me something. Saying a word here and there, I slowly made my way to the center of the playground. Suddenly I heard drawn out moans and sobs followed by a resounding roar with intermingling boyish screams and wild shrieks which seemed to come from the main entrance. The students ran there to see what was happening, but almost immediately they ran back madly to us along with the terrified artisans. Many artisans had already fled from the gate to the other end of the playground.

As the cries and howls of pain and hopelessness kept increasing, I anxiously asked what was happening and tried to shove forward to help, but the boys about me wouldn't let me.

"Let me go," I cried. "Let me see what is happening to frighten everyone so."

"No, no, please don't go!" they shouted. "Stay away. There's a monster which will swallow you up. Run away with us! Don't go there!"

But I wanted to see and, shaking off the boys, I got close to the artisans' playground.

"Look out!" the boys screamed. "Look out!"

"What's wrong?"

"Look! Back there!"

I turned in the direction indicated and saw a horrid animal. At first I thought that it was a giant lion, but it was nothing like an earthly lion. I gazed intently at it. It was monstrous; it looked like a bear, but seemed more ferocious and was far more terrifying. It had an undersized rump but enormous shoulders and a huge belly. Overly large too was its head, with grotesquely cavernous jaws, open wide, ready to swallow a person at one bite. Its mouth sprouted two thick, long, pointed tusks shaped like sharp swords.

I stepped back among the boys, who kept asking what they were to do, but I was frightened too and at a loss. "I wish I could tell you," I replied, "but I don't know myself. Just now let's stay together under the porticoes."

No sooner had I said this than the bear stalked into the second playground and made its way toward us with a slow heavy tread as though assured of its prey. We drew back in terror until we stood here

under this portico, the boys clinging fast to me and all eyes centered on me. "Don Bosco, what should we do?" they pleaded. I kept looking at them in silence, not knowing what action to take. Finally I exclaimed, "Let's turn back to the farther end of the portico, where Our Lady's statue stands. Let's kneel and pray more fervently than usual so that She may tell us what to do and what kind of a monster this is, and so that She may rescue us. If it is just a wild animal of some kind, we shall manage to kill it somehow; if it is a demon, Mary will come to our aid. Don't be afraid. Our heavenly Mother will see to our safety."

Meanwhile the beast kept up its slow approach, belly close to the ground, crouching and preparing to spring and seize us.

We fell to our knees in prayer. It was a moment of utter helplessness. The huge monster had gotten so close that in one leap it could be upon us. Then, all at once—I don't know how or when—we found ourselves on the other side of the wall in the clerics' dining room.

In the center I could see Our Lady. I am not sure, but She looked like the statue we have here in the portico or the one in the dining room itself, or maybe like the statue atop the dome or the one inside the church. But, be it as it may, there She stood, aglow with a brilliance which blazed through the dining room now grown a hundred times in breadth and height. She shone like the sun at midday, thronged by saints and angels. The dining room seemed like heaven. Her lips moved as though She wished to say something to us.

We were a countless crowd in that dining hall. Astonishment had replaced terror in our hearts. The eyes of all were upon the Madonna. "Do not be afraid," She reassured us in the gentlest of tones. "My divine Son is just testing you."

I looked carefully at the persons brilliant in glory who surrounded the Blessed Virgin and recognized Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, a certain Brother Michael of the Christian Schools,[14] whom some of you knew, and my own brother Joseph. I saw others too who had once attended our Oratory or belonged to our Congregation and are now in heaven. In their company I also saw several others who are living today.

Suddenly, one of those about the Blessed Virgin loudly announced, "*Surgamus!* Let us rise!"

Since we were already standing, we could not understand his command.

"Why *surgamus*? We are already on our feet."

"*Surgamus!*" he repeated in stentorian tones. The boys looked at me, thoroughly surprised and still, waiting for directions because they had no idea of what to do. I turned toward the one who had given the command

[14] Brother Michael Romano, director of the brothers' novitiate in Turin. [Author]

and asked, "What do you want us to do? What does *surgamus* mean, since we are already on our feet?"

"*Surgamus!*" he again ordered in a stronger tone. The order made no sense to me; it was incomprehensible.

As I was standing on a table for better control of the crowd, one of those who thronged around the Blessed Virgin addressed me in a wondrously powerful voice. The boys listened intently as he said to me, "You are a priest and should understand what this *surgamus* means. When you offer Holy Mass, do you not say *sursum corda* [lift up your hearts] every day? Are you speaking about the physical act of standing up? Don't you mean instead the uplifting of the heart's love to God?"

Turning to the boys I instantly shouted, "Up, up with your hearts, my sons! Let us strengthen our faith and raise our hearts to God. Let us make an act of love and repentance. Let us earnestly strive to pray with lively fervor. Let us trust in God." I gave a sign and we all knelt down.

Moments later, as we softly prayed in an outburst of confidence, we again heard a voice ordering, "*Surgite!* Rise!" Leaping to our feet, we all felt that we were being lifted from the ground by some kind of supernatural power—how high I cannot say, but I know that we were all raised quite a distance above the ground. I have no idea what supported us. I do recall that I held fast to the sill or frame of a window. All the boys were clinging to windows or doors—one gripping here and one there, some holding on to iron bars or stout spikes, some others to the cornices of the ceiling. We were all hanging in the air, and I wondered that none of us fell to the floor.

Then, behold, the monster we had seen in the playground stormed into the dining room, followed by a vast herd of other wild animals. They stamped about the dining hall growling frightfully, straining for combat and ready to pounce upon us at any moment. But, though they kept eyeing us, staring with bloodshot eyes and tossing their heads, they did not immediately attack us. We looked down on them from above. Clinging for life to that window, I thought, *Were I to fall, how horribly they would tear me to shreds!*

Caught as we were in these strange positions, we heard Our Lady sing out the words of St. Paul: *Sumite ergo scutum fidei inexpugnabile.* [Take up, therefore, the impregnable shield of faith—cf. Eph. 6, 16] So harmonious was the sound, so full, so sublimely melodious, that we listened ecstatically. Every note could be heard from the lowest to highest, and we thought that a hundred voices had blended into one.

Intent upon this heavenly song, we noticed a number of graceful young lads, who had descended from heaven on wings, leave Our Lady's side and draw near to us. They bore shields in their hands and put one up against the heart of each boy. They were large shields, sparkling in beauty

and reflecting the light which shone from the Madonna. It was a heavenly sight. Each shield seemed to have a steel center, surrounded by a large ring of diamonds, and the whole shield was edged in purest gold. It was all one could hope for in beauty, sweetness, and melody.

As I gazed about me, lost in the music, I was startled by a booming voice which cried: *Ad pugnam!* [To arms!] Then the wild beasts began stamping about furiously.

In a flash we all found ourselves on the floor, each on his feet, each engaged in deadly combat with those monsters, protected only by our divine shields. I can't say whether the struggle took place inside the dining hall or out in the playground. The heavenly choir did not interrupt its singing. The monsters rushed at us as smoke streamed from their gaping mouths along with leaden balls, spears, arrows, and weapons of all kinds. But these weapons either missed us or hit our shields and bounced off. Our adversaries were bent on wounding and slaughtering us, and they kept hurling themselves against us, but all in vain. Meeting us head on, they smashed their fangs and were forced to flee. In waves these hordes of frightful monsters assailed us, but all met with the same fate.

It was a lengthy battle, but finally we heard Our Lady saying: *Haec est victoria vestra, quae vincit mundum, fides vestra.* [This is the victory that overcomes the world: your faith—cf. 1 Jn. 5, 4.]

At Her voice, the entire herd of frightened beasts balked and, dashing headlong, disappeared, leaving us safe, free, victorious in that immense dining hall, still ablaze with the brilliance emanating from the Madonna.

Then I carefully studied the faces of those who bore the shields. They were an immense number. Among others I could see Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, my brother Joseph, and the Christian Brother who had fought by our side.

But the boys could not take their eyes away from the Blessed Virgin. She was chanting a canticle of thanksgiving which gladdened us with a new joy and an ecstasy beyond words. I doubt that a lovelier canticle can be heard in heaven itself.

Suddenly our happiness was rudely broken by blood-curdling shrieks and cries intermingled with bellowing roars. Were some of our boys being torn to pieces by the wild beasts which had fled the scene but moments before? I immediately tried to rush out and help these sons, but I could not because the boys kept restraining me and firmly refused to let me out of the room. I struggled to free myself. "Let me go to help those poor boys," I begged. "I want to see them. If they are hurt or killed, I want to die with them. I must go, even if it costs me my life." Tearing myself from those who were holding me, I dashed out to the portico. Oh, what horror! The playground was strewn with the dead, the dying and the wounded.

Boys, panicking with fear, tried to flee in all directions, only to be pursued by those monsters which pounced on them, sinking their fangs into their arms and legs, tearing them to pieces. Every second some boys fell to the ground and died amid horrifying screams.

But the beast that wrought the most fearful slaughter of all was the bear which had first appeared in the artisans' playground. With its sword-sharp tusks it pierced the boys' chests first from the right side to the left, and then from left to right. The victims fell tragically dead with a double mortal wound through the heart.

With determination I shouted, "Courage, my dear sons!" Immediately many lads ran to me for protection, but they were pursued by the bear. Summoning up my courage, I stepped forward in its path, joined by some of the boys who had already conquered the beasts in the dining room. That prince of darkness flung itself upon us but could not hurt us because of our shields. In fact, it could not even touch us because the very sight of the shields forced it to back away in terror and even homage. Then it was that, as I fixed my gaze on the two long sword-sharp tusks, I noticed one word on each in big letters: *Otium* [Idleness] on one, *Gula* [Gluttony] on the other. In utter suprise I kept asking myself: Is it possible that here where everyone is so busy and we do not know where to begin doing all the work we have to do, there is still someone who idles away his time? As for the boys, I think they keep busy with their work, study and play. It made no sense to me.

Then someone said: "And yet how many half-hours they waste!"

"But gluttony too?" I asked. "Here at the Oratory one could not indulge in gluttony if he wanted to. There is hardly ever a chance. Our food is most ordinary and so is what we drink. We barely have just what we need. How could one be so intemperate as to endanger his eternal salvation?"

Again came the reply: "Oh, you priest! You think you are well versed in moral theology and quite experienced, but on this point you know nothing. You are a babe in arms. Do you not know that one may sin by gluttony and intemperance even when drinking water?"

I wasn't convinced at all, and I wanted a better explanation. While the dining hall was still bright with the Blessed Virgin's presence, I went very sadly to Brother Michael to clear up my doubts. "My friend," he answered, "you are still a novice in these things. I will teach you.

"As regards gluttony, you must learn that one can be intemperate by eating, drinking or sleeping more than one needs, and by pampering the body in other ways. As for idleness, you must know that it does not just mean being lazy. It also means letting one's fantasy run on to dangerous thoughts. One can also be idle during study periods by fooling around

and disturbing others, by wasting time in silly reading, or by being slothful, especially in church. Idleness is the father, the font and source of many temptations and of all evils. You who are these boys' director must safeguard them from these two sins by striving to strengthen their faith. If you can manage to make your boys temperate in the little things I have mentioned, they will always overcome the devil. Through temperance they will grow in humility, chastity, and other virtues as well. If they will properly use their time, they will never fall into the clutches of the infernal enemy but will live and die as saintly Christians."

I thanked him for his instructions and then, wanting to verify the reality of all this, lest it be a mere dream, I tried to grasp his hand but touched nothing. Again and again I tried but failed. I grasped nothing but air. Yet I could see those people. They were talking and seemed real. I approached Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, and my brother, but once more I grasped nothing.

Beside myself, I cried out, "Is this all true or not? Aren't these all real people? Didn't I hear them talk?"

Brother Michael replied, "After all your studies, you should know that as long as my soul is separated from my body, it is useless to try to touch me. You cannot touch a pure spirit. We take on our former likeness only to enable mortal eyes to see us. But when we shall all have risen at the Last Judgment, then we shall put on our bodies, immortal and spiritualized."

Then I tried to draw close to Our Lady who seemed to have something to tell me. I was almost beside Her when I heard a new uproar and more shrieks from outside. I immediately dashed out of the dining hall again, but as I did so, I awoke.

To conclude his account, Don Bosco added these reflections and suggestions:

Whatever this mixed-up dream may mean, it does restate and explain St. Paul's words. However, I was so worn out and exhausted by the strain of this dream that I begged the Lord never to send me any more dreams like that. But—wouldn't you know it?—the following night that very same dream came back, only this time I had to see it to the end, something I was spared the night before. I was so frightened that I screamed. Father Berto heard me and in the morning he asked me why I had shrieked and if I had passed a sleepless night. These dreams drain me far more than if I were to spend the night at my desk.

As I said, this is only a dream. I do not want you to give it any more importance. Think of it only as a dream, no more. I would not like you to

write home about it or tell outsiders who know nothing of the Oratory, lest they say, as they have already, that Don Bosco fills his boys with dreams. I don't really mind, though. Let them say what they will, but let each of us draw from this dream whatever applies. Just now I will not give you any explanations because all of you can easily understand the dream. I only recommend very strongly that you revive your faith, which is safeguarded particularly by being temperate and avoiding idleness. Let temperance be a friend and sloth an enemy. Some other evening I will return to this subject. For now, good night.

Rather than distract the boys from their studies, the frequent religious celebrations made them more diligent because the faculty knew just when to tighten and when to loosen their control, and the boys' cheerfulness, well seasoned with piety, was wholesome and tranquil. The long awaited St. Aloysius' feast day came on July 2 with its traditional solemn procession and awards assembly for the artisans after evening services.

There were three artisan awards: one for excellence in evening classes which closed at the start of Mary's month, another for good conduct, and a third for year-round shop work. To enhance these awards, Don Bosco would invite a distinguished person to give the keynote address at the assembly. Two raised platforms were erected in the playground, one for the band, the other for the honored guests and Don Bosco, at whose right sat the patron of the feast. All the Oratory boys, artisans and students, were grouped in two semi-circles on either side of the platforms, facing each other. These very imposing arrangements impressed the boys and made them appreciate merit and reward.

At this time the weather was hot and humid. At the "Good Night" on July 5, Don Bosco, wisely drawing lessons from the most ordinary things, told the boys: "Tomorrow we must caution the one who lights the stove in the morning to go easy on the wood so that we won't all roast. But if anybody needs a comforter or blanket, let him speak up and he can have it (general laughter). But, my boys, let's get used to taking everything as coming from God's hands: cold, thirst, and all the vexations of this pitiable earthly life. Just now let's put up with the heat and acquire merit to help us reach heaven."

Don Bosco's concern for young people never slackened, regardless of the time of year. For several years he ran elementary

summer courses for the day boys of the festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius and St. Joseph. The boys flocked to these courses in large numbers. There were more than six hundred in 1876. In a teeming city like Turin, this was a real godsend for families who could not keep their sons off the streets. Above all, it was a blessing for the boys themselves—an excellent season for catching many little fish who never went to confession. Heaven knows there was a goodly crowd who had never received the sacrament of penance. Most of them, when asked about the time of their last confession, would reply, "Easter." Without these classes they would never have thought of receiving the sacraments until the following Easter. In this way, they had plenty of opportunities to receive Communion, and those who had not been confirmed were properly prepared for this sacrament. True, within a few months these boys were not seen or heard of again, and, being short-term pupils, they resumed their old practices, but meanwhile they had acquired a fair knowledge of their religion, developed the good habit of approaching the sacraments, put aside their worry of people's comments and lost their foolish fear of confession. For these reasons, as long as circumstances permitted and at the cost of any sacrifice, Don Bosco kept up this vacation school.

Usually the city of Turin gave him a grant for this, but it failed to do so in 1876. Although he invited the city fathers to see the school, they did not respond. Anxious to know the reason for this strange refusal, Don Bosco called on the mayor and at the right moment told him, "We do all we can to meet this positive need of our city, but expenses are too high for any private citizen to afford. With any assistance you might be able to grant, I am willing to make this sacrifice."

The mayor was too embarrassed to reply, and, on being pressed by Don Bosco, suggested that he see Count Riccardi, to whom his request had been forwarded.

"Shall I tell him you sent me to him? Don Bosco asked.

"Yes, if you wish. He has an official answer to give you."

"Can anyone escort me to assure the count that I was sent by the proper authority?"

"Whom would you like?"

"A personal aide will do!"

The mayor agreed. On arriving at the count's office Don Bosco

found him engaged in a meeting, but, when summoned, the count excused himself and momentarily left the conference. "I was sent expressly by the mayor, who had his aide accompany me," Don Bosco said. "I have come to get a reply to a petition I have repeatedly made to you that you kindly come to visit our summer school and grant us a subsidy."

"Well," the count hemmed and hawed, "I have a meeting now. . . . I really couldn't. . . . Come again . . . or, better, write."

"I have written enough letters and have had no reply, and I don't intend to come back again. The mayor sent me for an answer, since this is your responsibility."

"Well, just now I can't. . . ."

"I need only a few words. Just tell me the reason so that I'll know how to act in regard to this city government. I have other business, but I need to know if this is a gesture of mistrust in me or if there is some other reason."

"Since you want to know, I will tell you bluntly and briefly. You are a Catholic priest. Most of us at City Hall are Freemasons. Now you know."

"Indeed I do. I knew it already, but I wanted to hear it officially. This will help to guide me. Still, I am astonished that this city government, to a large extent Catholic, which administers the money of a Catholic population, discriminates against Catholics while favoring Waldensians and Jews with subsidies."

City Hall did not openly oppose the Oratory and always let it operate, but never granted it whatever it could legally refuse. However, it was due to Don Bosco's expert tact that open confrontation never occurred. Without attempting to investigate whether other saints have ever found themselves in similar circumstances, we can state that his patience, condescension and kindness were certainly to be admired, as without resentment he kept working for the benefit of the city, taking in boys whom those very men recommended.

By the feast of the Assumption, forty new pupils had already taken the places vacated by the fifth year students, who after their final exams were enjoying a few weeks' vacation at home. The impression made upon these new pupils by this, their first feast with its solemn church services, choir and band, defies description. Father Barberis, who was there, wrote: "How wonderful it is to see

the trust and simplicity with which they gladly go to confession, baring their souls with ease to Don Bosco, who is so solicitous for their eternal welfare!"

For the second time Don Bosco's birthday was mistakenly observed on August 15 [rather than on August 16]. Several gentlemen had been invited to dinner. Mindful of Don Bosco's abiding gratitude to his benefactors and his desire to pass it on to his sons, Father Barberis specifically mentions in his chronicle, among others, Dr. Sistelli, a dentist who gave his services free of charge to the Oratory. Regretfully we have only the topic of Don Bosco's "Good Night" that evening—his hope that he might continue to dedicate his remaining years totally to his boys.

Even on such a joyous occasion God allowed His good servant to feel a pang of grief. For three years Don Bosco harbored a keen desire to have Archbishop Gastaldi come to confirm the Oratory boys. Some weeks before the Assumption he renewed his request. The archbishop seemed willing to accept, but he kept postponing the date until he finally sent a refusal. It hurt Don Bosco to send several scores of boys home for vacation without having received the sacrament, especially since two fifth year boys and some boys of the fourth year who were to be vested as clerics had not yet been confirmed. He therefore asked the archbishop of Vercelli whether, all things considered, he would kindly come to the Oratory to confer the sacrament. The latter answered affirmatively. Don Bosco then wrote to Archbishop Gastaldi for permission to invite the archbishop of Vercelli. Archbishop Gastaldi's secretary replied as follows:

August 15, 1876

Dear Reverend Father:

His Excellency, the archbishop, has asked me to inform you that he has no objection to have the archbishop of Vercelli administer confirmation to the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. However, he points out that it would have been a public gesture of reverence toward his authority as archbishop if these pupils had been sent to the archbishop's residence to receive confirmation from their own shepherd.

Informing you of the archbishop's feelings in this matter, I remain, with esteem,

Yours devotedly,
Canon Thomas Chiuso, *Secretary*

Since he could not have Archbishop Gastaldi at the Oratory to confirm the day students, Don Bosco sent them to the archbishop's residence, but it would have seemed odd to do likewise with the resident students, even regardless of the trouble involved. Furthermore, Don Bosco loved to celebrate solemn events as a family feast with the participation of a bishop, for he knew how much it meant to the boys. It pained him to be so misunderstood. Confirmation took place on August 27.

In those days the Oratory school year used to end [in September] on the Thursday during the novena in honor of Our Lady's Nativity. Don Bosco stretched it out so late in order to cut the summer vacation to a minimum, for he usually called it "the devil's vintage." On two consecutive evenings he gave the boys salutary advice for that perilous period.

AUGUST 23: *Vacation Evils and Some Safeguards*

We are approaching the fall vacation, so it is time that I gave you some advice to help keep you in God's reverential fear during this dangerous period. I shall give you just a few pointers at a time so as not to leave everything to the last day.

I am asked: "Why is it that some boys, maybe most boys, are so good, obedient, and careful to avoid sin during the school year, yet, during a brief vacation, they lose all they have acquired by great effort, not only becoming dissipated and disrespectful to their parents but often committing truly ugly sins and making it a habit?"

I can readily answer that. A bird does enjoy freedom outside the cage, true, but the hawk may also swoop upon it when least expected and gobble it down. You are like little birds. As long as you are in the Oratory, all goes well, but once you leave, the devil is at the gate just waiting to trip you up.

How does such a mishap occur? Well, let's be realistic. Outside there are more incentives to do wrong and less helps to keep you on the right path. Incentives to evil may be companions who are sometimes as corrupt and wicked as you can ever find. You encounter occasions of sin and scandal. Like it or not, you hear cursing and foolish, sinful and immoral talk. At one time it may be immodest dress, at another some dealings with persons of the opposite sex. Even your own parents and friends keep insisting, "Eat, eat! Come on, drink! Have another!" How can you hold up under that pressure? Especially boys who easily yield to others' opinions—how can they hold out?

Secondly, at home you have fewer means to keep you in God's grace. Here, if your conscience bothers you, you can go to confession immedi-

ately, every day. That is not true at home. Here you may receive Holy Communion, visit the Blessed Sacrament, attend daily Mass—all of these are high-powered means to keep you in God's grace—but at home you have none. Here we pray morning and evening, meditate on spiritual matters, and attend Benediction. That is not true at home. Many of you will immediately give up most of these practices. Therefore it is obvious that you will more easily fall into sin.

My conclusion is this: If any of you want to stay at the Oratory during vacation, I will be glad to have you. The Oratory never closes down and everyone is free to stay here. If somebody wants to go home, I have no objection—he may leave. But for heaven's sake, he should shun as much as possible the perils and occasions of sin, especially the bad companions he may meet, and he should do all he can to keep up his usual practices of prayer as he would at the Oratory. What is so hard about saying your morning and evening prayers? So say them, and say them properly, all of you! I also feel that you can all attend daily Mass and, better still, even serve Mass. Do so gladly. Then who is going to stop you from a little morning meditation, some spiritual reading, and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament during the day? Keep your good habit of going to confession every week or every ten or fifteen days. Do this and I don't think your vacation can harm you.

If you want to be as good at home as you are at the Oratory, keep up your religious practices.

One more recommendation—and one that is very important. Keep recollected. Stay home gladly with your parents. Don't try to go everywhere, to see everything, and to attend worldly attractions.

Resolve now to do the little things I have suggested, my dear sons. Make up your mind now, and you can be sure that you will be happy at the end of your vacation for not having offended God.

AUGUST 24: *Keeping Recollected*

Let me add a few words to what I said last night. I commented that those who want to remain good during their vacation should carry out the same practices of piety that they would if they stayed here at the Oratory. Now let me explain what I meant by "keeping recollected." It means keeping away from persons, places and things which can lead you into sin. By "recollection" I don't mean that you must spend your whole day huddled in a corner by the fireplace. I mean:

1. Keep away from some people. Regretfully many of you have friends at home with whom you used to carry on talk that was far from proper. If you hang around with these friends again, you will be lost miserably. You

may meet someone who speaks disrespectfully of religion or ridicules good morals. Walk away! Avoid him! Leave him alone! That would be discourtesy, you say? No, he is the one who is discourteous for having said something you find offensive. If he says, "You hypocrite, you faker," it is the other way around. He is the faker; he is the hypocrite. To call oneself a Christian and not behave like one is hypocrisy. One either does not claim to be a Christian or he abides by Christian rules. You can honestly tell such a person, "I have no intention of denying my faith, and therefore I don't want to hear this kind of talk." The same is true of any other sin or evil. One who calls himself a Christian but does not behave like one is a faker.

2. I said to keep away from people and places that can be dangerous—for example, parties, dances, shows, and fairs. It is just about impossible to attend these worldly amusements without offending some Christian virtue. In these gatherings you hear blasphemies, curses, and obscenities that stir up evil thoughts. You will also see immodesty in dress. Take my word for it, serious dangers abound.

You go to a party or stop in at a friend's, and then it's one glass of wine and usually two or more. Thus you start fancying things, you arouse feelings and desires, and who knows how it will all end, because one thing leads to another. I was young like you once, and I'm sorry to say that I also found myself exposed to such dangers. Listen to my words. I am more experienced than you are. You will be quite fortunate if, heeding my experience, you will keep recollected. You will avoid grave dangers, and you will trod the upright path before testing the bad. This too, believe me, is good fortune—to learn from the experience of others rather than at your own expense.

The natural restlessness of youngsters just before leaving for home usually makes itself felt also at times of prayer. The "Good Night" of August 25 aimed at correcting carelessness in prayer lest the new pupils receive bad example. Don Bosco spoke as follows:

I'd like to advise everyone in the house—new and old—to make properly the first act of our holy faith, the sign of the cross. First you put the right hand to your forehead and say: "In the name of the Father." Then you touch your breast, saying: "And of the Son." Next you touch your left shoulder and then your right shoulder, saying, "And of the Holy Spirit." Finally, you join your hands and say: "Amen."

Let me also urge you to say your prayers devoutly and in the same tone. What I mean is: Don't let your tone of voice drop as you pray. Tomorrow I shall give you some tips for a good vacation. I know that a few of you

have already decided to stay here, but I also know that others can't wait to go. More about that tomorrow. For this evening I will only say: "Good night."

At last, on August 31 an awards assembly was held for the students, and for the first time prizes were given for music. Father [Francis] Dalmazzo, the director of Valsalice College, gave the address. Fifth year award winners, who had already been away for a month, came back, and since Don Bosco had scheduled the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death on that day, they all went to confession to him. The next morning, departure day, was marked by an impressive general Communion—"a Viaticum of sorts to accompany them on their way," as the chronicler styled it. Right after Mass, Don Bosco walked to the altar rail and, facing his dear sons, took a fatherly leave of them with the following few words:

This is not a sermon—just a word of counsel to accompany you on your vacation. It will be very helpful to you if you act upon it. I don't object to your going home for a vacation because it is a reward for your efforts. As a traveler rests a while after a long tiring journey so as to renew his strength before continuing his trip, so you are now going home to rest after the year's labors and brace yourselves for further work.

Pray to God that this vacation may have no bad results for many of you. I deeply fear that it will, and so I want to give you some advice. I sum it all up in few words: "Turn away from evil and do good." "Turn away from evil" means to avoid everything that may harm your soul. "Do good" means just that. Do you feel that the Lord is demanding too much of you by this "do good"? No, the Lord is satisfied with very little. Whatever you have to do, do it well. In short, look after the good of your soul. You are taking this very precious soul with you. If you could leave it here behind you, you could go away peacefully, saying, "Don Bosco will take care of it." But it cannot be detached from your body, and you must take it with you. Will you look after it with the greatest care? Will you watch lest the devil rob you of such a precious treasure? How will you look after it? Do you have the means? Often read that little book of vacation tips which you were given. Read it every day, meditate on it, and do all it says.

Some will object that they cannot attend Mass or receive the sacraments as frequently as they do here. Well, if you cannot do that daily, do it at least on Sundays. Make sure that you find time to go to Mass, confession and Communion. Are you unable to receive the sacraments

every Sunday? I am not prescribing any particular day; just try to find time, be it Thursday or any other day. If some have no sins on their conscience, they need not go to confession, but they should say their usual prayers and receive Holy Communion. Let them be sure that their conscience is really clear, and if they are in any doubt, I suggest—as the catechism teaches—that they go to confession as soon as they can.

If I were to ask each of you "Do you want to have a nice vacation?" you would all answer, "Yes, Don Bosco! Be assured that I won't let relatives or friends lead me astray."

"Fine, fine, we'll see," I would answer.

Some lads go home, hear a friend say something indecent, dressing it up in pretty words, and they smile. If not this time, the next time they will also join in the talk of their fouled-mouth friend. It was that first smile which was an act of surrender to the enemy. Some lads get their hands on a bad book and begin by looking at the frontispiece and scanning the first few lines; the next day they read a page, and the following day they take interest and read the whole book, going through many hours of the night. Come morning, they sleep long past their rising time and so can no longer attend daily Mass. Then they begin going around with companions and friends because they have given up prayer and have dulled their sense of fear of sin which they once felt. They give in to what people may say. In short, little by little, they fall miserably.

Are they having a good vacation? Far from it. These are the boys who return to the Oratory and the first thing they say is: "Where is Don Bosco?"

"Over there," they are told.

"Good. I mustn't let him see me."

"Why not?"

"I know why. Tell me, will we have an outside confessor on Sunday?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Because, because. . . ."

Let me finish the sentence. It's because he did not have a *good* vacation.

Let me give you some sound advice to spare you such embarrassment. Drop me a note two weeks from now. Will you do that? I recall that last year I listed some forty boys who gave me little reason to hope they would persevere in virtue. "Write to me twice a month," I told them, "and tell me what you are doing; in turn I will advise you and help you to keep your resolutions." Incredibly, not a single one of the forty boys wrote to me. On their return I asked them why they had not written as they had promised.

"Things didn't go too well with us. We were afraid," they replied.

Afraid! Can't you see this was a deceit of the devil? He delights in your

silence, in your reluctance to do what is necessary to conquer evil and protect yourselves against it. He seals your lips with an overdose of shame.

I have another piece of advice that I think is very important. Some boys, upon arriving home, greet their parents, and then clam up, as if they had come to the Oratory to become silent and sulky. I know it sounds strange, but it happens fairly often. This is bad. You have received a good education here and learned good manners as well. When you go home, greet your parents affectionately. Ask about the crops, if business is good, if some relative or friend of yours is well. In response, your parents will ask about your own health and studies and you should be able to say, "I got first prize! Here is my award for good conduct and effort!" Others will say, "I didn't get an award, but my marks will tell you I did my best to make you happy." Others yet will say, "I tried hard, but even though I did not succeed, I promise you that I will study during this vacation to be ready for the November examinations and keep up with my classmates." If you speak like this, your parents will be happy or at least satisfied, because they will feel that their money has not been wasted.

Act this way also with other people you have to visit, such as your parish priest, your former schoolteacher, and friends of your family. Hand your pastor the note you received, give him my regards, and ask him to sign that note when you are ready to return to the Oratory.

Some of you fear that while you are home you will receive a notice to stay there. Now, let each one rest assured in the belief that your superiors are not ogres and seek only your own good. Those boys who have behaved well can go home in peace, with no worry that they will get that ominous letter. Those who know they deserve such a notice and will get it because of their bad conduct and laziness—fortunately this has been a better year than others—have one last resort. "Maybe my superiors will take me back," they can hope, "if I really make up my mind to change my ways and habits." Well, let them do that and then they too can have a worry-free vacation.

Those who choose to stay here at the Oratory also will have a pleasant and restful vacation. I am speaking about the new students, those who have to make up subjects they failed during the school year, those who want to take advanced courses, and those who will receive the clerical garb. We shall find ways to make their vacation enjoyable.

And now a word to all about returning here. Those who have to take a make-up test must be back here by October 15, all others by October 19. I don't have to tell you to be here on time if you want to find a place at the Oratory. Let me just say that every year some return late and have to go back home again. I'm not saying that you should not return if something serious has delayed you. If your father or mother is very ill, for instance,

or if you yourself are sick or are detained for some very serious reason, you may stay home without worry, but have your parish priest or a trustworthy person drop us a note. Don't write yourselves, lest suspicions arise—and, well, you understand.

Briefly, this is all I wanted to tell you. Do what I say and you will surely have a pleasant vacation. Now and then read the leaflet *Tips for a Wholesome Vacation.* For more reading, take along *The Companion of Youth*, and you will find many good suggestions for a pleasant, wholesome vacation.

I have a sad bit of news to give you. Our cleric Vigliocco is seriously ill and there is little hope for his recovery. Seemingly the Lord wants him in heaven. He heartily asks your prayers. Let us all implore the Lord. He seems to want him with Him, but, if He so wills, He can restore Vigliocco to his former health.

Keep healthy yourselves! But make sure that, as you give your body rest, recreation and food, you do not forget to do the same for your soul. Avoid parties, dances, and amusements which may in any way harm you spiritually. If you do so, you can be sure of a good vacation in the Lord's holy peace.

As you have already heard, this coming November will see a new expedition of missionaries to Patagonia. If you all return, you can again attend the magnificent ceremony which we held once before. There will be a place over there for you, too, if you wish to go. Much work awaits us, and the eyes of all are fixed on us. Tell your parents about this, if you wish; tell them too that Don Bosco sends his greetings and will remember them in Holy Mass and asks their prayers for him. Tell your pastor the same and give him my regards. For my part, I shall always remember you, my dear sons, in my Mass, so that we may meet once again under this beloved roof. Have a happy vacation!

Four hundred boys left within a few hours. The chronicle remarks: "Today's departure was very orderly. Everything had been foreseen and taken care of: railway tickets, forwarding of baggage, and the grouping of boys according to their destination."

Many crowded about Don Bosco to hear yet one more word from him. Parents, too, sought him to greet him or seek his advice. Every year, once the boys had cleared out, a little cloud of sadness came over Don Bosco's face. His heart feared for the fate of his boys, who for over ten months had been the object of so much care and solicitude.

The boys did not fully realize the impression Don Bosco made on them while they lived at the Oratory, but years and experience

taught them to reflect and understand. Father Francis Piccollo, the lively fifth year student mentioned previously,[15] experienced great relief in his many trials by recalling those bygone days or occasionally jotting down reminiscences. In a manuscript we have now before us, he describes Don Bosco as he saw him in 1876. We will close this chapter with two of Father Piccollo's impressions. "Above all," he said, "for me his figure was and still is clothed in unquestionable virginal purity. He revealed the splendor of this virtue by his every gesture and word. He was an angel in the flesh. In speaking of this life, he sang its beauties as few men can. He looked at things with such modesty that we could barely see those magnificent pupils of his eyes. If he touched anyone (and the only time he ever allowed himself to touch us was to put a hand on our head as a benediction), his touch was like the breath of a heavenly being filling us with love and purity." The second impression of Father Piccollo was: "Don Bosco always prayed. In him, union with God was uninterrupted. Anyone approaching him instantly felt the presence of a seraphim. Indeed, he at times looked like an angel when kneeling in prayer or celebrating Holy Mass. Such was his walk, grave but serene; such was his conversation, for even in ordinary talk he knew how to raise our minds to God without becoming tedious or heavy. He did it all with incredible naturalness. One could have written in luminous letters around his head: 'Our abode is in heaven.'"

[15] *See* pp. 234f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 13

Household Matters

CONCERN for the household's needs is concern for the family. The Oratory always had a serious financial problem. Toward the middle of August there was so little money in the house that when a confrere had to go to Borgo San Martino, there was not enough money for his fare. Brother Pelazza, who managed the printshop, owed thirty thousand lire for paper and could get no further deliveries. Brother Rossi, who made purchases, owed sixty thousand lire to the textile mill, and he too could get no further supplies. The poor man did not dare face his creditors, and whenever he saw Don Bosco he would merge into the company around him and make no requests, well aware of the financial situation. One evening Don Bosco broke the ice. "We must really do something about this," he exclaimed. "Look, Rossi, I will give you all the money that comes in. I have sent out several letters and hope that I can get a response. But just now there is nothing we can do, because the wealthy people who have money are away on vacation and Turin is a dead city."

On October 31, he wrote to Father Cagliero, "Finances depleted," and two weeks later he added: "This missionary expedition has sunk us up to our necks in debt." Nevertheless the worrisome financial situation did not depress him. "God helps us," he added,[1] not as an expression of future hope, but as a firm conviction of present fact.

Buoyed up by such supernatural confidence, Don Bosco spared no expense when vocations were at stake. It was suggested that new clerics might be told to provide their own ecclesiastical wardrobe, which, in all, cost some two hundred lire. To advance the money meant that it would never be repaid, for once the young clerics had been outfitted by the Oratory, they would not feel that

[1] Letter to Father Cagliero, November 14, 1876. [Author]

they were under any obligation. Don Bosco well knew the expense involved, for he could foresee that he would have eighty clerics to clothe, and he was also well aware of two unpleasant drawbacks. First, a goodly number would drop out because, unable to withstand the pressure of parents reluctant to pay, they would return to their families rather than haggle about expenses. The second drawback was psychological: most of those remaining, considering the burden they had placed on their parents to raise the money, would keep worrying, to the detriment of their own formation. "True," he said, "our financial situation is shabby, but we shall manage somehow. The results will justify the expense. If a boy becomes a good priest, will not our sacrifices have been repaid? If he remains in the Congregation, he will compensate many others. We have boys here whose fees are being paid by Dominicans, Jesuits, Oratorians and Oblates of Mary. These congregations carry this burden with the sole hope that those they now aid may enter their ranks. And still, in most cases, they fail to enter or later leave. We can do much better than they, for we have fewer costs and hardly notice if we have one student more or less, one more mouth to feed."

Another suggestion to strengthen the financial base was to open more boarding schools and thus raise the income. Don Bosco's reply was categorical, "We must mainly devote ourselves to poor youngsters. We do need boarding schools. Our festive oratories, hospices, and homes for destitute boys are a source of many vocations and the means of extraordinary good. The best thing we can do is to open many houses like this Oratory of Turin, the hospice of Sampierdarena and the hostel of Nice, where students and artisans, poor or on the verge of poverty, can live, where there is vocal and instrumental music, where there are different kinds of trades, and where there is a place suited to every individual lad. If we set up our houses in this way, modestly, accepting destitute boys, we will be welcomed by good and bad. No obstacles will be raised. Even without certified teachers and fancy programs we shall be able to run our schools and turn out well-trained young men who will be loyal to us. If our enemies will not support us, we can at least hope that they will not bother us."

These were months of feverish preparations for the second missionary expedition, and expenses were piling up. The confreres,

too, were being assigned to new houses and had to be supplied with clothing. The Oratory had only the clothing it needed, whenever it had any at all. But Don Bosco was not cheap. He would not have the confreres going to a new house looking seedy and threadbare. A moderate quantity of clothing did come to the Oratory; sent by charitable people, it had to be shared by two, and it was hard to make ends meet. "*Deo gratias*," our chronicler exclaims by way of comment.

Although hard pressed for funds, Don Bosco permitted some small but costly masonry work in the first playground of the Oratory. Where presently [1931] stands one wing of the main building which serves as a background to a bronze statue of Don Bosco, there used to be a portico which was later closed in to form a spacious hall. Upon it two upper stories were subsequently added, to the height of what is today the tin roof which covers the length of the veranda. Above the portico there used to be a terrace some five meters wide, ringed by a railing which was anchored on brick pillars topped by flower pots. Some vines, rooted in boxes near the wall, spread their tendrils up the wall and draped them around the windows of Don Bosco's rooms. On October 18, 1876 construction of two additional floors over the terrace began in order to give Don Bosco a kind of closed balcony where he could walk for exercise when his infirmities made it difficult for him to go up or down stairways. In all truth, permission for this project was wrested from Don Bosco during his absence by his thoughtful sons, who told him that the work required little time and no great expense. As he would not want the vines to be destroyed, they were transplanted below the terrace so as to continue to brighten his rooms and let him follow a cherished custom of his—plucking the grapes to send them to benefactors as a sign of his gratitude, and to treat the Oratory's upperclassmen.[2]

As for thrift, Don Bosco followed St. Thomas' dictum, *neque largius neque parcius* [neither overabundantly nor too sparingly], neither needless expense nor tight-fisted cheapness. For instance, he did not think it necessary to whitewash the walls of half the

[2] F. Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*, pp. 131–132, Torino, Società Editrice Internazionale. In 1876, when the grapes were last picked on the original site while Don Bosco was away, he sent Father Rua a long list of benefactors to whom grapes were to be sent on certain dates with a booklet on the Salesian Cooperators. [Author]

buildings every year. In fact, on May 31 [1876], after voicing his objection to some superiors, he added, "Help me, and keep reminding the confreres that a day without a bricklayer in the house is a happy day. I realize that I must take this responsibility on myself and reserve the right to give permission for any masonry work, no matter how small." But if he judged an expense to be necessary, he acted in what may be called a truly munificent manner. A maxim he frequently repeated was: "No matter how many boys we take in gratis and how large and costly our enterprises are for the spiritual well-being of others, I have no fear that Providence will fail us. It will desert us only if we waste money on needless things."

The general administrator of the Oratory—or, really, of all Salesian houses—was Father Michael Rua. His gift of outstanding capacity for work he placed fully at Don Bosco's service for the good of the Oratory and of the Congregation. He was then thirty-nine and had lived two-thirds of his life at Don Bosco's side. He was a young boy when he decided to remain with him. When he set himself into Don Bosco's footsteps to assist him, his self-giving was unreserved. As St. Francis Xavier, we are told, pledged his head and hands to St. Ignatius, Father Rua fully entrusted himself to Don Bosco's direction. With admirable fidelity and steadfastness he always sought to interpret exactly every wish, desire and intention, and to carry them out precisely. Rarely does history show two hearts and souls so literally welded into one, so closely in unison were their thoughts, judgments, methods and objectives at all times. What impressed Father Joseph Vespignani at his first sight of Father Rua one evening in November 1876 was his unwavering demeanor toward Don Bosco, standing beside his good superior, seated at table, as though he awaited a word, order, or advice. Don Bosco handed him Father Vespignani's letter of introduction for reading and comment and then put the newcomer into his care. It was clear to the latter that in all matters and with all persons Don Bosco acted through Father Rua. Nor did it take him long to realize that both the Oratory and the entire Congregation depended directly on the young, amiable, and prudent priest. Lastly, he observed that everything Father Rua did seemed to be a response to Don Bosco's directives or wishes and was done in his name—everything, that is, except distasteful measures.

Father Vespignani's testimony also concerns other matters regarding this great son of Don Bosco which he himself witnessed every day. In concern for community life, he saw Father Rua always punctually at his post, so punctually, indeed, that sometimes he would even break off a conversation with Don Bosco—precious as it was—to attend night prayers with the confreres and boys. He observed Father Rua's tactful care to have useful reading in the dining room. That year the reading of the *Church History* of [René François] Rohrbacher was completed; for various reasons it had taken nine years to read all fifteen volumes. Sometimes other readings were inserted, and from August to November Don Bosco would have such heavy reading suspended since the frequent movement of personnel made it impossible to follow the narration uninterrupted. Let us remark that Don Bosco considered Rohrbacher as most suitable for reading in the dining room, save for a few pages which, he advised, should be omitted because of the presence of young clerics and coadjutors. Father Vespignani tells us that, after night prayers, he would see Father Rua walk slowly by himself along the portico, devoutly saying the rosary and gently admonishing those who did not observe the prescribed silence or delayed retiring. He would then make the rounds of the entire Oratory. Father Vespignani also knew that Father Rua would repeat his rounds during the middle of the night and end them in church before the Blessed Sacrament.

He was one of the regular confessors. Father Vespignani tells us that he performed this office with fervor. When counseling a penitent, he would whisper into his ear, offering most suitable advice and considerations. His penitents came away impressed by his ardent zeal to kindle God's love and a desire for perfection in souls.

His position obliged him to admonish and give orders. Father Vespignani illustrates this with some interesting details. Father Rua kept an eye on everything, without ever arousing the feeling that he was being distrustful or was spying on people, so gentle and thoughtful was his manner. But on his desk he always kept little pads of scrap paper which the bookbinders made for him, and now and then he would tear off a slip and jot a word or name or scribble a mark on it. During the afternoon recreation he would walk to the playground, slips in hand, and go to a confrere, stop another, or

call a third. They were the ones he meant to speak to, and he would always use Don Bosco's own expressions: "Would you do me a favor?" "Would you be willing to go to such and such a place?" "Would you like to talk about your studies?" "Does your job give you problems?" "Would you like to talk about this matter or that?" And he always ended as Don Bosco did: "Be cheerful. . . . Let's alway's be friends. . . . Be brave!" Father Vespignani recalls how all admired his thoughtfulness and how they almost wished he had a slip for them so that they could have a few pleasant moments with him. He tells us that being called by Father Rua did much good, kept the confreres on their toes, and fired them with feelings of generosity.

Father Rua had several secretaries. He did not simply assign them work, but he observed their aptitudes so as to prepare them for various offices, especially that of prefect in our houses.[3] To aid them he prepared a whole series of brief manuals to illustrate the method of keeping accounts in our houses. He made up ledgers for recording Masses, books for accounts receivable, fees, lists of cooperators and their donations, and as many manuals as there are branches of administration in our houses: sacristy, workshops, library, kitchen, pantry, maintenance, laundry and so forth. With tireless patience and fine clarity he taught newcomers how to handle various administrative tasks and how to keep entries and record them in ledgers. He awakened and developed within them a consciousness of precision and exactness in domestic economy.

Most of the mail came to Father Rua, who sorted it, made notations and gave it out to different secretaries to write out standard responses which required only his signature. Several letters would bear marginal notes made by Don Bosco, who usually referred domestic matters, reduction or remission of fees, acknowledgment of offerings and applications to enter the Congregation to Father Rua. Father Vespignani, whose first task on his arrival was to be one of Father Rua's secretaries, wrote: "I can truthfully state that Father Rua's office was an excellent place for me to observe the normal operation of the Salesian Congregation."

Father Rua took loving care of the theology students. He gave them a weekly lesson on the New Testament and kept a vigilant eye on their intellectual and spiritual formation. He supervised prac-

[3] The confrere in charge of the administration of the goods of the house. [Editor]

tice teaching and reminded priests to be precise in observing the rubrics. In addition, he gave a personal example of highest concern for religious poverty. He was frugal even to the extreme in the use of paltry items like paper and pens, yet always with a propriety that avoided stinginess.

Father Vespignani learned two tactful lessons from Father Rua which showed how he felt toward Don Bosco. A priest sought admission to the Congregation. Don Bosco drafted a reply and gave it to Father Vespignani, who happened to come from the same town, asking him to enclose it with a letter of his own. Father Vespignani went to Father Rua and informed him that this excellent priest was in an advanced stage of consumption. Fearing that Don Bosco might accept the application, he suggested that Don Bosco's reply be held back or that Don Bosco be cautioned against accepting a man in such condition. Very seriously Father Rua looked at him in astonishment. "Would you dare to intercept a letter from Don Bosco?" he asked. "Would you jeopardize the plan which Our Lord and Mary, Help of Christians may have for that priest, whom you judge to be unsuitable and given up by his doctors? Don't you know that Don Bosco has a special understanding with Our Lady?" The questions were too much for Father Vespignani. He stammered an apology and mailed the letter.

One morning Father Rua went up to him very quietly, as usual, with a sheaf of papers in his hand and said in a tone of mystery, "I have a fine job for you. But first put yourself in God's grace and say a hearty act of contrition, because Don Bosco's handwriting is most difficult to make out. These are the regulations for the houses which Don Bosco has checked, corrected, and almost entirely rewritten, and here is the final copy for the printer, so transcribe it carefully." When he finished, he asked Father Rua if he could keep one page of the original in payment, so as to have an autograph of Don Bosco as a relic. Father Rua cut him short: "What are you asking? Don't you know that every scrap of Don Bosco's writing is carefully kept in the Congregation's archives? That is especially true of this document which is the rule of Salesian life." Father Vespignani realized the impropriety of his request and also the deep veneration of his superior for Don Bosco.

Devotion and prayer sanctified work in Father Rua's office. As soon as all were present, he would say the *Actiones* and *Ave Maria*

with his secretaries and read a thought from St. Francis de Sales. Before closing, he would read another of the saint's sayings and end with the *Agimus* and *Ave Maria.* In summary, his office was truly a classroom of every virtue, doctrine and holiness, an exercise in Salesian formation. Both in his office and outside Father Rua was always a man of perfection—such was the feeling and judgment of those who were lucky enough to live close to him. Thus, Father Vespignani, whom we have widely quoted and who was then in a position to observe him right through the day, states, "More and more I admired Father Rua's promptness, unflagging constancy, religious perfection, and self-sacrifice joined to a most enchanting gentleness. What charity, what grace of manner he had in training subordinates for any office he wished to entrust to them! What tactful scrutiny, what insight in recognizing and assessing their aptitudes so as to bring them forth in service to Don Bosco's apostolate!" This was the alter ego whom Don Bosco found and formed, and whom Providence chose to be his first successor.[4]

Don Bosco's constant work and that of his faithful disciple reinforced their exhortations and gave their personnel new energy. All through Turin's August heat, the teachers remained at their posts, regardless of fatigue. The doctor did suggest a seashore rest, but Don Bosco turned a deaf ear. In fact, when several confreres at the Varazze boarding school, just a short distance from the shore, asked for permission to go to the beach, Don Bosco said no. There was always work, unending work, and work was also the topic of conversation. On August 14, an after-supper discussion began whether it might be true that work was killing off Salesians before their time. Everyone had his say, and Don Bosco listened to the pros and cons. Then he spoke. For about fifteen minutes he expressed his opinion. He practically gave a conference on the topic, developing it with theoretical reflections and practical examples. So noteworthy was his talk that Father Barberis hastened to record it.

For each of us who might die of overwork—Don Bosco explained—a hundred others would be drawn to the Congregation. Yes, it is true, and I rejoice and am even proud to say: we work hard. But this has nothing to

[4]The main sources of these details about Father Rua come from Father Vespignani's book *Un anno alla scuola di Don Bosco* [A Year at Don Bosco's Side] and from a handwritten account. [Author]

do with what I heard, that the priests who died in our community were victims of overwork. No, I believe it is not at all true. They worked much and they were brave fighters; with more rest they might have prolonged their lives, but each of them suffered from an illness which doctors diagnosed as incurable.

Father Alasonatti had a tumor in the throat. He tried every cure, every remedy, in the hope of recovery. The many doctors he consulted always held out some hope of recovery, but then their remedies failed. In the last year of his life, I again ordered him under obedience to take care of himself regardless of the cost, and he obeyed, but all in vain. The tumor killed him. Father Ruffino was also a giant of work, but his death was caused by severe pneumonia. He went from Turin to Lanzo in the pouring rain, and, without changing his wet clothing, heard confessions in the parish church for hours on end, since it was Holy Week. He developed a severe cold which fatally affected his lungs, and he died. Father Croserio taught and worked very hard, it is true, but from boyhood he had suffered from heart trouble, and it was this affliction that brought him to the grave. We all know about Father Chiala. The government accepted his resignation as postmaster because of poor health. And much the same can be said of others who were great workers. It was not the work that actually killed them. If we might call anyone a victim of work, it is Father Rua, and we see how the Lord has at least so far kept him in good health.

But even if it were true, how glorious a death it would be to die from overwork! For such a sacrifice God bestows precious rewards not just to the individual in heaven, but on earth to the Congregation to which He sends a hundred for the one taken away. Our Congregation will never diminish or decline in numbers; indeed, it will keep growing as long as we work hard and are ruled by temperance. I believe that within fifty years we will have ten thousand members. But . . . I also see a marked tendency toward comfort which frightens me. When I started to found the oratories and the Congregation, I was alone, yet everything got done. Now the work is parceled out more and more. True, our undertakings keep growing vastly and the workers are mostly young and still inexperienced, and generally they have to learn by themselves and prepare to take tests for priestly faculties. But you can be certain that as long as those who lived with me for any length of time and witnessed the early years of the Congregation are alive, things will go well. Afterward . . . well, let us put our trust in the Lord.

There are three things which undermine a religious congregation. The first I have already mentioned: idleness, too little work. We must indeed set more work for ourselves than we can actually do, and then, who knows, we may manage to do all we can.

The second cause is being fastidious about food and drink. God help us

if we ever develop the habit of keeping wine, liqueurs, cookies and candy in our rooms. God help us when we begin to make demands at table and seek choice viands. We have already taken this road for quite a while—that is why I worry. Someone starts by saying: "We must not lack what is necessary." Then it becomes: "We could very well have this and that since we always have guests at table. First one step, then another is taken, especially as regards wine. Then, of course, once one has eaten and drunk well, he must take a nap. The body may rest, but not the imagination, and passions grow strong. . . .

The third cause of decline is egoism or a spirit of reform, or call it grumbling—it's all the same to me. When a subordinate does not agree with his superiors' actions, he complains, suggests other policies, and demands that things be done to suit him. By a subordinate I do not mean a novice or someone not charged with administration, but a lesser superior. Always remember that once divisions begin to develop among us, the Congregation no longer goes forward. United into one heart, we can do ten times more work, and it will be easier.

While encouraging his men to work, Don Bosco did not discount their need for rest. Toward the middle of August, fourteen clerics returned to the Oratory from Pinerolo where they had taken their teacher certification examination. In previous years examinations were taken at the government authorized normal school of Novara, where Salesian candidates were a major topic of conversation because of their excellent preparation, to Don Bosco's personal and public praise. Then in 1876 the Ministry of Education designated the state schools as examination centers for candidates from private schools. The nearest one was at Pinerolo. The bishop had generously offered the seminary's facilities to Don Bosco's clerics. They had worked very intensely to get ready because they had to work while they were studying, but the outcome was worth their labor, since all received their diplomas and won the praise of both the board of examiners and the school superintendent. Returning now to Turin with Father Cipriano, who had supervised them at Pinerolo, they noisily entered the half-empty dining room and dashed to greet Don Bosco as he sat finishing his frugal lunch. Pleased with their success, Don Bosco told them that he planned to give them a well-deserved vacation after the feast of the Assumption. Among them the one in poorest health was the cleric John Rinaldi, the future founder of the Salesian house at Faenza. "Now that you have completed your

herculean tasks," Don Bosco told him, "and since you are tired and not too well, I want you to have a real vacation, one you can really enjoy. Choose any one of our houses where you would like to take a little rest, and where the climate would best suit you. Go right away and take a vacation there. The choice is all yours." The good cleric chose Turin so that he could always be near Don Bosco.

What Don Bosco could not bear was to have clerics asking to go home for vacation. This situation, of course, called for discretion. He clearly understood that he had to put a resolute stop to such trips, but he also realized that an abrupt break would cause the loss of many vocations. "Innovations are to be introduced little by little," he said, "almost imperceptibly. In this way the newcomers accept them as already established and give them no further thought, while the older members are not hurt." As more houses were founded, it became easier to provide suitable recreation for the confreres near the mountains or at the seashore, according to personal needs. Thus he had arranged to have the clerical novices spend a month at Lanzo, but in order that they might rest without idleness, he also had them do some schoolwork and chores which would not tax them. Father Barberis' letter to Father Lemoyne, the director of the boarding school, made Don Bosco's intent very clear:

Turin, August 17, 1876

Dear Father Director:

Don Bosco has asked me to contact you regarding our clerics' vacation at Lanzo. Please read these directives to them.

1. Since good order requires that there must be someone in every house who gives orders and those who obey, Don Bosco wishes that the director of the school have the last word over the clerics and whatever arrangements are made for their vacation.

2. To handle all details Father Rossi is specifically put in charge and everyone shall refer to him. He should try to be with the clerics at all times. Don Bosco believes that he can do it since school is over.[5]

3. Since a rest for the body must not mean harm to the soul, and since a strengthened body should invigorate the soul, our usual practices of piety will be held regularly in common at the most suitable time.

4. So that everyone may be prompted to full compliance and the exact performance of the practices of piety, Father Rossi is asked to keep a daily record of each one's conduct and mail it in to Don Bosco.

[5] Father Francis Rossi was the prefect of studies at Lanzo. [Author]

Let everyone strive to be "the light of the world and the salt of the earth," and may there be not one moment in our life when we do not practice this saying of Our Divine Master to priests and priestly aspirants. Rather let our lamps shine ever more brightly, that their radiance may light up the entire house in which we are. Let us take care that our salt be an ever richer seasoning, acquiring fullness of taste and preserving from corruption those around us.

Don Bosco has asked me, Father, to write these things to you, and I do so solicitously and with great pleasure, since nothing is dearer to my heart than prompt obedience to the man who for me and for all of us represents God Himself.

Believe me always, Father Director, to be

Your brother in Christ,
Fr. Julius Barberis

Meanwhile the autumn spiritual retreat was drawing near when the novices would have to decide whether or not to apply for vows. To assist and advise them in this all-important matter and to help them with their retreat, Father Barberis went to Lanzo. From there he immediately wrote to Don Bosco to report on their frame of mind and to ask him to visit. The zealous master of novices was upset by a few defections. Don Bosco sent him a most interesting reply:

My dear Father Barberis:

Your letter re-echoes the thoughtful words of our ever beloved Father Lemoyne that I come to Lanzo, but current business, and my health which demands the attention I would gladly forego, prevent me from coming, *at least for now*. But every novice is free to write to me and even to come to Turin, if necessary. I would think that difficulties should arise when one applies for the novitiate rather than at religious profession, which is entirely the free choice of the individual.

You will do well to explain that applying for vows entails no obligation and that everyone is entirely free after the spiritual retreat. The time to reflect was during the course of the year, and many wisely did so. Now there seems to be nothing else to do but give the world a kick, as St. Alphonsus said in a little poem of his.[6]

Now I want to tell you a dream or whatever else it could be that filled my mind on the night of St. Ann's feast. I saw a shepherd who toiled to pasture his sheep and safeguard them from harm. For a whole year he

[6]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

labored by the sweat of his brow, and he was very pleased with his efforts, for his sheep put on weight, their wool hung in folds, and they gave plenty of milk.

He set a date of shearing and invited his friends. The good shepherd went to his fold early in the day and saw that several sheep were missing. Where could they gave gone? he wondered.

He was told that a man had come along with the offer of greener pastures, and those he deceived went along with him. Nothing else was known.

"Poor me!" groaned the anguished shepherd. "I have worked and sweated for those sheep and counted on the wool and cheese they would yield. Now I see that I have labored in vain."

"No!" replied all the other sheep. "Some sheep deprived you of their wool, but we will repay you not only with our wool but with our entire hide."

The shepherd regained his composure and bestowed a thousand caresses on the sheep which had faithfully remained in the fold, not succumbing to deceitful allurements.

Offer a handsome reward to anyone who can interpret my story.

God bless us all. Pray for me. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

A brief aside in keeping with the title of this chapter will not prove displeasing. We came across a short note which deserves publication. It was written by Louis Piasco of Sampeyre, a secondary school Oratory student who figures among the clerical novices of the following year. He addressed himself to a "superior," very likely Father Barberis, since the marginal comments are in his handwriting and were probably meant for his chronicle. Apparently the boy had been sick in June and felt that he needed a rest. He asked if he might go and enjoy the bracing air of Lanzo. Don Bosco approved, and the boy wrote from there to thank him. The contents of his letter make it clear that he did not go just to enjoy a vacation. A simple document overflowing with gratitude, it shows us, as so many other signs have done, the amenities of family life which the boys enjoyed at the Oratory.

Lanzo, June 12, 1876

Dear Father Superior,

Thank you for all you did to have my wish for a few days' rest at Lanzo

come true so quickly. Not even parents give their children so much attention, nor do they so readily grant their wishes—a proof of the love our superiors have for us. Here too we are given every possible consideration and all efforts are made to keep us reasonably happy, so that we can wish for nothing more. And what can we do in return for such care? The answer immediately suggests itself. We will try to respond to their wishes. Please tell Don Bosco that I love him and thank him. Because of him, I find that I now lack nothing. Please accept my love and my gratitude.

Louis Piasco

Episodes, like cherries, come in clusters. Anthony Aime, an eleven-year-old orphan, had been entrusted to Don Bosco by Divine Providence. Like others who had no home to go to on vacation, he stayed at the Oratory. Don Bosco, who went to Lanzo for the Salesians' spiritual retreat, thought of him and wrote to his secretary, Father Berto, to bring him along with others to spend a few days at Lanzo. Anthony came with Peter Furno, a first year lad in secondary school. On arriving at Lanzo, both youngsters asked if they could make the retreat too, but Father Dalmazzo objected that the retreat was not meant for boys. They complained to Don Bosco, who told them with a smile, "If Father Dalmazzo won't let you make the spiritual retreat, I'll have to keep you busy in other ways. Go to Father Prefect and tell him for me that every day he is to give each of you four soldi and two bread rolls, one for morning and one for afternoon. While you are at Lanzo, you will eat your breakfast and lunch of bread and fresh milk up in the mountains." Further, he himself drew up a schedule for them. Their vacation could not have been more fun, as Father Aime, who later became a provincial, first in Spain and then in South America, himself testified. His name is held in honor wherever he labored. Furno also became a Salesian and was the first director of our house at Trent.

Admissions to the novitiate usually took place in the fall. Some incidents rescued from oblivion cast light, in this volume as in the preceding one, upon the criteria which Don Bosco used in admitting or rejecting candidates for his larger family.

Borghi, Ghiglione and Garbellone were three artisans at the Oratory who were attracted to our way of life and seriously wanted to attend the novices' meditations and conferences.

"We know they are good boys," Don Bosco remarked. "I am

glad that they want to take part in the novices' common life. In fact, I'd love to see two-thirds of the boys join in, because in reality whatever we do is just what a good Christian should do, except that the conferences point out our failings more frankly." Passing over the first two, we all know the third, at least by name. This lad was a living sign of Don Bosco's exceptional gift of formative training. Elsewhere, Garbellone's natural bent for eccentricity would have made him the butt of ridicule and a man of little or no account. But he left Don Bosco's hands so molded that he could exploit even the weakness of his temperament, and in the course of fifty years he achieved immeasurable good at the festive oratory of St. Francis de Sales and rendered numerous, sometimes distinguished, services to the Congregation. He would have thrown himself into the fire for Don Bosco, who so appreciated his loyalty that he once publicly gave him thirty thousand lire to pay a bill, placing the money unconcernedly into his hands. Garbellone, then not quite thirty, was touched by his trust and could not keep back his tears. He always recalled the incident with feeling.

Two clerics, each from a different diocese, applied to enter the novitiate. They seemed to be good and determined, but Don Bosco accepted them only as aspirants. He was very slow to accept applicants who had not studied in our schools, for he wanted to be sure that they would respond to genuine Salesian formation.

A man of average intelligence, who was unfortunately deformed, wished to enter the Congregation as a brother. Don Bosco did not think it wise to accept him. As he usually did in giving oral directives, he suggested how Father Barberis could give a negative answer. "Look," he was to say, "the superiors are all fond of you and you are welcome to stay with us. Still, it would not be wise for you to enter the Congregation. As Salesians, we have to go out into the world and deal with outsiders. Unavoidably your handicap would hurt our Congregation. But rest assured that we will always treat you with real consideration." In fact, he spent all his life at the Oratory. His name was Doda, and everyone in the house knew him.

Three priests, who knew that Don Bosco would not on principle refuse to shorten their trial period, wanted to make perpetual vows on the feast of the Immaculate Conception after a novitiate of just three months. Although they were excellent men, attuned in spirit to our way of life, the Superior Council did not admit them. On

this matter of simple vows,[7] the canonists of the day, being in disagreement, advised against a liberal use of dispensation which generally resulted in harm to a congregation, but ultimately they left the decision to the superior general, who, therefore, did not have to refer to Rome. In this case, although he was fully informed and had special faculties from Pius IX, Don Bosco abided by the Superior Council's decision.

The hand of Divine Providence was evident in this steady flow of new personnel. At the beginning of November, twenty-three brothers, clerics and priests left for the missions, and exactly as many priests, clerics, and brothers sought admission to the Congregation. Singularly providential, too, was the following incident. Don Bosco had opened verbal negotiations with Rome for certain dispensations or concessions on behalf of the Society. The need for them was truly urgent. One day he sat at his desk and spent considerable time in drafting a letter to the Holy Father. Since certain tasks had been entrusted to him, he asked, would the Holy Father grant him what he needed to carry out his revered wishes? On the morning of November 19, he folded the sheet and slipped it into an envelope, ready to be mailed, when a letter arrived from the Pope. It answered each and every question he just had posed in the letter he was about to mail and granted his petitions from first to last. "This is truly an act of Providence!" Don Bosco exclaimed. "The Pope really lives in a higher, miraculous world."

The fame of the Congregation kept spreading more widely each day, so much so that many priests wrote to or visited the Oratory, anxious to apply. Don Bosco, however, was anything but anxious to encourage them. He used to say, "These men have responsible positions in a diocese. They face countless difficulties in giving them up, and so I doubt that many will come. If they surmount all obstacles to do so, they will for the most part begin to complain after a short stay in the house because they cannot continue their old habits and must adjust to a new life. On our part, we must steadfastly refuse to tolerate lifestyles contrary to our rules and traditions. Their dissatisfaction and our resoluteness will result in very few of them staying. I believe that they are good priests, and they can do much good where they are, especially in these days

[7] Simple vows are for a definite period of time or for life and render contrary acts unlawful but not invalid; solemn vows are for life and render contrary acts invalid as well as unlawful. [Editor]

when priests are hard to come by. May the Lord bless them where they are! Though I do not close our houses to adults, neither do I go looking for them."

One of the priests who came to us in 1876 is our councilor for trade schools, Father Joseph Vespignani of Lugo, who immediately grasped the spirit of his new environment from his first day at the Oratory. He came late in the evening. Don Bosco had been in the confessional until ten, since it was the eve of the Exercise for a Happy Death and of the missionaries' departure. Father Vespignani found him at supper. Four or five priests stood or sat by him speaking very familiarly. Asked to sit down at Don Bosco's right, he handed him a letter of recommendation from Father Cerruti, since he had just taken his brothers to our school at Alassio. Don Bosco passed the letter to Father Rua who was standing beside him. Father Rua read the letter and told Don Bosco, "This is a newly ordained priest from Romagna who has come to live with Don Bosco."

"Yes, yes!" Don Bosco replied, fixing his gaze upon him with a smile. "You come to stay with us for a while, perhaps a year, to see how we run our schools, and then you will return home to do the same."

Father Vespignani was dumbfounded, for as he was leaving his native town of Lugo, his parish priest, learning of his destination, had literally suggested that he do all that Don Bosco had just told him. Recovering from the initial shock of that strange turn of events, he hastily denied planning anything like that. If Don Bosco would accept him, he would remain with him always. "Well," Don Bosco replied, "now we see each other by the light of this lamp, but tomorrow we shall see each other in daylight and shall get to know each other. So, you are a newly ordained priest? Tomorrow you will celebrate the community Mass for our missionaries who are leaving for Argentina." He then bade him good night and entrusted him to Father Rua, who very amicably led him to his room and prepared his bed. After pointing out an inscription on a porcelain plaque hanging by a holy water font and wishing him good night, he withdrew. The inscription read: "No matter how much God may cost, he is never expensive." That was a golden maxim which he was soon to have occasion to remember.

Clerics and priests who wanted to enter the Congregation needed testimonial letters from their bishops, but most of the time

the latter would not issue them. Don Bosco therefore decided to follow the system adopted by the Barnabites. He had forms printed similar to theirs and sent one to each aspirant to sign and forward to his bishop. Whether or not the bishop answered, the aspirant then could be accepted. As for boys who attended Salesian schools, we already know that Don Bosco had full faculties to admit them regardless of age. Yet, despite such precautions, he was given an admonition by Cardinal Ferrieri, then Pro-Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars:

Rome, November 28, 1876

Very Reverend Father:

It has come to the attention of this Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars that you have regularly admitted young men to your Society of St. Francis de Sales without applying for testimonials from their respective bishops, in accordance with the decree *Romani Pontifices*, issued by this Sacred Congregation on January 25, 1848. Subsequently, according to complaints received in this connection, you have admitted and later presented for ordination some young men who had been dismissed from the seminary for immoral conduct. This Sacred Congregation therefore requests you to inform us of any special dispensation from the aforesaid decree you may have been given. Otherwise, in regard to your institute, you will have to comply with this decree, from which no congregation, society, institute, or house, even of simple vows, is excepted. This directive is communicated for your guidance and direction. Asking God's protection upon you, we are at your service.

✠S. Cardinal Ferrieri, *Pro-Prefect*

After some delay—the reason for which we do not know—Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, December 16, 1876

Your Eminence:

I received the admonition you kindly sent me, and I thank you for the fatherly manner in which it was given. I am asked two things: whether I have obtained a dispensation from testimonials of ordinaries as required by the decree *Romani Pontifices* (January 25, 1848), and if I have admitted young men dismissed from the seminary of Turin.

To the first question I answer affirmatively. From the very beginning I noticed that all aspirants to the Salesian Congregation were young men

who had pursued their studies in our boarding schools and who were therefore hardly known, if at all, to their respective ordinaries. Moreover, most of them came from other states. Acting on the advice of a high ranking person, I sought permission, and graciously was given it *vivae vocis oraculo* [orally], by the Holy Father (Audience, May 3, 1876) dispensing from the aforesaid testimonials all those who had lived in our houses, hospices and boarding schools and applied for admission to the Salesian Society. Later, when a few priests applied for admission to this Congregation, the same dispensation was extended to all without distinction (*vivae vocis oraculo*, November 10, 1876). Nevertheless, desiring not to offend any diocesan bishop to whose assistance this Congregation is entirely dedicated, we have always applied for testimonials to the respective ordinary whenever it was a case of admitting any cleric or priest already listed in a directory of diocesan clergy, and they were graciously given. The exception is the archbishop of Turin, who decided not to grant them, and consequently we abided by the second section of the aforesaid decree, which directs us to write to the Holy See.

As for the second charge, accepting clerics expelled from the seminary and presenting them for holy orders, I must reply in the negative. The same reply we have already given to our own archbishop, and once in the presence of the archbishop of Vercelli. Perhaps the complaint refers to the fact that we temporarily took in a few unfortunate clerics who were dismissed from the seminary and found themselves out on the street. We charitably befriended them, not to have them become Salesians but to provide them with shelter and necessities, so as to avert their spiritual and material ruin. Therefore, I respectfully request our ever revered archbishop to name even one single cleric expelled from the seminary for immoral conduct and accepted into the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. Having responded to these admonitions, I dare to beg Your Eminence to request our archbishop of Turin on my behalf to explain certain severe measures against the Salesians. For example:

1. He suspended my humble self from hearing confessions by issuing limited permission which he refused to renew, giving no reason either before or after.[8]

2. He forbids us to conduct spiritual retreats in our houses for those lay teachers who wish to spend a few days in recollection during the fall vacation.

3. He has denied preaching faculties to some of our priests who work in our festive oratories to help endangered youngsters.

[8] We described this unfortunate episode in Chapter 22 of Volume XI, but we forgot to add one observation. What distressed Don Bosco at that time was the suspicion that the reason for this extraordinary measure was a slanderous accusation of a delicate nature. [Author]

4. When invited to preside at any sacred function, he refuses to come, and he will not let us invite any other bishop.

5. He will not come to administer the sacrament of confirmation, nor will he permit any other bishop to do so.

These and many other actions of this kind underscore serious motives which we have never been able to discover.

In presenting these things, I mean not to register a complaint, but merely to make you aware of what impedes the welfare of souls. Let me be told things clearly and specifically, and I promise in advance faithfully to carry out all that the Holy See may judge conducive to God's greater glory. I add but one request. Whenever Your Eminence has any cause to advise, correct, or admonish me, you will be doing a great act of charity if you will so tell us. We may well say that the Holy Father is our founder and has almost personally directed us, and so we all earnestly desire to work to our dying breath for the glory of the Church. Every wish of the Supreme Pontiff or of any of the Sacred Congregations will always be for us a clear command never to be transgressed.

Most gratefully and respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

The liberal professions, too, looked to the Oratory: lawyers, notaries, clerks, and even doctors yearned for it as a shelter. Don Bosco was so impressed by this occurrence that he mulled over the idea of opening a house specifically for men of this category, not only so that they might know the Congregation and become known to us, but also because, as a general rule, they had to learn both the theory and practice of religious life. But the idea came to naught because experience proved it unnecessary, since very few adults persevered in the Congregation.

More than the adults, Don Bosco had at heart the younger hopes of the Congregation, the novices especially, whom he kept an eye on during the school year and to whose spiritual growth he had given a strong thrust at the beginning of the year. Secular subjects were still something of a problem during the novitiate. Of necessity, Latin was limited to translating and explaining the psalms and some of St. Jerome's *Lives*; in Italian there was a canto or two of Dante, and in philosophy there were courses in logic and ontology. He felt that this allowed the novices to apply themselves seriously to the tasks and practices proper to their year of testing.

He was concerned about classes in pedagogy, which he felt had

to be adapted to our needs. His desire was for an overall course which could be entitled *The Salesian Teacher and Assistant* and would deal with the following topics: the task of the assistant in the dormitory, on weekly walks, in church, in class; the Salesian teacher's punctuality in class and his attitude toward discipline, prizes, punishments, and so on. Such lessons would be given during the novitiate and then printed to serve as a textbook for our use.

To the practice of isolation from other groups, one item had to be added: the separation of novices from the professed. "Everywhere and always," he said, "novices must be conscious of the rule. Mingling with professed members who either exempt themselves by necessity from the rule or trangress it through carelessness, the novices lose their desire to embrace wholeheartedly a way of life which, imposed by duty, will one day bring them great advantage and satisfaction." There was another change that he thought should be introduced in the dining room. Until then, the major superiors ate with the others, but it did not seem proper that the clerics who had just received the cassock should sit at table as equals with Don Bosco, Father Rua, and others. They could partake of the same fare, but if an older confrere should require a special diet, it was reasonable that he be served without having the younger men scrutinize him or remark on the difference. He even added that it would be better for the Superior Council to have a separate dining room where they could have greater freedom to speak without the risk that an indiscreet remark might be heard by others.

It is apparent to our readers that we are still in the period when Don Bosco dealt personally with all matters of the Salesian family, big or small. Proof of this is a note of his found among the papers of Father Lemoyne, director of the school at Lanzo. As ordination day drew closer, Don Bosco wrote: "Dear Father Lemoyne: Let Varaja begin his retreat without delay at Borgo San Martino. Ordination, September 3." The ordaining prelate was the very kindly Bishop [Peter] Ferrè of Casale. In this family narration some reference to the young ordinand would not be amiss. In 1868 Anthony Varaja, a student at Lanzo, had to leave school to help his family. Deeply grieved, he had a dream on the eve of his departure. In that dream he seemed to find himself going into the

reception room, close to which was a small swing. To his astonishment and fear, he saw Jesus Christ there, and so overcome was he by His brilliance and majesty that he fell to the ground in a faint. The Divine Savior took him by the hand, raised him, and, clasping him, said, "Do not be afraid. I will be your own father (the boy was an orphan), since others have forsaken you. Trust Me."

Kneeling before Him, Varaja replied, "O Lord, grant me the grace of becoming a priest and a missionary." Jesus looked at him with ineffable kindness and answered with a smile, "Both one and the other!"

"Yes, Lord," the boy repeated. "Make me a priest and a missionary."

And Jesus repeated, still with a smile, "Both one and the other!"

The promise was kept. Two years later, Varaja was reaccepted, tuition-free. In 1876 he was ordained a priest and then sent to direct the house at Saint-Cyr in France. Eventually, in December 1891, his superiors sent him to the Palestine mission where he ended his days in a saintly manner on October 19, 1913.[9]

What follows fits in well with family matters. The psalms and canticles of the Bible often extol God, voicing gratitude and detailing the favors which His bounty has granted to His chosen people, while all creation is called upon to glorify the Giver of all good. Don Bosco raised such a hymn to the Lord with grateful heart on the evening of November 25. It was the usual evening hour of family intimacy, just after confessions, in the dining room, with a group of ten or twelve priests. Reviewing the recent and distant past, he came to speak of the graces with which the Lord had blessed and was still blessing the Oratory. He did not make general allusions but detailed a long series of events, his listeners urging him on and praising God. We believe it is appropriate to record these reminiscences in Don Bosco's own words after an introductory reflection that he himself made.

As his family grew and expanded, Don Bosco gladly looked back upon the past. His reasons he stated and restated often, but he best expressed them on December 21, as our chronicler tells us. In the presence of [Charles] Bacchialoni, a professor of Greek literature at the University of Turin, and several Salesians, he stated, "I enjoy recounting the first days of the Oratory. Sometimes

[9] This incident is described with additional details in Volume IX, pp. 212f. [Editor]

they also involve me personally. But I do not relate them out of vainglory. Oh, no, thank God, vainglory has no place here. My purpose is solely to tell of the wonders of God's power and to show that God uses all kinds of means, even the weakest, the least capable, to overcome any kind of obstacle and to fulfill His will."

This is the hymn of thanks in which Don Bosco showed how God, in so many situations, revealed His benevolence toward the Oratory, protecting its residents from tragic accidents and untimely death.

Two years ago, on St. Joseph's feast day—he said—just as our biggest bell was tolling over the heads of a group of boys clustered beneath the belfry, suddenly they all started to scatter for no apparent reason—and none too soon. Within seconds, the clapper broke loose and hurtled below, smashing the cornice of the portico before hitting the ground. No one was harmed. Father Lazzero who was standing nearby turned around, startled by the clamor and the boys' cries, only to see the cleric Ghione happily toting away a huge tongue of iron on his shoulders. Father Charles Ghivarello, well-versed in physics, declared that the clapper's weight had the impact of a cannon ball.

Last year, on February 19, the first day of St. Joseph's month, Father Rua and Buzzetti heard a strange noise coming from the end of the playground adjoining the vegetable garden. They got up and went downstairs to investigate. As they got outside, Buzzetti immediately spotted a black patch on the ground, like a huge hole, and quickly pulled Father Rua back. They were hardly a few paces away when the ground on which they had just stood gave way. The cover of the cesspool had caved in; the pool was nearly ten feet deep and full. They skirted death by just a few moments.

The wall in the center of the first wing of the new building suddenly crumbled causing the collapse of the three stories near the church; on another occasion, a thunderbolt struck the St. Aloysius dormitory. Yet, no one was injured in all three accidents.

Aldroandi, a boy from Guastalla, a protégé of Monsignor Rota, fell over twenty feet from the balcony railing into the playground and landed on his stomach. Within minutes, however, he was on his feet again, laughing. The doctor was summoned and sutured a large abdominal wound. Three days later, the boy insisted on taking part in an outing to Superga and ran so much that the stitches broke. Without panicking, he walked to the coach and, alighting at the stop, came home. The doctor repaired the sutures and bandaged the wound as the boy tranquilly peeled an apple and ate it. He recovered fully.

A few days ago, a boy, while playing a game of hide and seek, fell into a pit that had been dug for a dumbwaiter in the new dining room, and he tumbled into the cellar. Immediately he scrambled to his feet and kept running, unaware of the danger he had just escaped, to get away from the boy chasing him.

A massive side door of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians came loose and landed on the pavement of the portico where a crowd of boys were playing, but no one was touched. At least twenty could have been crushed.

One boy, while playing, hid inside a drainage pipe. Another lad squeezed in after him, shouting: "Here I come! I'm a snake and I'll eat you up!" His prey fainted from fear. He was dragged out and carried to the infirmary, apparently dead of fright. The doctor who was summoned could not diagnose the problem, but as he prepared to administer a powerful stimulant and others spoke of anointing the lad, the boy leaped to his feet, rubbed his eyes and cried, "I'm all right now." And he abruptly dashed out of the infirmary, to everyone's astonishment.

When some of our boys went on vacation to our house at Trofarello, Fiore fell into a deep fish pond. Finocchio dove in to save him. When his first attempt was unsuccessful, he surfaced for breath and plunged in again. Then he reappeared, pulling his companion to the surface, and the others immediately dragged him ashore. It took some time to revive him. Words cannot describe the anguish and fear of his companions and of Father Francesia.

Not a single mishap occurred during the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians—a real miracle. As Father Savio walked along the scaffolding at the height of the dome, he stepped on a plank that gave way, but he managed to hang on to a cable and was saved.

Twice the counterweights of the clock in the belfry of the Church of St. Francis de Sales fell, smashing a step, but harming no one.

And fire? A fire did begin on the second floor in the room next to Don Bosco's, but Father Cagliero managed to put it out. Menzio's straw mattress smoldered for several hours and burst into flames only when someone entered the room, but it was extinguished in a moment. And how about the time the boys made coffee inside a trunk in the dormitory? So as not to be caught in the act as the assistant showed up, they closed the lid and sneaked out of the dormitory, leaving an alcohol stove burning. Yet there never was a fire! And this year, as people battled the Tensi factory fire, water buckets bounded off the roof without hitting a person, although the playground below was crowded with boys.

How about the boys who are forever falling without ever getting hurt? One lad struck his head so hard against a pillar that he bounced back three steps and fell, apparently dead, with an ugly gash on his forehead.

Yet three days later he was happily at play with his friends. Two boys collided with such force that both fell backward to the ground. The rival teams came running up to claim them as prisoners, but they jumped to their feet and dashed off as though nothing had happened. Another boy, his leg fractured in two places, kept running to avoid being caught in a game, until he fell exhausted. Doctored and healed, there he was playing again. How enthusiastically those games are played during recreation! There is something truly poetic about them.

Then there was my own recovery at Varazze. When I got back to the Oratory, you were all moved with pity, but I kept telling Father Rua and Father Bonetti that I was hungry and wanted food. When I talked to the boys and they heard my feeble voice, none of them could look up at me because their eyes were welling with tears.

And what about the time the gunpowder factory exploded? And what about the two cholera epidemics in Turin? Yet no one at the Oratory became ill, although priests and young clerics were actively caring for the victims. And how about the many times plots were hatched against my life?

In 1864 Father Cerruti fell sick at Mirabello. I sent word that he was to teach the upperclassmen. He obeyed but suffered a relapse, so much so that his life was feared for. Father Rua wrote to beg me to relieve Father Cerruti from his exhausting work. I answered, "Cerruti is to continue teaching." And so Father Cerruti continued. At the end of the first day he was completely worn out, but he continued to teach on the following day and felt better. On the third day he was almost completely recovered. At my request he commuted every week to Turin to attend lectures at the university and was none the worse for it. Later, sent to open and direct our new house at Alassio, he felt so worn out that he feared he would die on the way. "Go," I told him, after listening to his justified objections, and he went. In the first few hours he felt ready to drop, but he got to Alassio in excellent condition. If he ever has to illustrate the scriptural verse "An obedient man shall speak of victory" he won't have to go hunting for examples in books!

Had the cleric Erminio Borio been present, he could have told his companions what had happened to him that autumn which he described in a letter twelve years later. He was almost dead of malaria contracted at Borgo San Martino during the summer of 1876. He was sent to the seaside at Alassio, but his condition worsened. He tried his native climate, but there was no improvement. In spite of this, he was told to study for his certification tests, and he came to Valsalice College here in Turin. The anxiety and

strain of study aggravated his illness. One day, at about two in the afternoon, feeling the usual onset of chills, he felt that he had to have some solace from his superiors, and so he set out for the Oratory on foot, driven by such a delirium that he could scarcely see the road or move his feet. He somehow got to the Oratory and chanced upon Don Bosco who was walking the porticoes, and he kissed his hand. Seeing him so pale and exhausted, Don Bosco kindly questioned him. Then placing his hand on his head and pausing a moment as if in reflection, he said in his usual comforting way, "Cheer up!"

The cleric left him and went upstairs to rest. As he sat in the waiting room of the prefect's office, the fever left him, never to return. It is a fact that he stayed four more years at Borgo San Martino without a recurrence of the illness.

A family's spiritual treasures play an important part in its affairs. Two papal briefs arrived during September to enrich Don Bosco's religious family with added spiritual favors. The first extended to all the houses of the Congregation certain privileges granted to the motherhouse, such as the erection of private chapels for the convenience of Salesians and anyone else who resided in their houses, so that on any holy day the obligation of hearing Mass could be satisfied. The second brief allowed the celebration of Mass, distribution of Holy Communion, sermons, catechesis, and reservation, exposition and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Such faculties had already been granted to Don Bosco for his festive oratories in Turin by Archbishop Fransoni and Archbishop Riccardi, but these two papal briefs extended them to all of his communities in any diocese. Thus Don Bosco gradually acquired the privileges which he had not been able to obtain in other ways, as we have narrated in the preceding volume.[10]

[10] *See* Vol. XI, Chapter 21. [Editor]

CHAPTER 14

School Matters

THERE is little to say of school matters for the second half of 1876. We begin with Liguria, which our holy founder visited twice more,[1] first in July and again very briefly [in November] to attend the departure of our missionaries. We will relate more of that second visit later, but of this first, an ordinary visit, we have sparse accounts.

On Thursday, July 20, he was at Alassio. We know this from two letters dated from there, one to Nice, the other to Turin. In Nice, purchase negotiations for a new house were in progress. Father Ronchail was conducting them according to detailed, clear and official instructions from Don Bosco, as expressed in his letters of June 5 and July 20 to Father Ronchail and Father Rua.[2]

Either on his way to Alassio or on his departure, Don Bosco dropped in for a welcomed visit at Albisola to Mrs. Susanna Saettone, whom we have already introduced [as Mrs. Susanna Prato].[3] Her veneration for Don Bosco and her concern for the boarding school at Varazze transcend description, but we would like to mention a hitherto unpublished visit of hers to Don Bosco in 1871 when he was seriously ill at the school.[4] One of the confreres who was attending him wrote, "Yesterday morning an elderly woman, who was not well herself, came to Varazze exclusively to visit Don Bosco. It was a moving sight, a tribute of affection. I was there and could hardly keep back my tears."[5] The visitor was Mrs. Saettone—Mrs. Susanna as we Salesians familiarly called her. From her home Don Bosco wrote to Countess Gabrielle Corsi, who was hosting Father [Peter] Guidazio at her

[1] He had been there between February and March. *See* p. 89. [Editor]
[2] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[3] *See* Vol. X, p. 125; Vol. XI, p. 115. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. X, pp. 125–126. [Editor]
[5] Peter Enria to Joseph Buzzetti, Dec. 22, 1871. [Author]

villa near Nizza Monferrato, since the rest and care he needed could not be had at the Oratory.

Dear Countess:

I have learned that our beloved Father Guidazio is again distressed by his former illness. I fully trust your generous and well-known kindness toward us and hence do not have to commend him to your care. But I do seek specific information and would appreicate your letting me know how sick he is, and whether or not he is able to say Mass. He should not be allowed to read even a small portion of the breviary.

Please write to me. I shall be at Alassio until Saturday, on Sunday at Varazze, and from Monday through Friday at Sampierdarena.

I write this from the home of our devoted Mrs. Susanna at Albisola, whom we style our dear mother. She sends warmest regards to you and to Countess Maria.

Please pay my respects to Father Guidazio and give him my cordial greetings. Assure him that I am praying for him and that he is not to worry about the school or his other work. He is to concentrate on getting well again, and then, with God's help, we will see what can be done.

God bless all of you. With cordial regards to your honored family, I am pleased to remain,

Your most obedient son,
Fr. John Bosco

The director of the school at Nice came to meet with Don Bosco at Alassio, as the following [undated] letter shows:

Dear Father Rua:

1. I received your letter.
2. I talked with Father Ronchail and he is counting on 20,000 lire from Turin.[6]
3. The houses have no cash. I am coming back with 3,000 gold francs taken from Father Fagnano's account. Look elsewhere for more.
4. Seek Commendatore Dupraz' advice about cashing Father Turco's handwritten note.
5. Saturday, God willing, I shall be in Turin. I hope to see Father Guidazio.
6. I need money for the St. Vincent Home. You may tell all our boys

[6]He needed them to reach his goal of 30,000 lire to close the deal for the St. Vincent de Paul Home. [Author]

that two tribal chieftains of Patagonia have begged Father Cagliero to send them a squad of Salesians. He assured him that not only will they not be eaten but they will indeed be respected and heard with deep devotion. Father Cagliero is following this up most carefully and we shall learn the results.[7]

Greetings to you and all our dear ones. Believe me always in Jesus Christ to be

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

From Alassio Don Bosco returned to Sampierdarena whence he had departed. The above letter tells us clearly enough how much he needed funds for the St. Vincent de Paul Home, where construction was going on. He also had to provide for his Sons of Mary who were being housed there. Furthermore, he saw that he would have to set up a printshop there so as to be free to publish material which would provoke problems if printed in Turin. The required imprimatur for books printed at the Oratory caused regrettable delays and wrought havoc with schedules, causing authors no small embarrassment. Father Durando sent the chancery two issues of the *Italian Classics for the Young* which he was editing. Although the publishing date was imminent, the ordinary wished to examine them personally, and it was only after considerable delay that he returned the proofs with the comment that permission was needed from Rome since passages from books which had been put on the Index were being quoted. There was really no need for this because his approval would have been enough. Luckily Father Durando, a stickler for publication deadlines, was able to get out of this difficulty by substituting an alternate book to meet the emergency. As for the two volumes sent to the archbishop, Don Bosco suggested that Father Durando contact [Anthony] Cardinal De Luca, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, a kindly prelate who would offer no objection once he knew whom the books came from. As he usually did in such cases, he drafted a letter for Father Durando, stating: "Since this book is in heavy demand in the schools, we thought of publishing a condensed edition which would meet school requirements and, besides containing nothing objectionable, would not send readers to the

[7] He alludes to the contents of a letter from Chubut. *See* Ch. 9. [Author]

original which is on the *Index*. We submitted it here for revision, and it was returned with the notation that, though the book contains nothing objectionable, we should apply to Rome because the author has been placed on the *Index*. I understand how busy Your Eminence is, etc."

Father Durando did as he was told, but, anxious to be rid of these annoying conditions, he insisted that Don Bosco speed up the installation of a printshop at Sampierdarena so that books could be sent for approval to the Genoa chancery office where there was certain hope for every assistance. One of the insurmountable difficulties in Turin stemmed from a difference of philosophies. Several professors would have had their books printed at the Oratory, but they either gave them to the printers who disregarded ecclesiastic censorship or sent them out of Turin. Professor [Joseph] Allievo, head of the Pedagogy Department at the University of Turin, sent his works to Milan because Turin gave him a hard time whenever his ideas clashed or seemed to clash with Rosminian doctrines.

Two decrees of the archbishop, dated June 27 and 28, announced the ordinary's appointment of two censors for *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] and *Italian Classics for the Young*, but the language was couched in unusual terms. Since we are on the topic, we will add that in April [1876] Don Bosco had obtained permission from Rome to allow his Salesians to read books on the *Index* whenever he thought it advisable.

After its move from Marassi to Sampierdarena, the school grew from forty to almost two hundred pupils—a progress that had seemed impossible a few years before except to Don Bosco and some close collaborators. On one of his visits, as several benefactors were sitting with him at table and someone marveled at such a healthy growth, Don Bosco stated firmly, "The boys will keep increasing, and one day there will be three hundred, four hundred and more. In size and importance this house will rate as high as the Oratory in Turin."

We have only two brief records of Don Bosco's four-day stay at Sampierdarena, and they are two short letters addressed to Lanzo and Turin. He wrote to Father Lemoyne about some business with which we shall be mostly concerned in this chapter.

Sampierdarena, July 27, 1876

Dear Father Lemoyne:

Do your best for the railway festivities.[8] I hope that there will be no backlash after the municipal elections.[9]

Arrange with Turin for the brass band, provided that the municipality invites us. I shall be very glad to attend if I am in Turin during those days.

I enclose a letter I just received from Monsignor Ceccarelli. Father Cagliero has also written a very nice long letter.

Regards to Father Barberis. Tell the novices[10] and all the confreres that two Patagonian chieftains have formally asked Father Cagliero to send Salesian missionaries to them, assuring him that they will be well received. Father Cagliero is negotiating this highly important matter with the government. It really appears that God is expecting something great from the Salesians. God bless our dear family at Lanzo. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I received everything that Father Barberis sent to me.

Written two days before Don Bosco's departure for Turin, where he arrived Saturday, July 29, the second letter is addressed to Father Rua. Whenever he arrived home from a trip about midday, he always went to lunch with his dear old friend, Father Vallauri, so as not to bother anyone at the Oratory by coming in late and also in order to finish some urgent work which would otherwise have to be delayed for several hours.

Sampierdarena, July 27, 1876

Dear Father Rua:

I enclose Prince Chigi's letter[11] so that you can start acting on its contents, namely the certificates for Father Cipriano and Father Bodrato.

I enclose Father Ronchail's letter. Do what you can to get the money together, and we shall forward it on Monday.

I could not go to Nice to see Father Guidazio. I might pay him a visit from Turin.

[8] This refers to the inauguration of the last segment of the newly constructed railway from Turin to Lanzo. [Editor].

[9] This alludes to disorders that erupted after the previous elections. [Author]

[10] Father Barberis had accompanied to Lanzo those who were about to complete their novitiate year. [Author]

[11] We shall see later what it was about. [Author]

I shall lunch Saturday with Father Vallauri. If you can, join us. Drop him a little note and ask him to keep some soup for me since I shall be arriving at 12:30.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Shortly after his return to the Oratory, Don Bosco received a letter from James Cardinal Antonelli in Rome which greatly pleased him for its very affectionate tone. This was the last token of good will given to him by the well-known secretary of state who was to render his soul to his Maker on November 6.

Rome, July 29, 1876

Dear Father,

It is to your kind heart and warm love that I ascribe your greetings for my name day. They are very welcome because they are so sincere. I am truly grateful to you for your best wishes and for the prayers which you had your boys offer for me to God on this occasion. You can depend on my unwavering good will.

Yours affectionately,
James Cardinal Antonelli

Don Bosco always liked to drop in at each of the schools toward the end of the school year for a personal chat with the upperclassmen to advise them on their vocation. That was one reason for his trip to Liguria, after visiting his schools in Piedmont. At Borgo San Martino he joined the pupils in the celebration of the feast of St. Aloysius. He had not come unexpectedly. Some days before, he wrote to the boys telling them that he had important matters to talk over with them. Although we do not have the letter, we know that his message, worded in a manner all his own, filled them with joy, and many replied personally to thank him for caring so much for them. They gave him a joyous welcome on the broad avenue fronting the railroad station. The upperclassmen were given every chance to talk with him at their ease.

One of the boarders who expressed his wish to join the Congregation was Peter Rota of the village of Lu, who entered the novitiate the following fall. He was later to be a provincial in Brazil for many years and then a tireless worker in Portugal. Father Rota

recently told us of the joy the older boys felt when approaching Don Bosco and opening their hearts to him during his visits to their school. "How fruitful were those interviews! How indelible his words, uttered perhaps as a light comment or in a moment of jest! We were hardly aware that Don Bosco was guiding us along the path laid out for us by the Lord. Thus it was that, almost unconsciously, on finishing my fifth year, I could not face up to the possibility of leaving Don Bosco."[12]

On that trip, Don Bosco stopped off at Lu where he was well known. The local, saintly pastor was a promoter of *Letture Cattoliche*. At the beginning of the month, a young mother, Isabella Grossetti, had slipped into a coma, notwithstanding the efforts of skilled physicians, prayers to Mary, Help of Christians, and appeals to Don Bosco's prayers. Then, to the wonder of all, she had regained consciousness and recovered.[13] Don Bosco was, of course, given a royal welcome by all the people, and several families disputed the honor of hosting him, but since he had promised to lunch with the Rota family, the other households agreed to send in dishes of their own cooking.

As at Borgo San Martino, at Lanzo he notified the upperclassmen of his visit in advance and personally interviewed them. That is the only note in the school chronicle for June 26.

Once more the Valsalice College comes to our attention. It was the feast of St. Aloysius, and the director had invited Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda of Fossano to preside at the solemn services. On learning of this, the archbishop of Turin had his secretary write an indignant letter to Father Dalmazzo demanding an explanation and an apology for violating the sacred canons. Father Dalmazzo immediately apologized to Bishop Manacorda for any embarrassment caused him, but the bishop promptly assured him that there was nothing to fear because he had acted within his rights. He proved it by citing prominent canonists and the mutual agreement of the sub-Alpine bishops to allow each other to officiate in their respective dioceses. We do not know how the controversy ended.

[12] *Al Beato Don Bosco*, special beatification issue of the Borgo San Martino Junior Seminary, p. 23. [Author]

[13] Cf. Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, *L'Arca dell'Alleanza* [The Ark of the Covenant], p. 77, Tipografia Salesiana, Sampierdarena, 1879. This report tells us that Don Bosco met and blessed the young woman on a second visit to Lu during the following August. We have no other details. [Author]

This incident occurred during the unpleasant dispute concerning the manual of Salesian Cooperators.[14]

Let us now return to Lanzo and its brief hour of fame, as we shall narrate in the rest of this chapter. A corporation had been formed in the Canavese region in 1865 to build a thirty-two kilometer railroad between Turin and Lanzo. Various sections of track were inaugurated upon completion: Turin to Venaria, then Venaria to Caselle in 1868; Caselle to San Maurizio and to Ciriè in 1869. The final segment, Ciriè to Lanzo, was finally completed in 1876. A huge political rally was planned to celebrate the event. This segment was a mere eleven kilometers, but it crowned a ten-year project. Parliament had recently undergone a shift from right to left, and the new men in power, while posing as ardent supporters of progress and freedom, were actually determined to use their might to promote not only democratic ideals but clear-cut anticlerical policies. The inauguration of the railroad seemed made to order for the enthronement of the new political order in the heart of traditional Piedmont. The new government was called upon to lend its weight, and grandiose plans were drawn to focus the nation's attention on Turin. The Lanzo celebration, offering the government the raison d'être for its political show of power in the historic capital, was the major attraction. Don Bosco's name got mixed up somehow with the event, but he prudently managed to steer a safe course between the devil and the deep blue sea.

At the end of July the mayors of Turin and Lanzo called upon the school director to find out if he would obligingly host government officials and guests at a cocktail party which they wished to hold in the spacious porticoes of the school. Mayor [Felix] Rignon of Turin represented the Honorable Bargoni, prefect of the province, and the cabinet ministers; on his part, the mayor of Lanzo, speaking on behalf of the municipal authorities, stressed that the Salesian school was the only place that could suitably host such illustrious guests. Father Lemoyne gave the mayors a tour of the grounds, but he informed them that he would have to consult Don Bosco. Permission would most certainly be given—he assured them—but he himself did not have the final say. The mayors agreed, and Father Lemoyne wrote to Don Bosco, who was then at

[14] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 66ff. [Editor]

Sampierdarena. As we have seen,[15] Don Bosco gave him a free hand and told him that, were he then in the area, he would come to Lanzo.

The official opening of the railroad was held on Sunday, August 6 [1876]. Don Bosco had arrived at Lanzo the day before with the Oratory brass band. He had made the trip with [Peter] Barale, a coadjutor brother, who still clearly remembers that Don Bosco talked at length about the respect a Christian owes to lawfully established civil authorities. With the events of 1870 still fresh in everybody's mind, any contact between clergymen and government officials could easily have drawn criticism or malignant interpretations.

The school was festooned with crusader flags flying from every pillar, between which fluttered red and white streamers. In the center of the portico a portrait of King Victor Emmanuel II stood on a stand between the national colors, and beneath it a graceful column supported a large floral coat-of-arms of the municipality. At its base, on a wide red background of geraniums, a floral inscription of miniature daisies from the Salesian school read "Joy to All." On thick rugs, chairs were ranged on each side of the coat-of-arms, and beyond them were two long rows of tables, covered with white tablecloths, for the refreshments provided by the municipality. A bandstand stood at the foot of the main staircase facing the town plaza.

Prince Amadeus, duke of Aosta, was expected, but at the last minute he was unable to come.

Lanzo is built on a hill. At its foot the town erected a temporary banquet hall draped in white and blue streamers.

The weather was gorgeous. At 8:30 the train pulled in with four hundred guests headed by Italy's premier, [Augustine] Depretis, [John] Nicòtera, minister of the interior, and [Joseph] Zanardelli, minister of public works, who represented the king. Father Frederick Albert, the vicar forane, and eight seminarians met the train. Surrounded by passengers and townsfolk, he blessed the train and delivered a brief, inspiring homily. With soldiers lined up along the way as an honor guard, a squadron of mounted carabinieri and a platoon on foot led the premier, the ministers and all the other

[15] *See* p. 297. The following description of the festivities is drawn from other documentation in our archives. [Author]

dignitaries from near and far into the town through a triumphal arch. After a brief visit to the local hospital, the ministers proceeded to the town plaza where they were officially greeted by the vicar forane and the school children. The guests then moved on to the Salesian school.

Don Bosco and Father Lemoyne were waiting for them at the entrance. Turning to Don Bosco, Minister Zanardelli asked, "Excuse me, Father. Is Don Bosco here?

"I am Don Bosco," he replied. After some formal handshakes and mutual greetings, the ministers entered the courtyard where four ranks of uniformed students greeted them by doffing their caps and giving them a rousing cheer. General admiration for the gorgeous decorations was voiced aloud as the town officials hastened to congratulate and thank Father Lemoyne for the splendid reception. The floral coat-of-arms was the focus of wonder and admiration.[16]

The band took its place behind the singers. Amid respectful silence, Father Lazzero, Brother [Andrew] Pelazza and two boys sang a four-part anthem written by Father Lemoyne and set to music by Brother Dogliani. The audience burst into prolonged applause.

After refreshments, nearly all the guests followed Don Bosco and the ministers into the garden. The latter stayed with Don Bosco on a little terrace overlooking the Stura River and struck up a lively conversation with him.[17]

Nicòtera began. "Don Bosco," he remarked, "you travel quite a bit."

"Of course. I visit my schools several times a year."

"Do you go to Rome very often?"

"Yes, I've been there several times."

"We know that you also visit the Vatican."

"Certainly. It's quite the place for priests. Where else should I go?"

"They say you are quite close to the Pope."

"The Holy Father always receives me very kindly. Our relationship is as friendly as His Holiness allows it to become. On the other

[16] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[17] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

hand, I also have easy access to government officials. Whenever I had to transact business with cabinet ministers, they would always receive me immediately; then I would return to the Vatican and promptly be ushered into the Holy Father's presence. That is how some problems were settled. I can also say that the Pope has particularly trusted me and, within limits, has given me full freedom of action to negotiate for him. Minister Vigliani has also shown me great trust, allowing me almost full freedom in certain matters, although he knew that I am more papist than the Pope himself."

Here Deputy Ferraris interrupted, "True, true! I can repeat what Vigliani said to me and others who were present when he left. I quote: 'You had better value Don Bosco. He is the one who can perhaps render the state the greatest service.'"

"I took on all kinds of commitments," Don Bosco continued. "I can say that the Pope let me speak freely without interrupting, even when the matters under discussion were unpleasant. But I never wanted to handle any business in an official capacity. Many things were undertaken in agreement with Vigliani, but, because of someone's indiscretion, they remained at a standstill."

As Don Bosco spoke so unassumingly about high-level negotiations, all listened in respectful silence.

"Well, Don Bosco," Nicòtera said, "you are not telling us everything that is on your mind."

"I am not?"

"You're too smart."

"In what way do you think I'm smart? My lips speak what is in my heart. I hide nothing, unless it's something confidential. Even the youngest lad in our schools knows what I want to do. If this is being smart, then, indeed, I am. As for religious matters, I stand with the Pope, and very proudly so."

"And how about modern trends?" Nicòtera asked.

"I obey established authority."

"Still, Don Bosco, I have the feeling that you are not telling us everything."

"With your pardon, my candid way of speaking should make it clear that I am not here to flatter or indulge in double-talk. I always speak my mind as an upright man should. Everybody knows where I stand."

Senator [Hercules] Ricotti, an historian, now spoke up and addressed Don Bosco. "That is all very well," he said, "but the left-wing cabinet ministers have given Don Bosco two bad marks."

"Please, tell me what they are so that I can see if they are wrongs which can be righted."

"First, you turn out too many priests."

"And second?"

"Too many teachers."

"Well, Senator, I can't see any harm in that. As for your first charge, I have no defense. The priests I turn out are not too many. In fact, they are nothing compared to the overwhelming number of people who have gone into state employment, the military, the scholarly professions, the arts and skilled trades. Nor can I see how you can say that a priest does wrong by trying to train others to help him in his ministry. I believe that all of you gentlemen, from first to last, would like to instill your own spirit into as many people as possible, training them to be men like yourselves, dedicated particularly to public service. So it is only natural that a priest should wish to turn out more priests. Doesn't a soldier try to train other good soldiers, a doctor many skilled doctors? So too with lawyers. You can't blame me, Professor, if I try to instill my spirit into others and train men to be like me, restricting ourselves in our humble career to benefiting our fellowmen. You would yourselves have to fault me if I were unconcerned in this matter. Were I to neglect training priests, people would say that I have no love for my profession."

"Don Bosco is right," the ministers agreed, becoming ever more entranced by his directness and mostly by his tone of utter sincerity.

"As for your second charge of turning out too many teachers, who forces me to do this? You do, Senator, because you put me against the wall by sustaining laws of certification in Parliament. I am only trying to comply with a law that has been forced upon me. To keep our schools open, we must have certified teachers with academic degrees. If you think that doing one's best to comply with a state law is wrong, then I am proudly in the wrong. I'm sure that everyone agrees with me on this point. With us it is an absolute necessity. We would be in trouble if our schools did not have certified teachers. These gentlemen (*and he smilingly indicated the ministers*) would have it in for me."

"Don Bosco has hushed us," they agreed. "Don Bosco is right."

The conversation then took a more humorous twist. "Tell us, Don Bosco, since you can read men's hearts," Senator Ricotti began, "who is the worse sinner—Nicòtera or Zanardelli?"

"What can I say? Looks are often deceiving; they are not a sure basis for judgment. As for their inner selves, I do not know them, so I have no answer."

"Please say something. What do you think of us two?" Nicòtera and Zanardelli asked.

"Gentlemen, I believe you are both fine men."

"Come, be specific!"

"I respect you both. You, Mr. Zanardelli, are a competent lawyer, well known throughout Italy, while Mr. Nicòtera is famous for his works on statistics which I highly regard."

"Don't dodge the issue, Don Bosco," Ricotti insisted. "Answer my question. Who is the worse sinner?"

"You are putting me in a bind. What can I say? Look, judging from their intellectual achievements, they are both honorable men. Looking at them as men of action, I must say that they are truly unique, and it would be hard to find their equals. But if you ask me to judge them from a moral viewpoint, I have no answer, because I do not know them."

Then Nicòtera, turning to Ricotti, exclaimed, "Why pick on me? Keep me out of it. Ask Don Bosco instead if you are not the biggest sinner of the lot."

"But I have no intention of being converted," Ricotti replied.

"Then you are a bigger sinner than I," Nicòtera replied, "because you know what is wrong and do it anyway. Don't you know what the Bible says? *Desiderium peccatorum peribit.* [The desire of the wicked shall perish—Ps. 111, 10]

"What else can I say? You are all taking the words out of my mouth," broke in Don Bosco. "Just to get to know any one of you would take me not only one hour, but a whole spiritual retreat. Each of you would have to review his whole life and think of death which ends our performance, of the emptiness of worldly things, of the value of heavenly goods, of God's judgment, of eternity. You would have to realize that in death's hour only good achievement brings joy, while everything else brings regret. Only after such reflections and an honest general confession could I venture an opinion on a person's inner self."

"Well now, tell us, do you think we shall be saved?" someone facetiously asked.

"I would hope so. After all, the Lord's grace and mercy are great."

"But we don't intend to be converted right away."

"You mean you would really like to repent, yet you do want not to change, or maybe you're not sure?"

"Right. That's it."

"Then what else can I say but what that gentlemen said a little while ago: 'The desire of the wicked shall perish.'"

"That applies to you, Nicòtera," someone remarked.

"Even more to you too," broke in another.

The conversation gradually ebbed away and other topics came up. We do not know what they were, but we do know that during conversations Don Bosco would not let an opportunity pass without injecting a few wholesome, disturbing truths. However, his kindly and simple manner had no trace of bitterness or personal offense, so much so that they remained grouped about him, speaking lightly with no hint of disdain in word or manner. In brief, Don Bosco had completely won them over. That day Zanardelli was not feeling well either because of worries or some physical ailment.

"Aren't you feeling well?" Don Bosco asked.

"No, not at all," Zanardelli answered with a sigh.

"Then try to get better." These words of Don Bosco had an extraordinary effect on Zanardelli, as Father Lemoyne, who was there, tells us. Under such circumstances, Father Lemoyne also remarks, a glance of Don Bosco said far more than his words.

Nicòtera plucked a flower and wore it in his lapel throughout the day. Some journalists remarked that by this the minister meant to show his love and regard for Don Bosco.

Gradually the deputies, senators and guests had gravitated toward the group on the terrace, commenting with pleasure on the ease and graciousness with which Don Bosco sat among the ministers and conversed with them. In fact, he was the only one who played a significant role at Lanzo that day, overshadowing all the local authorities who had made themselves scarce.

While Don Bosco held court, so to speak, in the garden, the students entertained in the playground with music and gymnastics.

The boys had been told during the previous evening that they were to uphold the school's honor by their obedience, and especially in not breaking ranks without permission, as Don Bosco would be displeased. They followed orders perfectly, so much so that in spite of parents trying to persuade their sons to join them, no one budged from his place for an hour and a half. The honored guests strolled about the playground, observing them with special interest, looking for lads from their localities and greeting them kindly. Finally, the ministers, followed by a whole entourage, appeared, Don Bosco between Nicòtera and Zanardelli, and Depretis, who had hardly opened his mouth, walking behind them.

The ministers moved to the semi-circle of chairs and Don Bosco was made to sit in the middle, while Nicòtera and Ricotti sat at his side. Depretis remained standing, leaning on Don Bosco's chair. Zanardelli took a chair and set it directly in front of him, thus closing the circle. Don Bosco became the focus of all attraction. The organizing committee had timed the ministers' stay at the Salesian school for twenty minutes, but they stayed an hour and a half. The mayor interrupted several times to remind them of the schedule, but they kept saying, "Just one moment more!"

Toward 11 o'clock the ministers arose and with kindly insistence asked Don Bosco to join them at lunch, but he declined with thanks. They had opened up and had become quite cheerful and almost affectionate as they showed keen delight at the reception that had been tendered to them. Zanardelli expressed his warmest satisfaction. Nicòtera was quite vocal as he left, and everyone heard him exclaim, "I have been more than pleased. One experiences such contentment only once in a lifetime."

"Unless he is invited to come back again to Don Bosco's schools," Zanardelli added.

Recognizing one of the teachers, our confrere Father Albano, who was caught in the crush at the school's gates, Zanardelli put his arm around him as in an embrace and, bending low, whispered in his ear, "Tell Don Bosco that I could not be happier with the reception I have received here. Tell him, please, for me. My regards to these dear boys. Tell them I shall never, never forget them. Thank the superiors, students, musicians, and singers for us. I have learned some of their poetry and will take care to learn the rest. I do not intend to forget them ever but will bear them engraved on

my heart. Be sure to tell him all these things. Don't forget. I will do all I can for your school." With these words he joined his colleagues as they were leaving. Don Bosco escorted them halfway across the square, and after repeated bowings and handshakes on all sides, he turned back, visibly gratified.

After lunch he sat in an armchair in the portico, surrounded by clerics and priests, and expressed his thoughts and feelings, some of which we consider worthy of recording.

I do not believe that those ministers and deputies ever heard as many sermons as they did today at Lanzo. In one way they are impoverished men who never hear a word spoken from the heart or a truth not expressed in harshness. I accepted them sincerely, and, wearing my heart on my sleeve, I told them what the occasion prompted. Those truths which I could tell them without offense, I uttered fully and honestly. Maybe they have never made a spiritual retreat, but I feel that today they got one without having to go to St. Ignatius' Retreat House.

As for other things, I never felt that this ceremony would become so impressive as to awe people. I was no more impressed than when I am in the midst of my boys, and I talked with those gentlemen with the same ease and sincerity as I do with them. They asked me a jumble of questions, all in a heap, and I had to laugh. They thought it was because their questions were strange, but I could not help laughing at seeing myself in the midst of so many people like an oracle. While listening and answering their questions, I kept thinking of what an odd situation I was in.

I thought I did well to come to Lanzo. The poor director would have found himself in a pretty predicament. How would he have replied to the tricky and spiteful and provoking questions they would have thrown out at him? He would either have been tongue-tied or become the butt of their jokes or lost his temper, and that would have caused embarrassment. For one unused to these things, it is not easy to show a wholesome prudence toward people who are in the habit of looking down upon priests as of no account. That is why I came, since this reception was unavoidable and no one could handle the situation. How could anyone refuse hospitality to these ministers when they requested it themselves? What an uproar a refusal on our part would have caused. We might have had to close down the school. And we had no reason to refuse them. We are in Piedmont [the cradle of the House of Savoy], Duke Amadeus was expected to attend, and Zanardelli came to represent the king. Since we had to welcome him, we had to do it in the most fitting way. The music was not out of place. The celebration had no overtones of hostility for the Church, and nothing of that nature had ever been hinted. So whatever we did was

well done. There is a saying in the Gospel: *Give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's.* We did so. We have done nothing more than render homage to constituted authority.

Some other advantage, I hope, has come to us. I do not think that any of these men will again be major enemies of the clergy. I treated them with sincerity, and so they will readily think that other priests too seek only their good. I believe that at the moment of death, they will all want to have a priest at their side.

In fact, in all the talk during the banquet, not a word was heard in any way offensive to religion. Nor did the remembrance of Don Bosco ever fade from the ministers' minds, as we were able to note on several occasions.

Word of the event greatly enhanced the school's reputation, so that the next year it had two hundred and eight resident students.

We feel we must also state that the director, Father Lemoyne, had the esteem and trust of the parents, while the students loved him like a father. On one occasion an alumnus spoke fondly of his memory and pointed out the rustic bench in the upper playground portico where the good director would sit in a circle of boys, telling them edifying stories with that rare gift of narration which was an enviable quality of his.

CHAPTER 15

Salesians Deceased in 1876

WE consider it in keeping with the contents of these memoirs if we mention those confreres who passed away in 1876. They all lived in greater or lesser contact with Don Bosco, so that, in speaking of them, we always encounter our founder. Furthermore, a study of their lives offers us precious material to form a correct judgment of the spirit which then animated the members of the Congregation, a spirit substantially Don Bosco's own. We must remember that at this time there was no Eliseus to whom Don Bosco had relinquished his cloak, and, as we have amply demonstrated, he alone was the firm animating spirit of his growing family, so that from him, directly or indirectly, all drew inspiration and impetus. We consider it worthwhile to spend some time on three clerics and two priests who were called by God to eternity during the course of this year.

All three clerics came from our houses which they attended through the fifth year of secondary schooling. We first mention James Piacentino, born at Rocchetta Tànaro, who studied at Lanzo and received the cassock in 1870 at eighteen. In those early days Don Bosco accepted clerics who were a little older and had some experience, so that, on receiving the cassock, they could be sent to the houses and be entrusted to the local director, who, while assigning them tasks, could also guide them through their novitiate and studies. Of course, he did not forget about them, for he always saw to it that they felt his kindly influence. Piacentino was sent almost immediately to Borgo San Martino for two years, first as an assistant and then as a third grade teacher; afterward he was recalled to the Oratory, where he remained as assistant of the artisans until his death. It was due to his ingenious talent that in 1876 the artisans became a challenge to the students in dramatics—something unheard of before. Once his theological studies were

well on the way and his ordination day drew near, both family and friends relentlessly endeavored to persuade him to leave the Congregation by holding out the prospect of a more affluent future, but he rejected their proposals energetically. Moreover, once he made his religious profession, he decided to forestall any future danger by refusing to go home again. In May 1876, an overall physical decline set in, and his superiors sent him to Alassio, hoping that its mild climate might restore his health, but in July, purified by suffering, he passed on to heaven. The memory of his tireless zeal for the artisans' welfare lived long after him at the Oratory.

Three months before, Anthony Vallega, who came from Alassio and studied at the school, died at Noli, Liguria, while at home with his family. At the age of seven he had been cured of a very grave illness through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, and this favor helped to make him pious and utterly devoted to God. A very talented student, he took his final exams at the Ginnasio Monviso of Turin and won top honors. On entering the Congregation, he strove ardently for perfection and knowledge. Each month he kept a checklist of his failings and resolves in a little booklet which Father Barberis treasured. In it, after making his profession when the rules were approved, he wrote: "By my vows I have made myself, soul and body, the living temple of the Holy Spirit. It is my wish that this temple remain ever pure and stainless." In January 1875 he relapsed into an illness which he had contracted before entering the Congregation, and it bore him relentlessly to the grave. On the very eve of his death he still thanked the Lord for having been called to the Salesian Congregation, and he earnestly begged Father Cerruti who was at his bedside to tell Don Bosco of this, adding that, please God, were he to live, he was ever at his disposal for the foreign missions.

On September 8, the cleric James Vigliocco passed into eternity. "Valuable" was how Don Bosco described him on informing Father Cagliero of his death.[1] He came from Barone in the diocese of Ivrea. Even as a child he possessed a remarkable gift of prayer. Both at home and in school at Caluso, where he began his classical studies, he was often found both day and night deeply rapt in prayer. He wanted to become a priest. On hearing one of his

[1] *See* p. 221. [Author]

teachers speak of the Oratory, he felt so drawn to it that he insisted on completing his secondary schooling there. Very small for sixteen, pale, simple and quite unpretentious in manner, poorly but neatly dressed, he looked somewhat like a youngster just out of grammar school, so that he was unquestioningly assigned to the first year of secondary school. He said nothing but sat through the class quietly. The next day, when he handed in his homework, the blunder was discovered, and he was transferred to the last year where he excelled as one of the top students. His piety soon made him a candidate for both the St. Aloysius and the Blessed Sacrament Sodalities; later, he joined the Immaculate Conception Sodality, which was open only to the best boys. When it was time for him to decide on his vocation, he had no hesitation. His response to distinguished and influential people who tried to change his mind was that in the choice of a vocation one should listen only to one's own conscience and to the advice of one's spiritual director. As a novice, he entrusted himself to his novice master, who unhesitatingly commended him to Don Bosco in a written report as "the model of the novitiate" and a "genuine St. Aloysius."

One of his first aims was to master meditation. He read, asked questions and finally came to the following system. First, after placing himself in God's presence, he envisioned Jesus Crucified, looking lovingly upon Him. As he meditated he kept his attention on the crucifix, to draw strength and thus to concentrate better on the truth he was meditating upon. Then he prayed to Jesus to let a few drops of His Most Precious Blood fall upon him in token of pardon and grace. He ended his meditation with firm resolves. His constant thinking of Jesus Crucified spurred him to a careful soul-searching and to steadfast resolutions.

He fully appreciated the value of obedience. When a companion once expressed his dislike of an immediate superior, Vigliocco acquainted him with pertinent teachings of St. Alphonsus such as this one: It's a blessing in disguise to have a superior seemingly quite imperfect because we can then evaluate whether we obey because we like him or because he represents God. Nothing was insignificant in Vigliocco's eyes in the matter of obedience. Even if he happened to transgress in a trifling matter, he still accused himself of disobedience to his superior. He also appreciated the

value of time. He did not enjoy small talk but made studies his delight and recreation, throwing himself into them so intensely that he became unaware of life about him. Don Bosco, needing a competent, reliable teacher for the Sons of Mary, had his eye on him and never regretted his choice. Vigliocco totally subscribed to and made his own Don Bosco's maxim that one does a lot when the little he does is what he should do, whereas one who does much, but not what he should do, does very little.

What mostly attracted him to the Congregation and made him join it was its primary goal of dedication to poor, homeless youth. He longed to instruct the most ignorant lads in religion and lead them on the right path. For two consecutive Lenten seasons he rushed after daily classes to teach catechism at the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory near Porta Nuova. He prepared his lessons very conscientiously, and his pupils were so fond of him that they were most faithful in attendance, very well disciplined, and attentive. Every Sunday of the year, in addition to supervising the youngsters in church, he gathered the most willing boys and taught them how to serve Mass, while the other catechists were taking a break. Father Guanella, director of both the Sons of Mary and the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory, who had Vigliocco as his assistant, when writing of his own acquaintance with Don Bosco after the latter's death, spoke of Vigliocco as "a very virtuous young man."

His enthisiasm in teaching catechism grew as he heard Don Bosco talk of foreign missions. Anxious to become a missionary, he felt that he was preparing himself to become one by working in the festive oratory. On February 2, 1875, he formally requested Don Bosco to include him on the first missionary expedition. "I realize my little worth and the little help I can be," he wrote, "but, with God's assistance, I too could do something. Though I am the least of your sons, let me be the first to express this strong desire. I very strongly desire to do good to others, and I am not frightened at the thought of discomfort and fatigue. At a word from you I am ready to go to the ends of the earth."

But Divine Providence disposed differently. His visibly worsening health aroused grave anxiety. He was relieved of teaching and sent to the refreshing air of the Superga hills; later, at his family's request, he went home. Here he gathered the boys of the village and neighboring farms and taught them catechism, keeping at this

task until illness forced him to take to his bed. Don Bosco, who loved him tenderly, could not personally visit him and sent Father Rua. He died on the morning of the feast of Our Lady's Nativity [September 8]. Some days before his death, the parish priest asked him if he was afraid to die. "I don't think so," he replied. "I will not be afraid because I have always made the Exercise for a Happy Death every month."[2] He was just twenty.

Two Salesian priests were also taken from the Congregation by death in 1876. One, Father Joseph Giulitto, grew up at the Oratory, which he entered in 1866 at the age of twelve. We have a thumbnail sketch of him, probably taken from a funeral oration and published by Father John Bonetti in *Letture Cattoliche*, with a short preface by the cleric Charles Cays[3] who introduced his subject as follows: "Schoolmates and teachers still recall his friendly manner, jovial character and entertaining conversation, as well as his edifying conduct, purity of manner, fervent piety, and zeal for souls."

Father Giulitto came from Solero, a suburb of Alessandria, and had been recommended to Don Bosco by Marchioness Emily Imperiali of Solero. He finished his schooling in four years, docilely letting Don Bosco guide him. An angelic candor shone in the boy. He too was promised a brilliant career if he would switch over to the diocesan seminary, but he could not bear to leave Don Bosco.

The following year he was separated physically from his spiritual father when Don Bosco sent him to teach at our school in Borgo San Martino. He had been there only a few days when he asked the cleric Louis Nai,[4] with whom he had become friendly, to be his private mentor and admonish him for failings and faults in his conduct. Father Nai, who has recently informed us of this edifying

[2] Letter from the pastor, Father Peter Botta, to Don Bosco, September 8, 1876. [Author]

[3] This biography appeared in 1878 in the appendix of issue No. 303, entitled *Gli ultimi giorni e ore di Pio IX* [The Last Days and Hours of Pius IX]. Count Cays, who was then a Salesian cleric studying theology, acted as a secretary to the editor of *Letture Cattoliche*. [Author]

[4] Louis Nai (1855–1932) completed his secondary schooling at the Oratory under Don Bosco's guidance. In 1872 he took his first vows as a Salesian and was ordained a priest in 1877. From 1887 to 1892 he directed the Salesian school at San Benigno Canavese. At the expiration of his term of office in 1892, he was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses of Palestine until 1906, when he was named provincial in Chile. He held that office until 1925, when he officially visited the Salesian houses of some republics of South America on behalf of the Superior General. That mission completed, he returned to headquarters in Turin where, revered by all, he filled the office of director until his death in 1932. [Editor]

detail, also recalls the good grace with which his younger companion accepted his first admonishment. The task of supervising the pupils' recreation practically forced all the Salesians to gulp down their morning coffee and rush out into the playground. Giulitto, still new at his job, was not as fast. On being reminded, he said he was very thankful and never again lingered over coffee. Father Nai also recalls that Giulitto was an avid reader of Rodriguez[5] and had him at his fingertips. Rodriguez became his unfailing authority to end arguments decisively, clarify issues in ascetics, emphasize a viewpoint of his own, or correct mistaken notions. His *ipse dixit* was: "Rodriguez says this, Rodriguez says that." Father Bonetti confirms this in mentioning two incidents that corroborate the aforesaid. Someone one day complained to Giulitto that an assignment was just too burdensome for his shaky self-denial. Giulitto's reply was, "Read chapter one of Rodriguez, volume two, and what now seems such a burden will become as light as straw." To someone reluctant to obey, he advised several days of reading the fifth chapter of the third volume of Rodriguez, saying, "I think that within a week you will be the most obedient person in the house."

The first thing he did on reaching his new assignment was to set up a timetable for himself, assigning a task for every hour of the day so as not to waste a moment's time. Under no pretext would he let himself forego either meditation or spiritual reading. His deep love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament gave him so cheerful a manner and so serene an expression that everyone was fond of him, including the doctor who treated him during his final illness.

To his utter surprise, in September 1875 Don Bosco told him to prepare himself for minor orders and, shortly afterward, for major orders. The cleric was barely twenty-two. In need of priests, Don Bosco was often forced to such quick decisions. Giulitto was perturbed by the sudden news. Don Bosco, who knew him thoroughly, encouraged him, requested the required dispensations, and then presented him to his good friend, Bishop [Peter] Ferrè of Casale. Giulitto received the sub-diaconate in December, but then developed a serious lung infection, followed by a stubborn cough and oral hemorrhage. It all came like a thunderbolt out of the blue. He was sent to spend the winter at Alassio, where he recovered

[5] Father Alonso Rodriguez, S.J. (1526–1616) authored the widely used devotional book *The Practice of Christian and Religious Perfection.* [Editor]

enough to return to Borgo San Martino and prepare for the priesthood. He celebrated his first Mass on the feast of the Most Holy Trinity. A little note was found among his papers, entitled *Memento of My First Mass.* It read: "1. Lord, may I be the priest You would have me be after Your own heart. 2. May I love You as You would have me love You. 3. May I attain my eternal salvation. 4. May no soul ever be lost through any fault of mine, but may I save many."

Unfortunately, his fine hopes and those of others were soon to vanish. Barely a month after the impressive ceremony of his priestly ordination, the mournful chant of *Requiem* and *Dies Irae* filled the same chapel which had rung with a hundred voices singing *Hosanna* around the altar of the newly ordained priest. All his confreres far and near mourned him deeply. The remembrance of his saintly example never faded from the minds of those who had known him, and the very few who are alive today [1931] speak of him with sincere and tender admiration.

Just a few weeks before Father Giulitto's death, Father Caesar Chiala, well known to the readers of these memoirs, passed away. It was of him that Don Bosco one day remarked to a few Salesian priests, "From every point of view he is a pearl of great price."[6] He became a Salesian at a somewhat older age, but he had known Don Bosco for a long time. In fact, his name appears in a list of a hundred boys and young men whom Don Bosco in 1850 took from Turin to Giaveno for a spiritual retreat at the local junior seminary. The list, in Don Bosco's own hand, contained the name and age of each boy. Chiala was then sixteen. He was born at Ivrea in 1837 of a wealthy family. When they moved to Turin, he met Don Bosco just as his wandering Oratory was finally sinking its roots into Valdocco. To meet Don Bosco and to love him was one and the same thing. Caesar chose him for his confessor and spiritual director and would do nothing important without asking his advice. At the age of twenty-six he was already in charge of the postal services of Piedmont. Since he admired Don Bosco's ways in dealing with boys and teaching them, he gladly offered his services to teach catechism as a student and later as a postal employee. Every Sunday he went with the cleric Rua to the Guardian Angel Festive Oratory at Borgo Vanchiglia, choosing the chimney-sweeps

[6] Chronicle of Father Barberis, March 11, 1876. [Author]

as his class. It was an impressive sight to see him, tall, elegantly dressed, refined in manner, sitting among some thirty of these ragged youngsters from the Aosta Valley intently teaching them about God. In 1864, when the capital was transferred from Turin, he had to leave his dear Don Bosco and go to Florence; then in 1870 he was appointed head of the postal services in Caltanissetta, Sicily, where he was such an example of virtue and sincere piety to both staff and general public that at his death they held solemn funeral services for him even though he had left Caltanissetta four years before.

He had done so in 1872 when he resigned his office in order to leave the world and join his spiritual father. After overcoming some serious difficulties with his family, he finally entered the Oratory to begin his novitiate as a cleric. Neither his widowed mother nor his brother Louis could understand why their Caesar should seriously seek to embrace a way of life that was so poor and humble.[7]

His four years in the Congregation were well spent. He began his theological studies with great earnestness and was ready for holy orders in less than three years. His great delight was always the Guardian Angel Festive Oratory. Father Barberis, then the director, wrote, "I am pleased to testify that I have never had a more intelligent or zealous assistant." He did in fact possess a gift all his own of completely transforming unruly youngsters who seemed to be as hard to domesticate as broncos.

He was ordained in April 1875. We again quote Father Barberis: "His virtue, already eminent, became totally heroic. . . . Many a time I had to admire him, as, exhausted from work at the end of hard days, he forced himself to complete his period of mental prayer late in the night. . . . He celebrated Mass with composure and deep devotion, always after a long preparation and a period of fervent thanksgiving. He used to say that the joy of having the Blessed Sacrament in the house was his greatest consolation."

He habitually kept in the background. Embarrassing and un-

[7] Louis Chiala, a writer and politician, was elected senator in 1892. He published *Lettere edite e inedite di Camillo Cavour.* He died in 1904. When he heard that a biography of his brother Caesar was being considered, he opposed the idea. His mother, who had promised to write a life of her son, did nothing further about it. Enlarging a brief outline he had himself written in an issue of *Letture Cattoliche* in 1877, *La Repubblica Argentina e la Patagonia*, Father Barberis dedicated eleven pages of his *Vademecum for Salesian Novices* to Father Chiala. [Author]

pleasant tasks which other shirked he undertook with docility and graciousness. We will not mention here his priceless efforts to help the artisans. He also edited *Letture Cattoliche* in which he had considerably assisted Don Bosco even before coming to the Oratory, and he also proofread galleys and translated booklets from French. Several anonymous pamphlets always carefully edited by Don Bosco were his work. During the time he lived in Turin he often came to Valdocco in the evening after dining with his mother, and he would retire to a small room kept for his use where he could work into the wee hours. Sometimes he slept at the Oratory, and in the morning, after edifyingly saying his prayers with the boys, and after nibbling a piece of dry bread with the clerics (at that time the clerics did not have coffee and milk), he would go to his job at the post office. Father Lemoyne writes, "At times he accompanied Don Bosco to Becchi to continue writing under his supervision; here too he was content with dry bread and nothing at breakfast."[8] The illness which had already afflicted him as a postal official worsened in the summer of 1876 and brought him to his grave by the end of June. His death deeply moved those who had been fortunate enough to know him. This was their sincere conviction: "A saint is dead!" His mortal remains rest in the family tomb at Feletto.

In his dream of paradise[9] Saint John Bosco was soon to see Father Giulitto, Father Chiala and other Salesians in the company of Dominic Savio.

[8] *See* Vol. V, p. 521. [Editor]
[9] *See* Chapter 20. [Editor]

CHAPTER 16

The Spiritual Retreats at Lanzo

AS the superior council had decided in its meeting of June 18, the spiritual retreats of 1876 were held at Lanzo in three rapidly succeeding sessions. Don Bosco presided at all of them, taking active part and addressing the retreatants. However, we have relatively little information on these retreats.

The first ran seven full days—from Sunday evening, September 10, to Monday morning, September 18. Only confreres attended—among them a good number of clerics and brothers who were to take triennial or final vows. Father John Bonetti gave the instructions and Father Ascanio Savio offered the meditations. From the little we know, Don Bosco gave six "Good Nights" and three sermons.

After night prayers on the first evening he gave the retreatants some needed and helpful hints for the smooth running of the retreat, stressing recollection and silence. He asked them to accept uncomplainingly sleeping accommodations, food and service even if they were not up to par. Such inconveniences, he maintained, were unavoidable because school facilities had to be changed so quickly immediately after the scholastic year ended. He also asked them carefully to avoid damage, especially in the garden, and not to help themselves in the vineyard and orchard, lest they be faulted for intemperance and gluttony. "The timetable is widely posted," he reminded them. "I suggest, as always, that it be kept faithfully right from the beginning. Let each confrere conduct himself as if he were alone on retreat and it were to be his last." As all were very tired, exhausted after a long day's travel, he said that rising would be delayed a half hour.

At nine-thirty the next morning Don Bosco gave an opening conference, of which we find an adequate summary in a notebook by Father Barberis.

[Imagine that] at the beginning of the year the manager of a large farm hires hands to work at different jobs: one is to plow the fields, another to tend the orchard, and so on. After receiving the manager's instruction, the workers go off to their job with a will—one to till the soil and another to sow the seed, while some look to the livestock and others care for the orchard. In a word, all get busily to work.

Months go by and it is time for the hired hands to account for their performance. Since the manager does not want to undertake this task personally, he sends them all to the farm's owner. One by one the latter questions them as to how they have carried out their assigned task and with what success: how one has tilled the soil, another cared for the orchard, fertilizing, watering, and pruning. He wants to know if they have made themselves useful. He inquires about the care of his livestock, has it been fed and so on, until he hears from all the farmhands what they have done and earned for him.

Had the manager questioned them, some might very well have lied to him, but once they saw that it was the master himself before whom they had to appear, either they knew they could hide nothing from him because he knew his estate perfectly, or if they had to plead negligence, they regretted their ways and resolved to be more reliable workers.

Now, coming to ourselves, you are the workmen and I am the manager. At the beginning of the school year, each of you met with me, I gave you an assignment, and off you went to your task. Now, at the close of the year, your manager calls you back to give an account of your year's work.

Don Bosco is a manager, true, but you know well that he can be deceived and some things he will never know. Not that he is so naive as to let himself be tricked, but you know that intimate matters are secret because we all see only the exterior. However, it is not to me that you are asked to account for your work, but to God, and He cannot be deceived since He knows your every thought and deed. So, then, you are here to evaluate your year's work and give God an account of it. If need be, you will resolve to do better next year.

Let me also say that it is most imperative that we look over the past year in God's presence because for some of us every year this retreat becomes our last. Year by year some of us pass on, and if their last retreat was not good, I pity them because now they seek in vain for the favor of another chance of repairing their record.

This retreat too will be the last for some of you who hear me. Just a year ago our clerics Vallega, Piacentino and Vigliocco, Father Chiala and Father Giulitto sat in this very church, listening to me, and they prayed for confreres who had died during the previous years. Now here we are praying for them, just as next year others will pray for some of us. It is a convincing reason, is it not, to make this a good retreat?

As we begin, let me give you some advice—just a few pointers which you can follow and find very helpful. Later on I will have time each evening to speak briefly to you and, if necessary, to give you further recommendations.

Let me start with a very important reminder for most of you: during this holy retreat let no one give others bad example. Indeed, each is bound to be a good example to others so that his every word and deed may benefit their souls. I hope you will follow my advice, so that the preachers' words will be promptly heeded and any need for admonition will cease. Then the retreat will run smoothly, to our spiritual advantage.

Without further ado I close by reminding you to keep the periods of silence. Silence is the basis of a smoothly running retreat because it gives the mind a broader range for reflection and meditation on the chief points of the sermons. Keep the silence required from night prayers to breakfast the next morning and during the afternoon snack so that you can enjoy greater recollection and benefit spiritually from the retreat. Even when silence is not demanded, you will do well to avoid noise and whatever may upset or distract others.

In closing, I urge all to give each other good example and to keep the required silence times so that our retreat may run smoothly and greatly benefit our souls.

The other five "Good Nights" we now record in proper sequence under a brief descriptive title.

2ND EVENING:
CORRECT POSTURE IN CHURCH

In some parts of Italy—Liguria, it would seem, accepts it—there is a certain custom which I would not like to see introduced among us. It is a sort of kneeling and sitting at the same time, resulting in a squat position. If it is an established custom, it should be discontinued, and we should be the first to do away with it. When it is time to sit, let us sit properly, and when it is time to kneel, we should kneel upright, without props. I ask the directors of our schools to enforce this reverential posture in church. Believe me, external bodily posture does much for interior recollection.[1]

3RD EVENING:
HARMFUL HABITS

Tonight I wish to stress the avoidance of certain habits. By "habits" I

[1] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

do not mean good ways of acting or our usual practices of piety, because these things are excellent. In fact, everyone should try to form many good habits, for they make the practice of virtue easier for all. I mean habits which are bad or just indifferent but in some way harmful.

Take the case of one who is always slow to rise in the morning. "I'm a fast dresser," he says, "so I can doze fifteen more minutes and in the next fifteen can get ready." Now, this is not a good habit. If you yield to it, you will suffer more than just minor losses.

Consider the habit of smoking. It is certainly very harmful to one's physical health. Except for very stout people, it could gradually cause serious intestinal irritation.

Some persons indulge in snuff—another very harmful and dangerous habit. I know a gentleman who spends over three lire a day on snuff alone. It is a habit that one can contract unawares as a pinch is offered here and there.[2] Soon one becomes addicted and cannot do without it. So, if you have no real need, stay away from snuff. If a doctor prescribes it as a remedy for headaches or for eye trouble, all right, but that should be the only reason. The same goes for coffee, certain drinks, and so on.

Unfortunately, as you know, we already have all kinds of habits that have to be catered to. So let us not contract others. Let us not create necessities. It would be great if we could do without sleeping or eating. How better off we would be, how many fewer problems we would have, how much more work we could get done! But, alas, we have no way out. However, we can at least avoid sleeping too long or at odd times, eating and drinking at all hours, and so forth.

4TH EVENING: VALUE OF THE VOWS

Tomorrow is application day for those who have not yet been formally admitted to the Congregation and for those prepared to take their vows. Applications are to be given to Father Barberis, possibly at breakfast, but those who cannot hand them in then will have time to do so after lunch.

I am often asked about the difference between doing things under vow and doing them without a vow. I would like all to know my answer. A good deed done by vow has double merit: that of the good deed itself and that coming from the vow. St. Bernard, posing this question, answers that the difference between one who does a good deed under vow and one who does it without a vow is the same as that between one who gives of the vineyard's produce and one who gives the vineyard itself. Acting without vows is like offering the vineyard's fruit to God and keeping the vineyard,

[2]This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

one's own will, for oneself, whereas one who offers himself entirely to God by vow offers not just the fruit but the vineyard as well.

People ask about the difference between triennial and perpetual vows. First, I reply that both are pleasing to God. From a positive viewpoint, one who desires to serve the Lord and seek his soul's welfare should not fear to take either temporary or final vows.

But someone may object that since circumstances and conditions change, one with perpetual vows can no longer turn back, and so it is better to take them for three years.

This is a fallacy. Triennial vows leave a person open to much anxiety, apprehension, and annoyance from parents and the devil himself, while one who takes perpetual vows severs all ties to the outside and feels more at peace. As for second thoughts when circumstances change, it is not true that one cannot go back. If one has valid reasons, the superior has full authority to dispense him from either triennial or perpetual vows. Therefore fears of this kind should be put aside. If one feels he is ready to make perpetual vows, let him freely apply.

A further question: What is the use of taking vows? There are many advantages. Omit the material ones, such as knowing that one will not need for food, clothing, or shelter, and will not have to worry about them. Nor will I say that one can do more good, whereas by himself he would have neither the know-how nor the opportunity. I bring out but two spiritual benefits which the soul directly derives from taking vows. By doing so, one places his soul once again in baptismal innocence as though he were just baptized, and he acquires before the Lord the merit of one who sheds his blood for the faith. He becomes like a holy martyr of the Lord. This is the common teaching of the Church Fathers. As a Salesian, he also gains a plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory.

5TH EVENING: PRAYING FOR DECEASED CONFRERES

Tomorrow a requiem Mass will be offered for the souls in purgatory. Our rule prescribes that on one of the last days of the retreat, special prayers are to be said for the souls of our deceased confreres. This year five have passed into eternity. True, all were of outstanding goodness, and we firmly trust that they are now with God. Still, we shall pray for them. The Lord took to Himself the cleric Vallega, the cleric Piacentino, Father Chiala, Father Giulitto, and most recently Vigliocco. Tomorrow we will offer all our Communions, rosaries, and pious practices to the Lord for this intention. Our priests too are asked to commend them to God at Holy Mass. It is our hope that, if they are still in debt to the Divine Justice, they may be delivered tomorrow.

6TH EVENING:
THE PRIEST—BEING HONEST WITH THE CONGREGATION

Applications to take vows were handed in today. How wonderful and comforting it is to consecrate oneself to God by vow! However, here is a problem. There are some who intend to consecrate themselves to God in our Congregation, but they still think of home and parents and personal gain. Let all banish such thoughts, my sons. The Lord, who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air, will not fail those who put their trust in Him. All we must do is dedicate ourselves entirely to the Lord, with no reservation of any kind. Let no one say, "If I succeed in becoming a priest or teacher, I will do as I wish, earn money, and so forth." Anyone with such intentions should not become a priest. A priest is God's minister, not a merchant. A priest is one who should strive to save souls, not make money for himself.

Then, let no one ever say to himself, *I will stay just a while in the Congregation, maybe three years.* Such a man would be guilty of downright theft before God and the Congregation. Will you have money and effort spent upon you, and later, when you are able to repay the Congregation in some measure for the expenses it has borne on your account, walk away from it? Take, for example, a student who is poor and cannot meet expenses. In the firm belief that he will later somehow contribute his help, the Congregation does all it can to help him continue his studies, paying his tuition and other fees until he becomes a certified teacher. Then, after we have made all these sacrifices, he says, "I don't need the Congregation any longer," and he leaves. I cannot see how such a person can be at ease in his conscience before God. He is really guilty of theft, and his sin cannot be forgiven unless he makes restitution. Regretfully, from time to time some of our former confreres have acted in this disgraceful manner. I leave them to their own conscience. Maybe their parents have been nagging them or their pastor put their mind at ease, or perhaps even a bishop called for them, but that's no way to leave the Congregation.

Let us therefore do as Our Savior says. No one who is putting his hand to the plow should look back, for such a one would become unworthy of the kingdom of heaven. Be stouthearted, then! Let us all consecrate ourselves to the Lord, but entirely, with no reservations.

These words are but a mild summary of the "Good Night" he gave on the sixth evening, for we know with certainty that he bolstered his words with allusions to past and recent instances, speaking with such force as to make a profound impression on his listeners. His words were particularly calculated to restore some

sense in two clerics whose triennial vows had already expired and who had no intention of renewing them. They were both exceptionally gifted, and seemingly neither had reason to doubt his vocation. Consequently, abandoning their vocation was tantamount to rejecting God's call.

When the Superior Council met the next morning and this matter came up, Don Bosco admitted that he realized he had spoken rather forcefully but felt he had to because at stake was not only the good of those two clerics but that of several others. Also, he said, both clerics could not be sure they were the target of his fatherly concern since neither one had as yet said a word to him about remaining or leaving, and they could not even assume that he knew whether or not they had handed in an application.

Don Bosco's words were not in vain. The two clerics talked the matter over together that night; one submitted his application the next day, while the other seemed willing to do likewise, and he did so a little later. We should add that the latter had been badly harassed at home not just by his parents but also by his pastor who, with zeal worthy of a better cause, struggled to pull him away from Don Bosco. Furthermore, even the archbishop, while on a visit to the village, went to his home and, after trying to dissuade him from his decision with gentle words, finally told him harshly that he would never attain the priesthood. That ended the matter, but the cleric was badly shaken, with the consequences we have seen.

September 17 was the day of religious profession. At nine-thirty all the retreatants gathered for a second Mass—it was Sunday—during which they chanted the usual Little Office of Our Lady. After the last reading of the rules and the singing of the *Veni Creator*, the thirty-five candidates for vows assembled in the sacristy. Twenty-one were to take their perpetual vows and fourteen their triennial vows. The sanctuary had a kneeler at which the profession was to be made by each one singly. At the altar, on the gospel side, was an armchair for Don Bosco who was to receive the vows. First came those who were to take their perpetual vows, and then those for temporary vows, to whom Don Bosco addressed the usual series of questions. Father Barberis' chronicle comments: "This year I noted a special determination in the way all read the formula in a loud clear voice, without slip or stammer." After pronouncing his vows, each one signed the customary form and

returned to his place. As Father Barberis tells us, the ceremony ended with an "effective little sermon," and he jotted down its main points, as follows:

A general is glad to see his troops grow stronger because he hopes it will make it easier to overcome the enemy and dispel all fear of them. So too I now delight to see my sons' ranks expand with new champions willing to take arms against the devil, expand God's kingdom on earth and merit for themselves a beautiful crown in heaven.

Do you realize what it means to take holy vows? It means that we are posted in the vanguard of the Divine Savior's forces in order to do combat in His service.

But what I now want to tell you is that pronouncing vows is not enough. We must strive with all our might to carry out what we have promised God by vow.

By our holy vows, we have all consecrated ourselves to Him completely. Let us not ever take back what we have given. These eyes of ours we have consecrated to Him, so do away with useless and trivial reading and curious or evil glances. These ears of ours we have consecrated fully to God, so let us no longer linger to listen to one who grumbles or sows discontent, nor yearn for comfort, nor share in talk or gab sessions where speech, though sinless, is still thoroughly profane and earthly. This tongue of ours we have consecrated to God. Let there be no more biting or stinging remarks to our confreres, no arguing with superiors, no speaking of discontent. No, our consecrated tongues are no longer to suffer stain, but to be intent upon singing the Lord's praises, telling edifying stories and urging others to do good. Our palate we have consecrated to God; let us therefore curb our desire for fancy foods and let us be moderate in the use of wine. Let us not be drawn by gluttony to accept invitations to dinners and parties. These hands of ours are especially consecrated to the Lord, so let them no longer be idle or shirk tasks that appear lowly so that everything may be done for God's greater glory. These feet of ours have been consecrated fully to His service—ah, this is a vast field to consider! Let us not use them to walk back to that world which we have left behind.

But now I must deal at length with this topic. The Lord has bestowed on us a great gift in calling us to follow Him, for this world is too corrupt and corrupting. Let us treasure God's gift and not turn back to contaminate ourselves. The Holy Spirit tells us clearly that "the whole world is under the Evil One." [1 Jn. 5, 19] Let us make sure that these feet of ours do not lead us back to slavery. The biggest trap, the hardest difficulty we come across, is our relationship to our parents. The Lord has said that if

they place obstacles to our greater good, we are not to listen or look to them. Indeed, He even comes to the point of saying that we are to hate them. It is therefore necessary to break away from them truly, because God has favored us by calling us to follow Him. Then, too, by our vows we have cut ourselves away from them to bind ourselves in a special way to God. Why then should we again put ourselves in peril of breaking away from God by going home to listen to their woes, their needs, and their wishes? I have not yet come across one who could say on returning from a vacation at home, "Oh, how much good this visit, this vacation, has done for my soul!" I assure you that no one in all these years has ever managed to sink deep roots of virtue while home with his parents or drawn any spiritual benefit from such a vacation. Going home brings about no good, regardless of one's best intentions.

Let me tell you of a recent experience. A fine young man asked to go home for a visit. "I want to draw my brother to the Congregation," he said, "and take my sister to Mornese and thus place my whole family under the protection of Mary, Help of Christians." Knowing this lad's inconstancy, I tried to dissuade him, but he went anyway. Waiting for him to return was useless. Then I met an acquaintance of his who told me that this young man was having a wild time with no thought of returning. I asked his acquaintance to remember me to him and give him a message from me. Shortly afterward I received a letter, which I still have, telling me, "From what I was led to believe at the Oratory, I thought that the world had only bad people. Now I know that things are very different. There are good people everywhere, and I realize that I too can be a good Christian here and help my parents, and I think it best to stay here and not return to the Oratory.

I was sorry for that dear lad because he was one of our finest. At times, I recall, I held him up as a model to others, saying, "Do as he does if you really want to succeed." That letter of his to me was quite unkind, for he had not a word of thanks or recognition for the years of benefits. He harshly broke away from the Oratory without saying good-bye to anybody. As it turned out, my concern for him was well grounded. A short time ago I chanced upon him. He tried to dodge me but I cornered him and managed to talk to him. When I was through, he frankly told me, "Well, I see things altogether differently now. The days of kissing priests' hands are over for me." Persisting, I asked him if he had at least performed his Easter duty. The answer was no. Could he live at ease with himself, I asked, or was he being bothered by remorse? With an ugly look he cut all talk short, saying: "Bah! We no longer understand each other, and so let's go our separate ways." He resisted my efforts to detain him and walked away. That friend of his told me later that for some days he

seemed quite upset and remarked, "I curse the day I met Don Bosco." And why? Because I had stirred the worst of personal struggles in him by contrasting the peace that had been his at the Oratory with his current despair. I have been told that to shrug off those guilt feelings he had to resort to blasphemy, drink, and wild living.

That is the story of one of my finest boys who went home to win over his family. Now you know how he ended. He just had to go home and would not listen to his superiors. Let us fear for ourselves.

Don Bosco then went on to comment at length on Jesus' words which insist that we bid farewell to all things, even our parents, in consecration to Him. Quoting the example of Abraham and citing Moses' words which close Deuteronomy, he tied them both in with the words of Jesus and beautifully showed how the natural law personified in Abraham, the written law of Moses, and Jesus' law of grace aim at convincing us that it is to our best interest to withdraw from both country and family. He concluded:

I realize I have strayed somewhat from my original theme that, having especially consecrated ourselves to God, we owe Him our entire life, all we do and are. We must make every effort to make our lives, our deeds, truly conform to this aim. Believe me, no one at the point of death has ever regretted his consecration to God and a life spent in His holy service, while countless others regret their failure to have loved and served Him—poor souls who weep, for their time has passed. Since the Lord has willed in His great mercy to give us timely warning by calling us to Himself, let us say yes to Him and perform deeds indeed worthy of His call.

Don Bosco's third conference took place just before the impressive closing of the retreat on the morning of September 18 when he gave the so-called "souvenirs" by exhorting to patience, hope and obedience. This time we have a more complete source of information on this talk. He spoke thus:

We are about to go our own ways, each of us, as the Lord calls us to exercise our holy ministry. What watchword can I give you as a timely reminder, wherever you may be, of the fruit of this retreat? Just three words which I believe are most important, and on which we would do well to fix our attention: PATIENCE, HOPE, and OBEDIENCE.

First, I urgently stress patience. It is the Holy Spirit who warns us: "You need patience." [Heb. 10, 36] In another place we are told: "By your

patience you will win your souls." [Lk. 21, 19] "Patience is a perfect work." [Jas. 1, 4]

The patience I mean here is not that required to bear arduous toils or exceptional trials, nor is it the patience demanded by martyrdom and serious illness. It is true that patience, heroic patience, is needed in these cases, but since they rarely come our way and since God gives us special help when they do, the patience I speak of is the patience we need to carry out our duties well, to keep our rules perfectly, and to meet our responsibilities with exactness. This is the patience I speak of. Superiors and confreres all need it, and the occasions are myriad. Patience in plentiful supply is necessary.

Take the case of one who is overloaded with work and someone tries to give him another job on top of that. He is about to scream in anger at one who is unaware of the situation. He needs patience.

Making it more personal, suppose that you would like to teach but are told instead to supervise the boys, or that you would like to take some courses but are assigned to teach. Here, again, one needs patience.

Take the person who is convinced that his superior is against him, does not like him, and always gives him the most undesirable tasks. If he has no patience and immediately starts to grumble and show discontent, what will happen? Consider someone who is given a distasteful task. He does poorly in it and is tempted a thousand times to drop everything and quit. He must beware a hasty decision and more than ever had better be patient. At some time or other one will say, "My superior hates me!" It might be more imagination than anything else, but does that entitle him to complain, make derogatory remarks and openly show resentment? No, not at all. That is why I say patience is to be your inseparable companion.

And a superior—how he needs patience! If he makes others practice patience, it would be fair for them to say: "We are many and he is one. Each of us has to practice a little patience, but he is alone among so many and has to practice patience with all of us." That is why superiors, though young, may age prematurely because of worries, misunderstandings, frustrations and at times downright ill-will. But does that allow a superior to break relations with confreres or just quit?

I know that they will a thousand times be tempted to cut a person down or tell him to get lost or whatever. But this is just the time that he needs vast resources of patience or, better, boundless charity seasoned with St. Francis de Sales' recipe: kindness and meekness.

Likewise, a teacher or assistant could settle his every problem with a slap here or a kick there, but—keep this well in mind—while this may sometimes check a disorder, it never does any good, and it never draws or excites the heart to virtue. Be truly zealous and strive to do good in every way, but always with kindness and patience.

You may comment, "Well said, but it costs effort to control one's anger, especially when. . . ." It costs? I know it costs, but consider the origin of the word patience. It comes from a Latin word *patior*, which means to feel pain, to put up with, to endure, to control oneself. Without effort, it would not be patience. Precisely because it is so costly do I recommend it to you and does the Lord insist upon it in Holy Scripture.

I too know how much it costs. Don't think that it is the world's easiest thing to have to interview people all day long or to sit at a desk all evening to handle business and write letters. Believe me, I'd often like to go out for a breath of fresh air, and perhaps I really need it, but I also have to take matters with holy patience. If not, things would not get done, much good would be neglected, and important affairs would get bogged down. Therefore, let's be patient!

You may remark, "Sure, it's nice for Don Bosco to say, 'Patience, patience!' But. . . ."

Do you think that it is easy for me to keep calm when, after entrusting an important or urgent task to someone, I find that task not done or badly botched? Believe me, sometimes my blood boils and I am about to burst.[3] But what good would that do? Things will still not get done, nor will my anger correct anyone. Let us admonish, advise, and exhort, but always calmly. And even when circumstances call for a reprimand, let us give it, but let us first pause a moment and ask ourselves: *How would St. Francis de Sales act in this case?* Be assured that this is the way we will obtain what the Holy Spirit promises: "By your patience you will win your souls." [Lk. 21, 19]

Then, too, we need that patience which is an unwavering and persevering adherence to our rule. The day will come when one is tired, bored and—let's admit it—with no desire for meditation, rosary, sacraments, or the unappealing ceaseless task of supervising the boys. That is the time to pray with unswerving perseverance to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin for patience.

See the effort a gardener puts into cultivating a seedling—effort thrown to the wind, you might say. Yet he knows that, given time, the seedling will produce abundantly. Hence, regardless of effort he toils and sweats to till the soil—spading, hoeing, fertilizing, weeding, planting and sowing. Then he carefully makes sure that no one tramples the seeded ground and that birds and chickens do not peck at the seed. Happily he watches the seedling grow: "It is sprouting; it has two leaves, three!" Then he prepares a graft, selecting with exquisite care the best of his garden plants. He slices off a branch, binding the graft to keep it from the cold and damp. If the

[3]This confession, which reminds us of what St. Francis de Sales said of his own fiery temperament and his twenty years of effort to control it, is of great value in evaluating Don Bosco's habitual calm even during moments and occasions when such calm appeared impossible to preserve. [Author]

young stalk sags to one side, he quickly adds a support to keep it straight. If he feels it will yield to wind and storm, he drives in a stake and binds them together to forestall damage. If you wonder why he expends all the care, he answers, "Because without it, it will bear no fruit. If I want a good crop, I have to do all this." Yet, remember, sometimes, despite all his care, the graft does not take and he loses the plant. It is only the hope of success which makes him do all that work.

We too, my dear sons, are gardeners. We till the Lord's vineyard. If our labor is to yield a harvest, we must attend to the young plants that are ours to cultivate. Unfortunately, despite all our effort and care, our graft may wither and the plant may die, but with due care a seedling will almost always grow well. If not, the owner of the vineyard will still reward us out of his goodness. Be convinced that fits of anger and hasty outbursts will get you nowhere. Endless patience is needed, marked by constancy, steady effort and toil.

But a gardener expects to be paid for his labors. What about us? Who will pay us? This leads me to the second point of my talk: hope. Yes, the hope of a reward is what buoys up our patience. Let us keep working because a most comforting hope of reward shines upon us. We are blessed to work for such a good Master. How consoling are His words: "Because you have been faithful over a few things, I will set you over many." [Mt. 25, 23] We poor little ones can do so little, frail as we are and incompetent. No matter. Let us be faithful to the little we can do, and the Lord will still reward us generously. For instance, when you as a teacher are worn out and are thinking of quitting, strive to remain trustworthy in small things if you wish the Lord to put you in charge of greater affairs. Likewise, a director may have counseled, cajoled, and encouraged until he is ready to throw in the towel and let matters take their course, or he will fly into a rage. Well, let him too take care to be trustworthy in small things, and he will be put in charge of more important ones.

Another area calling for much patience while holding on to hope is that of self-conquest in overcoming habits, bad inclinations, and temptations which relentlessly assail us. Yes, it is costly to give up habits, routine lukewarmness, easy-going ways, and neglect in matters affecting obedience and prayer. Here too we need endless patience during extraordinarily painful struggles lest we succumb to the devil. Day and night, awake or asleep, at play or at work, we must always endeavor to overcome these bad tendencies. This is what I mean by patience or forbearance. And if victory comes only through strenuous combat, let us look to the great reward and prize awaiting us, and we will not be vanquished. "By your patience you will win your souls," says Holy Scripture [Lk. 21, 19], and St. Paul adds: If you are delighted at the greatness of the rewards, do not be deterred by the hardships you will have to endure.

I will not elaborate on how well founded our hope is. You know very

well that the promise comes from our most gracious Lord who offers us much for the little we faithfully do. He calls those who keep His law blessed, for He knows the greatness of their reward. And elsewhere He says that even a cup of cold water given in His name will have its reward. So take heart! When patience would falter, let hope sustain us!

Here he inserted the story of a hermit who in time of trial would look up to the sky through a narrow crack, and this sufficed to keep him constantly cheerful and content. "All my joy comes from that tiny fissure," he would say. [Then Don Bosco continued:]

Now, which virtue combines patience and hope into one unit? Obedience. Just a thought or two, since the chapter in Rodriguez on obedience has been read during the retreat and often commented upon.

I strongly urge patience in obeying. I would wish that when obedience does not appeal to us and is the farthest thing from our minds, we would look up to heaven and draw strength from hope.

A steady obedience is the life of a religious congregation, its bond of unity. How much can be accomplished if many individuals unquestionably obey one person whose outlook is broader by virtue of his office, who sees things as a whole and knows what works and what has to be done, who can tell one man to stay where he is, to do something, to go, and he is immediately obeyed! More good can thus be done that could never be accomplished without unconditional obedience.

Obedience brings another great benefit. It enhances the merit of all we do, however menial. Take a person who can do little or nothing, but submits to obedience. His superior tells him to sweep or to cook, and that person can merit as much as one who strains himself all day in the pulpit or confessional or classroom. This is one great advantage of obedience. Let each one patiently carry out his assignment, doing his best, with no thought to other things. The Lord is pleased with him and blesses him.

There is one more consideration which I want to bring to your attention today to tie together the first three: a well-made Exercise for a Happy Death. Once a month, for one day, let us honestly set things aside as far as possible, in order to put our souls in order. It will greatly help to compare one month with another to see if we have gone forward or backward. Let us ask ourselves: *How have I kept this or that virtue?* Review especially whatever concerns vows and practices of piety. *How do I stand as regards obedience? Did I do better? Did I obey perfectly? For instance, did I properly supervise the boys entrusted to me? Did I prepare my lessons? As for poverty, am I at fault as regards clothing, food and lodging? Am I gluttonous? Did I complain when I had to do without*

certain things? Concerning chastity, did I harbor improper thoughts? Have I detached myself from undue parental love? Did I mortify my taste, glances, and so on? Then, while examining your practices of piety, take particular note of routine lukewarmness. This self-examen, long or short, must always be made.

Since some of you have duties which cannot be put aside on any day of the month, they may continue to be done, but on that appointed day let each one find time to think of these things and make good, practical resolves.

One last brief thought. Replying to the young man who asked what he should do in order to be saved, the Lord quoted the Law and said, "Do this and you shall live." [Lk. 10, 28] So I say to you: You have the rules; it is the Lord who gave them to us. Let us keep them and we shall live. Let each one strive both to study them and find ways to keep them. Let all, superiors or not, priests or brothers, be concerned with their observance. How happy and comforted we shall feel at our death to recall that we have kept them! Be assured that we shall not be disappointed in our hopes because the Lord is faithful to His promises. The hopes to which He leads us He will grant. Indeed, He is full of kindness and mercy and will give us much more than we could ever dream of.

Let us then take heart. If we must endure and suffer in order to carry out fully the Lord's commands, let us not turn back. He knows how to reward our every effort, and He will gladden us in time and eternity with that reward which surpasses all expectation.

After this talk and the *Veni Creator* the confreres renewed their vows before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, led by Father Rua who ascended the pulpit and, after Our Lady's Litany and the *Pater*, *Ave* and *Gloria* in honor of St. Francis de Sales, read aloud the formula for the others to repeat. The *Te Deum* and Eucharistic Benediction closed the rite of profession and the retreat. Dinner at noon featured special fare and was followed immediately by departure—the confreres from the Piedmont schools leaving immediately, those from Liguria delaying one further night at Lanzo. It was Father Barberis' comment that from beginning to end all went with great "calmness."

A somewhat shorter retreat was held from September 21 to September 28 for some two hundred and fifty retreatants, almost all novices or aspirants. The only preacher was Father Gaspar Olmi, a zealous missionary widely known and highly respected in northern Italy for his virtue, dedication and persuasive preaching.

In a thumb-size diary, Father Lazzero notes that "he was greatly appreciated."[4]

The retreat closed with eighteen final professions and eighteen triennial professions.[5] Apart from one exceptional occurrence and a most remarkable dream, that is all we know about this retreat.

The episode concerns Father Michael Unia, apostle of the lepers of Agua de Dios. He arrived at the Oratory from his home at Roccaforte Mondovì at the start of this second retreat and was immediately sent to Lanzo. Don Bosco and he had never met before. Toward the end of the retreat, Unia, seeing that all were going to Don Bosco for confession, decided to do the same. It was his intention to cover only the time since his last confession, but Don Bosco asked, "Don't you think it would be good to make a general confession?"

"I'm not ready," he replied, "and I don't believe I can examine myself right now."

"That doesn't matter. I will tell you all your sins and you will just have to answer 'yes' to all I ask."

Then Don Bosco proceeded to unfold his entire life, detailing the circumstances and numbers of his failings with such exactness that Unia, well over twenty-four years old, was dumbfounded. In fact, all he had to do was gasp "Yes!" and offer no further explanation. Filled with inexpressible joy after his absolution, he asked Don Bosco, "How did you come to know me so well?"

"I have known you since you were a little boy. Shall I give you a proof? One Sunday, when you were twelve years old, you were in the choir of your parish church for vespers. Your cousin was beside you, asleep, with his mouth wide open. Seizing the opportunity, you took a plum from your pocket and dropped it into his mouth, so that the poor fellow almost choked."

The incident is true, as Father Unia insisted he would state under oath, and trustworthy Salesians heard the account from his own lips.

As a retreat souvenir, Don Bosco related a dream rich in symbolism—one of the most instructive he had ever had. Father Lemoyne took notes as he spoke and immediately afterward wrote the dream out completely and showed it to Don Bosco, who made

[4] We are omitting a short circular mailed to potential retreatants. [Editor]

[5] During the year 1876 there were four other triennial professions and eighteen perpetual professions. [Author]

only slight changes. For clarity we will divide the narrative into four parts.

PART I

It has been said that we are to pay no heed to dreams, and I assure you that most of the time I too agree. Nevertheless, though dreams may not reveal future events to us, they can at times help us to see our way through intricate problems and to act wisely in different matters. Therefore we may accept what they have to offer us that is good.

Just now I want to tell you about a dream that absorbed my mind, you might say, all through the retreat and that especially last night upset me. I will tell it as I saw it, because I think that it has many valuable lessons, but I will condense it here and there so as not to be too lengthy.

Well, then, it seemed we were all together on our way from Lanzo to Turin, aboard some vehicles—either coaches or railway cars, but just which I am not sure. At a certain point on our way, I can't recall where, our vehicles stopped. I got off to see what had happened and faced a man who defies all description. He seemed to me both tall and short at the same time, stout and slim, red and white, walking on the ground and floating in the air. Totally confused and bewildered, I made bold to ask, "Who are you?"

His only answer was, "Come with me!"

I first wanted to know who he was and what he wanted, but I had no time to find out. "Hurry!" he said. "Let's get the vehicles into this field." The astonishing thing was that he spoke loudly and softly at the same time and in different tones, so that my amazement knew no bounds.

The field was very vast and, to all appearances, quite flat, unplowed and as smooth as a threshing floor. Not knowing what to say and seeing his determination, we turned the vehicles around into that vast field, and once there we ordered everyone to get down. They all did so very quickly, and no sooner were all off than the vehicles immediately disappeared, leaving no trace.

Not knowing how to conduct myself with that stranger, I stammered, "Will you now tell us why you made us stop here?"

"To save you from very great danger!" he replied.

"What danger?"

"A raging bull which leaves not a living person in its path: 'A roaring bull seeking whom to devour.'" [Cf. 1 Pet. 5, 8]

"Easy, my friend!" I retorted. "You apply to a bull what St. Peter says of a lion—*leo rugiens*, a roaring lion."

"That does not matter in the least. There it was a roaring *lion*, here it is a roaring *bull*. What matters is that you had better be on guard. Call all

your followers about you and immediately and very seriously tell them to be on guard and very alert. As soon as they hear the roar of a bull, an unusual and thundering roar, they are immediately to fling themselves face down upon the ground and stay that way until the bull has passed. God help anyone who will not obey you. Whoever refuses to lie face to the ground as I have ordered will be as good as dead. Holy Scripture tell us that the lowly shall be exalted and the proud will be humbled."

Then he immediately added, "Quickly, quickly! The bull is on its way! Shout as loud as you can to fall to the ground!"

I did so and he insisted, "Louder! Louder!"

I yelled so loudly that I'm sure I frightened Father Lemoyne who sleeps next door to me. I was shouting at the top of my voice.

In an instant the bellow of a bull was heard, and the man told me, "On guard! On guard! Make them all lie next to one another in two straight rows, with an aisle for the bull to pass between them!" I shouted out his orders. In a flash everyone lay flat on the ground, and we could see the bull far off, thundering forward in a fury. Although just about everyone lay flat on his face, a few remained standing in order to have a good look at the bull.

"Now you will see what happens to them," the man told me. "You will see what they get for refusing to lie low."

I wanted to warn them again, to shout, and to run to them, but he forbade me. I insisted that he let me go to them, but he answered sharply, "Obedience applies to you too! Lie down!"

Before I could get down, I heard a thundering bellow, awesome and frightening. The bull drew closer. Terror seized all, and they kept asking, "Who knows? Who knows?"

"Do not fear!" I shouted. "Stay down!"

And my friend kept yelling: "He who humbles himself shall be exalted and he who exalts himself shall be humbled . . . he who humbles himself . . . he who humbles himself. . . ." [Lk. 14, 11]

I found one thing strange and astonishing. Pressed flat to the ground as I was, face to the earth and eyes in the dust, I could still clearly see everything happening about me. The bull had seven horns set almost in a circle, two below the snout, two in the place of eyes, two in a normal position, and one on the crest. Even more amazing was the fact that the horns were very tough but mobile, and the bull kept turning them as he wished, so that to gore and fling his victim to the ground he did not have to turn from side to side. He kept running forward without a turn, knocking down anyone he encountered. The horns below the snout were the longest, and they wrought frightful havoc.

The bull was now upon us. The man shouted, "Now you will see the power of humility." Instantaneously, to our astonishment, we found

ourselves lifted high into the air, so that the bull could not possibly reach us. Those few who had refused to lie flat on the ground were not raised up. The bull rushed them and in a flash tore them to pieces. Not one was spared. Meanwhile, hanging in the air, we were scared stiff at the thought of what our fate would be if we fell to the ground. We could see the angry bull straining toward us and leaping high to sink his horns into us, but he could not do us the least harm. More furious than ever, he rent the air with a frightful roar as if to tell us he was leaving to seek reinforcements. And so "in great wrath" [cf. Apoc. 12, 12] he stormed off.

Then we instantly found ourselves again on the ground, "Face the south!" the man shouted.

Part II

We did so, and suddenly, to our amazement, everything changed around us. To the south we saw the Blessed Sacrament exposed and many candles burning on either side. The field was gone, and we seemed to be in a very vast church, all beautifully decorated.

While we were all kneeling in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, a host of most horrid, roaring bulls appeared, their heads bristling with horns. They came close to us, but since we were in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, reciting the chaplet in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, they could do us no harm. After a while, I don't know how, we turned around and saw that the bulls had left. Looking back to the altar, we saw that the candles had disappeared, the Blessed Sacrament was no longer in sight, and the church itself had vanished from sight, and we found ourselves back in the field where we had been before.

You know well enough that the bull symbolizes the devil, our spiritual enemy, who in rage against us continually tries to harm us. The seven horns are the seven capital sins. We can be rescued from the horns of this bull, that is, from the devil's assaults, and not fall into those sins mainly by humility, the bedrock of virtue.

Part III

Meanwhile, we kept looking at each other, confused and amazed. No one spoke, for we did not know what to say. Everyone expected me or the dream personage to say something. Drawing me aside, he said, "Come, I will show you the triumph of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. Climb that rock and you will see!"

A huge boulder stood in the middle of that boundless field, and I climbed on it. A limitless panorama spread before me. I would never have thought that the field was so immense; it seemed to cover the entire earth.

People of every race, color and nation were gathered there. They were such a multitude that I never thought the world could hold so many. I carefully observed the first who came into my view. They were dressed like us. Those in the front ranks I could recognize. I saw many Salesians leading groups of boys and girls; they were followed by other Salesians with more groups, and more came after them and still more whom I did not know, until they became a huge blur. They were numberless. To the south I could see Sicilians, Africans, and an innumerable host of people I did not know. All had Salesians in the lead, but I could recognize only those in the first few ranks.

"Turn around," the man ordered. My gaze met countless masses of other people wearing animal skins and a kind of cloak of velvet sheen, brilliantly dyed in various colors. I was told to face the four points of the compass. Among other things, in the east I saw women whose feet were so tiny they could barely stand or walk. The wonder of it all was that everywhere I saw Salesians leading squads of boys and girls and countless crowds of adults. I always recognized those in the front ranks, but not those who followed, not even the missionaries. At this point I must cut short many things because it would take too long.

Then my guide said to me, "Look and pay close attention, even though you will not understand what I am now telling you. What you have seen is the harvest awaiting the Salesians. Do you see how immense a harvest it is? This vast field you stand on is the Salesians' field of labor. The Salesians whom you see are already at work and you know them, but then the horizon extends as far as you can see, filled with people yet unknown to you. This means that not only in this century but also in the next and in future centuries, Salesians will labor in fields of their own. Do you know under what conditions the achievements you have seen are to be reached? I will tell you. Take heed: you must have these words engraved on your coat-of-arms as your watchword, your badge. Note them well: *Work and temperance will make the Salesian Congregation flourish.* Have these words explained repeatedly and insistently. Compile and print a handbook that will clearly explain that work and temperance are the legacy you are bequeathing to the Congregation, and will be also its glory."

"I will most willingly do so," I replied. "It is wholly in keeping with our purpose. It is what I keep insisting upon day after day and stress upon every occasion."

"Are you really quite convinced? Have you thoroughly understood me? This is the heritage you will leave them. Tell them clearly that as long as they live by it, they will have followers from the south, the north, the east and the west. Now bring the spiritual retreat to a close and send them on their way. These will set the norm; others will follow."

Then coaches suddenly appeared to take us all to Turin. I kept looking at them. They were quite peculiar, the strangest I had ever seen. Everybody began to step aboard, but since they had neither railings nor sides, I feared that our boys might fall off, and so I didn't want to let them go. But my guide told me, "Let them go. They are quite safe if they faithfully abide by the words: 'Stay sober and alert.' [1 Pet. 5, 8] If these words are diligently carried out, no one will fall, even though the coach has no hand grips and is in rapid motion."

PART IV

They left and I remained alone with that man. "Come," he said quickly. "I want to show you a very important thing. Oh, you have so much to learn! Do you see that coach out there?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what it is?"

"I can't see it that well."

"Draw closer then. Do you see that placard there? Go closer and look at it carefully. There is an emblem emblazoned on it. It will tell you what the coach is."

I went up to the placard and saw four very thick spikes painted on it. I turned to him and said, "Unless you explain, I cannot understand."

"Don't you see those four nails? Look at them closely. They are the four nails which pierced and so cruelly tormented Our Divine Savior's body."

"And so?"

"They are also the four nails which plague religious congregations. If you can keep these four nails away, that is, if your Congregation is not plagued by them, if you are wise enough to shunt them off, things will go well and all of you will be safe."

"I am still no wiser than before," I replied. "What do these nails symbolize?"

"If you want to know, go inside this coach. It has four compartments, one for each nail."

"What do the compartments mean?"

"Look at the first." I did so and read the words, "Their god is their belly" [Phil. 3, 19]. "Ah, now I begin to understand," I exclaimed.

My guide remarked, "This is the first nail which plagues and destroys religious congregations. If you are not careful, it will create havoc among you also. Fight it relentlessly, and you shall see that things will go well with you.

"Now read the inscription on the nail of the second compartment: 'They are busily seeking their own interests rather than those of Jesus

Christ.' [Phil. 2, 21] This refers to those who seek their own comfort and ease, scheming for their own advantage and perhaps that of their family, rather than for a Congregation which is working for Jesus Christ. Be on guard, drive scourge far from you, and you will see the Congregation prosper."

On the third compartment I saw the third nail's inscription. I read: "Theirs is the tongue of an asp." My guide said: "A fatal nail for any congregation will be grumblers and complainers, those who, right or wrong, are forever criticizing."

The fourth compartment read: "Chamber of idleness." The guide remarked: "Here idlers abound. When idleness gains a footing in a community, it totally destroys it. On the other hand, as long as your men work hard, you will face no danger. Now take note of another thing which is too often overlooked. I want you to give it special attention. Do you see that little cubicle which belongs to no compartment and yet reaches a little into all?"

"I see it but it's just a heap of leaves and grass, tall and short, all tangled together."

"Good! Take a close look at it!"

"But why?"

"Read carefully the nearly half-hidden inscription."

I peered intently and read: "The snake lurks in the grass."

"What are you driving at?"

"Look, there are some people who lie low. They clam up and never confide in their superiors; they keep their secrets to themselves. Be on guard, for the snake lurks in the grass. They are a real scourge, a plague for any congregation. Bad as they might be, once discovered, they might be corrected, but, no, they remain hidden and we are unaware of them, and the evil becomes worse and poison builds up in their hearts. By the time they are found out, it is too late to repair the damage they have already done. So, then, learn well what things you must keep far from your Congregation. Keep well in mind what you have heard. Give orders to have these things explained at length again and again. If you do so, you can rest secure that your Congregation will increasingly prosper."

Then, lest I forget anything he told me, I asked him permission to write it all down.

"You can try if you want to," he answered, "but I doubt that you have time. Be alert!"

As he was talking and I was all set to write, I seemed to hear a confused roar, a rumble all about me, and the very ground seemed to quake. I swiftly looked around to see what else was happening and saw that the boys who had departed shortly before were all dashing toward me from every direction in utter fright. Just behind them came a roar and then a

bellowing bull in pursuit. His very reappearance struck me with such terror that I awoke.

I have told you this dream on this occasion before we return to our houses because I am well convinced and can say in all truth that we would worthily close this retreat if we were to resolve to live up to our motto, *Work and temperance*, and strive to a man to keep from us the four great nails which plague religious life. They are gluttony, comfort and ease, grumbling and idleness. To this we might add that each one is to be always open, truthful and trusting with his superiors. In this way we shall not only benefit our own souls but also help to save those whom Divine Providence will entrust to our care.

Don Bosco had originally planned—and then promised in the course of his narration—to explain later at length the point on temperance through an appendix to the dream itself. However, when he went on to the second part of his talk, which we shall soon record, it slipped his mind. When he was awakened, as he said, by the reappearance of the roaring beast, he became anxious to know something more, and he got his wish as soon as he fell asleep again. What he then saw he later described at Chieri, and Father [Joachim] Berto, who was present, wrote it down and forwarded it to Father Lemoyne, who added it as a conclusion to his account.

I was anxious to know the results of temperance and the consequences of intemperance [Don Bosco went on]. So, with this thought, I returned to bed. Hardly had I fallen asleep when my guide reappeared and invited me to follow him and see the effects of temperance. He led me into a most lovely garden, filled with an abundance of flowers of every kind: full-blown roses, the symbol of charity, beds of carnations, jasmines, lilies, violets, perennials, sunflowers, and countless others, each representing a virtue.

"Now pay close attention," the guide said. The garden vanished and I heard a loud racket.

"What's that noise? Where is it coming from?" I asked.

"Turn around and see."

I turned and saw a grotesque sight: a box-like cart being drawn by a pig and a toad of enormous size.

"Go near and look inside."

I did and saw that it was brimming over with the most loathsome animals: crows, snakes, scorpions, snails, bats, crocodiles and salamanders. Not being able to look at or stand the stench of those loathsome animals, I turned away in horror. At that moment I woke up with a start,

but the stench remained with me for some time. I was still so shaken up by the horrible spectacle that I could get no further rest that night.

Father Lemoyne, concerned only with the dream, did not think of recording the second part of Don Bosco's talk, but we have it summarized as follows by Father [Julius] Barberis:

Desirous now of giving you a special remembrance to keep throughtout the course of this year, I would say: Look for every way to preserve the queen of virtues, that virtue which safeguards all others, that virtue which, once possessed, never comes alone but has all others in its retinue. Once we lose it, the others either do not exist or are soon lost.

Love this virtue, love it much, and remember that we have to work and pray to keep it: "[This demon] can be driven out only by fasting and prayer." [Mk. 9, 28] Yes, we need prayer and mortification of the eyes, of rest, of food, and especially of wine. We are not to seek comforts of the body; rather, I would say, we should work it hard. We must not give it special treatment unless we have to for reasons of health. For all other cases, we are to give our body what it strictly needs, and nothing more, for the Holy Spirit says: "The corruptible body burdens the soul." [Wis. 9, 15] Does it? Well, what did St. Paul do? "I chastise my body—he wrote—and bring it into subjection so that it may serve the soul." [Cf. 1 Cor. 9, 27]

As I did at the last retreat, I now recommend three things: OBEDIENCE, PATIENCE, and HOPE.

The other recommendation I make is humility, which we must strive to acquire and impress upon our boys and others. It is a virtue which is usually called the basis of Christian life and perfection.

It is sometimes said—and I would never allow it—that things should be done just to please me. No, my dear sons, don't aim at that. Seek to please the Lord. Be smart! What reward could I possibly give you if you strive to please me? Just my own nothingness. Set your minds firmly on pleasing the Lord. If at times you receive an unpleasant assignment, carry it out just as well, with good will and with the conviction that you will earn the love of Our Lord Jesus Christ and heaven's eternal reward.

Each of you should have a copy of the rules. Read them and study them. Let them be our code of law, the norm to which we seek to conform our life in its entirety.

I especially recommend fidelity to the practices of piety and—as a special retreat souvenir—that you introduce and carry out faithfully whatever concerns the Exercise for a Happy Death. I can assure you that one who carries out this monthly practice well will not need to worry

about the salvation of his soul, for he will be secure in the knowledge that he is always walking in the path of his own vocation. It will happen that several of you cannot find a day when you can be entirely free of duty, but that doesn't matter. Let them do what they really must for their work. But there must be no one who cannot find a good half hour on that day to ask himself seriously: 1. If I were to die this moment, would my conscience be fully in order? 2. What have been my main faults this month? 3. From last month to this, in what did I do better? 4. Were I to die now, would I leave a mess in whatever concerns my duties? Would my superiors have no idea of what belongs to me and of the financial responsibilities of my office? After these reflections, we must try earnestly to straighten out whatever is not in order.

One more consideration about doubts which anyone may have in regard to his own vocation—whether it really is his vocation, and whether he can be truly sure that the life he has embraced is what the Lord wishes of him.

First of all, bear this well in mind: I have never accepted anyone of whom I have not been positive that the Lord has called him.

Furthermore, by the mere fact that you have come together here at Lanzo from different places, notwithstanding difficulties of one kind or another, and setting aside your work because of your conviction that you are here for a special reason, it is my belief that this is a true sign that God is calling you to embrace this way of life. Moreover, at this very moment I have not the least fear to say that all of you here present have been called by the Lord. All you have to do is to respond and set your hearts to observe the rules. Yes, indeed, my answer to each of you would be Our Divine Savior's reply to the young man: "If you wish to enter into eternal life, keep the commandments." [Mt. 19, 17]

"Do this and you shall live." [Lk. 10, 28] Keep the rules. Anything else? Do this and you will live. Do you know when a vocation becomes questionable? Doubts will arise when you begin to transgress the rules. Yes, then you will really have doubts about your vocation, and if your transgressions continue, you will run the serious risk of losing it.

Take heart, then! Let the exact observance of our rules be the souvenir to seal all others, both those which your good retreat preacher has gradually inspired and those which your own meditations, examen of conscience and Holy Communions have prompted. Let it also be the seal of all I have counseled in this conference and you will be happy!

Tragedy marred the second retreat. While the retreatants were in the school chapel attentively listening to Don Bosco, the parish rural dean, Father Frederick Albert, a learned and saintly enter-

prising priest and an artist, was putting the finishing touches on a painting of his on the ceiling of a chapel that had been built for a summer camp for his festive oratory. He missed his footing and fell some twenty-seven feet, striking his head on a pile of huge stones and lying there unconscious. That very morning he had completed a month of fasting and had happily told Father Lemoyne that he was expecting a special favor.

The first thought of a bystander was to run to the Salesian school to call Don Bosco, a close and old friend of his, but since Don Bosco was still speaking, Father Rua and Father Lemoyne rushed to the scene themselves. Unfortunately, the injury was fatal. The local doctors had him taken to the rectory for initial attention. The renowned Dr. Bruno[6] arrived, summoned from Turin by telegraph, but the patient was beyond the help of medicine. He lingered two more days in a coma. When Don Bosco went to see him, bystanders noticed two things: first, while Don Bosco was speaking, the sick man held his belabored breathing and gave a long-drawn sigh as soon as he ceased; second, when Don Bosco held his hand he seemed to be making an effort to squeeze it, but could not. Perhaps the two saintly men were in heavenly silent communication on the threshold of death. Priests flocked to his bedside and broke down at seeing him in that condition. Many called on Don Bosco voicing the same request, "Pray for him to your Madonna because his condition is now hopeless. If you pray, he will recover." Don Bosco, who felt Father Albert's imminent loss more keenly than they, could only say, "Humanly speaking, if there has ever been a time when a miracle from Our Lady was needed, this as it, but we must be resigned to God's will." For no one did he have a word of hope.

To his own Salesians he confided, "If anyone feels his loss, it is I, because no one has benefited by his charity as much as I have. There was not a thing he could do for us which he did not do immediately and willingly. When we had problems here at Lanzo, we always turned to him. Several times when we had no preacher on the very eve of a retreat, we would ask him and he would willingly and zealously accept. He helped us financially too before he opened his own hospice. On my own part, I do not recall that he

[6]Lawrence Bruno (1831–1890) of Murazzano (Cuneo) was a physician and surgeon and the founder of the Alpine camps for poor and sickly children. [Author]

ever asked us for anything and was denied. It was largely due to him that we accepted this school. Recently he had given all his attention to his festive oratory, which we too were anxious to see started. In fact, one of our priests was already assigned to run it and provide his priestly ministry. Still, as he was putting the last touches on the ceiling of his long-desired chapel, the Lord called him to his reward. For Lanzo and for us this is a very sad loss."

Then he went on to tell how they had become acquainted years earlier. One Sunday in 1844,[7] in the most critical days of the Oratory, Don Bosco was visited by a young priest who introduced himself and said, "I hear you need priests to help you with catechism and training these boys. If you think I can be of any use, I gladly offer my services."

"What is your name?"

"Father Albert."

"Have you preached yet?"

"Yes, a few times. If necessary, I will prepare myself. If you don't need me for preaching, I could help in teaching catechism, writing, copying in good penmanship or any other capability."

"Have you ever conducted a spiritual retreat?"

"Not yet, but if you give me a little time, I'll get ready."

"Good! I have some young men here who live with me, and others may join them. I think it would be excellent to have them make a spiritual retreat. Prepare yourself, and we shall see."

He did. Don Bosco got about twenty boys together, and that was the first spiritual retreat ever given at the Oratory. From then on, he and Don Bosco kept in touch.

Father Albert died at dawn on September 30, at the age of fifty-six. Sturdy as he was, he might have lived to a ripe old age. He led a life of mortification, zeal and work, constantly carrying out his duties with prudence and vigilance. He founded a hospice for poor girls and restored the parish church—two achievements for which he will always be remembered. He also ranked among the finest speakers in the archdiocese. His body lay in state at the hospice of the Sisters of St. Vincent, whom he had founded. Don Bosco had the clerics and priests scheduled for the third retreat at Lanzo arrive earlier to join in the funeral services.

[7] Here the author of this volume made a chronological error. The incident here described took place in 1847. *See* Vol. III, pp. 152f. [Editor]

The third retreat, from October 1 to October 7, was preached by Father Bruno, a member of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, and a renowned spiritual director. Only priests and older clerics made the retreat. Don Bosco never left Lanzo during the brief intervals between retreats. Apart from a dream which he narrated at the end of the retreat, we know less about it than the first two. The dream itself we have to piece together, since it was not passed down to us as a talk. Records of that period refer to it under the heading "The Phylloxera."[8]

Don Bosco dreamed he was in a very large hall in Borgo San Salvario[9] in Turin, where a number of men and women religious of different orders and congregations were gathered together. As Don Bosco entered, all faced him as though he had been expected. Among them he spotted a strange looking man with his head swathed in a white turban and his body shrouded in some kind of a cloak. When Don Bosco asked the identity of the man with that strange headgear, he was told that it was he himself. Perhaps it was an image of Don Bosco dreaming.

He moved into that crowd of religious, who smilingly encircled him in utter silence. He looked about in wonder, but all stared at him and kept smiling, still silent. "What are you up to?" he finally asked. "Are you mocking me?"

"Mocking you? Far from it! We are smiling and laughing because we have surmised why you came here."

"How could you if I don't know why I came here myself? Believe me, your behavior is quite surprising."

"You came here," they all answered, "because you have just given your clerics a retreat at Lanzo."

"And so?"

"Now you come to find something to say for a closing talk."

"All right, then, tell me what I should say—something that will foster the growth of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. I shall be much obliged."

"We have only one suggestion: tell your sons to beware of the phylloxera."

"The phylloxera? What has the phylloxera to do with it?"

[8]The phylloxera was not discovered until 1879 in Italy. But in France it was known earlier, and there was much talk of it in Italy, too, though with inaccuracies arising from inadequate knowledge. [Author]

[9]A zone in Turin where Don Bosco had opened a festive oratory. *See* Vol. III, pp. 398f. [Editor]

"Keep the phylloxera far from your Congregation, and it will last a long time, flourish and do great good for souls."

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? Why not? The phylloxera is the scourge which has wrought havoc in many religious orders and kept them from any longer attaining their noble purpose."

"Your suggestion is useless unless you explain its meaning. I don't understand at all."

"Then all your theological studies were not worth your trouble."

"As you wish. I studied what I was supposed to study, but I never came across any mention of phylloxera in my theology books."

"But it was there. Break the word down to its moral and spiritual meaning."

"The etymology of phylloxera has nothing even remotely resembling a spiritual meaning."

"Well, since you cannot grasp this mystery, here comes someone who can explain it to you."

There was a jostling in the crowd and way was made for a new personage to step forth. Don Bosco scrutinized him carefully but could not remember having seen him before, although his friendly manner seemed to indicate that he was an old acquaintance. As soon as he drew near, Don Bosco told him, "You've come just in time to get me out of the embarrassing situation these people have put me in. They claim that the phylloxera is a threat against religious communities, and they want me to make the phylloxera the theme of my closing sermon of the retreat."

"Don Bosco, you think you are so wise, and you don't know these things? It is true that if you fight the phylloxera with all your might and teach your sons to do the same, your Society will not fail to grow. Do you know what the phylloxera is?"

"I know it is a blight which attacks plants and kills them by stunting their growth."

"What causes this blight?"

"It is due to myriads of parasites which invade a plant."

"How can neighboring plants be saved from the blight?"

"I have no idea."

"Then listen carefully. The phylloxera first shows up on just one plant, but in a short time all nearby plants become infected, even those at a distance. Now, once this disease shows up in a vineyard or orchard or garden, it spreads like wildfire, and the beauty and crops you hoped for are ruined. Do you know how this blight spreads? Not by contact, because there is some distance between plants, nor by parasites crawling to the ground and going over to other plants. It has been proven that it is

the wind which carries this curse to the branches of healthy plants, so that disaster spreads rapidly. Well now, know this: the wind of grumbling bears the phylloxera of disobedience far. Now do you understand?"

"I am beginning to."

"The harm caused by the phylloxera carried by this wind is beyond reckoning. In the most flourishing communities, it first undermines mutual charity, then zeal for the salvation of souls. Later it fosters idleness and destroys all other religious virtues, and finally scandal turns a community into an object of censure by God and man. There is no need for an infected member to go from one community to another. It is enough for this wind to blow from afar. Be convinced that this caused the destruction of certain religious orders."

"You are right. I see the truth of your words. But how can one remedy such a situation?"

"Half-measures are not enough. Radical action is needed. To check phylloxera, blighted plants used to be treated with sulphur, lime water and other remedies—all to no avail, because phylloxera on a single plant can immediately infect an entire vineyard. From one vineyard it spreads to others like wildfire, so that one area can soon infect an entire province or an entire realm. Do you want to know the one way to nip this evil in the bud? As soon as phylloxera appears on a plant, carefully cut it down along with the adjacent brush and burn everything. If the entire vineyard is infected, cut down all the vines and thoroughly burn them to save neighboring vineyards. Only fire can exterminate the blight. So also, when phylloxera appears in any community in the form of opposition to the superiors' will, arrogant neglect of the rules, or contempt for the responsibilities of community life, do not delay. Raze that house to its foundation, get rid of its members, and don't yield to dangerous tolerance. And as you deal with a house, so deal with an individual. At times you may think that a certain individual, if left to himself, will improve and return to the right path, or you may not like to punish someone because you love him or because he has special skills or knowledge which you feel will bring credit to the Congregation, but do not be swayed by such considerations. Rarely will people of this kind change their ways. I do not say that their conversion is impossible, but I maintain that it is rare—so rare, indeed, that this probability does not of itself give a justifiable reason to incline toward a more lenient decision. You may say that some of these persons will turn out worse by living in the world. So be it. They will bear full responsibility for their conduct, but your Congregation will not have to suffer from it."

"What if, being kept in the Society, they might be coaxed back to the right path?"

"Your assumption is worthless. It is better to dismiss these haughty

individuals than to keep them in the hope that they may sow seeds in the Lord's vineyard. Impress this principle upon your memory, use it decisively when need arises, treat of it in your conferences to your directors, and make it the topic of your closing sermon of the retreat."

"Yes, I will. I thank you for your warning. Now tell me who you are."

"Don't you know me? Don't you recall how often you have seen me?"

While the stranger spoke, all the bystanders smiled.

Just then the morning bell rang for rising and Don Bosco awoke.

Don Bosco added that this dream had come on three consecutive nights, thus dispelling any suspicion that he had concocted this parable of sorts to give his own thoughts a fanciful dress. His mention of the "strange headgear" was an opener to humble himself as he usually did and to dispel any impression from his listeners' minds that this was a charismatic gift. In most of his dreams Don Bosco encountered a man who acted as guide and interpreter.

CHAPTER 17

New and Proposed Foundations

EVEN those foundations which never got beyond the stage of planning, or did so years later, deserve a place in these memoirs, we feel, for two reasons. First, they witness to the trust which, despite adverse times, Don Bosco's name inspired among the clergy and laity who sought to provide youngsters with a Christian education. Second, they are a record of things that Don Bosco necessarily said and did during negotiations, whether they continued or not, and that history has both the right and the duty to collect the material needed for a full assessment of both the man and the saint.

Canon Joseph Guerello wrote to Don Bosco formally inviting him to take over and expand a boys' home and orphanage which he had at Chiavari. In support of this plea Father Stefano Rumi, the rector of the local seminary, also wrote, asking Don Bosco what sum he would consider sufficient for his Salesians' expenses.[1] In his own hand, Don Bosco jotted a concise answer on Father Rumi's letter: "No more than is needed for living in poverty." Unfortunately, the proposal itself had the mere backing of slender hopes—that the city, in agreement with the archbishop, would hand over a Capuchin monastery that was then empty, that the Capuchins would cede their rights, and that some local agency would sponsor the project and the public would contribute to the home's support. Nevertheless Don Bosco thought it wise to keep negotiations open, since he was anxious to help the city. His answer was that the Salesians would very gladly go to Chiavari, but that if negotiations were to continue two obstacles had to be cleared up: the Salesians would not take up residence in a house belonging to another religious order, and they would never accept

[1] Both letters were dated June 9, 1876. [Author]

terms incompatible with a religious community's independence. Other matters too came under discussion, and Father Cerruti, the director of the school of Alassio, checked out the good priest's small hostel. However, nothing ever came of the proposal. The negotiations, broken off for some three years, were resumed in 1879, and they dragged on until 1884, but, once the principals died off, everything was forgotten. In 1895 the bishop of Chiavari tried to obtain some other type of youth ministry from Father Rua, but acceptable terms were not worked out, nor is there any likelihood that they ever will. And so, nothing remains of this long-discussed project except the remembrance of both parties' good will. As yet [1931] there is no Salesian foundation in Chiavari.

From Bologna came another request in early June from Marquis Prospero Bevilacqua, a reliable Catholic gentleman who had visited the Oratory just a month before while attending an annual meeting of the Supreme Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Turin. He arrived in time for the Sunday vespers and had such an exceptional religious experience that he was moved to tell Don Bosco of an idea he had.[2] "Everywhere," he stated, "more stress is put on providing education for girls than for boys. Turin is the only exception, and that is due to the charitable institute which you founded and direct. I am speaking of poorer youngsters. In my town of Bologna, too, boys' boarding schools are badly needed, and I really do believe that it is much more difficult to set up, direct, and keep alive a school for boys than one for girls. In short, Bologna needs a boys' school." He then asked Don Bosco on what terms he would open a house of this kind in Bologna.

A Salesian foundation in Bologna was favored also by Marchioness [Marianne] Zambeccari, who wanted one for Modena as well. She was willing to endow each house with an annual income of thirty thousand lire and back up a guarantee of adequate support by Marquis Bevilacqua and other citizens of Bologna.

Don Bosco judged both proposals suitable because of the chance of doing good in two important cities and the assurance of adequate financial assistance. It was a well-known fact that he lacked the material funds needed to work for the good of souls. Furthermore, there was a third advantage: the marchioness did not want it to appear that she had called the Salesians to Bologna. This

[2]Letter to Don Bosco from Bologna, June 3, 1876. [Author]

anonymity gave Don Bosco greater freedom of action. It was always his policy to set up his projects independently of charitable agencies, administrative bodies, or even individual benefactors. His reply in outline was: 1. He had no problem accepting. 2. He intended to start with a festive oratory which would eventually lead to a school and a hostel. 3. As for living expenses, just the bare essentials would do. But Don Bosco was not to see either house in existence, for his sons went to Bologna and Modena only after his death.

After an exchange of letters, the bishop of Saluzzo came personally to the Oratory to offer Don Bosco the Gianotti Institute of that city. It was verbally agreed that Don Bosco would draft some guidelines to serve as a basis of further discussion. When he read the articles and terms of the agreement to his council, the members praised his prudence and insight. Although a first reading would seem to favor only the interests of those then directing the institute, a more careful weighing of the language recalls Don Bosco's finesse in inserting certain clauses that might be easily overlooked but that would nevertheless safeguard the Salesians from unpleasant surprises. Seemingly, the municipal authorities did not cooperate and the bishop's plans never materialized.

In San Remo too, the resort city of the Ligurian Riviera, there was interest in Don Bosco's institutions. In July, Father Julius Barberis, the novice master, went there to attend the religious profession of an aunt who had entered the Visitation Convent. The nuns' spiritual director was Father Luke Calvi, a fellow student of Don Bosco at the Convitto Ecclesiastico of Turin. This circumstance put Father Barberis and Father Calvi on friendly terms. The latter lamented the fact that Liguria had only one home for abandoned boys at Sampierdarena, and he went on to say that Don Bosco could very well found another in San Remo, especially since the Protestants were gaining ground there and threatening the people's faith. A Salesian festive oratory, he was sure, would stem the tide of heresy.

This last issue was always a sensitive matter to Don Bosco, and when Father Barberis told him of Father Calvi's suggestion, he answered, "Write to him at once that I intend to open a house at San Remo. Ask him to find me premises to serve our purpose, a building which I can either lease or buy. Tell him to let me know

what he has found and I will go to see it immediately. Perhaps we can start work at once." Just days later, Father Calvi wrote to say that he had found a house to accommodate about a hundred boys, at a rental fee of three thousand lire. Simultaneously, a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Chapter, who knew nothing of Don Bosco's plans, asked him to open a trade school in San Remo. Don Bosco was very responsive to these proposals also because he hoped to make some contacts with England through the many English tourists and do some good to that nation, but his hopes remained unfulfilled. A second attempt to set up a foundation in San Remo in 1912 also came to naught.

For quite some time Don Bosco had been trying to gain a foothold in Rome. As the Congregation developed, this soon became a necessity because he then had to deal with top authorities of both Church and state. Cardinals and high-ranking Romans kept urging him to set up a residence there. In September he received a warm invitation. On the right bank of the Tiber, near the Garibaldi Bridge, where now [1931] proudly stands the newly restored Anguillara Castle, this historic residence of that once powerful noble family was being used as a warehouse. Eventually the vast building was put on sale. It seemed that it could serve Don Bosco's twofold purpose of housing a few hundred young artisans and students and of providing a house of studies for his seminarians. Monsignor Fratejacci seized the chance. He talked, argued, and wrote letters, and in his great love for Don Bosco he let his ardent imagination drive him everywhere. The idea had come to him when he heard that Pius IX intended to give Don Bosco the nearby Church of St. Bonosa, one of the most historic and ancient churches across the Tiber, which, unfortunately, was demolished just a few years later. Averse to rush things, Don Bosco mulled over the project. On his visit to Rome in November, either because of his brief stay or because of other urgent matters, he had no time to look into the matter, and the owner, cutting off further delays, gave his consideration to other offers.

However, though the hour had not yet struck for a Roman foundation, Don Bosco felt that he had to accept requests from Romans concerning Albano and Ariccia, two of the most ancient towns outside Rome.

The Ariccia proposal came from Prince Mario Chigi of Cam-

pagnano, who had already mentioned it in May to Don Bosco in Rome. The town officials, obliged to the prince who lived in Ariccia and owned real estate there, kept pressing for concrete action. They requested two teachers for the elementary schools and one priest to head the parish. The former teachers' dismissal having already been authorized, the names and certifications of two Salesian teachers were to be sent to the town board and the prefect of the province. A starting salary of 1,320 lire, with an added bonus of 200 lire and free lodging, was offered for both teachers. After one year an equitable contract would be worked out. Don Bosco requested an annual stipend of 2,000 lire, assuring the town that he would do his best to promote the Christian education of its youth. He also sent in the teaching certificates of Father Charles Cipriano and Father Francis Bodrato. Since the majority of town officials, overriding objections, firmly approved the agreement, the Protestants, who already had a foothold in the schools, had no choice but to leave town.

Having come to an agreement with both school and town officials, Don Bosco began canonical procedures for the confreres to be sent to Ariccia. Two problems faced him. Our rules required each community to consist of not less than six religious, and Ariccia had requested only three. Secondly, the lodgings assigned to them really belonged to the Doctrinarians,[3] one of whom resided there as pastor of the adjoining church. Unless he withdrew, acceptance would be impossible. Don Bosco therefore petitioned the Holy Father for dispensations and provisions. Through Bishop [Francis] Latoni he was informed that in this particular instance the Pope would allow him to send only three Salesians to Ariccia and that arrangements had been made for the Salesians to have the exclusive use of the residence belonging to the Doctrinarians. The Holy Father also gently suggested that while hastening to please Prince Chigi and the people of Ariccia, Don Bosco should also turn his thoughts to Albano.

This veiled but clear intent of the Holy Father originated from a report he had received from Cardinal [Camillus] Di Pietro, the bishop of Albano which took in Ariccia. The latter, having learned of Don Bosco's agreement with Ariccia, asked him to take over the town's secondary school which his seminarians would be attend-

[3] A religious order founded in France in 1592 by the Venerable César du Bus. [Editor]

ing. Albano and Ariccia being twin towns separated only by a bridge, the cardinal felt that one residence would do for the teachers of both schools. Don Bosco's answer was already two weeks overdue when he learned of the Pope's wish. He immediately replied in the affirmative to the cardinal and even went beyond his request, for, while the cardinal, probably not sufficiently updated on school legislation, was happy to get two certified teachers, Don Bosco promised him four more to meet the state requirement of at least six. He then hastened to inform the Holy Father of what he had done through a letter addressed to Bishop Latoni on August 26, 1876 from Turin. Don Bosco ended the letter with a plea for the Pope's blessing on all Salesians and on three new houses to be opened in September at Trinità (Mondovì), Lanzo and Biella.[4]

Cardinal Louis Bilio, a Piedmontese Barnabite and the bishop of the suburbicarian diocese of Sabina, requested Don Bosco to send him two Salesians to teach at his seminary in Magliano. The seminarians were few but he hoped that the Salesians would bring in more. Don Bosco kept temporizing, but he finally accepted this sacrifice of personnel, knowing that he could rely on his confreres' zeal which never cried "Enough!" when it came to work.

In choosing personnel for the three new houses, Don Bosco, a practical man, told his council that some places in Italy gave great importance to personal appearance, so that people were judged by their looks. However, he himself did not give such secondary values undue importance, and a few years later he did not hesitate to send to those places some of his as yet beardless young men who knew how to handle hordes of boys not just in festive oratories but in classrooms as well. The cleric [Francis] Piccollo is a case in point. When Don Bosco sent him to Ariccia in 1878 he looked so young and was so short that as he walked down the street the townswomen, in their free and easy way, would call out to him, "Brother Piccollo, where's your nursemaid?" Yet he marvelously handled over fifty lively first graders. One day the state school inspector, known to be a prejudiced anticlerical, walked into his classroom unannounced and was startled to be greeted by silence and discipline. He bade Piccollo to continue his lesson and then personally interrogated the pupils. Verifying that Piccollo had actually earned his certification at Mondovì with a high rating, he

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

left, congratulating the youthful teacher. Don Bosco performed veritable miracles with his "boys." In a very beautiful letter [in late October or early November] asking Piccollo to transfer from Borgo San Martino to Ariccia, the good father wrote:

My dear Piccollo:

Your assignment has been changed. You will go with Father Gallo to Rome; there you will see the Holy Father, pay homage to him for me, and ask for his blessing. Then you will go on to sanctify the people of Albano and Ariccia.

You will strive for holiness by the exact observance of our rules, by your monthly manifestation to your director, and by punctually making the Exercise for a Happy Death. Write to me often when you will meet with difficulties and tell me about yourself, your spiritual progress and your achievements.

God bless you, my dear Piccollo, and pray for me, who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The confreres left Turin for Rome in three groups: the first one on October 29, the second on November 7, and the last one at the end of November.[5] The first group was led by Father Anthony Sala, the Oratory's economer, an experienced, able-bodied man with the soul of a child but wise in the ways of the world. They managed to see the Pope in Rome. As he passed by them with Cardinal Bilio and Cardinal Mertel, the Pope exclaimed, "Oh, here is Don Bosco!" After a fatherly word to each as they were introduced by Cardinal Bilio, he said, "I bless you, your families, your Congregation, and your future pupils." Then he withdrew, leaving them full of joy.

Between school work and the sacred ministry, the first ones to get to Albano were swamped with work and on bended knee implored the swift arrival of reinforcements. On reading the plea

[5]Sent to Ariccia: Fr. Charles Montiglio, Caspar Seita, a cleric, and Louis Falco, a coadjutor brother. Sent to Albano: Fr. Joseph Monateri, director of the two communities, Fr. John Baptist Sammorì, and five clerics: Joseph Pavia, Ermenegild Musso, John Rinaldi, Stephen Trione, and Francis Varvello. There were also two coadjutor novices: Fiorenzo Bono and Felix Bussa. Sent to Magliano: Fr. Joseph Daghero and the cleric Blaise Giacomuzzi. [Author]

sent to him by one of them, Don Bosco, who was having a meeting with his council, picked up a piece of paper and jotted down some cheering verses.[6] Perhaps they were not lofty poetry, but they carried an uplifting message.

Don Bosco had asked Father Celestine Durando of his council to discuss the personnel for the seminary at Magliano with Cardinal Bilio. The Salesians had been working there for little more than a month when His Eminence sent Father Durando a letter which must have gladdened Don Bosco. We think it should be quoted in its entirety:

[No date]

Dear Father,

I believe you will be happy to hear from me regarding Father Joseph Daghero and the cleric Blaise Giacomuzzi. From my frequent contacts with the school superintendent and the seminary rector I gather that they are doing excellently. I am delighted and again thank both the Very Reverend Don Bosco and you. In their letters, your confreres say that they are quite happy with both the seminarians and the townsfolk, and the feeling is mutual, thank God. Maybe this year's small number of seminarians does not match the great zeal of your confreres, but I hope that it will soon draw more students. Both teachers benefit the seminary by their teaching and edify the town by their good example. I would suggest that Giacomuzzi be promoted to holy orders soon. Speak to Don Bosco of this. I am very willing to ordain this cleric for him.

Be assured of my heartfelt gratitude.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
✠ Louis Cardinal Bilio, *Bishop of Sabina*

Let us now return to Piedmont. At Trinità near Mondovì, Commendatore Dupraz and his wife moved heaven and earth to bring Don Bosco's sons to the village of their summer home, but they knew that they would have problems with the civil authorities and with the people, who were rather cold toward religion. After obtaining the bishop's hearty consent, Don Bosco decided to accept the invitation but to proceed slowly—first with a festive oratory, then with a few elementary grades, followed by a type of hostel which would finally evolve into a full-scale home for

[6]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

destitute boys. Things got off to a good start, but they soon faltered. The house was opened in November on premises offered by Commendatore Dupraz, with Father Louis Guanella as director. Don Bosco sent him down with Father Durando to open the festive oratory, but he had mixed feelings. He arrived there on the eve to take possession of the house. After exchanging courtesies with the sponsors, he took from his pocket a cap which he used to wear indoors and remarked, "Well, gentlemen, now I can put on my cap!" By this he meant that if he was to run the oratory, he had to be master in his own home.

The enterprise seemed to be born under a lucky star. By the middle of December, the Dupraz school—the name that had been agreed upon—operated three day classes for one hundred and twenty pupils, the town's poorest, ranging from eight to sixteen, and three evening classes for about a hundred adults, divided into age groups: sixteen to twenty, twenty to thirty, and thirty to fifty. The festive oratory was frequented by over two hundred boys.[7] It is unfortunate that an enterprise so well begun was to have such a short life. At a reception tendered him by Commendatore Dupraz, Don Bosco remarked that only by free-will offerings could his works prosper. The remark was aimed at Mrs. Dupraz, but she was overly attached to her wealth and turned a deaf ear to him. Mainly because of her lack of cooperation, the school had to be shut down three years later.

This is probably the best place to quote an important letter of Don Bosco to Father Guanella in April 1877, giving him instructions on directing his community.

Turin, April 10, 1877

Dear Father Louis:

I have been delighted by your letters. I thank the Lord for having helped us to achieve as much as we have in so short a time. I hope that we shall do more in days to come.

Since I cannot get to see you often, let me jot down some guidelines which I usually give to the directors of our houses.

1. Watch over the morals of both Salesians and pupils. Make sure that you call them for the monthly manifestation and that once a month all make the Exercise for a Happy Death.

[7] *Unità Cattolica,* No. 22, December 22, 1876. [Author]

2. *Age quod agis* [Mind the business you have on hand]. Eternal things must have priority over everything else. Try to improve things; concentrate on our affairs, our people; help them as best you can in sorrow and in illness.

3. Try to make your house financially self-sufficient. If possible, contribute to the motherhouse, which is burdened with the needs of the entire Congregation.

4. Prepare your sermons in writing; help the confreres with their studies by providing or suggesting needed books.

5. Read, ponder, and put into practice our rules. See that the others keep them too.

Do all you can to implement these friendly tips. Warm regards in the Lord to all our Salesians, to Traversino, Depper, Lidovani and Boassi. Ask them to pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

We shall close this chapter with the account of another undertaking far more important but, notwithstanding Don Bosco's good will and untiring efforts, doomed to failure. It called for charity, patience and tact. Pius IX had it very much at heart when he decided to entrust it to Don Bosco. He made it quite clear that he wanted him in Rome to discuss the matter as its importance warranted. In fact, on giving Cardinal Bilio five thousand lire to sent to Don Bosco toward the expense of the forthcoming missionary expedition, he had smilingly remarked, "Tell him I'll pay for his trip if he comes to Rome." Don Bosco understood and immediately decided to accompany his missionaries to Rome.

The gist of the matter is this. In 1857, soon after the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception [1854], Cipriano Pezzini of Cremona conceived the idea of founding a lay religious institute in honor of the Immaculate Conception. Its members were to be known as the Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception, or, more simply, the Concettini or Conceptionists, and their mission would be to work in hospitals. The institute eventually got its actual form from Brother Louis Monti [1825–1900], of whom we shall say more later. Pius IX, who promulgated the dogma, showed them special favor and patronage. The institute began well, but in due course internal conflicts reduced the membership considerably and a general exodus became a real threat. By 1876,

hardly fifty members remained in three houses—forty-two at the Santo Spirito Hospital in Rome where the Pope had built them a fine residence, three at Orte and five at Civita Castellana. From the beginning the institute's spiritual direction had been entrusted to the Capuchins, but experience suggested a change—in fact, several changes in other matters as well. Pius IX felt that the right man for this task was Don Bosco. He therefore had Cardinal Bilio write to say that he would please the Holy Father very much by promptly assuming this responsibility either by coming to Rome personally for a few days or by sending a capable Salesian. To meet the Pope's wish fully and get first-hand information, Don Bosco decided to go to Rome himself. In his November 5 report to the Superior Council, he did not fail to point out that this gesture of Pius IX would give the Congregation a new thrust. "True," he added, "we are very short of priests at this moment. If we can get the Holy Father to delay implementing this plan, we shall take it in hand later. Otherwise we will reply, 'We are your humble servants. We shall be proud to obey you, even with grave inconvenience, down to your least desire.'"

And so Don Bosco accompanied his missionaries to Rome. In a private audience the Pope told him, "I want you to look after the Conceptionists. Theirs is a sublime mission, for they can help the sick to die a good death. Your task is not to reform or amend them, but, rather, to amalgamate their constitutions with those of the Salesians."[8] Obedient as ever to Christ's Vicar, Don Bosco only asked him to put his wish in writing to enable him to ponder it and carry it out better.

Meanwhile he lost no time. He met several times with Monsignor Louis Fiorani, Commendatore of Santo Spirito,[9] to learn all he could of the institute, its origins and constitutions, which had been tentatively approved for five years. Having gathered sufficient information on what might be done to meet the Pope's desires, he drew up a memorandum with Monsignor Fiorani and asked him to deliver it to the Pope, since he himself had to leave Rome.

[8] Letter from Don Bosco to Cardinal Bilio, Turin, November 29, 1877. [Author]

[9] Today [1931] this is the title of the Roman prelate who cares for the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, adjoining the Santo Spirito Hospital. It was once the title of the grand master of the hospitaller order of the Canons Regular of Santo Spirito in Sassia, suppressed by Pius IX. Innocent III founded the Santo Spirito Hospital in 1200; for a long time it was the largest hospital in the world. It is in the neighborhood of the Vatican on the right bank of the Tiber. [Author]

Memorandum

The Institute of the Brothers Hospitallers of the Immaculate Conception has today [1877] received a renewed spiritual thrust in its charitable mission by Your Holiness' fatherly concern as you personally deign to entrust it to the direction of the priests of the Salesian Congregation, to which you wish that it be attached. The Reverend John Bosco, superior general of the Salesian Congregation, whom Your Holiness has honored by delegating to him the responsibility of fostering the institute's greater advantage and of strengthening its original purpose, immediately contacted the undersigned Commendatore of Santo Spirito, as Your Holiness requested. After several meetings, the above superior general, being fully briefed on the institute's present status, background and constitutions presently approved on a trial basis, was able to make a fairly adequate judgment of what can be done to meet Your Holiness' wishes. To provide a firm foundation for such an undertaking he requests the following faculties from Your Holiness:

1. To revise the present constitutions of the Conceptionists according to the spirit of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, save what concerns the original scope and objectives of the Conceptionists.
2. To set up community life as prescribed by Article 1 of Chapter 5.
3. To erect a regular novitiate to screen postulants before accepting them into active hospital work.
4. To program the Conceptionists' life in such a way that, amid their charitable efforts to benefit the sick, they will unfailingly have time for the practices of piety prescribed by Chapter 3 of their constitutions.
5. To apply these faculties always in accord with some trustworthy person appointed by Your Holiness.

The above-mentioned superior general makes these requests. Fully aware that they are in accord with Your Holiness' wishes, the undersigned Commendatore of Santo Spirito pleads that you grant these faculties and appoint a representative in accord with whom said superior may take action.

Louis Fiorani

The Holy Father received the memo on November 14 and issued a rescript on November 17 granting the requested faculties and Don Bosco's plea for a written mandate. The original was duly forwarded to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and Don Bosco was informed by Monsignor Fiorani as follows: "His Holiness has graciously granted the Reverend John Bosco all the aforesaid faculties. He may avail himself of them in agreement with the undersigned prelate of Santo Spirito, protector of the Institute.

This is notwithstanding what may be contained in the tentatively approved consitutions of the Brothers Hospitallers or other previous rulings. Luigi Fiorani, Commendatore of Santo Spirito." In regard to the last faculty, the Holy Father indicated that Don Bosco was to act in agreement with Monsignor Fiorani but would be given another ecclesiastic on request.

Don Bosco was already back in Turin when he received this communication. He acknowledged it in a letter to the Pope on November 18. Among other things, he wrote:

> I have given due attention to reading the Conceptionists' rules, which I find very similar to those of the Salesian Congregation, with which they can be merged with very few changes. Perhaps it may be difficult to persuade the Conceptionists to observe poverty and community life as outlined in their constitutions, but with patience and Your Holiness' guidance I hope that we shall succeed. Your Holiness kindly expressed a wish to get this task under way as quickly as possible, and rightly so, for, although these religious mean well, they will soon find themselves in a profession for which they have little skill if they do not set up a novitiate to train candidates in the observance of their constitutions. Indeed, any delay can hurt the institute itself. I would ask Your Holiness to allow Monsignor Fiorani to give me more information on the Conceptionists: their number, the hospitals they work in, and matters relating to their moral and financial condition—for my private use only. In this affair I am prepared to follow Your Holiness' wishes at all times. There is general rejoicing among the Salesians that our kind and deserving Pontiff, rightly considered as the founder and champion of our lowly Congregation, should be the one to open the city of Rome to our first house there. I beg Your Holiness to excuse the filial confidence with which I write and not to mind that, for the sake of legibility, I have used my secretary's services.

Don Bosco sent this letter in care of Monsignor Fiorani and enclosed a preliminary draft of articles to be used as a basis of further deliberation. The Pope read it in the prelate's presence and then had him read it. He also looked over the articles, praised them, and expressed satisfaction with Don Bosco's concern for a matter to which the Holy See attached great importance. The eight articles drafted by Don Bosco were planned as an appendix to the Conceptionists' constitutions.[10]

[10]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Don Bosco spent more than a month in studying the Conceptionists' rule. During that time he felt that it would be helpful to have the Conceptionists' superior or a capable member stay at the Oratory for some time to get acquainted with the Salesian spirit. Such a person would also be able to give him the information he sought. Monsignor Fiorani immediately seconded Don Bosco's wish and on November 23 sent Brother Gregory, the former superior, explaining, "I chose him because the present superior is taking a rest away from Rome just now and Brother Gregory is greatly concerned about his institute and very cooperative. Since he was superior, he is also very knowledgeable." The Holy Father approved.

Brother Gregory gave Don Bosco a letter from Monsignor Fiorani in which the prelate answered Don Bosco's questions about a residence for the Salesians and commented on some views contained in the latter's memo to the Pope.

You expressed a fear that there may be a problem getting the Conceptionists to keep their vow of poverty and live a community life as prescribed by their constitutions. I doubt that this will happen, because the constitutions did not introduce a new element into their lives but only put into words what they had been doing for twenty years. The Conceptionists themselves made no comment on this point and were quite pleased with everything. Indeed all would have gone well, had it not been for those recent upsets about which I have already told you. However, this does not mean that you cannot make modifications to harmonize their rule with the Salesians' rule *without jeopardizing the purpose and aims of the institute*. I would like the Conceptionists to hold on to two things: their name, which honors the Immaculate Virgin Mary, under whose banner they labor and which recalls the origins of their institute and the definition of the dogma; secondly, their habit, lest they attract undue notice from the present hospital authorities. I understand that you also seek information on the finances of the houses and hospitals where these religious work, their number, and whether the institute's posts are all filled. Better than any written account, you can get this information personally from Brother Gregory, whom you can fully trust. As you will learn, the Conceptionists, once numerous and growing, are now but few, since many left because of the recent rifts. I have lately learned that nearly all the rest were ready to leave in December because of a ruling made, without my knowledge, by their current superior. This is no longer a threat, and I must admit that the Holy Father's decision to turn to you

and your Congregation was truly an inspiration of God, who does not want this Institute to be totally disbanded and will, I hope, cause it to grow and prosper in its true spirit.

Brother Gregory arrived in Turin on November 26. Still young and energetic, he seemed to be mature and prudent. The next day, as he was conferring with Don Bosco, the Superior Council members joined them. In their presence Don Bosco told Brother Gregory, "The main point you have to bring to your confreres' attention is this: let them be convinced that we will gladly do all we can to help them. We are not trying to wipe out their institute; rather we want to save it, perfect it and make it grow. They can be sure that whatever the Holy Father decides in this affair, our only desire is to follow his instructions. We do not intend to bring in reforms but just to strengthen what has already been established."

Brother Gregory withdrew, and Don Bosco, opening the chapter meeting, gave an extended report. Since his words were taken down,[11] we shall pass them on to our readers.

The Conceptionists' main problem—he said—is that they have never had a regular novitiate. They have rules for a novitiate, very good rules, but they were never implemented. Candidates with serious moral problems have kept entering the Institute—and still enter it—as long as they can produce a letter of recommendation from a pastor. It's simply impossible for a congregation to operate in this manner and survive. We ourselves were able to dispense with a regular novitiate because we never took in strangers, only boys we had known over a number of years, boys, who, as it were, grew up beneath our gaze. But now that outsiders are beginning to come to us, we too must have a regular novitiate if we want to survive.

Now, the Conceptionists' great fear is that we want to turn them into Salesians and thus destroy their institute. That is why they want full autonomy with independent superiors. In a word, they would like us to be nominal superiors or even just chaplains. The Capuchins are behind them in this, telling them, "You do not want us any longer. Very well, here comes Don Bosco! You who don't want to be Franciscans will be forced to become Salesians. He will make you toe the line, set up new rules, and so forth." I know this from Monsignor Fiorani and from the Conceptionists themselves. They said so in their letter to this good brother of theirs

[11] Chronicle of Father Barberis, November 27, 1876. [Author]

authorizing him to deal with me. I told him that they may keep their autonomy but that we will have absolute authority in all matters of direction, whether administrative or moral.

"So what do you leave us?" I was asked.

"The purpose of your institute, your habit, your name, and so forth."

The nub of the question is this: they no longer care for the Capuchins' direction because they had some very unpleasant experiences with them. The latter were trying to turn them into Capuchins. Hence recently they once more appealed in a body to the Pope, protesting this pressure and putting themselves into his hands, asking him to give them a director as he saw fit, as long as their stability and growth would be safeguarded. Now the Holy Father has put it all into our hands, and I am to find the best way to put matters right. After I gave the problem a great deal of thought and prayer, I drafted a memo to serve as a basis for what I thought should be done and sent it to the Holy Father, who was very pleased and approved it, sending me word to proceed along those lines. Monsignor Fiorani even wrote to tell me that, after reading my draft, the Holy Father passed it on to him as protector of the institute, saying: "Read this masterpiece! I could not have asked for more." So, as far as we are concerned, the matter is almost settled, although the Conceptionists know nothing of this. Now we have to find how we can best implement the plan to the satisfaction of both parties. My memorandum to the Holy Father derives from this principle: "The Conceptionists are to accept and observe our rules fully; the Salesian Superior General is to be also their superior." Our rules, however, will contain an appendix for them with instructions for the proper running of their hospitals.

Now, it is pointless to prolong this meeting because we can reach no conclusions yet. When things will become clearer, we shall meet again to see what we can do. I believe that the Conceptionists' reluctance to accept any direction other than their own stems from a hidden material interest. Their vow of poverty allows them to dispose of forty-five francs a month at will, and they rightly fear that they will lose this privilege.

In his discussions with Brother Gregory, Don Bosco drew up a new draft of basic principles, some from the earlier draft, some new, and sent it to Monsignor Fiorani for forwarding to the Holy Father.[12]

The Pope received the draft on December 12. Two days later Monsignor Fiorani sent Don Bosco a report, and he presented it to the Superior Council on December 17. We quote Don Bosco's words from Father Barberis' chronicle:

[12]Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Brother Gregory left a week ago. Monsignor Fiorani now writes to me and in substance says: "I saw His Holiness, who assures me that he was very pleased with your plans for the Conceptionists. However, he has some ideas of his own and expressed them to me to pass on to you, but only *orally*. His Holiness asks you to come to Rome to close this affair and to bring a priest with you to assume the direction of the Santo Spirito Hospital immediately." I have done a lot of thinking and praying. Now we have no choice but to act, since this is what the Holy Father wants. I already answered that I am leaving at the beginning of January with a priest and that we shall be ready to listen to His Holiness and act accordingly. Our only purpose in going to Rome is to carry out what has to be done. My only problem is: Whom do I take to Rome as director? I have written to Lanzo and talked with Father Lemoyne. His prefect, Father Scappini, seems the ideal man for this task; he is energetic and approachable. Besides, we urgently need a priest to represent us in Rome almost as a procurator general. This way we can immediately set up a Roman province. Father Lemoyne and I have straightened out matters in Lanzo. I will leave Turin at the beginning of January and stay in Rome until everything is definitely settled, because a matter like this I cannot leave unfinished. Then around the feast of St. Francis de Sales I shall go to Liguria, and from there to Marseilles. All they requested for the Santo Spirito Hospital is one priest and a manservant, since there are only two rooms available for a director or chaplain. However, I will get the feelings of the hospital administrators, and, if we can manage to win their favor, we will have not only two but fifty rooms for our use. Then, also, we shall have a better idea of what the Holy Father wants. This is our uppermost concern before we take any steps. We are not going there to discuss or to propose, but only to listen and then act.

In summation, we gather from Father Barberis' chronicle that both the Holy Father and Monsignor Fiorani were pleased with Don Bosco's handling of this matter and that just a brief meeting was needed to come to a final understanding. In the meantime Don Bosco was to take a priest with him to assume the direction of the Conceptionists immediately, and from then on it would be smooth sailing. As things turned out, instead, no sooner would Don Bosco get to Rome in January 1877 with a priest to direct the Conceptionists than the sky would darken and the water would become stormy. However, to keep this volume limited to 1876, we will give the epilogue in Volume XIII.

The year's many undertakings aroused certain fears in the minds

of Don Bosco's closer friends who wondered whether he was not taking on too much. Father Secundus Franco, S.J., highly respected in Turin and a warm friend of Don Bosco, one day called on him, planning to voice his fears that the opening of so many houses every year could gravely harm the Salesian Congregation. No sooner did Don Bosco see him than, gazing on him with a peculiar smile which usually played on his lips at special moments, and giving him no time to speak, he explained the strong reasons which drove him to start new foundations. His visitor was astounded and speechless, convinced that Don Bosco had read his mind. On telling Father Francesia about this some time later, he concluded: "That's just how it was with St. Ignatius Loyola!"

CHAPTER 18

Departure of the Second Missionary Expedition

A SECOND expedition of twenty-three missionaries was scheduled to depart on November 7.[1] Don Bosco publicized the event with a circular which nicely directed attention to a need "of clothing and fares" but betrayed no financial concern or fear.

SALESIAN ORATORY

Turin, November 4, 1876

Dear Sir,

With pleasure I announce the ceremony of our missionaries' departure for America to be held Tuesday evening in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Vespers will be at five, followed by an appropriate homily. After Eucharistic Benediction, the blessing of the Most Holy Mother of God will be given to the missionaries. A brotherly leave-taking will close the sacred service.

The missionaries will leave at seven from the church to board a train for Rome. The ship is scheduled to leave Genoa on the morning of November 14.

We still need clothing and funds for the fare, which will be defrayed by a collection taken in the church.

We hope to be honored by your presence at this ceremony. Invoking God's blessings upon you, I am

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

[1] *Priests:* Francis Bodrato, Louis Lasagna, Stephen Bourlot, Thaddeus Remotti, Michael Fassio, and Augustine Mazzarello. *Clerics:* Spirito Scavini, Daniel Raimondo, Emil Rizzo, Marcellino Scagliola, Charles Ghisalbertis, Louis Farina, and Evasius Rabagliati. *Coadjutors:* John Barberis, Anthony Bruna, Joseph Bassino, Joseph Viola, James Ceva, Felix Caprioglio, Anthony Tardini, Anthony Roggero, Francis Frascarolo, and Peter Sappa. Surviving [as of 1931] are Father Fassio, Father Remotti and Father Caprioglio. [Author]

The Superior Council, meeting on November 5 to determine the departure ceremonies, decided to invite Archbishop Gastaldi to impart benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. Father Durando was asked to extend the invitation. Should the prelate be unable to attend, Father Durando was to request that he at least receive the missionaries for a farewell. The outcome was as expected; the missionaries, therefore, called at the archbishop's residence on the morning of November 7. The latter received them courteously and gave each a souvenir. Monsignor Anglesio, superior of the Cottolengo Institute, was asked to impart the blessing.

As in former years, the boys that morning made the Exercise for a Happy Death; the students had the whole day off, while the artisans were free for the afternoon. The missionaries were honored at dinner by music and the presence of distinguished guests at three in the afternoon. By five o'clock the church was jammed; all of the Oratory students were present. The missionaries filed out of the sacristy into the sanctuary and knelt in a long pew, priests and clerics wearing the cape and hat proper to the Spanish clergy. The former year's service was repeated: a talk by Don Bosco, the *Tantum Ergo* and Eucharistic Benediction, the ritual Blessing of Missionaries, a fond embrace and farewell to the confreres standing near the foot of the altar, the long walk down the center aisle to the coaches, and the ride to the railroad station, as we have already described in the preceding volume.[2] About the farewell to the confreres, *Unità Cattolica* commented on November 10, 1876 as follows: "We cannot describe this moving scene. Only those who have experienced sharing their lives for many years and then separating with the fear of never meeting again on earth can understand it." The missionaries got to the station just on time, and were joined by the Salesians who were on their way to Ariccia or to Albano. Father Lazzero's chronicle laconically states: "Our dear Don Bosco accompanied them all."

Just moments before, in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he had addressed a huge crowd, directing these words to his Salesians and boys:

A year ago at this time, my dear sons, from this very Church of Mary, Help of Christians the first band of Salesian missionaries set out for Argentina to evangelize those people and find a way to contact the

[2] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 363f. [Editor]

Indians of the pampas and Patagonia, who are believed to be quite savage and ferocious. We participated in that departure ceremony and took our farewell with deep feeling and tears which were tempered by the thought that they were going to start a new mission. From this very pulpit they heard loving words of encouragement and farewell which reminded them that they were but heeding the command of the Divine Savior to the apostles: "Go into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" [Mark 16, 15] and were taking up an apostolic work. And they were also told, "You leave, but not alone, for we shall always be with you in thought and prayer. More and more of us will follow you in your noble endeavor and be your companions. If the need arises, we will all be ready to leave and join you in the evangelical field that Divine Providence has prepared for us." Those hopeful words are now being translated into fact. At this moment I look upon a small band of Salesians who, animated by the ideals of our first missionaries, are straining to go and strengthen the ranks of their confreres.

Having decided to give you only a brief talk this evening, I will say nothing to draw tears from your eyes or mine—they would but keep me from talking. Nor, my dear sons, do I think this is the time to impart words of prudence and wisdom that may seem appropriate for those who are about to set out for those far-off lands.

Two thoughts alone I wish to express. The first concerns the accomplishments of those ten confreres of ours after that memorable evening, when, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and before the painting of Our Lady, they took their leave of us. In a moment I will give you the highlights of those accomplishments so that you may see how marvelously great is the good which you can do, and how blessed and shielded by Our Lord, respected and beloved by men, are those who are inspired by real zeal for souls.

Secondly, let me point to the harvest that God is preparing for us in South America. The tasks are many, the good to be achieved boundless, the field immense. By laboring earnestly in the Lord's vineyard, you are actually continuing the work of the apostles. Dearest sons, listen to me: God sees you; God hears you; to Him alone be the honor and the glory! If we are given credit as lowly instruments chosen by the Lord, let us always say, "By God's power has this been done! To Him alone be honor and glory!"

After going to Rome for the Holy Father's blessing and to receive his mandate [to evangelize Patagonia], our first missionaries returned to Turin. They left again on November 11 and sailed from Genoa on November 14. After a long, safe voyage—you can read the details in a special pamphlet—they landed in Buenos Aires. The rousing welcome they received—especially from the pious and learned archbishop, who

considers them to be his own sons—was such as they could hardly ever expect from even their dearest friends. On hearing of their arrival, crowds flocked to greet them, especially Italians who poured out in great numbers to pay their respects and to beg them to stay and care for their families and fellow countrymen. It had been the missionaries' intent to go in one group to San Nicolás de los Arroyos, as originally planned, but so forceful was the insistence and so great the need in Buenos Aires that they split up into two groups, and three missionaries stayed on in the capital.

It bears repeating that the purpose of this first missionary expedition was to bring moral aid to the many Italians living in South America and to make a fresh attempt to reach the Indians of the Patagonian pampas. Many Oratory alumni live in Buenos Aires and in provincial towns, and now they came forth enthusiastically to see their former schoolmates.

We were originally charged with the church dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, also known as the Italian church, and Father Cagliero immediately opened the Christmas novena with a series of sermons. It was a grand success, as people flocked from miles to hear him. The morning and evening services, in Italian and Spanish respectively, were well attended. Long hours of the day were given to hearing confessions, and since limited time and facilities made it impossible to accommodate all those who showed up, sermons and confessions continued into the Christmas octave. Nor has this attendance lessened. Rather, it seems to grow steadily, and more missionaries are needed lest those who are now there succumb to their labors.

Meanwhile the other seven missionaries continued on to San Nicolás, a twenty-four hour journey from the capital by riverboat. Here agreements called for a boarding school for about a hundred boys and an adjoining church, but instead they found that construction had just begun and there was room for only eight boys at the most. However, the Salesians were undismayed. With the townspeople's help, they took the work upon themselves. It was a treat to see them opening classes and at the same time turning into trade masters. They worked as contractors, builders, masons, blacksmiths, and carpenters. They speeded up the work.

As soon as a cubbyhole or room was ready, it was put into service, and enrollment went up. Would you believe it? Within six months that building was ready for occupancy by one hundred and thirty pupils, and there they are now, delighting their teachers by their diligence and good conduct. They belong to very good families.

While elementary and secondary classes were under way, a public church with a festive oratory was also opened. At San Nicolás the harvest is so abundant that our missionaries soon found themselves too few and begged for help.

San Nicolás, bordering on the province of Buenos Aires, is not far from

the Indian lands, and so the Lord inspired a few Indian families to enroll their sons in our school. Thus we achieved one of the most lively desires which drew us to that distant land—the gradual penetration of the tribelands. Seemingly we have succeeded, because once these native boys have become Christians, they will in turn teach our faith to their tribespeople, and our plan of having natives evangelize natives will go into effect.

As work continued at Buenos Aires and San Nicolás, word of the Salesians' arrival spread throughout the land. With spiritual needs being endless and the means to meet them being scarce, Father Cagliero, the Salesian superior, was flooded with requests for missionaries to conduct night schools, festive oratories, hospices for homeless boys, boarding schools and junior seminaries. The first requests came from cities, Córdova and Mendoza (Argentina); then others came from Chile, where negotiations are in progress in three cities. In Santiago, the capital, we have offers of a public church, a trade school, a boarding school and festive oratories; the same is true at Valparaiso. At Concepción, which borders on Indian territory, we are being asked to direct the local junior seminary. All we need is missionaries. May Divine Providence grant us many so that we may soon send a third expedition.

Just now in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay and a densely populated area, where there is neither a seminary nor a Catholic boarding school—not even one seminarian in the whole republic and no chance of any in the immediate future—a youth ministry is desperately needed. Bishop Vera, the vicar apostolic, has urgently appealed to Father Cagliero to find some way of setting up a Salesian school in that city. After lengthy negotiations, diabolical hostility, and countless obstacles, we succeeded in coming to a definitive agreement, thanks to several thoughtful and religious-minded people who spotted a fine building to serve our purpose, in a charming suburb known as Villa Colón. They bought it and handed it over to our Salesians with the sole condition that we take in, educate and train those boys whom Providence will send to us. Some of the missionaries of this band are on their way to open that school, the only Catholic school in the republic. It is called "Colegio Pio" in memory of Pius IX's stay there as a delegate of the Holy See in 1823.

At this very moment that I am speaking to you, another historic moment has been reached or soon will be: hostile Patagonian Indian tribes who have never yet allowed a European to set foot into their territory, having heard that there are missionaries whose sole purpose is to educate the young and to train and help the needy, have realized that these men will benefit rather than harm their people, and so they have requested that Father Cagliero be asked to visit them.

Wonder of wonders! Just as we are about to open a house at Dolores,

an outpost of civilization at one end of the Argentine republic, we receive a request from the extreme opposite end for a parish at Patagónes or Carmen de Patagónes which lies at the very heart of Indian lands and in which the whites are apparently quite safe. Two of the most powerful Indian chieftains have summoned Salesian missionaries and assured them that they will not be harmed in the least and that their religious message will be eagerly welcomed by all. Even from the tip of Patagonia, Vera Cruz and Punta Arenas, in the Strait of Magellan, comes the cry for Salesian missionaries.

In the midst of these happenings it was becoming obvious that more houses had to be opened in Buenos Aires. In a shabby quarter of the city, know as "La Boca" or the "Devil's Mouth" where many thousands of Italians live, a church is needed; in another neighborhood a parish has to be established; most of all, a trade school has to be opened for poor, homeless boys; finally, the care of other parishes has to be assumed.

Since the needs are so endless and divergent, and since ten missionaries could never shoulder such responsibilities, we planned to send more. Father Cagliero first asked for six, then ten, then twenty, and now at least twenty-four. I am sure that, were we to delay this expedition a little longer, we would be flooded with requests to send more and more missionaries to those lands. The appeal to Europe is unceasing: "Come to our aid! Send us workers!"

And you, my brand-new missionaries, are now going in small bands to those countries. One group will go to Buenos Aires itself to operate a new trade school, so that from now on homeless, endangered lads will find a home and security from material and moral misery. Spiritually safe-guarded, they will learn a trade or craft by which they will earn an honest living. We must therefore send not just clerics but Salesian craftsmasters. We must open festive oratories for young people and care for a very congested Italian parish.

Another group will head for Montevideo to open a truly Catholic school where students can learn with no peril to their innocence and purity of life. We have sound hopes that this school, so blessed by our Holy Father, will bear a rich harvest. It may well be that we will soon find some young plants to transplant into the Lord's vineyard, so that this vast republic may no longer have to bewail its lack of seminarians.

A third group is on its way to strengthen the ranks of confreres who are working at San Nicolás, since both the school and the festive oratories have grown so fast that the present staffs are overwhelmed. There too we have land to till, cattle to care for, young appretices to train—all tasks that call in a thousand ways for the skill and work of brave, unselfish men who are determined and ready for sacrifices.

And finally a fourth group, heeding God's call, will penetrate into areas

of greatest need to announce the Gospel and to make inroads among the tribes of the pampas and Patagonia, because it is my feeling, my sons, that by the time you get there we will have concluded negotiations in this regard and the only thing needed will be a leader who can direct the evangelization of the natives.

But now there is still one thing we must do, one thing before you set out for those distant shores: to go to Rome and receive the Supreme Pontiff's special blessing, the blessing of Christ's Vicar. We still have to kneel at the feet of this incomparable benefactor of ours, hearken to his directives, and follow them.

I call Pius IX our "incomparable benefactor" because you all must know that Pius IX loves us in a most extraordinary way and never lets the slightest occasion slip by to give us his blessing and come to our aid. Here I should tell you who the Pope is, who Pius IX is, but my voice quivers and my heart is deeply moved when I think of the bounty of this Pontiff of the Immaculate Conception, this living image of Jesus Christ. Only a few days ago, learning of our extreme need of clothing to complete our missionaries' wardrobe and the very tight financial straits we were in, he cleared his desk of all valuables, and, finding 5,000 lire, he immediately gave them to Cardinal Bilio to send to us, saying, "Tell Don Bosco that this is so little compared to his needs, but that just now it is all a good father has, and he gives it all to his beloved children. The Lord will not fail to meet their other needs." This is why I told you and keep repeating that all of us must bless and love the Pope, this distinguished benefactor of ours, and pray for him. We shall therefore kneel at his feet, thank him and say, "Holy Father, we are your dearest sons. Bless us!" And with his blessing go forth, my sons!

It is to you, my missionaries of peace, that I must now address myself and give you a souvenir or two. What remembrance shall I give you? Some souvenirs I gave the first band of missionaries. They have been published, and you have read them and may read them at your convenience. Individually I have given you other souvenirs to suit your personal needs. What else am I to tell you?

There is no doubt in your minds that it is the Lord who asks this sacrifice of you and that those endeavors in distant lands are willed by the Lord. It is truly the Lord who is sending you. What more do you need? That it is the Lord who calls you who have received so many signs, all so clear, there is no room for doubt. No! Have no fear! The Lord and the Blessed Virgin themselves will take you by the hand and lead you where the need is greatest, where you can do the most good.

You will, all of you, find your own place, for clerics are needed to teach, supervise, and catechize; lay Salesians are needed to provide for the material needs, to handle the household expenses, to be doorkeepers,

gardeners, shepherds, carpenters, blacksmiths and so on. There will be work for everybody.

Have no fears. After all, you are not going as pioneers into venturous fields without knowing anyone or without knowing where you will be stationed. There you will find brothers to give you a warm welcome. You will find a home awaiting you, room and board.

I cherish a warm trust that sooner or later we shall see each other again. Argentina is but a few days from here. But should it perchance happen that some of us cannot see each other again on earth, there is no reason why after our earthly stay we cannot once more meet. Then we shall be together forever in heaven.

On their way from Turin to Rome only one noteworthy incident befell our travelers. In those days the railroad's extent in northern Italy ended at Pisa, and one had to buy new tickets to continue south. Father Bodrato had been given a collective ticket for the group's fare and was to purchase another ticket for Rome. At the ticket window he found out that the fare amounted to five hundred and ninety-three lire. After vainly waiting for his return, Don Bosco, knowing that Father Bodrato had little money on him, went to investigate, but on hearing the price "he put a hand to his forehead and with a gentle smile"[3] asked, "What are we to do? All I have is five hundred lire." He then rummaged through his pockets, searched his wallet and turned it inside out on the counter, but it was empty. Father Bodrato did the same with somewhat better luck, for his wallet yielded nearly sixty lire. In this predicament Father Lasagna went around and collected thirty-two lire from his companions. Triumphantly, Father Bodrato added them to his own and Don Bosco's, but sadly discovered that he was still short four lire. "If you can't find them, your friends can leave and you will stay here," the ticket agent coldly announced. Meanwhile word of their plight got around but no one came to their rescue. The station master was about to dispatch the train. What was to be done? "Calm and still smiling," Don Bosco said something to the station master, who turned a deaf ear. Finally, digging into another pocket, he found a coin purse he had overlooked, and out came the redeeming four lire, but they were silver coins of the old realm. Luckily no questions were asked. It is a fact that bad luck can

[3] The words in quotation marks are from a letter of Father Bodrato to Father Barberis from Rome, November 9, 1876. [Author]

sometimes turn to good. While the missionaries were waiting on the platform, the other passengers boarded the train and crowded all compartments, so that another coach had to be coupled on to accommodate them. To their joy, it was all theirs. Dawn broke in the meanwhile, and as the sole occupants of their coach, they all felt free to say their morning prayers together aloud. Then as the priests recited the Divine Office in choir fashion, the others sang sacred hymns. By these and other tricks they managed to still their hunger, which had been whetted rather than eased by the few mouthfuls of bread they had bought along the way with the few *soldi*[4] they had scrounged from the bottom of their pockets, and so they arrived in Rome without a cent and with voracious appetites. Father Sala was waiting for them at the station with two carriages and took them to a hospice, adjacent to the Church of Trinita dei Monti, while the ever thoughtful Mr. Sigismondi took Don Bosco to his own home, waiting upon him with the utmost solicitude.

Hardly had they eased their fast of twenty-four hours when joyous news came to delight them: the Holy Father, Pius IX, would give them an immediate audience the following day. They were jumping for joy. At twelve noon the next day, November 9, as they stood waiting in a semi-circle in a hall adjoining the private audience room, the Holy Father suddenly appeared in the company of Cardinals Asquini, Caterini, Franchi, and Di Pietro and many bishops and archbishops. "Look," he exclaimed in a fatherly tone, "here is a band of Salesians who are going to South America. God bless you, my sons, and may the Holy Virgin protect you." In a burst of love, thinking that they could act the way they did at the Oratory, they all rushed toward the Pope to kiss his hand. "No, no," he said smilingly. "*Servate ordinem.* I will make the rounds and each can offer his own greeting."

He began with the expedition's leader. "Holy Father," Don Bosco said, "this is Father Bodrato who heads this new expedition. Close to him are those assigned to Buenos Aires."

"Buenos Aires is a great city," the Holy Father commented. "I was there in 1823. It has a very zealous bishop. May God be with you everywhere!"

"These others are going to San Nicolás, and their leader is Father Remotti. The school has grown so large that we just have to send more personnel."

[4] A *soldo* was worth five *centesimi* or cents. [Editor]

"San Nicólas de los Arroyos," the Pope continued, "is another town I have visited. There are many Italians there. You will have a great deal to do. However, it is an outpost bordering on Indian territory. You will need much patience and prudence."

"This third group, headed by Father Louis Lasagna, will stay in Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay. That city has neither seminary, nor bishop, nor clergy. At Villa Colón we will open a boarding school which, may it please Your Holiness, we shall call 'Colegio Pio.'"

"Very well," the Pope answered good-humoredly. "I have been there too. I am acquainted with those places. There are many Italians there, and their children badly need a Christian education and wholesome training. There is a vast harvest, a vast harvest!"

"This last group will go to Albano."

"In Albano too you will find an abundant harvest. The people are very good and religious. You will be able to put your zeal and charity to good use. May God be with you!"

Completing his rounds with a few words for each one as they kissed his hand, Pius IX rejoined the cardinals and, waving his cane with his left hand in a youthful gesture, he told the missionaries, "I am delighted with this new Salesian expedition. May God bless you and the Holy Virgin protect you! With divine help you will do great good. They say that St. Francis Solano traversed the whole length of America on foot. It could not have happened through natural power. I believe God's angels must have carried him over that long, painful trek. I do not say that you must cover the entire breadth of America, but I can assure you that with God's help you will do a great deal of good. Who knows how vast is the area, how abundant is the harvest God is preparing for you? Seek only to live up to the loving care of Divine Providence for you, and have no doubt that your efforts will yield a rich harvest. I pray that God will grant you steadfastness in your good intentions. May He bless you all, and may your guardian angels accompany you on your way by land and sea, while at work and forever! God bless you, your mission, and those missionaries who are now in America! May He bless the bishop of Buenos Aires and the vicar apostolic of Montevideo! May He bless your relatives, friends and benefactors! I will now bless your medals, rosaries and crucifixes, and pray that God will bless you in this world and one day grant you eternal happiness." He then imparted the apostolic blessing

with a plenary indulgence for their parents and relatives to the third degree. The Pope was visibly moved as he finished speaking. Then, regaining his usual cheerfulness, he moved on into another chamber with his entourage. The missionaries stood rooted to the spot in rapture and ecstasy, as the apostles must have done when Jesus ascended into the clouds of heaven.

Don Bosco was again given a private audience the following day. On that occasion he requested spiritual favors and also the privilege to accept postulants to whom some bishops had refused to grant testimonial letters. Pius IX graciously granted all his requests.[5]

The main object of this audience was the matter of the Conceptionists, but we know nothing more than what we learned in the previous chapter. The Pope also gave Don Bosco the task to inspect a house he was having built as a novitiate for the Conceptionists in Piazza Mastai, across the Ponte Garibaldi, near the ancient Anguillara castle which was mentioned above. Since the building was near the Church of St. Bonosa, the rumor arose that the church was to be given to Don Bosco. Don Bosco inspected the site shortly before leaving Rome and reported as follows to the Pope:[6] "I believe that it is my duty to comment briefly on my visit to the house in Piazza Mastai, one of the many works which Your Holiness has under construction. I found it well suited to its purpose and merely made some very minor comments which I thought would benefit its future residents. It will house twenty-five to thirty people. The contractor told me that the masons will finish their work this year; then some time will be needed for drying and for furnishing."

We have nothing else of importance to add concerning this brief stay of Don Bosco in Rome, save for a letter he wrote to Father Barberis after his private audience, while he was busy conferring with Monsignor Fiorani about the Conceptionists.

We must first understand why Don Bosco wrote this letter. No sooner did he leave the Oratory than the house council introduced a temporary change. Choir practice used to be held after supper at the Oratory, although this was not the custom of the other Salesian

[5] This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]
[6] Letter to Pius IX, Turin, November 18, 1876. [Editor]

schools, which held it before supper, alleging that it was more advantageous. When it was proposed that the Oratory do the same, Don Bosco did not at first oppose it, but when November came, he did not favor the new schedule for that school year. He felt that it was morally better to keep the boys together [in the study hall] during that evening hour when supervision was difficult. However, the Oratory superiors thought they would try it for a month. Father Barberis, who favored the change, wrote to Don Bosco about it once it was introduced, and Don Bosco replied, commenting on it and other things, as he usually did.

Rome, November 10, 1876

My dear Father Barberis:

1. Inform Miss Lorenzina Mazé, or have someone inform her, that her mother is allowed to take liquids before Communion.

2. Tell Canon Molinari that his faculty in cases reserved to the Pope has been renewed.

3. We have received unlimited dispensation from testimonial letters.

4. Our missionaries have unlimited faculties for hearing confessions throughout this voyage. All these favors have been granted orally [by Pope Pius IX] on November 10, 1876.

5. Concerning Daniele's receiving the clerical habit, I entrust the whole matter to our kindly Father Rua.

6. It was not my intent to end [the Sons of Mary's] crash course, especially since we had agreed with Father Durando and with Zemo [their teacher] to improve it. True, the course is held at Sampierdarena, but at least one group should take it in Turin for many reasons.

7. You were wise to schedule choir practice before supper during my absence, because I would not have allowed it, as I did not last year. When the cat is away, the mice will play.

8. The Holy Father gave our entire Salesian Congregation a general benediction and a special blessing to the novices, whose praises I sang, and to the aspirants with these words: "God bless you, tender seedlings. Grow—but grow so as to bear much fruit in the Lord's vineyard."

9. The missionaries are all cheerful and well. They leave tomorrow morning (Saturday) at 10 o'clock. I shall leave at the same time on Sunday with Father Sala.

10. Our affairs in Rome are in great shape indeed. Three cheers for Rome! But we shall talk about that in Turin.

11. Regards to Father Tonella, Father Capelletti, Father Porani, and Father Santucci, for whom I have asked a special blessing.

My regards also to Father Rua, Father Lazzero, Father Bertello, Botto the cook, and Father Berto. May God preserve us all in His holy grace. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ.
Fr. John Bosco

This letter calls for some comment, item by item.

1. Lorenzina Mazé was a niece of Archbishop Gastaldi. The concession referred to here was for her mother, the archbishop's sister.

2. Canon [Francis] Molinari, professor of theology at the University of Turin, was one of the Oratory's first friends. He was most diligent in teaching theology to the Salesian clerics there and ran into difficulties [with the archbishop], but he stated that he would rather relinquish his title of canon and his professorship at the seminary than leave the Oratory without a theology instructor.

3. The question of testimonials was a headache. Despite the bull of 1848 on the status of religious, bishops would not always issue them willingly. Several religious orders enjoyed a more or less extensive privilege of exemption, Don Bosco having it for those boys who had studied in Salesian schools. On this occasion the Pope extended the privilege to remove all limitations, but Don Bosco had to be content with an oral permission, as it would have been useless to hope for a rescript, which would only undo the Church's own decree of 1848.

In this regard Don Bosco jotted down, in a note we have in our possession, the following norms for the Superiors of the Council: "1. All boys educated in our houses are dispensed from testimonial letters. Concession made orally by His Holiness Pius IX. 2. Testimonials are not needed for lay members, only for those who seek admission as clerics or as priests. Consult the authors. 3. In an audience with the Holy Father on November 10, 1876, dispensation from testimonial letters was obtained orally for everyone without distinction."

4. The faculty of hearing confessions had come in very handy to our missionaries in the first expedition to benefit souls.

5. John Daniele, a student, had said nothing of a vocation after his fourth year of secondary schooling, but he wrote to Don Bosco and spoke with Father Barberis seeking admission to the Congre-

gation. Don Bosco referred the decision to Father Rua who, probably taking his cue from the word "benevolent," delayed and daily kept deferring a decision. The boy wrote to Don Bosco again on his return from Rome, and Don Bosco referred the matter to Father Barberis who accepted the boy immediately into the novitiate. It may be that Don Bosco and Father Rua delayed because Daniele had been found unprepared for some final examinations and, having failed a make-up test in Greek, was repeating his last year, then in progress. We find his name among the clerical novices in the catalogue of 1877–78, after which his name disappears.

6. We have written extensively elsewhere about the crash course [for the Sons of Mary] and the problems plaguing it beyond 1875.[7]

7. The Piedmontese proverb is the same in Piedmontese, Italian [and English]: "When the cat is away, the mice will play." The meaning is obvious. Father Barberis softens the remark by observing: "Jotted in a letter whose contents were in a light vein, this remark was not really a reprimand. In fact, Don Bosco did not mention the matter again on his return."

10. "Our affairs in Rome" are the Conceptionists' proposed merger, the Pope's offer of a house, and the frame of mind of high-placed ecclesiastics.

11. The names were of priests who had recently come to the Oratory and were in their novitiate year.

Don Bosco's thoughtfulness stands out in these small attentions.

After the missionaries' departure from Rome, Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua a short letter brimming with concise news and letting him know, without an excess of words, his deep personal satisfaction.

[Rome, November 11, 1876]

My dear Father Rua:

Our missionaries are on their way to Sampierdarena. I leave tomorrow morning at ten o'clock.

Everything went well. Today I will look at the house that the Holy Father means to donate for our use. Tuesday, God willing, I shall be in Turin. I will write from Genoa. Father Sala will come with me. Every-

[7] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 44ff, 57. [Editor]

thing is going smoothly at Albano, Ariccia and Magliano. God be with you, and stay well.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

At Sampierdarena the missionaries received a warm brotherly welcome with music, songs and speeches—nothing was spared to cheer their hearts. They could not find enough words to thank Father Albera, the director, a most worthy son of Don Bosco who so well emulated the father. It took two full days to comply with required formalities and to book their baggage. Don Bosco accompanied them everywhere. "Poor Don Bosco!" Father Bodrato wrote to Father Barberis. "Eight days he has been on the road; lots of headaches and no rest."

The missionaries broke up into two parties. Those going to Buenos Aires, headed by Father Bodrato, embarked at Genoa on November 14, while the second party, led by Father Lasagna and sailing to Montevideo, left later for Bordeaux. Don Bosco went with the first group, fourteen in all, aboard the *Savoie*, where he again met Captain Guiraud, who went to great lengths to show him respect, telling him how much he had enjoyed the delightful journey the year before with the first expedition. Don Bosco thoroughly checked out each one's accommodations to make sure he had all he needed and then lovingly commended them to the captain's care. A man peddling Protestant Bibles came aboard and began arguing with Don Bosco, but he was immediately and unceremoniously put ashore at the captain's orders. To cheer up his sons, Don Bosco then accepted the captain's suggestion that he have lunch with them. He stayed on board two hours, speaking now to one, now to another. When it was time to leave he drew them together and reminded them earnestly to labor solely for God's glory and the salvation of souls, for the triumph of the Church and of the holy, Catholic and apostolic faith. Then he blessed them, saying, "Go without fear! God is with you. Mary will protect you." As he went ashore, they followed him with a loving gaze until he disappeared from view. At two that afternoon, the ship weighed anchor for Marseilles. As soon as he returned home, Don Bosco wrote to Father Rua.

Sampierdarena, November 11, 1876

My dear Father Rua:

Give Rossi the gold currency to bring to Bordeaux for the voyage. The missionaries are already aboard; we had lunch together. They shed a few tears, but when I left them, they were in good spirits again. They leave Genoa at two. Warm greetings from them to their confreres and friends at the Oratory. They will write from Marseilles. God willing, I shall be back in Turin on Friday and have lunch with Father Vallauri. Let him know and, if you can, come along yourself. Do all for God's greater glory. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Aboard the *Savoie* were five first-class passengers, twenty-two in second class and seven hundred in third class; four hundred among the last group were Neapolitans. More passengers came aboard at Marseilles and Barcelona, so that on its crossing the ship carried thirty passengers in first class, forty-two in second class, and eleven hundred in third class. Our Salesians were perfectly free to offer Mass, hear confessions, preach and catechize, and they did so generously of their own accord. Surveying the situation, they divided the passengers among themselves and zealously set to work. The coadjutor brothers attracted special attention among the passengers, and many, drawn by their example, began attending Mass and other religious services.

The missionaries destined for Montevideo had to board their ship at Bordeaux, the home port of the Pacific Shipping Company, from whom the Uruguayan government had purchased the missionaries' tickets. On the morning of November 16, Don Bosco accompanied them to the railway station of Sampierdarena and, as they were waiting for their train, he strove to appear cheerful, amiably conversing with them, offering useful advice and finally giving them a most heartfelt blessing. It was most moving to see them kneeling in the waiting room, their eyes wet with tears. They kissed his hand and, tearing themselves away, hurried to board the train just as it was about to pull out of the station. They spent the night at Nice and resumed their journey the next day.

An unpleasant surprise awaited them at Bordeaux. They had hoped to board the *Poitou* on November 20, but the ship had already left when they got there. They managed to get rooms at the Hotel Toulouse, but their funds dwindled so alarmingly that they realized they had to find lodgings elsewhere, since they had no idea how long they would have to wait. Some charitable people came to their aid, espeically the chairman of the local chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the auxiliary bishop, who saw to it that the five priests were given rooms at the seminary, while two coadjutor brothers boarded with the Passionist Fathers and three with the Carmelites. At each place they were warmly welcomed. On November 24, the feast of St. John of the Cross, all were invited to dine with the Carmelites. Father Lasagna, in the presence of the auxiliary bishop, sang the Mass.[8] They stayed in Bordeaux until December 2. Finally, after a lot of trouble, they boarded a large British vessel, the *Iberia*. However, their misadventures were not as yet over, for shortly after departing they found out what a violent storm at sea can be like.

Don Bosco remained at Sampierdarena until November 17. During his stay there he wrote Father Cagliero two news-packed letters.

Sampierdarena, November 14, 1876

Dearest Father Cagliero:

1. Today, November 14, fourteen Salesians left Genoa for Argentina aboard the *Savoie*. Ten others will leave Bordeaux on November 20 for Montevideo. They are scheduled to arrive on December 19.

2. Next April six Salesians and six Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians will leave for San Nicolás. Two of the nuns are the Borgna girls who were born and brought up in South America and know Spanish very well.

3. Wisely distribute the personnel on the list which Father Bodrato will give you.

4. Next year, 1877, four of your men will be eligible for Holy Orders. When needed, we have the Holy Father's dispensation from the required age even beyond twenty months. Remember, too, that we have the *extra tempus*[9] faculty.

[8] Letter from Consul Gazzolo to Don Bosco from Bordeaux, November 22, 1876. He had accompanied the missionaries there and had remained with them until they left. [Author]

[9] Ordinations outside the appointed time. [Editor]

5. One of the things to keep in mind is a house or locality for a novitiate and house of studies. Do your very best to find an Indian or two for priestly training. I can send you a good novice master if you need one.

6. There is quite a movement among pastors and associate pastors to enter our Congregation. The priests of this expedition have already been generously replaced.

7. Your letter of October 9 arrived just a few hours before the *Savoie* set sail.

8. The Holy Father sent our missionaries five thousand francs and added another thousand in gold because I went with them to Rome at his invitation. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs gave me one thousand lire with deepest regrets for not being able to do more. It's better than a black eye.

9. The diplomas for the Salesian Cooperators have been printed in Spanish and Italian. Push the Association of Cooperators, but do it discreetly. In due time send me their names.

10. Our Salesians are already at Magliano, Albano and Ariccia. The Holy Father wants us in Rome for a special work, and he is having a house built where we can begin; it will be ready soon. The missionaries will give you the details.

11. I have definitively accepted the vicariate of the East Indies; we will go in 1878. The Holy Father has already asked me to choose someone who I think should be made bishop of this new mission.

12. We have a hundred and thirty-six novices. Delay a little longer and you will find a new world. Could you, without detriment to the smooth functioning of our houses, return here next year?

13. This missionary expedition has sunk us up to our necks in debt, but God is helping us and we will get by. The promissory note for nine thousand lire has not yet arrived.

14. You will be given an IOU for 1,755 lire. Please pay it. It is the balance we owe for the ship fare.

15. The rest you will learn from the dear confreres who are on their way to you.

16. After you have presented the personnel to each house, see to it that the community assembles to read the recommendations given to them last year,[10] and have someone add a few words.

17. I have assigned the personnel, but you can make changes according to need.

18. Make sure you send me a list of Salesians, novices and aspirants in each house.

19. I may not be able to write to Monsignor Ceccarelli, so please tell

[10] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 364f. [Editor]

him that I spoke to the Holy Father about him, and that the *quid pro quo* [one thing for another] will be taken care of next winter when I go again to Rome. Do you think he knows any English?

Greet our confreres in my name and pay my respects to each of them, as well as our acquaintances, friends and benefactors.

God bless us all!

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Sampierdarena, November 16, 1876, 4:00 P.M.

Dearest Father Cagliero:

I have some news. I have not yet received the promissory note for 9,000 lire. Father Bourlot can act as interim pastor in Buenos Aires; he is very experienced in the sacred ministry.

Meanwhile I am readying the departure of the Sisters and the Salesians for March or thereabouts, unless you instruct me otherwise.

Cardinal Antonelli has been succeeded by Cardinal Simeoni, the former nuncio in Madrid and a close friend of ours with whom I have been in correspondence. Father Lasagna is leaving[11] right this moment for Bordeaux, and he will give you news of Rome. Besides the fares, I got a bank note for 1,535 francs in gold from Montevideo. Not enough, to be sure, "but it is always better than a black eye." There was a muddle with the baggage which could not be sent through Bordeaux,[12] so we have to work things out with the *Savoie* and the Daughters of Our Lady of Mercy[13] who will be leaving December 1 on the *Lavarello*. Consul Gazzolo is accompanying the Salesians as far as Bordeaux, because, as best I can, I intend to make sure that everything works out all right.

The Holy Father has great hopes for the pampas and Patagonia, and he is ready to help us financially if necessary. More of this later. My head is spinning, but no matter. God helps us, and everything is going in a way the world would call "fabulous" but we call miraculous. May God continue to show us His grace so that we may continue to be worthy of His favors.

Special greetings to Dr. Espinosa and Father Baccino. My respects to Marquis Spinola;[14] tell him that we have particularly prayed for the

[11] That is, he is on his way. Perhaps Don Bosco thought that he would continue to Bordeaux the night he arrived in Nice. [Author]

[12] Seemingly there was an increase in the baggage shipping charges. [Author]

[13] An order of nuns founded in 1837 in Italy by St. Mary Josephine Rossello (1811–1880). [Editor]

[14] The Italian ambassador to the Argentine government. [Author]

repose of his father's soul in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

May God bless us all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

On his return, either from Rome to Genoa or from Genoa to Turin, poor Don Bosco was afflicted with a very painful headache, just as he needed time to concentrate on important matters. When his companion, Father Sala, became aware of it, he begged him in all simplicity and sincerity to have the pain passed on to him. "If you really want it," Don Bosco answered, "then take it." Immediately a throbbing headache afflicted Father Sala and Don Bosco was totally relieved.

The anxious concern of boys and confreres at the Oratory to hear about the missionaries kept them in suspense until Don Bosco satisfied their curiosity in his "Good Night" of November 17. Stepping onto the little pulpit, he purposely hemmed and hawed to build up their expectations.

When you can enjoy invigorating fresh air outside, why do you all cram like sardines into this hall for prayers, risking suffocation? Does anyone have an answer? Do you feel that as long as the air is just cool, all is well, but when it turns to freezing, it's no longer comfortable?

Well, let us patiently endure a little cold, although it's not really cold yet, and I hope it doesn't get that way. Here, within these thick walls, it's warm enough, and in the dining room you can warm up quickly enough, everyone together, with hot soup and a good bottle (*of plain water*, someone interjected). And then, snuggled in bed, you're warm enough, aren't you? Good! I'm glad because I want you to have whatever you need to make you comfortable. Still, if occasionally you should catch a cold or suffer some inconvenience, be virtuous enough to offer it up to the Lord.

But let's talk about more interesting things. I escorted our missionaries to Rome and got to speak to the Holy Father several times. He asked me about everything and everybody, and I told him how many of you have donned the cassock, while others are still waiting but are very good all the same. I told him that all of you, more or less, were rivaling St. Aloysius in holiness. When he heard this, the Holy Father asked, "Don't you have any roughnecks?"

"Oh, no," I answered. "We really have no such characters; instead, we have boys who are as good as St. Aloysius."

"Tell me more about it," the Pope continued.

"Well," I replied, "I am referring to those who actually are and those who are determined to imitate St. Aloysius."

"Now I understand," the Holy Father said smilingly. "Tell your boys that I have great hopes for them and send them my apostolic blessing with all my heart."

This blessing I have brought you and now give it to you in his name.

I accompanied our missionaries from Rome to Genoa, stopping off a few days at Sampierdarena where we were heartily welcomed by our confreres and boys. What a muddle we were in! Some passports were not in order. Some missionaries were short of clothes; others could not find their luggage or had forgotten books in Turin. It was quite a mess, I tell you. Everybody was running about for one reason or another. Eventually everything got straightened out.

During the trip we had a nice time conversing or discussing things. I accompanied them to the ship; they were all cheerful. From afar, the ship looked like a heap of wood, but when aboard one would think that it was a city with every convenience. The captain told me that it carried 1,200 passengers. The third-class voyagers—not to mention the fourth class, reserved for sheep, cattle, chickens and livestock—have good food and no cause to complain. Here is their menu: coffee or tea for breakfast; soup, a main course and fruit at other meals. They can eat as much as they want. There is a big dormitory for sleeping; passengers are provided with a heavy large blanket in which to snuggle up as best they can.

Second-class passengers have better accommodations: a cot in a roomette about five feet long, but the cots are stacked up like shelves, so the one in the top bunk must be pretty careful in getting into bed, and, once in, he had better look out (*general laughter*)! I say that because if he is not careful, he may step on somebody's head. A great advantage is that one enjoys some privacy. Each cot has curtains, and washrooms are nearby. I was able to book a compartment exclusively for our six priests because there was no room for them in first class.

The meals for second class are, of course, better than in third, and those for first class are exquisite and plentiful. If the leftovers were put in a basket and sent to the Oratory, I'm sure you would be thrilled and well fed.[15]

Besides having all they need for the body, our missionaries also have the facility of saying Holy Mass, while those who are not priests can attend and receive Holy Communion. So, as you can see, they want for nothing.

Everyone was full of joy till the moment came to say *Bon voyage! Good-bye! Keep well!* Then they all turned pale and finally broke into

[15]This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

tears. "Don Bosco, give us your blessing!" they all cried, dropping to their knees.

With deepest emotion I blessed them and said, "Let's offer our separation to the Lord. Go now!"

But everyone had one last word to tell me, and there was no end. However, they all agreed on one request. "Tell everyone, especially our friends at the Oratory," they said, "that we are going to [South] America of our own will and desire, with no pressures and with our superiors' consent. We asked to go not on a whim, but with the sole intention of doing God's will, to save our own souls and the souls of our neighbors. Encourage our boys to follow us, should God call them to this life. We shall be waiting for some to come to our help." Then we parted. As I told you, one group left from Genoa; the remaining ten took a train through the Mont Cenis Tunnel and tonight are on their way to Bordeaux, whence they will sail for Montevideo the day after tomorrow.

I have other things to tell you about Sampierdarena and the ship, but lest I weary you by saying everything tonight, I will reserve some of the principal things for next Sunday.[16]

Don Bosco's first thought on his return to Turin was to write to the Pope, and he was able to do so the following day. We have already quoted from it before, and we now cite its beginning:

My first duty on arriving in Turin is to express my own fervent thanks to you and those of the Salesian missionaries. Filled with joy at the great honor of paying their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ and for his apostolic blessing, they have gladly departed for South America, assuring me that wherever they may go, they will proclaim your goodness and kindness, and they are ready to die, if necessary, for our holy Catholic faith, which alone brings salvation to mankind.

The shortness of his stay and the many things he had to do in Rome prevented Don Bosco from asking for the same faculties which his first missionaries had received in 1875 and which were implicit in their recognition as apostolic missionaries.[17] Thinking of it some weeks after his return, he wrote to Archbishop Ludwig Jacobini, secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, requesting also vestments and sacred vessels for

[16] We have not found any trace of a second talk in reference to this subject. [Author]
[17] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 139, 439. [Editor]

the [five] new parish churches and others to be opened in the future in South America.[18]

Don Bosco, whose thoughts followed his sons as they crossed the ocean, wrote again to Father Cagliero:

Turin, November 30, 1876

Dear Father Cagliero:

1. Lest you worry, I wish to inform you that the Montevideo contingent could not sail on November 20. Rather I should say that their ship belongs to a different company, and so they have to remain at Bordeaux until December 2, and will arrive in Montevideo on December 19 or 26 or 29, according to different sources.

2. This letter is being delivered to you by Daughters of Our Lady who have some of the baggage which our men could not ship aboard the *Savoie*.

3. I approve of your studying English, but do not neglect Spanish and, little by little, prepare yourself to go to India. How about it?

4. The Holy Father issued a decree putting all the Conceptionists under our authority to make Salesians of them all. It is a new venture for the Church. We'll see what happens.

5. Listen to this. Six priests go to South America; six others enter our Congregation. Seven clerics go with them; seven others ask to be admitted. Twelve coadjutor brothers go to South America, Albano and Trinità; twelve new zealous young men apply and are accepted. Do you see how God keeps running our business?

6. I will negotiate with Consul Gazzolo about purchasing the lot. He is very eager to sell. Have we gotten anywhere with the contract for the Italian parish church? I alert you to the fact that Consul Gazzolo's star which seemed so promising is pretty much on the wane.[19]

7. Father Reyne, the pastor of Castelletto-on-Ticino, is here at the Oratory and can't wait to join you. He recommends a pupil of his, Mr. Pollinini, a banker in Buenos Aires, for any banking operations you may have. He talks big.

8. Just now the Superior General of the Conceptionists is with me, sent by the Pope to discuss the arduous taks of merging our two congregations. We shall see.

9. I have six Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and six Salesians

[18] We are omitting this routine petition for the above-mentioned faculties. [Editor]

[19] On the trip to Bordeaux, Father Lasagna had begun to see through him quite clearly. [Author]

ready to leave in spring. I shall send them if needed; otherwise they will stay home.

10. Madame Mazé[20] has died; there will be a solemn funeral on Thursday. The confreres will give you more news. Ten million best wishes, all tied up in a bundle, coming to you from everywhere!

May God bless us all, dear Father Cagliero! Pray for me.

Yours ever affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Special regards to Dr. Edward Carranza and to Marquis Spinola.

The Montevideo contingent did not even have a pleasant crossing. They had it rough, especially in the Bay of Biscay, when a severe storm relentlessly buffeted the ship for four days. An account of the storm, sent from Lisbon, was publicly read to the boys, but, instead of dampening their spirits, it aroused to a fever pitch their eagerness to join the missionaries. The crossing lasted eighteen days. The sons of Don Bosco, anxiously expected, were warmly welcomed by Bishop Vera, the apostolic vicar, by church and civic authorities, and by prominent laymen. Their destination, however, was Villa Colón, as we have said. They found the bare outlines of the city as it was later developed and expanded with its long, straight, broad avenues extending to the periphery where the school stood—a complex of buildings encircling a fair-sized Gothic-style church. The interior and outer walls of both the church and other buildings were stuccoed and coated with white paint, but there were no decorations and no furniture. Weeds and thistles three feet tall grew riot over the grounds right up to the very walls. It took much time and effort to clean, dress up, equip and adapt the place by demolishing and rebuilding, until the complex began to look like an educational center. When the missionaries arrived, they learned that Father Cagliero, Father Tomatis and the coadjutor brother Scavini, a carpenter, had come there several weeks before from Buenos Aires and had been relentlessly at work, with loads more to be done. As soon as the school was finally ready, the news was immediately spread through the dailies of Montevideo and other cities, so that within one month there were about a hundred boarders in the elementary and

[20] The niece of Archbishop Gastaldi. [Editor]

secondary school grades. Choir and piano classes soon made it possible to celebrate solemn liturgies and hold impressive assemblies. Father Lasagna introduced the same timetable as at Alassio where he had been director. The pupils were diligent, docile and fervent in prayer. Parents visited often and voiced their satisfaction far and wide. Anti-clerical prejudice reared its head in slanderous newspaper attacks, but they had to reckon with a dauntless foe. Father Lasagna silenced them orally and in writing, while the students reinforced his stand by their splendid progress. Thus the school's good name spread throughout the country and initiated á growth that became irresistible. Today [1931] Villa Colón's "Colegio Pio,"[21] named by Don Bosco in perpetual memory of his gratitude to the immortal Pius IX, has grown beyond expectations in the center of beautiful gardens and vineyards. It also boasts a meteorological observatory. In short, it has become a cultural center of the republic. Its church, dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians, is now a national shrine.

The missionaries assigned to Argentina arrived in Brazil on December 6 after a very pleasant voyage. They went ashore to pay a courtesy visit to Bishop Lacerda (of Rio de Janeiro), as the first expedition had done, and gave him Don Bosco's cordial regards. The worthy bishop embraced each tenderly, and, on hearing that they too were bound for Buenos Aires, asked plaintively, "Always Buenos Aires? My diocese has over forty huge parishes without priests. People are born, live and die here, God only knows how. Why do you all keep going to Buenos Aires? . . . Tell me what I must do to have some of you here. . . . My dream was to have a trade school in this city, but the government won't tolerate monks. The Lord inspired me to send for Salesians, because they are the only ones who would be allowed here, since they are dedicated to the education of poor boys and your founder had the holy, clever and God-inspired thought of giving his religious no special habit to mark them out from diocesan priests."

Father Bodrato heartened him by assuring him that Father Cagliero would be passing through Rio de Janeiro and negotiations could be begun. "It is all very well," the bishop replied, "but

[21] Although dedicated to Pius IX, this boarding school was always known simply as "Colegio Pio" right from the very beginning, whereas the one inaugurated in Buenos Aires after the death of the great Pontiff was known as "Colegio Pio IX." [Author]

just now I am talking with you. Like Father Cagliero, you will certainly write to your Superior General, and this means I can save time." He asked them to stay for lunch, but they had to return to their ship, and he wistfully watched them leave.

At Montevideo, where they landed on December 11, they had just enough time to deliver their confreres' baggage to Villa Colón and be most courteously greeted by the vicar apostolic. On the morning of December 12, they sighted Buenos Aires. A steam launch was rapidly making its way to the *Savoie*. On deck were two priests, finally recognized as Father Cagliero and Father Fagnano. They both boarded the ship for moments of heartfelt emotion.

Passengers were not allowed to leave tne ship for twenty-four hours, since Buenos Aires did not then have the magnificent port of today [1931] and large ships had to anchor some ten miles from shore. People disembarked on steam launches which took them to ferryboats that alone could sail up to the shore. The complicated maneuver could take place only if the waters of the Plata Bay were calm; tossing seas made landing impossible. This was a day of rough seas.

The following morning, Father Cagliero's friends were impatiently awaiting the newcomers at the pier. For an entire week there were visits and receptions. Archbishop [Frederick] Aneiros expressed his deepest desire to meet Don Bosco and see the Oratory; as we shall see in the next volume, he did not speak idly. Taking his leave, he remarked, "I regret that I cannot write to Don Bosco now, because I am on my way to Paraguay, but I will do so later on. Meanwhile, when you write, tell him I love you, because you are destined to be the salvation and good fortune of this city and of my vast diocese. Tell him that I grant you all the faculties and privileges I can."[22]

People expected great things of the Salesians; all classes of citizens greeted them with indescribable esteem. History shows that such early expectations were fully met.

Father Chiala had gotten sick just after readying for *Letture Cattoliche* a voluminous report on our missionaries, which was published posthumously in the October and November issues. A brief historical introduction about the Salesian missions was

[22] From two letters of Father Bodrato to Don Bosco from Rio de Janeiro, December 6 and from Buenos Aires, December 19, 1876. [Author]

followed by several letters from the missionaries,[23] which, edited by Father Chiala, had already appeared for the most part in *Unità Cattolica*. He added other letters and the latest news on the subject. The report ended with an appendix of documents. The aim of this work merits special attention. Don Bosco's purpose in asking the author to do the work was twofold: first, to arouse admiration for God's providence as He avails himself of lowly instruments to carry out His adorable designs; second, to show his appreciation to those who helped to finance the first missionary expedition, and to inspire others to contribute prayers and material help.

[23] Rev. Cesare Chiala, *Da Torino alla Repubblica Argentina* [From Turin to the Argentine Republic]. Tipografia e Libreria Salesiana, Torino, 1876. [Author]

CHAPTER 19

Newspaper Harassment

WITH the lapse of time, newspaper attacks generally appear of little account to the general public, but not to the person impugned. Among other things Don Bosco suffered also from this kind of harassment until the end of his days. It is true that ultimately his reputation was never impaired in the slightest degree and that he who spits at heaven spits in his own face, but certainly, both as a priest and as the father of a large religious community, he was deeply wounded by the malicious falsehoods of a hostile press.

Proceeding in chronological order, let us first take to task a nasty humoristic newspaper published tri-weekly in Turin. Entitled *Il Ficcanaso* [*The Busybody*], for better or worse—and generally for worse—it exercised its trade of meddling in other people's affairs. Unavoidably, it often suffered confiscations, lawsuits, and injunctions, but in the long run such reverses worked to its advantage by giving it a notoriety that whetted public curiosity. Its spirit, unfortunately, was Voltairian, which became its boast. And yet, how many people shed their inhibitions when it's a matter of reading such tabloids, as though a desire to laugh justifies the means. In fact, this despicable rag boasted of a circulation which truly excellent periodicals could not hope to match. But to be held in derision, with mention of name and surname and all else, was at that time like being dragged through town tied to a horse's tail.

In 1876 this lurid newspaper was obliged to suspend publication

because of some impropriety, but it soon was out again on the feast of St. Joseph [March 19]. Hardly back in business, it made known clearly enough that its revived program included harassing Don Bosco. In the brief span of a few months he was their target three times. In its own way, it revealed its malicious intent to its readers by claiming that after resuming publication it had sent him a "cordial greeting" and received a courteous reply stating that "to respond worthily to its courtesy" he had in mind to become a "special contributor" and "comrade-in-arms." It then announced that Don Bosco's collaboration would start with an account of "the long history of the Succi inheritance," sarcastically promising that "with polished style" and "exquisite priestly kindness" he would speak about many bigwigs—lawyers, attorneys, administrators—all of them involved in who knows what unsavory affair. On behalf of the public the editor thanked him, "deeply touched by such a favor," and anxiously awaited "the story of that inheritance."

This was nothing more but malicious insinuation. Yet it bitterly wounded Don Bosco's benevolent heart. Louis Succi, a lawyer, had died suddenly in early January 1875, leaving Don Bosco in an ugly predicament. Don Bosco had guaranteed a bank loan of forty thousand lire that the lawyer had sought from a bank. He had done this willingly because he knew that the lawyer was very wealthy, though at that time he lacked ready cash, and because he felt obliged to him for his frequent financial assistance. By law, the lawyer's heirs should have shouldered the obligations of the deceased, but after a muddle of specious reasoning, they refused, thus forcing Don Bosco to honor his own signature. How and to what extent human greed intrigued for that inheritance is no concern of ours. It will suffice to note that the intention to strike indirectly at Don Bosco's reputation, as if he were an accomplice to a large-scale fraud, did not go beyond an insidious and elusive insinuation of a general nature. Still it sufficed to discredit him before many readers who were not in a position to know the whole background of the story or to ascertain its veracity.

A month and a half later this Turin tabloid again meddled in Don Bosco's affairs. By this time a sensational fiscal sanction would have silenced it if the same paper had not reappeared in May under a new title, *La Lanterna del Ficcanaso* [*The Busybody's Searchlight*]. Just then Don Bosco happened to be in Rome. In the May 6–7 issue (Year 1, No. 2) it attacked him in two articles, from

which we will draw only the substance, discarding the vile and blasphemous rind of their language. The first of these articles was entitled *Don Bosco in Rome.* It was a hodgepodge report, typical of the work of secular journalists writing about ecclesiastical matters. The press had had no inkling that in 1875 Don Bosco had been suspended from hearing confessions,[1] so great was Don Bosco's reserve. Now a strange news story was being circulated that Don Bosco had just been suspended *a divinis* [from all priestly functions] and had gone to Rome for this reason. The newspaper maintained that Archbishop Gastaldi had suspended him from the celebration of Mass for three reasons: 1. He had too many connections in Rome. 2. He exploited this advantage to bypass the archbishop's authority. 3. He upset the conscience of the faithful in order to extort inheritances from them. The writer depicted Don Bosco as fighting "tooth and nail" in Rome to shake off his ordinary's canonical penalties and concluded ironically: "This time the archbishop has acted properly, and he deserves praise. . . . We shall see who is the more powerful, Don Bosco or Archbishop Gastaldi." What gall!

The second article was entitled *Jesuitical Fanaticism* which mainly corresponded to the truth. We quote the article as written, omitting incidental comments which, distorting facts, abuse Don Bosco and would deceive unwitting readers. The article read as follows:

> Some time ago, three gentlemen called at the St. Francis de Sales printshop to have a pamphlet published. Everyone knows that this printshop is controlled by Don Bosco. He agreed to print it, set the price, and accepted the manuscript. Three days later the customers came by to see how things were going. "Gentlemen," Don Bosco said, "I ask a thousand pardons. Kill me if you wish, but God inspired me to burn it and so I did!" "Why?" they asked him. "Because this manuscript did not speak too well of our dearly beloved archbishop."

It really was no "pamphlet" or "booklet," but a manuscript of at least a thousand pages! As for "not speaking too well" it concocted such a biography of the archbishop that the book would have offered indisputable grounds for a libel suit. At the end of the article, the writer admitted that he failed to understand why the

[1] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 449–459. [Editor]

three authors of the destroyed manuscript had not taken the case to court. His explanation was very simple: Don Bosco had bought their silence.

A third bifrontal attack appeared in its columns a few days later in the May 9–10 issue. Both attacks were disguised, each in a different way. The first would not have identified its true target but for its title, *Matters at Bra*, or *A Pupil of Don Bosco*. This pupil was supposed to be a certain "Father P., parish priest at Bra"; the case in point was an extorted inheritance. But no former pupil of Don Bosco was a parish priest at Bra, unless a dastardly meaning was given to the word "pupil," namely a disciple and imitator in the art of extorting inheritances.

Seemingly the second attack was against Don Bosco, though it really was leveled at Archbishop Gastaldi. It rehashed the sensational item of Don Bosco's suspension *a divinis*, repeating its imaginary reasons and adding new vicious allegations. It again asserted that the reasons for this grave sanction were secret jealousy on the part of the archbishop and Don Bosco's ruthless competition in chasing after inheritances. At the bottom of it all was always evident the same malicious falsehood whose very enormity made it incredible to anyone acquainted with its victim. But Scripture says that calumny perturbs even a wise man, even though it may not always undermine the courage of his heart. *Calumnia conturbat sapientem et perdet robur cordis illius* [Oppression troubles the wise, and shall destroy the strength of his heart—Eccl. 7, 8]. A source of great affliction to Don Bosco was to see how this diabolical cunning sought to discredit him before the people among whom he exercised his apostolate.

Another humorous journal which enjoyed a wide circulation, and which we mentioned in the preceding volume, was *Il Fischietto* [*The Whistle*].[2] It resumed venting its spleen against Don Bosco and Archbishop Gastaldi in its May 2 issue, No. 62. A certain "Fra Giocondo," neither a friar nor a merry one, but a man imbued with Voltairian ideas and with a penchant for blasphemies, presumed to pontificate about the mysterious origins of "the well-known and long-standing friction between these two great men."

We shall spare our readers the utter nonsense regarding Don Bosco's suspension *a divinis* and insinuations similar to those

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 468f. [Editor]

already cited. But the article offered a new tidbit to its readers by claiming that Don Bosco was seriously thinking of leaving the banks of the Dora River and of establishing himself on the Ligurian Riviera. It had drawn this conclusion from the festivities held on May 18 at Sampierdarena, celebrating Don Bosco's return from Rome. In reporting this news, *Il Cittadino* [*The Citizen*] of Genoa mentioned "a manifestation of filial love, held with proper solemnity in a spacious hall of the new and beautiful building complex constructed as if by magic through the generous assistance of various benefactors." This paragraph of local news was embellished into a report that because of harassment in Turin Don Bosco was seeking a more peaceful environment in Liguria. Such a departure might have suited the enemies of the Church, who seemed to be united in undermining his reputation in order to force him to leave. But this was not in the designs of Divine Providence.

A press account about the inauguration of a new segment of the railway connecting Turin with Lanzo also annoyed Don Bosco by giving him more publicity than he desired. We must be aware of the politics of the time, characterized by the recent transfer of powers from conservatives to democrats. The party newspapers made this event at Lanzo their own, each portraying it in its own color. Yet the role of Don Bosco on this occasion was generally viewed favorably by the newspapers of both the right and the left, as well as by the so-called independents such as *Unità Cattolica*, which disavowed both right and left. The question of parliamentary orientation daily grew more urgent, for there was a rumor of forthcoming political elections. The unanimity of the press in presenting Don Bosco's action in a favorable light was an indication that even on that occasion he had been faithful to his great principle: "Politically I belong to no one." And yet, from this unanimous agreement, a discordant note was soon struck.

It is helpful first to read the praise given to him by *Unità Cattolica* on August 8:

> At the Salesian boarding school, a fine reception and refreshments had been prepared beneath the elegantly decorated porticos for the entire gathering. The pupils' brass band accompanied a delightful choral piece for the occasion, performed also by Salesian students, and drew tumultuous applause. The three cabinet ministers and the prefect of the province visited the school and expressed their heartfelt praise.

L'Emporio Popolare, also an advocate of Catholic principles, had this write-up on August 7:

I must state that Don Bosco's school was admired by all, and that the most fervent and sincere compliments came from the three cabinet ministers and the prefect of the province. One must say that it deserved them under every aspect, since it is a splendid and outstanding institution.

The *Nuova Torino* [*The New Turin*], an industrial journal and certainly not clerical, also wrote the same day:

We walked to Don Bosco's school, where this priest graciously received his guests and engaged at length in conversation with Ministers Nicòtera and Zanardelli.

Even *La Gazzetta del Popolo* wrote on August 7:

At the [Salesian] boarding school a fine reception, with white wine and vermouth in abundance, was prepared by the municipality. The students presented a delightful choral number to hearty applause.

Despite its briefness, by no means accidental, this slight notice was really considerable, in view of the anticlerical phobia of that Turin newspaper at the time.

The discordant note, mentioned earlier, had its origin in a government-sponsored newspaper of Rome, *Il Bersagliere*, whose profuse praise went beyond that expressed by other segments of the press. A sour note was struck in the August 9 issue in the following passage:

We finally entered the magnificent school of Don Bosco, the wonder-worker who manages to support nine thousand boys in his several institutes! The pupils greeted the ministers with applause and shouts. Don Bosco was present and shook hands with Zanardelli, Nicòtera and Depretis. Under the spacious colonnade facing a lovely chain of hills, Don Bosco had iced vermouth served. Excellent! The students sang, the all-boys brass band played, and squads of these youngsters performed military drills. To be for or against priests is not the issue. Here education is manly, and the boys grow up into citizens of sterling character. At a certain moment, Don Bosco becomes the main attraction and sits among Nicòtera, Zanardelli and Depretis. The most surprised of them all is the

Honorable Zanardelli, who cannot believe his own eyes. But it is so. This wonder-worker priest, who could be mistaken for a mere sexton, accompanies the premier as far as the town square. The two men shake hands and exchange compliments with bows and cordial words.

At this point politics reared its head to destroy harmony. A Roman dispatch for *Unità Cattolica*, written that same day [August 9] and published in the August 11 issue, stated:

> [Nicòtera] visited the northern provinces, known as the stronghold of the rightists, to deceive the simpletons by playing "saint" with Don Bosco and at the Cottolengo Institute, and the "monarchist" with Victor Emmanuel.
>
> One should read this morning's *Bersagliere*, the organ of the Neapolitan baron, to catch an echo of its owner's devotion. It describes him to us as he gets off the inaugural train at Lanzo to attend its blessing and then takes his place in the procession behind the crossbearer—he who only yesterday forbade all religious processions. Then he profusely pours out compliments on Don Bosco, the wonder-worker priest, and goes on in that vein in a manner which would upset even a strong stomach.

A week later an article appeared in the same newspaper, in which the writer, professing to be a "most affectionate son of Don Bosco," asserted that he was "greatly mortified at the poorly written tributes" lavished on him by the Roman newspaper. Therefore, fearing that others might be "unfavorably impressed regarding *his* most beloved benefactor," he declared that the article "inflated" things and contained "little that was accurate" and "much that was false." The writer then absolved Don Bosco of any possible charge of wasting money "on decorations and refreshments for the premier, the cabinet ministers and their party." He would have found a much better use for the "twelve thousand lire spent by the municipality for the famous *dèjeuner!*" The conclusion read: "Whether in his exquisite courtesy Don Bosco shook hands with the ministers, I cannot say, for I was not present. But if he did, it would be desirable that their Excellencies would match his courtesy by effectively helping him to give an ever growing number of boys a good education, which cannot be anything but manly because it is genuinely Catholic." So much for the ill-advised Roman dispatch.

No one can fail to see how untimely this unfortunate article was. Yet worse even than the article itself was the introduction by the paper's editor:

> We are very glad to publish the following letter, written to us by a Salesian, in regard to *Bersagliere's* eulogy of Don Bosco. On August 6 we would have wished Don Bosco one of those momentary indispositions which on similar occasions so conveniently affect diplomats, including papal nuncios.

The paper's editor-in-chief, Father [James] Margotti, was not in Turin at the time. Upon his return he immediately called on Don Bosco to apologize, declaring that he had known nothing prior to the publication of that article. Consequently, in the issue of August 23, he took the opportunity to insert the following item:

> *Unità Cattolica* always bears the greatest affection and veneration for Don Bosco, and is aware that in all his actions he is motivated solely by the glory of God, his love for the Church and the Pope, and his desire to win souls to Jesus Christ. We consider ourselves very privileged every time we can support his truly apostolic labors through our newspaper.

Among other things, it should be pointed out that although the unfortunate article was signed "A Salesian," it was apparently written by Father Joseph Persi who had been a guest of the Oratory but was not a Salesian. To conclude, we might add that shaking hands with cabinet ministers, as *Bersagliere* repeatedly stressed, got on the nerves of certain people.[3] But no law, human or divine, forbade what Don Bosco had done. After all, he was dealing with ministers of his legitimate sovereign; furthermore Zanardelli represented Prince Amadeus, who was to have come, but did not appear, because, as the opposition newspapers declared, he really was prevented by a diplomatic indisposition. Nor could one honestly say that there was anything antireligious about the event. Besides, how could Don Bosco refuse to host cabinet ministers without risking very grave harm? And having granted the request, could he fail to give the visitors a suitable reception? He

[3] For example, in the same issue of August 23, someone signing himself "A Roman Catholic" made this highly transparent allusion: "We don't care who shakes hands with Nicòtera, Depretis, and others. . . ." [Author]

would never have resorted to a diplomatic indisposition and thereby leave his young Salesians in the lurch by exposing them to an interview for which he alone had the wisdom to handle the unanticipated, embarrassing and compromising questions.

Don Bosco was very displeased with this rambling article, and he had good reason. Anyone who was unaware of how he always kept himself free of newspaper controversy might easily imagine that the journalist had followed his instructions and his views, whereas he had had nothing to do with the matter. Reaffirming his policy in regard to newspaper controversy, he declared: "This kind of reporting unavoidably perpetuates one's troubles by unfailingly alienating both sides. Utterly insignificant things are blown up to enormous proportions, and what should remain private is made known to the entire world."[4] On this occasion he deliberately chose to be overcautious. Therefore, to put an end to all gossip, he even forbade the publication of a poem written for the occasion by Father Lemoyne and set to music by Brother Dogliani. He explained that there had already been too much publicity on the Lanzo event and too many interpretations. Furthermore, it was unwise to feed the fire when it was dying out; printing the poem could support the false opinion that he had given the reception an official and political overtone.

Also the shameless *Secolo* of Milan was interested in Don Bosco that year. It was rumored that he planned to open a school on the picturesque slopes of Cassine, a municipality in the district of Alessandria. This annoyed an anonymous anticlerical who gave vent to his anger in the Milanese newspaper. But the people of Cassine became very indignant and responded in kind to the troublemaker by addressing a protest to the newspaper with a very long list of signatures. Then, wishing to give tangible expression of their sentiments toward Don Bosco, they sent him a manifesto of support signed by 1,184 people, with a covering letter from the local doctor. Don Bosco sent someone to inspect the building they had offered for sale, but two problems prevented the Salesians from going to Cassine. The area adjacent to the building was too small for playgrounds, and complications were foreseen in the purchase of the building which was to be converted into a school.

[4] Chronicle of Father Barberis, August 15, 1876. Under this date the chronicles combined two other incidents that took place later on. [Author]

Thus the plan was abandoned after an unproductive exchange of letters.

Nor did all approve of the Salesian foundations in the Roman suburbs. In the second half of October 1876, *La Libertà* and *La Capitale*, two liberal newspapers, published two letters from readers in Albano who were sounding a cry of alarm [about who was responsible for inviting the Salesians to Albano and Ariccia]. After 1870, the fashionable topic in Roman circles was to argue about "Whites" and "Blacks," as the two Roman aristocracies were characterized, according to whether they accepted or rejected the accomplished fact [of Rome's annexation by Italy].

At first Cardinal Di Pietro was displeased, but soon he realized that it was only a flash in the pan. Probably a word from on high had its effect, because the write-ups on Lanzo were still well remembered. Nor was it long before a friend's prediction came true: "The 'Blacks' will not say that you are 'White,' and the 'Whites' will not qualify humane and Christian charity as 'Black.'"[5]

[5] Letter to Don Bosco from Canon [Charles] Menghini, Rome, October 24, 1876. He meant that the ultra-conservatives would not accuse him of being a liberal, nor would the liberals accuse him of being ultra-conservative. [Author]

CHAPTER 20

October Through December 1876 at the Oratory

THE encouraging words of Don Bosco, drawn from manuscripts in our archives, will fill a goodly number of pages in this last chapter.

At the Oratory the school year generally began after All Saints' Day, but Don Bosco wanted the boys to be back a couple of weeks before that solemnity. All the new pupils and two-thirds of the old ones were present on the evening of October 20, when at the "Good Night" he exhorted them to put things right with their conscience.

I am glad to see you again, all healthy and in such large numbers, after a period of absence, although not all have arrived as yet. I commend those who came back punctually at the set time, and especially those who even anticipated their return. They were blessed with nice weather, while those who chose to delay by one day encountered bad weather, which to all appearances will continue.

Now what will be your first task at the Oratory?

Do you know what a traveler does as soon as he comes home from a journey? He first examines his clothing for any dirt, mud, or stains. Then with a brush he removes these stains one by one. If he happened to fall into a puddle, he has to have his clothing laundered. That is what you must do now after returning from your vacation. Examine your conscience to see if it is clean or stained. Should you find even a small spot, use the brush of confession immediately to remove it. If you find any big stain, then, for heaven's sake, remove that too!

It may be that during your vacation some of you have not stained yourselves at all, not even slightly. But tell me, is there anyone among you who can say: "During my vacation, I behaved better than when I am at the Oratory and made progress in virtue"? No, I have never heard anyone tell me that. Rather, very many regretted the time spent on vacation. One said: "Despite myself, a friend of mine persuaded me to eat meat on Friday." Others lamented: "A relative made me eat and drink more than

was good for me; some companions made me listen to indecent conversation; a neighbor got me to read a bad book, and he took me for a walk during which I saw some bad things." In short, the harm that some suffer during vacation is greater than can be imagined.

Now that you are back here again, try to purify your soul by a good confession and Holy Communion. Let us always keep ourselves ready to return to God at whatever moment He may wish to call us. Good night.

He spoke again two days later. Few classes were planned for that week, and he earnestly exhorted them to occupy their time well. He also expressed his heartfelt wish that they speak Italian rather than their dialect.

For the time being—he said—we cannot follow a regular timetable, because quite a few boys for justifiable reasons have not yet returned from vacation, but, starting tomorrow, we shall have a few classes so as to review the subjects you covered last year. A few industrious lads I came across have already done that on their own. That is a very smart thing to do, and they will gain the benefit during the school year.

We shall have a full schedule after the feast of All Saints, when everyone will be back. On that day we shall meet in church for the Exercise for a Happy Death, sing the *Veni Creator*, and close with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, as is our custom, so that the Lord may grant us a fruitful year.

Just now what I particularly recommend is that you do not waste time. At mid-year how many regret the time they wasted and the poor grades they receive! They would like to make it up by studying during recreation or by rising before the regular time, but these things are not allowed. All need their night rest and recreation period lest their health suffer. They would have no trouble if they set their minds to their work from the first day of school.

I recall that last year especially we had to be very alert day and night to keep students from overtaxing their strength by study. Be determined now to make good use of each day so as not to regret the loss of time. Even a single moment, remember, is infinitely precious, as St. Augustine says, because during that moment one can perform a good deed and thus deserve God and heaven.

Tomorrow we start the novena in honor of All Saints. Let each strive to make it well. I suggest two resolutions for this school year: first, avoid sin of any kind, and, second, shun all thoughts and words offensive to the holy virtue of modesty. May this latter resolution endure not only this year, but for years to come and always. Then, if during this novena you would like a practice or suitable nosegay which can serve for the entire

month or even for the whole year, I suggest this one: Don't say a single word in the Piedmontese dialect. You may think that this is a seemingly useless suggestion, but it will help you greatly in learning to speak proper Italian. So, away with dialect, and not a word of Piedmontese! Talk, play, work, eat, drink and sleep—but all in Italian. *(General laughter)* And if anyone starts to snore tonight, then let him snore in Italian. *(More laughter)* This nosegay does not call for any painful penance or sacrifice. All it requires is self-control. But if you feel that it is very difficult, the greater will be your heavenly reward. May the Lord bless you, and good night to all of you.

The novena of All Saints suggested the topic for the "Good Night" of October 27. He recalled the days of Dominic Savio, comparing them simply and effectively with their own time.

The novena of All Saints is in progress, but I still fail to see that you have become especially good. Not that there hasn't been any improvement at all, but I see no miracles happening. I recall how several boys, like Dominic Savio, Mickey Magone, Francis Besucco and others, made this novena with extraordinary devotion and fervor. One could not ask more of them. I do not mean that you are making it poorly; there are good boys among you, but the enthusiasm of former times is lacking. Then everybody was aflame. There were only sixty or seventy boys, but there were just as many receiving Holy Communion. What has caused this change? Could it be that Don Bosco no longer talks to his boys or can no longer make himself understood as in the past? Could it be that you do not understand him or no longer want to understand him, as those boys of old did? I do not wish to know now where the fault lies. What really matters is that you become good. There is still time. Have you ever seen a bunch of sticks stacked one on top of the other? If one catches fire, all in turn ignite each other. You can do the same. During this novena be an incentive for good to each other. A lighted match can set fire to a haystack and start a great bonfire. One of you with the will to become a saint could kindle the others by your good example and salutary advice. What if all of you were to make this effort? What a great blessing that would be!

Let everyone think of heaven, where some of you have brothers or sisters, friends or companions, superiors or subjects, a father or mother, who are enjoying the reward of their virtuous lives. They were flesh and blood, the same as you, and perhaps they were not shielded from danger as you are. Maybe it wasn't as easy for them, as it is for you, to practice their religion and go to confession. So if they became saints, why can't you?

What does it require? God's help and nothing else. And I assure you

that the Lord will help you. What do you lack? A small dose of good will. If you haven't got it, if you cannot arouse it by yourselves, ask the Lord for it. Ask insistently and He will grant it. Should your prayers be insufficient, turn to the saints, and especially to the Blessed Virgin. During this novena they are ready to help you in every way. Ask them to obtain for you an ardent and constant love of God, and the Lord will grant through the prayers of so many saints what your prayers were unable to obtain. Good night.

At the Oratory everybody knew what the Salesians were doing, and the boys took an active interest in them as becomes members of one family. Thus the departure of confreres for various destinations provided Don Bosco with the topic for the "Good Night" on October 29 and with the opportunity to introduce the subject of a vocation. He publicly hinted at a conference he planned to give to the Salesians, not only to inform them, but also to coax some upperclassmen to seek permission to be present.

A few hours ago some Salesians left for Rome. These are not the group destined for South America. They went to open a small boarding school in Albano, a little town near Rome at the foot of the hill on whose slopes Alba Longa once stood before and during the days of ancient Rome.

Next Sunday, a second little group will leave to open another small boarding school at Ariccia; from there some of them will go to Magliano to teach in the local seminary. Lastly, a group of three or four will leave at the end of this week or early next week to open a house at Trinità. Meanwhile we pray, as is our custom, for those who are on their way to Rome and likely will not be there until tomorrow at about two in the afternoon.

Since we are now making the novena of All Saints, we must not allow a day to pass without praying for those who are to go to South America. I ask our priests, too, to remember them during Holy Mass. This time our missionaries number twenty-four, but perhaps they will not all leave at the same time; the departure of the second group might take place a week or two later.

Now that the adult ones are leaving, the younger ones should grow, take their places and likewise become apostles. It would be nice if the bread rolls baked here[1] under the motherly protection of Mary, Help of

[1]The Oratory bakery was located in the basement of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. [Editor]

Christians would make each of you boys grow a meter taller every time you ate one and turn you all into adults. *(General laughter)*

Let us put our trust in Divine Providence, with whose help I hope you will gradually become good missionaries for the conversion of the whole world. Meanwhile I want to let all of you know that tomorrow evening, at about five-thirty, there will be a conference for the members of our Congregation.

Let us always stand firmly by the Lord who guides all our actions, and let us so behave ourselves that He will have nothing to reproach us for on the day He will come to judge all mankind.

Do not let a day go by during this novena of All Saints without asking some favor of God. Let us strive in particular to gain the plenary indulgences obtainable at this time. Let us not forget the souls in purgatory: the souls of those who once lived here with us, who played with us in the same playgrounds, who had our same teachers. Finally, those who have lost their parents or relatives should not be so unmindful as to forget them. Prayers offered for the souls in purgatory gain a twofold advantage: these poor souls are relieved of their sufferings, and we, in turn, will earn a great reward in heaven. Good night.

The conference announced for October 30 aimed at spiritually disposing the professed members, novices, and aspirants to start well the new school year. Two hundred and twenty-eight people gathered to hear their good father talk to them about vocation from half past five to seven in the evening. After assuring all present that God had indeed called them to the religious life, he discussed the danger of losing this signal gift by going home [for visits or vacations]. For some time now he had earnestly desired to eliminate such trips entirely, but he wished to do so by persuasion. Enough has been said elsewhere how cautiously he had to proceed to solidify the regularity of religious life among his sons. Detachment from the world, religious vows, and confidence in one's confessor were his main points on the theme of vocation.

During the spiritual retreats at Lanzo—he began—we discussed our Congregation, [the priestly and religious] vocation, and the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. I was very pleased with the outcome of the retreats, and so were also the preachers and retreatants. I was very gratified by their number and fruitful participation, and also by the fact that several made their vows and others are preparing to do so next year.

I am here now to solemnize the year—not the school year that will start

next Monday if not sooner, but "the Salesian year," a year memorable for the expansion of the Congregation in Italy, in Argentina, and in France at Nice. During this year we opened twenty-one new houses. Only yesterday some confreres left for Ariccia and Magliano near Rome, and possibly at this very moment they are at the feet of the Holy Father asking his apostolic benediction upon us. Others will leave shortly for Albano, which is also near Rome. Let us hope that this year will be just as fruitful as the one just completed.

However, to achieve great things, we must be faithful to our vocation. The first step requires that we forsake the world, as many of you have already done by putting on the clerical habit. This, in itself, symbolizes the renunciation of the world and its allurements. Many wish to enter the Congregation as lay members, but for all members the main objective is the salvation of their souls. This honest intention assures us that we are on the right path. Banish all doubts. As for all of you gathered here, were you to ask me if your vocation is to remain in the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, I believe that I can answer affirmatively.

Yes, all of you are called to the Salesian Congregation, to the priesthood and to the religious life.

I can assure you in God's name that all of those who made their profession were undoubtedly called. Before accepting them I made it a point to know them thoroughly, and by admitting them I proved beyond doubt that I was convinced of their worthiness for this great calling. Moreover, the superior is obliged under penalty of a grievous sin to reject any applicant whom he considers unfit.

What of those who are only novices or aspirants? I believe that I can say the same thing, and I can prove it. How? Holy Scripture says that the whole world is under the evil one and is enslaved by lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life. Now the Lord wants us to save ourselves, to think of eternity, and to love Him alone. Is not the world a great obstacle to this love? It certainly is.

Consequently, does one act rightly or wrongly by resolutely forsaking the world in order to give his attention to God? Undoubtedly he makes the right decision, just as you have done.

In conclusion, what does one do on entering the Congregation? He acts according to Our Lord's desire; he does God's will. The mere fact that God led us here and that we followed Him is a clear sign that He Himself opened to us this path of salvation. Feeling an inclination for the Salesian life is already a sign of vocation. Who instilled this feeling into us? "Every worthwhile gift, every genuine benefit," says St. James the apostle, "comes from above, descending from the Father of the heavenly luminaries." [Jas. 1, 17] Hence, your vocation comes from God.

What if something unexpected should lead one to decide otherwise? In

this case the same superior, noticing a weakening in the subject's vocation, is bound to alert him to it. I would be the first to tell such a one: You are not called to the religious life, and by remaining in it you are jeopardizing your eternal salvation. Then we would both work together to find a calling better suited to the achievement of his salvation. If necessary, I would solicitously help him to find a position outside the Congregation. But until such a sign becomes manifest, St. Thomas says, one should persevere in the state he has embraced. St. Paul, too, warns us to abide in the same calling in which we were called. [Cf. 1 Cor. 7, 20]

Many object: "In our Congregation we can't even go home and see our relatives and friends." Well, they are the very ones we must guard against as regards our vocation. St. Alphonsus used to say, "Parents are our soul's enemies." And even those who mean well will many times by their advice create the greatest difficulties for those wishing to dedicate themselves totally to God. "We have done so much for you," they lament. "It is only right that you help us now. And then, too, the Fourth Commandment says: 'Honor thy father and thy mother.' " In explaining the Gospel text about how "a man's enemies will be those of his own household" [Mt. 10, 36], St. Thomas [Aquinas] states that parents are incompetent in matters of vocation and turn into enemies. For the most part our relatives seek their own interests rather than those of Christ Jesus. [Cf. Phil. 2, 21] Their conversation is about worldly advantages, and their thoughts and desires are for worldly comforts.

A relative may visit a religious and say: "Why do you stay here? You could come home to your father and mother who are so fond of you. You can find a more rewarding job at home. Couldn't you do just as much good if you were a diocesan priest?" Similar remarks are also made by respected and well-meaning people, who, however, do not understand what a vocation is. But what of home? I, too, went home, remained there a day or two, did what I had to do, and then returned to the Oratory. "Why don't you stay a little longer?" my relatives asked. "Here too boys need a Christian upbringing." "My duty calls me back to the Oratory," I replied. "If there are boys here who need a Christian education, I will provide for them in some other way—through others, perhaps. But I have to be where the Lord placed me."

In such cases we must do as Our Divine Savior did when at the age of twelve He was temporarily lost by Mary, His mother, and Joseph, His foster father. Did they not love Him with all their heart? How anxiously they searched for Him! How much they wept for Him for three days until they found Him in the temple! "Why have You done this to us? You see that Your father and I have been searching for You in sorrow." And Jesus said to them: "Why did you search for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?" [Lk. 2, 48–49] Such should be our answer to

anyone trying to draw us away from the life and the place where God wishes us to be. "Do you not know that I must do the will of My Heavenly Father? Do you not know that I must think of matters that pertain to the greater glory of God and not of My father and My mother?" The Virgin Mary was silent, the Gospel says, at such a response, and She kept these words carefully in mind to meditate upon them.

One day when Jesus was preaching to a multitude of people, His mother and brethren—that is, cousins—came to speak with Him, but He gave them no attention. The Virgin Mary could not get near Him, and she sent word by someone. Then this individual tugged at His mantle and said: "Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside and wish to see You." [Lk. 8, 20] Extending His hands over the surrounding multitude, He exclaimed: "My mother and My brothers are those who hear the word of God and act upon it." [Lk. 8, 21] This statement most eloquently proves that those who wish to follow Jesus Christ must detach themselves from their parents.

To a few among you I could also say, "Why do you at times sigh for the life from which the Lord has mercifully rescued us?" Isn't it true, my dear sons, that here we are safeguarded from the occasions of sin that abound in the world? Let us therefore turn to the Oratory if our choice is a place far removed from sin. Here we no longer fall into the sins we committed in the past.

Let us then seek this safe place, far removed from bad companions. Here it's much easier to do good, to visit the Blessed Sacrament, to meditate and receive the sacraments. If we wish to save our soul by removing what could harm it, let us cling to our Congregation, a safe haven and a most suitable place for attaining our eternal happiness.

Naturally, we must be on guard lest we lose our vocation, by turning back from the path already taken. "Can a vocation be lost?" you will ask. It certainly can. A vocation is the precious pearl mentioned in the Gospel. A man goes in search of it, finds it, and in order to have it he sells all he possesses. If one owns a pearl or a diamond, he guards it jealously. If, instead, he should foolishly throw it into the sea or trample it underfoot or, unmindful of its minute size, drop it in the sand or loose soil or even throw it into a deep puddle to be lost in the mud, this brilliant, costly gem would be gone. No one would sympathize with a man who foolishly lost his treasure. We must, therefore, hold our vocation dear. The Fathers of the Church refer to it as the pearl hidden in the religious life, the pearl that belongs to the religious who carefully observes his rule. We would incur God's wrath if we were to show contempt for this most precious treasure and cast it away.

Then, too, we must love seclusion and be wary of exhibiting it to the world. We must keep it safely guarded or we shall lose it. If the owner of a

silver or gold coin of great value were to go into a public square and shout: "Look what I have!" some pickpocket would immediately try to snatch it away. But if he says nothing about it and carefully carries it with him, no one will be the wiser, and he will not risk losing his treasure. We should do the same; let us carefully guard our religious vocation lest the devil, who seeks only our ruin, be given a chance to make us lose it. Furthermore, let us not seek advice from those who might dissuade us from our vocation. At times we even ought to conceal it from our parents, if possible, especially when we must make a decision, because a man's enemies are those of his own household. But above all, we must not be worldly-minded and fond of sensible affections or family attachments.

Now I'll say a few words about the vow of poverty. Someone might say, "I would gladly remain in the Congregation if I had a better furnished room, if I had work more to my liking, and so on." Well, didn't we make the vow of poverty? Would one mind being poor as long as he lacked nothing? This would be a mockery. Some take pride in having taken the vow of poverty but fret at its consequences. For instance, wine may be watered down and not to one's liking, but if we really mean to be poor, we must accept some privation. A truly poor man would be content with poor quality wine. Let us not be the kind who love poverty only in word.

And what about the vow of obedience? I hear complaints such as this: "My superior cannot bear the sight of me. When he knows that I like something, he won't let me have it; contrariwise, he will deliberately order me to do something I dislike." Haven't we taken the vow of obedience? In taking this vow, we sacrificed our will to Our Lord, and therefore we ought to do whatever our superior may order. Do we like it? That's fine! Does it upset us because it's against our inclinations? So much the better! We acquire greater merit before God. But we should not obey with a sour face, as some people do. We ought to obey willingly and cheerfully, accepting our superiors' orders as coming from Our Lord Himself. Look, a good breakfast eaten in obedience is more meritorious than any mortification prompted by one's whim.

At times a superior may give an order and the confrere will carry it out only halfway. Later, when the superior finds things only half done, he sadly ponders all night what to do about it. With so many other things to look after, the poor director has to worry about this because a spoiled young religious took it into his head to do things his own way.

The third vow we took is that of chastity. What a beautiful virtue this is! I would like to speak to you for days on this topic, but obviously I lack the time. Would that all Salesians could preserve it free from even the slightest blemish! This is the loveliest, most resplendent and, at the same time, the most delicate of all virtues. It is so easy to lose if we do not use the means to preserve it. It is so easily tarnished if we do not safeguard it

as our superiors and the rules suggest. We must do our utmost to remain pure and holy in God's sight. Be on guard at the first hint of temptation, curb your feelings when you tend to be sentimental, avoid unbecoming words, and abhor friendships that are somewhat tender-hearted and books that unduly fire the imagination. Curb your senses. And if the devil, taking advantage of some idle moments, neglected safeguards, and imprudent acts committed by transgressing the rule, should assault us without warning, do not waver. Do not relinquish your treasure by saying: "Just once! I will do it only this once! It is so long now that I have been resisting! Later I shall make up for it!" "Deep calls unto deep," says Holy Scripture. [Ps. 41, 8]

What if someone allows the devil to overcome him? He should be careful not to take a fatal step by changing his confessor. I know of no other thing more harmful than this. Here it is not merely a question of absolution, but of spiritual direction. Any confessor can absolve you, but how can you expect one to direct you if you tell him only minor faults and conceal from him serious ones? How can he advise you about certain faults when, lacking further information, he may consider them trivial whereas they are the real cause of what you are concealing? What spiritual assistance can he give, what guidance can he offer, if, believing what you tell him, he understands as scrupulosity that which is consent and as carelessness that which is the consequence of something he does not know about? What would you say of a patient who discloses to his personal physician only minor ailments but conceals what really ails him? The doctor will prescribe a palliative, but it will not save the patient's life. The most effective remedy in such cases, the most powerful means to avoid falling into that sin, is to confess it to one's regular confessor.

In conclusion I urge all of you—boys, clerics and priests—not to let a single day pass without asking the Lord very earnestly, especially after Holy Communion or Holy Mass, for the grace of preserving this beautiful virtue. Always pray for it as for the greatest of favors. Ask for it very insistently while the Eucharistic Jesus is within you. I think I can say that, since the body of Jesus permeates our body and His blood mingles with our blood, nothing unbecoming can happen to us.

The "Good Night" on All Souls' Day deserves particular note. After announcing the resumption of regular classes, Don Bosco graphically presented the three fundamental principles of his educational system: avoidance of sin, frequent confession, and frequent Communion. It is a delight to observe the calm simplicity and the commanding language with which he stated his long-held views on the frequent reception of the sacraments—then a very ticklish subject.

I have some news for you. Tomorrow our regular schedule will begin. Some of you were already complaining about too much playtime, too many leisure walks, and too little study time. Well, tomorrow you will all be satisfied. But you will still have plenty of time to enjoy yourselves. You must constantly bear in mind that you are here to learn; therefore, study! I shall carry out my duties and you will carry out yours. So, commencing tomorrow, do your utmost to avoid idleness and sin if you really want to learn. If only you knew the value of time! Time is a treasure; wasting even a moment means losing part of this treasure. Therefore, let us immediately set about our work willingly, so that at the end of the year we need not grieve over wasted time.

You must also be convinced that true wisdom comes only from God. Keeping busy and making good use of time would be of no avail if you are burdened with sin. Since "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," we must put our conscience in order. In the study hall there used to be a poster with this inscription: "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins." [Wis. 1, 4] I do not know if it is still there; if it is not, I will ask Father Durando to put another one up.

Here I feel the need to repeat the advice I customarily give at the beginning of the year: *Frequent confession and frequent Communion.* As to the frequency of confession, I make no rules. The Fathers of the Church suggest once a week, or every two weeks, or once a month. St. Ambrose and St. Augustine agree on once a week. I leave it up to you; go to confession whenever your conscience bothers you. Some of you may go a week or ten days without committing a sin; others may go fifteen and even twenty days. However, still others may fall into sin within three or four days. Naturally these boys should go to confession more frequently, unless their sins are slight. The catechism teaches us to go to confession once a month or every two weeks. St. Philip Neri taught and recommended weekly confession. Such was also the practice of St. Aloysius. I suggest this: if you care but little for your soul, go once a month; if you want to save your soul but are not too eager about it, go every other week; if you want to aim at perfection, go every week. Do not go more often, unless your conscience bothers you.

As to the frequency of receiving Communion, I likewise do not wish to set rules. Instead I will tell you a short story. There was a man who usually went to St. Vincent de Paul for confession but became dissatisfied with him because he insisted that the man should go to Communion several times a week. Tired of hearing this, the man decided to go to another priest. He found one and told him, "I want you to know that I used to go to Father Vincent, but since he always ordered me to receive Communion nearly every day, I left him and came to seek your advice."

Perhaps unaware of the harm he was doing, the priest replied: "You are

right, my son. Why go so often to Communion? Once a week will be enough." Some time later he even counseled his penitent to go every other week in order to better prepare himself. Finally, continuing in this false spiritual direction, the priest told the man to receive only once a month. I do not know the reasons for this advice; perhaps the man kept committing the same sins or the priest thought that he was not making any spiritual progress. The poor fellow followed his confessor's advice. And what happened? Within a short time he discontinued going to Communion altogether, and only went to confession. Then he began to go to theatres, parties, dances, and other amusements, and soon enough he stopped going to confession and gave himself up to unbridled living.

After a while, though, feeling rather miserable and remorseful, he went back to St. Vincent and said: "I'm in very bad trouble, Father Vincent."

"Why did you not come to see me anymore, my son?" the saint asked.

"I became tired of frequent Communion, so I changed confessors. But I see that in abandoning Communion, I also gave up piety, became worse, and ended by abandoning confession. From now on I want to follow your advice and receive Holy Communion often."

He then made a good confession and again began leading a good life. Gradually he received Communion more frequently and once again became the pious man he had formerly been.

I recommend the same to you. Everyone needs Holy Communion. Those who are good need it in order to remain good, and those who are bad need it in order to become good. In this way you will acquire that true wisdom which comes from the Lord. Therefore, I repeat: avoid idleness and sin, and go frequently to confession and Communion. Good night.

At the beginning of every school year, wise educators sorrowfully find out that vacation time always claims victims—youngsters who have taken a bad turn because of bad companions or for other sinful reasons. To safeguard their other pupils from possible corruption and instill a healthy fear in the not-too-well-intentioned, these educators must necessarily overcome their own feelings and take drastic preventive measures. Such a course of action did not conflict with part of Don Bosco's system of education. During November, three upperclassmen were dismissed from the Oratory. (Incidentally, the whole class evinced disquieting symptoms.) The three culprits pleaded earnestly to be allowed to stay, but in vain. One boy from Palazzolo (near Brescia), after pleading with Don Bosco, threw himself at the feet of the kindly vice-director, Father Lazzero, with whom the final decision rested.

He earnestly begged to be allowed to remain even as a mere domestic, declaring that he was ready to do anything the superiors might wish. How many tears he shed! How many reasons he adduced to move the superior! Next, he pleaded with Father Bologna who was in charge of public relations with the pupils' parents. Convinced that the boy was sincerely repentant, the superiors allowed him to transfer to the Salesian school at Lanzo. Another boy from Trinità (Cuneo) did leave, but he returned a few days later with his parents. There was weeping and loud lamenting. His father, a well-educated man, was so distressed that he refused to take any food until his son was given another chance. Compassion for the poor man prevailed and the boy was sent to Borgo San Martino. The third pupil, from Busca (Cuneo), went home and from there wrote several letters to his superiors. In despair at receiving no answer, he returned to the Oratory with his parents. As a result, he was allowed to transfer to Alassio, but without any reduction in fees. The mitigation of a rule which was usually strictly applied was due to the special circumstances of these unfortunate upperclassmen.

Don Bosco never let himself be so totally absorbed by Oratory problems or other matters as to forget his other houses. In fact, on November 21 he visited the junior seminary at Borgo San Martino, where he attended the patronal feast of St. Charles, which had been postponed to November 23. On December 4 he visited the school at Lanzo, to which he returned on the eve of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Here he had a dream that Father Lazzero, after hearing it, described in his chronicle as "unlike any other." On December 12 Don Bosco went to Trinità to visit the newly opened house.

A letter in late November reveals his solicitude for the house at Vallecrosia.

Turin, November 29, 1876

My dear Father Cibrario:

I received your letter and that of Father Boido, and I am grateful to both of you for giving me the news as it is. This helps to guide me.

Father Rua will see to the sending of a teacher without delay. I am leaving for Liguria right after Christmas, and I will make an unhurried stay with you. Miss Letizia Lavagnino and her young sister may go to

Mornese at any time.[2] As regards finances, leave that to me and to Mr. Lavagnino. We will drink one of his choice bottles, and after that everything will be settled. Tell Monsignor Viale to ignite the fire [of enthusiasm] for his church; I will bring some wood.[3]

I am very sorry to hear of Bishop Biale's illness. This community is praying for him, and we hope that at his venerable age God may still spare him for us. My greetings to our sisters and to the Lavagninos. Impart to all a special blessing from the Holy Father. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Wherever possible, Don Bosco always tried to seek financial assistance for the various needs of the Oratory. His frequent trips made him keenly aware of the necessity to again obtain reduced railroad fares for himself and his boys. For this reason, therefore, he wrote to the Minister for Public Works and to the General Manager of Railways. [His request was granted for northern Italy.][4]

We now resume our account of events at the Oratory. Don Bosco personally wished to announce to the entire community the start of the novena in preparing for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. For the second time he mentioned Dominic Savio, but now he did so by expressing himself with notable fervor and recounting in greater detail an event to which he had briefly alluded in his biography. In Chapter 17 he had written:

Dominic's entire life may be said to have been a prolonged act of devotion to Our Lady. He never let go by an occasion of offering Her some sign of honor. When, in 1854, Pope Pius IX promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Dominic became very eager to give the Oratory a living and lasting memorial of the glorious title given by the Church to the queen of heaven.

"I would like to do something to honor Our Lady," he said, "But I must do it right away, or I won't have time."

Then the biographer went on to describe the Immaculate

[2] Miss Letizia was in Mornese as a postulant. Later, she and her younger sister Elvira transferred to Nizza Monferrato, respectively as postulant and resident student. The house of Vallecrosia was being generously helped by the Lavagnino family. [Author]

[3] A pun: *bosco* in the Italianized Piedmontese dialect means "wood." [Author]

[4] We are omitting these routine letters. [Editor]

Conception Sodality which Savio had conceived and brought into reality. It was to the same feast that Don Bosco referred in Chapter 8.

Dominic Savio was among those most eager to make the feast a holy celebration. On each of nine slips he wrote a resolution or act of virtue, and on each day of the novena he drew one of these to practice. Then, with careful preparation, he joyfully made a general confession of his life and very prayerfully received Holy Communion.

This is how Don Bosco spoke on the evening of November 28:

Tomorrow we begin the novena to the Immaculate Conception, and I would like all to put their best possible effort into it. Every morning and evening you will hear the words sung, "Praised be the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God." It is a prayer of the faithful in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, to glorify Her Immaculate Conception, the Church has instituted a special feast whose novena we will begin tomorrow and, God willing, complete, not without receiving some extraordinary favors.

I can still recall, as though it were today, the cheerful, angel-like face of Dominic Savio. How obliging, how good he was! The day before the Immaculate Conception novena began, he came to see me, and we had a conversation which is given only in summary form in his biography. Many of you have read it, and others can do so if they wish. It was a lengthy conversation.

"I know that Our Lady grants big favors to those who make Her novenas well," he began telling me.

"What would you like to do for Her during this novena?" I asked him.

"Many things."

"What are they?"

"First, I want to make a general confession of my whole life to prepare my soul. Then I intend to carry out perfectly the daily nosegays given each evening during the novena. Third, during the novena my conduct will be such that I can receive Holy Communion every day." Then he stopped short, as though he had more to say.

"Nothing else?" I prompted.

"Yes, there is something else."

"And what is it?"

"I want to fight a war to the death against mortal sin."

"Anything more?"

"I want to pray ever so much to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to Our

Lord that they will let me die sooner than allow me to fall into even a venial sin against modesty."

Then he gave me a note on which he had written: "I wish first of all to make a general confession and then to ask the Immaculate Virgin to keep me spotless so that I can receive Holy Communion every day, and to make me die rather than let me fall into mortal sin." With the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary he kept those promises. My dear sons, he was your own age, flesh and blood like you; he had the same bad inclinations we all have, he lived where we live and was brought up in this very Oratory, he studied in the same rooms where you study and have class, he slept in your dormitories, he ate the same food you eat—only, of course, he was a little better than the rest of us and left us a good example.

In saying this I don't mean that you should all make a general confession. No, not that. But if anyone has such a need, if he remembers any special sin of the past which he has not confessed, I urge him to go to confession. If it was a serious sin, then he must begin his confession from his last good one and tell all the sins, confessed or not, that he has committed. Some complain that they are always confessing the same acts of disobedience, the same badly checked anger, the same waste of time, the same bad thoughts not immediately put away, the same silly things and remarks—in short, a cycle of confession and sin, sin and confession. Let such a boy consider the way he has lived since his last confession. Has he done any better? The tree is known by its fruit. If he sees that he has made some progress, then he should continue to go forward in virtue, but if not, then he should realize that confessions which have been fruitless were not good, and that it is his fault. Let him endeavor to do better, with a good examination of conscience. Let him make a general confession and then make every effort to do better in the future.

Still, it would be a good thing for many, if not all of you, to make a general confession. Here I could have a lot to say about how you should prepare for it and how you should make it, but usually I sum things up this way: "See yourself at the last moment of life, and tell me what you would do. Think of all the sins you have committed as though you were just about to account to God for all you have done, and then go ahead and make your confession."

I am convinced that most of you do everything properly, but I would like to insist with a few that they apply themselves with every possible effort to make truly good confessions.

In closing, here are the only two things I suggest for this novena: a good confession and daily Communion—if not sacramental, at least spiritual, that is, a lively desire to receive Jesus in your heart. Good night.

He reserved the evening of December 3 for a "Good Night" to

the artisans and again recalled Dominic Savio. The words he used to inspire them to make a good novena must have borne fruit, for in his private little chronicle, under the dateline of December 8, Father Lazzero wrote: "Don Bosco showed himself greatly pleased with the artisans. A visit he paid them during the novena helped very much." Don Bosco spoke thus:

Now you can no longer complain that I don't drop in to see you. You think that I speak to the students every evening, but I don't. I've spoken to them only twice since August. I have another excuse, too. The bell for your evening prayers rings while we are still having supper, and I cannot make it over here on time. Besides, you have Father Rua and Father Branda who have all sorts of things to tell you.

However, if I don't come here to see you, you can come to see me. The students know that they can find me in the sacristy, and I am very happy to have some artisans come too. But in this matter the students have it all over you. Well, here's your chance to even up the score: "Don Bosco won't come to see us? We'll go to see him!"

There is something else I want to tell you. We are making the novena of the Immaculate Conception, and I will say to you what I have already told the students on the first day of the novena, namely, that by the time this feast is over they must all put things right with their souls. If anyone of you is worried about his soul, if there is something to be put right, he should not let this feast of the Immaculate Conception go by in vain, lest he put his soul in danger of being damned. I do not mean that all of you are to make a general confession. No, not that. In fact, if one has already done so, he need not repeat it. But let each one of you make the confession which he needs. One who keeps telling the priest the same sins over and over again would need a general confession. For instance: someone confesses to a lie and then keeps telling lies; someone else accuses himself of misbehaving in church or of being disobedient or disrespectful to superiors, or of indulging in bad conversation, jokes and comments, or of having bad habits. Have all his confessions been good? I say with the Gospel: "By their fruits you shall know them." If confessions bear no fruit, we have good reason to believe that while they may not have been sacrilegious, they were at least useless. So you will have to search your heart well to determine the reason: perhaps it was a poor examination of conscience, or lack of sorrow, or something else. Then, after making a good confession, sever all ties that might keep you bound to the devil.

There is another case that calls for a general confession, and that is when one may have had the misfortune of knowingly keeping back a

mortal sin and constantly neglects to confess it at the next occasion. Easter, Christmas, other feast days and even entire years go by in a continued series of bad confessions. I am not saying that this is true of any of you, but should it be so, let such a one not allow this feast day to pass without putting his conscience in order and thus avoiding the risk of eternal damnation. Let him confess the sin he has concealed, repeating all subsequent confessions, and turn over a new leaf.

Dominic Savio came to me the evening before the novena of the Immaculate Conception and said to me, "I want to make this novena well."

"I will be happy if you do so," I answered.

"What should I do?"

"Perform all your practices of piety well."

"Of course, but I would like to do more," Savio said.

"Receive Holy Communion more often."

"I hope to do that too, and with God's help I will receive every day, but I'd like to do more still."

"What, for example?"

"I want to make a general confession and renew the promise which I have repeatedly made to Our Lady of withholding every glance and haboring not even the remotest thought that may offend the virtue of purity."

Dominic Savio was exemplary in everything, but in this matter he was superb. He made a general confession to the great edification of all who saw him.

You too, now, following Dominic Savio's example, should do your very best in this novena. Does this mean that you must all make a general confession? No. As I said before, I do not want this, but if anyone happens to need it, he should not let the opportunity of this beautiful feast pass by. Should he be unable to put his conscience in order by the feast of the Immaculate Conception, let him do so on a subsequent day up until Sunday, for I will always be on hand to listen to him in the sacristy. But for heaven's sake, let no one dissuade anybody from going to confession!

Another thing I want to tell you is this: be good to one another, love each other, help each other and give each other good example and advice. But never—I say, never—let there be any friendship which only too often leads to mutual scandal, obscene conversation, and the ruin of each other's soul. Such is the friendship of those who come together for some evil purpose, such as stealing. In fact, I understand that this has been going on now for some time, to my great sorrow. There has been pilfering in the orchard, the dining room, and the kitchen. Even the infirmarian has to keep a careful eye on the supplies he needs in his care of the sick. Towels and shirts were stolen and sold. Are we living in a den of thieves?

Some boys have already been dismissed from the Oratory on account of this. It is not that I mistrust any of you. I am saying this to warn you and to discourage anyone who might be so tempted.

Just one more thing. You always keep saying that you love Don Bosco, but does your conduct show it? If you are asked "Do you love Don Bosco?" you instantly reply, "Of course!" But is this what Don Bosco wants? Not at all! Only those who cooperate with him in striving to save their own souls are Don Bosco's real friends—these and these alone! If Don Bosco works so hard to save *your* souls—*your* souls, I repeat—you too should make every effort to cooperate with him. After all it's *your own* souls that are at stake, even though Don Bosco must answer for them to the Lord. On my part, I shall always pray to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary that they may guide all of you to heaven. Good night.

After the feast of Immaculate Conception, a minor change in the house gave Don Bosco the opportunity of having his beloved words heard again. Because of their large number, the novices were assigned a more spacious study hall, and a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin was enshrined in it. A brief assembly was prepared by the novices for the hall's dedication and the blessing of the statue, and Don Bosco was invited to attend. Don Bosco was so delighted that he invited all the resident Salesians to meet with him there for a general conference. So, on Sunday evening, December 10, some two hundred people gathered in the novitiate study hall before Our Lady's statue, beautifully enshrined under a pretty canopy and surrounded by candles and flowers. It was the first little festivity that the novices had organized on their own initiative, and their joy was reflected in their faces. Don Bosco entered the room, a prayer was said to the Holy Spirit, and the choir sang a suitable hymn. Then, vested in surplice and stole, Don Bosco blessed the statue with the ritual prayers and, sitting beside the little altar surmounted by the statue of the Blessed Virgin, addressed the group.

We all understand that I have not blessed the Madonna Herself but only an image of Her. We also know that our reverence for this statue is directed to the Virgin Mary. Some people, especially Protestants, misjudge us and, quoting the Holy Bible: *"You shalt not create any graven image or likeness,"* accuse us of idolatry. But we know better.

We abide by the command, *"You shall adore but one God alone."* This

excludes all others. Since this is our premise, what further objections can the Protestants raise?

How are we to interpret that verse of Holy Scripture? Very simply! You shall not make any statue, any likeness of animals or anything, in order to adore it. That is the point: adoration, which does not mean veneration or reverence.

Adoration, or *latria* in Greek, means supreme worship, supreme service, given to God alone.

Contrariwise, the respect shown to the saints—*dulia* in Greek—is mere reverence and homage; it is not adoration, because we know that the saints were people like us, and we, too, can become saints.

The cult of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and queen of heaven, the most exalted of all creatures, on the other hand, is termed *hyperdulia* in Greek, and it means a higher form of veneration. *Latria* or adoration is reserved to God alone. If we ever loosely use the word adoration in reference to an angel, we do not mean this literally but only as indicating homage, veneration, but never real *adoration.*

We can rebut Protestants through their own Bible. For instance, what stood at the right and at the left of the very sanctuary of the Lord in the temple? Two cherubs! Who put them there? The idolators? Was it not Solomon himself who did so at the order of the Lord Himself? So, then, if God Himself ordered this, it in no way conflicts with His will. Protestants are embarrassed by such arguments and have nothing to say in answer except, "We never noticed that." Furthermore, as St. Paul says, images are necessary for people, because they rely upon material things to strengthen their faith. Man cannot long endure in an abstract faith, without symbols or images. The Christian always says, "See, the Blessed Virgin! See, such-and-such a saint!" He is not speaking of mere wood and plaster as being really the Blessed Virgin or the saints; they are just reminders of whom they represent.

Now let us come to our little celebration. I am very satisfied with it and would like many others like it to be held elsewhere.

What are we to learn from this blessing of the statue and the prayers we have said?

There are so many things I would like to tell you about Mary's special protection for us and for our houses! We can be positive that She watches over us and asks us to follow Her example. She asks us to respond to Her care and go with Her along Her glorious way, strewn with lilies. And what advantage shall we gain by keeping ourselves under Her protection? If we do so in *words* only, She will not number us among Her sons, but if indeed we are truly devoted to Her, we cannot doubt that we shall go to heaven and be happy with Her for all eternity.

In these corrupt times Our Lord made us understand that the Blessed

Sacrament is truly His body, that the Virgin Mary is queen of heaven, His own Immaculate Mother, and that through Him She is all-powerful. It is thanks to Her that our Congregation exists and prospers. I therefore plead with you to urge all first to adore Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and then to reverence the Blessed Virgin Mary. Promote this devotion. It will do an immense amount of good. In regard to one's vocation, the Virgin Mary is a firm support. One who can accomplish very little by himself will, with Mary's aid, achieve much. Without citing specific examples, I have known shaky and even totally mistaken vocations—a great misfortune, indeed—yet through Mary's intercession, they were completely straightened out.

Just one instance. Not very long ago, a man bound by holy orders for four years was living a dissolute life, poised on the very brink of hell. He came to me and opened up. I asked, "Tell me honestly: do you have devotion to Mary?"

"To tell the truth," he answered, "I have never given it any serious thought."

"Well, then, say three Hail Marys each morning and evening. Often, but especially when tempted, say 'Mary, Help of Christians, pray for me.'"

He promised to do so and went his way. Some years later we happened to meet again. He was very glad to see me and assured me that from the day he had opened his heart to me, he had always enjoyed peace of soul. "You gave me the right remedy," he said. "Always promote devotion to Our Lady. Especially to young souls setting out in God's service, recommend that they entrust themselves to Our Lady's protection."

Indeed, with Mary's help, one can obtain whatever favor he needs. By grace She is all-powerful and we are to invoke Her at every moment, for She will give us the strength we need to overcome all our spiritual enemies.

I hope that you will all revere this statue and refrain from any jest, conversation or reading that may displease Our Heavenly Mother and Her Divine Son. For the Most Holy Virgin will then grant you favors and blessings. I wish you this with all my heart.

I also ask you now to plead with the Blessed Virgin to help Don Bosco, who has so much to do and must answer to the Lord for your souls and his. I hope that we shall be devoted to Mary throughout life and that we shall all die a holy death so as to rejoice with Her forever in heaven.

After this homily Don Bosco set aside his vestments and sat with the superiors before the improvised altar to enjoy the assembly. Present also was the Conceptionist Brother who was to return to

Rome the next day. The hymn was sung again and followed by recitations in prose and poetry in Latin, Italian, French and German. A group of clerics chanted the Hail Mary in Chinese, having been taught by a former student of the apostolic schools of Turin. Before leaving the study hall, Don Bosco carefully looked over the new study hall, and with his observant eye he noticed that the gas jets had not been properly spaced. He directed that they should be rearranged for a better lighting of the room.

It was customary to give weekly conduct marks also to the novices. From the outset of the year Don Bosco had requested that they be brought to his room for his examination. The practice was resumed a week after the ceremony described above. Not all the marks were satisfactory. With a simple word or two Don Bosco personally cautioned those who had failed to obtain an excellent grade. "Look," he advised, after hearing confessions, "you got a bad conduct mark for this or that reason. Try to improve." The impression this made was extraordinary. The young men thus admonished ran in tears to their novice master, Father Barberis, to seek a detailed explanation.

The clerics' philosophy classes during the school year 1875-76 had left much to be desired,[5] and so, in choosing a new professor, Don Bosco looked to the youthful theologian, Father Augustine Richelmy, the future cardinal archbishop of Turin, who was very fond of him from childhood. Since he did not receive a favorable answer to his request, Don Bosco asked him if he would at least preach the Sunday homily to the boys of the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory, which had lost the services of Father Guanella. In his letter to Richelmy he alluded to the size of the church to forestall any objections because of the priest's weak voice.

[No date]

My dear Father Richelmy:

Since I cannot have you for our philosophy classes, would you at least help me in preaching at the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory? The church is not very big. A short catechetical homily, even a simple story rounded out with a moral, will do.

Father Durando will give you details. Pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

[5] *See* Vol. IX, pp. 270f. [Editor]

Don Bosco still kept thinking of the dream he had had while at Lanzo. He had promised to narrate it, but not immediately, because he still felt too distressed about it However, the effects of the dream's revelations resulted in immediate action. When Don Bosco realized what was going on among the Oratory boys and who were the ringleaders, he immediately summoned them to his room. They were two: an artisan and a student, both of whom, Don Bosco said, were real demons.

First he called in the artisan. "Look," he said, "I must tell you something. Do not interrupt me. When I'm through, just say yes or no. You have not been to confession for the past six months. After your last confession you did this and that, at such a time and such a place, with so-and-so." He went on in this vein for ten minutes without a break. "Now," he concluded, "is this true or false?" "It's true," the boy answered, thoroughly frightened. He remained silent for a tense moment and then added, "It's all true. I am totally guilty. If you can forgive me and let me stay, you may be sure that you will see a radical change in me; if you decide to expel me, I can't complain." Don Bosco said not a word. The boy fell silent too. Then, bursting into tears, he fell to his knees before Don Bosco, pleading, "Please forgive me! I really needed a shock like this. Yes, I have been away from God all this time. If you send me home, let me at least first straighten out my conscience. Don't send me away like this. . . ." "Please," he sobbingly added, "have mercy on me! Give me another chance and you will see that I will undo the harm I have done!"

"When you began to speak," Don Bosco answered, "and I saw that you were only admitting your guilt and promising to do better, ready either to stay or leave, I was afraid that this was a trick of the devil and that you would not keep your word. But now that I see that you want to put your soul in order and repair the harm by your good conduct, I am willing to give you another chance. For now you may stay."

Then it was the student's turn. "From such and such a day," Don Bosco told him, "you have done a lot of harm in this house. The only chance you have to obtain my pardon is to tell me in every detail all that you have done. Keep nothing from me."

The culprit admitted his misdeeds, but only in part, omitting several of the more serious faults he was guilty of. Don Bosco prompted him with a few comments, but when the boy kept lying

to excuse himself, he cut the interview short, dismissed him, and sent a note to Father Lazzero instructing him to send the boy home the next morning.

Many others were summoned quietly to Don Bosco's room. How much good was done by this dream's revelations! At times the unexpected shock would radically transform a youngster then and there. The entire community itself, knowing that the superior's gaze could penetrate their inmost secrets, was wondrously kept in check.

These initial warning signs made nearly everyone anticipate that Don Bosco would soon have something extraordinary to tell them, and on the evening of December 20, when he appeared to give the "Good Night," they thought that the moment had come. But no, he still refrained. However, he did speak at great length. First, formally but somewhat facetiously, he introduced Father Lazzero as vice-director of the Oratory, an office formerly held by Father Rua but recently filled by Father Lazzero. He then announced the establishment of a new office, that of Director of Education for Salesian schools in the person of Durando, the Oratory principal, whose duties were being taken over by Father Guidazio. Don Bosco closed with a fervent exhortation to the boys to be good always and avoid sin. He spoke as follows:

I have many important things to tell you this evening. First, I should narrate to you a marvelous dream, but I will do that tomorrow evening so as not to prolong things tonight, and I shall arrange for the artisans to be present too. Now here are some things which are not dreams, but cold facts.

There is a slight change in the administration of the house. Right now Don Bosco is liquidated, and so is Father Rua; Father Lazzero will follow suit, and, in due time, we shall all be liquidated. Until now, the next in command after the Superior General, the one who handled the more important affairs of the house, was Father Rua. But now he has to absent himself too often and can no longer look after everything. For this reason, he is yielding his office to Father Lazzero. Very often people come to see Father Rua and he is out, or an emergency arises and he is nowhere to be found, or some of you would like to speak to him and do not have the opportunity. Now Father Lazzero will be here most of the time and so will be able to look after the Oratory's needs. In conclusion, Father Rua, who is so good, will have other cares to attend to, and Father Lazzero, who is even better, will take his place as director, as he has practically

been doing already. So now it becomes official and everybody knows it. If anyone, therefore, needs anything, he can go to Father Lazzero and find him home and be able to talk with him freely.

Another change has been made concerning the running of the schools here at the Oratory. Father Guidazio, who is now in better health, cannot as yet carry a full teaching load, but he is strong enough to supervise not just one, but all the various schools of the Oratory, because supervising is less fatiguing than teaching. Hence, anxious to continue helping you, he will have the position of a superintendent, i.e., director of all the Oratory schools. Father Durando held this position up to now; he is indeed a very virtuous priest but cannot as yet manage to be here in Turin while he is at Lanzo or be at Sampierdarena and Alassio while he is here. Therefore he will supervise all the schools of our Congregation, both because he is known to outside authorities and because we now have someone at the Oratory who can take over his former work. Anyone needing school certificates should apply to him. In conclusion, Father Guidazio will now be in charge of the running of the Oratory schools and also of the clerical students, except the novices who are under the direction of Father Barberis. I don't want anyone intruding on other people's domains.

It is my wish that these men be superiors not just in name but in deed. Everyone, therefore, is to obey and respect them as real superiors. They in turn will take care to exercise their duties diligently. If there is any breach of discipline in the schools or some other infraction, I shall ask not Father Rua or Father Durando to account for it, but Father Lazzero and Father Guidazio. When anything goes amiss at the Oratory or when I see that things are not faring well, I shall go after Father Lazzero and scold him properly until he puts it right. They are the ones who must answer for everything regarding either the boys or the clerics, and not they alone; the other superiors and their charges are also obliged to answer for any impropriety which may occur so that it can be remedied.

And now, my dear boys, let's come to something closer to you. Regardless of how much good we try to do, some mischief will always occur. I know that many of you are genuine models of St. Aloysius, But I also know that many of you are not as yet behaving as they should. Just yesterday, as you know, to our regret we had to dismiss some boys. It will grieve parents to see their son returning home and know that he is not welcome either here or anywhere else, because, once it is known why he was dismissed from the Oratory, no other school will accept him. Recall how God punished that wretch who was the first to sin against the Sixth Commandment. You can find it in the Holy Bible. Therefore, let each one of you be particularly careful in matters of immodesty in deed and word. This is the vice which most harms youth.

Even the wicked esteem goodness, though they may not practice it.

There are fathers, you know, who realize how bad they are deep at heart, but they want their children to remain good, or, if they are not yet good, to become so, and are glad that they are receiving a religious training. There are fathers who are drunkards, but woe betide if their son dare to set foot in a tavern! A parent may well be a gambler, staking all he owns and even what is not his, but it will go hard with any son of his who is caught gambling! A man may be foul-mouthed, but heaven help anyone who will utter indecent words in the presence of his children! Why? Because they know the evil consequences of such bad habits. Just to cite an example, I recall a man somewhat advanced in years, highly respected but not religious, who called on me only a few days ago. "Make sure that my son attends your religious services, that he hears Mass and goes to confession and Communion, that he prepares himself for confirmation, and that he behaves well."

"Do you consider these things important?" I asked.

"I certainly do!"

"And do you act accordingly?"

"Well, now," he replied, "it's true that I'm bad and not much of a credit to myself, but that's the very reason I don't want my son to be like me."

"If you are so anxious to have your son receive a religious education," I countered, "wouldn't you want to become religious yourself?"

"Impossible," he answered, "at least for now! At my age? Besides, it's not so easy for me in my village. I've lived this way for so many years and can't make up my mind to change. Who knows? I may yet put my soul in order when I get sick."

"Don't bank on that," I retorted. "A lot of people drop dead in the street or while they are eating and laughing. A sudden accident hurls them into the next world. Supposing something like that were to happen to you?"

"Well, patience! What can I do?"

"Patience? Do? How will you manage to suffer for all eternity in hell when just now you cannot even bear a slight effort to straighten out your soul's affairs?"

He fell silent, and so did I. A moment later he said to his friend (they had come together): "Wait for me outside in the hall for a moment. I have to talk with Don Bosco alone, just the two of us."

When we were alone, he began, "Do you know that I was on the verge of tears just now? You recalled to my mind the peace which I enjoyed as a child, when I went to confession and carried out my devotions. Show me how to put things right with my conscience, and I promise that I will do so. I want to return to God."

"If that is all you want, an instant solution is at hand: make a good confession and a good Holy Communion."

"I've tried that many times already but at long intervals: Christmas to Easter, Easter to Pentecost, and so on."

"Well, if you wish, you may come here. If you can't come to the Oratory, stay a day or two in Turin and go to Our Lady of Consolation, where there are excellent confessors, or to St. Philip's Church or to the monastery. They will help you settle your account with God, and you will have the opportunity to do everything else well."

"Yes, I really want to put my conscience in order. I want the octave of the feast of the Immaculate Conception to be a day to remember in my family. I will write to you from home, and you can then tell my son here at school that his father is once more a Christian like him. But don't tell him right away, because I am not one yet."

With God's grace he kept his word and was able to be again a good Christian.

I wanted to tell you this episode so that you may see how hard it is to break a bad habit which has taken root in one's youth, how parents want their children to be trained to be good even when they themselves may sometimes be bad, and how upset they become to have a son dismissed from school. But the worst thing is not the grief of the boys' parents nor of their superiors, but the offense done to God. Often enough wrongdoings can be hidden from superiors. "Don Bosco is over there with the other superiors," one may say, "and we are here in this cubbyhole and we can get away with it." In God's sight too? Oh, no!

At the Oratory we tolerate pranks, childish capers and annoyances, but never an offense against God. One of you may shove a companion or answer back or neglect his work; if we see that you are sorry, we forget the whole thing. But when it is a matter of offending God, of leading others into sin, then the evil done is such that the limb must be amputated lest the gangrene spread. Avoid causing such deep grief to your superiors, and such offense to God!

My dear sons, pray! During this lovely Christmas novena think seriously about becoming holy. For tomorrow's nosegay, tell the Infant Jesus from your very hearts, "I promise to love You and serve You with all my heart by striving for purity in my glances and my speech." Good night.

Finally came the evening of December 22, a date that made history at the Oratory. Night prayers were said earlier than usual, and then the artisans and the rest of the community joined the students. Don Bosco had promised to speak the night before, but he had been unable to keep his word, so one can imagine the overall feeling of expectation. He stepped up to the platform and, as

usual when he came to give the "Good Night" to the entire community, was greeted by enthusiastic applause. As soon as he began to speak a profound silence fell.

When I feel asleep the first night I was at Lanzo, I had a dream which is totally different from all the previous ones. I did narrate a dream somewhat like this during the spiritual retreat, but since you were not all present and this is quite different, I have decided to recount it to you. It is quite strange. However, as you know, I bare my very heart to my sons and keep no secrets from them. So give this dream whatever consideration you wish, but because St. Paul says: "Test everything; retain what is good [1 Thess. 5, 21], if you should happen to find something in this dream that is beneficial to your soul, make good use of it. Those who do not want to believe it don't have to, but let no one ever hold up to ridicule what I am about to say. Furthermore, I ask you not to tell any outsider and not to write home about it. Dreams are to be given the importance they deserve. Those who do not know how close we are to each other might well misjudge the whole thing. They do not realize that you are my children and that I tell you everything I know, and even, sometimes, things I don't know. (*General laughter*) Whatever a father tells his beloved sons for their own good should stay between them and go no further. There is another reason, too. If the dream were to be told to outsiders, more often than not the facts could be twisted or presented out of context. This could be harmful and lead people to regard as worthless what, instead, is important.

As you know, dreams come in one's sleep. So during the night hours of December 6, while I was in my room—whether reading or pacing back and forth or resting in bed, I am not sure—I began dreaming.

It suddenly seemed to me that I was standing on a small mound or hillock, on the rim of a broad plain so far-reaching that the eye could not compass its boundaries lost in vastness. All was blue, blue as the calmest sea, though what I saw was not water. It resembled a highly polished, sparkling sea of glass. Stretching out beneath, behind and on either side of me was an expanse of what looked like a seashore.

Broad imposing avenues divided the plain into grand gardens of indescribable beauty, each broken up by thickets, lawns, and flower beds of varied shapes and colors. None of the plants we know could ever give you an idea of those flowers, although there was a resemblance of sorts. The very grass, the flowers, the trees, the fruit—all were of singular and magnificent beauty. Leaves were of gold, trunks and boughs were of diamonds, and every tiny detail was in keeping with this wealth. The various kinds of plants were beyond counting. Each species and each single plant sparkled with a brilliance of its own. Scattered throughout

those gardens and spread over the entire plain I could see countless buildings whose architecture, magnificence, harmony, grandeur and size were so unique that one could say all the treasures of earth could not suffice to build a single one. *If only my boys had one such house,* I said to myself, *how they would love it, how happy they would be, and how much they would enjoy being there!* Thus ran my thoughts as I gazed upon the exterior of those buildings, but how much greater must their inner splendor have been!

As I stood there basking in the splendor of those gardens, I suddenly heard music most sweet—so delightful and enchanting a melody that I could never adequately describe it. Compared with it, the compositions of Father Cagliero and Brother Dogliani are hardly music at all. A hundred thousand instruments played, each with its own sound, uniquely different from all others, and every possible sound set the air alive with its resonant waves. Blended with them were the songs of choristers.

In those gardens I looked upon a multitude of people enjoying themselves happily, some singing, others playing, but every voice, every note, had the effect of a thousand different instruments playing together. At one and the same time, if you can imagine such a thing, one could hear all the notes of the chromatic scale, from the deepest to the highest, yet all in perfect harmony. Ah yes, we have nothing on earth to compare with that symphony.

One could tell from the expressions of those happy faces that the singers not only took the deepest pleasure in singing, but also received vast joy in listening to the others. The more they sang, the more pressing became their desire to sing. The more they listened, the more vibrant became their yearning to hear more. And this was their song: *Salus, honor, gloria Deo Patri Omnipotenti . . . Auctor saeculi, qui erat, qui venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos in saecula saeculorum* [Salvation, honor and glory to Almighty God the Father . . . the Creator who was, who is and who will come to judge the living and the dead forever and ever].

As I listened enthralled to that heavenly choir I saw an endless multitude of boys approaching me. Many I recognized as having been at the Oratory and in our other schools, but by far the majority of them were total strangers to me. Their endless ranks drew closer, headed by Dominic Savio, who was followed immediately by Father Alasonatti, Father Chiala, Father Giulitto and many, many other clerics and priests, each leading a squad of boys.

I kept asking myself: *Am I sleeping or am I awake?* I clapped my hands and felt myself to make sure that I was seeing reality. Once that host of boys got some eight or ten paces from me, they halted. There was a flash of light far brighter than before, the music stopped, and a hushed silence

fell over all. A most radiant joy encompassed all those boys and sparkled in their eyes, their countenances aglow with happiness. They looked and smiled at me very pleasantly, as though anxious to speak, but no one said a word.

Dominic Savio stepped forward a pace or two, standing so close to me that, had I stretched out my hand, I would surely have touched him. He too was silent and gazed upon me with a smile. How wonderful he looked! His garments were altogether unique. The snow-white tunic which he wore down to his feet was studded with diamonds, and there were threads of gold running through it. About his waist was fastened a broad red sash, so thickly embroidered with precious gems that they almost overlapped each other, and sewn into such a charming design with such brilliance of colors that, just looking at them, I could feel myself quite lost in admiration. From his neck hung a necklace woven of exotic but not natural flowers whose petals seemed to be clusters of diamonds set into stems of gold. And so it was with everything else. Those flowers flashed with a preternatural sparkle brighter than the very sun, which was then brilliantly burning in all the glory of a spring morning. Their blinding sparkles reflected from Dominic's candid, ruddy countenance in an indescribable manner, so brilliant indeed that their individual species were undetectable. A crown of roses encircled his head. His hair fell down in waves to his shoulders, giving him such a handsome and lovely charm that he seemed . . . he seemed . . . an angel!

While enunciating these last few words, Don Bosco seemed to be at a loss for suitable expressions, punctuating them with a gesture which defies description and a tone of voice which moved his listeners. It was as if he had exhausted himself in an effort to find words that would fully convey his idea. He paused momentarily and then went on.

The other persons too were aglow with light, dressed as they all were in different but always glittering garments, some more colorful than others, each garment symbolizing something that exceeded human understanding. However, all wore the same red sash about the waist.

I kept staring and wondering: *What can it all mean? How did I ever manage to get here?* With no idea where I was, beside myself and shaking with awe, I dared not take a step forward. The others all remained silent. At last Dominic Savio spoke. "Why do you stand there silent, as though you were almost devitalized?" he asked. "Aren't you the one who once feared nothing, holding your ground against slander, persecution, hostility, hardships and dangers of all sorts? Where is your courage? Say something!"

I forced myself to reply in a stammer, "I do not know what to say. Are you Dominic Savio?"

"Yes, I am. Don't you know me anymore?"

"How come you are here?" I asked, still bewildered.

Savio spoke affectionately. "I came to talk with you. We spoke together so often on earth! Do you not recall how much you loved me, or how many tokens of friendship you gave me and how kind you were to me? And did I not return the warmth of your love? How much trust I placed in you! So why are you tongue-tied? Why are you shaking? Come, ask me a question or two!"

Summoning my courage, I replied, "I am shaking because I don't know where I am."

"You are in the abode of happiness," Savio answered, "where one experiences every joy, every delight."

"Is this the reward of the just?"

"Not at all! Here we do not enjoy supernatural happiness but only a natural one, though greatly magnified."

"Everything here then is natural?"

"Yes, only enhanced by God's power!"

"Oh," I exclaimed. "I thought this was paradise."

"Oh, no, no!" Savio answered. "No human eye can look upon the beauty of paradise."

"And this music," I asked, "is it the music which you enjoy in heaven?"

"No, no, absolutely not!"

"Are these then natural sounds?"

"Yes, of course, but brought to perfection by God's infinite power."

"And this light which outshines the very sun's brilliance—is it a supernatural light? Is it heavenly light?"

"It is only natural light, fortified and perfected by God's omnipotence."

"Might I be allowed to see a little supernatural light?"

"No one can see it until he has come to see God as He is. The faintest ray of that light would instantly strike one dead, because the human senses are not sturdy enough to endure it."

"Could there possibly be a natural light lovelier than this?"

"Yes, but if you could only see a single ray of natural light increased by just one degree, you would go into an ecstasy."

"Might I not see at least one tiny ray of this brighter light?"

"Yes, of course you may. I'll give you a proof of what I say. Open your eyes."

"They are open," I answered.

"Pay close attention, then, and look out toward the farthest end of that crystal sea."

I looked. Instantly from the remotest heavens a sudden streak of light flashed through space, fine as a thread, but so brilliant, so piercing that

my gaze faltered in pain. I shut my eyes and screamed loud enough to wake Father Lemoyne (he is here now) who was sleeping in the next room. In the morning he asked me in fright what had happened to me during the night to have so upset me. That filament of light was a hundred million times brighter than the sun; its brilliance could have lit up our entire universe.

After some moments I opened my eyes again. "What was that?" I asked Dominic. "Was not that a heavenly beam?"

"It was not a supernatural light," Dominic replied, "though ever so much superior in brilliance than the light of the world. It was nothing more than earthly light rendered ever so dazzling by God's power. Even if a vast array of light as strong as the ray you saw at the end of that crystal sea were to cover the whole world, it would still not give you an idea of the splendors of paradise."

"Then what do you enjoy in paradise?"

"Ah, that defies all telling. The happiness of heaven no mortal beings can ever know until they die and are reunited to their Maker. We enjoy God—nothing else!"

By now I had fully recovered from my initial bewilderment and was taken up with admiring Dominic Savio's beauty. "Why are you wearing that white, sparkling robe?" I asked him frankly.

Giving no sign of wanting to respond, Savio remained silent, but the choir, accompanied by all the instruments, sang: *Ipsi habuerunt lumbos praecinctos et dealbaverunt stolas suas in sanguine Agni* [They have girded themselves and have washed their robes white in the blood of the Lamb—cf. Apoc. 7, 14].

"And why," I asked as the music ended, "are you wearing that red sash about your waist?"

Again Savio did not reply and motioned that he did not wish to answer.

It was Father Alasonatti who then began to sing by himself: *Virgines enim sunt et sequuntur Agnum quocumque ierit* [They are virgins and follow the Lamb wherever He goes—cf. Apoc. 14, 4].

I then understood that Dominic's blood-red sash was a symbol of the great sacrifices, the strenuous efforts, and the near-martyrdom he had endured to preserve the virtue of purity, and that, to remain chaste in God's eyes, he would have given up his life if the circumstances had warranted it. It was also a symbol of penance which cleanses the soul of guilt. In addition, the shining whiteness of his robe signified the baptismal innocence which he had preserved.

Entranced by the singing and gazing upon those endless ranks of heavenly youths massed behind Dominic Savio, I asked him, "Who are they?" Then, turning, I asked: "Why are all of you so resplendent with light?" Savio continued to remain silent and all his companions broke into song: *Hi sunt sicut Angeli Dei in caelo* [They are like God's angels in

heaven]. I had noticed meanwhile that Savio seemed to enjoy a certain preeminence over that assembly, which kept at a respectful distance some ten paces behind him. "Tell me, Savio," I said, "you are the youngest of this entire following and of those who have died in our houses. Why then are you at their head as their leader? Why are you their spokesman, while they are silent?"

"I am the oldest of them all."

"Oh, no," I countered. "Many of them are a good deal older than you."

"I am the oldest of the Oratory," Dominic Savio repeated, "because I was the first to leave the world and enter into this life. Besides, *legatione Dei fungor*" [I am God's ambassador]. This answer made the reason for the apparition clear to me. He was God's envoy.

"Well, then," I said, "let us speak of the things which most concern us at this moment."

"Yes, and be quick. Ask me whatever you wish to know. Hours go by and the time I have been given to speak with you may run out and you might not see me again."

"I am convinced you have something of supreme importance to tell me."

"What could I ever tell you—I, a poor creature?" Savio said with the deepest humility. "From on high I was given the mission to speak with you. That is why I am here."

"Then," I exclaimed, "tell me of the past, of the present, and of the future of our Oratory. Tell me something about my dear sons. Talk to me of my Congregation."

"There are so many things I could tell you about that."

"Reveal to me the things you know. Tell me about the past."

"All the past is your responsibility," Savio replied.

"Have I made any blunders?"

"As to the past," he answered, "I will say that your Congregation has already accomplished a great deal of good. Do you see that countless multitude of boys there?"

"Yes. They are so many," I answered. "How happy they look!"

"Observe," he went on. "Do you see what is written at the gateway of that garden?"

"I do. It says 'Salesian Garden.'"

"Well then," Savio went on, "those who are there were all Salesians or Salesian pupils. They were saved by you or your priests and clerics. Or they are those whom you directed on the path of their vocation. Count them if you can! Still, there would be a hundred million times more if you only had greater faith and trust in the Lord."

I sighed in dismay. I had no excuse for his reproach but resolved within my heart: *I shall endeavor to have this faith and trust in the future.*

Then I inquired, "What of the present?"

Savio held out a gorgeous bouquet of roses, violets, sunflowers, gentians, lilies, evergreens, perennials, and sprigs of wheat and he handed it to me. "Look at these flowers," he said.

"I am looking," I replied, "but I don't know what you mean."

"Give this bouquet to your sons so that, when the time comes, they may offer it to the Lord. See to it that everyone has it, that no one is without it, and that no one steals it from them. Do this and you can rest assured that they will have enough to make them happy."

"What do these flowers symbolize?"

"Get your theology book," he replied, "and you will know."

"I've studied theology," I objected, "and I still can't fathom any meaning from what you have given me."

"And yet you absolutely should know these things."

"Well then," I pleaded, "ease my anxiety. Tell me what this is all about."

"Do you see these flowers?" Savio obliged. "They symbolize the virtues which most delight the Lord."

"Which are they?"

"The rose is the symbol of charity, the violet of humility, the sunflower of obedience, the gentian of penance and self-denial, and the wheat stalks of frequent Communion. Then, the lily stands for the beautiful virtue of chastity of which it is written: *Erunt sicut angeli Dei in caelo* [They shall be like God's angels in heaven]. Finally, the evergreens and perennials tell you that these virtues must endure forever. They denote perseverance."

"Very well, my dear Savio," I answered. "Now tell me, you who practiced all these virtues in your lifetime, what comforted you the most at the moment of your death?"

"What do you think it was?" Savio prompted.

"Perhaps having preserved the beautiful virtue of purity?"

"Not that alone."

"Having your conscience at peace?"

"That too is a good thing, but it is still not the best."

"Perhaps the hope of paradise?"

"No, not even that."

"Well, was it the treasury of good deeds you had stored up?"

"No, no."

"Well, what was it then?" I pleaded with him, nonplussed at having failed to fathom his thought.

"The one thing that consoled me most at the hour of my death," Savio answered, "was the assistance of the mighty and lovely Mother of the Savior. Tell your sons never to forget to pray to Her as long as they live. But now hurry if you want me to answer more questions."

"What can you tell me about the future?"

"In the coming year of 1877, you will have a painful sorrow to endure. Six and then two more of those dearest to you will be summoned into eternity. But be comforted, for they will be transplanted from this world to the gardens of heaven. They will receive their crown. And do not be worried, for the Lord will be your help and will give you other good sons."

"God's will be done! And what will happen to the Congregation?"

"The Lord is preparing great things for you. In the coming year your Congregation will see a dawn of glory so resplendent that it will light up the four corners of the earth. A great splendor lies in the offing. But see to it that the Lord's chariot is not led by your Salesians off its course, out of its set path. If your priests will guide it in a manner worthy of their lofty calling, the future of your Congregation will be most glorious and will bring salvation to endless multitudes of people. There is but one condition: that your sons be devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary and that all of them learn to preserve the virtue of chastity which so delights God."

"Now I would like you to tell me about the Church in general," I continued.

"The Church's destiny is in the hands of God, our Maker. I cannot tell you what He has determined in His infinite decrees. To Himself alone He keeps such mysteries, and no heavenly creature can ever share that knowledge."

"What will happen to Pius IX?"

"All I can tell you is that the Church's shepherd will not have much longer to do battle here on earth. Few are the combats he must still win. Soon he will be taken from his see and the Lord will grant him his well-earned reward. The rest you know. The Church will not die. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"What will happen to me?" I asked.

"If you only knew how many tribulations still await you! But hurry now, for the time allotted me to speak to you is drawing to a close."

Impulsively I stretched out my hands to clutch those of that blessed youth, but his hands were no firmer than thin air, and I grasped nothingness.

"How foolish!" Dominic said with a smile. "What are you trying to do?"

"I am afraid to lose you," I exclaimed. "Are you not really here in the flesh?"

"Not in my flesh. One day I will take that up again."

"But what is that I see? You have Dominic Savio's features; you are Dominic Savio."

"Look," he said, "when a soul, separated from the body, is allowed by God to reveal itself to a human, it retains its features just as it had them in

the flesh, though considerably enhanced in beauty, until it is reunited to the body on the day of the universal judgment. From then on soul and body will again be together. That is why I seem to have hands, feet and head, but you cannot grasp me because I am a pure spirit. You only recognize me because of the features that I am allowed to retain in order to be seen."

"I understand," I answered. "I have one more question: Are all my boys on the path of salvation? Tell me how to guide them."

"The boys whom Divine Providence has entrusted to your care can be divided into three groups. Take a look at these three sheets of paper." (He held one out to me.)

I looked at the first. It bore one word: *Invulnerati*, unscathed, that is, those whom the devil had not been able to harm, those who had never lost their baptismal innocence. There was a great number of them and I saw them all. Many I personally knew; many others I was seeing for the first time—perhaps boys who will come to the Oratory in future years. They were all moving forward unswervingly along a narrow path, regardless of the arrows and swords and spears that were continually being hurled at them from everywhere. These weapons bristled like hedges on both sides of their path, threatening and harassing but never wounding them.

Savio then handed me a second sheet. It bore the word: *Vulnerati*, wounded, that is, those who had fallen into sin but had risen to their feet again, healed of their wounds after repentance and confession. Their number was considerably greater than the first. They had been wounded on their passage through life by the enemies who lined their way. I scanned the list of their names and saw them all. Many dragged themselves along, bent over and disheartened.

Savio still held a third sheet in his hand, labeled: *Lassati in via iniquitatis*, exhausted on the path of iniquity. [Wis. 5, 7] It bore the names of all those boys who at that moment were in the state of sin. Impatient to know the contents of that list, I put out my hand, but Savio quickly held the note back. "Wait a moment," he said, "and listen. Once you open this note, such a stench will come out that it will overcome us both and make the angels withdraw in disgust and horror. The Holy Spirit himself cannot stand the offensive odor of sin!"

"How can this be," I objected, "since God and his angels are impassible? How can they smell a material stench?"

"They can," he answered. "The purer and holier a creature is, the more it resembles a heavenly spirit, but the filthier and more sinful one is, the further he moves from God and His angels, who in turn withdraw from him, an object of disgust and loathing."

He then gave me the note. "Take it," he said, "and use it for the good of your boys, but don't forget the bouquet of flowers which I have given you.

Make sure that everyone has it and does not lose it." Giving me the list, he hastily withdrew and joined his companions. I opened it. I saw no names, but in an instant there flashed before my eyes all the lads therein mentioned, just as real as if they were standing there in front of me. With great grief I saw all of them. Most I knew personally as belonging to this Oratory and to our other schools. I also noticed quite a few who rate as good boys and even some who rank among the very best but are not so at all. Then, as I opened that note, an unbearable stench emanated from it. An atrocious headache immediately seized me, and I felt so sick to my stomach that I thought I would die. The whole sky darkened, the vision vanished, and nothing was left of that wonderful sight. Suddenly a bolt of lightning flashed with a crash of thunder so deafening and frightening that I awoke in a cold sweat.

That stench penetrated the very walls and got into all my clothing, so much so that for days afterward I could still detect its foulness. Even the name of the sinner is truly foul in God's eyes. Even now, no sooner do I recall that stench than I begin to shudder and choke, and my stomach turns over with retching.

There at Lanzo, where I had this dream, I began to call in some boys and soon realized that my dream was no dream but, rather, a very special favor of God that enabled me to know each one's state of soul. Of this, however, I shall say nothing in public. There are also several points which need clearing up, but I will put this off to some other evening. Now, let me just wish you a good night.

Because the dream showed that some Oratory boys who seemed to be among the best were actually morally bad, it gave Don Bosco cause for misgivings that it might be a mere hallucination. That is why [before narrating the dream] he had summoned several boys to his room in order to ascertain its truth. Hence, too, he delayed two weeks before narrating it, and only when he felt quite sure that it had come from above did he speak. As its predictions would be fulfilled, time would corroborate its message.

The first prediction—very important to him—concerned his beloved sons who were to die in 1877: six within a short span and two later on. The Oratory records of that year bear the symbolic cross beside the names of six boys and two clerics.[6] The second prediction, likewise to be fulfilled in 1877, heralded for the Salesian

[6] *Boys*: John Briatore, Victor Strolengo, Stephen Mazzoglio, Natale Garola, Anthony Bognati and Louis Boggiatto. *Clerics:* Michael Giovannetti, a Salesian seminarian, and Charles Becchio, a seminarian who died at home in Murialdo on December 31, 1877, but who attended the Oratory throughout the school year 1876–77. [Author]

Society a radiant dawn whose splendor would reach to the farthest ends of the earth. That same year, the Association of Salesian Cooperators began to shine on the Church's horizon, and the *Salesian Bulletin* came into existence—two events which were instrumental in spreading the knowledge and practice of Don Bosco's spirit to the ends of the earth. The third prediction concerned the forthcoming death of Pope Pius IX, who did in fact die fourteen months later. The last prediction had an ominous ring for Don Bosco: "If you only knew how many tribulations still await you!" And sure enough, Don Bosco's last eleven years and two months were packed with ceaseless struggles, travails and sacrifices to his very dying breath.

At this time the police precinct of Borgo Dora [quite near the Oratory] was headed by a captain who knew several people at the Oratory. Having heard about the dream, he was struck by the prediction regarding the eight deaths, and so he kept careful count throughout 1877 to test its truthfulness. At the news of the eighth death, which occurred on the last day of the year, he abandoned the world, became a Salesian and exercised his apostolate in Italy and South America. He was Father Angelo Piccone, whom many still remember.

On Christmas Eve 1876 a plan was effected to give the novitiate an identity of its own by assigning a dining room exclusively to the novices. They moved in on that day and assumed all necessary chores. This separation from the professed members, especially from Don Bosco, was not painless, but Don Bosco was a master at kindling enthusiasm even for unpleasant tasks. His delightful way of announcing this emigration, the very novelty of it, the tables nicely set with new cutlery, the novices who served while wearing white aprons over their black cassocks, the dispensing with the usual public reading during a substantial part of the meal—all these things contributed to spread a feeling of contentment among them.

Don Bosco sang the customary Christmas Midnight Mass, for which permission had been granted by the chancery on December 21 with the condition that all entrances be closed to the public. The restriction posed a problem for the vice-director or vicar. Did it mean that all church doors had to be closed? Then how were the guests to enter? The director wrote a memo to Don Bosco: "Please read the last lines of this decree and let me know if we may let the

guests in through the door facing the inner courtyard. Should I consult the chancery secretary tomorrow?" Don Bosco brushed away his scruples by returning the note with a scribbled marginal remark: "We will all enter from the belfry."

In the evening Don Bosco presided at a ceremony during which four priests and a clerical student made perpetual vows and two other seminarians made their triennial vows in the presence of all the novices and resident Salesians of the Oratory. Don Bosco addressed them as follows:

I usually make a few comments after a ceremony of this kind. Various thoughts coursed through my mind during the religious profession. Four priests have come from some distance to our Congregation. It recalled to my mind what we recently read at mealtime about Noah: how God revealed that He would wipe out mankind and that Noah was to build an ark in which to take refuge. Noah symbolizes the man who, recognizing the world's many perils, seeks a haven and cuts off all relations with those who are hurtling madly into such dangers.

Lot is another example. Seeking to forsake the world, he abandoned the corrupt cities and withdrew into the hills. The same is true of Elijah who, hounded by his foes, fled into the desert and lived a hard existence sooner than remain among evil people like Jezebel and her courtiers. All these events demonstrate the dangers which are in the world and how God provided religious life for our salvation.

After this introduction, he divided his sermon into two parts.[7] In the first part, after recalling that whenever he invited a candidate—an adult, especially—to enter the Congregation, he would promise him bread, work and paradise, he took pains to develop this theme graphically. He did it by taking the newly professed members, so to speak, on a tour of the motherhouse which was a miniature of the Congregation, since all Salesian houses were modeled on it.

He took them metaphorically through the main entrance, where they were courteously received by the Salesian doorkeeper, whom he valued as a real treasure for a school. He then presented them to the priest in charge of admissions and to the director, graphically portraying the amiability and fatherliness of the men holding these

[7]This first part has been saved for us in a condensed form by Father [Joseph] Vespignani—one of those four priests—in his booklet *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco* [*A Year at Don Bosco's School*], pp. 36–39. The introduction and the second half of the sermon are drawn from notes taken during Don Bosco's talk by Father Gresino, at Father Barberis' request. We do not know why he omitted the first part. [Author]

offices. He bade them look from an upper floor upon the playgrounds bustling with boys who were playing to their hearts' content under the supervision of young clerics. Then he took them on a tour through the classrooms and the spacious study hall, explaining the system in use to train students in carrying out their duties. He did the same thing in the workshops, pointing out the various responsibilities of craftsmasters and assistants. "Here you see," he said, "how all these priests, clerics and coadjutor brothers work together with one spirit and with the sole purpose of saving souls." Then, pointing up to his own little room in the heart of the Oratory, he invited them to call on him frequently to tell him of their impressions, to confide their doubts, and to listen to the word of a friend.

Afterward he led them to the festive oratory crowded with boys and adults who came on Sundays and holy days to perform their religious duties, and he explained the well-integrated program of catechism classes, games and church services. Here Don Bosco seemed to be thoroughly in his element.

Finally he went down with them to the dining room where in a simple fatherly way he bade them taste Don Bosco's bread, sent, he said, by Divine Providence through the charity of so many good benefactors and shared by the Salesians with their poor boys, students and artisans.

Having thus gone through the first two parts of his declared program, bread and work, he drew his sons into a closer intimacy and spoke with manifest pleasure, saying, "After all that we have seen, the very best remains, not just to be seen but to be tasted—paradise!"

Breathless with eagerness to find out what kind of paradise Don Bosco was alluding to, the audience listened intently. He chose the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, portraying it in such terms as to excite not just their admiration but their genuine delight. Masterfully he took them step by step from the front entrance to the main altar where stood the tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament and, behind it, the painting of Mary, Help of Christians. He spoke to them about the solemn church services, the devotion of so many boys and the faithful, the music and singing, the frequent reception of the sacraments, and the visits to the Blessed Sacrament and to the image of Mary, Help of Christians. At this point, he asked, "Don't you think that all this is a beautiful prelude to paradise?"

He concluded the first part of his talk with the words: "All these things you will find in all our houses and churches. Wherever you go you will find bread, work and paradise. It may happen that, like the Hebrews in the desert, you will also have to taste *bitter waters* of frustration, sickness, trying situations, and temptations. Very well, then resort to what Moses recommended and dip into those bitter waters the wood that can sweeten them, the wood of the cross, the remembrance of Jesus' sufferings and death daily renewed on the altar."

After completing this metaphorical tour of the house, he returned to the idea of work, deepening its concept. On the premise that ours is an active, work-filled life, he explained:

In this regard, St. Ambrose, applying references from sacred and secular history to religious life, draws a fine comparison from bees. Incidentally, he must have studied Virgil very intently, or at least have read him several times. He begins by saying that the bee chooses the right moment. It knows when to go out and when to stay in. In rain, thundershowers and storms, it stays safe in the hive. If it is unexpectedly caught by a sudden tempest in the meadows, it hastens back to the hive. Swarms of bees, caught by surprise too far from the hive and in real peril, seek immediate shelter under a rock or in the hollow of a tree or beneath its broad leaves.

What bees do instinctively you should do by obedience, and it is a good norm to follow in all things. What a vast amount of good we could do to benefit ourselves and others with this kind of obedience!

A religious who seeks to go out, beckoned by worldly clamor, should stay at home. Once you have forsaken the world, you would only endanger yourself by returning to it. So, too, if we should find ourselves in the world with our souls imperiled, let us immediately withdraw if we can to our beehive, our home. At least, let us leave the place or company we are in and, given the chance, run off to safety.

St. Ambrose goes on to say that those who wish to become religious should observe the bees as they take over a hive which a farmer has set up for them. It is no more than a bare wooden shelter, and they turn it into an orderly dwelling. They find a plant which has a very thin peel oozing sap and draw from it a very bitter, sticky substance which they smear all over the hive, sealing every crack, even the smallest. Then they work all the tiny gaps at the hive entrance into one single slit to serve as both entrance and exit. They do this either to keep outsiders from peering in, or to drive off rodents by that bitter substance and keep out insects which

would steal their honey. If the hive has a glass panel, they smear it with that syrup which makes it opaque.

You religious, darken your windows and shut out the world. Imitate the bee which sucks the bitter syrup from that tree, which for us is the cross, from which we draw strength by prayer and meditation. Let all our longings be directed to Jesus. True, this spiritual retreat is not a vacation, for it has its painful moments and makes its demands, but the sap of the cross recalls the liquid used by the bee to keep harmful insects from the hive, where they would kill the bees and eat their honey. The bitter fluid kills or immobilizes them. We too can overcome our enemies by adhering to the cross. We must do more than hold it or kiss it. We have to carry it. All of us, whether superiors or subjects, have a cross to carry, be it the responsibility proper to one's office, privations or afflictions. At all times we need to mortify our senses, and we shall succeed in this by keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus crucified.

Remember what St. Ambrose tells us: regardless of the number of bees in a hive, there is only one way in and out, so that sometimes they have to wait their turn.

We too are to have but one portal in our house, even in a physical sense—one door to the outside. No one is to go out secretly, lest he be involved in some impropriety. How much of a blessing this is! Having only one entrance has its practical advantages. With several gates, we never know if someone is in or out. Ask for him at one place and you are told to go to another. Go there and you have to try elsewhere. With only one entrance, the doorkeeper knows who has gone out and can give an account. A superior who has a message for someone will not have to fret looking for him.

But most important of all, the devil tries to find a way to lure a religious back to his former state. You know that the more one strives to pull out of the world and leave it completely behind, the more the devil tries to make him latch on to earthly things and leave the religious life.

The devil makes his way into a congregation, spots a likely prey, and calculates: *There he is surrounded by the good example of his confreres, watched over by his superiors and strengthened by so many exercises of prayer. Let me trick him into going out.*

Might he not plan to strike that soul instantly? No, not instantly. He'd rather ease him out by degrees and not frighten him. The devil is clever and never thinks of getting us into compromising company or foul talk on the first try. He just tries to nudge us out of our security. Outside there will be people to talk against the Congregation and deride religion, clowns with their indecent shows, female acrobats in immodest attire, easy-going men to flaunt their fun in eating and drinking, and so many other things to harm one's chastity.

A religious who is always looking for something new leaves the house without need. He comes across people who spout their faulty morality; he sees paintings and pictures which he will carry indelibly impressed on his mind day and night. He will fight back for a while but will weaken in spirit. He will feel the need for distraction or to go on vacation and spend some time at home. In the end he will fall disastrously. Constant experience has proven that when the devil succeeds in getting one to leave the house without need, he always wins out. And Satan, so keen in the art of deceit, never runs out of excuses.

"I'll spend a few days at home. I have a relative who wants to see me," one will say. "I will make my meditation and do my spiritual reading and say my prayers and be faithful to all other practices of piety, just as if I were in a religious house."

Indeed? Go into the world with this intention and you will see. I'd like to know how many go home and faithfully live up to this resolve. The same problem has already befallen many. They would not believe me but had to find out for themselves; they learned about the world the hard way. They went, gawked at everything, and got into conversations; then came the drinking and card games and all sorts of entertainments. Put yourself into an occasion of sin. Do you think you can escape the net? No, you will die—or at least you will be badly hurt. If one comes out of it unscathed, he can regard it as an exceptional grace given to him by the Lord. Indeed, let such a one speedily return to his cloister, to the religious house where he took his vows, and the devil will be hard put to tempt him. There he will find good companions, work suited to every person and talent, and all the sources of merit before God that he can possibly ask for.

Now I would like to go back to the topic of the bees and St. Ambrose, because, if I had a little time, I would like to write a book comparing the religious life to that of the bees. When a bee is out in the fields and is hungry, does it help itself to the nectar it has gathered? No. It keeps the rule and, having gathered its full supply, it flies back to the hive and enters through that one common portal. Will it eat then? No, patiently it awaits the given bee's signal without which no one moves; that signal summons another bee to relieve it of its burden and store it away. Often you can see bees so laden that they can hardly stand, and yet, hungry as they may be, they wait. Once relieved of their burden, they eat only the tiny fragments dropped by the other bee as it was storing away the day's harvest. Then that bee can take its rest and another goes out. Thus all share the work, each doing its bit to build up the common store. They come and go, each minding its own business and each doing its own work.

How differently some of us act in regard to thrift and rules of eating. How often we seize a chance to get into the kitchen or pantry, and since the cook is an easy-going person, we make sure to help ourselves to all we

want, or at times we raid the orchard and vegetable garden. This cannot be allowed. Such serious disorders are to be forestalled at all costs. If we make these concessions to our clerics today, tomorrow we shall have to make them to the boys who will most certainly imitate their teachers.

The bees also keep their time of rising. Some mornings you can hear a buzzing which means that the bees are up, but none leave the hive. Sometimes you can see long strings of them waiting for the queen bee's signal; then, at a sign from her, they rush out to their day's work. Any bee going out before that time is marked out by the others, and on its return it is stopped at the portal, seized, and, after a due hearing, it is stung to death. And this, mind you, is for one single act of disobedience. Bees also retire at the same time, but no punishment is enacted if a bee returns late at night because that depends on distance and on the time it takes to find and gather its share of the harvest.

Is this how we show our obedience to the sound of the bell? Not a bee moves without the queen bee's signal. When bees become too numerous for a hive, the queen bee, to forestall disorders, splits the swarm, begets a new queen bee for the second group, and seemingly says, "Here you have learned how to live together, to make a home, a hive, to produce honey and wax. Now put all this to good use. We shall always be friends, never at odds, but let us not get in each other's way. Do not come and bother us, and we will not bother you." The new queen is told, "Go, seek your own fortune." The swarm leaves and settles in a tree or a beehive that someone has prepared for it, and there the bees establish their home. The new queen, who has sought a realm of her own, takes over and issues commands. This is pretty much what we have done in our missionary expedition.

Another striking thing about bees is that they do not work in winter, since there are no flowers, but rest, all huddled together, and build up energy to work with zest when spring arrives. So too we must stay here together, and in the springtime of our life we shall go forth and reap a rich harvest. We need seclusion and training. Let us get ready to combat temptation, discord, quarreling and those passions which can be overcome only by seclusion. Hence before religious profession we customarily make a spiritual retreat for a few days to dispose ourselves for the solemn promises we make to God and for their later exact observance.

Militia est vita hominis super terram [The life of man upon earth is a warfare—Job 7, 1]. Warfare means striving to overcome our spiritual enemies. A soldier fights by injuring and killing, the religious by fleeing to safety. Having left the world behind, we must fight by shunning places and people and such things as may be harmful to the soul. Like soldiers, we have to train, though our drills may not be the same. Wisely using a time of recollection we can acquire knowledge and virtue. The one who is

prepared braves danger and overcomes it. Strengthened by study, meditation, the sacraments, and visits to the Blessed Sacrament to master the senses, one can leave the hive, go to his appointed station and bring in sheaves from the Lord's harvest. But let him not leave without any hope of success. One who has done all he could to get ready and has been given his orders by his superior possesses that hope. Let him walk even into the midst of peril, for he will not fall. In promoting God's glory, he will tread upon serpents and scorpions and not fall because the hand of the Lord sustains him.

Furthermore, we can learn the lesson of work from the bees. All day long they labor untiringly, going from hedge to hedge, flower to flower, hither and yonder, for miles and miles until they finally return home with their supply. On reaching the hive, they separate the honey from the wax, depositing them in their proper places, and go back to work.

And if there are bees lazy enough to want to feed upon the work of others without doing work of their own, then the judges pass sentence, and there ensues a struggle such as one can often see among bees. An entire squadron hems them in, stinging them on all sides and clipping their wings until, rendering them defenseless, they push them out of the hive. It is sad to see those bees squirming helplessly, unable to fly, and trodden upon by the passers-by. The hive contains only bees who can and will freely work.

Here, too, we all have different chores to do: one washes dishes, another cooks, and still others preach, hear confessions or teach. Others sweep floors or help. Anyone who cannot do hard work prays and advises the others. Each one does his own share. Let him do it well and everything will run smoothly. St. Paul says: "Obey your superiors and submit to them," not in what pleases you, but in what pleases your superiors.

I recall a former schoolmate of mine who used to wash dishes as I did in my day. Referring to me he once remarked, "That fellow went to school, and now he is a priest, honored and respected, and here I am still a dishwasher, at the very bottom. I do not envy him, but. . . ."

"Do the job that you have to do," I say. "Do you think that Don Bosco's merit will be any greater?"

"But he hears confessions, says Mass and really acquires merits."

"Tell me, does one who hears confessions all morning long gain any more merit than one who scours pots? There is no difference. The Congregation is made up of both. If you were not there to wash dishes, the priest would have to do them. We are all equal—one for all and all for one. You do one thing, and someone else does another, but since we form one body we all strive for the glory of God. Everything we do is judged by God with the same weight and measure. Therefore the merit is the same, because more will be asked of a man to whom more has been entrusted."

[Lk. 12, 48] Of one who has a bottom position God will exact a minimum, while of the other He will exact ten times as much. Should there be any difference at all, it would be that the greater merit would go to the humbler task.

Would you like to know how we can be sure that we are doing something which redounds to God's greater glory? Let us throughout the day do whatever task we are assigned.

One washes dishes—fine. Another works in the kitchen—better. Someone has a good education and talent—fine; he will go and preach. One is not a good speaker; let him hear confessions. One confrere will teach, another will supervise. And if someone is not good at any of these tasks, he can sweep up because we need sweepers too. If one is sickly and unable to work, he can edify others by his patience, be a counselor and thus do his share. In a house such as ours, there is a wide choice of chores to be done. Each one will do the share he can handle.

Let no one say, "Someone else can do this. I have enough work already." No, if one is good at something, let him do it. Let's not lose merit or be deterred by difficulties which loom like mountains but are only molehills. Someone may say: "But that superior, that assistant, can't stand me and forever finds fault with me." My sons, such persons are a source of merit. We need patience to become saints.

Hence, for our own protection from danger, let us not make up excuses to return to the world, but rather keep our distance.

"But I cannot do the assignment they have given me," someone may object. If something is really beyond your strength, respectfully inform your superiors and abide by their decision. But if the task is beyond your will power, or just an inconvenience, then force your will, do that work, and do it well.

"But that confrere has a private room and I am in the common dormitory. I'd like some consideration."

"Well, are you here to lead your own life or a community life?"

"Community life."

"Then be satisfied with community life. There is only one superior, and he is responsible for what is being done or has to be done. Let each one of us do our own job."

Another recommendation I would like to give you is to help each other. Don't say, "That's his job, not mine." Sometimes you may notice something amiss which can and should be stopped, and the assistant in charge is not around. Don't stand by unconcerned because it is not your specific job. Then and there you are the assistant.

Anytime evil can be prevented, even in a material sense, prevent it. Let there be no waste of food, clothing or things we use. Since we are living in common, we are all bound to care for everything belonging to the Congregation.

Most of all, however, we must be alert to prevent all moral evil, any disorder, among the boys or ourselves. Only by unity can we go forward and render harmful members powerless. For instance, if you know that someone has a bad book, you who want to lead a religious life must not help him keep it or hide it but must try to get hold of it and burn it. Quarrels, cliques and scandals can be prevented. Sometimes newcomers, especially adults, find that they are left to themselves and need a friend. A timely good word can do them a lot of good. Let our practices of piety and our sodalities be bolstered and never put down. A disparaging word can seriously harm a listener, even in school matters and in superiors' directives. If one has a reasonable objection, he should go to those in charge and not babble about it to his companions. In conclusion, let the bees teach us to work with a will.

I have told you many things meant to give us new life in our humdrum tasks on this day when God has willed to consecrate to Himself seven of His servants who are promptly at His service.

Let us inspire each other in carrying out His will, which is that of the superior, and let us help one another to correct our faults and put up with those of others so that we may all keep on the right path. If anyone of us is in danger, let him be cautioned, and each one must support him and bring him aid.

Thus, always improving in this school of love, we will form but one heart and soul, joined to that of Jesus Christ, up to the last moment of our life, when we shall go to Him, never again to leave.

This memorable conference lasted an hour and a half, but, Father Joseph Vespignani assures us, it flew by like a moment.

Don Bosco sent very special birthday greetings to John Cardinal Simeoni, designated as Secretary of State by the Holy Father a few days after the death of James Cardinal Antonelli. He was well known to Don Bosco.[8] The promptness and tone of the reply[9] give us an idea of how gratifying his thoughtfulness was to His Eminence.

We now come to the end of the civil year. December 31 is the date on this brief letter to Father Cagliero.

Dear Father Cagliero,

I have not yet spoken with Consul Gazzolo about his parcel of land. I hope he is anxious to sell as soon as possible. You will have an answer by January 15. Others will give you the rest of the news.

[8] *See* Vol. XI, p. 116. [Editor]
[9] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

I will again go to Rome on Monday, summoned by the Holy Father. I have many things to attend to; our Congregation's advance is fabulous—or, rather, it is being carried aloft by God's hand.

The Corsi, Fassati, Radicati and Appiani families and many others send you the fondest best wishes.

Greetings to all our dear ones. Believe me ever to be

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The last "Good Night" of the year was given by Don Bosco to the entire community after prayers. Stepping up to the platform, he began with a greeting: "A Happy End and a Happy Beginning of the Year!" that was answered by a resounding "Thank you!" from all. With silence restored, he gave them the traditional practice for the New Year: "Let us always so live as to be ready to die at whatever moment death may come."

His salutary advice was preceded and followed by considerations that were colored by family remembrances, daily occurrences, and some lessons learned from experience and Scripture.

A Happy End and a Happy Beginning! Everyone is saying this these days. The words are ordinary, but, with a little thought, they make for good meditation. Tonight the year 1876 will slip into the oblivion of the ages. Not a trace will remain of it, nor will it ever come back. There will be other '76's—1976, 2076—but never another 1876.

So, how did this year pass? The good that was done will always remain with us; the evil, too, will remain.

Can nothing be done about it? No, nothing. We can do better in days to come, and God, considering our former good deeds, may well overlook one wrongdoing of the past, but the time lost, the time when we harmed our soul, can never be redeemed.

A Happy End and a Happy Beginning of the Year! We are pretty certain of starting the new year, but whether we shall see its end is not so sure. Someone may even wish us a happy ending of the new year, but no one can be so generous in heart as to promise us that much. Who can assure us that we shall not die this year? We are here now; next year many of us will not be here.

On the last day of last year—as is my annual custom—I gave you some words of counsel, and I foretold that some of those who were then listening to me would within this past year be called into eternity. I am no prophet, and this was no prophecy, but Father Piacentino, Father Chiala

and others (Massa and Vigliocco, *the boys whispered*) died, as well as some students whose names I do not recall at this moment. We shall pray for them, as we do for those who have died in previous years.

And this year—will any of us die? It is a prophecy which anyone of us can make. This evening we are all here, and it could well be that tomorrow some of us will not be here. Certainly someone will die this year. I am not a prophet, as I said before, but, basing ourselves on human reckoning, we have little choice but to believe it. We now number about eight hundred. Figuring on a three percent death rate, about twenty-four of us will die. Perhaps death will have some regard for your young age, since you do not wish to die. Does this mean that no one will die? No, because death is like a scythe. *Fenum est vita hominis.* "I wither like grass," says the psalmist [Ps. 102, 12]. Do you know what a reaper does? When he sees that the hay is overall quite ready, he cuts into it with his scythe. In the meadow some of the grass has dried up, some is still fresh but tall enough, some is short, and some is nowhere near ripe. Will the scythe spare this last? The scythe cuts its swath and moves on. So also is it with death. It finds an old man, white-haired and bearded; it cuts him down into eternity. Then comes one with black hair and beard, and it cuts him down too. It comes upon a beardless boy and also a baby not yet ready to talk—and all, all go into eternity. Death does not look at faces. This year it might be myself or anyone of you. Let us hope that there will not be twenty-four of us, but fifteen, or maybe ten. Eight there will certainly be. Let us keep ourselves prepared to make this great journey well. The year which ends tonight is a further step into eternity, for either everlasting happiness or unending misery. And so my greeting—or, better, my advice—is that we regulate our lives in such a way as to be always prepared for death at whatever moment it may come.

I give this advice in two parts. The first is how to escape death. What urges a horse into a gallop if not the rider's spur? Flinching at its pressure, the horse dashes at full speed. So also is it with death. What spurs death to rush swiftly upon you if it is not sin which hastens death just as the spur drives the horse? "The sting of death is sin," says St. Paul. [1 Cor. 15, 56] Therefore, to stave off death as much as possible, let us be alert to shun sin as much as we can, and if we are unfortunate enough to fall into it, let us immediately go to confession.

One who is in God's grace, who is without sin, who has a clear conscience, goes to bed at night with a prayer and calmly falls asleep with no fear of what may befall him. If the Lord calls him, all the better, and he serenely goes into eternity. But think of one who bears sins on his conscience and feels remorse eating at him. He goes to bed and worries that while today he lives, tomorrow he may die. He falls asleep, but fitfully. In the dead of night he awakens with a start, and his overwrought

imagination conjures up thoughts: what if, while everyone is asleep, he were to see at the end of the dormitory a hideous spectre, a stark skeleton, its skull eaten by worms, with holes for eyes? Torn by remorse, he shakes with fear. What if that hideous thing were to move toward him, stop at the foot of his bed and say, "Come with me! (*Br-r-r-r-r-r . . . general laughter*) "I do not want to die now," he wails. "I don't want to leave my parents, friends, and superiors. What a scare there will be in the dormitory tomorrow! And I'm not ready."

Now suppose that the spectre, iron-clawed, should get closer to him and say, "That does not matter. Now you have to leave everything—parents and friends. Forget this dormitory and tomorrow. You can take with you only what you have prepared. 'This very night your life shall be required of you' [Lk. 12, 20] and you shall go to your everlasting home." [Cf. Eccl. 12, 5]

What I say of one is true for all. Only yesterday, for example, Dr. Savio felt somewhat ill after supper and went to bed. Toward midnight someone went to check on him and found him dead. He died without receiving the Last Sacraments. Without even having time to think of his soul he was already in eternity. Fortunately he had said night prayers with his family that evening and, quite out of the ordinary, had led his family in the recitation of Our Lady's Litany. Let us hope that the Blessed Virgin helped him on his great journey. Years go by and death draws closer, and many of you who are now healthy and strong will not be here a year from now.

So, returning to our topic, to keep death at bay for as long as possible, let us flee from sin, especially impurity which, more than any other sin, hastens death. It was of this sin that the Holy Spirit said: "The sting of death is sin." [1 Cor. 15, 56]

The second part of my advice is how to keep ourselves ready for death. Let's resolve to go through this new year as we wish we had done in the year that is now drawing to an end. Every single task is to be done with diligence. I say with diligence, that is, with love, because diligence comes from the Latin *diligere,* to love. Cobbler or bookbinder or teacher or assistant or student—discharge your duty cheerfully and lovingly, and you will be prepared for death should it come. The Lord rewards the obedient. But these are material things. The word itself tells you that they are only matter, and that they concern our body which soon will come to an end. Greater diligence is to be put into the practices of piety: frequent confession, and frequent Communion which is our mainstay throughout our lives. Let us perform all the good works we can, carry out all our duties, and visit the Blessed Sacrament. Above all, let us be devoted to Mary Most Holy, often praying to Her from our hearts, and She will protect us. These devotions are to be done with love and joy, for "God

loves a cheerful giver." [2 Cor. 9, 7] The Lord desires that what we do for Him is to be done gladly. This is how we shall all form but one heart with which to love the Lord.

"And in this way," you ask, "death will not touch us?"

Of course, now, we must still die, but ours will be the death of the just man who fears death as the inevitable moment which determines one's eternity. It is the fear of going into the unknown and of appearing before so majestic a God, the fear of divine justice which finds blemishes even among angels. But it is also a hope in divine mercy, the hope of pardon granted when a sin has been committed.

Thus, by shunning sin and by diligence in all our temporal and spiritual duties we shall be well prepared and rich in merits when our time comes to leave this earth. Death will not terrify us, but will enliven our trust that the Lord will receive us with mercy. Today we are alive. A month from now I myself or one of you will no longer be here.

A happy ending and happy beginning of the year, and good night to all.

In figuring the number of those who might die in 1877, Don Bosco seems to have forgotten [Dominic Savio's] prediction [of the death] of "six and then two more" [who were very dear to him]. Just as, in his plans for his works, he forged ahead like one who had no plans and relied on all human means at hand to achieve his goal while he left God to dispose of all events, so also in this case he would not refer back to his many predictions unless others prevailed upon him. However, after saying that there might be "fifteen or ten," he did go on to say, "but certainly eight." He did not say this with assurance, it is true, but the way he put it strikes us as being noteworthy.

Let the events of this one year alone suffice for this volume. But before we momentarily leave this work, we would like to alert our readers to the danger of restricting their view of Don Bosco's achievements to a single facet. His exterior activity, which overcame a multitude of contrarieties and obstacles, is but one feature of the whole man, that feature which most forcefully catches the eye, but a second and most important view, lost to the gaze of the superficial observer, is that which sees the saint. Let us hear this from a man who in his day enjoyed position and esteem, Father Mauro Ricci, Superior General of the Piarists. He was personally acquainted with Don Bosco in Florence, having been introduced by Marchioness Henrietta Nerli, a generous benefactress of Don Bosco. His behavior "so simple, so plain of speech, so unpreten-

tious as though he were but the most ordinary of men" most highly edified Father Ricci. Moreover, he loved to stress the contrast between Don Bosco's humble station and that nobility of mind by which he raised himself to hopes and designs so lofty as to puzzle even an emperor. Later, searching to learn how Don Bosco planned and succeeded in doing so much good, Father Ricci wrote, "In meditation before the crucifix he drew that mighty spark which enabled him to make up for so much religious and moral damage and replace it with durable institutions which had in themselves the power to reach out to all the world. . . . Today we explain many things by blaming the environment, but Don Bosco built his own ambience on the inspirations that came from God." [10]

[10] Letter written by Father Ricci in May 1898 and published in *Charitas*, a memorial issue on the tenth anniversary of Don Bosco's death, Tipografia Salesiana, Torino. [Author]

APPENDIX

Appendix

CONFERENCE OF DON BOSCO TO THE SALESIANS

(*See* page 113, footnote 29)

Messis multa, operarii pauci

One day Our Divine Savior was walking through the countryside in the neighborhood of Samaria. Gazing about Him at the plains and valleys and seeing a bountiful harvest, He pointed it out to His apostles that they too might enjoy the sight. Soon, however, they noticed that there was no one to harvest it. Turning to the apostles and certainly alluding to something far more sublime, Jesus said to them, "The harvest is great but laborers are scarce."

Throughout the centuries the Church and people of all nations have re-echoed this anguished cry.

You quickly grasp that by fields and vineyards our Divine Savior meant the Church and all mankind and that the harvest He had in mind was the souls to be gathered into His granary. How abundant a harvest this is! Millions of souls live on this earth and vast is the work which remains if everyone is to be saved! But the workers are few—not just priests but all those who in one way or another work for the salvation of souls. Certainly, priests are more directly involved in harvesting souls, but they are not alone, nor are there enough of them. All those who work for the salvation of souls are called apostolic laborers, just as all who help in harvesting are themselves harvesters.

See how many kinds of laborers we need to work a field. Some plow, others clear the ground, break up clods, rake the soil, sow seeds and cover them with earth. Then a dozen other tasks have to be done before the wheat is finally harvested and stored.[1]

The Church, too, needs all kinds of laborers, and I mean all kinds. No one can ever say, "My conduct is blameless, but I would never be any good working for God's greater glory." Don't think that way, because everyone can do his share.

The laborers are few. What a blessing it would be to have enough priests for every city, town, village, and hamlet—enough to convert the whole world. Since this is impossible, others must lend a hand. Besides, how are priests to give full time to their ministry if they do not have persons to bake their bread and cook their food? Suppose they had to make their own shoes and clothing?

A priest must have help, and I believe I am not wrong in saying that all of you here present—priests, students. artisans, and coadjutors—can become true evangelical laborers in the Lord's vineyard.

[1] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

How? In many ways. For instance, you can all pray, and this is the most important element mentioned by Our Savior in remarking on the scarcity of laborers. Therefore pray to the Master of the vineyard to send laborers into His harvest.

Prayer strongly appeals to God's goodness and as it were compels Him to send workers. So, let us pray for our own country and for foreign lands, for the needs of our own families and cities, for souls still shrouded in the darkness of idolatry, superstition and heresy.

Let us all pray most heartily and insistently to the Lord of the harvest.

Another thing we can all do, extremely helpful and effective, is to give good example. How much good we can accomplish this way—good example in word, encouraging each other to do what is right and offering salutary advice. One person may have doubts about his vocation, another may be set to make an irreparably harmful decision. Timely good advice and encouragement can avert that. Often indeed a single word can mark the difference between choosing the right path or the wrong.

St. Paul used to exhort the faithful to be a "lamp set aflame and burning bright."[2] Oh, were such a light visible in us, were everyone edified by our words and deeds! If we only had that burning love which makes us put everything aside in order to help our fellow humans! If we only had that perfect chastity which enables us to wipe out all vices, that meekness that conquers all hearts! Then I believe that we would draw the entire world into our nets.

Another thing which we can all do is to be faithful to our practices of piety and to be persevering in all undertakings which may promote God's greater glory and the salvation of souls. Likewise, let us foster the good reputation of the Church, its ministers—the Pope especially—and its laws. These are things which each of you, from the highest to the lowest, can do. We are to act the same way among ourselves, speaking well of our superiors, the Congregation, the house, whatever is being done for us.

And that is not enough. We can all help uproot stubborn weeds, thistles, useless grasses, and all harmful plants. What I mean is that scandal is never to be tolerated. Those who are able to uproot it personally should do so and make sure it does not raise its head again. Those who cannot take direct action should not close an eye to it, but speak to someone who has responsibility as often as they have to until the scandal is done away with. If someone complains about the food, all of you can well advise him. If someone tries to go out without permission or groans because he is not allowed to do so, you can all raise his spirits, encourage him, and urge patience.

Another important thing: uproot all scandalous talk. This kind of thing

[2]Probably a slip of the tongue. The quote is from John 5, 35. [Editor]

can happen quite often without the superiors becoming aware of it and therefore making a move to stop it. It is of utmost necessity that you tell them of it, because while your superiors are not in touch with such mischief-makers, you are.

One way of uprooting this cockle is fraternal correction. Here and at home friends may inadvertently slip into unbecoming talk or use in their letters phrases which are un-Christian, words which may excite angry or evil thoughts in us.

In such a case one might reply, "Look at the kind of talk you are using. Remember that such words are unseemly on Christian lips. I know you are my friend and used them without thinking, but just because you are my friend I trust you will not feel offended if I call this to your attention." Or else you might say, "I'm sorry, but I cannot take your suggestions. They are out of keeping with the life a Christian youth is expected to live."

Many times such friendly correction to one's companions or brothers will be more effective than many sermons and may even prompt them to a better awareness of God and make them more religious-minded merely because of the kindly courtesy shown them by someone who they knew was living up to his faith.

Regretfully, one has to exercise such charity with parents sometimes, instructing and correcting them while disapproving of their ways. One is to be firm, unembarrassed, but all the while loving, kind and meek, as was St. Francis de Sales in similar situations.

These and a thousand other ways are open to all workers in the Lord's vineyard, be they priests, clerics or laymen, regardless of age and position. Everyone, you see, can help gather in the Gospel harvest as long as he is motivated by zeal for God's honor and the salvation of souls.

Now you may wonder, "What are you driving at, Don Bosco? What are you trying to tell us and why?"

My dear sons, the cry of "The laborers are few" did not resound only in past eras, but it is more imperative than ever in our present day and age. The harvest allotted to our Congregation grows daily at such a pace that I may well say that we do not know where to begin or how to go about our task. That is why I would like to see all of you very soon working hard in the Lord's vineyard.

An extraordinary number of requests for new resident schools, houses and mission stations reach us from different parts of Italy, France, and foreign countries, such as Gibraltar, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Arabia, India, China, Japan, Australia, Argentina, Paraguay, and practically all South America. Everywhere the scarcity of evangelical workers is thoroughly shocking when we consider how much good can be done and remains undone through lack of missionaires. Heartrending news comes to us from Father Carliero. In Argentina a priest does not ask his

penitent, "How long is it since your last confession?" but, "Have you ever gone to confession?" Not infrequently men and women between the ages of thirty and forty reply that they have never been to confession. And this is not due to dislike for the Church, but only because there was never an opportunity. So you can imagine how many will find themselves at death's door, desirous of making their confession and receiving absolution and this consolation cannot be theirs because very rarely is a priest available.

But I do not intend to urge you to journey to such distant lands. Some can, but not all, and there are reasons. First, we have an urgent need right here, and again, not everyone called to the Salesian Congregation is inclined to go so far. But in view of such need and such a lack of evangelical laborers, how could I remain silent? Realizing that you can all in one way or another work in the Lord's vineyard, how could I keep from revealing my heart's hidden desire? Yes, really, I would hope to see you all eager to work like so many apostles. This is the goal of all my thoughts, cares and efforts. This is the reason for our crash courses, for the greater opportunities we offer you to don the clerical habit, and for other special study courses.

How was I to remain silent in the face of so many and such urgent needs? How was I to turn a deaf ear to people appealing to us from all sides? I feel that it is God Himself speaking through them. Can I remain silent and not try to bolster the ranks of missionaries, when God makes it so clear that He wants to accomplish great things through our Congregation?

There is one more thing I have to tell you, and it is the most important of all. Although I urge you to be steadfast in your vocation or to enter the Salesian Congregation, I will not have anyone who does not have a vocation try to join. Realizing the great good we can accomplish, I tell you how abundant the harvest is and how pressing is the need of workers in order that those who hear an inner voice saying, "In the Salesian Congregation you will more easily assure your own salvation and that of many others," may know what the situation is, and may be encouraged to enter. However, I want all others to follow their own calling.

What I strongly desire and insist upon is that in all plans and callings you may be a "lamp set aflame and burning bright" as the Gospel says. [John 5, 31] I hold nothing against a young man who wishes to enter a seminary and become a diocesan priest. What I aim at, what I insist upon and will keep insisting upon to my last breath, is that seminarians be holy seminarians and priests be holy priests. He who wishes to share in the Lord's heritage by choosing the clerical state must not concern himself with worldly matters but should think only of saving souls. This is what I ask: that all of you, priests especially, be a light to illumine all about you,

not a darkness to deceive them. But this light is to shine not just in words but in deeds. Let each of us strive to adorn the heart with that charity which would make him sacrifice his own life to save souls and be indifferent to material gain when it is a matter of doing good. May we, like St. Paul, esteem earthly goods and gain as mere rubbish in order to win souls for Jesus Christ. With him let us say, "I have accounted all else as rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth." [Phil. 3, 8]

Be not slaves to gluttony and intemperance which lead many people—and regretfully, even priests—to ruin. If you want to work in the Lord's vineyard in any position, you must acquire self-control, especially in drinking.

A genuine evangelical laborer, wherever he is, willingly takes part in services of worship, promoting them, and enhancing their solemnity. If it is a novena, he shows his joy, performs special devotions and invites others to do likewise.

To be a real evangelical worker, one must not waste time but diligently carry out his duties, whatever they be, mindful that time is precious.[3]

These, my dear sons, are the factors which make a good evangelical worker. Would that they were to be put exactly into practice among us! Let us look about us. Are they practiced in our Congregation? If I could truthfully say yes, how fortunate I would be, how truly proud! If the Salesians were really to live their faith as St. Francis de Sales understood it in his zeal, charity, and meekness, I could truly be proud, and there would be reason to hope for a vast amount of good to be done! In fact I might say that the world would come after us, and we would master it!

Another factor which I see as truly most important, something we must strive to acquire and ever retain, is brotherly love, that bond which holds religious societies and congregations together. I think I can call it the hinge on which all religious congregations turn. But what degree of brotherly love do we need? Our Savior tells us, "Love one another asI have loved you." [John 15, 12] Holy Scripture repeats that we must have great love for one another, a love whereby the well-being of one is the well-being of all, the suffering of one, the suffering of all. We are to uphold each other, without criticizing the deeds of another confrere, without being even a little jealous of his position, his popularity and success. Do away with envy! The welfare of one must be the welfare of all; the sorrow of one, the sorrow of all. Is anyone being persecuted? We are all to feel persecuted, sympathizing with him. Is anyone sick? We are to feel downcast, as though we were sick. Then, in unity, let us promote good works, regardless of who offers the initiative. We know that not everyone possesses equal talent, knowledge or opportunities.

[3] This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Hence, let a strong brotherly love reign among us so that what happened in the Church will also occur in our Congregation. Besides the apostles there were seventy-two disciples, deacons, and other evangelical co-workers, all toiling in harmony with each other, all bound together by firm brotherly love. That is why they succeeded, as they did, in changing the face of the earth. So, too, with us. Wherever we may be, whatever tasks may be assigned to us, let us strive to save souls, and above all, our own. Do that, and it is enough.

But such an achievement demands painful sacrifices and suffering on our part, and we must be ready for anything. Yes, let each of you enter the Salesian Congregation, but let him first say to himself, *I choose to take this road for the only purpose of saving souls, my own especially. Since I cannot achieve this without sacrifice, I am ready for it. I intend to follow Jesus Crucified, who died on the cross, amid atrocious pain. I want to be His disciple and must get ready to suffer anything, even death on the cross!*

After all, does not the Gospel say, "Blessed are they who suffer"? It never says, "Blessed are those who have a good time." If we have to suffer, let us take joy in following the footsteps of Our Divine Redeemer more closely. The pleasures of this world last but a moment, and those who have indulged in them will lose them for all eternity, while those who suffer will do so for a short time only and their sufferings will win them a jeweled crown and they will be happy forever and ever.

I close with St. Paul's words, "If you joyfully look ahead to your great reward, do not be frightened by the nature of the hardships."

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

B.S.	Blessed Sacrament
D.M.H..	Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians
D.B.	Don Bosco
D.S.	Dominic Savio
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.N.	Good Night
I.C.	Immaculate Conception
L.C.	*Letture Cattoliche*
M.H.C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Cooperators
S.M.	Sons of Mary
S.S.	Salesian Society

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