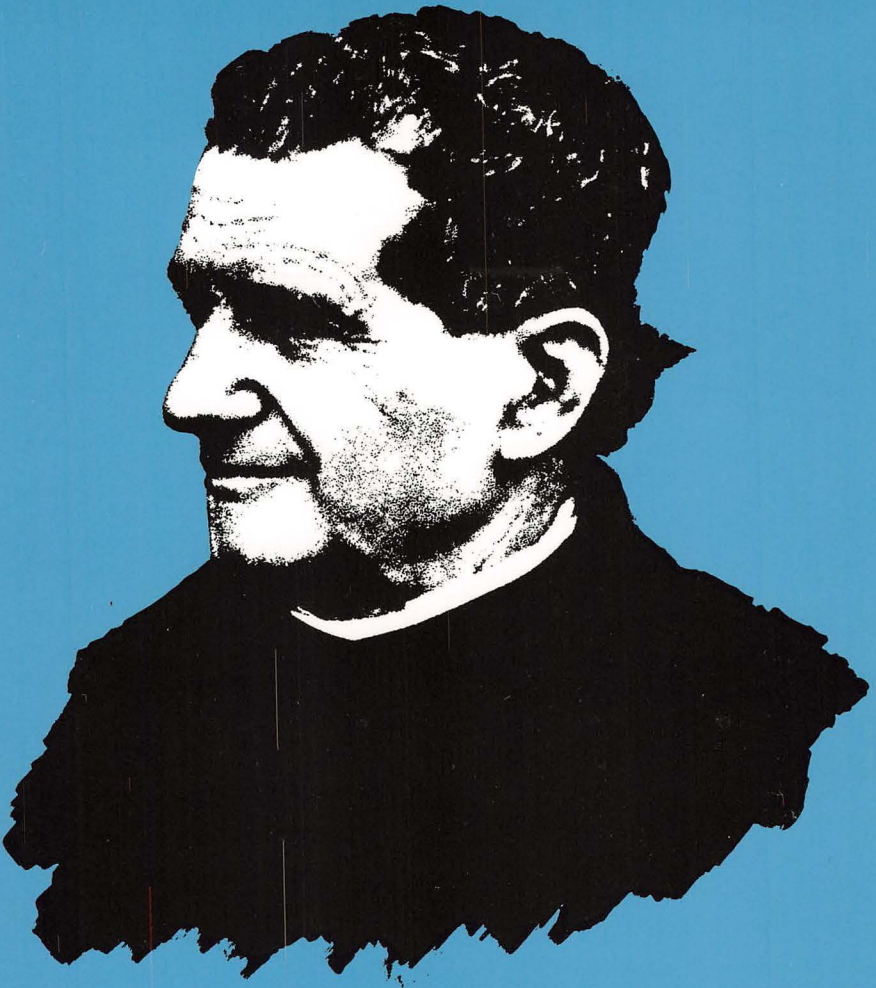




VOLUME XIV - 1879-1880

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

1995

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<i>Countries</i>	118
<i>Provinces</i>	89
<i>Houses</i>	2,026
<i>Bishops</i>	74
<i>Archbishops</i>	15
<i>Cardinals</i>	5

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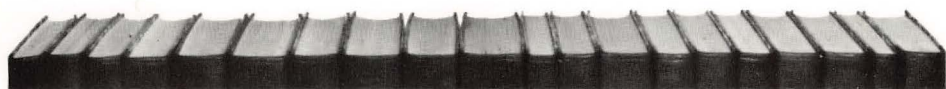
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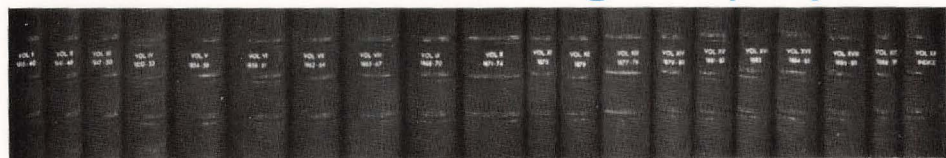
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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

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

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Feast of St. John Bosco

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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 memory

of

REV. JOSEPH PEROZZI, S.D.B.

(1919-1983)

His pioneering efforts

to spread the Gospel message

through the resources of the mass media

have effectively promoted

the Ministry of the Word

in the Salesian Congregation

Editor's Preface

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

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

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

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

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

Fortunately, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available 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

²All 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.

and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.³ When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, the *Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

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

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

EDITOR'S NOTE

As with Volumes VI through X and Volumes XII and XIII, 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.

January 31, 1985

Feast of St. John Bosco

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

Author's Preface

TIME and again in going through these pages, the readers may feel that Don Bosco is visibly bleeding as he walks beneath the arbor described in his now well-known dream.¹ It was a magnificent rose arbor: roses above him, roses under his feet, roses on every side, but all of them bristling with sharp, unseen thorns which ripped his flesh at every step. Casual onlookers watched with wonder or envy as he unhesitatingly moved along that flowered path, but those who drew nigh to follow in his footsteps instantly experienced at what price of pain this man of God gained every inch of ground.

In this volume, as in others, we have recounted events and produced documents covering a two-year period which could not be broken up without detriment to our narrative. As we moved step by step through the various periods of Don Bosco's life, we have gathered and coordinated as much material as we possibly could that is relevant to our founder, not only to serve for the edification of our confreres, but also to prepare the raw content which a future biographer will need for a stirring summary account of Don Bosco's exceptional personality as seen within the framework of his time.

Within this two-year period Don Bosco never slackened his laborious diligence in the running of his growing Congregation, in his sacred ministry, his management of countless business matters, his frequent journeys and his countering of the attacks of his adversaries, despite the relentless deterioration of his physical strength. Some timely comments of Blessed Claude de La Colombière will help us understand and better appreciate such intense activity on his part. At a moment of feverish apostolic activity which was almost overwhelming, Claude wrote to his sister, a Visitation nun:²

¹See Vol. III, pp. 25ff. [Editor]

²Letter III. [Author]

The problem is being constantly surrounded by people while seeking only God; forever having three or four times more work than one can possibly handle and yet never losing that peace of mind without which it is impossible to hold on to God; to have hardly more than a few moments to withdraw into oneself for prayer and yet, despite this, to keep one's mind from wandering away. All this is possible, but not so easy.

That it is truly possible is clear enough from the lives of both these holy men, with the difference, however, that this feverish pace lasted scarcely two years for Blessed de la Colombière, during his first stay at Paray-le-Monial, but Don Bosco experienced it for at least twoscore years. That both of them achieved what La Colombière called a possibility—a statement which proved true for both of them—is due to the fact that they took upon themselves all kinds of tasks for supernatural ends only in fulfillment of God's will.

The statement made by Pope Pius XI at an audience of June 17, 1932 to the pupils of both major and minor pontifical Roman seminaries casts new light on Don Bosco's spirituality. Among other things, the Pope said of him:³

Every moment of his life was a constant sacrifice, a continual withdrawing into prayer. The most striking impression on anyone talking to him was his alertness to whatever was taking place before him. People came from everywhere to see him about one thing or another, and in a flash, as though he saw it all at once, he would listen, see the entire picture, and offer an answer to every question without losing contact with God. One might have said that he was paying no attention to anything being said around him, his thoughts being elsewhere, and so it really was. In spirit he was one with God, yet, in a manner truly surprising, he replied to all questions, finding the exact word to say, causing astonishment and then wonder. This was Don Bosco's life of holiness, contemplation, and assiduous prayer in the hours of the night and at every hour of endless, unyielding work through the day.

From this reservoir of spiritual life Don Bosco drew unlimited trust in God, so that nothing he ever put his hand to seemed too difficult, nothing in the future threatened him. He knew how to

³*Osservatore Romano*, June 19, 1932. [Author]

imbue this same sense of trust in his co-workers and cooperators who, never overly worried by spiritual or material problems, followed the trail he blazed, the former sharing his daily labors, the latter supplying the daily funds he needed for his religious family and for his multiple enterprises.

Another concern which never escaped Don Bosco despite his many preoccupations was his zeal in guiding his Salesians to God. His secret of success in this was to love them dearly, each and every one of them so that they willingly did what was expected of them. This overall fatherly spirit—neither generic nor abstract—gave him that sense of moderation which is the mark of enlightened and truly superior men, enabling them prudently to adjust to various temperaments and move firmly but gently wherever need and duty so requires.

This leads us to another important observation. Don Bosco's intense efforts to train those who were to form the first nucleus of his Society were long and arduous. For at least thirty years he toiled to choose them, rear them, shape them, and win them over to himself and to his mission. How often his hopes were crushed by sad defections. But in the end he reaped the harvest of his undaunted constancy, particularly in two matters: the close bond of the first members with each other and with their head, and, secondly, the firm unity which they have passed down to us. In fact, to this day, over a period of sixty years, none of the deplorable schisms which afflicted other religious families at their origins have as yet shaken our enviable unity. What more shining proof of this brotherly harmony can we have than the recent election of Don Bosco's fourth successor? Over eighty electors from all four corners of the globe unanimously and with no previous collusion chose Father Peter Ricaldone in such marvelous unanimity, so promptly welcomed by thousands upon thousands of non-electors that it did not escape the keen eye of Pope Pius XI. In his first audience with the newly elected rector major, he remarked on the significance and merit of the event with pleasure:⁴

Walls will crack when their foundations are loose—he said—but solid walls tell us that the architect erected them on solid rock. God, we hope,

⁴Acts of the Superior Chapter, June 22, 1932. [Author]

will never allow harmful agents to draw near to such a substructure, but if in the course of time destructive forces should assail it, we are confident that they will not manage even to scar it, let alone break it up. The thorough understanding of Don Bosco's life, works, and spirit will perpetually exercise a sovereign influence to weld together ever more firmly all the units of the great structure he created.

And now we come to ourselves and our own task. Despite the factual evidence of Don Bosco's achievements found also in the period covered by this volume, we must still deplore a sad, extensive lack of understanding on the part of even intelligent people. While the overwhelming evidence of fact forced most people to proclaim "The finger of God is here," for others that finger was hidden in the humility of His servant. Such is the fate of those who work the hardest to sow in the evangelical field, for generally it is not the sower who reaps. The seeds whose harvest gives joy to the reaper are watered by the tears which usually go with the work of sowing.⁵

⁵"One man sows, another reaps" [Jn. 4, 37]. "Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing" [Ps. 125, 5].

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., Provincial Councillor for the Salesian Family, for his very valuable editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City.

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*.

COOPERATORS: Christians (laymen, lay religious or priests) who, even if they have no religious vows, follow a vocation to holiness by offering themselves to work for the young in the spirit of Don Bosco, in the service of the local church, and in communion with the Salesian Congregation.

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 Visit to the Salesian Houses in France

THE rapid growth of the Salesian houses in both Italy and France kept Don Bosco from the Oratory for increasingly longer and more frequent periods, as he visited newly opened houses and conferred with promoters and benefactors. Above all, he could not lose touch with Rome, where the most vital interests of the Congregation's future were under discussion. Luckily he had in Turin the efficient Father Rua¹ on whose good judgment he could fully rely, as the experience of the past few years had amply convinced him. Truly, he could not have asked for a more devoted son, a more loyal interpreter of his every wish, a more tireless and intelligent worker, a more enlightened mind and a superior of more unchallenged authority. Nor could he have found a man so fully dedicated to his mission, so totally imbued with his ideas and so amply qualified not only to keep the reins of the Oratory in hand, but also to be the founder's worthy spokesman at all levels and in all matters. Therefore also in 1879 on several occasions Don Bosco left the motherhouse for a considerable length of time, without the slightest worry of what might happen in his absence. In the next four chapters we shall follow him through France, Liguria, Tuscany and Rome and homeward to Valdocco by another route.

Had he sought his physician's advice, he would certainly have been told not to risk the discomfort, fatigue and rigors of such an extended winter's journey, but when God chooses certain men to accomplish spectacular feats for His greater glory on earth, we may safely say, in a certain sense, that "though weak, they were made

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

powerful” [Heb. 11, 34], so undaunted did they hold up under every adverse situation.

He left Turin on December 30, giving Father Rua little money, but leaving a circular² describing a lottery of paintings³ which he was to mail on January 1. He also gave him a letter for the cooperators to be published in the forthcoming January issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*, in which he was appealing to their charitable assistance.

Father Cagliero⁴ accompanied Don Bosco. They spent a few days at Sampierdarena and then on January 3 went on to Alassio, where they found the director ailing and the house staff in a state of exhaustion. As the feast of the Epiphany was at hand, they all begged Don Bosco to let his talented companion stay behind for a few days to help their young students celebrate the feast and to revive their good spirit with his pleasant humor. “I remained there,” Father Cagliero wrote, “working a good deal.⁵ My stay served as a pastoral visit to the Salesians and as a formal visit to the sisters.” On this occasion Don Bosco formally appointed Father Louis Rocca⁶ vice-director, which actually meant director, since Father Cerruti’s⁷ weak health and recent appointment as provincial made such a move necessary.

Don Bosco left almost immediately for Nice, taking with him three clerics who had joined him at Sampierdarena. Though no one there had any inkling of his coming, somehow or other the confreres seemed to feel that something extraordinary was in the air, for during dinner they heard a very loud train whistle, an unusual occurrence, and laughingly remarked, “Something’s going to happen!” After dinner as the director took his hat to go out on business, the doorkeeper came dashing up to him, exclaiming: “Don Bosco! Don Bosco!” At the news, the boys rushed out and surrounded Father Ronchail⁸ at the gate. Calmly he stood there, thinking that they were either dreaming or joking, but as he opened the door he saw Don Bosco himself step out of a coach. The

²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

³See Vol. XIII, pp. 544f. [Editor]

⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁵Letter to Father Rua, Nice, January 11, 1879. [Author]

⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁸See Appendix 1. [Editor]

heartiest welcome was hastily improvised for him. On entering the house, Don Bosco asked the director about the health of Baron [Amato] Héraud. That, too, was a strange coincidence, for at that very moment, though uninformed [of Don Bosco's visit], the baron himself suddenly appeared, bowing and presenting Don Bosco with the keys. Then, no sooner had Don Bosco finished his dinner than the telegram which he had sent from Menton to announce his arrival was delivered.

Everyone felt sad at Don Bosco's frail appearance. Train rides were usually hard on him, his eyesight was as always giving him trouble, and he felt queasy and close to vomiting. "Nevertheless," Father Ronchail wrote, "he has great faith in the prayers of his sons and wants everyone to receive Holy Communion devoutly for his intention." Father Cagliero in turn wrote: "We must pray for Don Bosco. Both his eyes and his stomach constantly pain him, and we must realize that he is no longer the man he used to be. His traveling companions must be especially thoughtful and alert, for, unaccustomed to asking, he now never makes his needs known. We have to anticipate them." During those days he dictated three letters [to Father Rua].⁹

He spent Sunday, January 5, and the solemnity of the Epiphany at Nice, leaving for Marseille on January 7 and taking Father Ronchail along as his secretary, so that Father Cagliero arrived at Nice to find instructions that he was to fill in for the director of St. Pierre's Hospice during his absence. The French ecclesiastical hat and clerical bib which Don Bosco wore on his departure provoked a few laughs, since his sons thought it quaint of him to dress that way. He laughed too, remarking, "Carnival begins today, and we've all got to do something funny!" But his humor covered up a far wiser attitude of his: as he dressed like a French ecclesiastic in France, so he wore Spanish clericals in Spain. That same love of God and neighbor which made him all things to all people in order to draw all to Jesus Christ prompted him to present a fitting external appearance that would break down and rid minds of all harmful prejudices, such as, for example, that he meant to imprint a distinctly Italian nationalism on his work outside Italy. Such fears

⁹One was written by Father Joseph Bologna (Marseille, January 8), another by Father Joseph Ronchail (Marseille, January 9), and a third by Father John Cagliero (Nice, January 11). [Author]

could only irritate the sensitivities of those countries which hosted him and raise doubts as to the sincerity of his zeal.

He and Father Ronchail went by rail to Fréjus where they were most graciously met by Bishop [Ferdinand] Terris; later that evening, they continued on to Marseille. There they were greeted by the first blasts of the mistral, an extremely cold northwest wind blowing from the mountains, which persisted for two days and at times threatened to overturn the house. Certainly it was not the best weather for Don Bosco's delicate health.

But the chill was not just in the air. At the start almost no one paid Don Bosco any heed, since he had come to Marseille without prior announcement; the only joyful welcome he received was at the parish festive oratory. Even [Canon Clement Guiol]¹⁰ the pastor of St. Joseph Church seemed to have changed, so indifferent was he to Don Bosco's presence. On his various visits to people Don Bosco met only cold politeness, and on one occasion, when calling on an important religious community, it was even worse. On asking the concierge for the superior, he was pointed the way to a staircase, corridor and room. Father Bologna¹¹ was with him. They went upstairs unescorted, looking about for the correct room. In it they found three priests seated on a sofa, engaged in conversation. Don Bosco humbly introduced himself.

"What do you want?" the superior asked.

"I'm looking for Father Superior," Don Bosco answered.

"Wait in the antechamber."

"I would only like to tell Father Superior. . . ."

"Wait in the antechamber. We are busy just now."

Don Bosco obliged and waited for some time. Finally the superior appeared and curtly, in a standoffish way, asked, "What is your name?"

"I am Don Bosco."

"What can I do for you?"

"I'd like to recommend the new boarding school I have just opened here in Marseille to your kind attention."

"Nothing else?"

"No, Father. Only this, and to pay my respects."

"Well, then . . . I understand. Good day."

¹⁰See Vol. XIII, p. 410. [Editor]

¹¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

And he withdrew, leaving Don Bosco to find his own way out. Father Bologna staggered behind him, seething with resentment and chagrin. "Don't fret," Don Bosco told him, totally unruffled. "They will be more embarrassed than we when they realize how rudely they have treated us." Indeed years later, when wonders revealed the hand of Providence in Don Bosco's works, those same priests were quick to call on him and pay their respects.

Shortly we shall point out what had caused such a radical shift of sentiment among the people that Father Bologna felt very uncomfortable and had to press Don Bosco to come to Marseille. Undismayed, Don Bosco tried to reassure the young director. His small room overlooked a hillock topped by three grand oak trees, but from below an upward slanting courtyard made it possible to look into the rooms of the house. One day, Don Bosco, pointing to the hillside through the uncurtained windows, told the director, "You will see that we shall soon be freed of this clumsy setup, and up there we will have a large, handsome residence with a spacious, level playground." These words cheered up the director somewhat, but did not fully put him at ease, especially when Don Bosco exclaimed, "I am wasting my time here!" The fact was that there seemed to be no chance of getting anywhere.

Then Providence stepped in to help Don Bosco out of the deadlock with an event which changed hearts and minds in the twinkling of an eye. A Piedmontese woman from the Asti district brought her son to him. The young boy was a pitiful sight—frail, bent almost double with rickety limbs, propped up on two crutches. He could have been no more than eight years old. Several day students attending the Salesian school and members of the St. Joseph choir saw him pass by. When mother and son were ushered into Don Bosco's room, he said a few words to each and then, blessing the little cripple, ordered him to drop his crutches. The transformation was instantaneous and total: the boy straightened up, threw down his crutches and ran off. Beside herself, the mother snatched up the crutches and dashed out after him, shouting that it was a miracle. Neither one of them was ever seen again.¹²

¹²Huysmans recounted this episode in his well-known sketch of Don Bosco, but with two mistakes: one of place and one of time. He wrongly states that the event took place in "Rue Beaujour," and he assigned it to January 29, on which day Don Bosco was actually at Saint-Cyr. Our account is based on the testimony of Father Bologna as given to Father Lemoyne,

It was just eight months later, during the spiritual retreat, that Father Bologna ventured to ask Don Bosco privately what had happened, he himself not having been present at the time. Don Bosco replied confidentially, "You see, Don Bosco felt that he was just getting nowhere in France, and so he told Our Lady, 'Come now, let's get started!'"

And a great start it was. The news of the marvel spread like wildfire through the city, creating such a furor that people flocked to Don Bosco in endless lines. It cannot be said that Don Bosco ever mastered French, but he spoke it with an engaging frankness that lent a charm even to his inevitable mistakes. Then, too, his unshakable serenity, all the more striking in its contrast to the usual vivacity of the French, deeply impressed the people. His concerns in those days centered upon the need to enlarge the building, and many of his visitors, knowing this, vied with each other in forecasting how rapidly that expansion would be made. Already they were talking about sheltering two hundred and fifty boys within six months. Don Bosco let them talk, but then with a down-to-earth remark, uttered in a tone which sounded phlegmatic by contrast, he brought his speakers back to the world of reality.

On January 12 Father Bologna wrote to Father Rua: "Enthusiasm has been aroused." That day the bishop invited Don Bosco to dinner and seated him at his side, flanked by ten parish priests. On January 14 Father Ronchail again wrote to Father Rua: "We never dreamed that we would find such generosity and so much good will. Looking at all that is happening about us these days makes us feel that we are living a fairy tale. Don Bosco is beside himself and can't figure out how all his hopes and wildest dreams have been surpassed. The events of this week will find a glorious page in our Congregation's entire history." That same day Father Bologna also wrote to Father Rua, "The movement is spreading in a fantastic way." The endless stream of visitors kept surging in such great numbers that his acting secretary, unaccustomed to meeting the demands of his duties under these

and on the witness of Father [Louis] Cartier, then stationed in our house at Marseille, whose several statements on this matter were recorded verbatim by our confrere Father [Frederick] Rivière. As for the date, we are of the opinion that this event took place on either January 10 or 11. Readers will agree to this if they will check out the dates cited in our subsequent narration. [Author]

circumstances, wrote to Father Rua on January 20, "His name has flashed through Marseille like a bolt of lightning! If he stays here any longer, we will have to get Father Berto¹³ to come and keep the crowds under control." Don Bosco personally informed Father Rua on January 27: "As the world would say, our works are moving fantastically, but we say prodigiously. May God's goodness be ever praised and exalted!"

All this enthusiasm gave rise to the idea of a public conference to be given by Don Bosco either in a parish church or in a public hall to a select audience. Don Bosco had to oblige. However, he managed to arrange for a meeting of his friends in one of the school's dormitories converted into a hall. The flow of visitors which gave him no respite made it impossible for him to give any thought to what he was to say and how to say it.

The bishop also attended the conference. Father Bologna marveled to hear Don Bosco speak French with such ease, as did others of his listeners, one of whom, replying to an inquisitive friend on how Don Bosco had managed with the language, wittily replied, "He spoke French as though he knew it."

Such unanimous acceptance of his plan to expand the boarding school soon began to bring in the first funds for financing the project. To stimulate the generosity of Marseille's citizens further, Don Bosco lost no time in calling in a builder and contracting for the project at a cost of fifty thousand francs, the building to be completed by August and large enough to accommodate two hundred boys. One morning, as he was reviewing the blueprints with Itier, the architect, Canon Timon-David¹⁴ showed up and spent some time with them, examining, advising, approving, objecting and finally disapproving. At last he left. Don Bosco, though a cautious mover who coupled caution with a native acute intuition, remarked to the architect, "I am afraid that when good Canon Timon goes to heaven, he will find something there not entirely to his liking."

Don Bosco would gladly have given a dinner for his most

¹³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁴See Vol. XIII, p. 75. We must correct an inaccuracy on that page. The Brothers of the Sacred Heart mentioned there were not those of Puy, but a local clerical congregation, known as *Oeuvre du Sacré-Coeur de l'Enfant Jésus*, founded by Canon Timon-David and approved by the Holy See a few years ago. [Author]

prominent friends in Marseille, but the premises were hardly suitable. Fortunately, Monsieur Jules Rostand, chairman of the Beaujour Society, had the bright thought of inviting the most outstanding people of the city to a grand testimonial dinner in Don Bosco's honor. While sipping their wine, the dinner guests discussed the boarding school to be built and the big hostel for artisans to be entrusted to Don Bosco's care. Two problems stood out, both very challenging: collecting enough cash to finance the actual construction and setting up a trust fund whose annual interest would provide for the boys' needs. All agreed that it was a bold project whose outcome was rather uncertain. Choosing the apt moment, Don Bosco said with a grave smile, "Yes, of course it's an ambitious project but only the people of Marseille can measure up to it." His words electrified them, so much so that he himself could never have imagined their striking effect. The cash problem gradually disappeared and construction never had to be suspended for lack of funds. When recounting the affair at Alassio, Don Bosco admitted that then and there he had no idea of the effect his words had produced since they had just poured out of the fullness of his heart. It was Canon Guiol who told him of it later, and facts bore him out. Be that as it may, we must recall Don Bosco's masterly skill in saying the right things to his listeners.

Callers flocked in endless sequence. An account of one visit in particular has come down to us, that of a certain Monsieur Olive, one of Marseille's wealthiest citizens. He was suffering from an incurable disease and asked Don Bosco for his blessing and intercession for a healing. Our saintly father suggested a sure means: he was to go to his bank, draw a sum proportionate to his wealth, and give it to Don Bosco; it might not be a great sacrifice but, should it be, he was to acquiesce, since it involved obtaining a true miracle. Monsieur Olive asked for some time to consult with his wife. "If you think it is too much," Don Bosco replied, "do what you think is best, but I consider it an absolute condition. However, God sees the heart, and He knows what sacrifice would be adequate. Should you not wish to give that sum to me, you may donate it to some other pious undertaking or to the bishop to use it as he may judge best, but this is what you must do in order to recover."

Although the gentleman returned to Don Bosco several times, he never got around to making up his mind. Finally one day while Don Bosco was calling on the bishop, the latter handed him two thousand five hundred francs on behalf of Monsieur Olive, who lost no time in visiting Don Bosco again, convinced of his own generosity. However, the sum was a mere trifle compared to what he could afford. It would appear that God wanted to help him detach his heart from his riches.

Don Bosco naturally thanked him for the donation, but to his insistent queries as to whether he might hope to receive the yearned-for favor, he replied, "When I made you that proposal a few days ago, I knew that the Lord would grant your prayer, but now I no longer feel so sure. Keep praying. He may still grant your wish in His vast goodness, but the chances are slim. The moment passed and it will not return. Scripture says that Jesus 'went about doing good' [Acts 10, 38]. He did not 'remain.' Do you understand the difference?" The man realized that he would not be cured, and so it was.

Besieged by visitors, Don Bosco was no less pressed by business matters. "Great projects are in the offing," he wrote to Father Rua, "and much prayer is needed if everything is to turn out successfully." A grave concern of his was to establish clearly and precisely the Salesians' relationship to St. Joseph's parish, since the director and the pastor had had a falling out. The latter wanted St. Leo's Oratory to train both the choir and the altar boys for the parish. In all reality, no one had ever mentioned this matter during the negotiations for a boys' hospice; it came up only after Father Bologna became director of St. Leo's Oratory. An unforeseen need had made Canon Guiol turn the training of his choir and altar boys over to the Salesians, who agreed to do it with great inconvenience to themselves and without stipend, in order to please the man who had so befriended them. They did their best, relying on the help of the day boys, whereas it was expected that a better training would be provided by the boarders. But this would only have jeopardized the boarders' formation because, doubtless, they could not be properly supervised if they had to leave the premises frequently and no longer be under their director's full control. "We have a special educational method, known as the 'Preventive System of Educa-

tion,' ” Don Bosco later explained when the controversy over this matter reached a climax,¹⁵ “and it is impossible to apply it if the pupils are not totally under our control. We never use repressive methods, relying at all times on supervision, reason and religion. It is therefore indispensable that the parish choir provide its services to the parish without involving the boarders in any way, although, if needed for solemn occasions, the boarders will willingly strengthen the ranks of singers and serve as altar boys.”

Besides the choir, the parish priest regularly demanded as his due the service of priests to help him in the care of the parish—something unheard of in Italy. The first time Canon Guiol brought this up, he had suggested it to Don Bosco as a source of income for the house. Once the priests had celebrated Mass, they could devote the rest of their day working at the festive oratory. No mention of any other obligation had been made until Don Bosco went to Marseille, and good Father Bologna could have obliged even in this without endangering the smooth running of the hospice. In this regard we quote a remark contained in the cited letter which touches upon the life of our Society, “which,” it states, “is dedicated to the moral and temporal welfare of youth. The assistant priest’s duties of funerals and escorting the deceased to the cemetery are so distasteful to the members of this Congregation that some of them might well choose to leave it rather than alter the purpose for which they pledged themselves to the Lord.”

These two situations, we think, suffice to explain the ill feelings arising between the hospice and the parish, the director and the pastor, once the “honeymoon” was over. A side effect was the chill which consequently fell over the relations between the latter’s friends and the Salesians. The suddenly restored enthusiasm, heightened by the miraculous healing of the boy, helped to ease the tensions, but the ill feelings had to be put to rest completely and matters set aright. In all of this Don Bosco’s magnanimity shone forth. Always grateful to Canon Guiol, who had done so much to bring his sons to Marseille, he kindly discussed the situation with him, and, after a lively exchange of letters between Marseille and

¹⁵Letter to Monsieur Rostand in reply to a letter of his of September 8, 1879. We still have the rough copy in two different handwritings, possibly because it was written under dictation. The additions and alterations in the text are by Father Rua and Don Bosco. Don Bosco signed it. [Author]

Turin, our saintly father finally agreed to sign an agreement of sorts with the pastor of St. Joseph's as a tangible proof of his genuine gratitude. However, to keep matters in perspective, he had a clause inserted which stated that St. Leo's Oratory would offer its services to the parish as required, "in a manner compatible with the oratory duties to which each individual is committed."¹⁶

There was another serious matter for which Don Bosco requested special prayers in his letter to Father Rua on January 21: "Much prayer is badly needed. If the boys really want to do something to please me, let them offer a triduum of Communions and prayers for my intentions and for the successful outcome of our affairs." A new contract had to be drawn up with the Beaujour Society to replace the old, no longer adequate for a new and very important need: guaranteeing the existence of our houses at La Navarre and at Saint-Cyr. To achieve this, the Beaujour Society was to purchase the two farms owned by Father Vincent and his tenants, paying only the liens on them with funds donated by benefactors and then leasing land and buildings to Don Bosco under terms to be arranged. The latter were worked out in painstaking discussions and drawn up into a contract¹⁷ which was to be signed within three months and become effective four months later. When all was ready, Don Bosco informed Father Rua by letter on January 27: "Today at two o'clock we shall have to make two important decisions. Everything is set in our favor. Let us hope that all will be concluded in accordance with God's holy will." Just a few days before, he had written to him on this very matter: "These decisions are very important, morally, materially, and spiritually."

The Auteuil undertaking¹⁸ also called for his attention. Father Roussel, long anxious to confer with him, took advantage of his presence in Marseille for a personal meeting. His intent was to register objections to the plan drawn up in Turin by the superior chapter and signed by Don Bosco, which had been sent to him some months before. However, once he saw the enthusiasm of Marseille's people for Don Bosco, he felt overwhelmed and signed

¹⁶We are omitting the full text in French. [Editor]

¹⁷Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹⁸See Vol. XIII, pp. 565ff. [Editor]

the agreement as it was, insisting that it go into effect immediately.¹⁹

We have documentary proof of Don Bosco's activities in Marseille also in his letters to Father Rua, of which we possess five. More aptly they should be called memos of items done or to be attended to. Their sketchy wording and listing show us how in accord these two minds were. We record them in an Appendix to this volume.²⁰ Perusing them, the reader will notice how Don Bosco, regardless of being bombarded on every side by problems of all kinds, gave his attention to everything and everyone with the solicitude of a superior general and the loving care of a father. Nor was he concerned only about his vicar. In fact, in writing to the novice master, for instance, he expressed his thoughtful concern for the novices:

Marseille, January 10, 1879

My dear Father Barberis:

A few matters to keep between ourselves. I trust that our beloved novices, the apple of my eye, are all enjoying good health and warmly vying with each other to drive off the chill we usually feel at this time of year. Please assure them that they are my joy and my crown. Roses, of course, not thorns! May there never be a Salesian candidate who by his bad conduct thrusts a thorn into the heart of his most loving father, Don Bosco! God forbid! Indeed, I am sure that all will outdo each other in their prayers and Holy Communions in order to comfort me by their exemplary behavior.

Of the three novices I brought with me I assigned Boyer to La Navarre, whereas Taulaigo, who is writing this letter, and Turin are here to edify the people of Maison Beaujour. This house, now a seedling, needs a great deal of initial care, but it will grow into a tree whose boughs and gentle shade will extend their beneficial effects to far distant lands. This is my hope in the Lord. On Saturday Foglino and Quaranta will board ship for Montevideo. They are happy and content and want nothing more than to fly to the aid of their confreres in Uruguay.

Father Ronchail will send you more news. Tell Father Depert to sanctify the sacristy and everyone in it; tell Palestrino, the sacristan, to be good and Julius to be cheerful; tell Father Rua to look for money and Count Cays to care for his health as he would for mine.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 570f. [Editor]

²⁰Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

God bless you all and may He grant you all the grace of a good life and a happy death. May He grant it especially to the one whom I will not see again when I return to the Oratory.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The one whom Don Bosco would not see again on his return was one of Father Barberis' helpers, Father Remondino, a postulant who died on February 1.

He did not forget the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, to whom he sent a message through their director at Mornese, Father Lemoyne. Unfortunately we have not been able to trace it until now.

[No date]

My dear Father Lemoyne,

I write this letter to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians while in the diocese of St. Lazarus, perhaps from the very spot where St. Mary Magdalene passed her days in prayer and penance. Either mother superior or, better, you yourself should read it publicly with such timely comments as you judge best. I would very much wish that copies be sent to all the other convents of the sisters.

Here I am very busy with many grave matters. When you will learn about them you will be astounded to see the Lanzo dream²¹ fulfilled. Next Wednesday I go to La Navarre by way of Saint-Cyr, where we have our house. God willing, I shall be at Nice by the end of the week. I do not know how the question of my friend Musso's ordination is doing; please give him my regards. Give my best also to the others in the house, the pastor, all our friends, and the Salesian cooperators.

God bless you, dear Father Lemoyne. Pray for me, who am always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Another thoughtful concern of his was for the artisans at the Oratory, whose best wishes he reciprocated in a very affectionate and fatherly note addressed to their catechist.

²¹See Vol. XIII, pp. 413ff. [Editor]

Marseille [No date]

My dear Father Branda,

Were I personally to visit my beloved artisans every time I think of them or pray for them, I would be spending a lot of time in talking to them and encouraging them. Still, I want to prove to them in deed that I really do particularly remember them. Tell them that I am most appreciative of their best wishes for Christmas and New Year's and that I reciprocate from the bottom of my heart. I have heard good things about them and pray that God will grant them good will and the grace to be virtuous.

Here I am at St. Leo's Hospice, where some sixty lads will gradually follow in the footsteps of the Oratory artisans. In fact, several are already determined to outdo them in obedience and piety, though I've told them that they'll never succeed. We shall see.

Meanwhile, tell them that I earnestly recommend frequent confession and Communion, but they must receive both sacraments with proper dispositions so that on each occasion some progress in virtue may be perceived. I wish I could say, please God, that each and every artisan is a model of good conduct to the others. It all depends on you, my beloved boys, to give me such utter consolation.

I know you are praying for me, and I attribute my improved eyesight to your prayers. Continue to pray. I thank you and God will reward you.

Give me the gift of one Holy Communion offered for my intention.

God bless you, dear Father Branda. May He also bless all our assistants, workers and artisans and grant us the grace of forming a single heart and soul to love and serve God here on earth, so that one day we may sing His praises and eternally enjoy Him in paradise.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

At the time when contacts with France were becoming ever more frequent and relevant, God inspired Count Cays to embrace the austere life of the Oratory, despite his already advanced years.²² This virtuous nobleman, who had perfect mastery of French, which he wrote impeccably, and who so thoroughly understood the French temperament, rendered outstanding services to Don Bosco both personally and by his writing. The following letter witnesses to Don Bosco's lofty esteem for him.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 157ff. [Editor]

Marseille, January 20, 1879

My dear Count Cays,

I was delighted to receive your letter and I thank you for your news. Father Roussel²³ did in fact come to Marseille and after some discussion did unconditionally sign the project we had outlined for him. I shall bring it along with me on my return to Turin. I hope we can meet at Alassio by next February 3 so that we can discuss some practical details.

See if you can sell part of the farmland at St. Ann's Villa²⁴ before we go bankrupt. I am still here in Marseille to settle some rather important matters which I hope will greatly benefit our Congregation. We shall talk about them at Alassio.

Monsieur D'Ycard²⁵ came to ask about you and was delighted to learn that you are already a priest. He had hoped to find you here.

My health has improved, thanks to God's goodness.

When you can, drop in on Marchioness Fassati and give her my regards and news of me.

Give my best also to your whole family. Tell Father Ghivarello to be good, Father Fusconi²⁶ that I miss hearing from him, and Father Angelo Savio to be a real angel. Take all possible care of your health. Look after yourself as you would look after me.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always, and may He help us ever do His holy will.

Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also wrote to Mrs. Matilda Sigismondi, wife of Mr. Alexander Sigismondi, whom we have often encountered in Don Bosco's journeys to Rome. His letter is a proof of the lasting devotion of this pious couple for our saintly father. How they loved him! In the summer of 1931, as Father [Philip] Rinaldi [third successor of Don Bosco]²⁷ was at the office of our procurator general in Rome, a gentle elderly woman, leaning heavily on her cane, barely managed to climb the not too steep stairs to pay her respects and give him a charitable donation. It was Matilda Sigismondi, now a widow. She had by chance heard that Don

²³*Ibid.*, p. 565. [Author]

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 632. [Author]

²⁵Monsieur Jean-Victor D'Ycard de Barbarin was Marseille's first Salesian cooperator and the first benefactor of St. Leo's Oratory. He died on February 24, 1979. [Author]

²⁶See Vol. XIII, p. 499. [Editor]

²⁷See Appendix I. [Editor]

Bosco's third successor was present in the office and could not resist her overwhelming eagerness to call on him and talk to him about Don Bosco.

Marseille, January 21, 1879

Most esteemed Mrs. Matilda,

Your letter caught up with me here at our house in Marseille. Father Rua has already had a Mass celebrated at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin for your intention. I too offered Mass here, and our orphan lads prayed and offered their Communions for you.

This house was inaugurated last year when I came to Marseille from Rome. It was named St. Leo's Festive Oratory in tribute to our new Pontiff.

My dear Mrs. Matilda and Mr. Alexander, how much we shall have to talk about!

Since my stay in the Holy City will be brief, we must really set aside a whole day just to chat together.

God bless you and dear Mr. Alexander and Mrs. Adelaide. Asking a remembrance in your prayers, I am happy and honored to be,

With filial love,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. My acting secretary wrote this for me since my eyes, notwithstanding some improvement, still pain me.

Along with Canon Guiol, pastor of St. Joseph's, Don Bosco went to Aix on January 27 "for a very important matter," as he wrote to Father Rua. It seems that on this occasion he delivered a fund-raising sermon which was followed by a collection.²⁸

A strange event took place in this ancient Roman city as Don Bosco himself narrated and Father Lemoyne recorded. Don Bosco called on Baron Martin and was hosted at a luncheon with his family, who enjoyed his deepest confidence. While crossing the parlor on his way to the dining room, Don Bosco spotted on a table silverware and platters of sterling silver. He stopped to admire that small treasure. Then, with feigned gravity and great calm, he

²⁸A sympathy letter from Father E. Vinson, a Vincentian, to Father Rua, February 6, 1888, on the death of Don Bosco, reads: "Should the Holy Father ever assign a patron saint to our Institute for the Young, and to other institutes, I hope that they and all the Salesian cooperators will entreat him that this patron be St. John Bosco!" [Author]

reached out and put piece after piece into his pockets, stowing away the rest in a bag which stood in the corner. The baron and the others stood by watching the game. When he was through moments later, Don Bosco asked the baron how much that table service might be worth. "Ten thousand francs, if you were to buy it new," the baron replied, "but you would probably get no more than one thousand if you were to sell it."

"Well, then, since my dear baron is so wealthy and I have such a hard time easing the hunger of my poor boys," Don Bosco said, "why don't you give me one thousand francs and I will give you back your silverware?"

As though it were the most natural thing in the world, the baron handed Don Bosco one thousand francs, and, just as simply, Don Bosco returned every piece to its place.

Still escorted by Father [Joseph] Ronchail, he left Marseille on January 29 for Saint-Cyr, where Father Cagliero had preceded him two weeks earlier on his return trip from La Navarre, whither he had accompanied two Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. He had rushed back, he said, because there was no one at St. Pierre's Hospice to be the community's confessor.²⁹

Although Don Bosco arrived at Saint-Cyr on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, supper that evening was not very lavish: lentil soup, a lentil salad, and two fried sparrows which the boys had caught during the day and which had to make do for three persons.

They were expected at Toulon the following morning to look over the choir-school which was to be entrusted to the Salesians. We must add that in some places these so-called choir-schools were really small junior seminaries. Don Bosco's inspection was long and thorough. During his stay he blessed a very sick young woman, who recovered almost instantly and lived five more years. We have no other details of this recovery, but we do know that as a result the young person's aunt became a most fervent Salesian cooperator for the remainder of her life.³⁰

Since the inspection was taking more time than expected, Don Bosco whispered to his secretary to look for a *trattoria* for their noon meal. However, the overly polite hosts who were escorting

²⁹Letter to Father Rua, Nice, January 16, 1879. [Author]

³⁰Letter from Mrs. J. Thomas to Father Rua, Toulon, February 8, 1888. [Author]

them would not leave their side and insisted on walking them to the railway station. They got there just in time to catch the train to Hyères. Nagging hunger pains were not the only upsetting thing that severely tested their patience. Night had fallen, and the coach that Count Buttigny was supposed to have sent was not there. They had telegraphed him from Toulon, but Father Perrot³¹ had sent a second telegram to him from La Crau to inform him of their arrival. Certain of the coach's coming and spying some distance away a pair of lanterns looking very much like a coach's headlamps, Don Bosco did not avail himself of the local bus. The town was some twenty minutes' walk from the railway station. The two travelers began heading for the two lamps, but hardly had they gone a few steps when the lights suddenly went out. They turned out to be street gas lamps lighting the road to the station.

They had no choice but to walk through ankle-deep mud since it had been raining all day at Hyères. The night was pitch-dark and their luggage weighed them down. Making a virtue of necessity, they set out in the Lord's name. When their arms ached too much for them to continue, they rested their suitcases on roadside posts or gravel heaps to catch their breath. Don Bosco would then tell funny stories, encouraging Father Ronchail to do likewise. Thus, after many such stops they finally trudged into Hyères. Meeting a woman, they asked for Monsieur Buttigny's home, but she, a native of Cuneo, had no idea where it was. They stopped at a cafe, only to be told that there were three families with that name in town. So they walked the empty streets in an aimless search until they met a man and asked for directions to the home of a certain Buttigny who owned an estate near La Navarre. He called a young lad over, gave him directions, and asked him to take them there.

Meanwhile, the count was on pins and needles, having sent his coach to meet Don Bosco at La Crau instead of Hyères. The count, in formal dress for a meeting he was to attend, insisted that he had received two telegrams about their arrival, and so kept heaping unkindly words on the luckless coachman. Just then Don Bosco and Father Ronchail appeared. "Here I am," Don Bosco said, dropping his valise wearily, but still smiling. The travelers were mud-stained to their waists, having walked a good hour from the

³¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

station to the house. The count welcomed them warmly, and, seeing their messy clothing, ordered his servants to have it cleaned. "Count, we've had no dinner today," Don Bosco said. "Please get us something to eat first."

A hot fire was crackling on the hearth. A meal was soon prepared, and they did it great credit. When they finally went to bed, they left their clothes with the servants who, after letting them dry, had a hard time cleaning them.

At eleven o'clock the next day, Dr. [Charles] D'Espiney, the local physician, came to escort Don Bosco to Count de Villeneuve. Father Ronchail went with them. The count had fallen from a horse and struck his head against a tree, sustaining a severe brain injury that threatened to impair his mental faculties. To add to his problems, death had deprived him of his wife, whom he dearly loved, and it was almost driving him out of his mind. Though not violent, he was so disoriented that his doctors had decided to put him into a nursing home that very week.

Dr. D'Espiney, a man of the old faith, suggested that they first have recourse to heavenly aid. Don Bosco found the patient smoking. "Count, this is Don Bosco who has come to visit you," the doctor said. The count stared blankly at Don Bosco and then called out to his maidservant, "Madeleine, it is time for my stroll."

"But, Count, please delay it a bit," the doctor begged. "Don Bosco would like to give you his blessing."

With serious mien, the count resumed his seat. Don Bosco gave him a medal of Mary, Help of Christians which he accepted, and then blessed him. From that moment a perfect calm came over him, replacing his usual nervous restlessness. Toward evening he had someone fetch Don Bosco from the house of Count Buttigny and kept him engaged in conversation for a long time. Don Bosco urged him to trust in Mary, Help of Christians, asked him to say some prayers, and then told him that he expected to see him in Turin, fully recovered, for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians in May. The count went to Turin a month earlier, no longer showing any signs of his former illness.

Don Bosco's visit to La Navarre and Saint-Cyr enabled him to learn at first hand the material and moral condition of both houses. He found that La Navarre had more fertile land than did Saint-Cyr, though here, particularly in early spring, the first crops of fruits and

vegetables and the evergreens which could be woven into funeral wreaths, so popular in France, brought a good income. He had to choose between leasing the land in both places or hiring men to farm it or establishing two agricultural schools. These institutions were well liked by all and everyone would have helped them.

As to the religious life of the communities, he found carry-overs from the past which he did not like. At La Navarre he picked up stories of the former owner's moral life which made him shudder, so that he had to use every possible means to erase the memory of such moral squalor. Some fifty boys were living there, of whom ten showed strong signs of a priestly calling. But at Saint-Cyr he found a veritable bedlam. There were some forty people there, ranging from three to thirty years of age. The so-called nuns, of whom we spoke in the foregoing volume,³² supervised the dormitories; boys and girls worked side by side in the workshops, mostly without supervision. It was urgent, therefore, that he speed up negotiations with the Beaujour Society and assume full charge of the normal operation.³³ At his superior chapter's meeting in Alassio, Don Bosco reported, "Let us ask God to bless us and keep His hand upon us. Surely, had I known about this situation before signing the contract, I would have been much slower to accept it, but I was told that the school was doing badly only because of incompetent administration."

With these and similar remarks, Don Bosco preventively silenced those who might in days to come be tempted to regard him as a visionary who chased the illusions of his own fantasy. Certainly he had not forgotten the glowing dream he had had in 1877 at Lanzo,³⁴ and so how could he now state that, had he known what he later discovered, he would not have signed the contract? We see here once again that, regardless of his dreams, Don Bosco, in the nitty-gritty of daily life, felt that he was in no way excused from following an enlightened prudence. In the long run, Providence always guided events.

We have no further information on this, Don Bosco's first journey to southern France, where his name stirs hallowed echoes

³²See Vol. XIII, p. 555. [Editor]

³³Letter to Canon Guiol drafted and written by Father Rua and signed by Don Bosco, Sampierdarena, February 15, 1879. [Author]

³⁴See Vol. XIII, pp. 413ff. [Editor]

even today. He was back at Nice on February 2, on his way home, and here again God graciously honored His servant in a miraculous cure which we related on the basis of a signed report submitted by the person concerned³⁵ and on the lengthy testimony of her attending physician.

Countess de Villeneuve had suffered from acute peritonitis in 1876 and had nearly died. She managed to recover, but never got over its consequences. Intermittent fevers which assailed her in the past now persisted obstinately despite every medication, becoming at times so violent that they threatened her life. Throughout 1878 her strength kept failing daily and her case was considered hopeless.

In November a friend of hers happened to mention Don Bosco and the favors he obtained through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. She became keenly anxious to meet this man of God and request his prayers. Her physician, Dr. D'Espiney, advised her to go to Nice for its mildness, and she was there in January 1879. Her condition showed no improvement. Rather, an overall weakness, loss of appetite, insomnia, and inability to exert the slightest effort—even to go up a few steps—made life unendurable. On hearing that Don Bosco was in Nice, she sought and obtained an audience with him on February 3. Her first sight of him made a deep impression upon her. He asked her to be seated and tell him of her illness, listening with fatherly concern. Then he rose and said, "Certainly there is nothing on earth more precious than good health. But we do not know God's will in these matters. Nevertheless, He promised to open to all who would knock, and so we shall knock so loudly that He will be forced to keep His promise and open to us. You will be healed, so that you may give your children a Christian education."

The countess knelt for Don Bosco's blessing. Having blessed her, he asked about her children and suggested she go to Turin for the May 24 celebration. In her statement she wrote, "I returned home full of hope, with hardly a thought of having been sick an hour earlier. That evening I walked some six kilometers with my sons. I no longer have problems in climbing. My appetite is fine, and I sleep well. I feel no trace at all of my prolonged sufferings.

³⁵Letter of the countess of Villeneuve to Count Cays, Nice, June 6, 1879. [Author]

Instantaneously I felt strength restored to my limbs, so much so that soon afterward I was able to walk twelve kilometers with a friend of mine in less than three hours, hardly resting at all along the way.” Her physician issued a statement of recovery in a detailed report.³⁶

Two other incidents most likely took place during Don Bosco’s stay in Nice. The first we heard from Cardinal Cagliero³⁷ when he was relating the power of Don Bosco’s glance and words. Don Bosco had just finished a sermon and was leaving the sanctuary to walk to the door, his passage blocked by people crowding about him. A dangerous-looking man stood stock-still, staring at him as though deliberating a violent move. Somewhat concerned, Father Cagliero kept an eye on him as Don Bosco slowly drew nearer to him. Finally they stood face to face. On seeing him, Don Bosco asked, “What do you want?”

“I? Nothing!”

“You look as though you have something to tell me.”

“No, not at all!”

“Would you perhaps like to make your confession?”

“I? How silly!”

“Why are you here then?”

“Because . . . well, because I cannot walk away. . . .”

“I understand. Friends, leave us alone for a while,” Don Bosco said to those about him.

When they pulled back, Don Bosco whispered briefly into the man’s ear. He fell to his knees and made his confession then and there in the middle of the church.

The other episode is related in D’Espiney’s *Life of Don Bosco*. The author heard it from the well-known Parisian publisher Josse. Monsignor Postel, a learned prolific writer and a deeply pious man, went to Nice to visit Don Bosco. As they were conversing, he abruptly asked Don Bosco, “Tell me, now, is my conscience clear before God?” Smiling faintly, Don Bosco made as if to walk away, but the other cut off his exit, double-locked the door and slipped the key into his pocket. “Don Bosco,” he said, “you are not leaving this room until I know how I stand in God’s eyes.”

³⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

³⁷Father Cagliero was created cardinal on December 6, 1915. [Editor]

So determinedly did he speak that Don Bosco became very serious, clasped his hands upon his breast as he usually did, looked at the priest kindly, and as determinedly answered, "You are in the state of grace."

"I have the feeling you are saying that out of kindly consideration."

"No, my dear Monsignor," Don Bosco assured him. "I say what I see."

CHAPTER 2

The Annual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales

DON Bosco's extended stay in Rome during 1878 kept him from holding these yearly conferences. However, determined not to omit them the following year, he planned well ahead of time. "We must convene the St. Francis Conference," he wrote to Father Rua from Marseille on January 11. "I suggest we hold it at Alassio or at Sampierdarena, possibly on February 3. You could come over with Father Durando¹ and others who you think are competent. Tell me what you think about its opportuneness. Personally, I'd like to meet in Turin, but then I would have to change my plans." Father Rua had to leave it to Don Bosco, only expressing a preference for Alassio. On January 21, Don Bosco replied, "Let's set up the conference at Alassio on February 3." The date was later moved to February 6.²

With Father Cagliero and Father Ronchail Don Bosco left Nice on February 5, stopping briefly at Vallecrosia to give the confreres a word of encouragement and reaching Alassio at dusk. The following midday Father Rua, Father Lazzero, Father Ghivarello, Father Barberis and Count Cays,³ who had spent the night at Sampierdarena, arrived from Turin. Their encounter with Don Bosco in the dining room was very touching. They entered separately, having been detained by clerics and boys outside, and Don Bosco welcomed each very warmly as they came in to greet him. He inquired about their health, about the clerics and boys, and about individual confreres. "Excellent!" he kept exclaiming. "I

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²We are following Father Barberis' notes, taken during the conference. [Author]

³For these priests see Appendix 1. [Editor]

must get in touch with them. . . . I must drop a line to so and so. . . . When you write to your boys, tell them that I am thrilled to know they are all healthy and doing well and that I am longing to see them. Ask them to pray for the success of the pressing matters we have in hand at this time.”

The conference opened at four o'clock on the afternoon of February 6. Besides the above-mentioned, the directors of the houses in Liguria were all present. The first session was devoted entirely to discussing our work in France. Don Bosco told them of his warm welcome in Marseille and spoke in detail of the houses of La Navarre and Saint-Cyr. He mentioned proposals he had received at Fréjus, Aix, Toulon, and Hyères. “Canon Guiol,” he said, “has been more than generous in giving material and moral support to our Salesians in Marseille. We must also be generous in meeting some of his requests.” The public reading of two letters from Father Bologna prompted him to comment, “I am sure that no Frenchman who had come to Turin, even if he worked miracles [upon his return], would ever have received the offers that were made to us in France, especially in Marseille, a city so averse to foreign interference.” Later they went over the agreement co-signed by Father Guiol and Don Bosco regarding the choir-school of Marseille, as well as the main clauses of the Beaujour Society contract. Two ad hoc committees were set up, one headed by Father Rua to provide personnel for the house of Marseille, the other to complete the staff at Sampierdarena. Don Bosco and Count Cays reserved to themselves the handling of correspondence, particularly with France. The last topic of discussion was Autreuil, which we have already treated at length in Chapter 19 of Volume XIII. The very fruitful meeting closed late that night.

The two personnel committees worked separately through the following morning. In the afternoon three provinces were created—Piedmont, Liguria, and South America, with headquarters respectively at Turin, Alassio, and Buenos Aires. Houses in Italy outside the two Italian regions were assigned to one of them. Father Francesia⁴ was appointed provincial of Piedmont, though he was to finish out the school year as director at Varazze; Father Cerruti became provincial of Liguria, since he already had a vice-director,

⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Father Louis Rocca; Father Bodrato,⁵ who was acting superior of the houses in South America for the last two years, was appointed provincial. The superior chapter met alone with Don Bosco in his office while appointing provincials. At the end of their meeting, they joined the directors, and Don Bosco announced the erection of provinces and the appointment of provincials, stating that he hoped they would relieve the superior chapter of much responsibility and be a big help to the individual directors.

We must note, as Father Barberis pointed out, that Don Bosco did not consider this setup permanent but wanted it merely as an experiment so that shortcomings which might surface could be remedied. We note too that at this conference in Alassio central Italy was not even mentioned, probably because there would soon be only one house there, the seminary at Magliano Sabino; later, however, this was changed, as we learn from the official communication⁶ sent to the houses under the Turin dateline of March 10, 1879, when Don Bosco was in Rome. From it we learn too of another matter which had been brought up confidentially at the Alassio conference. The members of the superior chapter were reaching the end of their six-year term and a general chapter would have to be summoned for elections. However, since it would disrupt the flow of the school year, Don Bosco appealed to Rome for a delay of elections to the next general chapter. The petition was granted.

The second part of the session was devoted to one of Don Bosco's favorite themes—vocations. He dwelt on these concepts:

We must first consider how we can foster vocations; we shall draw up proposals for the forthcoming general chapter about this. The source of all vocations we already possess: the frequent reception of the sacraments; let us hold firmly to this sacred premise and make sure that confession and Communion are properly received. But we must go further and build on this premise: directors are to give talks on vocation several times a year. We are not to state bluntly, "Be a priest," or "Don't be a priest." Rather, boys are to be taught that there are two paths of life they are to choose from. One may save his soul by taking one path, another by taking the second. Urge frequent prayer that the Lord may enlighten them as to

⁵*Ibid.* [Editor]

⁶Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

which choice they are to make, for there He has strewn His graces for their taking. Urge them also to consult their confessor.

Some excellent ways of arousing or safeguarding a priestly vocation or even kindling a desire to become a Salesian are:

1. Treat boys with kindness.

2. Be kind to one another. No boy will want to become a Salesian if he sees that we do not treat each other kindly, bicker among ourselves, and are critical of the superiors' directives.

3. Another effective means is to foster an understanding and an appreciation of our regulations and of the deliberations of the Lanzo general chapter. Each Salesian should have his copy of our school regulations and study them, so that when questioned he may give the correct answer concerning the particular rules of his office. Even if a director were to accomplish no more than succeed in having each member of his staff carry out properly the tasks assigned to him, he would be doing well enough. He would be ensuring orderliness, and orderliness prevents many evils that cause the loss of vocations.

I also wish that all Salesians have a copy of the general chapter's deliberations, not only to know them, but especially to suggest what could be added. Directors, prefects and all who hold office should insert blank sheets into their copies for those suggestions and emendations they consider advisable from their own experience. We aim at refining our rules as much and as soon as we can. The basic principles that we establish now with everyone's consent shall last. The boys who are with us now will easily absorb our ideas and traditions as they grow up. Once this first generation of students leaves us, any further changes will not be accepted, even if they are necessary, or at best they will be accepted only begrudgingly. So we must bring the task to completion. We know what has happened in other religious orders; they soon found that they had need of reform, or they splintered into factions to the scandal of all.

The general chapters which will take place thirty or fifty years from now, when we shall all be dead, will have little value.

But let us get back to vocations. Another factor in fostering vocations and promoting the overall well-being of our houses is the choice of the boys' confessors. It is essential that all our boys be guided by confessors who are animated by the same spirit. Sometimes excellent diocesan priests come to stay in our houses, and they hear confessions. Some may be truly holy men, but, not knowing our spirit, they advise the boys differently from us, and a youngster may lose the trust he has in his regular confessor and in his director. There are few things that can harm a lad as much as this. During the Lanzo retreat one boy sought my counsel on some delicate, personal matters and then asked the advice of another

priest, a non-Salesian, who gave him advice diametrically opposed to mine. It was the beginning of the boy's downfall, and now his life is in shambles. Let it be a policy in our boarding schools that no one is to hear the boys' confessions without the director's personal permission. Priests not belonging to our Congregation are not to be regular confessors in our houses, even should they be as holy as Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio and Father [Joseph] Persi. We would always stand to lose. Be cautious, too, in assigning our newly ordained priests as the boys' confessors.

A second grave threat to vocations and overall discipline comes from those who try to set themselves up as leaders among the boys. It must be stressed that in each of our houses the center of unity is the director. When asked for counsel, one is to reply, "What did the director say? Ask Father Director, seek his counsel, trust in him, and you will see that you will be glad you did. The Lord has appointed him to understand your needs and help you out. He is especially enlightened to tell you what you are to do or avoid."

Two centers of unity in a house are disastrous. They are like two pitched camps—if not in conflict, at least always divisive. Love centered on one will detract from love for the other. That trust which is won from a youngster is taken away from the person who properly should have it totally. Such coolness leads to indifference, to lack of respect and finally to dislike. A kingdom divided against itself is self-destroying. Therefore, let the director strive to preserve the unity of his house.

On this matter let us not now set up any hard and fast rule; rather, let us leave it to the discretion of each director to act along the lines set forth above. At any time he is entitled to say, "As bishops have the right to authorize priests for confessions in all institutions, so our rule holds that a director exercises that same right in regard to those entrusted to his care. This is his exclusive right. Everyone else must apply to him." If we have good diocesan priests residing with us, we may allow them to hear the confessions of day students, but the day-by-day confessor of the boarders is to be the director of the house. On Sundays, however, he should offer them a wider choice of confessors.

What policy should we follow as regards frequent Communion? Let reception be frequent, but take note of a few points:

1. Confession for the boys should be only once a week. If they need to go to confession more often in order to receive Communion, I think it wiser that they abstain. This is a general rule which admits of exceptions for particular individuals and particular circumstances.

2. If boys ask for permission to receive Communion whenever their conscience does not reprove them, that permission should be granted. How about venial sins? Bear in mind that one who confesses weekly and

during that time keeps committing many venial sins does not give much promise.

He then went on to offer two recommendations about admitting outsiders to live with the confreres. No outsiders were to be allowed to live in our houses either as craftsmasters or in any positions of some influence unless they intended to join our Society. Nor was any salaried craftsman to be permitted to live with us. On hiring outsiders, lodging in our house was never to be included; they were to be considered as outside staff members and were to live elsewhere.

The last item of business was the admission of several novices to final vows. As regards some who had applied for triennial vows, Don Bosco reiterated a viewpoint he had often stated, that a three-year commitment was too tempting a prospect for young men, who saw it as a provisional position from which they could easily be shaken and therefore found it hard to reject the allurements of the world. On the other hand, perpetual vows gave them a feeling of stability for the future and they looked nowhere else. "When we introduced the triennial profession," he clearly stated, "my idea of the Congregation was quite different. I intended to found something far different from what we have today, but I was forced to do things this way, and so be it. Life being what it is today, a three-year commitment creates risks. We will do better to admit only to perpetual profession those candidates who we see meet our requirements and have the necessary virtues and to exclude the rest." The meeting was closed late that night.

Don Bosco had voiced the same view on the subject of triennial vows the evening of October 18, 1878 while strolling in the corridor by his room with Father Barberis and Father Guidazio.⁷ After stating his opposition to a three-year profession, he added, "I went along with three-year vows because my original plan was to found a Congregation which would assist the bishops. Since this was not possible and I was forced to do otherwise, a three-year commitment is now more of a hindrance than a help."

This reiterated assertion calls for some clarification. The definitive form which the Congregation took on did not spring up in

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Don Bosco's mind all at once. The idea of enlisting collaborators came very soon to him, and his mysterious dreams artfully instilled it and kept it alive. The concept was vague, but it gradually became clearer and more well defined. In 1855 he determinedly began to seek the knowledge he needed to draft a rule. This he did in 1857, submitting it that year to eight volunteers who were to examine it and judge whether they felt they could follow it. Two elements in that original rule stand out which later underwent considerable modifications. One concerned the vows: "The vows," it read, "shall be renewed twice consecutively for three-year periods. After six years, one is free either to keep renewing them for three-year periods or to pronounce final vows, that is, to obligate oneself to keep them for the rest of his life." This statement makes one regard the triennial profession not as a preparatory step to perpetual vows, but as an entity in itself, a simple means of binding for a time the will of the members while they helped Don Bosco with his festive oratories and with fostering priestly vocations. This was primarily the help he wished to extend to the bishops. The second element linked to the above is to be understood in its light: "The vows bind one as long as he remains in the Congregation. Those who leave the Congregation for any reasonable motive or on the advice of their superior may be released from their vows by the superior general." Another significant article touches on relations with bishops. "If a new house should be founded," it reads, "the superior general shall first come to an understanding with the ordinary of the diocese in which it is to be opened as regards both spiritual and temporal matters in accordance with our regulations." Since the new houses needed to have but two members, of whom one was to be a priest, it appears that Don Bosco was looking toward setting up more festive oratories outside the archdiocese of Turin, but all of them under his direct control and in the service of the bishops. It was only after the papal audience of March 9, 1858⁸ that the work of organizing the Salesian Congregation and giving it definitive form took place, although the practice of triennial profession continued for more than a decade, when it became the exception rather than the rule until the promulgation of the new code of canon law.

The morning of February 8 was taken up in studying the

⁸See Vol. V, pp. 558-562. [Editor]

situation at Saint-Cyr and seeking to provide for the orphanage. We need not add to what we recounted in the previous volume⁹ except to report Don Bosco's concluding statement: "Let us take comfort, for this is truly a vineyard which Divine Providence has opened up to us. Much good will be done for souls, thanks to these two works. We have good hopes of priestly vocations, for among these boys there are many well-brought-up lads who are priestly material. Several have told me they want to become Salesians; one shall also join the Sons of Mary, and there will be a few who will stay with us as coadjutor brothers. France today has very few congregations of men who serve the working people. Such as there are have become inactive or have gone into schools for children of the upper classes. There is no one who does the educational work we do. All love our spirit and the class of boys whom we care for. This is why we find so much affection wherever we go, and why I hope we shall never be interfered with." This statement included our works both at Saint-Cyr and at La Navarre.

The afternoon session was shorter than the others. The first item on the agenda was a tour of Italy to be made by Father Durando and Father Cagliero to check out the most important localities which had been offered to Don Bosco. The tour had been delayed several months by various circumstances. The itinerary was now marked out: by rail to Naples, then by ship to Catania, Randazzo and Palermo. They were to return to Naples by sea and go on to Brindisi, where the bishop anxiously awaited them. From there they were to follow the Adriatic coast by train to Venice. Their return to Valdocco was to be through Milan. Principally their aim was to conclude negotiations at Randazzo, Brindisi and Cremona. At Randazzo they were to get acceptance of the contract already made with the township of Varazze, and at other places where they were being sought they were to promise that they would come once they had sufficient personnel. In addition, Father Cagliero was to make a decision for a girls' home which the duchess of Cáracci wished to entrust to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Catania. Don Bosco closed the discussion by saying: "Go, but since time is pressing make sure you get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow you can meet again and get many things done. In the

⁹See Vol. XIII, pp. 408, 418. [Editor]

places you visit call on the bishop and civil officials and give them my greetings.”

The reference to the sisters drew the assembly’s attention to a sad state of affairs. The number of sisters was growing considerably from year to year, but so too was the number of the sick and dying. Something had to be done to better the living conditions of their communities. The problem was given detailed attention, and Father Cagliero was asked to make an in-depth study. Meanwhile, since he was more acquainted with their communities, he promptly suggested some simple improvements which were easy to carry out: more physical exercise, lots of fresh air, frequent change of kitchen staff, a courtyard or garden for each convent where the sisters could have recreation and relax in privacy. He felt also that they should rid themselves of crushing mental anguish; he believed that many of them were suffering internally from scruples and inner fears which made them ill. Don Bosco closed the session by inviting all to thank God and declaring the conference at an end.

Those three days of meetings with Don Bosco afforded the chapter members and directors an opportunity of carefully observing his manner of living, as they did on every possible occasion, and of greatly admiring his virtues. For our benefit Father Barberis has reported the impressions they shared with each other. Above all they were struck by his heroic spirit of sacrifice. Anyone who did not really know him and judged him solely by his exterior would never have guessed the extent of his suffering, for, despite all he had on his mind and the difficulties he had to contend with, he never showed harshness to anyone or betrayed frayed nerves even for an instant. Rather, he manifested a graciousness and tolerance of others’ faults which one would take to be his second nature.

He fully appreciated good health and would not neglect the means to preserve it, but it was very edifying to see how calmly he adjusted to change of weather and other unavoidable discomforts. On a cold day he would say, “Well, we need the cold every year. Just keep well covered and take care of your health.” In summer’s sultry heat he would react by saying, “Very good! The farmers need this hot weather,” and he would extol the season’s blessings. When he was weary, he would say with a smile, “I am a little tired, but one of these days, when I have free time, I’ll rest.” Yet he would

not let others overtax their strength. His eyes were still paining him, his right eye being practically blind. "True," he would say, "I see less with one eye than two, yet I trust that the Lord will leave me this good eye, because I would otherwise have to stop working. Well, the Lord knows how to put things right." When he sat in on meetings in which proposals were discussed which he had already thoroughly examined, it must have cost him endless effort to listen to half-baked plans, groundless objections, and unreasonable opposition. It must have been hard for him to have a clearly designed plan in mind and know positively how to realize it but still not be free, with good reason, to explain more than part of it, while having to listen to lengthy arguments why the whole thing was tenuous and impossible. In such cases he would merely state his viewpoint with no defense and then and there would defer to their decision, even if contrary to his wishes. Later on, at an opportune time, he would again introduce the case and show that the impossible was really possible. Yet he did so without the slightest hint of triumph.

During his stay at Alassio he was kept so busy that he had no chance to talk to the boys individually except for confessions during community Mass. Still, on walking out of the chapel after eight o'clock, it never took him less than twenty minutes to cross the playground, for, as soon as the boys spotted him, they would dash up to him and he would stop to make a funny comment or to say a kind word. He had a stock of questions and answers for all situations. He did the same with teachers and assistants.

Several prominent people met with him to offer him schools and houses. He won them all over with his attitude, calm, and genuine goodness. They were taken by his depth of purpose and wise advice, his friendly dealings, and his loving smile. A delegation from the municipality of Port Maurizio came to ask him to assume the direction of the municipal schools and to open a boarding school which the city would erect and pay for. Though the proposal was turned down, the gentlemen left with the feeling that their interview with Don Bosco had been a blessing.

While at Alassio, Don Bosco gave two talks, one to the boys, the other to the Salesian cooperators. He gave the boys the "Good Night" on Saturday, February 8, addressing himself particularly to the upperclassmen and lyceum students. He recommended

cheerfulness, stressing that it came from peace with God. He suggested they share their cheerfulness with the holy souls in purgatory by praying for them and receiving Holy Communion on their behalf on the morrow, a Sunday. Lastly, he exhorted them to prolong their happiness by praying for enlightenment about their vocation during Holy Communion, for thus they would find happiness for the remainder of their lives. He closed by saying that he wanted them to rejoice not only in heart but also in body—hence, he had asked Father Director to make sure they were given something special at dinner. “By being good and joyful now,” he concluded, “you will be storing for yourselves eternal happiness such as I wish you with all my heart and pray that God will grant to you.”

He also made time for a conference to the local Salesian cooperators, who filled the central aisle of the spacious church. It was not the first conference of this kind to be given. One had been delivered the previous year by Bishop [Cajetan] Alimonda of Albenga, who was one of the very first cooperators. Warmly attached to the school and its director, with whom he loved to converse, he held the Salesians in the highest esteem and regarded Don Bosco, whom he had known even before becoming a bishop, as a man of God. Hoping that he had returned from his trip to France, the bishop had gone to the school to deliver the panegyric of St. Francis de Sales on February 2. On that occasion he had spoken lovingly of Don Bosco. Shortly before, on January 29, he had eulogized St. Francis de Sales, who was named a Doctor of the Church in 1877, to his own seminarians. He had also emphatically stated:

What shall I say of you, Don Bosco, my dearest friend, revered father of our clergy? You first came to know of St. Francis de Sales when you were a young boy, and you drank in his gentle wisdom, his charming holiness, his full array of kindly Christlike virtues which do you such great honor. From him you drew the concept of the Salesian Congregation and its spirit. I saw its birth and its first growth, like that of a heavenly flower transplanted on earth so closely resembling the development and spread of the Visitation convents. In you St. Francis de Sales lives on and multiplies himself, as he does throughout the world of our laity. This homage of praise I owe you to give vent to my gratitude, for in the dedicated work of your sons my dearest diocese finds both benefit and joy. The Catholic

Church itself reserves far more precious praise and worthier thanks for you, for through the Salesian apostolate it has become throughout Europe and America the mother of countless children reared in virtue, of converted barbarians and sanctified Christians.¹⁰

As soon as he found out that Don Bosco had returned, he sent to ask for time for a friendly chat. On his part Don Bosco was planning to forestall him by calling on him at Albenga, but the bishop acted faster, came to Alassio and talked with Don Bosco at length. When he finally took his leave, Don Bosco and all the superiors escorted him to the railroad station.

Before the chapter members and directors departed, Don Bosco called all the Salesians of the house to a conference. However, feeling too tired, he asked Father Rua to speak in his stead, while, with the chapter members, he presided over the meeting. This was the first time he had ever asked anyone to speak for him in such a gathering.

He gave Father Rua two letters and a note to deliver when the latter left for Turin. The letters were addressed to his dear friend Father Vallauri and to his ailing sister.

Alassio, February 9, 1879

My dear Father Peter,

Please give the enclosed letter to your sister Teresa. If she cannot read it, please read it to her and assure her that all of us keep her in our personal and community prayers. You too, my dear Father Peter, take good care of your health. I always commend you to God. I am on my way to Rome at the Holy Father's request. If I can be of any service to you while I am there, please let me know. Pray for me and for all our poor boys (forty thousand of them). Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Alassio, February 9, 1879

My dear Miss Vallauri,

Father Rua has told me about you. Indeed, I am very grieved to learn that your pains have worsened. God knows how much we have prayed for

¹⁰Cardinal G. Alimonda, *Il Mio Episcopato*, Vol. II, p. 444, Torino Tipografia Salesiana, 1886. [Author]

your recovery. We have not been heard, but we shall not give up, trusting that our community prayers will benefit your soul. Put your faith in Jesus and in Mary, Help of Christians.

You have been very generous to us, and as long as the Salesian Congregation lives, prayers shall be offered for you morning and evening.

God bless you. May His holy grace comfort you. Pray for me too. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. As soon as I get to Rome I shall ask the Holy Father to send you a special blessing.

The note, meant for the cleric Eugene Armelonghi, a teacher at our junior seminary in Borgo San Martino, was written [in Latin] on a visiting card: "Armelonghi, my son: if you love me follow my teachings, i.e., our constitutions. I am glad to know that you are well and that your young charges are growing in learning and piety. God bless you. Pray for me. Fr. John Bosco, Alassio, February 9, 1879."

On leaving Alassio, he stopped off briefly at Varazze and then went on to Sampierdarena, where he stayed until February 19. From Alassio he sent to Monsieur [Jules] Rostand of the Beaujour Society a report of his visit to La Navarre and to Saint-Cyr, detailing personnel conditions and the value of the estate. It proved to be of inestimable value to the society's administrative board in promoting a successful financial drive then being planned for launching new undertakings. Meanwhile the Beaujour Society scrupulously complied with all legal formalities concerning their project, so that all might proceed in perfect order. The chairman sent a long, affectionate reply to Don Bosco at Sampierdarena, hailing him as a messenger of Providence and expressing the hope that the work at Marseille would develop as fully as possible, now that the city would have the triple blessing of a Salesian novitiate, a secondary school for the fostering of priestly vocations, and a technical school. The Beaujour Society was ready to support his endeavors enthusiastically and would help him fund them.

Don Bosco, having just then to write to Canon Guiol, expressed the pleasure this letter had brought him with its glowing sentiments. Father Rua wrote the letter under his dictation and in his name: "I

have just received a marvelous letter from Mr. Rostand. I shall treasure it as a precious souvenir of a man who is a model of charity, faith and sound wisdom. I hope to answer him from Rome. Should you see him before then, let him know that his ideas are precisely those which have always been and still are uppermost in my mind. A novitiate, an orphanage, a school to foster vocations: this is what, God willing, we hope to accomplish at the Maison Beaujour. The time, the place and the people all counsel us to go forward with greatest caution and equal steadfastness.”¹¹

While at Sampierdarena he imparted a blessing which had an amazing effect. Mrs. Anna Chiesa’s daughter Pia suffered from very persistent headaches. On hearing that Don Bosco was at St. Vincent’s Hospice, she brought Pia to him for his blessing, but, since he was busy with others, she could not get to him. Not giving up, she waited very patiently some four or five hours. Several times Don Bosco stepped out of his room escorting someone but did not glance in her direction. Finally, on passing by her, he asked, “What can I do for you, Madam?” Briefly the woman told him of her daughter’s plight. “It is but a matter of a moment,” Don Bosco replied, resting his hand gently on the girl’s head. Instantly the pain vanished, never to return.

This episode gave rise to another equally extraordinary event. After Don Bosco’s death, a certain Mrs. Casanova, who had sadly neglected an ailment in her foot, was told, when she finally consulted a doctor, that she had no choice but to lose the entire leg. In utter desolation, the poor woman could not resign herself to such a fate. When her friend, Mrs. Chiesa, heard of it, she told her about her daughter’s instant healing and urged her to commend herself to Don Bosco. She also gave her a relic from cloth used by him, which was in such demand after his death. Mrs. Casanova thanked her and prayed to Don Bosco, placing the relic on her leg. On the day set for surgery, the doctors prepared their instruments and unbandaged her leg. To the astonishment of all, they could see clear signs of healing, which progressed until the leg was perfectly normal.

It was understood that Count Cays was to join our saintly

¹¹Sampierdarena, February 16, 1879. The letter was written by Father Rua and signed by Don Bosco. [Author]

founder at Sampierdarena and accompany him to Rome as his secretary, along with Father Berto. The count, now a humble Salesian, had said that he would gladly share a room with Father Berto, even sleep on a mattress on top of chairs if he had to, just so that he might be privileged to travel with Don Bosco. The latter therefore had sent him from Alassio back to Turin to take care of some matters before rejoining him a week later at Sampierdarena. Father Cays went to the Oratory, got his things ready, and said his good-byes to his many friends, accepting errands to do for them in Rome. The day before his departure, however, a telegram from Don Bosco instructed him to remain in Turin and to be replaced by Father Bonetti. Serenely the count unpacked his bags and told everyone he saw, "I am not going to Rome after all. Don Bosco has sent me word to stay here."

Escorted by his trusty Father Berto, Don Bosco boarded the train at Sampierdarena for La Spezia, where he stayed two days, writing and making visits. He was hosted by Chevalier [Joseph] Bruschi, who was later to become a Salesian priest, and celebrated Holy Mass in his family private chapel. A chevalier's nephew, who was the city's mayor and lived in the same building, could not bear the sight of priests and had openly declared his hostility on several occasions. Don Bosco, paying him a call, found him sick in bed, and stayed to chat a while with him. From then on the mayor was a changed man. He personally admitted to his friends that Don Bosco was not at all like anything he had expected, and on and on he talked, lavishing high praises upon him.

Don Bosco invited the pastor, the vicar forane, several canons, and a few other priests to dinner at the Salesian day school.¹² Chevalier Bruschi and other laymen were also invited. It created a real problem for poor Father Rocca, who had only a would-be cook and not a single room where he could properly accommodate his guests. Still, Father Rocca tells us, all went well, and everyone was as delighted as they would be at a king's table, so honored did they feel to eat with Don Bosco.

After visiting the school and speaking to the confreres, he went on to Sarzana on the morning of February 27 to pay his respects to the bishop who invited him to stay for dinner. That evening he went

¹²See Vol. XIII, pp. 512-519. [Editor]

on to Lucca.¹³ The director, Father Marengo,¹⁴ and several gentlemen of Lucca gave him a warm reception at Pisa's railroad station. Then, although it was raining when his train pulled in at Lucca, the boys were there to give him a rousing ovation—a welcome not usually accorded a priest in those days. Three handsome coaches drove him and his friends to the town where, after a brief visit to the Burlamacchis, he continued to the Holy Cross Festive Oratory. Here several distinguished citizens paid their respects and then, noting the hour, withdrew, “leaving us alone in pleasant talk with our father,” as Father Marengo wrote.

The following day, a Sunday, people jammed the Church of the Holy Cross to see him and attend his Mass. His visit to Lucca was marked by a vast array of requests for his blessing on behalf of the sick. It was precisely at midday that he imparted his first blessing to the eighty-eight-year-old Marquis Burlamacchi, at the request of his wife. The elderly man, burning with fever and exhausted by insomnia, could not utter a single word. Don Bosco blessed him and almost instantly he fell asleep, to awake feeling much better and to rise from his bed on Monday. Further appeals that afternoon brought Don Bosco to other bedsides, and that evening he imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament upon the entire congregation. In spite of the darkness and foul weather the boys stayed up to greet him and, as their director put it, “to hear a few words from our good and wonder-working father.”

The following day, Marquis Massoni also sent for him to receive his blessing. Don Bosco found him confined to his bed by paralysis, a condition that had persisted through six years. At this time the poor man could not move a finger. So advanced was the paralysis that, unless someone kept supporting his head, it would drop heavily upon his chest and cause him to fall to the floor. His family had to do everything for him as for an infant. His wife and daughter and one of his sons wept pitifully. “Heal this poor unfortunate man!” his wife kept pleading and sobbing. Kneeling before Don Bosco, she kept begging, “Heal him for me, Father!” Don Bosco sat down and began to speak, but his words stressed patience and

¹³From this point to his return from Rome we have only the laconic diary of Father Berto to guide us. For his stay at Lucca we have an account sent to Father Rua by Father Marengo. [Author]

¹⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

resignation and gave no ray of hope. When the family had somewhat calmed down, he blessed the sick man and asked him to make the sign of the cross. Wonder of wonders, he raised his right hand and did as he was told. Don Bosco told him that he was to make the sign of the cross daily and call upon the most holy names of Jesus and Mary.

Despite the amusements of the carnival season, Don Bosco's name kept echoing throughout the city. When he walked down the street, people stopped to look at him respectfully. Some followed him or asked him for his prayers. Even the masked holiday revelers would momentarily forego their waggery and reverently greet him as they passed by. Many people delayed receiving Communion until the 8:30 Mass so as to receive from his hands. No one will ever know what transpired between him and the persons who sought his counsel. Father Marengo saw many of them leave Don Bosco's room so lost in thought that they could not even find the way out. "Such a stream of people in those days!" he exclaimed. "Our Salesian house looked like everybody's home."

On February 25 the crowds broke all records; by evening he was so exhausted and tormented by such a severe headache that he had to cancel further interviews and withdraw to his room. The weather of those days was brutal, with heavy winds and rain. The morning of February 26 was marked by thunderstorms, snow, and then unrelenting rain. Using a coach kindly lent him by a lady of Lucca, Don Bosco visited several well-deserving townspeople who were in poor health. Among them was Count Sardi who later recounted how his little son, at the point of death, was instantly healed at Don Bosco's prayer and was now in perfect health.

Toward three o'clock he spoke to the Salesian cooperators in the little Holy Cross Church. The procedure was the usual one. Some one hundred and fifty people attended, including the archbishop. Don Bosco described the running of the schools and festive oratories and explained the meaning of the Association of Salesian Cooperators. His listeners hung upon his words religiously.¹⁵ Later, a large crowd poured into the sacristy and house, pressing

¹⁵*Il Fedele*, Catholic newspaper of Lucca, Number 51, 1879. [Author]

around him to whisper their needs and to hear from him some word that could help them cope with their temporal and spiritual needs.

The report of one particular incident spread like wildfire through the city. With the [Salesian] director at his side and a crowd of prominent men about him, Don Bosco was making his way to the cathedral to venerate the Holy Face—a miraculous sculptured crucifix venerated in Lucca since the eighth century and said to have been commissioned by Saint Nicodemus. It was rarely displayed to public veneration and never unveiled, even privately, save for very important people, and then behind doors. Don Bosco gave no thought to being allowed that privilege. While he and his party were walking to the shrine, a shout of “A blessing!” suddenly was heard. A twenty-year-old young man—the victim of palsy which had afflicted him for years—was being propped up by his parents. He could hardly even drag his feet and could not stand erect unaided. “Am I to bless him in the middle of the street?” asked Don Bosco. Then, raising his gaze to heaven, he added, “Yet God can bless us here too!” He lifted his hand in blessing, and all about him knelt. A crowd was pressing on all sides. After the blessing, the young man’s parents helped him to his feet. “Can’t you take even one step?” Don Bosco asked him.

“No, I have no strength.”

“Are you in pain?”

“No, Father.”

“Come, let’s see you take a step or two.”

The young man tried and managed to totter. “Come on, walk with me,” Don Bosco coaxed him. “I am going to see the Holy Face.” And he kept talking to him as they went along. The young man took some two hundred steps with no support of any kind. When the shock wore off, the crowd began to voice its wonder. The parents, recovering from their surprise, veered away with their son, followed by a number of people. Lost in wonderment, the young man made his way home, never to be seen again, just as had happened in Marseille.’

An unexpected welcome awaited our saintly founder. He was grandly received at the cathedral entrance by the canons in their choir robes and by four clerics bearing lighted candles. They escorted him to the chapel of the Holy Face, uncovered the holy

image and accorded him the very special favor of kissing the feet of Jesus crucified.¹⁶

Even the devil experienced in his own way Don Bosco's presence in Lucca. A woman, about thirty-five years old, who lived in St. Leonard's parish, was possessed and afflicted with bewildering diabolical vexations. On learning that Don Bosco was on his way to Lucca, Father Cianetti, her pastor, consulted with Church authorities to have her exorcised, keeping his intention secret. Still, one day, the poor woman suddenly burst out into a scream: "Let that sack of coal come, the protégé of that woman . . ." and she spit out a horrible blasphemy against the Blessed Virgin. It was quite an ordeal to drag that unfortunate woman to Don Bosco. He blessed her as soon as she came into his presence, but, when he tried to trace the sign of the cross on her forehead with a picture of Our Lady, no one could hold her down. She struggled wildly and writhed like a serpent. This happened on the morning of February 25. On leaving, Don Bosco stated that she would be set free on the feast of the Immaculate Conception. And so indeed it happened, for on December 8 the woman was suddenly shocked by a deafening thunderclap in her room and at that moment she was freed from her diabolical possession.

Don Bosco was deeply comforted by the sight of so many well-behaved boys in the festive oratory. So much had been done with those lads in less than a year. Shocking blasphemies, once resounding throughout the day, were no longer heard. Once so dead set against going to church that they even scaled walls to escape on the first sound of a bell, now when it rang the boys would immediately stop their games and quickly line up. In their frequenting of the sacraments, their devout behavior in the church and their love for their *little priests*, Don Bosco's experienced eye spotted the joyous spontaneity which characterized the educational

¹⁶Father Berto thus describes the crucifix: "The countenance is truly noble, a blend of quiet dignity and unspeakable tenderness, whose very sight overwhelms the spectator with religious awe; he is filled with a holy fear and is held spellbound by those sparkling, tear-glazed eyes, while some unseen power forces him to his knees, making him admit his nothingness and bewail mankind's sinfulness. Something more than human emanates from that countenance; it is the divine which is harbored there. A magnificent, precious crown of gold truly makes Him the *Rex tremendae maiestatis* [the King of awe-inspiring majesty]. Since the image is made more venerable in that it is blackened by the smoke of incense and candles, one can have an idea of the miraculous crucifix which the people of Lucca showed Don Bosco." [Author]

system he practiced and taught. On one occasion he was delighted to preside at an assembly, as they all gathered about him with song, declamation, and poetry. He was happy to see among them cobblers, tinkers, tailors, carpenters and cloth dyers—all young men—attending evening classes. He noticed that the church was well serviced by the Salesians and very well attended by the people. In a word, he said he was so pleased with the work at Lucca that the director was to write and tell Father Rua about it.

He wrote to Father Rua himself just four days before leaving Lucca:

Lucca, February 25, 1879

My dear Father Rua,

Burlamacchi¹⁷ insists that he has to change climate. His family does not want him at home. Shall we send him to Alassio? Think about it. Let Father Barberis know.

You may publish the biographies of our Salesians after looking them over; just make a brief notation of those of Arata and Father Gamarra. These may be printed separately later with human interest stories to be contributed by Father Scappini, Father Albera, Father Notario, Father Barberis, myself, and others. This way we will have two fine issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. Turin too may add something to them. As regards Cinelli, talk it over with Father Barberis. Father Bonetti is waiting for the parcels from Turin,¹⁸ and here in Lucca I am waiting for parcels and Bonetti. Tomorrow I will address the Salesian cooperators; the archbishop will attend. The following morning, February 27, we leave for Rome. I'll write from there. My heartiest gatherings to all the boys. Tell them I wish them well, that I love and bless them in the Lord, and that I hope to send them the Holy Father's special blessing, and see to it that they enjoy some treat at table. Remind them to be good and pray for the success of our affairs.

Father Bologna insists on having Grosso for music. If it is all right with you and it doesn't overly inconvenience the house of Lanzo, I think we can go along with him.

Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

¹⁷A clerical novice, of the noble Lucca family of that name. [Author]

¹⁸Father Bonetti had stayed behind at Sampierdarena. [Author]

Almost as a postscript he included a note for Father Barberis. We can readily see how, loving father that he was, he was concerned not only with the community but with individuals as he tried to meet each one's needs and condition.

Lucca, February 25, 1879

My dear Father Barberis:

I have already answered Father Rua on some matters you wrote me about. See him.

I anticipate with joy the excellent marks which the novices will receive on their term examinations. Tell the clerics the same, particularly Gresino and Aime.

I see no problem with the outing to St. Ann's. Just make sure the weather is good and the roads in fair condition. Take great care of their health.

Tell Father Bertello I realize how well he bears the cross, but he must do so if he is "to enter the kingdom of God." Assure Father Notario that I do care for him. Tell him I rely a great deal on his gentleness and firmness; I know he will not fail me.

Hearty regards to my dear Ghiglione, Pelazza, Bandino and Lisa.

Chide Father Savio for not having yet written me a long, long letter.

God bless you, my dear Father Barberis, and with you all our dear novices. I wish them abundant health and holiness for this life and the next.

Keep praying for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

He also enclosed a third letter for a cleric, Alexander Mora, one of those entrusted with handling the correspondence for the lottery to be run at the end of the year.¹⁹ Though far from home and busy with so many different concerns, Don Bosco had not forgotten about it and wrote for tickets to sell in Rome, encouraging the cleric and his helpers to work for the lottery's success.

Lucca, February 25, 1879

My dear Mora,

I know you are working. May God reward you. I am awaiting tickets for

¹⁹See Vol. XIII, p. 544. [Editor]

Rome. Do your best and try to recruit others to help you. This lottery should net us a hundred thousand francs. Just remember that you will have no peace of mind until we hit that figure.

My best wishes to your helpers. Best regards to Valentini, Marcellus Rossi, and Palestrino, and to Father Deppert for the fine letter he wrote me. May God keep all of us in His holy grace. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Bonetti, long awaited, finally arrived from Sampierdarena on the evening of February 26. Don Bosco had planned to leave for Rome the following day, but he was so exhausted that he feared he could not endure the trip and so spent two more days in Lucca, staying indoors all the time and handling details for the purchase of a building. Father Berto's letters about Don Bosco, read to the Oratory boys by Father Lazzero, stirred keen enthusiasm for the father they so dearly loved.²⁰

²⁰Letter from Father Lazzero to Father Berto, Turin, March 4, 1879. [Author]

CHAPTER 3

Four Weeks in Rome

AS we learned from Don Bosco himself in the preceding chapter, he was about to set out for Rome “at the request of the Holy Father.” From Rome Father Bonetti wrote: “Don Bosco has already had two audiences with Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina and other prelates on important matters. The secretary of state assured him that the Pope wishes to see him about things which I cannot mention here.”¹ It is a reasonable surmise that one such thing concerned the *exequatur* which the Italian government had refused to grant Cardinal [Lucido] Parocchi for his archdiocesan see of Bologna; we shall come back to this in Chapter 5.

We can reasonably conclude that the sudden substitution of Father Bonetti for Count Cays as traveling companion to Don Bosco was prompted by something that had happened to the former in those days: on February 12 a decree of Archbishop Gastaldi had suspended him indefinitely from hearing confession anywhere in the archdiocese and had demanded that another priest take his place at the St. Theresa Festive Oratory for girls in Chieri. Being out of town, therefore, would prevent suspicions, and being in Rome would make it easier for him to take defensive measures.

A week after receiving this injunction from the chancery, the Oratory had an unexpected visit which roused much comment and conjecture; detailed reports reached Don Bosco in Rome shortly before and shortly after he got there.² On February 20 a performance of a sacred play featuring the martyrdom of St.

¹Letter to Father Rua, March 10, 1879. [Author]

²Letters from Count Cays to Don Bosco (Turin, February 21, 1879) and from Father Lazzero to Father Berto (Turin, March 4, 1879). [Author]

Pancratius was held. That very morning a messenger of Archbishop Gastaldi called at the Oratory and, after learning from the doorkeeper the exact hour of the performance, informed him that the archbishop would attend. Everyone was astonished. Since he arrived at the Oratory somewhat late, the band could not be on hand to receive him since it was already performing for the audience, which consisted entirely of outside people. However, the superiors of the house met him and escorted him into the auditorium. From the stage one of the boys read a welcoming address with great finesse, and His Excellency seemed quite pleased. The interest he showed during the performance, his frequent applause and his generous compliments reassured those who had feared that he might frown upon the drama's subject matter. The boys and young clerics were absent, because, as customary when stage plays were open to the public, they were out on a walk. The head superiors, too, were away on business. Some days later the archbishop made another surprise appearance at Valsalice. Don Bosco merely sent word that they were to try to learn the reason for so unusual an occurrence, but, apart from more or less plausible possibilities, no one could discover anything tangible.

From March 1 to March 28, the entire duration of Don Bosco's stay in Rome, we find little more in Father Berto's diary than a long monotonous list of names of people on whom Don Bosco called, visitors and persons he met by chance, and places he visited.³ Standing out on this list are numerous cardinals and prelates with whom Don Bosco conferred at length. He also had several extended interviews with the [papal] secretary of state. Bishop Charles Laurenzi, auditor to His Holiness, and Monsignor Marzolini, his personal secretary, both of whom had come from Perugia to the Vatican with the new Pope, were very anxious to meet Don Bosco. One day, when they had been able to have him all to themselves for two and a half hours, the bishop was heard to exclaim in great admiration, "What a man! He really deserves his renown!"

Distinguished ecclesiastics who were not yet Salesian cooperators

³We have also gleaned information from the letters which Father Bonetti and Father Berto sent to the Oratory. [Author]

asked to be enrolled in the association as soon as they learned of it in their talks with him. Wherever he went, our founder usually returned with more names for the membership list.

At the Vatican, where he was fairly well known, he so impressed the Swiss Guard and gendarmes that they saluted him as they would a prelate. On one occasion, in St. Damasus Court, Commander Lambertini showered him with kindness, kissing his hand repeatedly, claiming that he was blessed to meet and know him personally, and asking to be enrolled as a Salesian cooperator.

And the dinner invitations! On March 17 he celebrated St. Patrick's feast at the Irish seminary, where the rector, Monsignor Kirby, as usual made sure that he was surrounded by a distinguished gathering of guests. He was warmly welcomed by the Benedictines of the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls on March 21, feast day of their founder. Some forty guests were present: Cardinal [Dominic] Bartolini, their cardinal protector, Cardinal Chigi, with a fair number of Roman patricians and distinguished guests from outside Rome, among them the famous archeologist John Baptist de' Rossi and others. Don Bosco was always at ease in such company and was able to mix well with everyone present. While he was in private conversation with Cardinal Bartolini after the banquet, a cluster of gentlemen looked on, and one of them remarked, "How venerable he looks! He is truly a saint!"

As always, the Sigismondi spouses surrounded him with loving care, having him and his two secretaries at dinner several times. On one occasion he told them that on a morning of December in 1878 he had observed a boy kneeling near his confessional rise to a noticeable height, while another lad, while in the midst of his companions, was likewise lifted more than a meter high. The secretary cites their names, but it does not seem probable that he heard Don Bosco mention them at that time.

We mentioned Don Bosco's audiences with Cardinal Nina, secretary of state, who had been appointed to that high office by Leo XIII seven months before, upon the death of Cardinal [Alexander] Franchi. Don Bosco was anxious to pay his respects, but for two consecutive days he found it impossible to obtain an audience. On his third try, on March 5, he had an endless wait since so many others were ahead of him. When finally his turn

came, the cardinal remarked, "I am sorry you had to wait so long because I know you have work to do." He received him and spoke to him with a friendliness which he had always shown him. Forty-five years later, the secretary who was the receptionist that morning wrote this touching account:

The waiting room was already full when I saw two priests come in. Like the rest, they were asked to take a seat and await their turn. Accustomed to studying visitors' faces, I was instantly struck by the rare modesty, serenity and rapt composure which shone from them, especially from the older—Don Bosco. I kept looking at him all through his long wait and had to wonder at his calm and his total lack of anxiety as he appeared absorbed in serious thought, intent on reading or jotting something into a notebook. Meanwhile the time of audiences was running out, and many of the visitors that morning would have to leave without an audience, among them Don Bosco, who had arrived rather late. However, he made no attempt to be received before the others. Always at ease, he just sat and waited. Never before had I seen anyone wait so calmly in such circumstances, when the audiences were drawing to a close. I was convinced that Don Bosco had to be a man of God, a saintly soul, for his singular calm stemmed either from an unshakable serenity and sweetness or from a certainty heavenly inspired that he would surely be received.

Filled with reverence and admiration, I decided that nothing would keep him from being received. When the time for audiences was over and those who had not been received were leaving, I told Don Bosco to wait. Then I went to the cardinal and earnestly begged him to grant him an audience, explaining how much he had impressed me by his holiness. The cardinal consented, and Don Bosco was well received. As he was leaving, I could see that he had been given a favorable audience, and I detained him, asking him to tell me something about himself. He amiably obliged, telling me about his Congregation, quite unknown to me, and about his cooperators, among whom he gladly enrolled me.

I recall another detail. When Don Bosco took his leave of me and walked through the entrance hall, he gave a gratuity to the cardinal's servants, who gladly accepted it. I believe that this was the way he wanted to repay them for having to wait beyond the regular closing time. This gesture too, with such delicate thoughtfulness of others, revealed the man of God in him.⁴

⁴Letter from Father Raphael of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, C.P., La Spezia (Bugnato), December 1, 1924, *Bollettino Salesiano*, February 1925, p. 26. [Author]

Ecclesiastics and lay persons vied for his rare free moments at his lodgings at Tor de' Specchi. The nobility also visited him and invited him respectfully to their palaces. Count Charles Conestabile and Marquis [Angelo] Vitelleschi both went to visit him, and from them he learned that the Pope had spoken with genuine enthusiasm about him. Prince Gabrielli, who called while Don Bosco was at table, would not let anyone disturb him but left his visiting card with a note that he would return a half hour later, as he did. At the home of Duchess Salviati, who was anxious to speak to him, Don Bosco spent three hours; Marquis Patrizi was present to talk with him.

Don Bosco met also with cabinet ministers and high government officials. We know of only one matter discussed in these circles. A threat which, if carried out, would close the secondary school [at the Oratory] had been hanging over him for the last five months. It was a very grave situation, of which only the first phase was then unfolding. We shall describe it in detail in two distinct chapters.

Though caught up in the midst of these many trying situations, Don Bosco never forgot the needs of the Oratory. He tried to scrape a little money together for Father Rua, who was in need. At one time he sent twelve hundred and fifty lire, at another nineteen hundred lire, and six hundred lire a third time. One day he said to Father Bonetti:⁵ "Tomorrow or the next day we shall receive word that money is pouring into Father Rua's purse." When the prediction came true Father Bonetti asked him how he had known it. "Yesterday, when I told you that," he answered, "I seemed to see white wine being poured into Father Rua's glass, and assumed that he must be celebrating his joy in the help he had received." Apparently a donation of five thousand lire had been sent in by an anonymous donor.

While in Rome, Don Bosco liberally disposed of lottery tickets to provide for the Oratory's needs. He advertised the lottery in a circular dated March 7, 1879, addressed to Salesian cooperators.⁶

Membership in the Association of Salesian Cooperators in Rome, though already large, grew considerably after the conference of 1878, and kept growing every day, thanks to Don Bosco's

⁵Letter to Father Rua, March 10 1879. [Author]

⁶This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

propagandizing efforts. On March 17⁷ he held a conference prescribed for the feast of St. Francis de Sales in the church of the Noble Oblates at Tor de' Specchi. Cardinal Vicar Monaco La Valletta presided over the meeting, which was remarkable for its attendance and the high standing of the participants. Don Bosco related the Salesian Congregation's achievements over the past year, with the help of God and the support of cooperators, particularly those benefiting poor, homeless boys of Italy, France, and South America. When speaking of these houses in Italy, he singled out those opened in localities threatened by Protestant influence, especially the day school and night classes at La Spezia, which were due to the generosity of Pius IX and his successor. Some two hundred boys had been rescued there from Protestant influence. He was asked by many of those present why he had not founded a technical school also in Rome. In reply he stated that some one hundred boys from Rome and its suburbs were already being taken care of at the Oratory in Turin or in other hospices, and that he too was anxious, as was everyone else, to do something for Rome. He hoped to succeed in this with the help of God and of the cooperators. Then the cardinal vicar spoke, confirming Don Bosco's words about the need of founding a house in Rome for poor boys. He went on to describe how recent events had wrought havoc among the charitable institutions of Rome, and he urged the cooperators to support new endeavors which necessity made imperative, especially in view of everyone's bounden duty to take a stand against Protestant influence. In the very heart of Catholicism every possible means of offering material assistance was being used in order to destroy the soul, as Pope St. Sylvester had once deplored in regard to certain foreigners.

This time too⁸ some steps were taken to open a house in Rome, a very strong wish of the cardinal vicar. When Don Bosco called on him one day, he bade him sit at his right, saying affably: "Don Bosco, I want you to sit at my right. That is highly significant. Do you understand? I want you to be my right-hand man at all times." Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia too was pressing Don Bosco, arguing that

⁷Father Bonetti was also present and sets the date as March 18 (*Bollettino Salesiano*, April 1879), but Father Berto's diary leaves no room for doubt. [Author]

⁸Other attempts had already been made in 1877. See Vol. XIII, pp. 105f, 502-506. [Editor]

the Salesians would be far more esteemed if they had a house in Rome. Archbishop [Ludwig] Jacobini, secretary of briefs, and Chevalier [Adolph] Silenzi, president of St. Peter's Club, both suggested a building owned by the Augustinian nuns near the Basilica of the Santi Quattro Coronati. Don Bosco checked out the premises and found everything in excellent condition. He could house five hundred youngsters there at a yearly rental of three thousand lire. He gladly accepted a dinner invitation from Chevalier Carosio, a Piedmontese, who was a councillor of the prefecture, so as to have some idea how he could circumvent bureaucratic red tape. This official had already promised him full support in this endeavor; in fact he himself had introduced him to the prefect as a first move in preparing the way for further negotiations. They readily came to an understanding, but as for the actual negotiations, nothing concrete ever came out of them, as we have elsewhere already explained.⁹ Had any firm financial guarantee followed upon the generous verbal offers made to him, Don Bosco would never have left Rome without a positive start of negotiations.¹⁰

A second splendid proposal was made to him: Prince Gabrielli offered him nothing less than St. Michael's Hospice, of which he was chairman. This vast charitable institution, which had been founded by Popes and expropriated by the Italian government, was going from bad to worse.¹¹ The moral tone left much to be desired and two-thirds of its income ended up in the pockets of officials. As usual, Don Bosco agreed on principle, but first and foremost laid down three preliminary conditions: absolute freedom of action in

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 504-506. [Editor]

¹⁰We may infer this on the basis of Don Bosco's manner of speaking on April 16 when briefing the members of the superior chapter about unsuccessful attempts. [Author]

¹¹The liberal scandal sheet *Dovere* of May 10, 1879 described the conditions of this lay-administered hospice as follows: "In the boys' arts and trades section imorality is rampant and breaks out into unheard-of perversions. There are frequent robberies at night, thanks to picklocks and false keys. Recently three cases of these criminal tools were found—clear evidence of the evil tendencies and pastimes in which the pupils indulge. Again and again dishes and food are hurled in protest across the cafeteria, down the stairs, and even into the offices of the board of directors. Furthermore, all this was accompanied by wanton and malicious vandalizing of doors and walls. For five consecutive days also, a fierce riot broke out with rock throwing and the smashing of over twenty large stone slabs." Further on, the newspaper deplored the administration of a certain Lovatelli, the director, who succeeded in "destroying, discrediting and undermining such an old and respected institute." [Author]

everything pertaining to internal discipline; dismissal of all personnel and families which had somehow managed to install themselves on the premises; a free hand over two-thirds of the revenue. With the best of intentions the prince told Don Bosco that he would summon the board immediately and give him an answer should a decision be made. Meanwhile Don Bosco asked Turin to send him a copy of the Oratory house rules. When a month went by and the members of the board were still talking, it was fairly obvious that the prince's good will would not prevail. No answer came.

In the meantime Don Bosco was completing a report on the spiritual and material conditions of the Salesian Society to be sent to the Holy See. We pass over it now and will return to it later.

Not content with this general report to the Holy See, he submitted two further reports to the cardinal secretary of state with the avowed purpose of obtaining a subsidy. The first listed all the Salesians' efforts to counteract Protestant intrigues, especially in Turin, La Spezia and Vallecrosia, stating that if they were to strengthen and develop the good work they had begun, they needed appreciable financial and moral assistance, since in all three cities they had to set up churches and hospices. The bishops of Italy were at that time sorely distressed by Protestant propaganda. Liberal laws had let loose a horde of Protestant propagandists who operated with no restraint whatever. It is no small matter that among the works of charity entrusted by his rule to the Salesian Society, Don Bosco listed counteraction against heresy, for he saw all too plainly in how many ways the Protestants sought to influence the simple and the ignorant. The tide of Protestantism rushed upon the city of the Popes through the breach made at Porta Pia¹² and reached out far and wide. The Protestants fell just short of setting themselves up in the Church of the Spaniards in Piazza Navona only because the Belgian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart fortunately intervened in time. At the Salesian cooperators' conference, the cardinal vicar commented: "These enemies of the faith of Jesus Christ have not only built churches and opened schools of error here, but charitable institutions as well, and they use every possible deceit to make converts, especially among the

¹²Italian troops entered Rome through this gate on September 20, 1870. [Editor]

lower classes, among inexperienced, underprivileged youth.” Publicizing what the Salesians had already accomplished in this field helped to confirm the urgency of calling upon them to exercise the same zeal in Rome.

In his second report, Don Bosco stressed the needs of the South American missions, pointing out that the Sons of Mary Program which he had founded at Sampierdarena¹³ offered an abundant source of [adult] vocations for the missions. Here too he requested donations of sacred vestments, books and money. He had already mentioned the South American missions in his first audience with Cardinal Nina. “The Holy Father knows you are in Rome,” the cardinal remarked. “When I see him tomorrow morning, I’ll tell him what you have said to me. Meanwhile, go to Cardinal Simeoni, the prefect of Propaganda,¹⁴ and tell him in my name to take up this matter with me so we can see how we can help your missions.” Don Bosco discussed the matter with the prefect of Propaganda on the evening of March 8 for more than an hour and a half. He also conferred twice with one of the clerks, Monsignor Zitelli, but we do not know the outcome of these talks. Always with this same intent, Don Bosco addressed a petition to the Holy Father, describing the Oratory in Turin and the hospice at Sampierdarena as seminaries for the foreign missions, asking for a favorable recommendation to the prefects of the sacred congregations concerned.

He also addressed three other petitions for spiritual favors to the Holy Father. In the first he asked that Salesian priests approved for confessions by a diocese might be assigned as confessors of students and residents of Salesian houses by their respective directors, and that these same priests, when traveling in missionary territories either on land or at sea, might also be allowed to hear the confessions of the faithful. The second petition requested that indulgences and other spiritual benefits granted by Pius IX on May 9, 1876 be extended to residents of Salesian houses and to the Salesian cooperators. In the third he again raised the question of privileges, asking that the two which had been already granted by Pius IX on April 21, 1876—namely that covering confessions and

¹³See the Index of Volume XII under “Sons of Mary.” [Editor]

¹⁴The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, now known as the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. [Editor]

that of ordinations *extra tempora* [outside the appointed time]—be renewed. He left this last petition with Attorney [Constantine] Leonori when he left Rome.

He also petitioned the Pope for honorary titles for four distinguished benefactors whom he wished to acknowledge publicly in token of his gratitude. They were Monsignor Jules Rostand, Canon [Clement] Guiol, Baron Aime Héraud, and Signor Benedetto Pela of Este. Three of the titles were granted, as were the indulgences and spiritual favors requested in the second petition.¹⁵

We do not know the outcome of the other petitions. We should bear in mind, however, that Don Bosco did not aim such petitions exclusively or even mainly at obtaining favors or benefits. He used these means simply because they were the easiest and most natural to draw the attention of the Pope and the Roman Congregations to his work and thus to strengthen his Society and counteract erroneous reports. This explains why he inserted into his petitions detailed information which at first glance would seem irrelevant.

Don Bosco had but one audience with the Pope, and then he had to wait until March 20, since papal audiences had been suspended for two weeks and of some five hundred applications only four were said to have been granted.¹⁶ His name had also been on the waiting list from March 8, when he wrote to Monsignor Macchi. Anxious for this audience and planning to go to Magliano and then leave for home, he appealed on March 20 to Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, the Pope's private chamberlain, begging him to get him a few moments' audience. This prelate, born in Perugia, was a confidant of the Pope and had met Don Bosco the previous year.¹⁷ He replied almost immediately that Don Bosco was to report that same afternoon at 3:15 to the Pope's antechamber. Don Bosco complied. Punctually the Pope appeared, alone, wearing his red cloak and hat for his daily walk. Don Bosco, who was waiting for him in the throne room, saw that the Holy Father was listening to him with pleasure. He asked that the Pope's secretary of state be cardinal protector of the Salesian Congregation, and the Pope replied that this had already been done. Don Bosco spoke about his South

¹⁵This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

¹⁶Letter from Father Bonetti to Father Rua, Rome, March 21, 1879. [Author]

¹⁷See Vol. XIII, p. 532. [Editor]

American missions and requested papal blessings. He mentioned other matters too, but only Father Bonetti and Father Berto, who were standing at some distance away, knew about this. Leisurely Don Bosco moved with the Holy Father toward the litter which was waiting to take him to the Vatican gardens for his walk. The Pope's manner of reception, as well as his far from usual friendliness, confirmed what he had already heard from several prelates about the Pope's favorable attitude toward him. Though he had no other private audience, he did again confer often and at length with the secretary of state and with other heads of the Sacred Roman Congregations—about what other matters it was never known, and we may probably never know, at least in their entirety.

Six days after his audience with the Pope, Don Bosco was officially informed that his cardinal protector had been appointed in a communication from the secretariat of state, signed by Monsignor Seraphim Cretoni, and couched in words of praise: "The Salesian Congregation daily merits greater thoughtful consideration from the Holy See because of its works of mercy and its accomplishments in evangelizing various areas of the world. It is the Holy Father's wish that it be granted a special protector, and he has graciously appointed Cardinal Lawrence Nina, his secretary of state." At the time of Pius IX, Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia had been the nominal protector of the Salesians since that Pope had taken the Salesian Congregation under his personal protection because at its origins it needed his special fatherly assistance. Now it had a true cardinal protector as did the other religious congregations. Nor could his choice have fallen on a more benevolent prelate, for, having known Don Bosco before he became cardinal, the secretary of state had a lofty admiration and a warm love for him, having declared himself more than willing when Don Bosco had first asked him to be the Salesians' protector. "I could not volunteer for this to the Holy Father on my own," he told Don Bosco, "but if he asks, I shall accept immediately." He gave eloquent proof of his good intentions when Don Bosco proposed that, in view of His Eminence's responsibilities, he might appoint an official of his with whom Don Bosco could deal in matters concerning the foreign missions. "No," the cardinal replied, "I want to handle this myself. Come tomorrow at half past four so we can discuss this at greater ease. It is a wonder that your Congregation can thrive in such times as these, while

others fall to pieces and everything is threatened.”

Don Bosco frequently experienced the benefits of such a loving patronage.¹⁸ After he returned to Turin and told the superior chapter that the Pope had appointed a protector, he wrote a letter of thanks to the cardinal on behalf of the entire Congregation, paying him a most cordial tribute and soliciting his help for the Salesian missions and perhaps also for the granting of privileges. This seems to be brought out by His Eminence’s reply dated April 29, 1879. Among other things, he stated: “I did not fail to represent you without delay to the Holy Father in the matter you requested, and I am glad to assure you that he received it very favorably.”¹⁹

We have so far made no reference to Don Bosco’s health. It seems to have been fairly good, except for his eyesight, concerning which we find some indications in his two secretaries’ correspondence with Father Rua. On March 2 Father Bonetti wrote, “We arrived safely yesterday; Don Bosco is well, and there is no worsening of his eye condition. Could this last until the end of the century, it would be a bountiful favor. You little saints of the Oratory have to obtain it from Mary, Help of Christians.” On March 7 Father Berto stated, “Our dear Don Bosco’s eyesight still leaves much to be desired. Pray and ask others to pray.” Two days later he added, “Yesterday and today his eyesight has been better. He did some walking, no more than that. Obviously, his best cure would be to get away, and that he cannot do.” That same day his chronicle states, “Sunday, feast of St. Francis. Mass at the Oblates’ church at Tor de’ Specchi. Cardinals Bilio and d’Avanzo were present. We stayed indoors all day. Toward evening we took a walk, reaching the foot of the Campidoglio just as the Angelus was

¹⁸Cardinal Lawrence Nina was born at Recanati May 12, 1812, and died in Rome on July 27, 1885. The son of a notary, he studied in Rome, where he was ordained in 1845 and where for many years he served as a non-certified attorney. Later he became assistant secretary to the Congregation of the Council, dean of the chapter of St. Mary Major, and canon of St. Peter’s. Pius IX appointed him assessor to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office and prefect of studies in the lyceum of St. Apollinaris. In 1869 he became a member of the preparatory committee for the Vatican Council, and on March 12, 1877 he was created cardinal and appointed administrator of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith and of the funds raised through Peter’s Pence. After the death of Cardinal Franchi (on the night between July 31 and August 1, 1878) Leo XIII appointed him secretary of state. In 1880 he was replaced by Cardinal Jacobini and retained only the office of prefect of the Apostolic Palaces. [Author]

¹⁹Excerpt from Cardinal Nina’s letter. [Editor]

ringing.²⁰ The sky was clear, and after strolling around the Campidoglio we returned home.” Don Bosco’s lodgings,²¹ recently demolished, faced directly the convent of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome near the slope of the Campidoglio, not very far from the spot where the Rarpeian Rock juts out. On March 10, Father Bonetti wrote, “Don Bosco is fairly well; his eyes have been somewhat better these last two evenings. Tell the boys to make the novena to St. Joseph devoutly that our dear Don Bosco’s eyesight may be preserved and that the spiritual eyes of a few unfortunate persons may be opened. Poor Don Bosco keeps praying for them and keeps also recommending them to their good companions’ prayers. We may ask whether these poor lads are students or artisans. Don Bosco has seen a few from each group.” Finally on March 24 Father Berto wrote, “Don Bosco feels quite well, but his eyes are not getting better. We must pray and keep praying. Tell this to the boys.” Don Bosco’s eye affliction pained his friends. On March 18 *Osservatore Romano* translated a long article from *Semaine Liturgique* on Don Bosco. Among other things, it stated: “The admirable Don Bosco, whose health has always been frail, is now in danger of [completely] losing his eyesight; one eye is already unseeing, and the other is clouding up. This good priest keeps saying, ‘I feel that I will soon be called to render an account to God. I would like to give some last touches to the Salesian Congregation.’ Meanwhile, he continues to work with the enthusiasm of twenty years ago.”

A visit of Don Bosco to our seminary at Magliano was advisable, if not actually needed. Arguments stemming from misunderstandings made life difficult for Father [Joseph] Daghero, who went to Rome with three board directors of the seminary. A conference with Cardinal Bilio, at which Don Bosco was present, cleared the air, and his visit to Magliano set things right. He left in the afternoon of March 24 with Father Bonetti and Father Berto, arriving at Magliano at one in the morning. Some forty seminarians and boarding students were waiting for him at the station at Borghetto. Father [Peter] Guidazio, who had come purposely from Montefi-

²⁰At Angelus time, the ringing of the bells from the top of the capitol fills the air with mystic harmonies, flooding the soul with tender emotions. [Author]

²¹See Vol. XIII, pp. 360f. [Editor]

ascone, was also there. Don Bosco spent the entire day visiting friends in town and stayed indoors throughout March 26 so as to give the confreres a chance to talk with him. The following day he returned to Rome with Father Berto, leaving Father Bonetti behind. In Rome all he had to do was hastily wind up some business and pack his bags.

This time he did not visit Albano but made up for it in a most satisfactory manner, as Father [Francis] Piccollo²² tells us in a report from which we now glean this colorful episode.

During my last year at Ariccia, the confreres at Albano and those of us who lived in a little house nearby received a wonderful happy surprise. Father [Joseph] Monateri got a letter from Don Bosco saying that he was in Rome and wanted his sons of both houses to go to Rome as soon as possible so that he could visit with them. Can you imagine how thrilled we were? The first free day we had we set out for Rome in several train coaches. We were bursting with rare joy, and our hearts were throbbing when we arrived at the modest apartment of Tor de' Specchi, knowing that we were close to the longed-for moment when we would see and welcome our dearest father again. When we entered his room, we saw him smiling, looking almost rejuvenated by his pleasure at seeing us. We spent the full day with him as he listened to us all and gave us whatever advice he thought was useful. At the simple lunch we ate with him we had the feeling that we were in heavenly bliss. Smiling, he spoke to each one of us in turn. Never had I ever seen him so cheerful. After dinner he told Father John Rinaldi to send a gift to Cardinal Nina, who was then our protector, and I was chosen to accompany him. It was a very modest gift: a bottle of wine eighty years old. The cardinal accepted it with open pleasure, detecting behind the actual gift itself Don Bosco's heart, and he asked us to convey his thanks. When evening came, Don Bosco repeated his counsels, added encouraging words and blessed us. On our part, we felt that the joy which had flooded us all day was fading away because we had to leave him, and we deeply felt the separation. I must admit that while he was blessing us he too grieved that he had to say good-bye.²³

²²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²³Under that day's date we read in Father Berto's diary: "March 23, Fourth Sunday of Lent. Mass at Tor de' Specchi. Seven people—priests, clerics and laymen—came from Albano and Ariccia to see Don Bosco and also stayed for dinner. Then Don Bosco went back to the Pope's secretary of state with Father [John] Rinaldi; he also called on Archbishop [John Baptist] Bianchi, secretary to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and again on the cardinal secretary of state, who agreed to become the protector of the Salesian Congregation. Finally, Don Bosco met with Monsignor Boccali and brought him a

We have three letters from Rome signed by Don Bosco, all dictated to his secretaries because of his poor eyesight. The first one was addressed to Canon [Clement] Guiol, the second to Chevalier Charles Fava, an old friend and benefactor. The third letter was one of thanks and counsel to Father [John] Marengo and the students of Lucca. We also have a letter, probably dating from 1879, which seems to have been drafted in French by Count Cays and addressed to the superior general of the Carthusian grand monastery at Grenoble.²⁴

After a papal audience Don Bosco would usually have his secretary write a personal notification to distinguished benefactors of the special blessing he had obtained for them from the Holy Father, and he would sign it. He did not have to state every name, since the Pope gave his blessing to all whom the petitioner had in mind. Don Bosco did the same on this occasion. Our files contain replies indicating the sincere delight of the persons to whom this communication had been sent.

bottle dating back to about the year 1800. He delivered three memoranda to the cardinal secretary of state—one on our South American missions, another on our European missions in their struggle against Protestant influence, and finally a petition for some privileges.

“When he came home, he blessed the confreres from Albano and Ariccia, and then with the cleric Varvello he went to dine at about eight o'clock at the home of Chevalier Carosio, underprefect of Rome. Chevalier Gilardini, official reporter to the Council of State, was to have been there also, but could not come. This enabled Chevalier Carosio to speak more freely with Don Bosco about the plans for opening a Salesian house in Rome. This gentleman is Piedmontese; perhaps he comes from somewhere near Ovada.”

Father Berto remarks that Don Bosco “again called on the secretary of state” because he had been with him only the day before, besides several other times. He sent the gift to the cardinal after his visit in the morning through Father Rinaldi since he was already known to His Eminence; he personally handed the gift to Monsignor Boccali. These were Don Bosco's usual ways to express his gratitude. On this occasion he wanted to thank the cardinal for accepting the position of protector and to the monsignor for having obtained a papal audience for him. Those bottles of old and choice wine had been sent to him by noble families of Turin for his own health, but he turned them to other purposes. [Author]

²⁴This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 4

First Steps Toward Closing the Oratory's Secondary School

THROUGHOUT the long, shameful campaign being waged against the Oratory School, the government officials acted more or less knowingly as tools of the [Protestant] sects. Once the ruling power passed into the hands of the parliamentary left wing, it multiplied its sneaky attacks on the ever increasing numbers of private schools being opened and directed by the priests and religious. We shall probably keep returning to this theme again and again, but here we will restrict ourselves to events which threatened our motherhouse. Therefore, delaying our account of Don Bosco's return to Turin, we will relate the first sallies directed against the secondary school at Valdocco and Don Bosco's defensive reaction during his stay in Rome.

The first decree, signaling the opening salvo, was dated October 10, 1878, and came from the provincial school board, warning Don Bosco that his teachers had to be properly certified to teach their classes and threatening severe measures, not excluding the shutdown of his school, should he not comply with the law. It also demanded that a list of teachers for the school year 1878-79, specifying each one's qualifications, be sent to the provincial superintendent of schools.

Don Bosco ignored this injunction; the reason was that he was trying to obtain a three-year period of grace from the Department of Public Education, during which uncertified teachers might still be allowed to teach the Oratory classes. To this end he petitioned Minister [Michael] Coppino with the following letter:

Turin, November 1, 1878

Your Excellency:

Your obvious dedication in fostering and supporting schools for the children of the poor has encouraged me to plead for an outstanding favor. I place my hopes solely on your well-known clemency and power. It will benefit the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, which has accepted several hundreds of poor boys, sent by various government departments, and trains them in arts and trades or in academic subjects, thus preparing them to earn an honest living in later life. The Oratory has no steady income but relies solely on God's providence. Hence, the education department has always shown us consideration, looking upon our school as a type of family institution—as it truly is—and has never raised any difficulties with teacher certification. Now, however, the provincial superintendent of schools has notified me that all our teachers must hold personal certification in each subject.

This would spell disaster for these poor boys, many of whom, well talented, would never be able to achieve honorable positions in business, the military, or the teaching profession.

In this my grave need I appeal to your Excellency that you graciously allow our present teachers, all well experienced, to be authorized to continue their free services in their respective classes for at least three years. During that time, these same teachers will have reached the required age to take the state examinations and obtain the needed certification.

I request this favor in the name of my underprivileged boys and ask God to brighten all of your days with happiness.

Deeply gratefully, I am honored to remain,

Fr. John Bosco

A note written originally by Don Bosco, but copied and signed by Father Durando, was attached to the petition. It stated:

As dean of studies in this hospice, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, I knowingly and freely declare that the following teachers (*here followed their names and respective classes*) have taught their classes diligently, with notable profit to their pupils, and have given unquestionable proof of their ability and skill in their respective areas. I attest to their self-sacrifice in teaching the poor youngsters of this school without salary. I also appeal to His Excellency the Minister of Public Education that he graciously allow these teachers to keep their positions in their respective classes as they have done for so many years, etc. Rev. [Celestine] Durando.

Unwilling to leave any stone unturned in his efforts to avert this disaster, Don Bosco also appealed to a Jewish friend of his who was general secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Chevalier [James] Malvano.

Turin, October 19, 1878

Dear Sir:

I am truly in need of your help. I have filed a petition with the Minister of Public Education, asking that the school in this hospice for poor boys be regarded as "a charity school conducted by the children's wards" and therefore not be required to employ legally certified teachers. My petition will come up possibly on Monday or Tuesday. I have requested that our present teachers be given temporary authorization or that they be allowed to take the state examination with a waiver of age requirement as required by law.

A word of yours on my behalf will help very much, especially since the minister is new in his office and may not be aware that our school is a true orphanage and that the greater part of our pupils have been sent to us by the state.

I rely on your goodness, my dear sir, and let this be a further debt of gratitude we owe you.

Please accept the regards of Professor Pechenino and Professor Durando, both of whom are with me now and ask to be remembered to you.

God grant you good health and a life of happiness! With heartfelt thanks,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The Minister of Public Education instructed the prefect [of the province of Turin] to express his regrets to Don Bosco that, as on a previous occasion, no exception could be made to the common law and that the provincial school board's decision was to be implemented in every detail. The prefect followed orders and also, on his own, requested Don Bosco promptly to send him a list of the teachers and their certifications, warning him that legal sanctions would follow should he not comply with the request. On November 15, Don Bosco sent in the names of Father Rua, Father Durando, Father Bonetti, Father Bertello, and Father Pechenino. To the list of these certified teachers he added the names of teachers' aides in

each class who had not yet received certification. A man of bold initiative himself, Don Bosco apparently hoped thus to win implicit approval of the teachers' aides. He always had in view that the Oratory should be regarded as a family institution. Two weeks later, [Joachim] Rho, the provincial superintendent, came unexpectedly to conduct an inspection of the Oratory school and its premises with the school superintendent of Novara. Two of the certified teachers who were in that day barely managed to rush into their classrooms; all the other classes were covered by teachers' aides. The superintendent made no attempt to hide his dissatisfaction on leaving, but, having been a fellow student of Don Bosco,¹ it was hoped that no drastic measures would be taken because of their friendship. However, it was commonly known that he looked askance at Salesian institutions, though he was equally capable of usually wearing a smiling countenance to cover up his real intentions. The surprise inspection had expressly been ordered by Turin's school board to ascertain whether the teachers were really certified and whether the people on the list did in fact make up the teaching staff. The superintendent's report was devastating. In consequence, the school board stiffened its demands, threatening severe penalties if matters were not all put right before January 30, 1879. Very shortly after this warning, Don Bosco received another official memo, this time a request in the prefect's name, to take a poor boy into the Oratory.

A second inspection on March 7, also conducted by the superintendent, was even more disastrous, so that Don Bosco was forced to take vigorous countermeasures himself. A reliable source had assured him of two particulars very important to him: the communication of the Minister of Public Education to Turin's superintendent had called for compliance with the law, but had not urged severe sanctions; evidently, then, the initiative had not been taken by Rome but by Turin's local authorities, citing disciplinary measures prescribed at a higher level. This information made it easier for Don Bosco to act. When pressured by the [local] authorities, he bypassed them and carried the issue directly to the top. On March 15 he wrote for an audience with Premier [Augustine] Depretis, and was answered by the cabinet director,

¹He had first met Don Bosco in 1840. See Vol. I, p. 373. [Editor]

Baron Celesia of Vegliasco, that His Excellency would receive him that same afternoon at two at the Department of the Interior. Don Bosco arrived punctually but had to wait a half hour for the minister to appear. When he did, Don Bosco stood up, and the minister, doffing his hat, immediately ushered him into his office. They opened their discussion by recalling their meeting at Lanzo² and then spoke for forty-five minutes. Don Bosco first told him about the [Salesian] missions, and the minister expressed his wish to extend his support. Then Don Bosco broached the hot topic of his visit, alluding vaguely to obstacles thrown up in his path, whereupon the minister remarked that, since public opinion was now on his side, he had nothing to fear. Don Bosco replied by recalling the "fickle crowd" of Sallust and then launched into his topic. Depretis was sympathetic and promised to recommend his school to the Minister of Public Education. The sailing was smooth enough and so Don Bosco made a further move. With the help of his friend, Mr. Ferdinand Fiore, an employee of the Department of the Interior, he drew up a memorandum for the premier, so that he might have at hand all that he needed to justify his approval of Don Bosco's request to have uncertified instructors teach at the Oratory school. Don Bosco summed up the matter to him as follows:

MEMORANDUM

Our aim is to come to the aid of an institution which strives to improve the lot of society's most needy group—our morally endangered youth. Bearing in mind that this hospice, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin:

1. has always been regarded by state and municipal authorities as a charitable institution, being declared such by both the senate of the realm and the Chamber of Deputies;
2. has time and again come to the public aid by sheltering homeless boys and has consequently won the continued favor, commendation, and financial support of the aforesaid authorities;
3. has been exempted by the school authorities for over thirty-six years from the requirement of having certified teachers in its secondary school classes;
4. would run into prohibitive expense of paying teachers because it has no income of any kind, and the financial burden would gravely harm its pupils, whose numbers would have to be cut down if it is to survive;

²See Vol. XII, pp. 301ff. [Editor]

5. [also bearing in mind] that the present Department of Public Education, willing to continue the support enjoyed by the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales under previous cabinets, is now being requested to recognize this institution, as it has already been, as a charitable home or family in which the Reverend John Bosco is considered a father to the youngsters he has charitably taken in;

6. that it is our intent to lend a kindly interpretation to the laws on public instruction, so as to have them benefit rather than harm the most needy class of society;

7. that it is our desire, finally, to cooperate with and to support obligatory education for the poorest underprivileged classes of society:

We authorize Father John Bosco to impart personally or through others a secondary education to the poor boys of his charitable institutions without being obliged to have certified teachers in the classes.

This petition was to be accompanied by a covering letter³ which was meant to serve as both a presentation and a timely reminder.

However, the premier did not think it wise to go along with this memo, feeling that he might more effectively act unofficially. He added in a friendly manner: "Whenever you wish to see me, you don't have to request an audience. Just come and have yourself announced. I would like to have us act like friends. Tell me the next time you are sending a band of missionaries so that the government may help at least by financing their transportation." He also asked Don Bosco to mention several things to the Pope, which Don Bosco promised to do. While leaving the Braschi palace where the Department of the Interior was then located, he happened to pass by a group of deputies. One of them greeted him in Piedmontese. Just before that, Father Berto had overheard a loud remark in one of the corridors: "He looks like a saint."

Mr. Fiore had singled out a certain "grim Commendatore Barberis," director general of secondary schools, as a man of very great influence in that department. However, characterized as a dyed-in-the-wool autocrat, he was loftily distant and deaf to all suggestions. Don Bosco had gone to school with him, and so, trusting in this former association, he went to see him. He was quickly ushered into the office and remained there some two hours. Since we are mainly writing for our confreres who are familiar with

³Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Don Bosco's way of describing all sorts of encounters, we shall not refrain from reporting the focal point of his conversation in a lively dialogue of question and answer. Father Berto and others heard it from his lips and jotted it down for posterity.

Don Bosco began by addressing the Commendatore politely in the third person, as did the latter with him, but once the ice was broken the official inadvertently broke in with, "Let's put niceties aside. You know very well we are old schoolmates. Let's just address each other as friends do, so we can talk more trustfully. Understand that in my position I speak without regard to persons."

"But you could really help me," Don Bosco interrupted.

"There's the law, my friend. That's the only thing I must consider.

"But you see that the right [is on my side]."

"The school board has taken a stand, and so the right is on their side."

"But do me a favor. See if you can bend the minister to less drastic measures. . . ."

"I can't."

"Look, I am not here to make demands on you. I only beg you to help me, to give me some advice."

"Obey the law. That's all I can say."

"Listen, I can handle a pen," Don Bosco said somewhat facetiously. "History will tell how you treated a poor man whose only intent was to help destitute, homeless youngsters."

"Write whatever you wish. Once I'm gone, I couldn't care less about what others will say of me."

"Look, my dear Commendatore, you now hold this office, but not forever. Your interpretation of the laws makes you odious, and when you will be out of office people will curse your memory."

Barberis became quite thoughtful and then said, "But the law must be upheld."

"True, but laws are also open to a kindly interpretation, not just to a harsh one."

"Enough! You will never have anything to fear from me. It is Turin that is yelling . . . the school board . . . they have sent us protests. . . . Get in touch with the heads of that board." Then he told him how to keep within the law and concluded: "Later on try to

see Minister [Michael] Coppino directly, or at least the secretary general, Commendatore Bosio.”

Certain remarks of the director general of secondary schools affirmed a strong suspicion of Don Bosco. Every year at least some thirty Oratory pupils used to report for state examinations, vying with pupils of the public school, whom they often surpassed. Their success irritated some of the bigwigs and stirred up envy, creating jealousy and resentment among people who could not tolerate that public schools should cut such a sad figure when compared with Don Bosco's schools. This was one reason for their hostility.

Following Barberis' advice, Don Bosco called on Commendatore Bosio, secretary general of the Department of Public Education, since any attempt to approach Minister Coppino himself would have proved useless; past experience had taught him that. Bosio was delighted to have Don Bosco visit his office, for he was very anxious to meet him. He conferred with him for two hours, giving Don Bosco some helpful advice concerning his teachers.

While Don Bosco was busy in Rome going up and down the stairs of government buildings, the school superintendent of the providence of Turin filed this report of his second visit to the Oratory school with the provincial school board.

I found discipline and perfect order in all the classrooms, but as was foreseen, all the classes, save the first year, were being taught by young Salesian clerics and priests who, in the previous inspection, had been listed as teachers' aides for the regular school staff. The fourth year teacher was definitely present on campus but did not appear in his classroom until he learned that I was visiting the classes one by one to see for myself who was really doing the teaching. A third teacher, apparently warned of my visit, showed up all flustered after my inspection was finished and his class was over.

The teacher who had “showed up all flustered” was Father Mark Pechenino, noted for his Greek dictionaries and his highly praised *Forme verbali* [Verbal Forms]. When he left the Oratory after that visit he imprudently remarked to an acquaintance of his, whom he considered a friend, “We tricked the superintendent this time!” It was this trivial bost which his gossipy friend rushed to repeat that enraged the grumpy official.

After studying the superintendent's report, the school board

decided to propose to the Department of Education the shutdown of the secondary school of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Assuring himself that no hostile campaign was being waged against his schools in Rome, Don Bosco imitated the delaying tactics of Fabius Maximus and kept the question open while playing for time. The school year was coming to an end in the meantime. If his school was shut down, he had time to find some way of opening it the next year.

We must mention that as this storm brewed in Turin a few honest voices were raised in Don Bosco's defense, even in the liberal ranks. Attorney Giustina, whose journalistic name was Ausonio Liberi (he was the editor of the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*) published an article entitled *Un po' di pietà . . . e di giustizia* [A Little Compassion . . . and a Little Justice] throbbing with admiration for Don Bosco. It described him as an "upright citizen," a credit to the city of Turin, before whom he bowed respectfully "not as a priest, but as the angel of public concern, the apostle of Christ." He appealed to the media and added: "Let's not make this a party issue. Before the public welfare all factions must disappear. Let there be only a united front of volunteers who are intent on working in the public interest and are concerned with public mores." It's too bad that this Mr. Giustina was not always so fair-minded.

Regardless of all these anxious cares which swelled the tide of his other problems in Rome, Don Bosco calmly remarked that this too would somehow be settled. "He has the serenity of a saint!" remarked Father Bonetti when writing of these matters to Turin.⁴

⁴Letter to Father Rua, Rome, March 10, 1879. [Author]

CHAPTER 5

Return Trip to Turin

WE would find it hard to understand how Don Bosco could calmly absent himself from the Oratory for months at a time, were it not that he left a man there who did much and did it unobtrusively—the providential Father Rua. He was Don Bosco’s masterly creation as well as a kindred helper whom God Himself had given him, lest his mission be hindered in any way from its achievement. Without being repetitious, we call the reader’s attention to one item. The report to the Holy See, already cited,¹ on which we shall soon dwell, merely touches upon the financial situation [of the Congregation]. “We have debts,” it reads, “but also some property whose sale will settle them.” Quite true! There was, for one, the highly priced estate bequeathed to Don Bosco by Baron Bianco of Barbanía. The trouble was that no sale had as yet been made, nor was there any satisfactory prospect in sight. In the meantime the financial situation kept worsening. Father Rua did not conceal from his closest friends that the Congregation had never before found itself in such a tight situation. The lottery brought in daily returns, so that Don Bosco decided to keep it going until it netted a hundred thousand lire, but this daily trickle of funds could at best momentarily plug a few of the many holes. In such straitened circumstances the economic pinch could have devalued the Oratory’s credit and lowered its spirit, eventually bringing about bankruptcy and the breakup of the Congregation had it not been for the calm, capable control of a man like Father Rua. Instead, all went tranquilly about their duties, their thoughts with the distant Don Bosco. Even those who best knew the true situation

¹See p. 53. [Editor]

never realized how much credit was due to Father Rua for this calm environment. While his prudence taught him to administer wisely, his virtue led him unobtrusively to the quiet accomplishment of his desired goals.

Don Bosco was always very anxious not to be absent from the Oratory during Holy Week which was now at hand, but the route he planned for his return was rather long. He left Rome for Florence [with Father Berto] on the morning of March 28, being met at the railroad station of Orte by Father Bonetti, who had remained behind at Magliano. The Tuscan capital had its citizens whose names merit a place in the annals of the Salesian cooperators: people like Nerli, Uguccione and the lesser known Dominican Father Verda who staunchly promoted *Letture Cattoliche* and *Italian Classics for the Young*.² Don Bosco and his two traveling companions were guests of Marchioness Nerli, who sent her coach for them. He comforted the pious, ailing Marchioness Uguccione by his visit, celebrating Mass in her own private chapel and speaking with her of spiritual matters. He also offered Mass in the convent of St. Mary of the Angels, where the body of St. Mary Magdalen de' Pazzi is preserved, and after Mass he said a few uplifting words to the sisters living there who had been dispossessed of their goods by the sects. At the Nerlis, many people called on him, among them Countess Digny. Without delay he paid his respects to Archbishop [Eugene] Cecconi, who cordially welcomed him, saying, "I entrust you with opening a home for poor boys here in Florence. Just tell me what you expect of me and I shall do as you say." Negotiations were thus opened for a Salesian hospice of that city.

In Florence he finally found time to pen a letter to Canon Guiol, who had sent him while in Rome a brief pamphlet on Don Bosco and his Congregation put together by his assistant, Father Louis Mendre.³

Florence, March 29, 1879

Dear Father:

I received Father Mendre's paper, a classic in its genre. Its lavish praise

²See Vol. IX, pp. 51, 195f, 391f. [Editor]

³L. Mendre, prêtre, *Don Bosco Prêtre, Fondateur de la Congrégation des Salésiens*. Notice sur son Oeuvre. L'Oratoire de Saint Léon a Marseille et les Oratoires Salésiens fondés en France. Marseille, 1879. [Author]

of my humble person often caused me to blush. May it redound to God's greater glory and profit the work it commends. My thanks to him and to you. The Holy Father was delighted with the two copies presented to him and sends you both his special blessing.

His Holiness spoke at length of St. Leo's Oratory and often voiced his thanks to its sponsors with a cordial blessing. He also promised me a holy card⁴ for you and another for Monsieur [Jules] Rostand. Once they are ready, I'll mail them to you.

I am now on my way to Turin. As soon as I get there I will supply for the needs of Marseille and of our two agricultural schools at Saint-Cyr and La Navarre.

I have many things to say to you personally; I hope I will be able to next May.

I owe urgent letters to Messrs. Jacques and Prat and others. In the meantime, please inform them of the Holy Father's special blessing. If our pamphlet is on sale, please mail ten or so copies to Turin for me. Those you sent me at Rome went like hotcakes.⁵

Pray for me, dear Father. With all esteem, affection and gratitude in Jesus Christ, I am

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. This is the first letter I have personally written in four months.

Having received and paid a number of visits, Don Bosco left Florence for Bologna on March 31. He was met by Countess Mary Malvasia, who brought him to her own residence and provided private, comfortable quarters for him and his two companions. Don Bosco's first thought was to pay his respects to Cardinal Archbishop Lucido Parocchi, who was delighted by his visit and asked the three to his palace on the following day. There was good reason for such a gracious reception, for the cardinal well knew of Don Bosco's mediation in Rome at the request of Leo XIII and the secretary of state, and how much effort was still being exerted to ease his painful situation. Having been promoted from the see of Pavia to become archbishop of Bologna on March 13, 1877, and having been formally installed in his cathedral, he had not been able to obtain the [government's] *exequatur*. In the senate session

⁴This is a humorous allusion to honorific papal titles he had sought for each of them. [Author]

⁵We are omitting a detailed description of Father Mendre's pamphlet given by the author of this volume immediately after this letter. [Editor]

of January 23, 1879, Senator [Charles] Pépoli again demanded a reason for denying the cardinal's request. Minister Taiani replied that, since "a milder wind was now blowing from the Vatican," the rigorous refusal of the *exequatur* could be eased, but he shamefacedly added that "this was not to imply that Pius IX's death had also buried all anger and rancor." Then, citing this particular case, he justified the government's action against Bologna's archbishop by alleging the opposition of the local authorities, the prefect, police commissioner, and magistrates in particular. It is quite probable that Leo XIII summoned Don Bosco to Rome to make it easier for the secretariat of state to handle the trying and delicate negotiations. The Italian government had really been more conciliatory with the other bishops, but it maintained a hard stand with the archbishop of Bologna. Aware that this opposition was deeply rooted in the local political parties' portrayal of Cardinal Parocchi as a dangerous, unyielding opponent, Don Bosco hoped that he might break down the opposition by speaking personally to the provincial prefect. The cardinal was completely won over to him and consequently, as later events proved, he dropped certain prejudices he had harbored against him. Marquis [Prospero] Bevilacqua, still determined to give Bologna a home for destitute youth, had so moved forward with his plans that he was ready to head for Rome and turn the whole thing over to Don Bosco. However, when he brought the matter up to the cardinal, the latter refused his consent and offered the project to another congregation, which declined it for lack of personnel. It was then that he learned of Don Bosco's intervention for him in Rome and in Bologna, and so he totally reversed his attitude.

Determined to act directly with the prefect, Don Bosco called on him. The first time he went he was told that the prefect was out. The second time he found him in the office and was given an audience. The prefect acted as if Don Bosco had come to beg for funds and, after opening remarks, commented, "Don Bosco is always at work begging for his boys."

"True," was the reply. "This time however I am not here to beg, but to offer my respects to authority."

"Why should you? You rank higher than the deputies and cabinet ministers themselves. Whenever your name is mentioned, we all bow to you."

Whether this exchange was subtle irony or just an excuse to avoid the issue, it went on for some time, and Don Bosco got nowhere. Anticlericalism would not back down. Five years later, Leo XIII summoned Cardinal Parocchi to Rome as his episcopal vicar to end the painful situation. There, we shall see, he encountered Don Bosco again in a matter deeply touching the Salesian Congregation.

Don Bosco regularly celebrated Mass in the private chapel of Countess Malvasia who generously hosted him; many distinguished persons attended, among them Marchioness Marianne Zambeccari who consulted him extensively about setting up the institutions she envisioned, as we have already mentioned.⁶

On the afternoon of April 2 he arrived in Este and was immediately escorted to the home of his dear benefactor, Benedict Pelà, who was observing his seventy-ninth birthday that very evening with a grand banquet for all his friends. At all costs he insisted on waiting for Don Bosco's arrival. On seeing him, this worthy gentleman's happiness knew no bounds; yet, he could never guess what surprise awaited him. In the midst of the dinner, Don Bosco arose to offer a brilliant toast in praise of the zealous charity of Este's people for the poor Salesians and in a hearty expression of thanks. Then he made an announcement which thrilled his host. "On this happy day," he continued, "I joyfully bow to our dear Benedict Pelà, Knight of the Order of St. Sylvester—an honor which the Holy Father has bestowed on him in token of his pleasure for all he does for the new Salesian boarding school and the care of Christian youth." The guests were all deeply moved, and Mr. Pelà himself wept with joy. No one could have asked for a warmer and more joyful gathering.

From the Pelà residence, Don Bosco went to the Salesian school, where the kind-hearted Benedict Pelà had thought of everything, even to furnishing Don Bosco's bedroom with soft-toned curtains to ease his hurting eyesight. The next day Pelà called on him with a friend, Anthony Venturini, and, taking from his wallet an IOU for eight thousand lire which Father Sala⁷ had given him, he offered it to Don Bosco as an outright gift, saying that

⁶See Vol. XII, p. 351. [Editor]

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

he was prepared to shoulder any expense to equip the school properly. This dear benefactor was always a real father to the Manfredini Salesian school.

At this writing [1933] a certain Dr. Francis Venturini, nephew of the above-mentioned Anthony Venturini, still lives at Este. Having attended the school from 1878 to 1886, he is an unquestionable witness of an extraordinary event occurring at his home in 1879. His mother was suffering from a serious womb infection. Her attending physicians, as well as Dr. Vanzetti of the royal university at Padua, who was called in for consultation, diagnosed her case as very serious.⁸ On the second day of Don Bosco's stay in Este, her father-in-law begged Don Bosco to see her and he obliged. Taken to the sick woman, he asked her if she had faith in Mary, Help of Christians. With deep feeling she replied that she had the greatest faith. He gave her a picture of Mary, Help of Christians to keep beneath her pillow and asked her to say a Hail Mary with him. He blessed her and assured her that Our Lady would obtain her recovery. In fact, a few days later, she felt perfectly healed and was back to her usual work.⁹

A howling wind and a downpour of rain forced Don Bosco to stay an extra day at the school, keeping him from journeying to Padua and paying his respects to the bishop, as he had previously planned. However, he was able to hold a meeting with the Salesian cooperators of Este. He addressed a large gathering of priests and nobility in the school auditorium. After the meeting, they adjourned to the chapel for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. All left after kissing Don Bosco's hand and receiving his special blessing or an encouraging word. Many kissed even his cloak or cassock.

Until then the conferences of Salesian cooperators had always been personally planned and chaired by Don Bosco, as in Este, Rome, Turin, Marseille, Nice, Alassio and Lucca. Now, however, he learned from a newspaper article dated March 25 that a conference of the Modena cooperators was held in the usual form in the Church of Our Lady of Paradise. This was a noteworthy event, marking the first time that the cooperators in a metropolitan area organized on their own initiative—a clear indication of how firmly

⁸This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

⁹Report by Dr. Francis Venturini, Este, August 29, 1931. [Author]

established they were—and we will dwell upon it.

Archbishop Joseph Guidelli, a Salesian cooperator for several years, sent his vicar general, Monsignor Prospero Curti, to represent him. The prior of St. Agnes Church, Father Henry Adami, was the keynote speaker. After citing the new perils threatening young people, he hailed Don Bosco as a man sent by God to save them through the Salesian Congregation, whose history he briefly outlined. He went on to talk about the Salesian cooperators and their work. He answered questions such as: “Did Modena have places caring for boys of working families? Did it have zealous laymen willing to help the clergy? Why, then, this new association?” His answer was: “The Association of Salesian Cooperators aims at inviting you to join forces in a holy league so as to make your efforts more effective. It also offers you spiritual benefits in recompense for your work; it begs you to do your best for the welfare of boys by encouraging others to join you in supporting, promoting and fostering with all your strength our city’s educational institutions.” He closed with a rousing appeal to his listeners’ goodness, urging them to do their bit as individuals and, as Don Bosco stressed, by joining forces with others. A telegram from Cardinal Nina brought the Pope’s blessing, as it stated, on “that first meeting of Salesian cooperators.”

Don Bosco was thrilled by all this, but his words of special praise were prompted by the conclusion of the newspaper report that properly grasped the spirit which should inspire the Salesian cooperators. It read:

In keeping with the regulations, Don Bosco was always to be considered as their superior. The local officers, approved by Don Bosco and by the bishop, were as follows: Monsignor Severino Roncati, president; the pastor of St. Peter’s Church and the prior of St. Barnabas Church, vice presidents; Dr. Louis Marchiò, secretary, and Marquis Julius Campori, treasurer. The secretary then read an appendix to the regulations for the Modena chapter of the cooperators, and there followed a brief discussion of the chapter’s promoting of Christian education of youth. It was agreed that, in keeping with the regulations, a donation was to be sent to the superior in Turin for Salesian houses and missions at least once a year; also that members should actively volunteer to teach Christian doctrine in parishes and festive oratories, and that the Modena chapter’s funds should be used to support the Sons of Mary Program, a free popular library for

the young, recreational activities on Sundays and holy days, and the maintenance of a meeting hall. Meanwhile, a fund-raising drive was to be started with a lottery, a collection at every meeting, and the payment of monthly dues of at least twenty-five centesimi from benefactors among the cooperators.

The meeting ended with the singing of *Iste Confessor* and a blessing with a relic of St. Francis de Sales which had been venerated on the altar with a picture of the saint.

Late after supper that evening, Don Bosco set out for Padua where Bishop Frederick Manfredini, eighty-six, had stayed up to welcome him to his residence. The following morning Don Bosco went with Father Bonetti and Father Berto to say Mass in the cathedral. The only town visit he made was to Countess Da Rio. At eleven o'clock that evening he arrived in Milan and stayed at the home of his good friend Attorney [Charles] Comaschi. That same day, April 5, Father Cagliero and Father Durando returned to Valdocco from their trip to Sicily and other towns in Italy.

During the four days he stayed in Milan, Don Bosco comforted several of the sick with the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians, among them a former pupil of our Valsalice College, Bonola by name. He had fallen from a trolley car and fractured his leg which later had to be amputated. His condition turned critical. After Don Bosco blessed him and gave him a medal of the Blessed Virgin, he quickly began to improve, but by the following evening his condition again worsened.¹⁰ Don Bosco called on Father Uselli, pastor of the Church of the Incoronata, only to find him out, but he met his housekeeper, who for the last four years had been unable to move about without help. He blessed her and told her to stand up on her own; she obeyed. When told to walk into the kitchen, she did so, ecstatic with joy.

The following day Don Bosco again called on Father Uselli, who gave him a thorough tour of his boarding school in the hope that Don Bosco would take it over, starting with the arts and trades section. The archbishop, who was most cordial toward Don Bosco and spent two hours with him, was very favorable to the idea. "At least I shall have friends by me!" he exclaimed. But his preference

¹⁰The youth died before the month of August, as we gather from a sympathy letter written by Don Bosco to his mother on August 19, 1879. [Author]

was that Don Bosco should first take care of the students. Don Bosco was of the same mind, but the artisans were to be a foil for the students, since the school authorities were too hostile to private schools. It was agreed that a contract would be signed by the end of May, but “ ’twixt the cup and lip is many a slip.” Father Usuelli could not make up his mind. When the time came to close the deal, he wanted to prolong negotiations. He was politely informed in time to forget about having the Salesians there.

Milan was the final stage of Don Bosco’s journey. The news that he would be arriving on the evening of April 9 set the Oratory afire with joy. He had been away for three and a half months. That day, Wednesday of Holy Week, after the evening service, the boundless expectation overshadowed everything not connected with preparations for his reception. When he arrived at supper time, the clamor of the boys drowned the strains of the band. The two long, deep rows of boys through which he was to walk broke down in no time, and there was no way to contain their rush toward Don Bosco and their crowding about him. In vain did Father Lazzero, Father Cagliero and Father Barberis try to restore some kind of order. Don Bosco took at least a half hour to cross the playground, go to his room and immediately come down again for supper. Then an air of serenity descended upon the house, as over a family which knows that father has safely returned. This exchange of loving feelings which link a father to his children peaked at two special moments of mystic silence and joyous liveliness. At dusk on Maundy Thursday Don Bosco performed the ceremony of the washing of feet in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians before the entire community, a service which, repeated every year, never lost its freshness, tenderly moving all hearts. Then, on Easter Sunday, an assembly, carefully planned to celebrate his long-awaited homecoming, was an hour of genuine exultation with song, music and recitation, delighting everyone.

His poor eyesight made it impossible for Don Bosco to extend his Easter wishes to his benefactors by personal mail, but he dictated a letter for Chevalier Fava to his secretary:

Turin, April 10, 1879

Dear Chevalier,

Having just returned from Rome, I hasten to inform you that the Holy

Father has again sent a special blessing to you, your wife and your little girl. May God keep you all in good health.

Please accept my greetings for a Happy Easter.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Rua substituted for Don Bosco with a circular inviting friends and benefactors to the welcome-home entertainment and giving them the whole Oratory's Easter greetings.¹¹

It was still a custom at the Oratory to take no important decision without first consulting Don Bosco verbally or in writing. His arrival had been pending for some time and decisions had been delayed, so that no sooner did he get back from his long, toilsome journey than he found himself engulfed in a sea of things. We will recount the little we know about them.

His first concern was the house. He asked Father Lazzero and Father Barberis about the boys and clerics: was anyone sick, had anyone misbehaved seriously, who were those outstanding in good conduct, did the students and artisans attend to their duties? The director singled out three boys whose conduct hurt their companions and asked for permission to send them home. Don Bosco inquired if they were older or younger boys, and when he learned that they were upperclassmen, with no evident hope of improvement, he told him to send them home immediately. Ordinarily, he had strong hopes for younger lads doing better. Even in an instance of serious misconduct, such as insolence or public defiance, he would be understanding, because he considered it an isolated incident within the context of an overall satisfactory behavior. But when an older lad, not altogether bad, consistently was half-hearted and lazy, he set no great hopes on him and told the superiors to take in his name whatever action they judged necessary.

The novice master also had two problems for Don Bosco. He had a novice—a Frenchman, a subdeacon and former Carthusian—who had been recommended by the superior general of the Grand Chartreuse at Grenoble. Though pious, talented, and ready to admit his faults, he had a somewhat fiery temperament which had

¹¹This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

twice exploded into quarrels and even fights during Don Bosco's absence. Convinced that he would be dismissed because of this, he had gone to the novice master and asked leave to pack up and go, but the latter decided to wait for Don Bosco's return. Don Bosco listened to the case and suggested they wait in the hope that the young man's good will might prevail. At times such generosity of heart caused others to wonder, but in these matters Don Bosco followed his Divine Teacher's instruction not to smother the smoking wick. Scandal made him adamant, but he was patient with young clerics whose conduct was mediocre, as long as there was no danger of their ending up badly. Such was his reaction to a cleric from Lucca who, during his absence, had seriously misbehaved, although basically he was not a hopeless case. This gave Don Bosco an occasion to express his views on clerics whose behavior was mediocre. "Let such clerics stay on," he said. "There will always be mediocre persons in every religious congregation and in every community. If one were to be unduly severe and dismiss everyone who is mediocre, I am afraid that even some of the better religious would become mediocre too, for it seems to be the way of Divine Providence that perfection is not of this world, at least among most of us."

More than anyone else, Father Rua was the person most needing to see Don Bosco. He was the Oratory's treasurer—a word denoting an administrator who only too often had no treasury at his disposal. The [Oratory] chronicle reports an amusing dialogue between Don Bosco and Father Rua in the presence of Father Lemoyne, Father Barberis and several other priests on one of the first evenings after Don Bosco's return.

"Father Rua," Don Bosco said, "everyone asks for money, and I hear that you send them away empty-handed."

"That's because our coffers are empty."

"Then sell the bonds that we have so we can meet our most pressing debts."

"I have sold some already, but I don't think it advisable to sell the rest, because every day unforeseen, serious needs arise, and we would be left without a penny."

"So be it. Then the Lord will provide. In the meantime, let's pay the most urgent debts."

"I have already earmarked the little money at my disposal to pay

a debt of twenty-eight thousand lire falling due within two weeks. That's why I have been putting aside all the money coming in these last few days."

"No, no, it is sheer folly to neglect debts which we can pay today so as to meet those which fall due two weeks from now."

"But today's debts can wait. The other debt is a heavy one."

"In due time the Lord will provide. Let's start by settling today's debts. Earmarking money for future needs closes the door to Divine Providence."

"But prudence says we are to think of the future. Haven't we been in enough serious trouble before? To pay one debt we were forced into another. This is the shortest way to bankruptcy."

"Listen to me. If you want Divine Providence to take us fully under its wing, go to your room, gather all the money you have, and pay off all the debts you can. Leave future needs in God's hands."

Then, turning to the others, he went on, "I simply can't find an administrator who will fully back me up in this, who will have unlimited faith in Divine Providence and not store up funds for a rainy day. I fear that we are in this critical financial situation because we rely too heavily on ourselves. When we do, God holds back."

Still, despite his firm reliance on Divine Providence, he did not neglect to do all he could to find material aid. One of his first actions on returning to the Oratory was to eke out some more funds from the still unexhausted lottery; he reprinted the circular of January 1, sending it out with a liberal supply of tickets. He even mailed packs of them to his cooperators for distribution to others. Then, to avoid any possible waste of money, he directed that the Oratory find some way to set up an office exclusively to make decisions regarding expenses. At first, everything depended on him; later, when he could no longer handle so many disparate matters personally, he entrusted to individual members of the superior chapter the more urgent problems as they surfaced. But this system proved harmful financially. "Things went along haphazardly," he commented, "but where important matters are at stake, this procedure is bad." At this point, Father [Joseph] Leveratto, the Oratory prefect, offered a plan which would organize the various offices and their respective responsibilities in a scheme that would link everything under the one person who had to get things moving.

Don Bosco then directed that a committee be set up to study this plan. It included Father Rua, Father Lazzero, Father Sala and Father Leveratto.

In another effort to improve the financial situation, Don Bosco decided to resume visiting charitable, wealthy families who were always willing to help him. In most cases, he would skillfully inject into the conversation the topic of charitable undertakings which would draw God's blessings on those helping the needy. He would draw God's blessings on those helping the needy. He would cite examples showing that almsgiving was a sure means of obtaining favors from God. He would also point out that the Oratory was one of the needy institutions and that it stood under the special protection of Mary, Help of Christians, who in so many ways had shown how much She appreciated the assistance given to the boys. Father Barberis, who often accompanied him in his visits, remarked that Don Bosco always spoke calmly, mentioning benefactors and impressively describing in various ways the importance of material charity motivated by a spiritual purpose. People enjoyed listening to him on this subject.

Having but recently returned from Rome, he was frequently questioned about the situation there. In those years of transition from the old to the new political order, people devoted to the Pope took a passionate interest in any news from Rome, and there were many such people among the Piedmontese aristocracy. They paid scant attention to the newspapers, relying rather on the confidential reports made from mouth to mouth because they held such news to be closer to the truth. Since Don Bosco was thought to be a party to secret matters, he was avidly questioned, at times somewhat to his embarrassment. This happened, for example, at the home of the De Maistre family in Borgo Cornalense where he had gone with Father Barberis to visit the duchess of Montmorency and Count Eugene de Maistre who was there spending Easter with his children. In a conversation both the duchess and the count heatedly attacked Italy's terms to the Pope and the Church, but Don Bosco, letting them talk animatedly, only made a few serene remarks here and there. So calm, in fact, was he that he somewhat irritated the noble lady, who was prompted to ask how he could remain indifferent to so vital a question.

“Of what use is it to bewail these evils?” he replied. “It is better to do all we can to offset them. Then, too, people presently in power merit our compassion because their reckoning with God will be a heavy one.”

The reports made by his two envoys—Father Cagliero and Father Durando who had returned to the Oratory a few days ahead of him—were very encouraging. Both men were happy to have completed their long journey in so short a time, seeing so many places and dealing with so many matters. We shall speak of this later. Noteworthy are two long letters of Father Cagliero from Sicily. They had been astonished to find how well the bishops and clergy of Acireale, Catania and Randazzo knew Don Bosco and his Congregation, and how much trust they had in the Salesians’ work on behalf of young people. One remark which very deeply impressed both priests and led them to interpret Don Bosco’s instructions to them somewhat broadly was: “The Salesian Congregation was the first to be called upon to rebuild the horrible destruction wrought by the recent suppression and banishment of religious orders.”¹²

One of the first things on which Don Bosco focused his attention on returning home was Marseille. Father Angelo Savio had been at St. Leo’s Oratory since April 5, having been sent there to supervise the new construction to make the newly purchased house comfortable. Since the money raised in Marseille was insufficient, he asked Turin for financial help. It so happened that a former schoolmate and intimate friend of Don Bosco while he was at Chieri—Hannibal Strambio of Pinerolo—was stationed in Marseille as Italian consul. Don Bosco mentioned him in the first of his writings in our possession.¹³ Could not this intimate friend help Don Bosco obtain a substantial subsidy from Rome? Don Bosco wrote to him on April 15, 1879, earnestly begging him to take the matter to heart, pointing out lengthily the benefits which would accrue to Italian immigrants¹⁴ from Salesian action in the city.

¹²Letter to Don Bosco from Acireale, March 9, 1879. [Author]

¹³See Vol. I, pp. 262-267, 337f. [Editor]

¹⁴This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Just then Don Bosco received a piece of heartening news: Bishop Cajetan Alimonda, who had been so benevolent toward him at Alassio, was elevated to the cardinalate. A great prelate, he had always shown Don Bosco open proof of his affection. However, the strongest proof was yet to come when Don Bosco's life would approach its end.

CHAPTER 6

The Soul of the Oratory

IF charity was Don Bosco's realm, then the Oratory of Valdocco was his palace. Here he set up the home he loved, personally guiding it through so many years. From it radiated the beneficial works he kept ever expanding in a worldwide apostolate. But such growth unavoidably compelled him to relinquish little by little the day-by-day management of house affairs and to entrust it to reliable confreres. We have now reached that point in our narrative when the Oratory attained self-government under Don Bosco's watchful eye.

The committee we spoke of in the preceding chapter carried out its mandate. Its major deliberations were approved and implemented as follows: the prefect was to be the sole top administrator of all the Oratory's finances, with responsibility for direct supervision and control of the printshop, the bookstore and the workshops. The economist general was freed from that area of concern, except insofar as the Oratory was a house like the others of the Congregation. The Oratory's director had the authority of the directors of the other houses though he was always careful to keep Don Bosco informed of serious matters, as he wished that no major decision be taken without his knowledge. The members of the superior chapter were not to butt into the director's responsibilities, since all important matters, particularly the admission of pupils, were exclusively his responsibility. The assistant prefect for externs, whose office was by the doorkeeper's post, was to serve as his secretary and assistant, acting in concert with him, his main duties being to receive visitors, give information about the Oratory and process new pupils by checking out their papers and records. However, he could take no decision without first conferring with

the director. If a boy did not meet entrance requirements but was recommended by a bishop or an influential civil official, such as the prefect of Turin who had just then recommended a boy barely eight years old, he was to refer the matter immediately to the director, who could authorize an exception to avoid offending people in authority. If a boy was too young for the Oratory, he was to be sent to Lanzo or elsewhere, even though tuition-free. The assistant prefect then had but a subordinate role in registration and was always to follow the regulations; free or reduced tuition, overdue notices, and admission or dismissal of pupils were reserved to the director. The same rule applied to provincial houses: provincials kept the overall supervision of their houses and were the liaison with the superior chapter, but they were not to interfere in routine local administrative matters. The new setup at the Oratory was underscored also by the fact that the superior chapter moved to separate quarters. Their offices, until then shared by the local superiors, were moved to a complete section of the second floor in the main building adjoining the Church of St. Francis [de Sales]. Each chapter member was given two rooms. Likewise, the chapter's dining room was set up on the same floor; formerly they had eaten their meals with other confreres on the main floor.

A ministry at the Oratory which Don Bosco never relinquished was that of hearing confessions. Nearly all went to confession to him. During the students' spiritual retreat in late April, though there were plenty of priests, he heard many confessions. One evening he was so totally drained of strength that he could not eat. His right arm was so numb after many hours of resting his elbow on the kneeler and of giving absolution that he could not hold his spoon between the fingers of his right hand, and after four tries he had to use his left hand. Don Bosco regularly heard a large number of penitents in a relatively short time because his advice was brief and forthright.¹ In valuing the effect of his terse comments we must appreciate the unction with which he spoke—a factor which all who experienced it praised to the skies.

The prevailing belief that he could read consciences served greatly to draw boys to his confessional. Though this happened

¹Some wrote down the advice they had been given, and we still have a few such documents. See the notes taken by a young cleric, whose name naturally is not revealed, in Appendix 2. [Author]

rarely, the mere realization that it was possible was enough to swell the number of his young penitents. From time to time, however, his reading of consciences did take place and was not always kept a total secret. One day in 1879 he stood among some twenty lads crowding about him in the playground, one after another kissing his hand. Unexpectedly one lad felt Don Bosco pull him aside to show him a long, red scratch mark on his arm. "Do you see what you have done to me?" Don Bosco asked. The boy looked at the scratch and instinctively at his nails, which he had trimmed that very morning. Don Bosco kept his gaze riveted upon him, and a silent understanding came between them. The youngster was stung to the quick. Normally a well-behaved lad, he had been listening to a rather indecent conversation and had later yielded to temptation. The next morning he made his confession to Don Bosco, convinced that he knew all about it, as indeed he did. Stunned and deeply contrite, he avoided all evil occasions from then on and conceived an even deeper horror of sin. Eventually he became a priest and declared that he was ready to swear to the truth of this incident: that Don Bosco had clearly read his conscience.

Don Bosco's eyes still gave him much trouble. While some feared cataracts and others wondered whether total blindness could be averted, Dr. Raynaud, a highly esteemed eye specialist, stated categorically that there was no hope. During this period Don Bosco was trying a cure of his own which he had mentioned to Father Berto while journeying from Florence to Bologna. On March 31, just as they were about to arrive at Pistoia, Don Bosco confided that several nights before a mysterious lady had appeared to him in a dream, holding a small bottle of a dark green liquid in her hand. "If you wish your eyes to be healed," she told him, "use a few drops of this chicory extract every morning for fifty days." On their arrival in Turin, both Don Bosco and Father Berto forgot about the dream. However, one evening at the beginning of May, Don Bosco, while in the dining room with Father Rua and Father Berto, suddenly asked Father Lago, who had been a pharmacist,² "Tell me, Father Lago, is an extract of chicory good for the eyes?"

"It is a recommended medication," he answered.

"Fine. Prepare me some."

²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Father Lago promptly obliged. From the first application Don Bosco felt an improvement. On May 22 he stated that his eyes were markedly better. After the prescribed fifty days, his improved eyesight remained stable, regardless of his increasing desk work from morning to night. Some two years later, however, he lost the sight of his left eye.³

Think as we may of this particular dream, Don Bosco had another dream which he narrated on May 9. In it he saw the fierce battles which faced the men called to his Congregation, and he was given several valuable instructions for all his sons and sound advice for the future.

[I saw] a hard-fought, long-drawn-out battle between youngsters and a varied array of warriors who were armed with strange weapons. Survivors were few.

A second fiercer and more terrifying battle was being waged by gigantic monsters fully armed, well-trained tall men who unfurled a huge banner, the center of which bore an inscription in gold, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum*. The combat was long and bloody, but the soldiers fighting under the banner were protected against hurt and conquered a vast plain. The boys who had survived the previous battle linked forces with them, each combatant holding a crucifix in his right hand and a miniature of the banner in his left. After engaging together in several sallies over that vast plain, they split, some heading eastward, a few to the north, and many for the south. Once they all left, the same skirmishes, maneuvers and leave-takings were repeated by others.

I recognized some boys who fought in the first skirmishes, but none of the others, who nevertheless seemed to know me and asked me many questions.

Shortly afterward I witnessed a shower of flashing, fiery tongues of many colors, followed by thunder and then clear skies. Then I found myself in a charming garden. A man who looked like Saint Francis de Sales silently handed me a booklet. I asked him who he was. "Read the book," was the reply.

I opened it, but had trouble reading, managing only to make out these precise words:

³In another version of this dream the person who appears to Don Bosco was a man rather than a lady. This was stated by Attorney John Baptist Gal of Torgnon (Aosta Valley) in a letter to the *Bolletino Salesiano*. The attorney was a close friend of Don Bosco from whom he heard the dream. His letter is listed as Document 16 in the Appendix of Volume XIV of the *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*. [Editor]

“For the Novices: Obedience in all things. Through obedience they will deserve God’s blessings and the good will of men. Through diligence they will fight and overcome the snares set by the enemies of their souls.

“For the Confreres: Jealously safeguard the virtue of chastity. Love your confreres’ good name, promote the honor of the Congregation.

“For the Directors: Take every care, make every effort to observe and promote observance of the rules through which everyone’s life is consecrated to God.

“For the Superior: Total self-sacrifice, so as to draw himself and his charges to God.”

The book said many other things, but I couldn’t read any further, for the paper turned as blue as the ink.

“Who are you?” I again asked the man who serenely gazed at me.

“Good people everywhere know me. I have been sent to tell you of future events.”

“What are they?”

“Those you have already seen and those which you will ask about.”

“How can I foster vocations?”

“The Salesians will harvest many vocations by their good example, by being endlessly kind toward their pupils, and by urging them constantly to receive Holy Communion often.”

“What should we bear in mind when admitting novices?”

“Reject idlers and gluttons.”

“And when admitting to vows?”

“Make sure that they are well grounded in chastity.”

“How are we to maintain the right spirit in our houses?”

“Let superiors very often write, visit and welcome the confreres, dealing kindly with them.”

“What of our foreign missions?”

“Send men of sound morality and recall any who give you serious reason to doubt; look for and foster native vocations.”

“Is our Congregation on the right path?”

“Let those who do good keep doing good. [Rev. 22, 11] Not to go forward is to go backward. [St. Gregory the Great] The man who stands firm to the end will be saved.” [Mt. 10, 22]

“Will the Congregation grow?”

“It will reach out so that no one will be able to check its growth, as long as the superiors meet their obligations.”

“Will it have a long life?”

“Yes, but only as long as its members love work and temperance. Should either of these two pillars fall, your entire edifice will collapse and crush superiors, subjects and followers beneath it.”

Just then four men showed up bearing a coffin and approaching me.

"Whom is that for?" I asked.

"For you."

"How soon?"

"Do not ask. Just remember that you are mortal."

"What are you trying to tell me with this coffin?"

"That while you are still living you must see to it that your sons practice what they must continue to practice after your death. This is the heritage, the testament you must bequeath to them; but you must work on it and leave it [to your sons] as a well-studied and well-tested legacy."

"Can we expect roses or thorns?"

"Many roses and joys are in store, but very sharp thorns also threaten. They will cause all of you acute distress and sorrow. You must pray much."

"Should we open houses in Rome?"

"Yes, but not hurriedly; proceed with extreme prudence and caution."

"Is the end of my mortal life near at hand?"

"Don't be concerned. You have the rules and other books. Practice what you preach and be vigilant."

I wanted to ask more questions, but muffled thunder rumbled through the air with flashes of lightning. Several men, rather horrid monsters, dashed toward me as if to tear me to pieces. But then a deep darkness enveloped me, shutting everything out. I felt that I must be dead and started to scream frenziedly. I awoke and found I was still alive. It was a quarter to five in the morning.

If we can draw some good from this dream, let us do so. In all things let honor and glory be given to God forever and ever.

He spoke again in June on the theme of vocations in an important letter to the upperclassmen of our juniorate at Borgo San Martino.

Turin, June 17, 1879

My dear upperclassmen at Borgo San Martino:

I wish I could have promptly answered your brief letters and those of your good teacher, but since I cannot do so individually, let me write to all of you as I look forward to speaking privately with each of you on the approaching feast of Saint Aloysius.

Keep in mind that in this life we must take the road to heaven either in the clerical or in the lay state. If one's vocation is to the lay state, he should select those courses of study or those professions which will not block him from meeting his obligations as a good Christian and which are

in accord with his parents' wishes. As for the clerical state, you must go by the norms which Our Divine Savior gave us: forego earthly comfort, glory and pleasure so as to give yourself to God's service and to be better assured of unending heavenly joys. Before reaching a decision, you must each listen carefully to your confessor's advice without heeding those above you or under you, relatives or friends, and then choose whatever makes it easier for you to follow the path of salvation and feel tranquil at the point of death. A young man who chooses the priestly state with such intentions can be morally certain of doing what is right for his own soul and the souls of others.

The clerical state has many branches; to be genuine they must stem from and tend to the same source—the desire to serve God. Evangelical laborers can work for God's glory in three ways: as diocesan or religious priests or as missionaries. You are all free to choose which you prefer or that which is more in keeping with your physical and moral capabilities, after seeking the counsel of a prayerful, learned and prudent person. At this point let me clear up for you many knotty areas concerning life in the world—a world which would have all the young in its service, while God wants them totally for Himself. I will do so in person and will explain the obstacles each of you will face in choosing a state of life.

Frequent reception of Holy Communion and saying every Saturday the prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary for the choice of one's calling are the foundation of a happy future. You will find the prayer in *The Companion of Youth*.⁴

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you always, and may He grant you the precious gift of perseverance in virtue. I shall pray for you every day. Please pray for me, too.

Yours always in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

At the beginning of May Don Bosco had another occasion to verify the helpful influence of his evangelical charity over misled politicians. Senator Siotto-Pintò of Cagliari, a worthy lawmaker, was a militant ultra-liberal who even in 1871⁵ had published a book imbued with heresy and anticlericalism.⁶ In 1879, however,

⁴A 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]

⁵After the seizure of Rome by Italy. [Editor]

⁶*Fuori la Francia. Pensieri di Giovanni Siotto-Pintò [Away with France. Reflections]*, Torino, 1871. [Author]

“troubled in mind and body,”⁷ he had a change of heart and again called on Don Bosco to ask for a special papal blessing. Don Bosco wrote to Rome and obtained it. This gracious gesture of the Pope led the senator to reconsider and recant his former views on the makeup of the Church and its leaders as expressed in several books of his. He returned therefore once again to the Oratory on May 4 together with Professor [Joseph] Allievo of the Royal University of Turin to thank Don Bosco cordially. After a detailed tour of the entire Oratory, he left with a deep sense of satisfaction, and from then on, until his death on January 24, 1882, he gave repeated proof of his sincere affection for Don Bosco, as we shall later see.

The novena of Mary, Help of Christians in May 1879 was marked by four singular events: a pilgrimage, two conferences and, between the latter, an abjuration.

Two hundred French pilgrims concluded their Roman journey at the Oratory. The scene of 1877⁸ repeated itself. Arriving on the evening of May 15, the first day of the novena, they immediately joined the boys and faithful for the Marian services, listening to the fervent words of Monsignor Stanislaus Schiapparelli, canon of Corpus Domini Church, who addressed them in French. Afterward they streamed into the Oratory playground where they were rousingly welcomed by the brass band and Don Bosco. They were served refreshments by the members of the Turin chapter of Catholic Youth, headed by Count [Prospero] Balbo. The reception was held in the arcade which was festively decked for the occasion, with the participation of cheering boarders and day boys. Several speakers addressed the pilgrims; Count Cays spoke on behalf of Don Bosco. The last talk was given by Father [Francis] Picard, second superior general of the Assumptionists, who thanked everyone eloquently and affectionately; he spoke highly of the Pope and then, recalling previous speakers’ words of praise, turned to Don Bosco with the exclamation “Here is the king of pilgrims!” He then went on:

Don Bosco can be rightfully called a pilgrim. He frequently visits the Salesian houses in Italy and France and he multiplies his presence by sending his sons where he cannot go. These substitute pilgrims of his we

⁷Letter to Father Margotti in *Unità Cattolica*, June 6, 1879. [Author]

⁸See Vol. XIII, pp. 101f. [Editor]

see all over the world; crossing oceans, they penetrate even into the hostile domains of the Pampas and Patagonia. I conclude by expressing two wishes on behalf of my fellow pilgrims. It is my ardent hope that pilgrimages will continue, increase and spread. France too has its many holy places, precious relics and renowned shrines, and so I invite the Turin chapter of Catholic Youth to promote pilgrimages to our country. We shall look forward, my brothers, to seeing you in Paris, which, notwithstanding its reputation as today's Babylon, still boasts, as of old, zealous followers of the true God, courageous worshipers of Jesus Christ, and deeply devoted sons of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Yes, we shall expect you, so that we may repay the charity and courtesy of your welcome to us in the devout city of Turin. Secondly, we wish that God may soon send a band of Salesians, led by Don Bosco, to our own city of Paris, to open a boys' home such as this. We on our part shall pave the way for them by word and prayer.

They left the Oratory late that night, escorted to their hotels in different groups by members of the Catholic Youth chapter.⁹ A news release of May 16 [1879] from Turin to the *Univers* of Paris described the welcome given to the French pilgrims "at the Oratory" as "an admirable reception."

Three letters, of which two were written in 1880 and the third in 1883, testify to the deep impression which the visit to the Oratory made on these good Catholics. A gentleman from Bordeaux and a priest from Lille, thanking Don Bosco for enrolling them as Salesian cooperators, recalled with emotion their meeting with him on May 15, 1879. The gentleman wrote: "I have not forgotten the brotherly, affectionate welcome you gave us at your blessed house in Turin and have the fondest memories of the delightful evening we spent among your boys and their well-loved superiors. I find no words to thank God for the grace I received to savor a few precious moments in the presence of His great servant, who has done such wonders for His glory." "As a pilgrim from Rome," the priest wrote, "I saw the magnificent works God has accomplished through you. I feel highly honored to be enrolled as a Salesian cooperator." In the third letter, Viscountess de Lagrégeolière, née de Beauregard, after reiterating her request that he pray for a hospice she had very much at heart and which had run into

⁹*Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1879. [Author]

obstacles and difficulties, informed him that since her visit things had taken a decisive turn for the better.

The warm concluding wish of Father Picard vibrantly echoed the hope that the Salesians would soon go to Paris. Other matters concerning France, which we have already seen, surface in this letter of Don Bosco to [Canon Clement Guiol] the pastor of St. Joseph's [in Marseille].

Turin, May 20, 1879

Dear Father:

Last winter you gave me some hope that you would visit us on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Shall we really have the pleasure? We all heartily await you. Would you know whether there is any likelihood that the bishops of Marseille and of Fréjus might drop in for a brief visit on their return from their pilgrimage to Rome?

I often receive news of our [festive] oratory,¹⁰ but I would like to learn what you have noticed: good, mediocre or bad. You know I have full trust in you and wish to follow your prudent advice. Six weeks from now it will be a year since we began our pious undertaking, and by then I'd like to know that we have taken some root.

The house at Auteuil is too much of a problem for us, and so, following your counsel, I have definitely terminated negotiations. Other proposals have come from Paris, but for the time being I am not taking any decisions. Just now, La Navarre and Saint-Cyr are in an organizational phase. As for Saint-Cyr, we have no contract and without it we cannot take possession. Still, a few of our priests will go there next week to size up the situation and take up what is more urgent.

If you have a chance to talk to the members of the Beaujour Society, please tell them that we shall be saying special prayers on Saturday at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians for God to keep them and their loved ones in good health. All the Salesians send you their regards, and I pray that God will shield you. Pray for me too.

Respectfully and affectionately yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Salesian cooperators attended the first of the two conferences mentioned a while ago; their limited number—some forty in all—was due to bad weather. Don Bosco's talk in substance followed the

¹⁰St. Leo's in Marseille. See Vol. XIII, pp. 558f. [Editor]

same pattern: new foundations of that year in Italy, France and South America; the role of the cooperators and encouragement to continue their help. He particularly singled out the Church and hospice of St. John the Evangelist, with a stress on their beneficial purpose.

The feast of the Ascension marked the adjuration of a boy, a Waldensian, Concourda by name, son of Catholic parents, who had been enrolled as a child in a Waldensian hospice near Ventimiglia. A bright lad, he did well in school while absorbing at the same time the poison of heresy and arousing great hopes in the Waldensian leaders. By nature a good thinker, as he grew up he began to harbor strong doubts, which had been provoked and strengthened by the endless invectives and abuse he constantly heard directed at the Catholic Church and the Mother of God. One day, while he was conversing with the director, the latter's wife and some of his teachers and schoolmates, the talk turned to Mary's virginity. For some time he let them have their say, but finally he interjected, "You keep maintaining that Mary was not a virgin. If so, why does the Apostles' Creed you make us recite say that Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary?" A slap in the face—which he warded off—was the answer the director's wife gave him. "That's no answer," he protested quite rightly. His doubts became so strong that he began thinking of becoming a Catholic. But how could he escape the hands of his tutors? And where could he find shelter? Both parents were dead, and his only relatives were Waldensians. Divine Providence came to his aid. A pious Catholic who had an idea of what he was going through helped him to escape and brought him to Don Bosco. He was then fifteen. He received instruction in the Catholic faith, and on May 22, 1879, before the usual novena service, he publicly renounced his former allegiance and was conditionally baptized in the crowded Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Monsignor Tammi, vicar general of Piacenza, then a guest at the Oratory, administered the sacrament in the presence of the godparents, Marquis [Ludwig] Scarampi and Marchioness [Mary] Fassati. His baptismal name was Leo, that of the reigning Pope. After the ceremony, Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio¹¹ went up to the pulpit and, taking his cue from the

¹¹See Vol. XII, pp. 230f, 240f. [Editor]

baptismal event, extolled the Catholic apostolate from the day of Our Lord's ascension to the current apostolic activities of the Salesians. He later developed this twofold theme more extensively in the August 1879 issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, which he dedicated to both godparents as a lasting remembrance of the rite in which they had taken part.

The Waldensians did not take their humiliating defeat quietly. The Protestant minister and the director of the Waldensian hospice where the youth had boarded free of charge for five years published a scurrilous booklet in which they declared that the superiors of the Turin Oratory had exploited the boy's poverty to pervert his mind, as they had previously tried to do with three other boys of the same hospice. Furthermore, their periodical, *Le Temoin*, viciously attacked the young convert and heaped such abuse on him as to surpass even a maddened vixen. In an open letter which Don Bosco helped him to write, Leo set the facts straight.¹²

A new first was a conference for Salesian women cooperators on the eve of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Two hundred ladies were present. The procedure was the usual one, except that the reading from the life of St. Francis de Sales was replaced by a reading from the biography of St. Jane Frances de Chantal that described her husband's tragic death and her heroic patience as she dedicated the rest of her life entirely to God's service and to works of charity. In his address, Don Bosco told them that in planning the Association of Salesian Cooperators he had at first intended to limit its membership to men only, but that Pius IX himself, wishing to extend its spiritual favors to women, had personally added these words to his rescript: "To all the faithful of both sexes." He then went on to acquaint them minutely with what the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were accomplishing—under the guidance of the Salesians—on behalf of girls with God's grace and the help of women cooperators. After describing the frightening perils to which girls were exposed in Italy and particularly in South America, he urged his listeners to aid the Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in bringing the benefits of a Christian education to an increasing number of girls. How was this to be done? Here are a few suggestions Don Bosco offered to them.

¹²*Bollettino Salesiano*, July 1879. [Author]

First, make great efforts kindly to instill love of virtue and horror for sin into your children's hearts and those of your neighbors, relatives, friends and acquaintances. If you come to know that some young girl's morals are being threatened, promptly strive to save her and put her beyond the reach of rapacious wolves. Should you know or hear that some family has boys or girls of school or work age, be quick enough to suggest, advise and exhort their parents or family to place them in schools or shops where, as they learn knowledge and skills, they may also absorb the holy fear of God in a morally safe environment. Bring Catholic books and publications into your own homes, and when the family has read them, pass them on to as many people as you can. Give them as gifts to boys and girls who faithfully attend catechism class. Above all, whenever you come to know that a girl can be saved from moral dangers only by placing her in a boarding school, make every effort to do so.

I most earnestly commend to your care well beloved, pious boys who give signs of a priestly vocation. Yes, esteemed ladies, take these hopes of the Church to your hearts and do all you can—even the impossible, I'd say—to cherish and bring to blossom the precious seed of a vocation in their young hearts. Direct them to a school where they can continue their studies and, if they are poor, help them with whatever means Divine Providence has put into your own hands, or as your own piety and love for souls suggests to you. How fortunate you will be if you provide the Church with priests in these times when they are so scarce that some of our own villages have no Sunday Mass or worship service. You will have the thanks of God, His angels, the Church and the souls you have saved for your noble efforts, and even here on earth your action will be rewarded a hundredfold with God's blessings in anticipation of the glorious crown which He keeps in trust for you in heaven.

Some might say, "But money is needed to do all these things, and I am not in that position." My answer is that a pious woman who loves God, His Church and souls can always find a way to contribute to works of mercy. I realize that you are doing so and that you give evidence of it every day. But let me deplore—in fact let us all deplore—the utter blindness of many people in this day and age. They can always find money for a pleasure trip, for fine clothes or whatever will enable them to shine at some party or other. They have wealth enough to buy not one but two or more teams of fine horses and magnificent coaches, but when they are asked for a donation to build or restore a church or an orphanage, to feed and clothe destitute youth or to provide one more priest for the Church, they have a thousand excuses at hand and end up doing little or nothing for the Church or to relieve human suffering.

Some time ago someone threw a party here in Turin. One person told

me that it was stupendous, magnificent, princely. "How much did it cost?" I asked. "Seventy thousand lire." Seventy thousand lire for one evening! What blindness! That money could have sheltered and educated seventy boys, and possibly have even provided seventy priests who, with God's grace in due time, could have saved thousands of souls. Note, too, that just weeks before that same person had been asked to fund the board and tuition of a poor boy for three months, and he refused! God will certainly in His time ask him for an account of that party. This is an excellent example of how some people become deaf to the call of charity.

What I have said about squandering God's gifts on a large scale is true also on a smaller scale. If repeated often enough, it will have the same effect: it will keep families from supporting institutions and activities most beneficial to the Church and society.

My dear cooperators, I do not mean to raise scruples in your minds and tell you that it is wrong to live in a manner befitting your station. I only wish to urge you not to let the deadly scourge of luxury pervade your hearts and households in greater or lesser measure. Shun that scourge, and you will always have something to contribute to charitable endeavors, to dry compassionately the tears of many a poor family, and to save many lads who have found refuge in institutes supported by your charity. . . .

There are indeed numerous proofs that the women cooperators were contributing generously to Don Bosco's charitable work. As at the Oratory in its first days, every new house which Don Bosco opened found a mother in some good-hearted lady. A recent case in point was that of Madame Jacques at St. Leo's Festive Oratory in Marseille. Nor did these pious women limit their charity to a nearby Salesian house, but they reached out also to the motherhouse. We have some touching documents of such motherly love which well deserve to be handed down to posterity. We have mentioned Mrs. Susanne Saettone [née Prato]¹³ as the Salesians of Varazze called her. Born in Celle [Liguria], she had married and made her home in Albissola, where she gave incalculable aid to the local Salesian house from its very beginning. Such was her influence with Genoa's civil authorities that several times she was able to ward off hostile measures being planned against the school she loved so dearly. Following is a letter of hers to Father Rua for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians:

¹³See Vol. X, pp. 125, 128; Vol. XI, p. 114; Vol. XII, p. 293. [Editor]

May 22, 1879

Dear Father Rua, my dear adopted grandson:

Tomorrow morning I will be very happy to send you by the first train leaving for Sampierdarena a fruit basket for our dear, wonderful and thoughtful Don Bosco, your loving papa. At the bottom of the basket you will find a package containing four handkerchiefs: three are of fine cambric, ten lire each; the fourth has my name embroidered on it. I do not care to use them or just leave them in a drawer. They are brand-new, and Don Bosco can put them to good use. I hope that the peaches and oranges, sent to me yesterday from Finale, are ripe and sweet and that the apples which I purposely saved for the forthcoming feast are tasty. Please pray that the Blessed Virgin Mary will obtain for me the grace of a good, holy death.

Father Angelo Riello, a Vincentian in the boarding school for the nobility at Savona, has written to me that he did not receive the May issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*. I have already sent him my own copy. Please do not forget him; he is one of those who contributed the most for the first expeditions of your missionaries. He collected substantial sums of money which I handed over to Don Bosco.

My fondest regards to you, to him, to Father Cagliero, Father Durando, Father Lazzero and Father Pechenino.

Your devoted and grateful self-named grandmother,
Susanna Saettone, née Prato

That year's feast of Mary, Help of Christians was marred by a downpour from morning to night. Still, the church was packed throughout the day. Bishop Garga, auxiliary of Novara, officiated with permission from Archbishop Gastaldi. The previous day Bishop Berengo, who had been transferred twelve days earlier from Adria to Mantua, had also pontificated with his permission. Two casual remarks made by Don Bosco in a letter to Father Bologna reveal his happiness for the successful outcome of the festivities.

[No date]

My dear Father Bologna:

Enclosed are a few letters for you to address and forward to their destination.

If you succeed in persuading [Canon Guiol] the pastor at St. Joseph's to come with you for the feast of St. John the Baptist, you will make it a first-rate celebration. Tell him that his last letter was excellent and I shall reply

to all points. Madame Jacques should take heart in her concern for her health; the sisters are preparing themselves and will be ready at a simple request. What a spectacle was the feast of Mary, Help of Christians: over six thousand Communions on the day itself! Take care.

Fr. John Bosco

Though Father Guiol did not go to Turin for the feast of St. John the Baptist, Don Bosco's name day offered his sons another treasured opportunity to express their love for their father in personal notes, group gifts and public demonstrations of affection and respect. A song written by Father Lemoyne and set to music by our young composer Joseph Dogliani¹⁴ symbolically portrayed the four recently established Salesian provinces and Don Bosco's four major achievements: the Salesian Society, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, the Sons of Mary Program and the Association of Salesian Cooperators.

In addressing the public, Don Bosco stirred vibrant chords of enthusiasm in the hearts of boys and of guests when he announced in a voice moved with emotion that he had that very morning received a letter from Father Costamagna bringing him from the very heart of the Pampas heartening news about the evangelization of the natives. How could anyone looking upon his serene countenance ever imagine that on the very eve of that festive day the police vice-commissioner had handed him the decree shutting down his school?

Dogliani's musical composition was a superb delight. He made use of the rich variety of lyrics which called for a fantasy scenario and of the excellent voices at his disposal. The general public thoroughly enjoyed the performance. Then, when supper time came around, Dogliani resumed his routine task of waiting on the superiors' table. At this time they still ate in the community dining room. When everyone had finished and had left, he cleared the tables and then went up to Don Bosco to kiss his hand before leaving, but Don Bosco, firmly gripping his right hand, told him to stay. He was about to have coffee, a sign that he had a bad headache. The tray held two cups. "Here, Dogliani, have some

¹⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

coffee too!” Don Bosco said. Father Cagliero was there, and Dogliani looked at him as if to say that such an honor was for him, and not for himself. But Don Bosco poured the coffee and handed Dogliani the cup. He drank it, thanked him heartily and left. To this day [1933] he is still moved by the remembrance of Don Bosco’s gracious gesture.

Baron [Amato] Héraud of Nice had sent Don Bosco a box of candy to grace the table on his name day along with a generous donation. Affectionately Don Bosco sent him a thank-you note.

Turin, July 19, 1879

Dearest Baron:

Your brother, or, should I say, your good friend, Baron Felix Arnaud, is leaving for Nice, and I take this opportunity to send you some news. The matter you know about¹⁵ is constantly considered as settled, but I am still waiting for what makes it final. We shall see.

Your candy was delicious! Personally, I discovered that the donor’s sweetness and goodness were blended into the gift which made an excellent majestic appearance at table.

As I wrote before, your one thousand francs were duly received and immediately spent on behalf of Father Joseph Fagnano,¹⁶ who will be leaving Buenos Aires at the beginning of August to open our first parish in Paraguay as ordered by the Holy Father.

I’ll tell you more some other time. I have some problems and badly need your prayers.

God bless you and the baroness and keep you both in good health.

Yours gratefully and affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

It had been hoped at the Oratory that Attorney [Charles] Comaschi of Milan, whose veneration for Don Bosco is well known to our readers, would be present on Don Bosco’s name day. Since he did not show up, Don Bosco hastened to write to him.

¹⁵The baron had a case pending in Rome. Writing to Father Ronchail, director at Nice, Don Bosco had asked him to convey this message to the baron: “Tell him that Cardinal Bilio, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, has informed me that he has already given his case serious consideration and has entrusted it to one of his secretaries for further study and a report.” [Author]

¹⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Turin, June 29, 1879

Dearest Chevalier:

Your letter gave me hope that I would welcome you in our midst any time during these last few days, but as yet we haven't seen you. Are you ill, perhaps, or is there any problem at home? I sincerely hope not and pray God it be not so. At any rate, you know perfectly well that we are all yours and that our home is yours too. God bless you and your family.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Some of the Oratory's festive preparations for Don Bosco's name day were also used to honor Bishop Gerlando Genuardi, first bishop of Acireale. He had hosted Father Cagliero and Father Durando on their tour of Sicily with "rare finesse and kindness," summoning all his clergy to the episcopal residence and solemnly introducing them to the diocesan senate; he had wholehearted praise for Don Bosco and his Salesians, of whom he claimed to be "a confrere."¹⁷ Don Bosco was very anxious to have him pontificate in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, but Archbishop Gastaldi set down such restrictions that they were very much a refusal of permission, with the result that, far from pontificating, he could not even assist pontifically at the solemn High Mass.

As we have seen, there was an endless line of illustrious guests at the Oratory, and it is always gratifying to know their impressions. One such testimony came to Don Bosco at the end of May, and we shall add it to those we have already presented elsewhere. Father Leonard Guerra of the Friars Minor wrote: "I always fondly and gratefully recall the happy days which, thanks to your goodness, I spent at the Oratory, a haven of genuine virtue, of most kindly and courteous hospitality. I really needed a rest when I returned from my mission in Algeria, and, thanks to your charity, I also had the opportunity of being edified and enjoying some spiritual insights."

Don Bosco's name day was also the stage for the alumni's annual testimonial dinner which was generally held within the last few weeks of the school year. That year it took place on August 17.

¹⁷Letters from Father Cagliero to Don Bosco from Acireale, March 3 and 9, 1879.
[Author]

More than sixty alumni, all united as brothers regardless of rank, social position or merit, sat in the dining room honoring Don Bosco. Their toasts recalled the early days, extolled the progress, forecast the future, or just reminisced about incidents in Don Bosco's life. In words pouring straight from his heart, Don Bosco thanked God for having granted him the joy of seeing himself surrounded by a crown of his earlier pupils, and he exhorted them to persevere in virtue, wishfully inviting them to return for these heartwarming gatherings for at least another hundred years.

It is indeed true that Don Bosco's former pupils loved to return to the Oratory, for which they cherished fond memories. "Truthfully, I was really fortunate to spend part of my youth under Don Bosco's guidance at the Oratory," a former pupil¹⁸ who could not be present wrote to a classmate of his. "There is something special about the Oratory, a totally unique system of educating young people not to be found anywhere but in Don Bosco's schools."

The day after Don Bosco's name day marked the end of a contest which had been going on for two years with Don Bosco's active participation. It had been sponsored by *Unità Cattolica* in 1877 at the closing of another contest for a book on St. Joseph. On that occasion, the newspaper had expressed the hope that someone might soon sponsor a contest for a book on St. Peter. At this time Monsignor Peter Ceccarelli, pastor at San Nicolás de los Arroyos in Argentina, was in Turin with his archbishop. He read the article and, recalling that he had celebrated his own first Mass on the centenary of the prince of apostles, whose name he bore, went along with the idea. He offered a prize of one thousand lire to the author of the best book on St. Peter in a simple, popular style. This did not mean, however, that the author could not include in the text or in an appendix two studies dealing with St. Peter's coming to Rome and papal infallibility. Monsignor Ceccarelli entrusted the matter to Father [James] Margotti, editor of *Unità Cattolica*, on the condition, however, that Don Bosco head a committee of competent Salesians appointed by him to evaluate the entries according to the rules followed in similar contests: an identifying motto on the manuscript and the author's name in a sealed

¹⁸Letter from Father Frederick Mulattieri, Clavesana, March 24, 1879. [Author]

envelope, not to be opened until after the winner had been chosen.

Shortly afterward, an anonymous devout Catholic of Mantua made a similar proposal to his bishop regarding a book about St. Paul, and put up equal prize money for the best work submitted. The bishop, knowing of the previous offer, asked Father Margotti to combine both contests and also submit the second entries to the committee to be formed in Turin. Father Margotti gladly acceded to his wish and announced the contest in his newspaper.

The manuscripts soon began to arrive. The deadline had been set for June 29, 1878. Don Bosco appointed the committee on August 1 and its members¹⁹ began to evaluate the manuscripts. Their verdict was to be announced on January 18, 1879, but the number of manuscripts and their size forced the committee to move the date to June 29 [1879].

Only four manuscripts were submitted in the contest on St. Paul, and the prize was awarded to Father James Murena, a Vincentian born at Piacenza and resident in Ferrara.

The other contest, for which ten manuscripts had been submitted, required a longer time, and judging was slow in the final weeks. After a thorough check of all the entries, the committee decided to exclude those manuscripts which did not fully meet the required conditions, thus bringing the contestants down to three. Questions and problems arose as to the lesser or greater merits of each and opinion was divided. Noting that the majority leaned toward one entry, Don Bosco ordered that the final verdict be shelved and that all three manuscripts be sent to Bishop [Peter] Rota, former bishop of Mantua, who was now titular archbishop of Carthage. A high-ranking prelate esteemed for his learning and virtue, he was the one to make the final decision. The committee

¹⁹Official list of the nine committee members: Rev. John Bosco, chairman; Count Charles Cays, doctor of both civil and canon law, secretary; Rev. John Bonetti, professor of literature and theology; Rev. John Cagliero, doctor of theology; Rev. Francis Cerruti, doctor of literature, professor of history and theology, director of the lyceum at Alasio; Rev. Francis Dalmazzo, doctor of literature and director of the secondary school and college at Valsalice; Rev. Celestine Durando, professor of literature; Rev. John Baptist Francesia, doctor of literature, professor of theology, and director of the municipal secondary school at Varazze; Rev. Michael Rua, professor of literature, biblical hermeneutics and theology, and prefect of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Substitutes: Rev. Julius Barberis, doctor of theology; Rev. Joseph Bertello, doctor of theology, literature and philosophy; Rev. Dominic Belmonte, professor of philosophy, director of St. Charles Junior Seminary at Borgo San Martino. [Author]

members unanimously agreed, setting aside their preferences in their desire to be scrupulously honest in their judgment, as Don Bosco wanted them to be. Bishop Rota agreed to act as arbiter, and on May 13, 1879, he wrote to the committee secretary as follows:

I have read the three biographies of St. Peter. Not relying fully on my own judgment, I asked other competent people to evaluate them. The work which should be declared winner seems to be the biography made up of five chapters, whose identifying motto is *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam* [You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church—Mt. 16, 18], and this quotation from Origen: *Nec adversus Petram, super quam Christus Ecclesiam aedificavit, nec adversus Ecclesiam portae inferi praevalerunt* [The gates of hell shall not prevail against this rock upon which Christ established the Church, nor against the Church itself—Origen on St. Matthew's Gospel].

The bishop's readers thus summed up their verdict: "In our modest opinion it would seem that the author of the *Life of St. Peter* in five chapters has met the objectives of the contest. The book's clarity, simplicity and persuasive tone should both please and help the readers for whom it was written." Then, after noting a few flaws in language and style, they went on: "In conclusion, we unhesitatingly assert that St. Peter's accomplishments are presented here in a manner which will be of great help to the majority of ordinary readers."

The evaluating committee went along with this verdict and so the prize money offered by Monsignor Ceccarelli was unquestionably awarded to the author of the manuscript which bore the two mottos mentioned above.

The committee met on June 25 to open the envelopes bearing the inscriptions identifying the authors of the lives of St. Peter and of St. Paul which had been declared winners. Father Margotti was also present and was asked to open the envelopes. The name in the one bearing the two texts from St. Matthew and Origen was: Father John Bosco. Don Bosco immediately explained that he had had no intention to strive for the prize, but, since the contest aimed at glorifying the prince of the apostles, he had not been able to resist his desire to share in singing his praises. By privately adding his own manuscript to those entrusted to the committee, he had only wanted to reassure himself that his own work might be as beneficial

to the general public as had been the intention of the contest's sponsor. He declined the prize in favor of whatever charity Monsignor Peter Ceccarelli, the sponsor, might choose.²⁰

The contest rules did not specify unpublished works, and so Don Bosco had simply touched up his own *Life of St. Peter*, published for the centenary of the apostle, with proper deletions and modifications.²¹ The book was not published until 1884.²²

We have often mentioned in these pages a small lottery initiated toward the end of 1878. Don Bosco's attempts to get as much money from it as possible advised that he defer the drawing as long as there was hope of selling more tickets. He sent out a further circular on May 24.²³ The persistence with which he pursued his undertakings once he had decided to initiate them was truly admirable.²⁴

Between mid-September and mid-October he visited the Salesian houses in Liguria, probably on the occasion of the spiritual retreat at Sampierdarena, but, except for an allusion to this journey in a moving sympathy note to Count Eugene de Maistre who had just lost his wife, we would know nothing at all of this journey.

Turin, October 15, 1879

Dear Count Eugene:

I do not know how to begin this letter. Upon my return home from a visit to our houses in Liguria, I received the very sad news of your wife's death. I can well understand the grief and sorrow that has fallen upon you and

²⁰*Unità Cattolica*, August 17, September 2, October 6, 1877; January 16, June 27 and 29, 1879. [Author]

²¹Our own Father [Albert] Caviglia made a thorough comparative study of this manuscript and of the original manuscript in his work entitled *Don Bosco, Opere e scritti editi ed inediti*, Volume II, Part 1: *Le Vite dei Papi*, Series 1: *Da San Pietro a San Zeffirino*, pp. 11f. Remarkably he noticed that in his re-edited work Don Bosco deleted all the quotations which he had previously included from a manuscript by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. [Author]

²²*Vita di San Pietro, Principe degli Apostoli raccontata al popolo*, Father John Bosco, Second Edition, Sampierdarena, 1884. The front cover bears the imprint of *Letture Cattoliche* without the issue number. [Author]

²³Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

²⁴We are omitting three pages detailing the progress, extension and results of this lottery. Suffice it to say that the royal family of Italy accepted five hundred tickets and that numerous bishops and cardinals gave their support. Don Bosco sent also a circular to French benefactors, and part of the lottery proceeds were given to the Salesian houses in Nice, Marseille, La Navarre and Saint-Cyr. [Editor]

your entire family. I only regret not being able to do anything but pray. This we have already done, and are still doing both for you and for your loved ones. When she was seriously ill, the duchess informed us and asked us to pray. We did pray in all our houses, but God did not see fit to grant our prayer, or perhaps He judged that that rose had attained such beauty in His eyes that it was ready to be culled from this earthly garden and transplanted in the heavenly garden of eternal delight. We bow to His divine will and say "Thy will be done!"

But, my dear Count Eugene, you have several consolations in your affliction. You have lost a devoted wife on earth but have acquired a patroness in heaven, and you may rejoice at the thought of joining her one day, perhaps soon, in a life far better than this on earth. Furthermore, all through our lives we can help her, if needed, by prayer and good works. Better still, we may enhance her glory in heaven in the event that she is there already.

God bless you, ever beloved Count Eugene, and with you your whole family. May He inspire you and guide all of you safely along the road to heaven. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

We were forced to omit from this chapter the account of Don Bosco's struggle in 1879 in defense of the Oratory. Since the narrative is rather lengthy and cannot be interrupted, we have left it out. However, we already saw its first indications in the controversy over the teachers' certification. The most stormy phase of it was still to come. Don Bosco said that the Oratory had been born and had grown under siege; it also survived it.

CHAPTER 7

Shutdown of the Oratory School

THE temporizing techniques to which Don Bosco resorted¹ in his controversy with Turin's school board over the Oratory's teachers did nothing to stall the course of events, much less to halt it. Lest some reader misinterpret the stand he took and maintained unyieldingly throughout the confrontation, we must clearly explain Italy's school laws of those years as regards private secondary schools which were not certified as on a par with public schools. Education throughout Italy, both public and private, was then governed by the law of November 13, 1859, the so-called Casati Law, named after its author, Gabrio Casati. It was a liberal law that, along with public education, allowed several other forms of private education, of which only two need concern us. Article 246 stated: "Any citizen over twenty-five who meets established moral standards has the right to open a secondary school, either boarding or day." Three specific conditions were laid down, the main one being that all classroom subjects be taught by state certified teachers. These were the so-called "private schools" which, according to law, the minister of education was to supervise but not run—this supervision meaning the safeguarding of good morals, health, discipline and the very existence of the schools.

A second type of private secondary education was covered by Articles 250 and 251 [of the Casati Law]—i.e., schooling imparted "in the privacy of the family by the father or legal guardian to his children or to the children of relatives"; it also applied to schooling "imparted to children under the supervision and responsibility of

¹See pp. 66ff. [Editor]

several parents who join together for that purpose.” This was the so-called “parental school” which by law was “exempted from all state inspection.” It also applied to hospices set up by generous philanthropists to house poor and abandoned youth, for whom they could, therefore, be [logically] considered as “parental schools.” The truth was, however, that directives from the Department of Public Education, interpretations given by school superintendents, and regulations issued by school boards kept whittling down the legal principle of private secondary education to mere pretense. Undoubtedly no executive can rightfully set himself up as law; likewise, no citizen who tries to counteract arbitrary interference and enforcement may be charged with civil disobedience.

Knowing the statutory law, let us now see how it was applied in Turin by the responsible officials, primarily by the prefect of the province who distinguished himself as the most zealous campaigner against the Oratory. The prefect was Minghelli Vaini, whose career was described by the then celebrated city counselor, Dupraz, in a long confidential letter to Don Bosco. Here is a brief summary. In 1848 Vaini was a very militant revolutionary in Modena, a member of the provisional government of that duchy, and, after its annexation [to Italy], a minister. In 1849 he was appointed chief warden of the new prison at Oneglia, in which position he showed that he had no talents of organization or governance. After an investigation and hearing he was transferred to Turin as warden of the women’s prison and of the syphilitics’ hospice. Later on, he became a member of parliament, superintendent of prisons, prefect of Cagliari, and, finally, prefect of Turin. Another member of the ex-duchy of Modena, Nicomedes Bianchi of Reggio Emilia, assessor of public education in Turin, was really the driving power in this controversy, injecting into it that sectarian mentality which he abundantly evidenced in his historical studies. Superintendent [Joachim] Rho was backed up by his priest-brother, a simple elementary school teacher who illegally acted as school inspector. Both brothers had been schoolmates of Don Bosco at Chieri, and both harbored a long resentment against him from the time that a nephew of theirs had been expelled from the Salesian boarding school at Mirabello. The priest, a hot-tempered individual, had actually threatened to avenge what he termed an affront, and in

1879 he went about blustering against the Oratory and predicting as certain the shutdown of its secondary school—manifestly, of course, an occurrence that he would not regret. Returning from Rome, Don Bosco paid a visit to the superintendent and, alluding to his inspections, remarked: “I hope that you at least will treat me fairly.” The other’s reply was that he totally abided by the law. Don Bosco continued to insist, citing their years of friendship and alleging his reasons, only to be told repeatedly, “Keep within the law!” Inadvertently, the superintendent had let out a reason for his adamant stand while talking with someone in the Oratory playground: he feared being transferred as superintendent to Palermo or even losing his job.

Let us now line up the facts. During the novena of Mary, Help of Christians, the secretary of the provincial school board sent Don Bosco a copy of the education minister’s injunction of May 16 mandating the shutdown of all secondary classes at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales; the order was signed by the prefect as chairman of Turin’s school board. This drastic measure was based on two reasons: non-compliance with existing laws regarding teacher certification and Don Bosco’s alleged repeated duplicity in sending to the local board a list of certified teachers while employing non-certified ones. The minister’s injunction, however, was not yet a formal order, but rather a notification to take the necessary steps to comply with the law. The prefect took this step because most of the board members favored Don Bosco and agreed that the order was not to be formally issued until the day before the pupils began their vacation. Don Bosco had to act swiftly to avert the disaster. He called on the prefect to thank him for his thoughtfulness and to state his case through the following memorandum.

Turin, May 18, 1879

Dear Sir:

Allow me to bring a few things to your attention concerning the poor youngsters who are being sheltered at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

I offer some clarifications concerning the decree issued by the minister of public education to shut down the secondary school of this institute, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

BACKGROUND HISTORY

In 1841, keenly anxious to do something for so many unfortunate lads whom neglect drives to a miserable future, I endeavored to draw as many as I could to suitable recreation centers. In 1846 I opened a hospice for the most destitute and threatened youngsters, and government officials made it a point to send unfortunate boys there. My aim was to teach them some skill or trade which would one day enable them to earn an honest living. Among the young lads I took in there were some who had a natural talent for studies as well as others of middle-class or aristocratic families who had fallen upon hard times, and they were given a chance to get a secondary school education. The results were good: a sizable number achieved honorable careers in business, in the military or in the teaching profession; a few even managed to obtain professorships in state universities. Several, anxious to enter the printing trade, were taught at our own graphic arts shop. At all times the city school authorities considered this school as a work of charity, a hospice, a parental school, conforming to articles 251-252 of the Casati Law. Furthermore, the school superintendents as well as the ministers of public education and the reigning sovereign himself, Humbert I, have always been our most distinguished benefactors through counsel and financial support. This past year, 1877-78, was the first time that the provincial superintendent of schools demanded certified teachers for all classes, and he even threatened to shut down our secondary school for these underprivileged boys. This would be disastrous for so many poor lads who would be deprived of a chance to earn an honest living; perhaps some might even have to return to their former tragic destitution.

On the other hand, anxious as I am to comply to the best of my ability with government regulations, I assigned duly certified teachers to classes. However, some of them holding administrative offices in the school availed themselves of qualified teachers' aides for the supervision and instruction of their classes at such times when they could not do so themselves. Such was the state of affairs when, during my absence from Turin, the provincial superintendent (see his letter of January 2) appeared unannounced for a second school inspection. He found nothing amiss in terms of cleanliness, sanitary conditions, discipline and good conduct; his only complaint was that three of the certified teachers were taken up with administrative duties and their classes were being taught by substitutes. For this reason, and this reason alone—as you may see in the above-cited letter—he threatened to close the whole hospice if the teachers we had listed [as certified] were not always in their classrooms. Let me point out that the school year in our hospice runs from October 15 to the following September 15 and that we manage to adjust the school timetable

to meet the teachers' needs. So, while at certain hours on certain days all teachers may not actually be present in their classrooms, they do not in any way neglect their teaching. If their multiple responsibilities keep them from following the regular class schedule, they more than make up for that time whenever they are free of their administrative duties. Let it be further observed that no law obliges private institutions to follow the schedule of public schools. I know of no law which forbids a teacher's aide from taking over a certified teacher's class when the latter cannot be there, particularly when instructors are used who hold equivalent diplomas. There are many such instances: here in Turin, one instructor has been teaching in a top-rate lyceum even though he holds no certification of any kind, unless the superintendent's approval is rated as a certification. Be this as it may, it is my desire not only to submit but also to be deferential to school authorities. Hence I request, as a personal favor, a reasonable time extension to allow me to make arrangements to follow not only the law's requirements but also the wishes of the superintendent. In the meanwhile, I beg you, dear sir, as father of the children of our poor citizens, to use your kindly offices with the provincial school board of Turin and, if needed, with the minister of public education, to grant this extension not so much to me as to these young people whom I care for.

It is my hope that I will be granted the favor I ask. However, should it not be forthcoming, rather than endanger the future of my poor boys and throw them out into the street, I will at the cost of grave sacrifices modify the school's administrative policies so as to guarantee each certified teacher's presence in his classroom at the required time.

I am,

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco, Petitioner

Aiming at the withdrawal of the decree, Don Bosco sent copies of this memorandum to influential people in both Turin and Rome, among them Commendatore Barberis, Premier Depretis, General de la Roche, minister of defense, who was a friend of Father [Francis] Dalmazzo,² and several other important officials. On June 8 he told the members of the superior chapter: "Minister Coppino will at least realize that we have champions in high places, and that, despite his evil intent, the Lord will make sure that we will overcome even with only human means. It is not worth my while to write to him because whenever I have done so or spoken to him in

²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

the past he always promised me the moon while in reality he did his best to entangle me in all sorts of ways.”

Convinced that the crisis was not imminent, he dropped in to see Nicomedes Bianchi,³ who wielded weighty influence over Turin’s provincial and local school board. They knew each other well. In the above-mentioned chapter meeting, Don Bosco updated the members on the situation and reported the highlights of this interview, as we find in the minutes of the meeting. On seeing Don Bosco, Bianchi, without giving him a chance to say a word, immediately exclaimed, “Don Bosco, you are here because of that decree.”

“Precisely.”

“Have no fear. The council has decided not to serve the decree until the eve of your pupils’ departure for vacation.”

“That is all well and good, and I heartily thank all who extended me this kindness. But you understand, sir, that such a decree is a slap in the face and a sign of mistrust in me. I don’t think I deserve that.”

“What can we do? It has been issued.”

“What would you advise? I would like to have it rescinded by presenting pertinent documents.”

“I have studied the situation, and I believe that you have enough arguments to get it legally rescinded, but I advise against it for two reasons. First, should they be forced to withdraw it, they will with set malice make things much worse for you. Second, though you may have strong arguments, they would counterpose arguments of their own, and willy-nilly the order would stand. You must realize that this matter involves the Turin school board, city hall and the Department of Public Education.”

“So I must submit to this act of mistrust?”

“Look, finish up this year and next year get yourself certified teachers for your classes.”

“I do have certified teachers and they do teach. . . . Are we being forced to follow government school hours? We certainly are not bound to do so.”

“The report made to the provincial school board states that the Oratory does not have certified teachers.”

³See Vol. VII, p. 311. [Editor]

“But we do.”

“Then send immediately a list of their names to the prefect, showing him that you really have these teachers and citing their degrees. One more thing: neither as a city councilman nor as a school board member, but as a friend, I can tell you that indeed you are not obliged to keep government school hours. [Do this:] To forestall future difficulties with importunate visits, let them know that for the greater convenience of your teachers and pupils you are not following the government’s school schedule. Tell them that you run early morning and late evening classes or that your own method calls for morning and evening classes at certain hours. Thus, if the school superintendent drops in on you unannounced in the morning, you can claim that the students are having a study period because classes are held in the evening, and should he come in the evening, you can say that they have already had their classes in the morning.”

“Thank you for your kind suggestion. However, I assure you that I have never tried, and never will, to dodge the law or infringe it. I am firmly determined to abide by it. All I can say is that, in the overall picture, it is not always feasible to follow a rigid timetable, and at times a substitute teacher has to be used.”

Don Bosco was anxious to know more about his standing with the school board and the city authorities, and he kept asking questions to find out what else had put him in a bad light. He was assured there was nothing else. The assessor even made it clear that the school board’s lengthy discussion had words of highest praise for Don Bosco’s institute, for his charitable enterprises, and for the poor boys whom he was taking in. However, he stated, it was charged that Don Bosco wanted to dodge the law and deceive the authorities by putting uncertified teachers in his classes (the Oratory still had elementary classes for day students) under the pretense that they had certification.

“This is the only black mark against you,” Nicomedes Bianchi said, continuing: “The superintendent personally went to inspect your school and did not find certified teachers in the classes. A second time he came and found the same situation. Furthermore, one of your teachers or someone else told somebody after this second visit, ‘We really fooled him this time!’ This was because one

or two of your certified teachers managed to dash into their classrooms just before the superintendent entered. He found out about this and told the school board, which became distrustful and led them to propose that the Department of Public Education issue a decree for the closing of the school."

Don Bosco remonstrated how ungrounded and unfair the board's order was, having been issued because some unknown person had made a disparaging remark about the superintendent to some other unknown person. However, he did appreciate this lengthy interview. Later he declared, "Outwardly Nicomedes Bianchi acted kindly with me and disclosed things that it was important I should know. Without doubt he is the board member who most poses a threat for us, and probably he is the one who gave us the coup de grace. However, the Lord sometimes speaks to us even through Balaam's donkey."

The Oratory's top superiors were told all about the school problem, but no one else in the house knew. Don Bosco kept hoping for a two-year extension, which was allowed by law; in two years he could get much done. Hence he earnestly appealed his case to Father [Peter] Baricco, a city councillor and close friend of his, whose only answer was, "I have every intention of supporting the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales which you founded and have been maintaining to the great advantage of the public, but I see that it is problematic, not to say impossible, that the school authorities will ever grant you a two-year extension to comply with regulations. For years now the Department of Public Education has been insisting with provincial school boards to bring all private schools into line with the law, and so at this late stage such an exception is unthinkable. Should an exception be made for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, which is well known for its large enrollment, smaller schools would all be clamoring for the same. As things are going today, I think it is wise to urge you to do all you can to put full-time, qualified teachers in your classrooms. You will thus guarantee your school's smooth running without fear that anyone will disrupt it. The Providence in whom you place your trust will provide the means you need to do this."

In view of the situation, Don Bosco clarified his position with the following letter to the prefect:

Turin, June 20, 1879

Dear Sir:

Although I have already given you orally the names of the teachers in our secondary school, I think it proper to give an official record to the school authorities over whom you so worthily preside.

The teachers who are currently teaching the classes for these few remaining weeks of the school year are as follows:

5th year: Father Celestine Durando

4th year: Father Michael Rua

3rd year: Father John Bonetti

2nd year: Father Mark Pechenino

1st year: Father Joseph Bertello

Their certifications are on file in the offices of the provincial superintendent; if necessary, I will send a copy also to you.

Some changes will be made next year, 1879-80, and I shall duly inform you in good time. I assure you that they will all have proper certification.

I am honored to remain,

Yours sincerely,
Fr. John Bosco

But there was not the ghost of a chance for a two-year stay. Once [Michael Coppino] the minister of education heard that plans were afoot to propose delaying the school's closing to the end of the school year, not only did he reject the proposal, but he peremptorily ordered the provincial superintendent to shut down the school no later than June 30. The superintendent unofficially forewarned Don Bosco in a friendly manner, adding:

Our personal friendship over the years compels me to suggest that you resignedly accept the order in unfeigned and sincere compliance. After that, you can send the minister an appeal in which you declare that, as a good citizen, you have carried out the government's directives and are requesting permission to reopen your secondary school for 1879-80, promising to staff it with certified teachers who will personally and regularly conduct their classes. Such a request, backed up by some influential person, will, I think, be favorably received. On the contrary, your former, twice refused appeal to the prefect to be allowed to use uncertified teachers for at least two or three years will, in my opinion, fall on deaf ears.

The lightning was followed by a clap of thunder! At ten o'clock in the morning, on the day before the feast of Saint John the Baptist,

Don Bosco's name day, a police officer called at the Oratory and delivered the order into Don Bosco's hands, requesting and receiving a receipt. Then, the following morning, Don Bosco found in the mail a letter, dated the prior day, asking him to admit a boy named Michael Gabbero to the Oratory on the request of Mr. Angelo Boggiani, a member of the Council of State, a sector of which had voted in favor of the closing of the secondary school.

How was anyone to think that Don Bosco could "resignedly accept the order" which would force him to shut down his school so suddenly? The Oratory was no tiny school furtively hidden in some lost corner of the land. Its head superior was a respected household name throughout Italy and half the world. Nor could so many boys be cast out into the streets so abruptly. He thought it best to change his mind and write immediately to Minister Coppino. He drafted a letter but hesitated to mail it, doing so only three days later after some rewriting. It read:

Turin, June 26, 1879

Your Excellency:

I have been served with a copy of the decree of the Department of Public Education ordering the shutdown of the secondary school in this Salesian Oratory. Please allow me to bring to your attention that the deliberation of closure reached by the provincial school board, on which your decree is based, has no legal basis (please see the enclosed document) for two reasons: first, the various courses offered in this school are assigned to certified teachers as Article 246 of the [Casati] law, cited against me by the decree without reason, prescribes; second, none of the serious reasons specified by Article 247 concerning the closure of any school exist. That certified teachers of secondary school classes have substitutes to replace them when they cannot be present in the classroom is no reason to authorize an enforced closure of a secondary school, primarily because this practice contravenes no article of the law; secondly, it takes place in all schools, public and private.

I therefore request that out of justice you rescind the order to close this school. I await your courteous response so that, should you reject my request (which I believe improbable), I may use legal means to protect my poor pupils.

I am honored to remain,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

If nothing else, Don Bosco saw this letter as gaining him some time, since every moment counted. He then wrote to the prefect of the province, as follows:

Turin, June 26, 1879

Dear Sir:

I have received your courteous letter with the enclosed decree of the Department of Public Education ordering the shutdown of our secondary school. Since it is quite impossible for me to comply with the order in the brief span of only four weekdays, and because the reasons for such a measure have no foundation in law, I have decided to carry my appeal to higher authority.

I am informing you of this so that you may suspend action on the above order until you receive further clarification, which is sure to come.

I am honored to remain,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Since he had to leave Turin, Don Bosco asked Father Rua and Father Durando to call on the prefect and hear from him directly what he intended to do with the order to shut down the school. Things went from bad to worse. In their interview they were informed that the boys had to leave the Oratory. He would not retreat from his adamant stand, and so they pleaded with him at least to give them time both to end the examinations—which was impossible by the terms of the order—and to make some provision for those boys who were orphans. The prefect seemed inclined to agree, and so they felt that the school could go on without any fear of disruption for a few days beyond June 30.⁴

But their wishful thinking was soon shattered. On the very day of their interview the prefect replied to Don Bosco's letter stating that in no way would he suspend the implementation of the order and that should Don Bosco fail to do so by June 30, he would resort to legal force to safeguard the respect due to the government department which had issued the order. "You were given not four days, as you erroneously stated, but eight to obey the order," he wrote, "since you were served the decree on June 23." Don Bosco justifiably excluded the two festive days of Saint John's Nativity on

⁴Letter from Father Rua to Don Bosco, June 28, 1879. [Author]

June 24 and Sunday, June 29; nor did he count the day of issuance and the day of closing. Unshaken, he calmly and frankly wrote back:

Turin, June 30, 1879

Dear Sir:

Having appealed to higher authority for grave and justified reasons, I believed that action on the order to shut down our schools for poor boys would be deferred until the competent authority could rule on it. Your note of yesterday makes it clear that you are demanding immediate compliance as of today, June 30.

Your order leaves no alternative but full and unquestioning compliance. I therefore inform you that as of today all secondary school classes in this hospice have ceased. I shall endeavor to place the students in some trade or craft suited to their age and condition. Those who have parents will most likely be returned to their families.

Lastly, some fifth year students will have to stay here until they can take their state examinations.

I am honored to remain,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The prefect got in touch with the city magistrate to ask for his cooperation in forcing the Oratory's evacuation, but the magistrate had no stomach for such ruthless measures against so many impoverished youngsters. He was mindful of the many orphaned and destitute lads who were showing up at the prefecture seeking food and shelter. Finally, on July 2 a few days' stay was granted to hold examinations. What had happened to temper the animosity? The government was tottering and its fall seemed imminent. At such times, smart public officials often recall Talleyrand's dictum: *Surtout, pas de zèle* [Above all, no zeal]. But Don Bosco's zeal gave him no rest. Again he drafted a defense of his position for the minister of public education, more clearly proving that his schools fell in the category of "parental schools," as described in the Casati Law. In an eloquent outburst of holy indignation, he also let his heart refute the allegation that he had willfully deceived the school authorities.⁵

⁵We are omitting this memorandum which substantially repeats and somewhat amplifies the "Background History." See pp. 111f. [Editor]

By the time this document got to Rome, the government had fallen. *Unità Cattolica*⁶ neatly characterized the notorious order to shut down Don Bosco's schools as "the government's last glorious accomplishment."⁷

On July 5, his usual serenity unruffled by these worries, Don Bosco opened a bird museum at the Valsalice College and invited Senator Siotto-Pintòr to preside. It was a small collection, well ordered and in excellent condition, the patient labor of Canon John Baptist Giordano, a priest widely admired throughout Turin as a speaker and as a man of virtue. A dedicated, knowledgeable naturalist, he devoted his spare time in his retreat at Rivalta to searching out rare birds which he then stuffed and classified. A room in his villa served as a museum, which displayed national and foreign birds in glass showcases. When he passed away in 1871, his heirs offered the collection to Don Bosco, who purchased it for his Valsalice College. This dedication ceremony promoting culture was his reply to the insult of having the Oratory schools shut down.

Siotto-Pintòr took a very keen interest in the Oratory's crisis, and his speech was filled with allusions and fairly caustic quips comprehensible only to those who knew the facts. Some are still alive [1933] who recall the sharp contrast between Don Bosco's serenity and the Sardinian senator's vehemence in attacking the troublemakers in his private conversation with Don Bosco. Nor did he limit himself to noisy but ineffective talk. He made his voice heard in Rome in defense of the "incomparable" Don Bosco. Though he was to set out for Cagliari, he did not leave Turin until he had fired a letter to the resigning minister of public education, who merely replied that if the Salesian hospice really found itself in the legal entanglement he claimed, its director should submit a legal protest to the provincial school board to have the closure order rescinded, since that was within its competence.⁸

However, there was little to be had from the local authorities, and so the day after the museum's inauguration, Don Bosco sent a letter to King Humbert I, imploring His Majesty to come to the rescue of the Oratory boys.

⁶*Unità Cattolica*, Tuesday, July 8, 1879. [Author]

⁷This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

⁸Letter of Minister Coppino to Senator Siotto-Pintòr, Rome, July 10, 1879. [Author]

Turin, July 6, 1879

Your Royal Majesty:

Most fervently and humbly I commend to your sovereign clemency a work of charity which your parents and you have often generously subsidized. I mean the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, whose only purpose is to shelter the poorest and most needy sons of the people. Last June 23 the Department of Public Education ordered the shutdown of its schools, which have existed thirty-five years, thus forcing me to drive some three hundred boys back into hopeless destitution. With but a year or two of further schooling, they might be returned to society as self-sustaining, law-abiding citizens.

I am sick at heart. Your Majesty is my last recourse to aid and rescue this poor band of unfortunate lads.

I plead with you to read the enclosed short, factual account of the situation as it stands. I have neither blame nor disapproval for the school authorities. I only ask that, if Your Majesty were to decide that the order of closure should stand, you would at least grant a period of grace within which I can make some provision for the future of my unfortunate boys, who reach out their shaking hands to Your Majesty's heart for thoughtful consideration.

They all pray to God with one voice that He will graciously grant protection to your Royal Majesty.

Your most humble subject,
Fr. John Bosco

Since time was pressing, on July 8 he telegraphed Count Visone, minister of the royal palace: "Forced to turn three hundred poor boys into the street. Urgent. Immediate action needed." That very day the count wired Chevalier Crodara Visconti, head of the royal household in Turin, from Rome: "Please advise Father John Bosco, director of St. Francis de Sales Oratory, that His Majesty has ordered his appeal to be taken up by the Department of Public Education." Don Bosco's immediate reply telegram to Count Visone read: "Boys and superiors gratefully offer heartfelt thanks in undying gratitude for the king's kindness."

Because of this series of events the dismissal of the secondary school students seemed to be indefinitely postponed. With all classes suspended, they took long walks by class groups into different parts of the countryside and there sat around their teachers for open air lessons. Apparently they had no idea that their school

was threatened with a shutdown. Don Bosco, convinced at the time that the respite was genuine, notified [Cardinal Lawrence Nina] his cardinal patron, who congratulated him on July 11, writing: "My deep regret at the news that your hospice was to be closed has yielded to genuine pleasure on receiving your note of July 8. Hoping that the delay order will soon bring about a definite end of aggravation against you, I rejoice with you and your homeless students for this happy step."

But the painful succession of troubles was not to end so soon. Don Bosco brought Chevalier Crodara's telegram to the prefect, who gave it no heed and refused to delay the execution of his order until action had been taken on the royal appeal. His only concession was a ten-day deferment for those boys who had no home to go to. Don Bosco was not to be put off; he was set on getting a deferment at any cost, and so he wrote⁹ to the minister of the royal household to hasten the king's help.

Following the example of *Unità Cattolica*, another Turinese school periodical, *Il Baretti*, edited by Professor Perosino, commented on this lamentable incident as follows:¹⁰ "In his downfall Minister Coppino chose to leave Turin a souvenir of himself by shutting down Don Bosco's schools at Valdocco. Further comments in our next issue."

Unità Cattolica returned to the charge in an article which substantially rephrased in journalistic style Don Bosco's report to Minister Coppino, concluding: "There is still someone in Turin, a man of eminent rank, who has a human and loving heart, and that man is King Humbert I." Then followed Don Bosco's appeal to the king and his reply.¹¹ A third newspaper, *Lo Spettatore*, Milan's Catholic journal of politics and business, likewise entered the fray with two sharply critical articles, of which we quote the second as remarking ironically:¹²

In a desire to safeguard these poor youngsters' education and to eliminate imaginary deficiencies, they will all be turned out into the street, where many of them, deprived of any semblance of education, will

⁹We are omitting this letter informing the minister of the prefect's refusal to wait until the appeal had been acted upon. [Editor]

¹⁰*Il Baretti*, July 10, 1879. [Author]

¹¹*Unità Cattolica*, July 12, 1879. [Author]

¹²*Lo Spettatore*, July 12-13 and 14-15, 1879. [Author]

necessarily have to turn to the trade of vice and licentiousness. And this is supposed to be in keeping with the aims of the law! Even supposing that this strange concept of education—which apparently can be meaningful only when sanctioned by the minister’s certification—cannot be given to these youngsters, why should they be evicted? Does inadequate teaching preclude the charitable mission of rescuing homeless youngsters from the streets and providing for their daily care?

Now, Father [Angelo] Rho, as self-appointed defense lawyer for his brother, the provincial school superintendent, wrote Don Bosco a very long letter, whose beginning and end are worth quoting. The opening was not too bad:

I must say that I have always held you in high esteem, as does everyone who has come to know your excellent character and your wonderful work for the poor in particular, but I must tell you quite honestly that I find you very wrong in the matter of your school’s closing. I believe—pardon me if I talk as a sincere friend, wearing my heart on my sleeve and hiding nothing—that your love for your institute may have slightly blinded you about its drawbacks, much as a parent’s somewhat excessive love can make him overlook his children’s shortcomings.

The charges which followed were totally based on Don Bosco’s inability or refusal to see the difference between a private secondary school and a parental school. All the grave evils he complained about stemmed from the lack of certified teachers. The heart of his long-winded diatribe is in the lengthy postscript, amply watered with crocodile tears.

I assure you—he went on—that my brother was very much grieved at having to enforce the law, as was his duty, and he still grieves at your refusal to grasp this and comply once and for all with the law. However, law and duty come first. Things had gone too far; though others may have closed an eye to it in the past, he could not in good conscience do so. Can you blame him for that? Doubtless, you are honest enough not to blame an old friend for what he did; upon serious consideration, you will have to admit that my brother simply did his duty, neither more nor less, and that you should comply with the law, so as not to have any problems in the future and avoid compromising others. It is certainly true that your institute, as you say, is well trained in morality, but is that enough? The answer is an emphatic, everlasting no! Teaching must be well ordered and

in keeping with the law, which no one must ever dodge, supersede or resist. Then all will be well. Don't you agree? My dear friend, I speak in all honesty: certain people advise you, but their motives are not always just or honest.

This last insinuation was aimed at Father [James] Margotti, editor of *Unità Cattolica*, and at Joseph Allievo, professor of pedagogy at the University of Turin. Apart from all this, one can sadly see how even a good priest can become legalistic when he allows himself to be tainted with bureaucracy.

Rather Rho restated his opinions [on July 17, 1879] in an acrimonious letter to Father Margotti, who disdainfully ignored it and forwarded it to "his deeply revered Don Bosco," remarking that he might help the cause and certainly do him a favor if he would "privately" answer the superintendent's brother. Don Bosco took his advice.

Turin, July 20, 1879

Father Rho:

Father Margotti has sent me your letter to him, asking me to reply to the section which concerns me.

I do so gladly because our disagreement calls for some clarification, without which everything is distorted.

Had you come to the Oratory I would have shown you that the charge of our teachers' not being certified is false.

Your brother, the superintendent, has on his desk the complete list—names, surnames, and certificates—of our teachers: Michael Rua, Celestine Durando, Joseph Bertello, John Bonetti, and Mark Pechenino, all of whom are duly certified. The order to close the school, therefore, citing uncertified teachers as the reason, is founded on an error of fact.

You claim that I am using older pupils to teach in the classrooms. By older students [I suppose] you mean the above-mentioned teachers who are in fact former pupils of mine.

So too are Professor Rinaudo at the University of Turin and Professor Marco at the University of Rome, and others elsewhere. Why couldn't I avail myself of their services in our school? Furthermore, since private schools are free to set up their own daily schedule, no one can object if classes are held when it's more convenient for the teachers. The law also plainly states that no hospice may be shut down unless public order, morality, or the health of the pupils is gravely affected. No one can say

this of our schools for poor boys. Indeed, the superintendent himself, reporting to the provincial school board after his visit, affirmed that he found nothing to be desired in cleanliness, discipline, moral behavior, and scholastic proficiency.

Furthermore, the law states that even in the face of some abuse, the hospice may not be shut down before the director's observations are presented to the provincial school board. This was not done. The superintendent dropped in during my absence, dashed through the classrooms, and found nothing lacking in sanitation, moral behavior, cleanliness and scholastic progress.

On my return to Turin, I found a letter from the superintendent insisting that the certified teachers had to be in their classrooms throughout the school hours set for public schools. The law does not call for this. However, to please the authorities, I asked for an extension of time lest the school administration be set topsy-turvy, and I concluded, "Should this favor be refused, please inform me, so that I may change the school's administration schedule and make sure that the certified teachers are in their classrooms during the hours the education department may require." I received no reply until last June 23, when I was told that the secondary school was being closed down. You keep appealing to the law as above everyone and everything. I would rather say that justice must govern the law.

Which article of the law have I violated? I keep asking and waiting for an answer, but all in vain. And again, how can the superintendent or anyone else order the eviction of poor boys from a hospice, as he is doing in this case?

You also add that for the past three years the superintendent has been insisting that I comply with the law. My reply is that all superintendents, all ministers of public education, have always commended, approved, assisted and subsidized this hospice over the past thirty years. It had to be a friend, a schoolmate of mine, to propose that it be shut down in spite of the fact that I was going out of my way to comply fully with the law. See, I too write with my heart on my sleeve, and you will be doing me a real favor by reading the Casati Law and citing the articles I have violated. I have written all this to protect the poor lads who are sheltered in this hospice. Apart from that, I assure you that I wish to be on good terms with you and your brother and would consider it a pleasure if I could ever be of service to you.

With due esteem,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Rho took offense. He was waiting for an answer to his eight-page letter to Don Bosco, opening with "My dear, good friend Don Bosco," but there was no answer. Then the letter he had sent to Father Margotti had been passed on to Don Bosco for a reply, and, in courtesy to Father Margotti, Don Bosco had obliged with a cold salutation: "Father Rho." Peppery by nature, Father Rho felt that he had to fight back. Following is Don Bosco's calm, dignified reply to his second letter:

Turin, July 24, 1879

My ever dearest friend:

When an honest man is disbelieved, he must withdraw in strict silence. You have not understood me and have not replied to a single one of the points raised in my letter. Then, too, the contempt with which you speak of the priests in this house makes it impossible for me to respond in decent terms. So it is quite useless for me to discuss the matter, as I ardently wished. Apart from this, we shall always be good friends, and I shall continue to rely on your kind offices and those of your family, particularly the superintendent. I shall always gladly be of any service to you and to your dear ones. In Jesus Christ, always and unalterably,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Rho wrote again on July 24, 1879, fretting and fuming, and urging Don Bosco to search for grounds of reconciliation, but Don Bosco kept his peace. It appears from the above that it was the superintendent himself who had engineered these maneuvers, but he miscalculated the results and so now sought to save face. After all, Father Rho had no ill feelings for Don Bosco; probably he may have been pressured from without and by the fear of losing his job.¹³

An obvious comment arises from the perusal of the priest's two letters. In each he praises Don Bosco's sterling character. "No one doubts your honesty," he writes in the second letter. "I would be the first to rise in your defense (as I assure you I have done and more than once), for, indeed, everyone acknowledges the immense good you have done and are doing. Let me say that you even try too hard. That is when (forgive me, my friend) trouble may arise. Am I

¹³See pp. 109f. [Editor]

wronging you by saying that you do too much good? I think not.” How could he hold Don Bosco in such high esteem and yet believe that he was knowingly stubborn in pursuing a line of conduct contrary to duty and justice? Wasn’t there something seriously questionable in this priest’s reasoning, and would not the zeal of the others deserve a worthier cause?

When the new government was formed under Premier [Benedict] Cairoli, the Department of Public Education was entrusted to Francis Perez, a Sicilian. Immediately *Unità Cattolica* published an article [on July 16, 1879] headed “A Plea for Justice,” authored by “a renowned person, neither a cleric nor clerically minded.” It proved that the closing of the secondary Oratory school was illegal. Its author was none other than Joseph Allievo, professor of pedagogy at the Royal University of Turin. The editor prefaced the article as follows:

We are sending a copy of this article to the new minister of public education. It would be an excellent start for him to redress a gross injustice and prevent a grave violation of moral rightness and law. Just a few days ago we were honored to greet here in Turin an illustrious bishop¹⁴ from Sicily, who came to our city expressly to request Don Bosco to open schools on his island. Soon afterward it was our lot to witness, in our own Turin, the harassing of the Salesian Oratory and its schools. How fitting it would be for a Sicilian minister to repair the harm done by a former Piedmontese minister upon the education of the good youth of Turin.

Professor Allievo not only highlighted the illegality of the shutdown order, but also excoriated the arbitrariness of its execution by the prefect of the province.

The minister of education—he declared—had decreed the closing of the private secondary school. Since a school is a place where pupils are taught, the closure order is implemented as soon as instruction ceases—as it actually did at the Oratory school on June 30. But he arbitrarily decided to strike out against the charitable hospice as well by ordering the eviction of all the boys, children of the people, who were peacefully attending to their studies in that institute. Tell us: by virtue of what law and by whose authority is he entitled to wrest so many poor boys from the protection of a hospice and throw them destitute into the streets?

¹⁴Bishop Gerlando Genuardi of Acireale. See p. 102. [Editor]

The author closed with a fierce defense of Don Bosco's honor.

In this dismal instance of illegality and raw power even the manner in which it was presented is outrageous.

Don Bosco wanted (so alleged the superintendent and the prefect in the ministerial decree) *to deceive the Turin school authorities repeatedly*. And so this good priest who in the name of Christian charity cares for so many poor children is said not merely to deceive, but to intend to deceive the authorities. His enemies were not satisfied with attacking everything he holds dearest, his boys' school; they had to assume the role of inquisitors and probe his motives, charging him with bad faith, with devious and deceitful conduct.

The newspapers now pitched into the fray. Bypassing the scurrilous remarks of the anticlerical press, we go directly to the promised article of *Il Baretto* which appeared in the July 17 issue and surprisingly put the school board on the defensive.

We demand to know who counseled, ordered, and executed the aforesaid school closing just because one day someone was found teaching who was not duly certified. We ask the school board if Turin's currently employed public school teachers have all received their degrees and certification. And let it be known that such uncertified teachers—the same as those in Don Bosco's school—are being paid a salary, rightfully so, while the Oratory teachers are donating their services in a commendable spirit of charity, just as do all who belong to that charitable institution. We might add that from the so-called illegal schools of Don Bosco have emerged learned teachers and authors of highly valued books, as well as distinguished college and university professors. To this day, these same schools turn out students all of whom nearly always pass the state examinations and stand out as the top students in the universities. But let us pass that by. Let's just say that when it comes to Minister Coppino's involving himself in legal matters as judge, we rightfully question his competence because of his far too many past and present performances.

Since it is difficult to resolve conflicts swiftly and properly at a distance or by mail, and since the change of government suggested an on-the-spot investigation, Don Bosco was wisely advised to send Father Durando and Professor Allievo to Rome to seek the government's deferment of the shutdown order and especially of the eviction of the pupils. He gave them a letter of introduction to Attorney Aluffi, secretary to the Department of the Interior.

Turin, July 20, 1879

Dear Sir:

Commendatore Allievo, professor of the Royal University of Turin, and Reverend Professor Durando are in Rome for matters concerning our schools. It is most urgent that they meet with Commendatore Villa, minister of the interior, who has always been a friend of ours.

Please help them find the quickest way of setting up this meeting.

Should you have acquaintances in the Department of Public Education, please introduce them to those parties.

I trust that you are in good health and pray that God will keep you so. Thank you.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The Honorable [Thomas] Villa, former deputy of Castelnuovo d'Asti, was then minister of the Department of the Interior, having succeeded Depretis in the new cabinet. He had personally known Don Bosco since 1859,¹⁵ and their contacts had been frequent and friendly. Don Bosco's envoys were to hand him this letter:

Turin, July 20, 1879

Your Excellency:

Forever grateful to you for the kind support you have so often given the poor boys of this home, I feel encouraged to seek your help at this time.

On June 23 of this year, I received an order from the minister of public education, dated May 16, shutting down our schools on the sole basis of lack of certified teachers. The charge is unfounded, since the school superintendent himself stated that a list of our certified teachers had been handed to him on November 13, 1878.

Nevertheless, we complied with the order and shut down all secondary school classes on the prescribed date, June 30. But what overwhelmed us with consternation was the order of the prefect of this city that the pupils themselves be dismissed immediately from the home and, consequently, turned out into the streets and their former sad life of destitution.

I appeal to Your Excellency as Minister of the Interior, as a well-deserving citizen of this city, and as the representative of my own native Castelnuovo d'Asti that you countermand the order and allow these unfortunate boys to continue living here, where they can learn a trade that

¹⁵See Vol. VI, p. 140. [Editor]

will someday help them earn an honest living. You would thus ease their present anxiety and their families' trepidation. We will all unite in thanking you and calling heaven's blessings upon you.

The bearers of this letter are Reverend Professor Durando, director of our schools, and Commendatore Allievo, professor at the Royal University of Turin, who freely lends his assistance to our boys. They will gladly supply any further information which Your Excellency may seek, should you make time for them in the midst of your many duties.

I am honored to remain,

Your most grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also compiled a summary report of the incident for the minister of public education.¹⁶

On the very day of the departure of Father Durando and Professor Allievo for Rome, the Catholic *Emporio Popolare* pointed out to parents that in shutting down Don Bosco's school, the radical left had committed one of the worst arbitrary actions ever inspired by left wing animosity since it had seized power in 1876. The paper made three points in view of such a monstrous abuse: the self-styled liberals were clamoring for education of the masses while callously closing down Don Bosco's parental schools which had been precisely set up for the poor; the officials had not acted for justice's sake but in blind envy and hatred for Don Bosco, whose schools were patently more successful than many public schools; Minister Coppino, a Piedmontese, disgraced himself when in his loathing for religion he did not hesitate to strike down an institute which all regarded as one of his native Piedmont's finest assets.¹⁷

The two professors had a surprise encounter in Rome as heartening as unexpected. At the Vatican, upon calling on Monsignor Ciccolini,¹⁸ private papal chamberlain and president of the Arcadia in Rome, they immediately obtained a papal audience through his good offices. Leo XIII, who was pacing in a nearby hall, agreed to receive them without further ado in order to hear

¹⁶This report substantially repeats a previous one sent to the prefect of the province of Turin, and we refer the reader to pp. 111f. [Editor]

¹⁷*Emporio Popolare, Corriere di Torino*, July 20, 1879. [Author]

¹⁸See Vol. XII, p. 109. [Editor]

first-hand the actual details of what had happened at Valdocco even though he had already been briefed by Cardinal Nina. “Waste no time,” he told Father Durando. “Call on the minister of public education and on the minister of the interior, seek the king’s support, enlist people of influence!” When the Pope was told that this was precisely Don Bosco’s strategy, he expressed his satisfaction.

Both ministers received them promptly and with heartening words,¹⁹ which the Honorable [Francis] Perez [minister of public education] later confirmed in writing on July 24 as follows: “In answer to your note of July 15,²⁰ I sincerely hope that your institution will prosper ever more for the benefit of the poor. I am sure that it will not suffer from the last setback given it by the former minister of public education because your administrative board, by staffing your secondary school with certified teachers, will not only abide by the law as the Department of Public Education desires, but will also guarantee your students’ sound instruction and intellectual proficiency.” This prompted Don Bosco to write to Attorney Aluffi:

Turin, July 26, 1879

Dear Mr. Aluffi:

My sincere thanks for helping my two envoys. This morning I received a letter from the minister of public education, assuring me that the decree of closure of our schools has been voided. However, the prefect’s order to dismiss all our boys from the Oratory still hangs over our heads. No one can see any reason for such an order. The decree we received referred mainly to the teaching and not to the eviction of the pupils. Hence, I am requesting an assurance from the minister in the enclosed note. Please see to it that he receives it safely.

I shall again thank you when all this is over.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile, Superintendent Rho, very imprudently venturing into the journalistic fray and attacking the Oratory, left himself wide open to public criticism of his action as a school official when

¹⁹Telegram from Father Durando to Don Bosco from Rome, July 22, 1879. [Author]

²⁰Probably a courtesy note to the new minister. [Author]

he requested that *Unità Cattolica* publish a letter of his on the matter. The newspaper, legally bound to honor such a request, gleefully declared that it was doing so “most willingly.” Basically his pet argument had not changed: the Oratory was a “private institution,” not a “parental school.” Since at the start of the school year 1877-78 Don Bosco had directly petitioned the minister of public education for permission to avail himself of uncertified teachers for at least the next three years, the superintendent claimed that he had caught him in flagrant contradiction; this, he said, was proof that Don Bosco himself acknowledged the “private” but not “parental” nature of his school.

He further went on to charge him with deceit because, having been cornered, Don Bosco had sent a list of teachers who taught little if at all.²¹

Father Joseph Bertello, as principal of the Oratory schools,²² counterattacked in two articles published in the same newspaper. In the first he proved that Don Bosco’s institution was “parental” and as such exempt from regulations governing “private” institutions. Though not an association of parents, as the law prescribed, it was open to fatherless boys and housed them with fatherly love and care. For well over thirty years, until 1876, the government had given him free rein to do as best he could with his means, as charity prompted him. Had he begun a private secondary school, his intent should have been stated in writing to the provincial school superintendent, under Article 247 of the Casati Law. He had never done so, nor had he even been called to order. How strange that an illegal school had been allowed to run undisturbed for thirty years! As for the claim that Don Bosco had requested temporary license to employ uncertified teachers, it was true, but only when the Department of Education had abruptly left him no alternative. It was either/or: either submit a list of certified teachers or close down the institution. Under these circumstances, as a last remedy Don Bosco had asked for a three-year period of leniency during which he could get certification for his teachers or otherwise provide for his boys’ future. In the second article Father Bertello contended that the superintendent could not prove that the certified teachers

²¹*Unità Cattolica*, July 22, 1879. [Author]

²²*Ibid.*, July 24 and 25, 1879. [Author]

were shirking their duties and passing them on to young priests and clerics, as the superintendent's report to the school board had stated. Admittedly, at this point the argumentation became casuistic, and he would have done better to simply reiterate his former position, for herein lay the Achilles' heel, but he made it easier for the superintendent to counter him in another article.²³ Father Bertello replied by literally dissecting the argument which the superintendent had cleverly passed over by stating offhand that Father Bertello's first article had contained nothing worthy of attention.²⁴

It was high time that Don Bosco spoke out. He broke his silence in a letter to *La Gazzetta del Popolo* in its issue of August 4, 1879.

Turin, August 2, 1879

To the Editor:

In several issues, particularly number 211, your paper has commented on the shutdown of the schools in the boys' home known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

For the sake of truth and the well-being of the poor boys who are sheltered here, several statements must be corrected, and so I ask you, in all courtesy, to publish the following factual account.

The Oratory has always been considered a hospice, a shelter for poor boys, never a private secondary school.

A good number of these boys are learning various trades and crafts, while others, either because they are intellectually gifted or because they come from formerly affluent families, are given a secondary school education, lest their talents go to waste and they be thwarted from achieving their goals.

The Boncompagni Law of 1848 and the Casati Law of 1859 both backed these schools, and for the past thirty-five years all the provincial superintendents and ministers of public education favored this home as a shelter for poor boys, as a parental institution in which the real father was the superior in accordance with Articles 251, 252 and 253 of the Casati Law. It must also be borne in mind that this house subsists entirely on charity, that the students are given a free education, and that the teachers are not paid for their work. In spite of all this, the superintendent chose to

²³*Ibid.*, July 31, 1879. [Author]

²⁴We are omitting excerpts from the notoriously anticlericals *Il Fischietto* and *La Gazzetta del Popolo* siding with the provincial superintendent of schools and hoping that the shutdown of the Oratory would be permanent. [Editor]

apply regulations governing private schools to this home and to force its superior to provide certified teachers at grave sacrifice on his part.

Wishing to show respect not to a law which did not apply to me, but to its representative which so demanded it, I provided five certified teachers and assigned them to the various classes as required by Article 246 [of the Casati Law].

The superintendent was not satisfied, but demanded the hours set by him. This violates the law, which permits private secondary schools to set up a schedule that is more convenient to them.

Because we did not follow public school schedules and because some of our certified teachers occasionally availed themselves of teachers' aides as substitutes, the Turin provincial school board, acting on the superintendent's report, decided to shut down our school.

The minister of public education, believing the report to be based on fact, ordered the closing on May 16, though I was not notified until June 23.

Others will judge the legality of this act. I will only say that the above is a correct report of the facts and nothing can change it or cause the facts to be interpreted in any other way.

There is one thing that those who love justice will not be able to swallow: the party most concerned was never given a hearing. Civil law and school regulations everywhere allow the accused to state his case. I was not allowed to do so, to the harm of these poor children of the people, who deserve the protection and earnest efforts of honest citizens to better their lives.

It is my unwavering hope, however, that the new minister of public education will redress the harm done to the public good in conformity to the freedom of education granted by our current laws.

I thank you in advance, sir, for the courtesy that you will extend to me in publishing this letter.

Gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

More and more convinced that Don Bosco was right, Professor Allievo no sooner arrived from Rome than he published a pamphlet entitled *The Casati Law and Private Secondary Education*. This was precisely what Don Bosco needed. His own name never appeared, but sound arguments were stated in his favor. He immediately put it to good use by sending a copy to Minister Perez with a covering letter of his own.²⁵

²⁵Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

The newspaper debate spread. Between August 5 and August 9 four more dailies joined in, one firing a double salvo. On August 5, *Unità Cattolica* carried Don Bosco's letter to *La Gazzetta del Popolo* with this comment: "Don Bosco is a living example of that charity which gives life; his enemies stick by the word that kills. The cry once raised against Jesus Christ is now directed against Don Bosco: 'We have a law, and according to that law he must die.' The law is now being just as brutally applied against Don Bosco as it was against the Divine Redeemer. Be this as it may, we now call an end to this debate. A man of charity has no wish to stir up dispute." That same day *La Gazzetta del Popolo* published two letters, both from priests, but how different! The first came from Father Rua and consisted of a brief resumé; the other came from a dyed-in-the-wool liberal, Father Mongini, whose only merit was that he was so outspoken that he kept disclosing the enemy's secret strategy. The legal aspect of the problem was merely a pretext; the crux was political in nature. Mongini wrote:

Operating schools in Italy and elsewhere, even in [South] America, Don Bosco has a political clout which he hides under the cloak of humanitarianism, so-called "doing good." His clout consists of the education he imparts, imbued as it is with the principles of the Syllabus,²⁶ and under whose guise he is training generations hostile to Italy and to worldwide civilization. Don Bosco, who seems to have the gift of being everywhere at the same time, may well be called "the traveling Syllabus." Coated with honey he doles out the Syllabus to his pupils in small spoonfuls to make it more tasty and easy to go down, much as a mother gives her children pills. He is a genius in inflaming people with love for the papacy, and in this he is far more successful than a thousand priestly teachers or a thousand Catholic journalists, even the extremists. Woe to Italy if its hundred cities harbored a Don Bosco in their midst. At the very least, the government would be embarrassed without end, and the consequences would be clearly in evidence. All this is to say that even if the law cannot correct all the blunders plaguing secondary education, it must still be severely applied to institutions of this kind, with regular inspections, and, if necessary, they must be shut down.

²⁶A series of propositions condemned by the Congregation of the Holy Office, an action ratified by Pope Pius X. It denounced the tenets of Modernism and repudiated its errors. The basis of these false doctrines was the pseudo-scientific theory of evolution in human knowledge and belief. [Editor]

A fine example of interpretation of a law according to ultra-liberal principles! On August 6 Father Rua replied to a few queries raised by the *Gazzetta Piemontese* which published the letter quite impartially. On August 7, Father Bertello refuted a few minor allegations in *Unità Cattolica* which he had sidestepped in a previous reply to the superintendent on August 3, but they contain nothing new. Finally, on August 9, *L'Osservatore Romano* in a double column entitled "An All Too Loyal Defense" juxtaposed Don Bosco's case with that of Father Ferrari. When Father [Angelo] Secchi, S.J., the world-renowned astronomer and mathematician, died in 1878 he was residing in the wing of the building housing the Vatican Observatory, his brainchild and his sole care, where the Italian government had left him undisturbed, as a final lingering tribute to human decency, after confiscating the Roman College. His brother Jesuit and assistant, Father Ferrari, however, who should have inherited the position because it was right and proper, was expelled, once the master was gone. So, too, Coppino, seeing his own arbitrary action to be in his party's best interests, hastily rushed into action. According to the Vatican paper, Minister Coppino had acted in the selfsame sectarian interest in deciding on the "arbitrary closing of such a distinguished and well deserving Catholic institution as Don Bosco's secondary school." It hit the nail on the head. In the confusion of this newspaper melee Don Bosco once more intervened in a letter to Father Margotti, a letter "truly worthy of him," stated the editor, who gladly brought it to the public's attention. "Some may still persist in doubting whether or not Don Bosco's schools can be called 'paternal,' but no one will refuse to acknowledge that his is truly a fatherly heart."

Turin, August 9, 1879

Dear Father Margotti,

Your kindness to me and my boys calls for sincere thanks from me and from the children you have benefited. Let me now request a different favor from you in this controversy of the Oratory with Turin's provincial superintendent of schools. The legal issue has been amply addressed, and now the debate has turned to personal attacks.

Since this house relies upon everything and everybody and since I wish to do my own little share in cooperating with the government for the

community's well-being, I request that you kindly put off any further consideration of this issue, so as to make room for that active charity which should unite all groups of our citizenry.

However, I think it opportune to single out the error which caused this entire regrettable controversy. It was claimed that this home had a private secondary school attached to it. Such was never the case. If any Turinese, even those living in this very house, had been asked where such a school was located, no one would have been able to give any information because no private secondary school exists in this hospice. What we have here, instead, is a free school where selected lads who are especially gifted or who come from upper but impoverished families are charitably given a secondary education.

Despite the groundless assertion for the verdict passed against us and despite the fact that there was no reason whatever that the shutdown order should include the dismissal of the boys, I obeyed not only the law, as in the past, but also its local representatives. And so, complying totally with the minister's order, I halted all secondary school teaching on the prescribed date and shortly afterward sent the pupils home to their families, friends or benefactors who would charitably give them temporary shelter.

My dear Father, it is difficult for you to understand with how heavy a heart I had to summarily break off the studies of some three hundred of my adopted children, to whom for years I had given my undivided attention, at the cost of no little material sacrifice, and—what hurts me even more—to dismiss them under the cloud of a sad future.

Still I fully trust that the school authorities, once they have recognized the nature of this institution vis-à-vis the law and civil society, will allow me to recall my boys with all haste, so that they may continue their education and be enabled to live as honest citizens and earn a decent living.

Meanwhile I gladly keep the doors of this home open to any destitute lad whom the government may choose to send me for training in a skill or trade. I close with a hearty thank you.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

On August 10 *Il Risorgimento*, another of Turin's liberal papers, taking no side, frankly wrote: "It seems to us that the strict enforcement of a law sometimes operates as a great wrong when it goes after an institution which is not only educational but charitable as well in providing for the physical and spiritual well-being of

hundreds of poor boys." Then, after the usual liberal reservations about the spirit prevalent in Don Bosco's many institutions, it went on, "Despite all this we cannot help but be dumbstruck by these wonders of faith and charity which no one else has ever surpassed, let alone achieved." With this preamble to justify the length of its article, the paper, abstracting from the legal points of the matter, went on to describe the true status of the much discussed Oratory, an understanding of which was indispensable "to pass fair judgment on the legality of the shutdown order and on its serious consequences." After recounting its founding, development, and constant contacts with the government, the article compared the school authorities' drastic measures to Herod's slaughter of the innocents and closed with the hope that the new minister of education would be of a better mind.

The press debate reached beyond the Alps. *Le Figaro*, a Paris paper certainly not above bias, gave its many readers a witty account of the shutdown of Don Bosco's school. In the August 13 issue its Turin correspondent, citing Coppino and Rho as protagonists, briefly sketched a friendly profile of their victim and then lashed out at the absurd childish order.

The day that this issue of *Le Figaro* appeared in Turin, a strange coincidence occurred, such as we usually ascribe to divine intervention in turning the tables on man's spitefulness. That day the notorious *Fischietto* tickled its readers with a cartoon portraying a scowling cassocked figure enthroned on clouds, clasping a candle-snuffer in his right hand, tucking a heavy tome and a bundle under his arm, and balancing a stick on his left shoulder with another bundle slung from its end. The caption read: "A fine way to promote industry! The wonder-man of Turin, *Dominum Lignus* [Don Bosco], turned out enemies for Italy with tools uncertified by the Department of Public Education, which promptly shut down his plant! Shall we see him fly to America astride a cloud and there expand his present operations?" Aside from any wishful thinking to see Don Bosco leave Turin,²⁷ the candle-snuffer was a blunder, for, while the readers were laughing at this light-snuffer who was being forced to export his obscurantism far away, the readers of *Il Baretto* were learning some

²⁷See Vol. XII, p. 399. [Editor]

interesting facts, such as that, of some thirty-two Oratory boys who had taken the state examinations at the Monviso public secondary school, twenty-two had passed, while only seven out of sixteen of the school's own students were promoted. Furthermore, twenty-two of Don Bosco's illegal school's students had obtained top scores. One of them had even beaten the very best of all eighty-two candidates by at least ten points, and the nine boys who had not made the grade in varied subjects would easily pass the October remedial examinations. The article commented: "This success came in spite of the school's unrest caused by the arbitrary shutdown order." Naturally, the city dailies prudently made no comment.

The summer holidays tempered the heated debate somewhat and suspended direct attacks, but they did not keep Don Bosco from his efforts to have the Oratory recognized as a parental hospice exempt from all regulations applying to private institutions. To this end, in September he wrote to the minister of public education and to the minister of the interior explaining that the Oratory was a charitable institution which also provided a free secondary education to qualified youngsters.²⁸

The new school year was about to start, and still no word had been received from Rome. Don Bosco once more appealed to Minister Perez' sense of fairness and compassion.

This time the minister replied. On October 28 he wrote: "Your kind letter of October 19 assures me that you have provided certified teachers for your secondary school. This will allow you to reopen your school; therefore, please contact the provincial school board for authorization. With great esteem, etc." The minister was playing both sides of the field. Don Bosco knew that this would get him no further than reopening his school upon presentation of his teachers' diplomas. He followed the minister's advice and sent the superintendent a list of his certified teachers, of whom two were not accepted: Bartholomew Fascie,²⁹ a university student in his second year of literature, and Besso Gallo, a second year mathematics student. This meant that he had to supply a certified teacher for the first year students in all subjects, and another one for the math courses in all grades. Only then would the superintendent ask the

²⁸This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

²⁹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

school board to authorize the reopening of the secondary school department. Don Bosco replied:

Turin, November 29, 1879

Dear Sir:

Professor Mark Pechenino will replace Bartholomew Fascie as teacher of the first year students in this hospice.

Since I cannot find a substitute for Besso Gallo, I am temporarily suspending all math courses. The law does not prescribe what subjects must be taught in private institutions.

Convinced as I am that this is a charitable institution and not a private secondary school, I am not bound by Article 246 of the Casati Law as regards the certification of teachers. I have submitted my list solely in deference to the local school authorities while awaiting a higher ruling.

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco could not let the closure order hang over the Oratory like a Damocles' sword. He had to get it revoked. Basically, his best approach was the attempt he was making to force an official recognition of the Oratory as a parental institution. At just this time leading European nations were experiencing a new struggle for educational freedom. Everywhere, it seemed, a tide of resistance was surging against an oppressive [state] monopoly of education, and public feelings ran high. In Italy the National Catholic Convention held at Modena during the last week of October faced the issue. [Albert] Buffa of Turin drafted a petition to be heavily subscribed, addressed to both houses of parliament demanding freedom of education. "As parents," the petition stated, "we have the right of conscience to educate and train the children God has given us. As Italians, we have the right to rear a generation which will be our nation's pride and glory, not its disgrace. As citizens, we rightfully demand that all school laws conform to the first article of our Constitution and to the principle of freedom of education decreed by the sub-Alpine parliament in 1857. This principle was incorporated into the law of November 13, 1859, but was ignored and rendered a dead letter by those who should have enforced it." During the discussion, when Buffa happened to mention Don Bosco and his charitable institutes, he drew a hearty round of applause.

Minister Perez was liberal in his view of educational freedom. His choice for personal secretary was Professor Allievo of Turin, a firm outspoken champion of freedom—which sufficiently reveals his own orientation as minister and which was confirmed by other facts. However, that very orientation of his was no mean factor determining his short-lived administration.³⁰ On November 19 he submitted his resignation, and shortly afterward internal strife caused the entire Cairoli cabinet to resign. Entrusted with choosing a new cabinet, Cairoli offered Perez the post of minister of agriculture, but he flatly refused: it was either the education post or nothing. His successor was Francis De Sanctis, a man of letters.

Don Bosco was determined to bring the issue to the Council of State and to have Coppino's order declared unconstitutional since the Oratory was a charitable institution. Warily he began paving the way with a memorandum to the new minister of public education to acquaint him with historical background and to supply him with a correct picture of the Valdocco Oratory. He attached five appendixes of documents dating from 1850 to 1866. In order that the state authorities might be thoroughly informed of the true situation, he had this memorandum printed as a pamphlet³¹ and sent it with or without the booklet authored by Allievo to all who wanted to know the truth of the matter. Then he sought some favorable way to approach the Council of State.

The Council of State was allowed to accept deliberations and documents only from state ministries, and so all petitions had to reach it through official channels. In our case, Don Bosco's appeal would have to be taken under advisement by the chairman of the provincial school board, who would then present it to the entire board. The latter would then issue a report to the minister of public education, who would study the matter and submit all documentation to the Council of State. But how could Don Bosco trust Turin's provincial school board? Would it not strive to twist the whole matter to suit its own purpose? If nothing else, would it not

³⁰Cf. *Unità Cattolica*, December 16, 1879, "La tirannia dell'insegnamento in Italia ed opportuni ricordi del professore Allievo" [The Tyranny of Education in Italy and Timely Reflections by Professor Allievo]. [Author]

³¹*L'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales, ospizio di beneficenza* [The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, Charitable Institution] by Father John Bosco, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1879. [Author]

endeavor to drag the issue out interminably by bureaucratic delays? There was another more reliable and speedier way: to appeal directly to the king. He could under the law, and so he did. True, the king's cabinet, after registering the appeal, would send a copy to the Department of Public Education, which in turn would contact the Turin provincial school board for an explanation. However, the appeal could not then be shelved or bureaucratically postponed. Furthermore, Don Bosco had trustworthy friends in both the Department of Public Education and the Council of State, who would follow it through, forestalling delays and winning others to his cause.

Don Bosco therefore drafted an appeal to the king amplifying the report he had sent to the minister of education and backing it with extensive documentation. "It could not have been better drawn up," wrote Mr. Benedict Viale, a Turinese friend and a veteran in the secretariate of the Council of State, in a letter to Father Rua. He showed it to a close colleague of his who held an important post in the Department of the Interior, and he too agreed that it was "very well written and quite embarrassing to the minister of public education" who had ordered the school's closing. If Don Bosco did not receive justice he could very well have recourse to parliament and even to the courts. On his own, Mr. Viale assured Father Rua, "Have no fear. I shall keep on top of it with suggestions and counsels for a favorable outcome, because that is only just."³² Don Bosco later published his appeal to the king,³³ and after receiving from Mr. Viale a list of the State Council members who formed the board dealing with public education, he sent each a copy along with his own pamphlet and that of Professor Allievo.

On December 11 Don Bosco's appeal was forwarded by the king's cabinet to the Department of Public Education, which on December 24 sent all documentation on the case to the Council of

³²Letter to Father Rua, Rome, November 19, 1879. Viale really did display most commendable zeal. His feelings on the matter are clearly set forth in his letter to Don Bosco on December 11: "If you need further instructions, do not hesitate to call upon me—both you and your countless communities everywhere, even as far off as Patagonia. I look to God for an abundant reward." [Author]

³³*Le scuole di beneficenza dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales in Torino davanti al Consiglio di Stato* [The Charity Schools of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin Defended before the Council of State] by Father John Bosco, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1879. [Author]

State with a covering letter which smacked of acrimony and consequently slanted the information received from Turin. Commendatore De Filippo, who seemed unbiased, had already been appointed to present the case, but internal changes within the State Council dictated that all questions pertaining to the Department of Public Education were to be handled by the Department of the Interior, and so the case was to be assigned to others. However, thanks to orders from higher-ups—Mr. Viale's influence is not to be discounted—it was left in the hands of De Filippo. Senator Siotto-Pintò also supported Don Bosco, using his influence with the minister of education, with President [Raphael] Cadorna of the State Council, and with several councillor friends of his. "This is a flagrant violation of the law!" declared Siotto-Pintò, the fiery senator from Sardinia.³⁴

The Turin provincial school board did not see it that way. As though nothing had happened, the prefect requested the school's curriculum and daily timetable. Don Bosco replied:

Turin, January 11, 1880

Dear Sir:

In deference to your letter of December 24, 1879, I hasten to inform you that we have no standard curriculum in our schools since the boys we befriend are at different levels of learning.

As for schedule—though constrained by no law—I freely inform you that for the most part classes are held between 9:00 and 11:30 each morning and between 2:00 and 4:30 in the afternoon.

However, since our instructors also have administrative duties, this schedule may often vary. Yet there is sufficient time to cover the whole course during our school year, which runs from October 15 to September 9.

I am honored to remain,

Fr. John Bosco

³⁴Letter to Don Bosco, Cagliari, December 29, 1879. In another letter dated January 5, 1880, he stated, "Today I am writing an urgent letter to Councillor De Filippo, asking him to rush that famous report; I hope that my letter will help. With all your sons please continue to pray for me that, God willing, I may attend Mass next June in the Church of St. Francis de Sales, with whom I am head over heels in love after reading his wondrous biography. At that Mass I shall dedicate all my strength to promoting your Oratory, with the trust that I shall be true to my promise. If there is anything else I can do, please let me know, for I shall spare neither time nor effort." In closing, he asked Don Bosco: "Save me a little place in that wonderful heart of yours." [Author]

As though nothing had happened, Don Bosco also appealed to Minister Depretis of the Department of the Interior for a subsidy, pleading hardship in having to feed so many boys who sought shelter at the Oratory. The minister instructed the prefect to express his regrets to Don Bosco that he could not grant the subsidy since his budget contained no funds earmarked for that purpose and since the limited funds he did have at his disposal had all been used up to help the countless victims of the winter's hardships all through the realm.³⁵

The president of the Council of State had named a special committee of eight councillors to investigate the matter. They met on February 26, 1880. They concluded that since the standpoint and nature of the school were not sufficiently clear, the committee would reserve decision until it could receive further clarification. Being confidentially notified, Don Bosco sent the following paper to the minister of education.

On November 13, 1879, I appealed to Your Excellency to revoke the order to shut down the secondary school of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, where many homeless boys are housed and given a Christian education. Having received no reply and not knowing whether my appeal has been filed with the Council of State or with the Department of Education, I write to Your Excellency and ask you kindly to let me know whether my appeal has been taken into consideration along with the documents which I submitted, and which made evident the charitable scope of the institution I founded. All the more am I concerned because, as I have heard, the word in Turin is that the school superintendent of Turin and its province recently communicated with the Department of Education in regard to this situation.

I would like to think that these are wild rumors at best, but should it be true that statements damaging to this already badly hurt institution are rife, it would certainly be my duty to show up the falsehood of such assertions. It has been said, if I hear correctly, that the superintendent of schools presented the Oratory to Your Excellency as a private secondary school with pupils paying a regular monthly tuition. This is a grave error, for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was founded for poor boys, and not a single lad pays as much as a penny in tuition, nor are any of the teachers paid even a minimal salary. The students receive a free education, and

³⁵Letter from Prefect Minghelli Vaini to Don Bosco, February 7, 1880. [Author]

their teachers are given no payment of any kind. I feel that this clearly brings out the true nature of this institution as a charitable home. Thus did the Council of State rate it last December. Still, let me cite, in proof of this assertion, several instances of boys being accepted free of charge on the recommendation of various past ministers, police commissioners, and even of Prefect Minghelli Vaini himself just days before the shutdown order was issued. True, there are a handful who can afford a tiny monthly or annual sum, and possibly one boy out of a hundred can pay twenty-four lire a month, but how can such a mite pay for the food, clothing, and housing of even one lad? It certainly does not alter the nature of this charitable institution for poor boys who live on the goodness of Divine Providence. Our regulations for admission make this point very clearly:

1. Boys must be between twelve and eighteen years of age.
2. They must be orphaned of both parents, unless particular reasons allow an exception.
3. They must be abandoned. Whatever they bring with them is to be shared with the whole institution.

It is further asserted that the lads in this school are being pushed into the priestly or religious life.

To answer this charge properly, it would suffice to visit, besides the Oratory in Turin, the hospices in Lucca and Sampierdarena, where hundreds, even thousands of poor boys are being trained in various crafts and trades, and they have never set their eyes on the priesthood. Many of the youngsters we have sheltered have gone into a wide range of careers, and—contrary to what is being charged—none of them have become misfits in society. I have always made it my duty to place the boys in proper jobs if, because of limited intelligence or funds or through personal choice, they felt that they did not want to continue their schooling and left the institution.

In further proof, I can name thousands of lads who were rescued from an idle and abandoned life and are now earning an honest living, just as I could cite numbers of our students who by hard work have achieved outstanding careers in law, in the armed forces, and in politics, and not a few—graduates in letters and philosophy—are highly lauded teachers throughout Italy's cities, not only in secondary schools and lyceums, but also in state universities. It is true, nonetheless, that a good number of these boys show signs of a priestly or religious vocation, and they find in our schools those means and helps which they require if they are to respond to the divine call. And we need them, for they teach, supervise, and guide the boys of the hospice, and they care for the lads who flock to our many recreation centers on Sundays.

I trust that Your Excellency is now sufficiently knowledgeable about the

real points at issue. Should they be necessary, I will promptly send you documents and proofs before a decision is made which—were it based solely on unfounded hearsay—would be damaging to so many poor youngsters who once used to hang out together in gangs on the city streets, posing a manifest threat to society, and now have decided to better themselves. A sound education gives them a strong chance of becoming good, honest citizens, the pride of society, the hopes of a happier future.

I have deep trust in Your Excellency's wisdom and goodness. It is my hope that you will have the kindness to bring my statement to the attention of the Council of State, so that, before giving a verdict on this regrettable situation, they may have a clear picture of the state of affairs.

As we can see, proceedings moved at a snail's pace. It was only after April 7 that Superintendent Rho sent to the minister of education the report that had been requested on the status of Don Bosco's Oratory. If we compare this latter report with Don Bosco's previous memorandum to the Department of Public Education, we clearly see how well grounded were his suspicions about the charges being made against him in the superintendent's report to Rome. The latter charged that a very small number of boys were receiving a free education, and that two-thirds of them, on leaving the institution after interrupting or completing their studies, returned to society with no way of supporting themselves, neither fit for the manual labor they had formerly exercised, nor sufficiently educated to enter upon a civic career. This was a damaging assertion, enough to show that the Oratory was no charitable institution. Don Bosco unassumingly anticipated both charges in his report to the minister.

Don Bosco was in Rome when the superintendent's report reached the minister of education. He must certainly have concerned himself with this matter, but we have no information on it until April 28 [1880] when the committee held its second meeting. It was inclined to issue a verdict based solely on the information supplied by the minister of education—that is, essentially by the provincial superintendent of schools—but Baron Celesia, a committee member, indignantly opposed the motion, exclaiming: "What? Are we going to pass judgment without even hearing the other side? Gentlemen, is this a rigged court?" His bluntness carried the day and the chairman instructed Commenda-

tore Gerra to present in writing the committee's opinion on the matter.³⁶ Substantially it ran as follows:

Father John Bosco, having been ordered to close his school, appealed to higher authorities to have the order revoked, but was not given a hearing on the data which the provincial superintendent of schools collected and submitted concerning the nature of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Father John Bosco's testimony can readily be obtained by the prefect of the province in the manner he judges most suitable; such testimony can prove very useful for a fuller and more factual picture of the situation. The prefect will thus be able to ascertain and evaluate all the data we need to establish whether the institution in question is a charitable institution or a school, and, if it is a school, whether it falls under Article 260 or Articles 251 and 252 of the law of November 13, 1859. It will be well for the Department of Education to clearly state its opinion on the basis of the findings of the interrogation. It is the committee's stand that it cannot issue a judgment until the matter is further clarified as above suggested.

In the meantime, Turin's civil administration had undergone several changes. A new prefect, [Bartholomew] Casalis, had been appointed. Following the Council of State's instructions, he sent Don Bosco five questions to be answered in writing: "1. What is the overall character of the Oratory and particularly what is your reason in conducting a secondary school? 2. How many boys are learning arts and crafts at the Oratory, how many attend secondary classes, and how many clerics are studying philosophy and theology there? 3. Are all the Oratory pupils, particularly those taking secondary classes, maintained free of charge? If not, how many receive free room and board and how many pay reduced fees? 4. How many pupils have usually taken the state's final examinations each year to qualify for a secondary school diploma, and how many passed the examinations last year? 5. How many students completed the fifth year of secondary school within the past five years? Of these, how many went on to study philosophy for the priesthood in order to become members of the Salesian Society founded by you?"

Don Bosco's reply follows:

³⁶Letter from Mr. Viale (undated) and from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, May 3, 1880. [Author]

Turin, July 7, 1880

Dear Sir:

I respectfully reply to the questions you kindly sent me on instructions from the Department of Public Education concerning the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

1. *What is the overall character of the Oratory and particularly what is your reason in conducting a secondary school?*

Here is my answer to the first part of the question. A judgment issued by the Council of State in 1879 set this norm: "The character of an institution is determined by its objectives and the kind of people it benefits." I doubt that I could better explain my objectives in founding the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin than to restate what I wrote when I first drafted its regulations, which were filed with the government and published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*: "We sometimes encounter boys who are orphans or are deprived of family care because their parents either cannot or will not assume responsibility for them. Without skills and without education these lads risk grave spiritual and physical harm. Unless someone reaches out and takes them in, trains them for a trade, helps them to straighten out their lives and teaches them religion, there is no way of averting their ruin. The purpose of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales is to shelter boys of this kind.

To be accepted as a resident of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, a boy must meet the following conditions:

1. He must be between the ages of twelve and eighteen.
2. He must be orphaned of both parents and have no family or relatives who can care for him.
3. He must be totally destitute and abandoned. These conditions being met, a boy must bring with him whatever he owns, and it shall be used for him, because it is not fair for one to live on charity if he has some means of his own.
4. He must be healthy and strong, with no bodily deformity and no repulsive or contagious diseases.
5. Preference will be given to boys attending the festive oratories of St. Aloysius, Guardian Angel and St. Francis de Sales, because this hospice is particularly meant to take in those boys who are utterly poor and abandoned and who attend one of these oratories.

This is the purpose for which the Salesian Oratory was founded, and I have always faithfully adhered to it, endeavoring to meet my goal with all the means Divine Providence sends me. Having said this, I think it is quite evident that the character of this Salesian Oratory is that of a charitable institution for abandoned boys. This is the way it has always been

regarded by city hall, the police department, the prefecture and even the central government departments: they have all sent me hundreds of homeless boys. Both the parliament and the senate of the realm recognized it as such, as have also upright, generous-hearted people who have helped it by their kind attention and generous donations, with the result that from humble beginnings it has grown to reach out to a thousand residents, with workshops and classrooms, where the finest skills and learning are given to the children of the people, so that they will one day be useful members of society.

To confirm the above, I can provide a long list of youngsters who came from this Oratory and today hold positions in various ranks of society, in lyceums and universities, in the armed forces and government offices. I am happy to assert that none of those lads who have been docile students of this institution have ever left unequipped to earn an honest livelihood. So also, to my knowledge, no one has ever turned out to be other than an upright person and a worthy citizen. Indeed, in some instances there have been those who in crises have proven themselves to be real heroes.

Now, replying to the second part of the question, I say that my specific aim in conducting a secondary school at this Oratory is to carry out an important function of education: to meet the varying needs and wide-ranging career possibilities of the residents. Some have talent for valued and skilled crafts, like printing and allied trades, but would be unable to learn them thoroughly and apply them profitably without some knowledge of Latin, Greek, French, geography, arithmetic, etc. Seeing that others were even more gifted and naturally inclined to higher knowledge, I felt that I should favor their inclinations, believing that with further schooling they could be a great help to society. Many of them, aided by us or by charitable foundations or by winning state scholarships, were able to enter colleges and universities; they are now successful teachers and writers. For the sake of brevity I do not list their names, which will be made available to public authorities upon request.

Then, quite a few other lads come from noble families whose fortunes have waned. In all fairness they cannot properly be combined with the first group, and so they are steered toward careers more befitting their station. To meet the needs of these last two groups, the Oratory had to go into secondary education. This special aim, you can see, far from hindering the Oratory's overall beneficent goal, actually furthers it.

To reply to the second question: We have five hundred and ten boys learning crafts and trades or doing work about the house, and about three hundred are enrolled in the secondary classes, as stated in my report to the provincial school superintendent. These numbers, I need not point out, keep fluctuating, as boys enter or leave nearly every week for various

reasons. Understandably, too, the Oratory houses more boys during the fall and winter than in the summer.

I make two comments concerning the clerics:

1. The Oratory offers no regular philosophy courses, but, as time and circumstances permit, the elements of philosophy are taught to those youths who are engaged as assistants or who hold other positions within this institution and seek to dedicate themselves to the priesthood. This prepares them properly for the supervision of the boys in the workshops and dormitories, in teaching catechism and conducting evening classes in Italian and vocal and instrumental music, and in performing other similar duties which are necessary and proper to their calling.

2. Not all the clerics now living at the Oratory and at other institutions of Don Bosco received their primary education at the Turin Oratory. In fact, the greater number are students from other boarding schools or seminaries who, wishing to join Don Bosco in his wide-ranging charitable activities, asked to be allowed to work under him. The following listing completes the answer to the second question.

The clerics taking philosophy courses at the Oratory as explained above number twenty-five; seventeen attended secondary school at other places and eight at the Oratory. The theology students number twelve, of whom five came from other schools.

To reply to the third question: An article of our house regulations reads: "If the applicant owns anything he must bring it with him and it will be used for him, because it is not fair for one who is not in dire need to live on charity." Consequently, not all the boys residing at the Oratory live here gratis; some pay a small monthly or annual fee, according to what they or their families can afford. However, in view of the kind of boys whom we take in at the Oratory, this leaves most of the financial burden on the Oratory, as the following figures show:

Out of eight hundred and ten boys, free room and board is given to four hundred and fifty. Among the students, one hundred and six pay no fees whatever; as regards the rest, one out of a hundred pays a monthly fee of twenty-four lire, and others contribute five, eight or ten lire. Considering the number of boys who live here gratis and those from whom fees cannot be collected, we may correctly say that the average fee of a student is no more than six lire a month. Obviously, this small sum cannot feed a boy, let alone pay for tuition. Neither do teachers draw a salary, nor does any member of the large staff that is needed for maintenance and the supervision of so many youngsters.

To give a complete answer let me point out that Don Bosco runs other educational institutions in various parts of Italy which care for the middle classes; there the tuition is twenty-four lire or more per month, and all

teachers are certified. The Oratory in Turin is not to be mistaken for these other schools, as it sometimes is, because its character and objectives are totally different.

To reply to the fourth question: Each year some twenty Oratory boys take the state examinations for their diploma. Last year, of the thirty-one who took the examinations, twenty-six passed, and several obtained the highest scores at the government's Monviso School in Turin. One student won the top award, his grades a good ten points above the others.

To reply to the fifth question: First, I had better point out that we are not a [religious] order, but rather a Pious Society named after St. Francis de Sales, whose aim is to educate boys, especially the poor and the abandoned. All members are free citizens, subject to our country's laws.

In the past five years two hundred and ten pupils completed their fifth year of secondary schooling here at the Oratory. Of these, thirty-one have continued their studies here to enter the priestly life and join the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.

I feel that it casts no discredit on the Oratory if some of its pupils freely join Don Bosco to pass on to others the benefits they themselves once enjoyed. However, considering all the statistics above, one would obviously be wrong in thinking that the Oratory school exists for the benefit of the Pious Salesian Society.

I believe that I have now sufficiently responded to your five questions. If necessary, I am ready to add further explanations upon request. However, at the same time, I make bold to ask that, besides passing judgment on the first part of my appeal, the Council of State also give me its *explicit opinion* concerning the second part, namely: Was it lawful for the Department of Public Education to order the shutdown of the Salesian Oratory schools?

In any event, I commend this work of charity to your kindly protection. With highest esteem I remain,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

The first people who saw copies of this statement felt that it was well done. Mr. Viale claimed that it gave well expressed and uncontestable answers to all the questions, putting to rest any doubts concerning the eminently charitable scope of the Oratory. "The sound reasoning—he stated—is matched by tempered, dignified language, so that its overall impression is one of genuine truth and of a clear conscience which deceives neither itself nor others." He then expressed the wish that the prefect would forward

Don Bosco's report to the minister and that the latter would see the justice of it and make amends for the harm done him.³⁷ Baron Celesia also read it and wrote to Don Bosco: "While traveling through the city I received your kind letter of July 17 and its enclosure. I thank you for your courtesy and trust that all will be cleared up for the benefit of the charitable work to which you are dedicated. I regret that I cannot pay you my respects personally."³⁸

Mostly, however, we are interested in the prefect's reaction. In acknowledging his receipt of the document, the prefect wrote:³⁹ "I have read the defense of your institution. I am already convinced and hope that others will be also." Kind words these, still to be backed and confirmed by facts, but they gave Don Bosco some inkling of the man's temperament—the one on whom the entire outcome of the issue depended. Don Bosco, we recall, usually passed on gifts he received from his friends to benefactors or to government officials. He had just been given a young live hare and thought that he might send it to the new prefect as token congratulations for his recent appointment. The prefect expressed his thanks in a somewhat singular manner in the same letter containing his five questions. "I thank you," he wrote, "for the hare, but I chose to give it a future worthier of me, of yourself and of its Creator by setting it free."

Incredibly, however, Prefect Casalis delayed so long in sending Don Bosco's replies of July 7, 1880 to the Council of State through the Department of Public Education, that the report did not get there until June 7, 1881. This delay enabled the new superintendent, Commendatore Denicotti, to conduct an investigation of his own. The prefect, in turn, merely summarized and adopted as his own the former's unfavorable comments, concluding that the closure order was not to be revoked until Don Bosco stated that he was ready to abide by the law like every other citizen.

The chairman of the department handling the Council of State's responsibilities for public education set up a *de facto* committee of nine members to re-examine the appeal. Privately alerted to this, Don Bosco immediately published the prefect's five questions, along with his reply and an introductory comment as follows:

³⁷Letter to Don Bosco, Rome, July 27, 1880. [Author]

³⁸Letter, Turin, July 24, 1880. [Author]

³⁹Letter, Turin, July 15, 1880. [Author]

Turin, July 2, 1881

Dear Sir:

Pursuant to my plea to His Majesty protesting the order of the Department of Public Education to shut down the secondary school of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, the minister of public education sent me the following questions concerning the nature of the Oratory. I replied as far back as July of last year, and I enclose my answers.

I think it best to include here a summary of my presentation to the Council of State:

1. The aforesaid institution is to be considered a true parental and charitable institution.

2. Granted but not conceded that this is a private institution subject to existing laws, it could not be shut down since the certified teachers who were duly registered actually did teach their classes, being substituted for only in case of necessity; it is therefore an error of fact that their classes were handed over to non-certified instructors.

3. Everything over the past years favors the petitioner, who was never asked by previous school authorities to submit lists of certified teachers and who did so only on request, citing Articles 251 and 252 of the Casati Law in his defense and only when the nature of the school was questioned.

Since my appeal has been referred to the Council of State for review, I am enclosing for your information a copy of both the questions and my answers, with the hope that it may prove of some use to you in better understanding the issue.

The Petitioner,
Fr. John Bosco

Without letting on that he knew the contents of the prefect's report and the makeup of the committee, Don Bosco sent printed copies of the above to them and to other members of the Council of State. He knew full well that supporting documents would not be read, much less studied; he knew, too, that committee members sided mostly with the government and vice versa. He therefore sent them both letters, briefing them on the issues to enable them to take a stand, reject the prefect's views, and cast a responsible vote.

The committee was apparently set to meet in mid-July, but the meeting was postponed to November 29, since most of the members were away on vacation. The delay hurt Don Bosco's case all the more, especially because of Abignente's spiteful insinuations. Two committee members took up Don Bosco's defense and Baron

Celesia also bravely battled on his behalf, but to no avail.⁴⁰ After a lengthy series of “whereas” and “considering”—the final item being that the minister’s shutdown order did not preclude Don Bosco’s reopening his school once he fully complied with the law—the conclusion was that his appeal protesting the shutdown order had no merit. On December 22 the king signed the decree rejecting the petition and the drawn-out controversy came to an end.

But success did not bless those responsible for it. Soon afterward Minister Coppino lost his position; Minghelli Vaini, prefect of Turin—a top-rated position—was demoted to the prefecture of Catania—a third-rate station—then to Lecce and was later forced to resign. Nicomede Bianchi, who had engineered the whole mess, was quietly ousted from office; Superintendent Rho, who so feared being relegated to Sicily, was ordered in 1880 to head the office in Palermo. He appealed, rejected the order, and shortly afterward was relieved of all duty and suspended without pay; finally, mentally disturbed, he retired to his native village. His priest-brother suffered a stroke and became bedridden for a long time. To bring this painful narrative to a close, we will just say that during these distressing maneuvers, a certain Professor Castelli called on Don Bosco with proposals and documentation which could have utterly destroyed the luckless superintendent’s reputation, but Don Bosco rejected the offer, spurning any such dealings as unworthy of a Christian. Nor did Mr. Rho have any personal complaint against Don Bosco, even while taking harsh measures against him. After Don Bosco’s death, he recalled “the burning Christian charity which had inspired him”; he fondly claimed to be “an old friend of the man to whom our country and all of the Christian world is eternally indebted.”⁴¹

In all truth, this was not the first of Superintendent Rho’s actions of this kind. He had already rejected the bishop’s claim that the junior seminary at Borgo San Martino was replacing the Mirabello seminary. He had also worked to revoke the accreditation of the Barnabites’ boarding school at Moncalieri. In a word, Superintendent Rho, either through weakness or personal decision, sided

⁴⁰Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, November 29, 1881. [Author]

⁴¹Letter to Father Piccolo, a fellow townsman of his, Pecetto, 1889. [Author]

with those who rejected freedom of education in an effort to de-Christianize the nation's schools. In 1875 Roger Bonghi, the minister of public education, stated openly in the chamber that Italy had no hope of achieving its moral regeneration or restoration until the clergy's influence was removed from the education of youth.

Such then was the aim of the harsh measures taken by hook or by crook to suppress the parental schools approved by the law of November 13, 1859. In January 1875 Bonghi sent out a circular arrogating to himself the right to interpret, mutilate and apply that law as he saw fit, and school boards as well as the Council of State followed his opinions and interpretations in refusing to authorize the opening of any parental school. Their excuse was that the spirit of the law could not be stretched to allow as many as one hundred fathers to unite and provide for the education of their children jointly under their personal supervision, and also that the law did not permit parents to transfer their rights and authority to others to run parental schools.⁴² The intent was that no school, day or resident, nor any children's home should succeed in keeping out the prevailing official spirit of atheism masked under a so-called laicism.

Pursuing this goal, freemasonry—still powerful in the education department today [1933]—quietly made a clean sweep of the Casati Law then in force. Ministerial decrees and even more circulars issued arbitrary interpretations of both the letter and the spirit of the law. Often a mere objection raised by any nonentity was enough to induce the Department of Education to clamp down where the law was silent and to hold its ground in spite of everything and everyone. And when the controversy reached the Council of State, that Council stood by the minister and passed judgment against those who acted according to law.

Don Bosco, who clearly sensed the secret aims of the anticlericals very early and strove quietly to check the rising tide of evil, was also one of the first to experience the effects of the tyrannic monopoly of education exercised by Italy's government.

⁴²Cf. *L'Opinione*, August 8, 1875. [Author]

CHAPTER 8

The First Triennial Report to the Holy See on the State of the Congregation

WHILE these and other burdensome worries to be recounted later would certainly have driven anyone out of his mind who did not have Don Bosco's saintly serenity, he also had to extricate himself from an embarrassing situation he had unknowingly gotten into with the Holy See because of an official act of his as superior general.

While in Rome in March 1879, he drafted a report on the material and moral state of the Salesian Society, which he then had printed¹ and submitted it to the Holy See, sending a copy also to the director of each Salesian house. The report opened as follows:

Chapter 6 of our constitutions prescribes that a report of the Society's moral and material state, as well as of its development, must be submitted to the Holy See every three years. Formerly we drew up only an estimated report since opening new houses and adapting our new-born Congregation to particular circumstances of time and place made it impossible to draw up the required complete and detailed report. Eager to show proper regard to the Holy See in all matters and trusting that we will receive in return such observations and counsels as may contribute to God's greater glory, the rector major, in performance of his duty, now humbly reports on the present state of this Pious Society in the various nations where it is involved in the sacred ministry and actively engaged in academic and trade schools for youth.

¹*Esposizione alla S. Sede dello stato morale e materiale della Pia Società di S. Francesco di Sales nel Marzo del 1879* [Report to the Holy See on the Moral and Material State of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales in March 1879], Sampierdarena, Tipografia Salesiana, 1879. [Author]

Then follows a clear summary of the beginnings and subsequent expansion of the Pious Society from 1841 to 1879, with an overall sketch of its governing structure. Our saintly father wrote:

In 1841 this Congregation was but a Sunday catechism class and a recreation center to which, in 1846, a hospice for homeless young apprentices was added, thus forming a private family-like institute. Several priests and a few laymen offered their outside help to cooperate in this pious enterprise. In 1852 the archbishop of Turin approved the institution and, on his own initiative, granted all permissions which were proper and necessary to Father John Bosco, appointing him superior of the festive oratories. From 1852 to 1858 a type of community began to shape up, with a school and a program of formation for clerics, of whom some, being ordained, stayed on in the institution. In 1858 Pius IX, of holy memory, advised Father John Bosco to set up a pious society to safeguard the spirit of the festive oratories. He himself kindly drafted a constitution which was then adapted to suit actual community life in a clerical congregation with simple vows.

After six years the Holy See issued a decree of commendation and praise for the [Salesian] Congregation and its constitutions and appointed a superior.

In 1870 the Congregation and its constitutions were definitely approved, with permission to issue dismissorial letters for any Salesian clerics who had lived in a house of the Congregation prior to their fourteenth year.

In 1874 the individual articles of the constitutions were definitively approved, with the faculty of issuing dismissorial letters *ad decennium* [for ten years] without restriction. Later, at various times, the Holy See granted this Pious Society privileges which are necessary for a clerical Congregation with simple vows. Meanwhile more houses of the Congregation were founded as Divine Providence gradually provided both opportunity and means. Because of their considerable growth, these foundations were gathered into inspectorates or provinces.

The confreres assigned to the various houses of the Congregation are responsible to the director of their respective communities. The directors are accountable to their provincial, who presides over a number of houses constituting his province. In turn, the provincials are subject to the rector major, who, with the superior chapter, governs the entire Congregation under direct and absolute control of the Holy See.

Although the specific aim of this Congregation is to care for youth, its members willingly offer their services to parish churches and charitable institutions by means of triduums, novenas, spiritual retreats and

missions, by celebrating Holy Mass, and by hearing confessions. Furthermore they are engaged in writing, publishing and spreading good books, of which they distribute over a million copies a year.

The report concluded with a brief overview of the moral state of the Congregation. Two details are of particular note also for the tactfulness of their presentation: one concerns relations with the archbishop of Turin, the other deals with the long-standing issue of privileges. We quote the passage.

After reporting on the material state of the Salesian Congregation and on the growth God has graciously given it, we briefly comment on its moral state.

1. Thank God, all our houses faithfully observe the constitutions, and to date no Salesian has ever been a cause of scandal. Although our work far exceeds both the strength and the size of our membership, no one is fainthearted, and work seems to nourish their spirit as does earthly food their bodies. True, both in Europe and in the foreign missions some of our confreres have fallen victim to their own zeal, but this has only served to intensify desire for work in their brother religious. However, care has been taken that no one jeopardize his health through overwork.

2. Many apply as Salesian aspirants, but we find that a good number are called to other religious orders or to the diocesan priesthood rather than to the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales. Every year some three hundred apply to us, of whom we accept a hundred and fifty into the novitiate; of these an average of a hundred and twenty take vows.

3. We have an excellent relationship with diocesan priests and bishops whom we can well characterize as fathers and well-wishers. With only one ordinary have we ever run into difficulties, without ever being able to come to the root of the misunderstanding. We trust that with patience, the Lord's help, and our obedient service within his diocese we may achieve that good relationship which we enjoy in all the other dioceses.

4. Another major obstacle we run into is that of the privileges. It is presumed that the Salesians enjoy those same privileges which are commonly granted to other religious orders and clerical congregations, but the Holy See has not as yet seen fit to grant them. Both our material and moral development would be greatly enhanced if we too enjoyed those privileges which we humbly and earnestly request.

5. Our first general chapter met in September 1877. Many very important issues touching on the practice of our constitutions were discussed, but we decided that, before sending our deliberations to the Holy See, we had best implement them for a term, with modifications, so

as to determine appropriate corrections to be made before submitting them to the next general chapter which, God willing, will be held in September 1880.

6. All members of the Congregation join the rector major in homage to the Holy See, for which we express our inviolable loyalty as we implore the fatherly support of the Church's supreme authority. We all pledge ourselves with total commitment never to cease upholding faith in and obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ in every nation of Europe and America in which we labor.

Non nobis, Domine, non nobis, sed nomini Tuo da gloriam [Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory—Ps. 113, 9].

Fr. John Bosco, *Rector Major*

The longer portion of the report² dealt with material matters. Don Bosco gave importance to every activity he had begun and his Salesians had continued, regardless of its extent. Therefore, no endeavor of the Salesians or of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians escaped his attention. The resulting report contains a breakdown of many and varied items which certainly stirred the Salesians to mixed emotions of surprise and satisfaction, so that they could exclaim: *Digitus Dei est hic* [This is the finger of God—Ex. 8, 15].

Every section of this first triennial report of Don Bosco was minutely scrutinized by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, prompting seven “observations” which Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri, the [Congregation's] prefect, sent to him on April 5. He found the letter waiting for him on his return to the Oratory four days later. He had no problem with supplying the requested clarifications, but it took him quite some time. Those months, as we have seen, and shall again see, were crammed with too many problems for him even to be able to think over those matters and weigh well his words. He drew up a rough draft of which he had a good copy made; on that he made some important additions and amendments. Very probably, he had to consult competent persons willing to help. The result was that his answer did not leave Turin until August 3. It is a most interesting reply. We reproduce it, citing in italics those “observations” to which Don Bosco was replying.

²For those interested, this report is published in the Appendix of the original Italian edition of this volume, Document 35. [Editor]

Turin, August 3, 1879

Your Eminence:

I have received a copy of the observations kindly drawn up by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on my report of the moral and material state of the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.

First, with humble thanks to Your Eminence, I assure you that I shall treasure these observations for the good of our Salesian confreres and use them as a guide in the required future triennial reports to the Holy See.

As of now I promptly comply with your request for clarifications in the order of your comments.

1. *This report makes no mention of the financial condition of the Institute, nor of the novitiate; the latter must be made according to the norms of the sacred canons and the apostolic constitutions.*

CLARIFICATION: The Pious [Salesian] Society has no legal status; therefore it cannot own property, contract debts or acquire credits. The Congregation's houses (please see page 13 of the report) are the property of the members who reside there. We do have debts, but one member of the Congregation owns a building whose value will cover them. However, both as a moral and as a legal body, the Congregation neither does nor can own anything.

Our novitiate here in Turin is duly approved and regulated by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and by the prescriptions set down and approved in Chapter 14 of our constitutions. Under the same ruling, with a decree of approval from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, a second novitiate was opened at Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina. Also with the aforesaid Sacred Congregation's approval, a novitiate has been set up at Marseille, where a new building which conforms to all [canonical] requirements is now under completion. Another novitiate will soon be opened in the diocese of Seville, Spain, for which we will apply formally to the Holy See for necessary authorization. We at one time sought authorization to open a novitiate also in Paris, but unexpected difficulties make further action in this matter unfeasible and we have dropped the project.

The novice master is a priest of proven virtue and learning and is assisted by two other priests. The novices have regular daily meditation, spiritual reading, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and the recitation of the rosary with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament each evening. They go to confession once a week and receive Holy Communion almost every day.

Two conferences a week are given, one dealing with the constitutions. To date religious observance has not slackened.

2. *The Pious Society may not be divided into so-called inspectorates—an uncommon practice—but into provinces, which may be established only with the Holy See's permission.*

CLARIFICATION: The Pious Society was divided into inspectorates in compliance with Chapter 9, Article 17 of our constitutions, which reads: "If need arises, the rector major, with the approval of the superior chapter, will appoint visitators, giving them the responsibility of looking over a certain number of houses, when distance and number shall require it. Such visitators or inspectors or assessors shall take the rector major's place in the houses and in those matters assigned to them."

His Holiness Pius IX of venerable memory recommended that terminology dissonant with the spirit of the times be deleted from the constitutions of the Salesian Society. Therefore, rather than call our houses *monasteries*, he suggested we term them *house*, *college*, *hostel*, or *orphanage*; likewise, not *father general* but *rector major*; not *prior* or *guardian*, but *director*; not *provincial* or *province*, but some equivalent term. We should point out that this division into inspectorates is not yet a reality, but has been proposed *ad experimentum*, so that as soon as we feel it is feasible, we will duly apply to the Holy See. In these sorry times and in the face of the endless grave obstacles daily being thrown up in our way, we see no other form or organization, and so request that for the time being this term be allowed to stand.

3. *Under the article "Piedmontese Inspectorate" it is stated that several institutions of women have been entrusted to the priestly ministry of the Salesians. Such responsibility can be given only by the pertinent episcopal authority, and it should have been stated if such really is the case, and in what this sacred ministry consists.*

CLARIFICATION: In founding institutions for women and assuming their spiritual direction, we have observed all the rules set forth in Chapter 10 of our constitutions. These institutions totally lack material means, and the Salesians charitably provide religious services at the ordinary's request. Our priestly ministry is always arranged and controlled by the diocesan ordinary in all that concerns the sacraments of penance and Holy Eucharist, the celebration of Holy Mass, preaching the word of God, teaching religion, and so on.

4. *The report shows that the Salesians run boarding and day schools, etc., but it does not say whether or not this is done with the permission of the respective ordinaries and if the norms of the sacred canons, particularly those of the Council of Trent regarding education, are being followed.*

CLARIFICATION: We have followed the rules approved by the Holy See as described in Chapter 10 of our constitutions regarding the opening of new houses. Therefore, all the necessary steps were taken with the diocesan ordinaries as the sacred canons and the Council of Trent prescribe.

5. The report includes a supplement on an institute of women named after Mary, Help of Christians, but nothing is said as to whether this institute has a superior general to whom the nuns are subject and whether it is totally independent, as it should be, from the Salesian Institute.

CLARIFICATION: When the Salesian constitutions were approved, whatever concerned the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was also treated and discussed.

The Institute of Mary, Help of Christians is governed in temporal matters by the superior general of the Pious Salesian Society, but in all matters of religious worship and administration of the sacraments it is entirely subject to the diocesan ordinary. The superior of the Salesians gives the sisters financial aid and, with the bishop's consent, appoints a priest to be spiritual director of each house of the sisters.

Several bishops have already approved this congregation of women, and we are now in an experimental period to ascertain practically which modifications we should make before seeking the Holy See's required approval.

Furthermore, since several articles of their rule state the limits of the sisters' obedience to the superior of the Salesians, a copy of the sisters' rule is enclosed for further explanation.

Let it be noted also that the motherhouse of these sisters is located at Mornese, in the diocese of Acqui, whose bishop has always had a say in the institute's founding, growth and development.

6. It is also stated that these sisters do the cooking and take care of the linen and clothing in seminaries and in boys' hospices—a practice which has always been frowned upon by the Holy See.

CLARIFICATION: In each instance this arrangement was made after previous understanding with the diocesan ordinaries; furthermore, they themselves personally requested such services, and all the norms prescribed by the sacred canons and dictated by prudence are observed.

7. This Sacred Congregation cannot help but lament as unusual and ill-advised the printing of this report. The triennial report of superior generals of institutes has been mandated exclusively for acquainting the

Holy See on the disciplinary, personal, material, and financial status of each pious institute, and the running of the novitiates.

CLARIFICATION: My only purpose in printing this report was to make its reading easier. Since this was the first time that I was filing such a report with the Holy See, I followed the advice of the superior of another congregation who assured me, "The Holy See prefers a printed report." In the future I shall be sure to send a handwritten report.

Having thus given Your Eminence the clarifications you requested, let me ask you to keep this humble Society in your kindly favor.

The present times, the government officials, the civil laws, and the efforts being expended to wipe out all religious orders lead me to beg Your Eminence for all the support and understanding which the laws of Holy Church allow you to give.

These replies were to have been sent to Your Eminence last May, but the serious problems which beset this house forced this delay.

With highest esteem, I am honored to remain,

Your humble, obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's clarifications drew further observations, dated October 3 and forwarded to him on October 6 by Attorney [Constantine] Leonori with a covering memo: "Excuse my boldness, but make your replies complete, convincing and to the point, so that the Sacred Congregation will have no more questions." It was not until January 12 that Don Bosco found time to reply as he was leaving for France and sending Father Dalmazzo to Rome as procurator general of the Salesian Congregation. He did not repeat the cardinal's observations, but, to make his replies understandable, we have inserted those observations in italics.

Turin, January 12, 1880

Your Eminence:

I am truly grieved that, despite all my efforts, I did not succeed in giving you the clarifications you called for relating to our humble Congregation's triennial report to the Holy See. To ensure that this matter and other concerns will be presented as this Congregation understands them and as the sacred canons require, I am sending Father Francis Dalmazzo to Rome as our procurator general with instructions to place himself at Your Eminence's disposal or at the service of anyone you may designate.

Meanwhile let me express some thoughts of my own in respectful reply to Your Eminence's letter of October 3, 1879. Father Dalmazzo will be able to give you whatever clarifications may be needed.

[FURTHER OBSERVATIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS]

1. [LEGAL STATUS] *In clarifying your reply to Observation 1 you say that the Pious Society has no legal status; therefore it cannot own property or contract debts. You then go on to say that the houses of the Congregation are the property of some members; we do have debts, but one member owns a building whose value will cover them. You then conclude that both as a moral and a legal body, the Congregation neither owns nor can own anything.*

This Sacred Congregation thinks that all these affirmations of a non-legal status are to be understood in reference to civil laws hostile to pious institutes because in the Church's view, before which civil laws have no force, all pious institutes, including your own, have a legal status according to the sacred canons. Hence they are subject to the Holy See for all goods they may own under any title, regardless of whose name they may have been acquired in and are now owned. All pious institutes ignore the civil laws of any government in drawing up their triennial reports. They state their financial situation, briefly listing the goods they own under any title, their income from any source, and their expenses. If they must sell goods acquired by a third person or take on debts, this Sacred Congregation has always impressed upon them the need of receiving the Apostolic See's permission, and all have obeyed. Your Reverence is the only one who cites civil laws to exempt himself from this obligation. Please bear in mind that the Holy See approved the Salesian constitutions with the stated obligations resulting from Article 2 of Chapter 6 and Article 3 of Chapter 7, even though at the time of this approval the civil laws you cited were already in existence.

CLARIFICATION: Our Pious Society is not a moral body before the Church or state and therefore cannot own property. Chapter 4 of our constitutions states: "Therefore, those who are professed in this Society can retain a so-called radical ownership of their goods." The second article of this chapter states further: "The members can freely dispose of their right either by testament or (with permission of the rector major) by an act 'inter vivos.'"

Because of the present sad times, this article was of basic importance to us, and so while seeking the approval of our constitutions I was asking how we were to understand the wording of Chapter 7, Article 3, which states: "In disposing of the Society's goods or acquiring income, let those norms

be kept which have been set by the sacred canons and the apostolic constitutions.”

Through Archbishop, later Cardinal Salvator Vitelleschi, who was then secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, the cardinal’s reply was: “The response is already contained in the article itself, namely “in disposing of the Society’s goods”; this must be understood to mean that as soon as time or place makes it possible for the Pious Society to own anything in common or in its own name, this article is to be observed as all other religious and clerical congregations observe it. This seems to be in keeping with Chapter 7, Article 2, which says of the rector major: “He has no right to buy or sell property without the consent of the superior chapter.”

This is the interpretation I have always given to our constitutions from the very beginning of this Pious Society. This too was always the understanding of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX, of ever glorious memory, and of the eminent cardinals he appointed to examine and approve our constitutions.

To consider buildings personally owned by our members as Church property and therefore subject to the prescriptions of the sacred canons would cause confusion in our administration, since all our Salesians took their vows with this understanding of Chapter 4, Article 1, *De voto paupertatis*, which states: “The vow of poverty, of which we speak here, concerns only the administration, not the ownership, of any goods.”

2. [NOVITIATE IN MARSEILLE] Again, in clarifying your reply to Observation 1 you assert that a novitiate has been set up in Marseille with the authorization of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. *This Sacred Congregation has no record that any such authorization was given. Please see to it that a copy of the rescript containing authorization to open a novitiate in Marseille is forwarded to us.*

CLARIFICATION: Regarding the authorization for a novitiate in Marseille, which we intend to set up, the misunderstanding was mine. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars sought the opinion of the ordinary of Marseille on February 5, 1879, and on February 23, 1879 he sent a favorable reply. Hence I felt that the matter was settled, whereas it is still pending. I herein enclose the relevant documents and renew my request for authorization.

3. [INSPECTORATES] *In clarifying your reply to Observation 2 you state that the Pious Society was divided into inspectorates in compliance with your constitutions, Chapter 9, Article 17. Now Article 17 makes*

reference to "visitors" to be appointed by the rector major if need be, with the approval of the superior chapter; it does not mention "inspectors." All other congregations, regardless of where they are located, are divided into provinces with previous approval of the Holy See, which has never tolerated the use of any other name. You must adhere to the general norm.

CLARIFICATION: I divided the Congregation into inspectorates rather than provinces because I saw this as a practical application of our constitutions, Chapter 9, Article 17: "If the need arises, the rector major, with the approval of the superior chapter, will appoint visitors, giving them the responsibility of looking over a certain number of houses."

In these sad times using the words "province" and "provincial" would be like throwing ourselves to the wolves to be devoured or scattered. Pius IX, of ever blessed and beloved memory, suggested this term himself. If, however, we positively must use the traditional terminology, I request that we be restricted to do so only in our dealings with the Holy See and that in our relations with the world we be free to use the best terminology we can in these times.

4. [INSTITUTES FOR WOMEN] *In clarifying Observation 3 you state: "In opening institutes for women and assuming their spiritual direction, we have observed all the rules set forth in Chapter 10 of our constitutions." This chapter refers to houses for clerics and for young men and boys to be educated by Salesians. Nothing is said about opening houses for women and their spiritual direction. Nor can it be held that it was the intent of the Holy See to allow the Salesians to open and direct such houses when their constitutions were approved, since this violates the very principles it set up for very understandable reasons. The Salesians may assume spiritual direction of women communities when they are entrusted to do so by the respective ordinaries, and then their ministry is limited to administering the sacraments and preaching God's word if and as the ordinaries charge them.*

CLARIFICATION: In matters concerning the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, the Salesians have no other function in their houses than that of spiritual direction, and that within the limits and in the manner permitted and prescribed by the ordinaries in whose diocese those convents are situated.

5. [INSTITUTE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS] *Your reply to Observation 5 was: "When the Salesian*

constitutions were approved, whatever concerned the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was also treated and discussed. The Institute of Mary, Help of Christians is subject to the superior general of the Pious Salesian Society.” *In reviewing the rather voluminous material on the Salesian position especially regarding the approval of their constitutions, we observe that matters concerning the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were never mentioned, much less discussed. Had this been done, most certainly this Sacred Congregation would have mandated the separation of the two institutes. It has never been this Sacred Congregation’s norm, especially in these times, to allow communities of women to be governed by communities of men, and, if such a case has arisen, it has immediately demanded that such governance be ended. You would like to introduce a contrary norm which this Sacred Congregation can do no less than reject.*

CLARIFICATION: Regarding whether or not the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was discussed when the constitutions were approved, I can state that in the summation which this Sacred Congregation had printed in the process of definitively approving our constitutions, when a list of the houses then in existence was drawn up on page 10 and page 16, we read: “Added to the Salesian Congregation and depending from it is the house of *Mary, Help of Christians*, founded with the approval of the ecclesiastical authority of Mornese, diocese of Acqui. The aim of this house is to do for poor girls what the Salesians do for boys. The sisters already number forty and they care for two hundred girls.”

The aforesaid eminent cardinals asked several questions about the nature and scope of this institution and, showing themselves satisfied with my oral statements, they concluded by saying that the matter would be more thoroughly studied when the sisters’ constitutions would be submitted for the Holy See’s timely approval.

6. [GOVERNMENT OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS] *When this Sacred Congregation inquired into the government of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, in Observation 5, it asked whether it had a mother general and not a male superior general as you erroneously state in quoting the observation.*

CLARIFICATION: In the request of April 5, 1879 for clarifications, I was asked “whether this institute has a superior general to whom the nuns are subject and whether it is totally independent, as it should be, from the

Salesian Institute.” I replied in the affirmative, adding that our authority was in conformity with the sisters’ constitutions. Your Eminence now inquires whether these sisters have a *mother general*. I reply affirmatively: they do have a mother general and their own superior chapter in conformity with Article 3 of their constitutions.

Having offered these clarifications, I beg Your Eminence to remember with fatherly concern that the Pious Salesian Society was begun without material resources and held its own in treacherous times in the midst of increasing difficulties, besieged in countless ways. It consequently needs all the benevolence and all the understanding which are compatible with the authority of Holy Mother Church.

At present we number one hundred houses, in which some fifty thousand boys are given a Christian education. Of these, more than six hundred enter the clerical state every year. On the other hand, I believe I can assure Your Eminence that the Salesians have no other aim than to work for God’s greater glory, the welfare of Holy Church, and the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ among the Indians of the Pampas and of Patagonia.

On my knees I ask Your Eminence’s forgiveness if I have inadvertently answered in an unbecoming manner. I declare it my honor to remain,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter sent by the Sacred Congregation to Don Bosco had also this passage:

In answer to Observation 6, that the Sisters of Mary, Help of Christians take care of linen and clothing in seminaries and do the cooking—something the Holy See has always frowned upon—you state: In each instance this arrangement was made after previous understanding with the ordinaries; furthermore, they themselves requested such services.” Any time this Sacred Congregation has become aware of women religious performing such tasks in seminaries or boys’ hostels, it has always forbidden it, even if the respective ordinary had given his consent and had personally asked the sisters to do such work.

Don Bosco offered no answer, probably because he was not the only person concerned since several bishops, those of Casale and Biella for example, were involved more than he.

His reply drew no further observations from the Sacred

Congregation. However, as we shall see in due course, the aftermath was distressful.

Through all the vicissitudes of this period [of Don Bosco's life], what outshines all else is the holiness of this man of God, who forged his way resolutely and calmly, never slowing down his many activities because of obstacles, never seeking pretexts from his undertakings to justify stern measures. It certainly takes heroic virtue in such circumstances in order not to deviate from one's course of action through human weakness or bold attempts. "I cannot hide my bitter grief," he wrote in reference to the above matter,³ "that I could not make myself understood. I labor and wish all Salesians to labor for the Church to their dying breath. I ask for no material assistance, but only for that indulgence and charity which are compatible with the Church's authority." On another occasion he wrote: "Every time they set up roadblocks my response always is to open another house."⁴ In these two quotes there vibrates the spirit of our saintly founder. That the second quote was not an empty phrase will be clearly proven in his next triennial report of 1882. Briefly, for saints, activity is no hindrance to holiness; rather, their activity arises from and grows from their holiness.

³Letter to Father Dalmazzo, Sampierdarena, May 7, 1880. [Author]

⁴To the above, Turin, July 21, 1880. [Author]

CHAPTER 9

The Girls' Festive Oratory at Chieri

IN 1879 the flourishing girls' festive oratory conducted at Chieri by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians faced fierce opposition which incredibly dragged on to 1883. Though centering on the person of its director, Father [John] Bonetti,¹ it involved Don Bosco also, since he was at the heart of all Salesian activity and the target of any conflict in and about Turin. We take up the thread of our story where we left off,² but we will have to break it again to resume it in Volume XV.

The New Year opened ominously for St. Theresa's Festive Oratory. In 1878 Don Bosco had opened an adjoining hostel for girls of middle income families, a free school for poorer and younger girls, and a Sunday school for older girls, but the bone of contention was always the festive oratory. Acting under misinformation supplied to him by several local priests, foremost among them the cathedral rector, Father [Anthony] Oddenino, Archbishop Gastaldi made a surprise appearance in Chieri on January 12. He called a meeting of the cathedral canons and harangued them with an address which left them confused and disturbed. He questioned the good work being done by the Salesians in the girls' oratory, calling them very generous workers, but likening them to steam locomotives which require stout brakes and safety valves if they are to function at all. Despite this charge, when it came to a showdown, the majority voted against closing the oratory, and so the archbishop agreed to put up with it a little longer.

Since Don Bosco was absent from Turin, his vicar, Father Rua, having learned of the meeting, was anxious to clarify the situation and nip the dispute in the bud, and so he wrote the archbishop a letter which is a masterpiece of diplomatic finesse.

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²See Vol. XIII, pp. 539f. [Editor]

Turin, January 13, 1879

Your Excellency:

I have learned that Your Excellency had occasion yesterday to meet with several canons of your respected chapter at Chieri concerning the St. Theresa's Festive Oratory, conducted by the Salesian Congregation, and its Sunday program for the town's girls. I was also informed that Your Excellency acknowledged the good work being done there and made your stand clear to the few who view it negatively. Trusting that Your Excellency will continue your kindness toward us, I think it well to enclose a copy of a brief granted by His Holiness, Pius IX, of blessed memory, which is our guide in holding religious services in the oratory as in all churches which we conduct in Italy, France and South America. In Don Bosco's name—he is presently in Marseille—I am sending you a copy of this brief with the sole purpose of furnishing you another argument with which to silence those who oppose us, to assure them that the Salesians are acting legally and are authorized not merely by yourself but also by the Holy See, so that no one out of petty fears need throw up obstacles to the good being done.

I also take this occasion to inform Your Excellency that, after our private interview with you toward the middle of last month, we submitted the following working plan to the Very Reverend Canon Lione, vicar forane of Chieri, which seemed reasonable to us and did not frustrate the objectives of the oratory:

1. When religious services coincide with catechetical instructions in the parish, married women and older girls will not be allowed to attend the oratory.

2. The other girls will be free to attend either function as they wish.

Contrary to our expectations, this proposal was rejected as unacceptable.

I thank Your Excellency for your kind support which encourages us to work in your archdiocese according to our objectives, and I beg you to continue your good will toward us.

To the charity of your prayers I commend my own humble person, this entire community, and especially our dear Don Bosco.

Kindly accept my profoundest respects as I reverently sign myself,

Your most humble servant,
Fr. Michael Rua

However, the festive oratory still had its enemies who gave it no respite but kept wagging their tongues without restraint. Distressed by the relentless slander, Father Bonetti wrote to the curate, begging him to desist from his hostility which was badly harming

the welfare of souls and kept fomenting unseemly gossip. He asked the curate's pardon for any offense he might have given him, and invited him to visit the oratory as a token of reconciliation, but he also protested that, rather than depress him, such vexations only inspired him to greater fortitude. The straightforwardness of tone and the curtness of some expressions upset Father Oddenino. Misconstruing their meaning, he consulted with his colleagues, and denounced the letter to the archbishop as a provocation. The archbishop, being then engaged in a fierce newspaper controversy over Rosmini³ with Monsignor [Peter] Balan, who was updating Rohrbacher's work [*Universal History of the Catholic Church*], let three weeks go by without answering the letter. However, on Father Oddenino's personal insistence that he intervene, he abruptly revoked Father Bonetti's faculties for confession until the latter should apologize to the curate "for the disrespect he displayed in his letter." He took this action on February 12, with no previous canonical admonition and without notifying Don Bosco.

Father Bonetti was stunned. Without delay he rushed to the archbishop's residence to find out what irreverence he had shown in his ill-fated letter, but he was refused a hearing. It was most urgent that Father Bonetti remove all reasons for surprise or scandal among the people by having the censure revoked before the following Saturday, when he regularly went to Chieri. On Thursday, January 13, then, he decided that it was wiser to yield to the imposed terms. Swallowing his pride, he wrote a letter of apology to the parish priest. However, since it had never been his slightest intent to offend anyone by his letter, he thought it only proper and fair to state the same. Having mailed his letter, he then wrote to the archbishop, expressing the hope that the censure would automatically cease and hinting at the same time that, were it not, he would not be averse to using unpleasant measures, such as recourse to Rome, to justify himself and to defend the Congregation's honor. These last words were really unnecessary and inappropriate. The archbishop not only took offense, but, without even bothering to find out if Father Oddenino had been pacified, he reiterated Father Bonetti's suspension, this time adding to its harshness by declaring the censure total and unlimited, revoking all conditions

³See *Unità Cattolica*, January 22, 1877, and following issues. [Author]

and leaving it completely up to his own judgment as archbishop.

We should state here that a rescript of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars dated November 20, 1615, dug out by Father [John Baptist] Rostagno [S.J.] for Father Bonetti's benefit, forbade any such summary procedure against members of religious congregations. The article stated: "In the name of the Holy See and by its authority, the eminent cardinals decide and declare that bishops and archbishops are not allowed to suspend religious from hearing confession, unless it be for reasons touching upon the act of confession itself." The decree which so well fit Father Bonetti's case encouraged him to proceed with his appeal, since the cause of his censure had been a letter, not a confession, and it still had to be proven that a letter constituted a criminal act. In his opinion his punishment was a travesty of law and justice. Be that as it may, at the present moment the suspension was binding, and so early the following Sunday morning, February 16, Father [Joseph] Leveratto, the [Valdocco] Oratory's prefect, set out to hear the confessions of the girls at Chieri, while Father Bonetti, the director, went for the evening catechetical instruction and sermon. Careful to cover up nicely his absences on following Sundays, he stated publicly that he had to accompany Don Bosco to Rome and, while there, also straighten out some problems about the St. Theresa's Festive Oratory, asking for prayers for the success of his journey. This was the reason why Father Bonetti suddenly took Count Cay's place as Don Bosco's traveling companion to Rome.⁴

Don Bosco departed, as we recounted, and it was then that Archbishop Gastaldi unexpectedly turned up at the Valdocco Oratory and at the Valsalice College to attend stage plays being then presented.⁵ We have already recounted the astonishment that his appearance caused and the various interpretations put on it. However, he delighted everyone when he agreed to admit several Salesians to minor orders, subdiaconate and diaconate during the Lenten rogation days. He really had no reason to refuse them, but everyone was so used to last-minute objections and refusals that both the ordinands and others were thrilled by his friendliness. Moreover, at the end of the ceremony he graciously returned the candles to the newly ordained. Better still, on spotting young

⁴See p. 38. [Editor]

⁵See p. 47. [Editor]

[Francis] Scaloni, later a provincial, returning the sacred vestments to the sacristy, the archbishop called him over and said, “You played the part of St. Pancratius. Excellent!” And he gave the lad a holy picture. In a word, the feeling was that His Excellency was finally about to make his peace with the Oratory.

Father Bonetti arrived at Rome on March 2, and on March 6 he filed a formal appeal to the Holy Father through the Sacred Congregation of the Council against Archbishop Gastaldi’s action. Don Bosco had already briefly reported the incident to Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in February. We do not know whether he had received a reply. However, it seems likely that Don Bosco’s letter may have prompted the notice to him that the matter was within the competence of the Sacred Congregation of the Council.

[No date]⁶

Your Eminence:

I regret having to bother you in the midst of your many cares for the worldwide Church. However, I feel it my duty to write this letter, because I see God’s greater glory and the welfare of souls being obstructed. This is now the third time that Turin’s archbishop has suspended Salesian priests from hearing confessions, ignoring due canonical procedure. Without giving me any advance warning, he suspended me by not renewing my faculties. Then he suspended Father John Lazzero, director of our motherhouse in Turin, without previously advising his superior or anyone else and without ever specifying the reason for his action. Recently he has suspended Father John Bonetti who does excellent work as director of a festive oratory in Chieri.

Both the local parish priest and the archbishop were of the opinion that Father Bonetti had sent them disrespectful letters. Even if the letters were truly disrespectful—which remains to be seen—matters could have been rectified immediately had he only informed the Salesian Congregation’s superior. Instead, he revoked Father Bonetti’s diocesan faculties for confession. It seems to me that the Church’s laws—reaffirmed successively by the competent Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars—require that such action be preceded by some admonitions by duly informing the superior and be for reasons concerning the sacrament of penance.

⁶Handwritten copy by Father Berto, Don Bosco’s secretary, who states that the letter was written in February 1879. [Author]

I therefore request Your Eminence to ask the archbishop of Turin to observe the Holy See's prescriptions for such measures and, before inflicting such serious ecclesiastical penalties, be fair enough to investigate whether the facts warrant it, making sure that as far as possible a public scandal be avoided, such as did occur in the case of Father Bonetti, who is still allowed to hear confessions. Such a zealous preacher as he is known to be in Chieri, he has had to absent himself from his confessional, thronged by crowds of penitents, and to leave the archdiocese so as not to become an object of public curiosity and gossip.

Having simply and respectfully stated my case, I will abide unreservedly by whatever Your Eminence may decree or advise in this matter.

Honored to pay my respects to you, in deepest gratitude I remain,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

That Don Bosco's praise of Father Bonetti was not undeserved is confirmed by a statement dated February 16, 1879, signed by five of Chieri's canons⁷ and stating that, during his six months' administration of St. Theresa's Festive Oratory, "he truly achieved much good, to the delight of all upright, God-fearing people, especially parents." This statement is further corroborated by Canon [Francis] Calosso in a letter dated February 12, which he wrote to Don Bosco on his own initiative to thank him enthusiastically for sending to Chieri every week "that excellent Salesian, ideally suited to instruct and correct the evil ways of so many uneducated, wayward girls." In the meantime Father Leveratto had temporarily taken over the direction of the festive oratory and was doing a fine job. "Still," wrote Canon [Matthew] Sona⁸ to Father Bonetti, "the Chieri oratory would remain unjustly defamed and the honor of the Salesian Congregation be made to suffer, should your reputation not be restored and you be free to exercise your sacred ministry."

It is standard procedure among the Sacred Roman Congregations to send a copy of a recourse to the ordinary of the priest-plaintiff for his information and opinion, and to the superior also if the priest is a religious. Father Bonetti's recourse prompted Archbishop

⁷Canons Cantore, Caselle, Mosso, Calosso and Savone. [Author]

⁸Chieri, March 6, 1879. [Author]

Gastaldi to have second thoughts on the ill-advised step he had taken, and he decided to straighten out the matter without sending a reply to Rome. Calling Father Rua, he welcomed him with cordiality and asked him to tell Father Bonetti that the archbishop was ready to restore his faculties for confession “when and where” he should wish. Yet, in the course of their conversation he added, “Father Bonetti is a good priest, but it’s not advisable that he return to Chieri. After all, he cannot get along with the local clergy. On my visit I summoned all the clergy; the vicar forane, the pastor and several canons, except Canon Sona, agreed that it would not be wise for Father Bonetti to return to Chieri.”⁹ At this point, as we infer from a footnote to Father Rua’s letter, Father Bonetti felt that either Father Rua had misunderstood the archbishop or the archbishop had mistaken the canons’ attitude. Be that as it may, Father Bonetti could not swallow the condition of never again setting foot in Chieri, for it was obviously a measure that savored of punishment and cast a cloud over him in the eyes of the faithful as if he were guilty of God knows what crime.

Tensions had reached this pitch when a very unpleasant incident occurred which recalls that well-known [Italian] proverb: “May God guard me from my friends; I can handle my enemies.” Father Bonetti had described briefly but frankly in a letter to a very close friend in Chieri what had happened up to March 24. Instead of keeping the letter confidential, this good friend came up with the unhappy idea of doing Father Bonetti a favor such as the latter could never have dreamed of. He immediately transcribed the letter, changing the singular “you” to the plural as though Father Bonetti were writing to the festive oratory’s girls, adding a few remarks of his own; then he had the letter read publicly to them at the oratory. When and on what day this happened we do not know, but certainly Father Leveratto was not forewarned nor did he have any inkling of it. After the reading, the letter was passed on from person to person, and copies were even made. It was a deplorable shame that only too late were the copies of that distorted version retrieved. We need not say that the news, spread about in that manner, filled the town with a flurry of gossip and added more fuel to the fire.

⁹Letter to Father Bonetti from Father Rua, Turin, March 22, 1879. [Author]

On returning from Rome, Father Bonetti was anxious to know the archbishop's mood, and he soon found out. The Turin chancery used to renew the diocesan priests' faculties for confession within a few weeks after Easter. Father [Anthony] Notario, who taught theology at the Oratory, went to the chancery to pick up the Salesians' certificates and at the same time to get the feeling of the chancery staff. Father [Louis] Deppert went along as a witness. No certificate was issued for Father Bonetti's faculties, and when Father Notario respectfully pointed this out, he was told that it was the archbishop's order. He therefore asked for a written statement of this to present to his superiors, but Father Chiaverotti, the secretary, hemmed and hawed. An argument followed which drew the attention of the chancellor, Canon [Thomas] Chiuso, whom Father Notario asked for an audience with the archbishop. The canon agreed and the archbishop received both Father Notario and Father Deppert. However, on learning the reason of their visit, he refused to grant faculties to Salesians residing outside the diocese, among them Father Bonetti, regardless of the fact that his permanent domicile was Turin. The Salesians residing in other dioceses retained faculties from the Turin chancery so as to hear confessions on the many occasions of their visits to the Oratory. Archbishop Gastaldi now refused both the faculties and the statement which Father Notario had requested. On questioning Father Notario about his identity and work and on being told that he was the new director of St. Theresa's Festive Oratory in Chieri the archbishop burst into virulent invectives and charges against Don Bosco and the Salesians. Father Notario listened with restraint, and when the cloudburst was over he bowed and turned to leave.

"What! So soon?" the archbishop asked.

"Do you expect me to stay here and listen to my father and superior being thus viciously maligned? I am in Your Excellency's home and so cannot speak up in his defense."

The archbishop calmed down, took Father Notario by the arm and prevailed upon him to sit down. Then he spoke in a calm and almost cordial tone. On rising to leave, Father Notario stated, "As regards the faculties, since the chancery refuses to give me an official statement [of refusal] I have a witness here who will testify for me to my superior."

Father Bonetti received his faculties on May 2, but still on condition that he not go to Chieri without the archbishop's express permission. Since he had already begun a series of Marian talks just two days before, he pleaded with Archbishop Gastaldi for permission to continue till the end so as not to arouse surprise by a sudden interruption and also in order to reap the fruits of his preaching in the sacrament of penance. His request was rejected. Hence, on May 4, he again appealed to the Holy Father against this odious measure.

It did not take long for the effect of this second appeal to become apparent. On May 26 the archbishop sent Don Bosco this note: "It is most urgent that I speak with you on a very serious matter. Please come to see me today. Even though I may be confined to bed, we can still discuss matters. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again after nearly eleven months since I blessed the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. Yours sincerely, etc." Don Bosco called on him that same evening. The "very serious matter" was of course Father Bonetti's appeal, of which a copy had been sent him by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The upshot was that the archbishop would restore Father Bonetti's faculties for confession throughout the archdiocese, leaving it to Don Bosco to decide whether Father Bonetti would return to Chieri or not.

Father Bonetti heaved a deep sigh of relief, and everyone was happy that the matter had been definitely settled. But their joy was very short-lived indeed. Very early the next morning another letter was delivered to Don Bosco from the archbishop, taking back all that had been said the previous evening. Its tenor was as follows:

My need to put an end without delay to the unrest in Chieri makes it imperative that Father Bonetti be kept away from there until I personally reinvestigate the whole matter on site and, once I have complete knowledge of the facts, come to a decision. Therefore, I deem it necessary that throughout that time this priest not exercise the ministry of confessor in Chieri. I consequently revoke Father Bonetti's faculties of hearing confessions until my investigation is completed. My present condition of health makes it impossible to set a definite time. This is what I had told Father Rua at the beginning of this month, and what I feel I must tell you on rethinking our discussion of yesterday evening.

Disappointed and deeply afflicted, Father Bonetti immediately sent this new appeal to the Holy Father:

Prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I, Father John Bonetti of the Salesian Congregation, humbly inform you of my appeals to Your Holiness dated March 6 and May 4 for the revocation of a suspension inflicted upon me by the archbishop of Turin, which, in my opinion, is in conflict with repeated decisions of the Apostolic See. Pursuant to the latter appeal, yesterday, May 26, the archbishop sent for Father John Bosco, superior general of the Salesian Congregation, and informed me through him that he was revoking the suspension and was restoring my faculties for hearing confessions unconditionally in the archdiocese. I was overjoyed and most grateful to Your Holiness. However, this very morning, May 27, hardly twelve hours later, another letter comes in from the archbishop, in which he informs my superior that the suspension is still in effect and yesterday's revocation must be considered as never having been made. No one can adequately describe the painful surprise that both my superior and I experienced on receiving this unexpected news. Hence, for the third time I humbly appeal to Your Holiness and respectfully but earnestly beg you kindly to use your supreme authority and free me from a situation which is distressing to me and to the Salesian Congregation and most harmful to souls, impeding God's greater glory and causing scandal and real unhappiness among the faithful.

The unending series of such conflicts kept giving Don Bosco new reasons why it was incontestably necessary for the Salesian Congregation to be granted full autonomy through the concession of privileges. Hence he sent a petition to Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, the Salesian cardinal-protector, requesting a renewal of some privileges which had already been granted him temporarily by Pius IX.¹⁰

Turin, June 13, 1879

Your Eminence:

As it is my earnest desire that you truly understand the humble Salesian Congregation's affairs, let me briefly acquaint you with the grave troubles which our motherhouse in Turin had to put up with because of our archbishop.

¹⁰These were the privileges granted by Pius IX on April 21, 1876, and which, together with several others, had been revoked after his death. See Vol. XIII, pp. 432ff. [Author]

The opposition he has raised has always coincided with that of government and school officials. Hence Your Eminence will readily understand how exhausting and painful it has been to start, uphold and strengthen a new Congregation which has no temporal support and financial means. Yet we have never lacked the counsel, guidance and support of the Supreme Pontiff, who has always treated us with the kindness of a loving father.

Your Eminence may ask why we did not appeal to the Holy See. We have done so on several occasions, but our lack of a cardinal-protector always rendered those appeals of mine fruitless.

All the originals of the correspondence referred to in this letter are on file in the archives of our Congregation.

A favor which is most pressing at this moment is the granting of privileges, such as those possessed by the Passionists, Redemptorists and Oblates of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which are generally enjoyed by all approved clerical congregations. Since this may pose serious problems, I ask that at least three privileges which we have enjoyed over a period of three years be renewed, since their delayed renewal has caused us serious hardship and brought us grave harm.

I think it opportune to enclose a copy of the petition which in the past we have sent to the then Archbishop Jacobini, so that, with Your Eminence's previous consent, he would push our cause through the Sacred Congregation of the Council.

We pray the Lord to keep Your Eminence in good health for the good of the Church and in order that you may help us regularize the status of the Salesian Society in the eyes of the Church, thus enabling it to withstand the attacks to which it is presently being subjected.

We all respectfully request your blessing. I am honored to pay my respects to you and remain,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The attached memorandum was "a handwritten report of Archbishop Gastaldi's doings against the Salesian Congregation taken from his own letters."¹¹ They were meant to show the consequences of not having privileges.

It took His Eminence quite some time to review all the items in

¹¹Marginal note by Father Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, on a copy of the letter sent to Cardinal Nina. He had himself written this "report," as he was in the habit of doing with every document that was to be presented to ecclesiastical or civil authorities. [Author]

the report, and so he expressly delayed his answer. As for the privileges to be renewed, he asked Don Bosco to send him the text of the original concession.¹² Don Bosco sent a copy of the rescripts to the cardinal, who recommended that the Holy Father renew them, but the latter was not disposed to grant the favor. The reason was that Don Bosco had addressed his petition to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, but competency in this matter belonged to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and the latter had already reported negatively to the Pope. Hence the good offices of the cardinal-protector came too late and were ineffective. His Eminence, however, commented: "This should not cause you to fear that the Holy Father has little regard for your well-meriting Congregation; it only shows that for the time being the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars thinks it inopportune to freely bestow further privileges." He concluded: "As for the rest, be assured that I shall always gladly favor to the best of my ability a Congregation which dedicates itself so earnestly to the welfare of souls and for which I have been appointed protector."¹³

Don Bosco did not give up his attempt. Having let the summer vacation go by, he tried another way of obtaining these privileges. Since experience told him that the prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was rather unfavorable to him, he appealed to the newly created Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda¹⁴ to use his influence with Cardinal Nina to have his application processed by the Congregation of the Council. The cardinal's most heartwarming response, if nothing else, served to mitigate somewhat the many bitter frustrations which afflicted him in those days, as we have seen in the previous chapters. "I already told you orally, and repeat in writing," Cardinal Alimonda wrote, "that whenever possible, within my competency, the Salesian Congregation, your beloved spiritual child, may always rely on me with assurance. Hence I am presently ready to serve you [. . .] I shall go to the Holy Father and do my very best [. . .] My dear Father John, God knows how much

¹²Letter, Rome, June 19, 1879. [Author]

¹³Letter, Rome, June 26, 1879. [Author]

¹⁴Born in Genoa in 1818, he was ordained a priest in 1843. In 1877 he was appointed bishop of Albenga and in 1879 he was created cardinal; lastly in 1883 he became archbishop of Turin till his death in 1891. Scholarly and eloquent, he wrote extensively on spiritual matters. As archbishop of Turin he was a great blessing for Don Bosco. [Editor]

I love and respect you. It is an honor for me and a comfort to be counted among your servants.”¹⁵

He wrote again after he spoke with the Pope: “I can assure you that the Pontiff is kindly disposed to the Salesians and appreciates the priceless services they render the Church, but he cannot back up your request to the competent Sacred Congregation, as you will understand.” Then, having lengthily conferred with Cardinal Nina on the advisability of appealing to the Congregation of the Council, he wrote: “The cardinal does not think it wise to switch your petition from the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to that of the Council; he thinks that both the delay in this matter and the difficulty of putting the Salesians on a par with other congregations, which are older and also underwent the very same problems at their beginning, do not arise from any hostile intent against the Salesian Congregation, but just from its recent origin. At any rate, he did accept your petition personally and will bring it up with the Holy Father. He seems to me quite ready to direct that your case be aired and decided as soon as the Sacred Congregations resume their work. I warmly insisted and shall continue to insist that at least the two privileges previously granted be confirmed. Certain it is that my influence means little in matters belonging to a Sacred Congregation of which I am not a member, especially since I am the last one to be admitted to the college of cardinals. Yet, what little I can do, I’ll do with all my heart.”¹⁶ Though the proceedings came to a standstill, it was to Don Bosco’s advantage to keep alive issues which were so close to his heart and thus foster and speed their attainment.

Let us now return to the matter of this chapter. Suspension is a most humiliating punishment for a priest, especially when, his guilt being in no way public, there is ample room for even worse interpretations. It is therefore very understandable that Father Bonetti could hardly wait to rid himself of that disgrace. After all those appeals, there was not one glimmer of hope. On July 16 he unburdened himself to Archbishop Verga, secretary of the Congregation of the Council:

¹⁵Letter, Rome, October 7, 1879. [Author]

¹⁶Letter, Rome, October 21, 1879. [Author]

For six months I have been weighed down by the burden of a suspension enjoined upon me by the archbishop of Turin even though it is judged to conflict with decrees repeatedly issued by the Holy See and to hinder God's greater glory. During this time I submitted three appeals to the Holy Father through your Sacred Congregation, but so far none has been brought up for deliberation and I still cannot freely exercise my priestly ministry, to the grave scandal of many poor souls. Hence, with a heavy yet trusting heart I appeal to your well-known kindness and ask you kindly to push for a definitive decision in this matter and thus free my soul from such a painful state and bring this evil situation to an end. I write this letter to Your Eminence with the consent of my revered superior, Father John Bosco, and in his name I beg you, for the love of Jesus Christ, of Mary, Help of Christians and of St. Francis de Sales, our dear patron saint, to be so good as to send me a reply so that he and I may know how we stand.

The help he sought did not come because the Sacred Congregation was awaiting a reply from the archbishop of Turin to make its decision, and the archbishop was not replying. Father Bonetti, therefore, thought up a new approach. On July 27 he sought the advice of Attorney Leonori. He wrote:

My censure has aroused a grave suspicion that I might be guilty of indecent conduct, especially since I was assigned to a girls' institute. These days we are being battered by the sword of the government¹⁷ and the cross of the archbishop's authority, and we are being slandered as unworthy priests and betrayers of souls. It is a war too unjust and too cruel, and I cannot see how the Holy See can any longer, on its part, allow such a disgraceful situation to continue when it arouses the indignation of upright people. If I am believed to be at fault I should be told, and if I fail to prove my innocence I do not refuse to die. But if I am not guilty, why am I forced to undergo such protracted and undeserved punishment which destroys my good name and that of my Congregation and causes such serious scandal to the faithful?

He intended to take legal action and asked the attorney to act on his behalf. While the attorney admitted that he preferred an out-of-court decision and would strive for it, he stated that he was nonetheless ready to defend him.¹⁸

¹⁷An allusion to the closing of the Oratory secondary school. [Author]

¹⁸Letter to Father Bonetti, Rome, July 31, 1879. [Author]

Don Bosco's forbearance checked Father Bonetti's impatience, and so the latter did not precipitate matters. However, he again insisted with Archbishop Verga on August 20:

... Being refused a hearing by Archbishop Gastaldi, I have several times, with my superior's permission, appealed to the Holy Father through the Sacred Congregation of the Council, which repeatedly has asked the archbishop for information and his opinion on the matter, but he neither replies nor revokes my suspension. In the meantime, I am looked upon as a priest in disgrace by my confreres, by the festive oratory I once used to direct, by the people I have counseled, in Chieri, my own home town and the entire archdiocese. The vicious rumors keep becoming more and more credible since it is common knowledge that I have appealed to Rome and after seven months have gotten nowhere.

He was, in a word, putting himself into the hands of Archbishop Verga and through him into those of the Holy Father, hoping for a reassuring answer which would put an end to his affliction.

August came to an end, September went by, and then it was mid-October, and still nothing had happened, despite the anxious efforts of Archbishop Verga and Attorney Leonori. Father Bonetti tried again to obtain a hearing with the archbishop on October 15, but while others were granted an audience, he was refused. *There is no hope to solve this problem here, he thought. Rome must intervene. I'll try another peaceful solution. Since the archbishop refuses to give me back faculties and refuses even to answer the Sacred Congregation's repeated letters, can I not obtain faculties from Rome to resume my priestly ministry until he has either sent his reply or has cleared up the situation in some way?*¹⁹ Hoping that the Holy Father would take the matter into his own cognizance, he drew up a fourth appeal, attaching to it the statements of the five Chieri canons and a testimonial letter from Don Bosco, which read as follows:

Turin, October 28, 1879

Father John Bosco, Superior of the Pious Salesian Society, certifies that Father John Bonetti, a member of this Congregation, has always led a

¹⁹Letter to Attorney Leonori, October 24, 1879. [Author]

virtuous and exemplary life as befits a good religious. He has distinguished himself in the education of youth by his various writings and by directing the junior seminary at Borgo San Martino, in the diocese of Casale, for a period of twelve years. He has also been a successful preacher for spiritual retreats, missions, triduum, novenas, and so on.

As director of the St. Theresa Festive Oratory in Chieri, he has zealously labored at no small sacrifice in catechizing, hearing confessions and instructing girls of poor families, drawing more than four hundred into the festive oratory through the help, supervision and management of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. I affirm the above so that Father Bonetti may put it to good use whenever necessary.

Father John Bosco

Father Bonetti sent the appeal to Cardinal Nina and asked him to use his influence in presenting it to the Holy Father, adding:

This matter should have been put into Your Eminence's care from the very beginning, but our Congregation had not yet been honored by your appointment as our cardinal-protector, and so we tried other ways. I think that this is the reason why everything is at a standstill. I wish to point out that in my eagerness to settle this affair without bothering the Holy See, several times, with my superior's permission, I requested an audience with the archbishop of Turin, but he refused each time.²⁰

Father Bonetti sent the appeal to Cardinal Nina through Attorney Leonori, asking him to deliver it and to do all he could to have the whole question resolved before the start of the novena of the Immaculate Conception, which was the principal feast day of the St. Theresa Festive Oratory. But his fourth appeal never got to the Holy Father because Archbishop Verga and Attorney Leonori judged it wiser to hold it up. It was going to take a great deal of time to clear up this matter.

The year went by without a trace of a solution appearing anywhere. Father Bonetti grieved more and more so that he had to give vent to bitter remarks in his letters.

Let me assure you that I am suffering intensely—he wrote to Attorney Leonori.²¹ I cannot for the life of me understand how within almost an

²⁰Letter, October 24, 1879. [Author]

²¹Letter, Turin, January 2, 1880. [Author]

entire year the Sacred Congregation of the Council has not been able to get Archbishop Gastaldi to state his reasons for acting contrary to the prescriptions of the Holy See to the harm of a helpless religious priest or order him to revoke my suspension so that I may again hear confessions freely as before and thus restore my reputation, so necessary to a priest. I thank God that He has given me from my childhood a lofty esteem and warmest love for the Holy See and all that appertains to it. Otherwise, I should be in serious danger today, because, my distressful situation being public knowledge, there is no lack of malcontents who would be only too ready to advise and push me to scandalous action. However, with God's help, I shall never cause the slightest scandal, even were I to die under censure, reputed to be an unworthy religious. To avoid heaping any unpleasantness upon our Holy Father and Don Bosco, I shall keep my suffering to myself, satisfied that my innocence will be revealed on judgment day. Still, I can't help wishing that I were relieved of this extended punishment, not only so that I might work freely in the Church under my superior's direction, but also so that I might preserve the good name of the Salesian Congregation, to which I belong, and that of my family which has been reviled and disgraced by this most unjust punishment.

Father [Francis] Dalmazzo, newly-appointed procurator of the Salesian Congregation in Rome, was also hard at work, doing all he could for Father Bonetti, but everywhere he ran up against arguments of prudence cautioning him to let time take its course.²² At last, on March 23, he was able to write to Father Bonetti: "Today the Sacred Congregation of the Council is sending a real ultimatum [to Archbishop Gastaldi], perhaps with this morning's courier." It was not until June 28 that Archbishop Gastaldi replied to the secretary of the said Congregation, only to assert that it was not a matter of punishment, but only of a measure dictated by prudence. We may well appreciate the disappointment that this evasion caused Father Bonetti, but there was nothing he could do except to let the summer go by and await the fall.

But well into the fall two incidents further complicated matters, creating a pretext for two more charges. In early November 1880, a Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians died at Chieri. No sooner was the good sister interred than charges of a serious violation of parish rights and canonical procedure went flying to the chancery.

²²Letter of Father Dalmazzo to Father Bonetti, Rome, March 20, 1880. [Author]

Canon [Emmanuel] Colomiatti, the chancery prosecutor, without waiting for further details, summoned Father Rua immediately for a hearing, giving him no hint of what it was all about. These were the charges: two Salesian priests had given the dying sister the last rites, taking Viaticum from the convent chapel and borrowing the holy oils from the Jesuit house; then, at the funeral, they had accompanied the deceased through the city streets to the cemetery. Taking that statement to be the truth, Father Rua offered the best explanation he could, excusing the two priests as being "rather inexperienced." Then he wrote to the archbishop, putting this same explanation in writing. He closed as follows: "I humbly ask Your Excellency's pardon for these two priests. If you feel I should, I am ready to apologize to the local parish priest as well. If any reimbursement is required for this violation of parish rights, at a simple hint from you we shall do all that is needed."²³

But imagine his astonishment when he later learned what had really occurred! It was not two Salesian priests who had administered the last rites to the dying sister, but Canon Matthew Sona of Chieri. Nor had the two Salesians accompanied the bier to the cemetery. After the funeral Mass the deceased was escorted to the cemetery in pauper's style by a cortege of teenage girls. The fact that the accusation had not been checked as to its truthfulness served the archbishop quite well in presenting this distortion of truth as proof that the Salesians never missed a chance to "offend him and cause him displeasure."²⁴

The second incident had to do with the issue itself, rather than Chieri. Tired of being left in suspense for twenty-two months, Father Bonetti, on November 17, 1880, sent directly to the Pope his appeal of October 24, 1879, which Archbishop Verga had held up. In it he declared that he was ready in advance to accept most reverently whatever His Holiness would decide in his regard. The effect was swift. Five days later, Cardinal Caterini, prefect of the Congregation of the Council, instructed its secretary, Archbishop Verga, to notify Father Bonetti that his appeal would be considered in a full session of the eminent cardinals within one month. Attorney Leonori, instructed to notify both parties to the dispute of

²³Letter, November 7, 1880. [Author]

²⁴Letter to the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, Turin, December 5, 1880. [Author]

the coming meeting, wrote to Don Bosco and enclosed a letter to the archbishop with the request that he kindly deliver it without delay.²⁵

Don Bosco received it while he was at the new novitiate in San Benigno and immediately forwarded the letter addressed to the archbishop, bearing the Sacred Congregation's seal, to the Oratory with instructions that it be delivered without delay. Father Deppert was entrusted with this task, and on December 3 he brought it to the archbishop's residence. Catching sight of the archbishop, he asked to speak with him, but was denied. He then called on the chancellor, Canon Chiuso, stating that he had a letter from Rome for the archbishop and politely requesting a receipt certifying delivery. The chancellor indignantly turned him down. Father Deppert then went to the chancellor's secretary, Father Corno, who treated him likewise. He pointed out that the letter was not from Don Bosco but from a Roman Congregation whose seal it bore; he also reminded him that, just a few months before, the archbishop had sent a messenger to deliver a similar letter from the Congregation of Rites to Don Bosco, and his messenger had requested and obtained a written receipt. Father Deppert might well have spoken to a stone wall. Fearing possible repercussions, he decided not to deliver the letter. Truly, a request for a receipt is not only a simple matter, but normal procedure.

The next day Father Deppert returned to the chancery with another Salesian and asked to deliver the letter personally to the archbishop. He was refused. He left it with the secretary, telling him, "I hope this letter reaches the archbishop. If it does not, my confrere can witness that I performed my duty." The archbishop held the letter for twenty-four hours and then returned it to Don Bosco, who, after seeking advice from Rome, sent it back to the archbishop with a courtesy note. As he had to go to Borgo San Martino for the belated patronal feast of St. Charles, he wrote as follows:

Turin, December 13, 1880

Your Excellency:

I must leave Turin for a few days, but before I do, I wish to expedite the

²⁵Letter from Attorney Leonori to Don Bosco, November 29, 1880. [Author]

distasteful case concerning Father Bonetti. Neither he nor I have any further comment to add to what we have already stated to the Sacred Congregation of the Council. The enclosed letter of that Congregation was sent in a packet to me for delivery to Your Excellency, and this I am now doing.

Assuring you that it has ever been a pleasure to do Your Excellency any service, I am honored to remain,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Father Deppert delivered the letter but, as it bore Don Bosco's return address, he did not ask for a receipt. The archbishop read Don Bosco's note and then mailed it back to him with the Sacred Congregation's letter without a single word of explanation.²⁶

But he did offer an explanation to the members of the Congregation of the Council. After giving his version of the entire incident, he added, "I have been deeply humiliated and hurt by the way I have been treated, especially in view of so many crosses with which I must daily cope. I most earnestly beg this Sacred Congregation to have the goodness not to send me any more letters through this priest who, forgetting my zealous and tireless cooperation—not disjointed from financial assistance—in putting his Congregation on a solid footing between 1848 and 1867, now keeps persecuting me and never neglects an opportunity to discredit and aggravate me."²⁷ However, Rome saw this just as being his way of delaying a decision which inevitably had to be taken and abided by.²⁸

There are three sharply distinct phases in this conflict. There was first the period of recrimination of Chieri's clergy against St. Theresa's Festive Oratory, preceding the censure of suspension. The second phase, that of the appeals from Turin to the Holy See, ran from February 12, 1879, to November 17, 1880. The third will stretch out through the entire period when the issue rested with the Sacred Congregation of the Council. During the early part of the second phase, soon after Father Bonetti's suspension, an anonymous pamphlet (the author claimed to be a family man of

²⁶Letter from Father Deppert to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, December 18, 1880. [Author]

²⁷Letter, December 5, 1880. [Author]

²⁸Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, December 21, 1880. [Author]

Chieri) was printed by the Bruno Press of Turin, entitled: *L'Arcivescovo di Torino, Don Bosco e Don Oddenino ossia Fatti buffi, seri e dolorosi raccontati da un Chierese* [The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino, or Some Comic, Serious and Sorrowful Events Narrated by a Resident of Chieri]. The anonymous writer assumed a heavy-handed defense of Father Bonetti, fiercely attacking Archbishop Gastaldi and the rector of Chieri's cathedral. The Salesian superior chapter learned of this publication on May 29 during their meeting. Immediately they most forcefully protested the public and disgraceful mockery of the archbishop's authority. In reality, the pamphlet was a meager thing, meant to vex rather than to convince, and would never have been cited were it not for the repercussions it caused during the legal proceedings. Nevertheless the vicar forane, Father Lione, and the cathedral rector, Father Oddenino, blamed Father Bonetti as the author, formally submitting their charge against him to the archbishop.²⁹ Such polemical expedients are deplorable in themselves and result only in poisoning the whole issue irredeemably, as we shall soon have occasion to see.

²⁹Their respective letters to the archbishop, Chieri, December 9 and 13, 1880. [Author]

CHAPTER 10

Conversion of a Young Jewess

THERE is little else to add about the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians that is strictly connected with Don Bosco's biography for the rest of this year [1879], except for an incident in which the underhanded complicity of evil-minded persons implicated the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Mother Mazzarello, while accompanying the ten sisters who were leaving for South America, met Don Bosco at Sampierdarena, and together they made plans to put on a firm footing once and for all the old motherhouse, now almost deserted, and the new one which was now practically full. On January 3 [1880] Mother Mazzarello left for Mornese while Don Bosco went on to Alassio on his way to France.

At Alassio Don Bosco assembled all the sisters and, before discussing anything else, invited them, starting with their superior, to tell him then and there about their meals, nightly rest, and other needs. Then, after urging fidelity to their rules, he added, "As for work, yes, go ahead and work, but don't overdo it. Don't shorten your life by privations or excessive toil or depression or such other nuisances." He saw them again, but not on a stopover, on his return from France, when he held the directors' conference in their convent. He then received the sisters individually and, with fatherly concern, set up a schedule that would allow time for rest and relaxation in their garden, and for whatever else would keep them happy and content. Once, while escorting a parish priest through the dining room, he saw Sister Succetti tidying up the room. "Oh, here is Martha!" he exclaimed. "Ah, Martha, Martha!" He alluded to the Gospel in such a tone as to make a deep impression on the sister's mind and ever afterward help her to keep recollected in God while doing her routine chores.

The transfer of the sisters' motherhouse from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato took place at the beginning of February. Leaving that haven of fond memories was a painful sacrifice for Mother Mazzarello. Only obedience could tear her away from the place where she had learned to love and serve the Lord, and which she had been certain she would never leave until the moment came for her to exchange earth for heaven.

There were only three new foundations in 1879: one at Cascinetta near Ivrea and two in South America—at San Carlos School in Almagro [a suburb of Buenos Aires] and at Las Piedras in Uruguay. Concerning new foundations, Don Bosco gave Mother Mazzarello this norm: “For the moment, you may accept kindergartens, but always with the condition that you open also a festive oratory and a dressmaking shop for girls of the working classes.”

As regards Las Piedras, we have a letter showing us how closely attuned Mother Mazzarello was with Don Bosco's ideas of dealing with one's subjects. The sisters' small community, formed as well as possible with the available personnel, was somewhat ill at ease, and so Mother Mazzarello wrote to the local superior:¹

I am sorry that our new house at Las Piedras is not doing very well. Sister Joan is too young and not steady enough yet to be acting superior. But have no fear. Be convinced that shortcomings will always be there, and so we must correct and remedy all we can, but calmly, leaving the rest in God's hands. Then, too, we are not to be too concerned about trifles. Too often we fret over minor things and overlook big ones. By this I don't at all mean that you should ignore little faults. Always correct and admonish, but in your heart be understanding and kind with all the sisters. We must study their natural inclinations and put them to good use; we must win their trust. Be patient with Sister Victoria; train her gradually in the spirit of our Congregation. She has been too short a time at Mornese to have absorbed it. I believe that if you handle her carefully, she will do well. So too with the others. They all have their faults; we must admonish them charitably, but we cannot expect them to be without faults or to correct them overnight. That is not possible. It can be achieved little by little by prayer, patience and watchfulness. Put your trust in Jesus, confide all your worries to His heart, let Him take over, and He will straighten

¹Letter to Sister Angelina Vallese, Nizza, July 22, 1879. [Author]

everything out. Be always cheerful and optimistic. When you do not know what to do, ask Sister Magdalene,² do whatever she tells you, and put aside all worries. Besides, you have a kind director, so you need not be anxious. Be sure to obey him. You tell me that you have a lot of work, and I rejoice, because work begets virtue. When we are busy, all whims vanish and we are happy. While I encourage you to work, and to work only to please Jesus, not for earthly motives, I also urge you to take care of your health. I would like each of you to instill into all hearts love of sacrifice, self-contempt and detachment from one's own will. We became sisters in order to be assured of paradise, but sacrifices must be made to earn it. Let us bear our cross bravely, and one day we will all be happy.

Mother General's letter had probably just arrived when Father Costamagna³ wrote to Don Bosco after preaching a mission at Las Piedras:

I could never have believed that the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians could be so helpful on a mission. I can safely say that we could never have accomplished so much good among the women and girls without the sisters' help. Crowds of women joined the catechism classes of the girls and hung on every word of the sisters, just as they had done with the preacher. Attendance at the mission grew day by day, and during the last four days the vast church was packed. We sent for Father Rizzo and other priests from Montevideo, and all heard confessions from morning to very late at night. Every now and then a young man or woman—eighteen, twenty or older—would come. They had never been to confession before and knew nothing at all of the elements of our faith. How could we have gotten anywhere without the catechists' help. While we sat enclosed in the confessional, the clerics Rota, Chiara and Baccigalupi and four sisters were continually instructing the young penitents but a few steps away and sending them to us so well prepared that many of them confessed their sins in tears.⁴

Don Bosco went to Nizza twice. His first visit was on the feast of the Assumption, at the close of the sisters' spiritual retreat, when religious profession was made. The keepsakes he gave them centered on prayer, work, humility, seclusion, and sacrifice solely for God and for souls and in imitation of our heavenly Mother so as

²Sister Magdalene Martini, provincial. *See* Vol. XIII, pp. 155, 611. [Editor]

³*See* Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁴Letter, Buenos Aires, August 19, 1879. [Author]

to share more abundantly Her heavenly glory. He returned on August 21 for the ladies' retreat. The chronicle records one of his "Good Nights."

There are wealthy, devout, generous people who leave a portion of their wealth after death to works of mercy. This is a good and holy thing. But remember that the Gospel does not say, "Give what is over and above your needs to the poor when you die," but rather, "Give what you don't need to the poor." This is quite different.

He also spoke separately to the superiors and the sisters. To the superiors he made the recommendation: "You have ample grounds here and no close neighbors. Give the young sisters opportunities to exercise with some light work in the garden and vineyard. It will do them good." His fatherly advice to the whole community was: "Write to your parents. Don't let them worry by a prolonged silence. This hurts both you and them and discourages many vocations. If your families hear from you often, they will be glad that they offered you to Our Lord. They will benefit spiritually from your words and pass your letters on to friends and acquaintances, who will more gladly let their daughters become sisters."

He tells of this retreat in a letter to Countess [Gabrielle] Corsi. Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio, who is mentioned in the letter, had given the retreat. "La Bruna," as the farmhouse which had been bequeathed to the sisters was called, stood atop the little hill where they later built their novitiate.

Nizza, August 27, 1879

My dear, kind Mamma:

I write from the shrine of Our Lady of Grace, where some one hundred women made an excellent spiritual retreat. All the sisters and their pupils took off for "La Bruna." The devotion, piety and happiness which shone from everyone defies description. We missed our Mamma Corsi, but we talked a great deal about you and prayed for you. What's more, I said Mass for your intentions on one day, and the retreatants offered their Holy Communion and special prayers that God would grant you and your family good health, and shield your little children from the illnesses plaguing this area. But you must really try to come sometime, for I am sure you will love it. Please ask Count Caesar and Countess Mary to forget about coming to Nizza this year. The diphtheria epidemic has abated, but

some cases linger here and there. Smallpox, too, is becoming more and more alarming, claiming six victims only last week. As of now there are twenty-five cases of smallpox, twelve of them in St. Hippolytus' parish. Last Sunday and Monday the bishop came to administer confirmation in St. John's Church. To avoid problems with the health authorities he spent two hours only in each of two churches. In the evening a new preacher substituted for Monsignor Belasio. Guess who? Don Bosco himself. Father Cagliero and Father Lemoyne are here too, both exhausted. Tomorrow they start a second retreat for the sisters.

I don't know whether I shall have time to see grandmother because I am deluged with work. All ask to be remembered to you—the sisters and preachers, Mr. Rosaligno who is also with us, and everyone. God bless you and your family. Please pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. This evening I leave for Turin.

The problems afflicting Chieri, which caused all the neighboring sisters to grieve in silence, did not affect the girls' attendance at St. Theresa's Festive Oratory, nor did it weaken the enthusiasm of the sisters who looked after them under the expert direction of Father Anthony Notario, whom Don Bosco had sent to substitute for Father Bonetti during the latter's suspension. The Sunday school contributed a tone of its own to the festive oratory. Hundreds of girls and young women were working in Chieri's textile mills; many of them, unable to attend elementary school, were illiterate—a serious drawback even in those days. Hoping to change this situation, Don Bosco arranged for the sisters to conduct free classes on Sundays between ten and twelve noon. Over a hundred girls, nine to fifteen, and some forty older girls divided into three groups according to age and learning attended these classes.⁵ Had anyone entered the oratory on a Sunday and seen the girls' fervent piety and their wide range of scholastic and recreational activities under the nuns' supervision, it would immediately have become clear to him why the enemy of good fought so fiercely against them.

Also at Lu, the local petty politicians scowled at the sisters. A dispatch to a Turin newspaper in February⁶ vehemently remonstrated

⁵See *Bollettino Salesiano*, January 1879. [Author]

⁶*La Nuova Torino*, March 7, 1879. [Author]

that "such a place as Lu" should witness such extreme tolerance in the "brazen partnership between a notorious reactionary like Don Bosco and a pro-clerical mayor." It denounced to the world at large "a state of affairs fatal to the social progress of this outstanding village of Monferrato." All this evil, it claimed, stemmed from the fact that Don Bosco, "thanks to the overwhelming blindness of those who should have taken preventive measures," had opened a convent there, "and through those sisters" strove to achieve "complete control" [of the village]. This gave the "Bosconians" license to preach "bigotry, a virus which inevitably will destroy domestic and social peace." The parish priest too was blasted because, while he "made a show of liberalism," he took part in some shadowy "Jesuitical gatherings with the mayor and his assessors." Finally, the dispatch appealed to both the people of Lu and to the local civil authorities who were "responsible for such a deplorable situation to avail themselves of the "formidable weapon" of the ballot in future elections to rid themselves of such individuals. But the populace and the authorities turned a deaf ear to those outcries—so deaf in fact, that the beneficial work of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Lu has never known interruption to this present day [1933].

On June 1 a more serious attack threatened the peace of the motherhouse. The community was in a festive mood because the postulants were about to receive the religious habit, blessed by Father Cagliero. Around 11:30 that Sunday morning, after the solemn high Mass, Father [Stephen] Chicco, the director, was unexpectedly called to the waiting room to face the underprefect of Acqui and the vice-mayor of Nizza. The government official asked Father Chicco whether it was true that a group of spinsters were to be vested with the religious habit. His affirmative answer prompted the question whether the young women were acting freely, under no enticement or pressure. We may well imagine how Father Chicco, partly stunned and half suspicious, reassured them as to their freedom. By no means satisfied with his answer, the underprefect demanded to see the young women and question them.

At this point, Father Cagliero, who was present but had till then kept silent, intervened as director general of the sisters. Had the underprefect come as an official or as a friend? If he was conducting a formal investigation, he had better produce a warrant. A long

argument followed during which Father Cagliero kept demanding to know by what authority an underprefect could investigate a private institution concerning unmarried women who wished to become nuns. After all, the convent was a private residence, the young women were legally free by age, and those who were not had their parents' permission. So, he firmly told the official, he was not about to yield except under threat of force, and then in the presence of witnesses and with a formal, written protest against this violation of privacy. However, he added, though he would never tolerate the underprefect's investigation as a government official, he was ready to satisfy his every wish if he acted as a friend. The vice-mayor fretted and fumed, harshly inveighing against the laws which had not adequately provided for the suppression of religious institutes. The underprefect, bidding him to keep silent, realized that he had taken a wrong tack and stated that he had come as a private citizen. "I am Germaine Magliani," he said. "Fine," Father Cagliero exclaimed. "Now I will fetch Mary Terzano, our only minor."

A new problem arose. Magliani wanted to interview her privately for greater freedom, but Father Cagliero pointed out very respectfully that since her father was not present, he was taking his place for propriety, if for no other reason. The young postulant came and, as a pure formality, the underprefect asked her very brief questions to which she gave suitable replies. After she left, the underprefect admitted that he had come especially for her, so that he might have grounds for action against her father, who, it was rumored, had induced her to take the veil for financial reasons. These allegations, however, were no more than spiteful rumors begun by evil-minded people. Father Cagliero then took the underprefect through the dining room, where the sisters were seated at table, and the dormitories. The official expressed his deep satisfaction and with extreme courtesy took leave of Father Cagliero, who reciprocated just as cordially, explaining that his former resistance was required by his duty.

The visitor then strode to the coach outside the gate, entered it and in a huff ordered the coachman to speed off, not without first a look of scorn on a group of men who had been on the watch for quite a different outcome. Among them was the district attorney of Acqui, a few carabinieri, and several townsmen. Once they realized that nothing was going to happen, they broke up disappointedly,

following the road so speedily taken by the underprefect. The vice-mayor's hostile attitude clearly showed the motive of that visit, but the whole truth came out shortly afterward. The local anticlericals, annoyed by the presence of so many nuns, and even more at the ease with which they won followers, had hatched their little plot in the hope of foiling the sisters' plans and gradually forcing the unwelcome newcomers out. But this time all they got was derision and failure because, apart from the expense of staging the show, they had to swallow the ridicule of most of the townsfolk.

However, another full-fledged storm was in the offing in Nizza. Whether or not this hostility had been coordinated, the coincidence of time, place and target is certainly striking. On that same June 1, the newspaper which had published the dispatch from Lu regaled its readers with an anticlerical article coming in from Nizza itself.⁷ Under the sensational title, "Clerical Infamies," the short article gave a further proof of the close watch that the anticlericals kept on Don Bosco and of the schemes they cooked up to destroy him. The article ran as follows:

We know that politicians are busily trying to unravel the murky clerical plot which suddenly drew a lovely maiden of Nizza Monferrato to leave her parents, enter the convent and ship out to Turin. On fleeing her home, she left a letter for her parents, declaring that she would never give up her faith—she is Jewish—and that she would never in any way sully her family honor. One of her relatives has just arrived in Turin to ask city officials to help find out where the girl is being held and wrest her from the clutches of this black-garbed gang. Throughout this whole affair the name of a notorious black-garbed man of our city keeps coming up, and this makes us suspect that the whole escapade can be traced to the crooked schemes of the accomplices of this influential reactionary agitator. And here we are, living in the nineteenth century when cloistered orders are abolished by law! Once this plot has been fully disclosed, we shall duly inform our readers.

However, this boastful newspaper had no chance to shed light on the matter nor to keep its readers informed, for it died that same day. Bees, too, die when they sting!

Let us first retrace what precisely had happened. Some very

⁷*La Nuova Torino*, N. 152, June 1, 1879. [Author]

wealthy Jews of Alessandria had forced a woman relative of theirs to marry a fairly rich shoe store owner of Nizza so as to keep her from doing as she wished and converting to Christianity. Twenty-three years later the pious desire of this woman became the firm resolve of her daughter, Anita Bedarída, who then entered the limelight for a brief moment. For two years she had been secretly yearning to be baptized, and when the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians came to Nizza, her desire gradually led her to them. She had originally been introduced to the sisters' festive oratory by friends, but thereafter she continued to visit the sisters on her own, sharing her hopes with them. The memory of her mother, under whose pillow her relatives had found a catechism immediately after her death, drove her to take a decisive step. Realizing that if she stayed at home she would never go through with her purpose, she planned to run away. One evening she went to the convent of Our Lady of Grace, begging the sisters not to refuse her their hospitality because she had no intention of returning home. The sisters were deeply moved, and, feeling that it was their duty to help her, agreed to a plan with her. They consulted the parish priest, but the latter wisely washed his hands of the entire matter. A friendly family then lent them their coach, and Anita Bedarída, accompanied by two sisters, rode to Incisa, where they boarded a train for Turin. It would have been unwise to take a train at Nizza because her relatives might easily have gotten wind of it. In Turin her two companions introduced her to the sisters at Valdocco, who affectionately welcomed her and made it easy for her to take instructions in the Catholic faith.

As soon as her relatives discovered her absence, they raised an uproar, mobilized the Jewish community in Turin and informed the press. And so it came about that the dying Turin newspaper gave its last gasp in echoing their outcry. But the hoped-for quick results never came. For the next three months the young Jewish woman lived peacefully with the sisters, even walking out on the streets of Turin without being disturbed. Naturally, her family immediately set about searching for her hideout, and when they found it they reported her escape to the police as an act of violence ordered by Don Bosco, pressing charges against him. However, since the young lady was of age, the police were slow to take action. Some days after her arrival at Valdocco, a police inspector had indeed

called on her and questioned her, but she told him that she had freely requested the hospitality of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and intended to stay there and prepare for her baptism. Consequently, the authorities backed down. Relatives and even her father called on her. She reassured him of her filial love, and they gave her no trouble for about three months.

Having been sufficiently instructed in Christian doctrine, the young Jewish woman now hoped to be baptized on June 24 or August 15 at the latest. Countess Balbo was to be her godmother. Father Cagliero who was instructing her, and Father Bonetti, her spiritual director, suggested that she delay so as to be better prepared for the great step.

The calm, however, was only forerunner to the storm. [The relatives'] frustrated hopes turned into fury, prompting them to strike out at her weakest spot, her love for her father, and then to rouse public opinion and prepare the way for a vigorous intervention by the civil authorities.⁸

On August 25 one of her brothers came to see her, remaining closeted with her several hours—five, according to hearsay. He was accompanied by a rabbi's son, said to be Anita's fiancé, but he kept to himself and appeared again only when his friend was about to leave. The poor girl weakened during the long interview. Her brother's tears as he kept begging her to return home deeply touched her, and her heart betrayed her. Aware that this was the right moment, her brother put paper and pen before her and dictated a few lines for her to write for the authorities, asking them to rescue her as though she were being kept there forcibly. She

⁸This narration is mainly based on two documents: a letter signed by Anita Bedarída herself (*Unità Cattolica*, No. 209, September 7, 1879) and another letter from Father Bonetti to the Department of the Interior. The copy of Anita's letter bears her own signature, but the letter itself is in another hand. It contains also this declaration signed by three witnesses: "The undersigned herewith certify that in their presence, Miss Anita Bedarída read this letter and had it read aloud to her, confirming that it expressed her thoughts and feelings. Therefore she gave it her full approval and freely signed it." The letter had been drafted by another, perhaps Father Bonetti, and hence this declaration. The second document is a letter from Father Bonetti, who wrote in Don Bosco's name. It is headed by a notation: "Attorney Caucino read and approved this. Will Don Bosco also approve it? If so, would he please sign two sheets of paper like this one—one to be sent to Villa and the other to Varè?" Varè was the minister of justice; Villa was an attorney. Don Bosco wrote beside it: "Unadvisable for many reasons." We also have two other documents in longhand: a lengthy paper by Attorney De Gregori, and one still longer by Father Bonetti. Though overblown, they do contain some reliable information. [Author]

wrote mechanically, though not entirely unaware of doing wrong, and left the paper with him, giving no thought to the consequences. Alone for a few minutes, she realized her blunder and, shortly afterward, in the presence of her brother and two witnesses, retracted her statement. Furthermore, although she had promised to leave with her brother to please him, she now refused to do so, having determined that she needed more time to think things over seriously. Indignant and bent on violence, her brother left with his companion.

Fearing retaliations, the young woman thwarted his plans by moving the next morning to the home of a kind lady not far from the Oratory. Hardly had she left the convent when her brother, a cousin and a friend of theirs turned up looking for her. Upon learning that she was no longer there, they went away fuming with anger. On the morning of August 27 the district attorney called at the Oratory. Shortly afterward the young woman came and, after telling him that she freely wanted to remain where she was, pleaded with him to protect her personal freedom. A written account of the interview was taken and she signed it. The district attorney then left, utterly convinced that there was not even a shadow of coercion.

The matter now appeared to be solved, but it was only the beginning. In its issue of September 1 the *Gazzetta del Popolo* fed its readers a dispatch from Nizza Monferrato, describing the occurrence like a tale from *The Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. The deception was already apparent in the title, "Story of a Maiden Taking the Veil," as though a young woman could be forced to take the veil, especially when she was not even baptized. One absurd detail, lapped up and reported very indignantly by other journalists, went as follows:

Since the young woman seemed not entirely convinced of the faith they were trying to force her into, they even got someone to come up with a short drama entitled, "The Jewess Converted," in which the unlucky lady was subjected to threats of dire punishments. She was repeatedly made to watch the play, sitting by a priest who would scowl at her and sharply reprimand her if she ever let herself be overcome and break into tears over her parents' grief and that of her relatives. . . .

In all reality this drama was but a travesty of a very well known school play staged by the sisters some time before Anita's flight

from home, and Anita was sorry that she had not left a week earlier so as to be able to play the part of the Jewess. It goes without saying that the Nizza correspondent made a great fuss about Anita's statement which had been forced from her, as we have already described. The *Gazzetta del Popolo*, after reporting the vicious Nizza dispatch, urged authorities to exert the law's fullest force against Don Bosco, and it dragged politics into the case in an effort to rekindle the furor that had raged in 1852 in the case of the child [Edgar] Mortara.⁹

Religious orders have been outlawed [the paper stated]. So why are they still allowed to have convents and monasteries and to keep undermining family freedom and peace? Did the left wing come to power to view such scandals and leave them unpunished? Italy had its male Mortara, though at that time this infamous deed was understandably carried out by the Pope's jailers. Now are we, under a liberal Italian government with a left-wing cabinet, to have a female Mortara?

The prefect of Turin, the same Minghelli Vaini whom our readers know,¹⁰ was quite receptive to the crystal-gazers of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*. Promptly in the early hours of September 3, a squad of plainclothesmen and uniformed police surrounded the house where

⁹See Vol. VIII, pp. 268f and Pelczar, *Pio IX e il suo Pontificato* [Pius IX and His Pontificate], Vol. II, pp. 195ff, Torino, Berruti, 1910. Edgar Mortara [1851-1940] was a priest of the Canons Regular of the Lateran. He was the object of abuse by enemies of the Church who posed as champions of freedom of conscience. On July 7, 1879 his name was cited by Madiez de Montjau, deputy of the French Assembly, in his diatribe against Catholics demanding the freedom granted everyone under the law. Father Mortara replied in an indignant letter published in *Univers* and again in *Unità Cattolica* on July 17, 1879. Among other things he stated: "A Catholic in principle and by conviction, I am ready to withstand your attacks and defend the Catholic Church even at the price of my blood. I affirm that your words are a grave insult to my honor and my conscience, forcing me to make this public protest." But Mortara was not a convert [from Judaism]. Though born of Jewish parents, he had been baptized at the age of two at the point of death by a Christian housemaid and thus, on recovery, was a member of the Catholic Church. Consequently, the Church had both the right and the duty to give him religious instruction in keeping with his baptism. The outcry which stirred an uproar in Europe and America had been raised by the synagogue at Alessandria della Paglia. Jewish, Masonic, Protestant and schismatic newspapers—which had been silent when Czar Nicholas wrested thousands of Catholic children from their mothers and reared them in his own schismatic beliefs—now raged against Pius IX, the intolerance of the Roman Church and the violation of parental authority. Our archives contain a letter from Father Mortara to Don Bosco, dated [October 10] 1880, which clearly shows the intensity of his inner joy at having been reborn to grace in the waters of baptism and his fondness for Don Bosco. [Author]

¹⁰See pp. 109f, 154. [Editor]

Anita Bedarída was a guest and hammered on the door as if to force it open. It was all in vain, but the noise awoke the Jewish girl who was terrified and went into convulsions. The vast display of force and the consequent wild rumors soon attracted a huge crowd who came to watch what promised to be an imminent assault on the house. Toward nine o'clock, the prefect of the province and the district attorney arrived at the Oratory by coach and asked to speak with Don Bosco. He arrived in some ten minutes, having just finished hearing the last of his penitents. The prefect's greeting was a reprimand for making him wait so long, and on the spot he bluntly asserted his suspicion that he had rushed to coach the young woman on what to say. Don Bosco silently pointed to the house where the girl was staying, hardly a stone's throw from the Oratory. All in a huff the prefect hurried over. Once the young woman stood before him, he rejected all witnesses but the district attorney. The girl did not panic, but, collecting her wits as best she could, she remarked that she had already gone through two similar interrogations and saw no reason for a third. The prefect, expecting to be greeted as a savior, was very bitterly disappointed, but in the presence of the district attorney he had to control himself. The young woman told the two officials that she was there of her own free will, that at no time had she been coerced into staying, and that her written statement of a week before had been wrested from her by her brother without her foreseeing its consequences. They sent for her father, brother and sister, and a long parley followed during which the prefect expressed the hope that the girl would return home and put an end to her family's grief. The district attorney, however, very calmly declared that she was no longer a minor and had the legal right to choose her religion as she saw fit.

The prefect, nevertheless, was not going to let go of his role of rescuing her from the nuns. Her reiterated protests that she had never been coerced and was not now being coerced in any way fell on deaf ears. He kept cudgeling his brains to find some words to persuade her that she would do better to leave and seek hospitality in some other kind of institution. Evidently the Jewish community had found the right man they needed.

"I know of no other institute than that of Don Bosco's sisters," she objected.

"I will take care to find a suitable one for you," the prefect

assured her. "Try the home for the Daughters of Soldiers."

"Why should I move?" she remonstrated. "I am no longer residing with the sisters, and there is no reason to assume that their counsel makes me want to become a Christian."

"Yes, but here you are, still living with people closely related to Don Bosco's institute. And your lodging is not befitting your social position either. I can readily find you a place far more comfortable than this. And your relatives agree with me, don't they?"

"Yes, certainly! I am ready to pay whatever it may cost," her father replied.

"Very well, then. I will find a place and inform her as soon as it is ready."

The police remained to guard the house until the next morning. Fearing that they would be waiting to seize her should she set foot outside the house, the young woman remained closeted indoors and wrote an indignant note to the prefect:

Thank you for your anxiety on my behalf, but let it be understood that I intend to enjoy my freedom to remain where I am and that I claim my right in the name of the law. I declare that I have no wish to leave this house. I also protest the presence of a police guard as if I were under house arrest. Efforts are being made to make it look as though I were a victim of priests and nuns; yet I am really the victim of other people, who are acting under the pretext of freedom. If I should no longer desire to remain here, I am perfectly capable of moving to some other location more to my taste, without having anyone else decide for me. I was free and able to find this house, I can still do so, and I intend to retain my full freedom of action. I trust that you will kindly order the police to withdraw from here. It is a disgrace to be treated in such a way, when I am an innocent, free citizen and no longer a minor.

But the prefect, under the false pretext of protecting her personal freedom from imaginary attacks by Don Bosco, kept up this state of siege for five days, arousing among her neighbors suspicion of puzzling crimes presumably committed by Anita and others. At night the police carefully watched every passerby, lest their prey might escape disguised as a man. Some guards were also guilty of defamation against Don Bosco by alleging that he wanted to force the Jewish girl to become a nun so that he could lay hands on her

money;¹¹ others, more shamelessly, said far worse things. This was confirmed by neighbors who watched their children lest they should go near those foul-mouthed guardians of the law. The morbid curiosity of the crowd was sharpened by a booklet of catchy ballads and ribald tales salaciously concocted to resemble what had happened to Anita. The heroine bore the romantic and tear-jerking name of "The Hapless Esmeralda."¹²

Father Bonetti had quickly rebutted the libelous accusations of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*. In a letter to the editor on September 2 he proved that the young Jewess had come to the convent of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians of her own free will, was willfully there, and was free to leave at any time. But the *Gazzetta del Popolo* published his letter only on September 4, adding "remarks" of its own to invalidate the rebuttal.

Now events followed at a faster pitch. Twice more the district attorney returned to visit the girl, during the morning and afternoon of September 6, advising—or rather begging—her to accept the prefect's suggestion of moving somewhere else. She finally agreed, but—to her credit—we must point out that she yielded only when the prefect made her understand that if she did not give in, Don Bosco and his Congregation would pay dearly for it. Having thus prevailed over her, on September 7 the prefect sent her the following letter:

I have the honor to inform you that the mistress of the Ferraris Institute, at 10-A St. Francis of Paola Street, will welcome you at whatever hour you wish to call at her second floor apartment. On the door you will find a brass plate with the inscription Ferraris Institute. There you will be absolutely free to make up your mind. The mistress has orders to second your wishes and also to escort you to a villa which she rents out in the vicinity of the Madonna of the Pillar, should you wish to breathe some country air. Your parents will pay all expenses for room and board and whatever else you wish, as befits the standing of your distinguished family. Dear mademoiselle, whether you wish to remain in the faith of your parents or become a Catholic, you are absolutely free to decide your

¹¹It was later known that Anita Bedarida's wealth amounted to fifteen or twenty thousand lire at the most, no great sum indeed. [Author]

¹²*Un Ebreo monaca per forza* [A Jewish Maiden Forced To Become a Nun], Ronchetti Publisher, Turin. [Author]

future. I shall do my very best in order that, in all conscience, you may persuade yourself and others that the prefect of Turin, or, I had better say, the king's government, which he represents, neither sought nor did anything whatsoever other than leave you utterly free to follow your vocation, becoming a Catholic or remaining in the faith in which you were born. Should you want for anything, or should it seem to you that the hospitality of the Ferraris Institute does not quite measure up to what I promised, please let me know and I'll give orders that your freedom of action be fully respected.

In the meantime, however, he was depriving her of her freedom to remain where she was. Before leaving, the young woman handed over this statement written in her own hand to a trustworthy person. The statement is now in our archives.

I, the undersigned, in the presence of witnesses who are co-signing this statement, declare that I am leaving this house at 31 Cottolengo Street not because I have been pressed or am now being pressed to become a Christian, but solely in compliance with advice given me by the district attorney who asked me to do so in order to prevent troubles and insults to my benefactors who have helped me so generously.

On September 7 she entered a boarding house for young student teachers conducted by Mrs. Ferraris, a close friend of the prefect and a fan of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*. As soon as Mrs. Ferraris met Anita, she suggested that the girl should let no one fill her head with fanatical ideas. The following morning her brother was introduced into her bedroom, but on awakening and seeing him she drove him away indignantly. On September 10 a doctor, falsely claiming to have been sent by Father Cagliero, tried to speak with her, but she became suspicious and refused to see him. The same day her self-styled fiancé, accompanied by her brother, asked the mistress for leave to visit her, but she turned his request down.

The moves were no more than snares, but when these failed, recourse was had to slander. When for eight days Anita refused to see anyone who might try to weaken her determination, the matron did not hesitate to ridicule her as a visionary and circulate rumors that "Anita had very seriously told her that she had seen God as a handsome old man with a long white beard, offering her advice and suggestions." The *Gazzetta del Popolo* reported it and other

newspapers followed suit.¹³ But the matron had another card to play. Before entering the Ferraris Institute, Anita had a chance to speak with Attorney Caucino, a lawyer of Biella very much feared by anticlericals for his successful defense of the clergy in lawsuits, and had asked his help. The lawyer called on her at her new residence and made a second appointment, but Mrs. Ferraris convinced Anita that it had been Caucino who had labeled her a visionary and a fanatic. She became so incensed that she vowed never to see him again, thus placing herself at the mercy of her enemies. One day, in the presence of another woman, the matron, trying to impress upon Anita that her parents were right to forbid her deserting her faith, asked the visitor: "How would you feel if you had a daughter who wanted to become a Protestant? Would you not do your utmost to stop her?"

Anita's family forbade her to have any contact at all with the Salesians or sisters for at least two weeks, but, fed up with those endless vexations, she refused to wait any longer. From a letter written to her by Father Bonetti on September 18 we can imply that she had by then made up her mind to return to Nizza. "It is a comfort to know that you are persevering in your good intention to receive the sacrament of baptism," he wrote.

On September 18, the very day Anita left for Nizza, a flyer entitled "Defeat Faces Don Bosco, Father Margotti and Attorney Caucino" and a retouched, repulsive woodcut of Don Bosco were widely distributed throughout the town to hail this sour victory. According to police reports, Jewish wrath had risen to such heights that the Oratory had to keep a twenty-four-hour watch to guard human life. What a fanfare was made to celebrate such a meager victory!

In the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*, Attorney Giustina, the editor, prodded the district attorney to prosecute, but nothing came of it, for the city officials realized that no crime had been committed, and that the newspaper's charges were vicious slanders.

L'Unità Cattolica immediately issued another handbill publishing three documents previously released separately: Anita Bedarida's letter to the editor [of the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*], her letter to the

¹³*La Gazzetta del Popolo*, September 13 and 15. The other newspapers, especially the *Cronaca dei Tribunali*, took up the cue from it. [Author]

prefect which we have already reported, and a telegram she had sent to the Department of the Interior in protest against persons who “were meddling in matters of her own conscience.”

This was the only time that *Unità Cattolica* intervened, and it was at the peak of the controversy. Such reserve was certainly in deference to Don Bosco’s natural inclination. Once he stated his case in a calm overview of the facts, he would shy from polemics. Had people listened to him in this particular controversy, it would promptly have died down. From the start he felt that it would have been wiser to hasten her baptism. “Once she is baptized,” he had said, “all will blow over.” In fact, Anita’s brother, believing that she had already been baptized when he first visited her, seemed to take it in stride. However, Father Cagliero had thought it better to proceed slowly. It was then that Anita’s brother, realizing his error, kicked up that uproar. In conclusion, this controversy was more than an ill wind that blew no good. Through the Jews, many good Christians came to know of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and of their motherhouse at Nizza Monferrato.

CHAPTER 11

Salesian Missionaries in Patagonia

NO missionary expeditions took place in 1879. While in South America the Salesians felt that the moment of affirmation of their missionary apostolate was fast approaching, Don Bosco exerted every effort of his own to win canonical recognition for his missions. His initial efforts while Pius IX was Pope had brought but meager results; he now broadened his objectives. His first step was to acquaint Leo XIII of his mission endeavors in Europe, namely, the contribution he was making by training apostles for his own and other missions. However, he chose to embody this in a petition for financial help from the two largest mission aid societies [of Europe].

Rome, March 20, 1879

Most Holy Father:

Prostrate in homage to Your Holiness, I respectfully wish to point out that for a number of years a hospice or seminary, known as the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, has been nurturing and training evangelical workers for the foreign missions. In fact, a noteworthy number of our alumni are now working in China, Australia and Africa, and well over a hundred are in South America.

This seminary, whose enrollment exceeds five hundred, has regularly been supported so far by contributions of the faithful and exceptionally by those of the Supreme Pontiff himself. But now our financial straits are so seriously hurting our goal of supplying missionaries for foreign fields that I am forced to ask Your Holiness to recommend this seminary of ours to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons and to the Holy Childhood Association, requesting that they give us some financial help. Thus we will be able to continue cultivating badly needed missionary

vocations also in our other houses, such as the St. Vincent de Paul's Hospice in Sampierdarena,¹ the St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice,² the St. Joseph's Orphanage near Fréjus,³ another orphanage at Saint-Cyr near Toulon,⁴ and lastly the St. Leo's Festive Oratory in Marseille.⁵ True, the names of these institutes may not be expressive of their objectives, but one can readily understand the reason why we chose them.

I beg Your Holiness to bless the work I have brought to your attention and to grant it your favor as you see best in your highly enlightened wisdom.

With deepest reverence, filial respect and loyalty, I remain,

Your most humble and obedient son,
Father John Bosco

A month later Don Bosco took a more decisive step. He sent a second petition to the Holy Father through the Salesians' cardinal-protector, containing detailed information on the work of his missionaries in South America. With that he enclosed several papal documents to highlight the importance of the Salesian missions, hoping that the Church's supreme authority would kindly establish their standing with the Sacred Roman Congregations.

Turin, April 20, 1879

Most Holy Father:

The Salesians first opened negotiations for their foreign mission apostolate with His Eminence Cardinal Barnabò in 1872, at his encouraging suggestion. Then in 1874 His Holiness Pope Pius IX signaled out Argentina as our mission territory and urged us to go there to care for Italian immigrants and make new attempts to evangelize the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia. He likewise very thoughtfully provided financial assistance for the first expedition, which set out on November 14, 1875.⁶

The first ten Salesian missionaries paid their respects to the Holy Father on November 1, 1875 to receive his blessing and apostolic

¹See Indexes of Volumes XII and XIII. [Editor]

²*Ibid.* [Editor]

³See Index of Volume XIII under "Navarre." [Editor]

⁴See Vol. XIII, p. 418. [Editor]

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 557ff. [Editor]

⁶See Vol. XI, Chs. 16-17. [Editor]

commission. The Pope addressed heartwarming words to them and then gave them a letter of introduction dated that day from the secretary of state to the archbishop of Buenos Aires. The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith granted required faculties in a decree dated November 14, 1875. Pope Pius IX approved and commended the new mission, expressing his satisfaction in a brief dated November 17, 1875. Informed of the expanding harvest of souls and of the vocations which God was raising up in those lands, and desiring to consolidate the Salesian missions, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith authorized us to open a novitiate in a decree dated July 6, 1875.

As the present Sovereign Pontiff—God grant you long life and good health—you kindly expressed your fatherly affection by approving and sanctioning the Salesian missions of [South] America in a brief dated September 18, 1878. Burdened though you are financially, as Sovereign Pontiff, once you learned of the problems facing the fourth [Salesian] missionary expedition⁷ for lack of funds, you offered us a generous subsidy in a letter dated November 23, 1878, and urged us to continue the work we had begun.⁸

One real problem we are facing is whether our South American missions come under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith or that of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastic Affairs. We entrust the matter fully to the zeal and charity of His Eminence Cardinal Nina, secretary of state, and we ask him as our cardinal-protector:

1. To identify the sacred congregation to which the Salesian missionaries in Uruguay and Argentina are to apply when petitioning the Holy See.

2. To meet the requirements set by the General Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith in Lyons⁹ by formally approving these missions and thus entitling us to the allotted funds of which we are at this time in dire need.

3. To notify the General Council of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith that all correspondence for funds and related matters should be addressed to Father John Bosco, rector major of the Salesian Congregation in Turin. This is the site of the principal seminary which sends forth our missionaries and which keeps in correspondence with them wherever they exercise their sacred ministry.

⁷See Vol. XIII, Ch. 25. [Editor]

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 609. [Editor]

⁹See Vol. XI, p. 376. [Editor]

4. We would also appreciate a letter of recommendation to the Holy Childhood Association in which he might point out that many young boys were saved from certain death when they were sent from Kabylia (North Algeria) to our motherhouse in Turin, where they received instruction in the faith and were baptized.¹⁰ Some were given schooling, others were taught a trade, while a few were trained for the priesthood and have returned as missionaries to their own country. Some who came from the city of Damascus are now in school and will later be sent back home. Far greater is the number of Indian children baptized in their own tribal territories by the Salesians, while others have been sheltered in various hospices in Buenos Aires. Today, April 20, 1879, three Salesian missionaries are setting out for Buenos Aires with Argentina's minister of defense. They will then go on to the Pampas tribes to rescue a vast number of children from the extermination to which the Argentinian government seems to have doomed them. Only too often thousands of them roam about looking for someone to save them, body and soul, but we lack the material and moral means to save them all. Yet we shall always manage to save some of these Indian children for God and for civil society.

Fr. John Bosco

As a follow-up, it was important that he keep the Pope mindful of the Salesian missions. Hence he asked the provincial, Father [Francis] Bodrato, to send warm greetings—personally and on behalf of his confreres—to the Vicar of Christ twice a year on the occasions of his name day and the New Year. The first greetings, postmarked Buenos Aires, July 6, arrived in Rome in time for the feast of St. Joachim, which fell on August 16. It informed the Holy Father that the Salesians were making progress in Patagonia, but badly needed a central settlement at the mouth of the Rio Negro, and that one of the confreres had preached a mission in Paraguay. The second letter was also sent from Buenos Aires on November 27, meant to reach Rome in time for the New Year. It gave the Pope news of recent progress made in Patagonia, told of the forthcoming opening of a Salesian house at Patagónes, and praised the assistance given by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Without waiting to ascertain whether this approach to the Holy See was having its desired effect, Don Bosco sent a third appeal on September 17, asking for mission aid from the Holy Childhood

¹⁰See Vol. IX, pp. 216, 348f, 452f. [Editor]

Association and from the [Society for the] Propagation of the Faith [of Lyons]. To his appeal he attached a copy of a letter from Archbishop Aneyros, which described the meritorious work of the Salesians in the Argentine Republic. Once more the reply came back, as courteous but as negative as ever. The Holy Childhood Association granted aid only to missionaries engaged in the threefold apostolate of ransoming, baptizing and bringing up pagan children; it supported new mission foundations only if they had already put up orphanages for this purpose. Neither could it make regular grants to new missions until they had accumulated sufficient funds to enable it to expand its scope.

The association's letter alludes—very helpfully, we think—to the director general's satisfaction with what he had heard about Don Bosco's "wonderful work" at the Congress of Angers. This congress, held shortly before, had dealt exclusively with Catholic labor organizations. Ernest Harmel, brother of Leo Harmel, known as the "good father" of Val des Bois, had read a paper describing Don Bosco's trade schools and their growth. It was that congress which prompted Father Machiavelli—born in Paris but incardinated in the diocese of Nancy and well known in France for his social work and his expertise in labor relations—to write to the Oratory the following year for further information on Don Bosco's work. He had heard of it, he said, at the Angers Congress but knew nothing more than it existed.¹¹ He was sent all the issues of the *Bulletin Salésien* which had appeared since its beginning in April 1879 and which also contained in translation the first thirteen chapters of the *Storia dell'Oratorio* [History of the Oratory] written for the *Bollettino Salesiano* by Father John Baptist Bonetti.

The reply of the [Society for the] Propagation of the Faith [of Lyons] came somewhat later, since the central councils, first in Lyons and then in Paris, had to process Don Bosco's application for funds. The usual statutory problems arose: the society was allowed to grant aid only to missions in pagan countries, that is,

¹¹Letter to Father [Peter] Pozzan, director of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, dated Nancy, April 16, 1880: "All I ask in return is as much information as you can supply concerning Don Bosco's work, which I heard highly praised last year in Angers at the Congress of Catholic Labor Organizations. All I know of Don Bosco's institute is that it exists, and I am so impressed that I must know more about it." Father Machiavelli was replying to a request made of the Nancy chancery for a copy of the diocesan directory of priests, to whom the *Bulletin Salésien* might be sent. [Author]

existing in lands not belonging to Catholic states and not having a regular hierarchy; such missions also had to have the Holy See's official recognition and be headed by specific religious superiors. These letters, however, serve to show us how well Don Bosco's work was known and appreciated in France.

On October 21 Cardinal Nina informed Don Bosco that the Holy Father was granting his missions a generous subsidy.

I did not neglect to tell the Holy Father of the news you gave me in your letter of September 16, and in that of September 27 about your missionaries in Buenos Aires as well as about those who are about to leave Europe for Paraguay. His Holiness, duly appreciative of the substantial blessings brought by your missionaries to the people, especially in distant lands, who are in dire need of spiritual help, was very pleased with the report and favorably received your petition for financial assistance, graciously assigning you a grant of one thousand lire to help defray the expenses of your forthcoming expedition. While notifying you of His Holiness' kind gesture, I also urge you to hasten as much as possible the longed-for departure.

Don Bosco's New Year's greetings to his cooperators later cited this instance of the Pope's generosity, emphasizing its fuller meaning and expressing his personal thanks, as follows:

We shall endeavor to repay such goodness on the part of the Holy Father by fervent daily prayers for his well-being and that of the Church, of whom he is the visible head. Since the donations he receives end up where the needs of the Church and of the faithful are greatest, we shall do all within our power to promote Peter's Pence as a project whose aim cannot be surpassed.¹²

Was Don Bosco planning to send missionaries to Paraguay that year? As we have already seen, yes, he was.¹³ On January 3, 1880, heartily responding to the urgent request made to him in the name of His Holiness, he quickly informed Cardinal Nina that by the following October he would have ten Salesians and as many Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians ready to go to Paraguay and give the people the spiritual assistance they so much needed. As

¹²*Bollettino Salesiano*, January 1880. [Author]

¹³See Vol. XIII, p. 604. [Editor]

October drew near and the local apostolic delegate renewed his insistence, the Vatican's secretariat of state pressed him to speed up the departure of the ten missionaries, who first were to stop at Buenos Aires and not continue to Paraguay until proper arrangements were made with the Pope's representative, Archbishop Angelo Di Piero. As for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, they should wait until a residence was properly prepared for them; the missionaries were to go first. These were the instructions Don Bosco received from Rome, where the Church authorities relied on his ability to honor the promise he had made in January to the Holy Father's great delight.¹⁴ However, unforeseen obstacles had meanwhile arisen to frustrate Don Bosco's plans, and he so informed Cardinal Nina, secretary of state:

Turin, September 16, 1879

Your Eminence:

I hasten to reply to your kind letter of September 10. As I have had the honor of informing you, two Salesians were to leave for Buenos Aires on August 1 and assume charge of at least the parish church of Asunción, Paraguay. A few days before their scheduled departure, however, they were advised, I don't know by whom, to postpone it because a revolution had broken out in that country. I have no idea whether the apostolic delegate's request is recent or was made before August 12. At any rate, I am now writing to our missionary superior in Buenos Aires to ask him whether or not they may soon leave for their destination and prepare a place for those who will shortly afterward follow them. However, it is most necessary for us to have access to some funds to defray our very heavy personal expenses and the cost of the journey.

I expect further news from Argentina and perhaps from Paraguay by the twentieth of this month and, if necessary, I shall immediately communicate it to you.

Most respectfully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

For some fifteen years we find nothing else being done about Paraguay. We refer our readers to our account of that country's political unrest in Volume XIII.

¹⁴Letter from Monsignor Cretoni, acting deputy of the secretary of state, September 20, 1879. [Author]

In May the bishop of Santo Domingo had also reminded Don Bosco of a promise to send him missionaries in March, according to the Holy Father's wish.¹⁵ "What are we to answer?" Father Cagliero had asked Don Bosco after reading the prelate's letter. "Write as follows," Don Bosco replied, "and let it be recorded in our chronicle. Say that we are very interested in his request and anxious to help him, but that, while we were trimming the personnel in some houses to meet his needs, the Holy Father himself pressed more urgent needs upon us. Hence, we ask him to be patient." For the Dominican Republic, too, we find no new insistence for several years.

This "trimming the personnel in some houses" so as to open new ones or strengthen others was being done every so often, even when the foreign missions were not involved. This was the complaint that some superiors made on April 29. They contended that the scanty personnel put an excessively heavy burden on the confreres to the detriment of their health, all the more so because in most places the confreres were helping out the local churches. Don Bosco commented:

We already have too many things to do without going out to look for more work—especially because such commitments interfere with our duties and draw our hearts to certain outside works which boost self-complacency and make us neglect our own tasks. Even in South America our confreres overburden themselves with outside work. True, we aim at God's greater glory, but it is also true that our primary goal is the care of youth, and, consequently, every concern which draws us from that cannot be good. To let a boarding school run down in order to go and hear confessions elsewhere makes no sense.

We close this little aside, leaving the Italian scene to concentrate our attention on our missionaries in South America. The year 1879 is of historic importance in the early annals of the Salesian missions in South America. That was the year our first contacts were made with the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia on their own lands, all of which were still largely unexplored. Having had to abandon their first efforts to go by ship the year before because of a raging

¹⁵See Vol. XIII, pp. 598f. [Editor]

storm at sea¹⁶ which threatened their lives, Bishop Espinosa and Father [James] Costamagna drew up a second travel plan by land. Their apostolic zeal was favored by a happy coincidence, as we shall relate.

In 1879 periodic expeditions of exploration and conquest began, which in a few years were to end Indian rule over the territory, opening the vast expanses of the Pampas and of Patagonia to colonization and exploitation. The government's first move was to push its frontiers to the Rio Negro, either subjugating the Indians as they went or driving them out beyond the impassable mighty river, navigable with its tributary, the Neuquén, from the Andes to the sea. Facing the government troops were twenty-five thousand Indians, of whom but forty-five hundred were warriors without modern weapons, ignorant of military strategy, and totally undisciplined. The plan of the military campaign had been legislated on October 4, 1878. The expeditionary corps, numbering forty-five hundred men, set out on April 16, 1879, divided into five battalions under the supreme command of General [Julio] Roca, minister of defense. Three battalions invaded the Pampas plains, another marched to the western border, and the fifth, the largest, pushed into the frontiers of Patagonia, then held by five caciques. Though it had been the government's intent only to flush out and subdue the tribal lands between the Rio Negro and the Andes, which included all of the Pampas and a corner of northern Patagonia, indirectly it was conquering all of Patagonia, since later on, with little or no show of force, the rest of the region was taken. It was first thought that the Indians would move southward to ally themselves with the Patagonians; however, some retreated across the Cordilleras toward Chile, while others surrendered or scattered out among the civilians with the intent of merging with them. Very many lost their lives even when they offered no resistance. This military operation lasted from April to July of 1879; the Rio Negro's campaign ended successfully in April 1881.

As we noted elsewhere,¹⁷ previous isolated raids had taken place with no overall plan. Many Indians had been killed or captured and given as slaves to various Buenos Aires households, engendering in the survivors such rancor that it made it extremely difficult for the

¹⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 612ff. [Editor]

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 123. [Editor]

whites to deal with them. It was not the government's intent to strike out inhumanely at the natives during its military campaign; indeed, the defense minister had at heart also their spiritual welfare. In fact, on learning of plans to send missionaries to the Pampas, he offered the archbishop his assistance, promising aid and protection for those he would send on the long, perilous journey. Archbishop Aneyros accepted the offer and entrusted to his care his vicar general, Monsignor [Anthony] Espinosa, and two Salesians, Father [James] Costamagna and the cleric Louis Botta, who were given the rank of military chaplains.

On April 16, Wednesday in Easter week, the three boarded the train at Buenos Aires with the commander-in-chief and several officers to go to Azul, the last outpost of civilization, beyond which stretched the endless expanse of the Pampas wilderness. The archbishop had all the church bells rung at their departure. At Azul the party was issued horses and a covered wagon to transport their baggage and to shelter them during the night or in foul weather. A week later they arrived at Carhué, where the troops were mustered and the battalions formed.

The settlement of Carhué lay deep in the Pampas, marking Argentina's western frontier with the Indian territory. Rising above the plain, it was mirrored in a magnificent saltwater lake. Some forty homes stood grouped about a stockade; beyond them the *toldos* or tents of two friendly tribes, the Eripaylá and the Manuel Grande, both named after their respective caciques, could be seen. Father Costamagna, who had arrived a few days before his companions, lost no time in repeatedly visiting the Indians, as they lived but a short distance away. Both caciques welcomed him, the first acting as interpreter. With their consent, he gathered the children of both tribes together and tried to teach them the Sign of the Cross and the basic truths of the faith. Once his companions arrived, they all set zealously to work, baptizing the children of both settlers and Indians, blessing marriages, and even predisposing cacique Eripaylá's elder son to the faith. Seeing them tirelessly engaged in their beloved apostolate, the defense minister asked them to go along with him as chaplains to his two thousand troops to the Rio Negro along the northern borders of Patagonia, where they would find all the Indians they wanted. Monsignor Espinosa agreed that they should go.

It was a very arduous journey of over thirty days on horseback. When two strong companies of Indians mistakenly tried to halt the troops' progress, they were hopelessly routed. By the solemn feast of Mary, Help of Christians, Father Costamagna was already at the shores of the Rio Negro, while his two companions were still riding from the Rio Colorado to the Rio Negro. Too often, alas, they had to grit their teeth and silently witness the soldiers' brutality against the Indians. They made a stop at Choele-Choel on the left bank of the Rio Negro and then went south to Patagónes near the river's mouth, where they took a well-earned rest. How well earned indeed they knew! After endless days on horseback, enduring hunger and thirst and sleepless nights as well as the ordeals brought on by poor and insufficient food, having felt the glacial cold penetrate their very bones as they slept outdoors without the benefit of roof or tent—the last leg of their journey took them into the very heart of winter—they finally were able to pause for rest to regain their strength and get themselves back in shape for work.

All along the way and at camp stops they had met Indians whom they tried to help as best they could. In a letter to Father Bodrato from Patagónes, dated June 16, 1879, Monsignor Espinosa wrote of Father Costamagna's ministry at Choele-Choel:

With his unique zeal, as soon as he arrived among the Indians he began instructing many adults to prepare them in a short time for baptism. All three of us felt more than amply repaid for our efforts and pains as we offered God these first fruits of the harvest on the shores of the mighty Rio Negro. On June 1, Pentecost Sunday, assisted by both Salesian missionaries, I celebrated Mass in a lovely prairie under a cloudless sky. General Roca and his entire staff along with the full regiment in dress formation attended it. It was the first time that the Holy Eucharist was offered in that wilderness, the first time that the standard of the cross had ever blessed those lands traversed by uncivilized, hapless natives. After Mass the *Te Deum* was solemnly sung as Patagonia was officially annexed to Argentina. We then baptized sixty natives who were promptly inducted into the army. On June 2 Father Costamagna baptized twenty-two Indian children, three babies of Christian families, and fourteen adult Indian women. Finally, on June 4 he baptized the last nine Indians who had not been judged ready on June 2. The following day, after the troops' reconnaissance of the Neuquén region, we set out for Patagónes. We

reached there on June 21 and started a parish mission with high Mass and a sermon by Father Costamagna. We hope to reap a bountiful harvest. After the mission is over, we shall go deeper into the interior and more leisurely teach the faith to so many hapless Indians who are waiting for missionaries to bring them spiritual and material assistance.

We will do well to learn more about this strategic center of future Salesian missionary endeavor. Patagónes, dating from a century before, had four thousand people who lived on either side of the Rio Negro about thirty miles from the Atlantic Ocean. The settlement on the left bank of the river was named Carmen de Patagónes, after Our Lady of Mount Carmel, whose image had been taken from Brazilian settlers by the Patagonians in a river battle, and the right bank was named Mercedes de la Patagonia, as it bordered on that territory. Here the missionaries again encountered Father Savino, a Vincentian, who had been with them on the unfortunate shipwreck of 1878. With him was [Anthony] Calamaro, a sacristan, alumnus of Lanzo and a native of Voltri; on June 23 he sang a hymn honoring Don Bosco's name day, which he had learned fourteen years before.

The missionaries returned to Buenos Aires at the end of July. The archbishop was so thrilled by the account of all they had accomplished with God's grace in the three and a half months of their expedition that he wrote Don Bosco a long letter on August 5.¹⁸

The time has finally come—he began—when I can offer you the Patagonian mission which you have so strongly desired. I also offer you the parish at Patagónes which would make a good mission center.

He then described the very sorry plight of those poor natives and the Protestant proselytizing, commenting:

I appeal to you with the liveliest solicitude of a pastoral heart and beg you through the merciful heart of Our Lord Jesus Christ to come to our aid and to that of these poor, benighted souls. . . . You might set up mission headquarters at Carmen de Patagónes or at Mercedes de la Patagonia to

¹⁸The *Bollettino Salesiano* published an Italian translation in November 1879. A French translation was sent to the Association of the Holy Childhood and to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith of Lyons with two petitions from Don Bosco. [Author]

direct your mission work in the settlements . . . and send missionaries to all of Patagonia's countless thousands who still live in the darkness of idolatry. . . . The government, too, is earnestly pressing me to send missionaries as soon as possible, promising me a substantial grant from the legislature to begin January 1, 1880, larger than the usual annual subsidy which we now receive. You can readily perceive that I am anxiously awaiting your reply. . . . My heart rejoices in the hope that you will heed my plea in this pressing situation and without delay will gladly accept this mission, which is so necessary for God's glory and for the salvation of so many souls now living in a state of utter abandonment for lack of missionaries. I am sure that Father Cagliero, who knows this land and has personally come in touch with its needs, will assist me in this holy, strenuous endeavor. I am very happy to hear that your eyesight is improving. I earnestly pray that God will grant you a long life and perfect health, for we need you so badly.

The archbishop enclosed a copy of a letter he had sent to Edward Calvari, emigration chief [at the Argentinian consulate] in Genoa, asking him to use his influence in obtaining free passage to Buenos Aires for the Salesian missionaries. It seems that the government of Argentina was at the same time officially entrusting Don Bosco with the task of evangelizing Patagonia, promising substantial support. Don Bosco received the archbishop's letter on September 5 while at Lanzo for the spiritual retreat. As he was reading it, Father Barberis entered his room and found him "filled with joy," so he tells us, adding that on giving him the news Don Bosco had remarked, "Who knows where all this will end?"¹⁹

Thus the Lord comforted Don Bosco for the grief caused him by the very painful disappointments which the reader is aware of. His joy is warmly attested to in a letter of his to Father Costamagna:

Turin, August 31, 1879

My dear Father Costamagna,

Thanks be to God! Your mission has been successful and you are safe and sound.

In your next letter tell me in minutest detail about the reception the caciques gave you, their dwellings, their clothing, and what they said to you.

¹⁹Notebook, bearing few entries, entitled *Brief Chronicle of the Lanzo Spiritual Retreat, 1879*. [Author]

The time has come for you to talk seriously with Father Bodrato and the archbishop about a mission center for both Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Patagónes. Would another center be also needed at Carhué? I'll take care of necessary personnel, and all together we'll pool financial resources.

My sight is much better, thank God. My fondest regards to Fathers Daniele, Vespignani, and Rabagliati, and all the confreres and boys. Any news of Mr. Gazzolo? Did Monsignor Espinosa get through the expedition safely?

Your letters have been published and are read with pleasure everywhere. How is my dear Father Allavena doing? How is he? I am most eager to know. Write me about the Rio Negro and the Rio Colorado regions. We love your letters.

God bless you, my dearest Father Costamagna! God grant that we may love each other prayerfully here on earth, and that one day we will all be together with Jesus in heaven!

This fall we sent you a shipment of candles at Buenos Aires. Did it arrive, and is the cost of such shipments really worth it?

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The handwritten letter from Don Bosco deeply touched Father Costamagna, and in his reply he gave free rein to his feelings.

How gracious of you to write me in your own hand! In these times a personal letter from you is a memorable event for your poor Salesians in America. You can never guess the thrill we experience in seeing our dearest father's own handwriting. Timothy himself certainly felt no greater joy on receiving a letter from St. Paul, his beloved father in Jesus Christ. Can you imagine, my dear Don Bosco, as we read the account of our Congregation's beginnings and the first endeavors of our founder²⁰ in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, our eyes fill with tears as we realize that you are still living and we are your sons. So what is it like for us to receive your letters, to see your handwriting, to hear you speak to our innermost hearts with the same warmth of love with which you one day snatched us away from the world without our being ever aware of it to set us within the chosen Salesian vineyard and there to work solely for God?

²⁰Father Bonetti was just then publishing the chapters which were later printed separately as a new volume, which became known as *Twenty-Five Years of History of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*. [Author]

Since Don Bosco had requested further details about the Indian life, Father Costamagna sent him for the moment a set of photographs in lieu of a written report, in which Don Bosco could see the Indians whom he and Monsignor Espinosa had instructed and baptized in the faith on the shore of the Rio Negro. Brief captions explained essential details.²¹ The following year a report written and certified by Francis Arrachez, secretary general of the Buenos Aires chancery, and dated Buenos Aires, November 3, 1883, stated that during that mission expedition two hundred and twenty-three boys of both Indian and European families had been baptized along with one hundred and two adult Indians.

Cardinal Desprez, archbishop of Toulouse, was one day gazing intently at a globe resting on his desk, thinking of all the Church's efforts to evangelize the nations. When his eyes rested on Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, he was pained to realize how little attention had been given to those outermost bounds of the new world. Only handfuls of missionaries had ever visited the shores of Patagonia, and then unsuccessfully, while no one at all had ever ventured into the hinterlands of Tierra del Fuego. He was still lost in this pensive mood when the *Bulletin Salésien* arrived, announcing that the Salesians had undertaken a mission in those lands. Overjoyed, he exclaimed, "I am glad that Don Bosco was chosen to fulfill the great prophecy: 'Through all the earth their voice resounds, and to the ends of the world, their message'" [Ps. 18, 4]. Some years later the same cardinal told this to Don Bosco himself in the presence of Father [Paul] Albera. A month later Don Bosco wrote a beautiful letter to Father Tomatis who had just been appointed director of the boarding school at San Nicolás. The school's first director, Father [Joseph] Fagnano, previously stricken with a grave attack of typhus, had suffered a relapse and had to be sent to Buenos Aires for convalescence. As we shall later see, he did not return to the school but went directly to the Patagonian missions.

Alassio, September 30, 1879

My dear Father Tomatis:

I have always kept up to date with everything going on in our boarding

²¹ *Bollettino Salesiano*, January 1880. [Author]

school at San Nicolás, and I see it now entering into a new phase under your direction. Let's hope so! Take heart! All our trust and hopes are in you. Here are some guidelines I always give our directors. Try to follow them:

1. Take good care of your health and that of your confreres. See to it that no one works too hard or sits idly by.

2. Strive to lead the others in piety and observance of our rules and make sure that they are kept by the others as well, particularly meditation, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, weekly confession, devout celebration of Mass, and frequent Communion for those who are not priests.

3. Valiantly put up with the shortcomings of others.

4. Be very kind to your boys; give them every chance and freedom for confession.

God bless you, my dear Father Tomatis and with you all our confreres and boys and our friend, Monsignor Ceccarelli, to whom I owe a letter. May God grant you all good health and the grace of a holy life. Fondest regards to everybody.

Pray for me, always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. This letter will show you how much my eyesight has improved.

The first few lines are a clear hint that the school was slipping. Enrollment had dropped. The main reason seems to have been the arrival of Father Fagnano's relatives who were clearly poor people. The rumor began to spread that, like so many others, the director had come to South America to set his family up in money—a rumor, Father Cagliero maintained, which in that part of the world was enough to wipe out any good a priest might do. We need hardly state that Father Fagnano had acted most honestly in his concern for the good of the school by hiring only people he could trust for various jobs in the house, but in this world of ours honesty has to be backed up by a strong dose of prudence. The following year, the boarding school picked up considerably while Father Fagnano was actively involved [in Patagonia] in a ministry which he alone could carry out so effectively.

Don Bosco was anxious that, before the end of the year, every one of his Salesians should share in his joy by learning about the Salesian apostolate in Patagonia. He also appealed to their sense of

solidarity so that the missionary undertaking might have the best beginning possible. Father Rua was asked to be Don Bosco's spokesman, and on December 18, 1879, he wrote to the directors of all the houses to give this news to all the confreres and boys:

The gateway to Patagonia has swung open to the Salesians. . . . God has chosen to entrust this important mission to us, as so many events have clearly shown us. Our missionaries in South America tell us in their latest letters that at Patagónes and in all the settlements, the people have the loftiest expectations of the Salesians. It can well be said therefore—as the Divine Redeemer stated—that the harvest is ripening and awaits but the reapers to gather it. And here is precisely the heart of the problem: we need personnel for the many undertakings we have underway. It will be wise to do what Our Divine Savior suggested to His apostles: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest” [Mt. 9, 28]. Our beloved Don Bosco has asked that on receiving this letter you begin offering an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be every day in the community through the month of January, that the Lord may deign to show us which of the Salesians He has chosen for this mission and that He may inspire them with the sentiments of zeal, charity and courage which they will need to meet this magnificent challenge. May it also be His pleasure to provide new personnel to replace those who will go to the missions.

On New Year's day Don Bosco informed the Salesian cooperators of this joyful news in a circular we have mentioned elsewhere:²²

The most wonderful field of work which Divine Providence now opens to your charity is Patagonia, a corner of our globe until now closed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The hour of mercy seems to have struck for those hapless Indians. Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires and the Argentine government have jointly asked us to evangelize the Patagonians, and I have accepted this arduous undertaking with fullest trust in God and in your charity. Thanks to some initial attempts, five hundred Indians have already been instructed in the faith, baptized and brought into the flock of Jesus Christ. Traversing the endless wilderness south of the Rio Negro, we find six settlements, somewhat like hamlets, each a few days apart, where trading and agriculture have already begun. Next March the Salesians, accompanied or followed soon after by the Daughters of Mary,

²²See p. 214. [Editor]

Help of Christians, will open mission posts and schools in those settlements. God willing, they will form a base camp from which evangelical workers will go forth into the trackless wastes and unknown hinterlands of Patagonia.

By remarking, a few pages back, that Don Bosco's aggravations had been mitigated by the comforting news from Patagonia, we did not intend to restrict ourselves to the shutdown of the Oratory's secondary school nor to his conflict with the Turin chancery, nor to the vexations related to the conversion of a Jewish maiden. We were also referring to hostile attacks being made against him through a charge that he had abetted a young man to dodge the draft by sending him to South America. Michael Foglino, a cleric just turned twenty, had been a member of the fourth missionary expedition in 1878. Having failed to report for military service, he was sentenced *in absentia* to a year in a military prison. Another young fellow, Athanasius Torello, of Nizza Monferrato as was the Foglino, a student attending the University of Turin, was drafted in the latter's place. He therefore brought suit against Don Bosco for having favored Foglino's desertion—not so much that Torello was personally out to get Don Bosco, as that he was a tool of the press. It was the rabid anticlerical lawyer, Giustina, who fired the first shot on October 18, 1879 by a sly hint in an article entitled "Sempre a Don Bosco" [Always to Don Bosco] in his weekly *Cronaca dei Tribunali* in which he threatened to drag Don Bosco into court. A week later, he reiterated his threat.

In our next issue—he promised—we shall expose Foglino's escape and show that he is now residing in a school operated by Father John Bosco. We will also publish an authentic letter detailing other interesting points which the public has a right to know.

On October 30, 1879, the Catholic *Corriere di Torino* issued a sharp rebuttal with transparent allusions to the recent handling by the newspaper of the Jewish family affair, which had also begun in Nizza, decrying the scandal sheet as "a Turin periodical which sees the light of day only on Saturdays," and commending Don Bosco as "too big a man to fear such attacks or to need defending."

The Saturday weekly kept its word. Its November 1 issue formulated a legal charge and demanded an investigation from the

district attorney. However, the charge was prefaced by irrelevant comments whose harshness unwittingly revealed the hidden machinations behind this and other attacks.

For those who do not know—ran the article—Nizza Monferrato is the citadel, the stronghold of Don Bosco's army. It is composed of priests, clerics, nuns and numerous local young ladies; they all believe in his miraculous powers, even calling him a saint well ahead of time. . . . Don Bosco, furthermore, has the backing of noblemen who cling to him. Their leader is a certain countess, Don Bosco's right hand. The young are yearning to throw off this yoke and hoist the banner of rebellion, but unfortunately they lack the numbers to hold out against the ranks of bigots who so loyally take up the cudgels for the clergy.

After an irrelevant aside about the Bedarida affair,²³ the writer continued:

Fogolino, a textile worker, son of a humble family, was accepted into a boarding school of Don Bosco, where he was steeped in Catholic teaching. After being immersed into the darkness of every conceivable superstition, he ended up as a so-called Salesian. Then came his time to be drafted. Fogolino went home to Nizza Monferrato for the draft lottery. His number came up with other qualified young men of draft age. He was now a soldier and had to report for duty. We have no way of knowing just how the Salesian Congregation reacted to all this, but we do know one thing and we have sworn testimony to prove it. While Fogolino was at Nizza Monferrato, he received pressing overtures to report to Don Bosco in Turin. Fogolino himself was heard to remark, "I don't want to go to Turin, because they want to ship me to [South] America." It is no secret that there Don Bosco has institutes for the propagation of the faith and apostolic missions. It is also no secret that missionary vocations are not on the increase today because it is hard to find persons willing to go to the New World to preach the Gospel. Don Bosco needs young men. . . . The rest you can easily surmise. Put two and two together, draw your own conclusions, and you will see the light of truth in this matter.

The truth, however, eventually came out in snatches but not as described above. Fogolino had first come to the Oratory in November 1871; the alleged "pressing overtures" to go to Turin

²³See Chapter 10. [Editor]

were the invitations made to him and to many other classmates of his during the summer of 1875 to join the Salesian Congregation, which shows the high esteem he enjoyed. That year the Oratory buzzed with talk of the [Patagonian] missions as preparations were being made for the first expedition. Uncertain as to whether he wished to enter the diocesan seminary of Turin or that of Acqui, the young man did say he did not want to go to Turin, in the context in which he meant it at the time. Another glimmer of truth is that then, as now, no one was ever sent out of his country without having formally requested it of one's own free will in writing. Three years elapsed between 1875 and 1878, during which Foglino had time to consider, reflect and make up his mind. As St. Paul says "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I felt as a child, I thought as a child. Now that I have become a man, I have put away the things of a child" [1 Cor. 13, 11]. The newspaper's bad faith comes out in the ambiguity of "while Foglino was at Nizza Monferrato," which misleads readers to think that Foglino had said this after the draft lottery, that is, three years after he had become a cleric and taken his religious vows.

Il Corriere di Torino retaliated the next day—November 2, 1879—with a humorous quip, and the battle of words waxed strong on November 22 and 23. *La Cronaca dei Tribunali* beat about the bush, but its evasion brought out two items more meaningful to history than to the actual event of the day. First, there was this clarification which truly touched the raw nerve of the whole matter:

By dodging the draft, Foglino made matters hard for one of our excellent young students, Athanasius Torello, who was forced to break off his studies and replace the deserter.

Then, after a long list of rhetorical questions about the authorities' inaction, the writer hastily put up a barricade to hide the real motives for his hostile stand.

No one has more regard for Don Bosco's social action than we—he protested—but no one has greater respect for the equality of all citizens under the law. To guarantee it we willingly give up all liking, all deference, all friendship and all family ties.

Such highbrow rhetoric left the author open to a master counterblow. In a later article *La Cronaca dei Tribunali* had taken the stance of a knight ready to slay a dragon about to rear its head, and therefore, on November 23, *Il Corriere di Torino* commented:

We've been awaiting the famous "dragon" of *La Cronaca dei Tribunali* with bated breath! Alas, what a letdown! It's only a bat, and blow it up as much as one may, it's still only a bat. Let the bat beware—we know what happened to Aesop's frog! We have been told that this bat knows Don Bosco, because . . . he has shared his bread. Not surprisingly, among all the tiny birds which Don Bosco has fed and sheltered—and still does—there must be a bat or two . . . who imagine themselves to be dragons. However, a few bats will never divert Don Bosco's loving care from his little birds and make him worry about the bats!

It was a fact that *La Cronaca's* editor had attended the boarding secondary schools at Lanzo and Varazze. Swept away by politics and making himself a tool of the anticlericals, he played the iconoclast to the very twilight of his life. He was angered by *Il Corriere's* allusion to him and tried to justify himself in a letter, which by law the paper had to publish. In it he admitted that he had been a pupil of Don Bosco in both schools, but only because it was "his parents' decision," and they had paid his "full tuition." A little show of gratitude might have been better, but God willed that Don Bosco should drink also of this bitter cup given to him by a former pupil.²⁴ May this comfort other teachers who cannot set their mind at rest because of the ingratitude of pupils on whom they have lavished their care. Even Don Bosco was not spared such disappointment.

For three months the press maintained silence. On February 28, 1880, *La Cronaca dei Tribunali* heralded the news:

Don Bosco in court. Our readers will recall our account of [Michael] Foglino, a recruit of Nizza Monferrato who fled northern Italy when

²⁴Toward the end of his life, Giustina came to his senses. He had always kept a warm place in his heart for his teacher, Father [Peter] Guidazio, and he fondly remembered his other superiors. Whenever he learned that Bishop Costamagna or Bishop Fagnano was in Turin, he called on him, and it was Father Lemoyne who assisted him at death. Regretfully, he was cremated, but that was not his intention. He had forgotten to cancel his membership in a cremation society. [Author]

drafted into military service and is now in Buenos Aires as a missionary affiliated with a well-known Turin priest. Our readers will recall the polemics raised by *La Cronaca* and *Il Corriere di Torino* on the subject. Well, the law is now seeking action against Father John Bosco, alleging that he planned and abetted Foglino's desertion. We shall cover the trial as it develops.

However, despite the newspaper's great interest in the case, it issued no report until June 12. Apparently, no one took it seriously.

Between June 12 and July 10, both newspapers exchanged comments, of which two alone are worth our attention. First, Don Bosco was acquitted "for lack of evidence"; in other words, not because he was innocent—a verdict just falling short of a pronouncement of "guilty." Second, "this verdict was passed because not all the witnesses who could have given evidence were interrogated."

La Cronaca in its July 10, 1880 issue does tell us something very notable about the witnesses who had not been questioned. It stated:

We were only asked for clarifications, but we pointed out that there were other witnesses who could better enlighten the judge.

This is but a hasty condemnation of the judiciary's neglect of duty in a weighty matter. More probably Giustina, finally having the opportunity to show off the evidence which he boasted he had access to, did not skimp on his contribution to the enlightenment of justice, but the whole thing turned out to be just a blown-up affair. In the poet's words: *Parturiunt montes, exit ridiculus mus* [The mountains are in labor and a ridiculous mouse is born]. The fact remains that the news he so blasted far and wide made no impression on his hearers.

What is more unpardonable is his statement that Don Bosco was acquitted "for lack of evidence." This way of putting it amounted to saying that there had been at least the start of criminal proceedings against Don Bosco, and certainly this is what his readers understood, for the terminology he used is precise. Our own extensive research into the files of the Nizza magistrate's court has revealed that, while there is no lack of documentation on this case, there is absolutely nothing even hinting at criminal proceedings.

From another source we did learn that the police had conducted an investigation, but it was the normal, routine check into the possibility of a cover-up of criminal doing. The investigation was closed after the parents of Foglino were questioned with the usual frightening warnings.²⁵ The matter was shelved. Certainly neither Giustina nor those responsible for the uproar were happy to see their soap bubble burst. This explains their reshuffling of the facts to cover up their own loss of face.

What lent an aura of truth to the whole story was that Giustina's articles contained details which could only be known by one who was familiar with the Oratory's intimate life. Our account of this episode would be incomplete were we to omit mentioning one of his informants. A certain Ferrero, physicist, natural history student and photographer, had been living at the Oratory for some three years, absorbed in unsuccessful experiments which cost the Salesians a good deal of money. Finally, realizing he was a phony, they threw him out and then discovered that he was a high-ranking Freemason. He it was who had given the newspaper a "good scoop."

It would be naive to ask whether Don Bosco knew that Foglino was dodging the draft. That the cleric heroically chose exile to the possible loss of his vocation is beyond doubt; that Don Bosco did not interfere with his choice is equally doubtless. But who of us does not know what kind of law it was which forced men of the cloth to live in army barracks? The truth is that sixty years later Italy's legislators courageously reviewed and amended that law in agreement with Church authorities who had always denounced it.

With good reason we have dwelt at length on this episode. First, we had to redeem Don Bosco's memory from the hateful accusation of exerting moral pressure on one of his young men. Second, whatever caused Don Bosco suffering should have a place in his biography. And there is a third reason. The charges of using uncertified teachers, of violating freedom of conscience, and of breaking his country's laws were all but pretexts which the anticlericals seized on to wage relentless war against Don Bosco and everything his name stood for. Testimonies which his assailants let slip through in their wild fury we have already brought

²⁵Letter from Father Lemoyne to Don Bosco, Nizza (undated). [Author]

out in several places. There are two others we consider valuable.

Giustina also edited a bi-weekly periodical, Turin's illustrated *Romanziere Popolare*. The January 11, 1880 issue published a very silly profile along with an offensive cartoon. Our interest centers on this excerpt of the profile:

John Bosco, in his loyalty to the Pope, has followed in the latter's political footsteps, concentrating all his efforts on raising up a progeny of priests, an army of anti-liberals, servants of the Church and enemies of Italy. True, he never trampled on charity, but he misconstrued it and manipulated it to serve the interests of his party. Miraculously coming into prominence, and prodigiously powerful, Don Bosco is the Vatican's far-seeing eye, the soul of the Catholic party, the educator of the new slayers of liberty who abide by the motto: "Long live the King-Pope! Long live papal Rome!" No honest liberal can blame the government when it seeks as best it can to shrink this man's sphere of influence. He has several times turned down the cardinal's hat, and at will he could have become by wit and effort one of the most famous and cunning Father Generals of the Jesuits. But he prefers—not for love of money nor for his party's glory—to stay with the young and to imbue the masses with the reactionary principles of the Church's political catechism, which he polishes and plates with the gold of charity.

Speaking of the youth of Don Bosco's schools, the write-up commented:

It knows neither patriotism nor reverence for the king and the laws, deserting its nation's armed forces and hiding in clerical garb to conspire against liberty, against the greatness of Rome, Italy's capital.

On July 10 Giustina launched a more violent attack:

No one more readily than we acknowledges a man's contributions to his country. But when this benefactor of humanity stuffs the heads of young people with principles that are the props of the papacy and the Orsini bombs²⁶ which will one day blast the sacred temple of freedom into nothingness—well, then we close our eyes to his benefits, and see him as an enemy who uses his charitable undertakings as a shield in his struggle

²⁶Felix Orsini (1819-1858) was a conspirator who on January 13, 1858 attempted the assassination of Napoleon III in Paris. He was put to death by the guillotine on March 13. [Editor]

for the Pope, so as to tumble what our fathers built at the price of endless sacrifices.

Rhetorical bombast of the times, yes, but a revelation of what politicians were cooking up in their caucuses while shaping the destiny of a godless Italy.

Don Bosco might have easily made his own the words St. Paul wrote when he saw a handsome opportunity of winning souls for Jesus Christ at Ephesus: "For a door has been opened wide for my work, but many are the adversaries" [1 Cor. 16, 9]. While God was opening Patagonia's gate for him, which he had already seen in his "dreams" as the field of his Gospel labors, hell kept raising up all sorts of opposition from every side to render him powerless. But like St. Paul before him, he not only did not lose heart, but he saw this hostility as a sign he was on the right road.

CHAPTER 12

Unrealized New Foundations in 1879

DON Bosco received a far greater number of proposals for new houses than those to follow, but, because of problems plaguing our archives, several pertinent documents have been lost; besides, in many cases no negotiations were actually started. Availing ourselves of whatever documentation is still available we shall therefore narrate what Don Bosco did in this area during the troublesome year 1879. First we shall recount the unrealized proposals and then pass on to houses that were closed in order to make better use of their personnel elsewhere.

By way of introduction we shall make a few points to be borne in mind if we are not to misjudge Don Bosco's handling of these matters. All these fruitless negotiations have mainly three phases. Initially, Don Bosco welcomed the proposals with a sincere desire to realize them, if feasible, thus raising the proponents' hopes. Secondly, formal negotiations were opened enthusiastically by the proponents and level-headedly by Don Bosco. In this second phase, obstacles which had either been willfully concealed or overlooked by the proponents would come to light. Finally, in the third and most crucial moment, the bitter word had to be spoken: "Impossible!"

In such matters, the more serious obstacles are usually of a sort that makes it preferable to plead lack of personnel or some other reason rather than state the plain truth. The result is embarrassment on the one hand, and disappointment, dejection and resentment on the other. When he was directly involved, Don Bosco had to use his gracious manner or his wise counsel to soothe inevitable hard feelings.¹

¹Since this chapter deals with topics of scant interest to our readers, we shall often condense the narration. [Editor]

1. MODENA

We begin with Modena, the first town where Salesian cooperators, acting on their own, organized and held a conference [in 1879].² Later, in 1894, a local committee supporting Don Bosco's works sent out a circular which declared that all good Christians had long looked forward to the opening of a Salesian house in Modena. It had indeed been so, and even more remotely than those good people thought. The first proposal [to Don Bosco] was made on March 21, 1875, while he was a guest of Count [Ferdinand] Tarabini.³ Learning of the urgent need for a festive oratory in that town to stem the growing corruption of youngsters of poorer families, Don Bosco had stated he was willing to cooperate with the townsfolk as soon as it would be possible to start such a project. Unfortunately, funds were scarce, but Count Tarabini, noting the deeper inroads that evil was making among the poorer classes, once again appealed to Don Bosco on January [2] 1877. His reply was favorable, but temporizing. When the Salesian cooperators' conference was held in 1879, priests and laity were already running a festive oratory according to Don Bosco's method, hoping to hand it over to the Salesians as soon as possible. At that time, however, Don Bosco could only encourage them to continue their project since he had already too many irons in the fire. Besides, Archbishop Joseph Guidelli of Modena was continually pressuring him to reopen the diocesan junior seminary at Finale Emilia, which had been closed for the past seven years. Don Bosco told him that he was willing to help but needed more time. In 1879 the archbishop became more and more insistent in view of the crucial need, and so Don Bosco, realizing that he could not satisfy his request so soon, notified him in June that the harassment he was experiencing at the hands of the government kept him from meeting the archbishop's wishes as promptly as he

²See pp. 75f. [Editor]

³Count Tarabini, former state councillor and minister to the duke of Modena, had met Don Bosco in Rome at the home of Count Vimercati on the evening of January 13, 1867. In his diary, the count remarked that during Don Bosco's visit there had been "a constant coming and going of people." From then on, whenever Don Bosco passed through Modena, he would trustingly rely on the count's hospitality, a clear sign that their meeting in Rome had not been a chance encounter. The entries in the above-mentioned diary show that the nobleman felt highly honored to have Don Bosco as his guest. [Author]

really desired. Only in 1913, sixteen years after the opening of St. Joseph's School in Modena, did Father Paul Albera, Don Bosco's second successor, find it possible to send Salesians to Finale Emilia and take over the junior seminary, dedicating it to Mary, Help of Christians.

2. ISILI

Don Bosco received the first request for a Salesian house in Sardinia in 1879. His name was already widely known by then, particularly through his books, *Letture Cattoliche* and the *Salesian Bulletin*. Proof of this is the fact that five students⁴ at Ales wrote to him collectively, requesting to be enrolled as Salesian cooperators and placed on the *Salesian Bulletin*'s mailing list. They also promised to perform any spiritual work of mercy he might suggest and to send him their savings at the end of each year.

It was a Jesuit priest, Father Porqueddu of Genoni, who first suggested inviting Don Bosco to extend his work to Sardinia. This priest zealously promoted devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, and recommended to Don Bosco young men of good character. Several were admitted to the Oratory as artisans or Sons of Mary, as, for instance, Father [Francis] Atzeni. Concerned at the alarming drop in priestly vocations, Father Porqueddu had for a number of years been urging the local bishops to convince Don Bosco to open with their help one or more schools on the island. Unfortunately, despite their good will, the bishops were in such dire financial straits that they lost heart at the thought of an undertaking whose importance was not grasped by many people, including the clergy.

When Father Porqueddu saw that his efforts with the bishops were unsuccessful, he turned to the laity. Very soon he found a man who offered a substantial contribution, asking nothing more than how much Don Bosco would need to open a boarding school, a junior seminary, or a festive oratory. His only concern was that young men might receive a good education and learn in their youth to accept sacrifice—"something which is almost completely

⁴John Baptist Tomasi, Anthony Cannas, John Scalas, Felix Matta and Louis Cossu.
[Author]

unknown here—Father Porqueddu wrote—so that divine grace may more readily waken in their hearts a desire to consecrate themselves to the Lord and become His worthy ministers.” Would Don Bosco send him word and let him know what to do? Don Bosco gave the letter to Father Cagliari with this notation: “To be brought up at the next chapter meeting.” The chapter decided that Father Porqueddu should be informed that momentarily no action could be taken, but that he should keep trying to raise necessary funds: “a house and a piece of bread.” Father Porqueddu wrote back, asking exactly what Don Bosco meant by “a piece of bread.” The second reply was not very encouraging toward opening a house, but the Jesuit was not a man to go halfway in any undertaking, especially when God’s service was involved. In fact he did succeed in finding a house which had been vacated by the Piarists, to whom the municipality of Isili had ceded the rights on condition that the building be used as an educational institution. As soon as the Piarists left, the municipality reclaimed it with its income and offered it to Don Bosco with a revenue of two thousand lire and other resources. “Do not tell me that you lack personnel,” the Jesuit wrote to Don Bosco.⁵ “Hunt around, search every nook and cranny, accept the offer and send someone at any cost. How much good can be done! What a fine Patagonia this is!”

So far the offer had not been official. The project had been first presented to the municipal aldermen by John Zedda, a councillor, at the request of Peter Ghiani Memeli, another councillor and deputy of Isili. The latter had met Don Bosco, probably in Rome, and had informed his colleagues that “a certain Don Bosco from Italy planned to open a secondary or elementary school in Sardinia if a municipality would provide premises and an annual income of four thousand lire.” Mayor Antiocus Porceddu seconded the proposal, saying, “Since this is a project of Don Bosco, with whom I am well acquainted, that’s reason enough to accept it.” After a brief debate, the municipal council voted in its favor and agreed to open negotiations. Three weeks later the provincial committee also gave its approval.⁶ Then, on May 24, Father Porqueddu again pleaded with Don Bosco: “Dear Don Bosco, for heaven’s sake, do

⁵Letter, Genoni, April 29, 1879. [Author]

⁶Minutes of April 29, 1879, with later additions. [Author]

your very utmost to make this project a reality. We need it even more than the poor Patagonians do. Sardinia does not have a single boarding school or junior seminary in which to train boys with a reasonable hope of success.”

Don Bosco gave it serious thought but did not commit himself to anything until favorable circumstances would allow him. Five months later, the mayor of Isili renewed his request. Father [Celestine] Durando, then charged with negotiations for opening new houses, replied on November 21 in Don Bosco’s name. After thanking the municipal councilmen for their many signs of trust, he informed them that the Salesians would gladly oblige if they had the personnel. Hopefully what was not then feasible could be accomplished later on. In the meantime he needed to know the distance from Isili to the nearest railway station, the capacity of the building, and whether it had an adjoining playground and garden. The mayor sent him all the requested information.

By now the school year was well advanced and so there was no urgency to speed up decisions. However, on April 22 [1880], the mayor, rather concerned at the long silence, wrote Don Bosco an earnest appeal on behalf of the municipal council to send a representative to inspect the premises and negotiate, adding that the municipality would fund all travel expenses. Meanwhile, two years went by, during which municipal elections were held in Isili. The new mayor, Anthony Cicalò, again took up the matter and, on December 13, 1882, voicing the sentiments of his townspeople, pleaded that speedy action be taken to open the long-desired Salesian school. But the time was not right, and nothing was done about Isili until after a Salesian school was opened at Lanusei, the region’s capital. We may feel that, despite his half-promises, Don Bosco’s indecisiveness lasted too long, but we must point out that at that time municipal and government offices were well established in the former Piarist boarding school. In view of this, it would not have been wise for Don Bosco to intervene and dislodge those tenants.

3. PISOGNE

A voluminous pile of correspondence dating from 1878 to 1886

concerns negotiations with the municipal council of Pisogne, a small town in the diocese and province of Brescia, where a diocesan priest, Father James Mercanti, had opened an elementary and secondary boarding school in 1822. Named after him, the school prospered until 1865, when it began to decline because of mismanagement and political unrest. Since Don Bosco's works were already well known and admired in that area, Bishop James Corna Pellegrini, a native son of Pisogne, thought of him as the one most able to restore the school's former reputation. "In this vast, religious-minded province," he wrote on October 8, 1878, "there is not a single first-rate boarding school to meet present-day needs. A school under your auspices and direction would do a great deal of good." Don Bosco's reply was that he could not oblige that year, but that there were hopes "for some other year."

Since the school was registered as a legal body and was being administered by the municipality, the town council was informed of the proposal and gratefully accepted it. Certain that they could safely rely on Don Bosco's "eminent civil and moral qualities" which had brought him renown and merit before society," they contacted Don Bosco directly. Their first request was that the secondary school be certified by the board of education, though no one was blind to the fact that to return the school to its former condition would make considerable demands upon Don Bosco.

Other sources alerted Don Bosco to the danger of being dragged "into a hornet's nest of problems, expenses and headaches." Then, too, nearby Lóvere had a boarding school, and its administration, fearing competition, offered to affiliate the Mercanti school. To make matters worse, the provincial school superintendent, abetted by local liberals, was striving to sabotage the invitation to Don Bosco, going so far as even to write libelous letters against him which the mayor indignantly discounted.

These problems, along with scarcity of personnel, justified fears of serious future difficulties and obstacles. Consequently Don Bosco instructed Father Rua to write in his name that he intended to withdraw from all negotiations. Four new attempts were made between 1892 and 1905, all in vain, mainly because the municipality of Pisogne would have tied the director's hands by its excessive interference.

4. MONTEROTONDO

When Canon Gerard Procacci, parish priest of St. Hilary's at Monterotondo, called on Don Bosco in Rome at the beginning of 1879, the latter promised to send Father [Joseph] Daghero from Magliano to inspect a building which was to be entrusted to the Salesians on condition that they run the public elementary school and start a secondary school. Quite certain of pleasing the townspeople, the noble Boncompagni family, along with Cardinal [Louis] Bilio [bishop of Sabina] and the municipal authorities, looked forward to the arrival of the Salesians. Father Daghero went there, checked out the premises and gave Don Bosco a very favorable report. The mayor promptly took the matter in hand, with the intention of dismissing the lay teachers and replacing them with religious, as was within his power. Hugo Boncompagni, eldest son and president of the local chapter of Catholic Youth, joined in the mayor's plea to Don Bosco not to defer action.

On Don Bosco's behalf Father Durando replied that for the moment it was impossible, but held out good hopes "for some other year." "We can wait," came the reply, "but let us draw up a contract now since elections are near at hand and a new municipal council might not be as favorable as this." The answer again promised that everything possible would be done but it also carefully avoided anything like a firm commitment. This was interpreted as a courteous refusal, and the matter ended there. In 1911 Hugo Boncompagni, a prelate, renewed the proposal to Father [Paul] Albera [Don Bosco's second successor], but it too was denied for lack of personnel and other reasons.

5. ACIREALE

Bishop Gerlando M. Genuardi of Acireale was the first bishop in Sicily to request Don Bosco's Salesians for his diocese. Although he had already supported a similar appeal from Randazzo, also in his diocese, he was particularly anxious to have the Salesians in Acireale. He planned to reopen the St. Martin School, formerly run by diocesan priests, and he arranged to turn it over to Don Bosco for a nominal rent.

Don Bosco sent Father Cagliero and Father Durando in his place to inspect the building. They found it splendidly suited for a boarding school. Later, after his *ad limina* visit to the Vatican, Bishop Genuardi went on to Turin to discuss the matter personally with Don Bosco. We only know of one specific item of their discussion. Since the municipal authorities of Acireale had in the past granted the St. Martin School an annual subsidy of two thousand lire, the bishop persuaded them to continue these funds for the Salesians when they would come. He even hoped to have it doubled, should Don Bosco agree to open a lyceum on the premises. In view of this, on June 30, 1879 Don Bosco officially informed the mayor of his intention to open a secondary school and inquired about the municipality's willingness to subsidize it.

The municipal council agreed to give the Salesians an annual subsidy of four thousand lire once they opened a certified lyceum—a stipulation which must have grated in Don Bosco's ears. Fortunately, however, matters took quite another turn, and negotiations came to an end. Apart from other considerations, the bishop's proposal for Acireale was abandoned because the Oratorians of St. Philip Neri had already opened a boarding secondary school—St. Michael's. In 1880, therefore, Bishop Genuardi turned his thoughts to another plan. His diocese, which had been established by Pius IX in 1872, had no seminary of its own, as it lacked the government's official recognition. As soon as that came in 1880, the bishop immediately concentrated on the seminary and, in full agreement with his chapter, wrote to Don Bosco to ask him to take over its administration and to conduct boarding elementary and secondary classes. Don Bosco promptly opened negotiations, suggesting a contract basically similar to that for the junior seminary of Magliano.⁷ The diocesan council agreed, but the written contract made it clear that the proposed undertaking had become quite different from that envisioned by Don Bosco and his chapter. A frequent exchange of letters between the bishop and Don Bosco continued until July 1881, and the bishop furthermore sent his chancellor and secretary to Turin to clarify plans and smooth out difficulties, but notwithstanding the good will of both

⁷See Vol. XIII, pp. 60f. [Editor]

parties, the superior chapter turned down the plan because details were still not sufficiently clear and unpleasant surprises were likely to arise in the future. The bishop was taken aback, but, being a man of eminent virtue, he did not close his heart to Don Bosco and his successors and kept voicing his pleasure at having within his diocese a Salesian boarding school which had opened Sicily's gates to the Salesian Congregation.

6. CATANIA

As a matter of fact, Catania had requested the Salesians one year before Acireale did, but despite the fact that many of the clergy were Salesian cooperators, no serious negotiations were ever initiated. Father Rosario Riccioli, rector of the seminary, tried to get things started by authorizing two priests who were going to Turin to discuss the matter with Don Bosco, but the latter simply advised them to confer with their ordinary, Archbishop [Joseph Benedict] Dusmet. Canon Cesáreo made a second attempt, proposing that Don Bosco open a school of arts and trades with diocesan help, but no action was taken.

In 1879, finally, Bishop Guttadauro of Caltanissetta expressed his desire to open a girls' orphanage in his diocese under the direction of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, but this too met with no success.

7. ROME

Even as late as 1879 the hour for a long-cherished foundation in Rome had not yet come. Two houses seem to have been ready for the Salesians in May of that year. One, in the neighborhood of the Church of the Santi Quatro Coronati [Four Holy Martyrs],^a was to be a small hospice for young apprentices; the other, across the Tiber, was to be a technical school, by the Pope's express wish. Don Bosco was asked to promptly send a capable priest to supervise the establishment of the former and to negotiate for both

^aFour Roman soldiers massacred for refusing to worship a statue of Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine. [Editor]

foundations. It was asserted that enough money was already on hand to meet the most pressing needs of the hospice and that the Pope would cover all expenses for the technical school.

This information, imparted on May 7, 1879 by Archbishop Ludwig Jacobini [secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith], was greeted by the Salesian superiors as a special grace of Divine Providence. Promptly Father [Joseph] Monateri, director at Albano, was chosen to negotiate and was instructed to listen, observe and then report without committing himself one way or another. "We have already pledged our word for other houses this year," Father Barberis wrote in Don Bosco's name, "but we must not let the opportunity of opening these houses slip by, because we really do need a foothold in Rome."

Father Monateri's report was not long in coming, but it was disappointing. The attitude of the Romans differed strongly from that of Don Bosco. They planned to give all powers, including internal government, to a commission, thus turning the Salesians into little more than lowly servants. In fact, the commission, which had already been appointed, gave Father Monateri a draft of the rules which they intended to impose. He pointed out that his superiors would not approve them and suggested an alternate plan which he thought would be acceptable to both parties. His recommendation fell on deaf ears, and reluctantly he relayed the tightly worded draft to Turin. The superior chapter unanimously rejected it while approving Father Monateri's own proposals. Thus the matter ended.

Concerning a Roman foundation, however, the final word had not yet been spoken for St. Michael's Hospice.⁹ In June 1879, Prince Gabrielli, chairman of the government's board of directors, formally invited Don Bosco to assume the internal direction of the hospice. We have already seen that this institution, on which the Popes had lavished money and anxious care, had fallen into a sad state of decadence. Don Bosco had previously been reluctant to accept the responsibility because he was given no freedom. The prince, who had done his very best to overcome this obstacle, now assured him that the Salesians would be free and unhampered in anything dealing with internal government. Don Bosco replied that

⁹See pp. 52f. [Editor]

he accepted in principle and that the Salesians were highly honored by the trust shown them. As a follow-up, he developed his concept in a reply which he sent to the prince.

Moved by the sincerest intentions, the prince asked for further clarifications, which Don Bosco gave him in greater detail. In addition, since Father Durando was then in Rome because of the hostile campaign being waged against the Oratory's secondary school, Don Bosco instructed him to deal with the matter personally.

It seems that the progress of negotiations was slow. Anxious to have someone who could properly represent him in Rome, Don Bosco, on October 1, 1879, wrote to his dear friend [Commendatore John Baptist] Aluffi,¹⁰ asking him to intervene on his behalf. It was an excellent choice, and Don Bosco had nothing but praise for the assistance of this first-rate official of the Department of the Interior. In his position he wielded great influence on the negotiations, which still proceeded slowly, but Don Bosco had good reason to avoid haste.

Among the scanty documentation concerning St. Michael's Hospice there now remain only the sketchy minutes of a superior chapter meeting which show that the freedom to be granted to the future director was more imaginary than real. For instance, he would not have been free to choose his prefect or appoint a workshop manager or even a Salesian doorkeeper who would be under his sole control. Negotiations, therefore, ground to a halt. Apart from this, it was advantageous for the Salesians that the Roman people came to learn that the government was negotiating with them and showed its trust in such an important matter.

8. MONTEFIASCONE

To these unrealized projects, we must add a few which, once established, failed to take root. The dire need for personnel would not let Don Bosco leave confreres in places where they felt hopelessly locked in and subject to others. We allude to Montefiascone, Albano and Ariccia, where Don Bosco had sent his

¹⁰See Vol. XIII, p. 428 and also pp. 128f of this volume. [Editor]

Salesians mostly to please some eminent people and always with an eye on Rome; there was little belief that these would be permanent foundations.

At Montefiascone¹¹ Father Guidazio felt like a fish out of water. His position became very uneasy after he opposed the unrealistic project of opening a lyceum staffed by Salesians. Soon enough the bishop and the rector became increasingly cold toward him, though no one ever thought he might leave, for the mere hint of his being recalled to Turin would have signaled a direct appeal to the Pope. In view of Leo XIII's affection for Bishop Rotelli [the local ordinary], it was more than probable that a papal intervention would block such a move.

Nevertheless, at the close of the school year, Father Guidazio was called to Turin for genuine health reasons, and later the bishop was informed that, since Don Bosco had stipulated to loan Father Guidazio for only one year, the latter would now be transferred elsewhere. The letter added that, if necessary, Don Bosco would look for and readily find a lay professor whom he might recommend to the seminary rector. Immediately the acting deputy of the Vatican's secretariat of state sent an earnest request that Don Bosco reconsider and send Father Guidazio back, also to forestall serious embarrassment to the bishop and grave displeasure to the Pope. After due consideration to this openly exaggerated statement, Don Bosco decided to stand by his decision.

9. ALBANO AND ARICCIA

The Salesians felt very uncomfortable also at Albano and Ariccia. Cardinal [Camillus] Di Pietro, who had brought them there, had been transferred to the see of Ostia and Velletri, and shortly afterward his successor, Cardinal [Charles] Morichini, had died. Both cardinals had loved the Salesians, but now the Salesians were no longer in the good graces of the new bishop.

Cardinal Morichini was succeeded by Cardinal D'Hohenlohe, who made an extraordinarily solemn entrance into his diocese. Father [Joseph] Monateri was invited to the gala reception, but,

¹¹See Vol. XIII, pp. 532ff. [Editor]

when he called on the cardinal shortly afterward with another Salesian, he received a somewhat glacial welcome. Later, Father [Stephen] Trione¹² went to pay his respects along with a newly ordained diocesan priest and was well received, but not one word was said about either Don Bosco or the Salesians.

Everything seemed to confirm the rumor that the cardinal was dead set against our Congregation; furthermore, as a champion of Rosminian philosophy, he was also a friend of Archbishop Gastaldi. When sounded out by someone about letting Don Bosco open a boarding school at Albano, he firmly rejected the idea. Likewise, there was hardly anyone of the diocesan clergy who would speak favorably of the Salesians to him. The local priests had never looked graciously upon these “outsiders,” and of late they had been waging a covert war against them. Even the slightest incident would have kicked up a storm, as it happened when Father [Charles] Montiglio lost his patience during class and, unfortunately, slapped a seminarian. Squabbles, gossip and slanderous comments resulted. To make matters worse, the Salesians’ quarters in Ariccia were very uncomfortable, unsanitary, and tight and noisy because of the endless movement of municipal employees to and from their offices. All requests for improvement met with only vague promises, because the municipality was practically bankrupt. The situation became simply intolerable.

It was a relief for them to have Father Cagliero and his traveling companion enjoy carnival with them. Father Cagliero’s report to Don Bosco read: “We see it as a waste to keep our Salesians at Albano when we have so many pressing requests for schools and hostels elsewhere and there is no hope for one here. What little good our priests are doing in these two small towns could just as readily be done by the local clergy. We have personnel here who are gifted and well disciplined and capable of far more good elsewhere.”¹³ Shortly afterward, Father Monateri was instructed to inform the cardinal bishop of Albano that the Salesians were resigning. Father Gallo was given identical instructions for the municipal authorities of Ariccia, who at first demurred but then had to yield.

¹²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹³Letter, Acireale, March 3, 1879. See also *Bollettino Salesiano*, August 1879, pp. 7f. [Author]

There was good reason for the Ariccia authorities' reluctance. Both the parish priest and aldermen had secretly and unsuccessfully tried to lure other teachers, and now they did not know what to do. Under the circumstances it was no place for Salesians.

At Albano only two boarding seminarians remained, and the clerics, forced to attend public schools with irreligious teachers and all kinds of schoolmates, felt very much out of place. The situation made it necessary to close the seminary, and it has remained closed to the present day [1933].

Nevertheless, the people of both towns were very fond of the Salesians because of their priestly ministry, their splendid liturgical services, and the care they lavished on the children both in and out of school. The boys liked them so much that they were constantly at the Salesian house. The few surviving confreres who once enjoyed this affection from young and old have fond memories of it. Their successors, who later established themselves in neighboring Genzano, kept hearing how much the old-timers missed Don Bosco's sons who had preceded them in the Castelli Romani twenty years before.

CHAPTER 13

Salesian Houses Opened in 1879

IN his 1880 New Year's greetings to the Salesian cooperators, Don Bosco listed the houses he had opened the year before, citing Saint-Cyr as the first. In fact, it was opened on June 10, 1879, when the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians took possession. For the moment we will add nothing to what we have already said in this¹ and the preceding volume.²

1. SAN BENIGNO CANAVESE

Destined to become most important for the life of the Congregation, this house was opened in the summer of 1879, marking the return of an active and fervent Christian life to an historic abbey which had been a peaceful haven of prayer, study and work for a large community of Benedictine monks from the year 1001. As in so many other instances, a sizable town had gradually grown around the abbey, from which it took its name, San Benigno di Fruttuaria. Its founder, William of Volpiano, former Benedictine abbot of St. Benignus of Dijon, who founded forty other monasteries, was widely known throughout Christian Europe for his holiness and learning. So weighty an influence did the abbey of San Benigno Canavese exert during the Middle Ages that its abbot governed thirty other monasteries, wielding temporal power in Italy, France, Austria and Corsica, thanks to Popes, kings and

¹See Index under "Saint-Cyr." [Editor]

²See Vol. XIII, pp. 407f, 418. [Editor]

feudal lords who had generously endowed it with villages, castles and estates. At one time as many as twelve hundred monks were under his jurisdiction. A true center of virtue and knowledge, it gave the Church two Popes, Innocent IV and Sixtus IV, and five of its abbots were princes of the House of Savoy. Its early history gained renown when King Ardoine, disheartened by political strife, withdrew there to find peace, donning the monastic habit and leading an austere, cloistered life to the end of his days. His memory lives in the folklore of nine centuries.

The abbey began to decline toward the end of the fifteenth century when it was canonically erected as a *commendata*.³ Abbots continued to be appointed to the benefice even after the monks had left and the dukes of Savoy had taken over the abbey. The last abbot to hold the benefice was Cardinal Amedeo delle Lanze, who died in 1738 after a life of charity and priestly zeal. The abbey lands were then absorbed into the diocese of Ivrea. On August 15, 1865 the historic estate was totally dissolved by law and the remaining revenues deposited into the government's Cult Fund, while the lands reverted to the state. In 1877 the king decreed the main abbey building a national monument, and the state lands were put under the municipality's trusteeship. This was the abbey's legal status when a lease was first negotiated with Don Bosco.

It was the local parish priest, Father Benone, who first thought of asking him to take it over; though his initial attempt failed, he succeeded the second time. We should point out that in 1852 the Fathers of Christian Doctrine had opened a certified secondary school with facilities for boarders, and another fine priest ran a branch school in adjacent premises for poorer boys. In 1867, however, differences of opinion with the municipal authorities caused the Fathers of Christian Doctrine and the priest to leave. Father Benone then suggested that Don Bosco come in and establish his own boarding school. Don Bosco gladly agreed, provided that the parish priest first obtained the consent of Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea. Foreseeing no obstacles, Father Benone called on the bishop and with the informality of an old friend put the matter before him. "Never, absolutely never, will I allow Don

³An abbey became a *commendata* when its rentals were granted by the Pope to an ecclesiastic or layman not belonging to the abbey. [Author]

Bosco to set himself up within my diocese,” the bishop replied.⁴ Thoroughly crushed, Father Benone left, not even staying for dinner with the bishop as he usually did on such occasions. Later, Bishop Moreno, in an effort to get the building for his own use and to block attempts of others, undertook a vast program of repairs, bringing pressure to bear on the government to declare it a national monument. He achieved his goal and immediately added a further fifteen thousand lire of restorations which ultimately benefited Don Bosco. Because of the building’s new status, no investors came forward, and so, after the bishop’s death in 1878, Father Benone succeeded in having the Salesians take it over.

Don Bosco’s aim was to move the clerics’ novitiate to San Benigno. This novitiate passed through three phases. At first the novices fully shared the Oratory’s family life of prayer and action according to each one’s capability: they supervised the boys, taught catechism or school subjects, worked in the city’s festive oratories, and carried out secretarial tasks under the direct guidance of the local superiors. They took philosophy and theology courses at the diocesan seminary.

During the novitiate’s second phase, the novices studied at the Oratory in classrooms of their own under their own superior, Father Julius Barberis, while continuing for a couple of years to supervise the boys. At this time, they were gradually grouped apart in a private dormitory, playground and dining room. Finally, on being freed from the duty of supervising the boys, they became totally separated from the rest of the Oratory community. The novitiate entered into its third phase when it was moved to San Benigno Canavese, where everything was directed to their religious formation.

Don Bosco himself acknowledged this intention of his in opening the house of San Benigno Canavese, but he also advised against giving it too clerical a look, and he set up workshops for young apprentices, thus also providing for its living expenses.⁵ Events were not slow to prove how wisely he had acted. When the municipality transferred the building to Don Bosco, the prefect of

⁴For the background of Bishop Moreno’s animosity see the Indexes of Volumes VII and VIII under *Letture Cattoliche*. [Editor]

⁵Chronicle of Father Barberis, April 18 and May 7, 1879. [Author]

Turin sent the following caution to the mayor before giving final approval:

Since the terms of the contract ceding state lands and buildings to the municipality bind the latter to allow the abbey's main building to be used exclusively for endeavors benefiting the public, you are obliged to specify distinctly what use Father John Bosco will make of that building and why such use may be considered a benefit to the public.

When Don Bosco was informed of this instruction,⁶ he sent the mayor the following reply:

Rome, March 10, 1879

Dear Sir:

I am honored to reply to your letter of March 1 concerning the use I intend to make of the main building of San Benigno Abbey. As already stated in the deed of cession, I intend to use it for the public good, as I have done with all other houses under my direction. Specifically, I intend to use the abbey's main building:

1. as a day school for the area's children;
2. as an evening school for adults;
3. as a youth center for the area's young men.
4. I would turn any remaining space into a home for needy youngsters who wish to learn a craft or trade, as is done in the [Valdocco] Oratory in Turin, where homeless youngsters from various places of Italy are sheltered.
5. Finally, if possible, I would also set up a center for our young personnel, to train them in practical ways of maintaining discipline in dormitories, workshops, and classrooms.

These are the projects I have in mind, space permitting.

I believe this is an adequate explanation of my plans. Should you request further details, I shall gladly answer your questions.

Obligingly yours,
Fr. John Bosco

His main purpose was mentioned last and only conditionally. But [we must bear in mind that] if the deed of cession stated nothing as to the way Don Bosco was to use the abbey's main building for the public good, he himself specified it in his contract with the board of

⁶Letter to Don Bosco from the mayor, March 1, 1879. [Author]

aldermen in which he declared that he and his successors agreed to abide by three conditions: 1. To honor the municipality's obligations to the government as stated in the deed of subcession; 2. To open an elementary school in the abbey premises for the area's children; 3. To honor the obligations which the municipality had contracted with the teachers of the elementary school.

The agreement with the municipality made reference only to matters of concern to the municipal authorities, nothing being said of Don Bosco's main purpose, which was then better left unsaid. Nevertheless, his intentions were amply intimated by the wording: "To open an elementary school in the abbey premises."

Once things were well under way, Don Bosco openly revealed his mind in the 1880 circular to the Salesian cooperators. Describing the new house as being "directed in many ways toward the public good," he added, "Many poor boys will learn a trade there, while others will be trained to become good teachers and assistants in our schools and workshops. Local children will attend the school, and an oratory will be opened on Sundays and holy days." His reasons for so cautiously avoiding all mention of a religious novitiate are obvious. On the other hand, the town was all the better off for giving Don Bosco leeway, since he enriched it with a charitable institution and helped ease some areas of the municipal budget.

Nor was his promise to house young artisans in the house a mere cover-up. In fact, Father Barberis, the director, on taking office immediately mailed a circular announcing that in San Benigno Don Bosco had opened "a new hospice for an increasing number of destitute boys who would be trained in goodness and work so as later to be able to earn an honest living." Father Barberis urged the readers to recommend boys from twelve to eighteen who needed a home and schooling and to help provide work for the existing shops: carpentry, tailoring, shoemaking and bookbinding. He also appealed to the faithful's generosity for donations, household goods and food. Soon more workshops were added. The novices themselves were not a bit bothered by the presence of so many young workers sharing their home. Throughout their usual routine, they were hardly aware of them, since each group had its own chapel, playground and living quarters.

That year was an extraordinary jubilee year to celebrate the election of Leo XIII. The parish priest of San Benigno came to the Oratory in May to ask the Salesians to preach a triduum and prepare the people for the papal indulgences. The reply was a prompt yes, and Father Barberis, who had been appointed director of the new house, went to San Benigno. Thus he was able to check on the work to be done before the premises could be occupied. Don Bosco later sent both Father Cagliero and Father Barberis to Ivrea to pay their respects in the name of the Salesians to the newly installed Bishop David Riccardi and to request the needed faculties. Graciously the bishop replied, "If needed, I grant you every faculty a Catholic bishop can give." In due time, when the Salesians finally came to his diocese, he was very happy and wished them a pleasant, permanent and spiritually fruitful stay.⁷

The first residents of San Benigno were the fifty clerical novices of 1878-79. On completing their final exams on July 3, they left Turin two days later and walked the entire road to San Benigno for their summer vacation. Both city officials and the people joyfully welcomed them. They lacked many things, but experience has shown that in the initial stages of a new undertaking it is always to the pioneers' interest to shift for themselves and meet their creature needs.

Despite his wish—indeed, his intention—of moving the novitiate to San Benigno, Don Bosco, anxious that the premises be ready before permanently transferring the novices of the new school year, had decided to send the clerical novices there for their summer vacation. Furthermore, during the September spiritual retreats at Lanzo, he asked Father Rua, Father Lazzero and Father Barberis to study the situation and make a report to the superior chapter. Their findings were quite favorable, except for two items: first, the new house would always be a financial burden to the Oratory since hardly any novices could afford to pay their way; second, it was too far distant for Don Bosco to hear the novices' confessions, as he had done in the past, and to imbue them with the true spirit of the Congregation.

The reply to the first difficulty was that the Lord, who had always generously cared for the needs of the Congregation, would

⁷Letter to Father Barberis, Ivrea, July 8, 1879. [Author]

certainly not stop now, especially since this undertaking aimed exclusively at His greater glory. As for the second difficulty, Don Bosco pointed out that he was already absenting himself from the Oratory several months of the year so that even then he found it hard to get to know all the clerics. He could make up for this by frequent visits, particularly on the occasion of the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.

The final decision was taken on September 17: the clerical novitiate would from then on be situated at San Benigno. The result was that candidates accepted by the superiors during the spiritual retreat were immediately transferred there. On October 20, Don Bosco vested the novices with the clerical habit in a private chapel of their own and fervently encouraged them to grow in virtue. Among those fifty novices, two deserve special mention: Michael Unia,⁸ heroic apostle of the lepers, and Philip Rinaldi,⁹ Don Bosco's third successor.

2. CREMONA

In the New Year's circular to the Salesian cooperators which we have mentioned, Don Bosco listed three other houses after San Benigno. All were short-lived, not because of his poor foresight or faulty preparation, but because their very origins were marked by overwhelming difficulties.

The house at Cremona came first. Don Bosco's deputies, Father Cagliero and Father Durando, stopped there on their return journey to Turin¹⁰ and found it doing fairly well. In September, Father [Anthony] Sala, economer general, visited the house and was also pleased with the preparatory work of a special committee. Toward the end of that month, then, three priests, two clerics and two coadjutors left for Cremona. Father Stephen Chicco, who was replaced at Nizza Monferrato by Father Lemoyne, was the director. Don Bosco's circular letter stated: "A festive oratory and a public church named after Saint Lawrence, as well as day and evening classes, have begun in Cremona."

⁸See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁹*Ibid.* [Editor]

¹⁰See p. 31. [Editor]

For three years the Salesians bucked serious obstacles put up by intolerant anticlerical parties who were dead set against anything even remotely seeming to curry clerical favor. Unfortunately, a teacher took exceptionally severe measures in disciplining some pupils, and a great hue and cry arose once it became known. The anticlericals seized this excuse to organize demonstrations against the school for several days, shouting threats and even attempting to overrun the premises. To make matters worse, Father Dominic Bruna, who had succeeded Father Chicco¹¹ at his death, unwisely defended the impulsive teacher, stiffening popular hostility and causing his own immediate dismissal by the prefecture.

Honest people, however, sided with the Salesians, and some fifty fathers of the students quickly signed a declaration of support which Don Bosco immediately sent to Commendatore [James] Malvano at Rome through Father Durando. The commendatore, on the point of leaving to dine with the king, promised to bring the matter up to the minister of public education, who would be a fellow guest. That evening, Father Durando, learning from the commendatore that things had taken a bad turn, conferred with Chevalier Costantini, the minister's secretary and informed him that Attorney Villa would handle the problem. Costantini's only comment was that this would certainly aggravate the situation. Cremona's Freemasonry had sent word to their colleague not to budge from Rome, so he pocketed the five hundred lire given him for traveling expenses and was not heard from again. Father Durando then hastened to Cremona to confer with the local authorities, but the prefect was away, the school superintendent was in hiding, the mayor had not yet been installed, and the acting manager had no intention of getting involved. It was the anticlericals' hour of triumph. Since the Salesians' position had become untenable, they withdrew on July 1, 1882, leaving the entire project in the hands of the committee which had first sent for them. Bishop [Jeremiah] Bonomelli of Cremona was deeply concerned, but he could do nothing to ease the anticlericals' wrath, nor did he care to look for a scapegoat. His love for Don Bosco and the Congregation never wavered. We shall return to this matter in the next volume.

¹¹He had died on September 8, 1881. [Editor]

3. BRINDISI

After citing Cremona, Don Bosco stated: "On November 8, a similar foundation was opened at Brindisi, the second southernmost city of Italy." This laconic reference seems to forecast a very brief existence. The Salesians never had a home of their own, being lodged in an apartment of the bishop's residence. That good prelate, Archbishop Louis Aguilar, a Barnabite, had once visited Don Bosco at the Oratory and had been deeply edified by what he had seen.¹² He longed for something similar in his own archdiocese, but his hopes went all awry. Misunderstandings not promptly cleared up begot lack of trust and hostility among the clergy against the Salesians, all the more so since the local priests saw no need for them. The few Salesians who had been sent to get the project started felt the cooling off of the initial favor and, seeing no way of rekindling it, returned to Turin the following summer.

4. CHALLONGES

Several times, while conversing with Commendatore [John Baptist] Dupraz—whom we have mentioned in connection with our house at Trinità near Mondovì¹³—Don Bosco had expressed a desire to start work in the diocese named after the Congregation's titular saint. In turn, this gentleman mentioned it to Bishop Magnin of Annecy, telling him of the good work of the Salesians, especially among poor, homeless boys. The bishop assured him that Don Bosco would have his full support whenever he might be ready to open a school in Savoy. The favorable moment came in 1877 when Commendatore Dupraz and his unmarried sister decided to buy and remodel a building at Challonges, their native town in Haute Savoie, for Don Bosco to open a festive oratory and a school for resident and day students. In giving his permission, the bishop wrote to Father Durando as follows: "For some time I have been acquainted with the good work Don Bosco's Congregation is doing, and I therefore heartily endorse what this man of God has in mind for Challonges in my diocese. Having long been a distant admirer of his zeal on behalf of Italian youth, I shall now be very fortunate

¹²*Bulletin Salesiën*, November 1879, p. 4. [Author]

¹³See Vol. XII, pp. 357f. [Editor]

indeed to bless and admire at close range the achievements of his Congregation which I am sure I shall see among my beloved people.”¹⁴ Bishop Magnin died just before the lengthy negotiations were concluded, and his successor, Bishop Isoard, promptly declared his own joyful willingness to give his support to the worthy undertaking and to welcome the Salesians, for he too had great spiritual expectations for his diocese.¹⁵

The building's remodeling took longer than anticipated, and the total outlay came to some sixty thousand francs including the sale price. Commendatore Dupraz paid the whole sum and also volunteered an annual subsidy of fifteen hundred francs for the Salesians. Don Bosco sent Father Durando to check on the work's progress and to determine how soon the school could be opened. The date was finally set for November 1879.

Meanwhile, shortly before the inauguration, one of Challonges' council members circulated a leaflet, "The Oratory of St. John the Baptist," which announced that, with the bishop of Annecy's authorization and the local parish priest's consent, a Catholic oratory was to be opened as a day school and a religious instruction center for boys of Challonges and its environs at the residence of Commendatore Dupraz. The project was detailed as including a tuition-free day school meeting the requirements of the canton's office of primary education and, eventually, a private elementary school.

However, schools of this nature required a headmaster who was properly qualified and was a French citizen. Originally Don Bosco had planned to appoint Count Cays, an Italian, to the position; now, however, he had no choice but to send for Father [James] Vincent¹⁶ from Saint-Cyr since he met all the requirements.

Father Durando accompanied the Salesians to Challonges, where they immediately opened the festive oratory and started a choir. It was a daily oratory because Savoy's diocesan regulations mandated an hour a day from November 1 to March 14 of catechetical instruction for all children. It was truly a long day for the Salesians: morning catechism classes ran from seven-thirty to

¹⁴Annecy, November 5, 1877. [Author]

¹⁵Letter from the bishop's secretary to Commendatore Dupraz, Annecy, August 27, 1879. [Author]

¹⁶See Vol. XIII, pp. 412, 418. [Editor]

eight-thirty, followed by Mass and regular instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic—the only subjects permitted. The boys returned for games in the afternoon, while many pupils who came from three neighboring villages brought their lunch with them and stayed till evening. The building was ideal, with spacious, airy classrooms.

Everything is fine—Count Cays wrote¹⁷—except for me because I feel that I am far from qualified for this top position. True, I keep remembering what you so often told me, “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me,” but they would certainly go better if my feeble trust [in God] were not matched by my ineptness. I candidly tell you of my unrest not because I am unwilling to do my very best, but rather because I need your prayers very much.

Meanwhile something that happened everywhere else began to take place at Challonges: public school pupils started to transfer to the free, or charity, school, as it was known, though it had a limited curriculum and no legal approval. This steady flow of new students forced the Salesians to expand the curriculum and to add new subjects. Then, at the insistence of priests and laity, they petitioned the competent authority to get their school approved on a par with other private institutions. Unfortunately, they moved ahead without due consideration to the legal requirement that a petition was to hold in abeyance for a month.

Immediately the Masonic press—particularly *Le Patriote Savoisien* of Chambéry, the radicals’ mouthpiece, kicked up a fury which was fed mainly by the town schoolmaster who was left with only two pupils. The school inspector reported the matter to the prefect of the province who, in turn, hung two violations upon Father Vincent: operating a private school illegally and hiring two foreigners as teachers and supervisors. The first charge drew a summons to Father Vincent to appear in court at Saint-Julien, the provincial capital. The second prompted the immediate closing of the school by order of the prefect of Annecy. Legally, such a drastic penalty was reserved for offenses against public morals. However, it was inflicted under the specious reason that the school was staffed by foreigners, as though they were by that very fact

¹⁷Letter to Don Bosco, November 13, 1879. [Author]

suspect persons. The situation forced Count Cays to dismiss the pupils on December 8, suspending all classes until further notice. Father Vincent was fined twenty-five francs and disqualified from operating a private school. Meanwhile Commendatore Dupraz kept clamoring for some qualified French Salesian to reopen the school immediately.

Learning of this impasse and of the school's financial straits, Father Rua felt that Count Cays should return to Turin to meet with Don Bosco. On December 4, 1879 he had written to Count Cays: "Fearing that this controversy may force you to postpone your return [to Turin], I asked Don Bosco what was to be done about Challonges, and he feels that it would be best for us, if we can, to withdraw, so to speak, with military honors."

Don Bosco's decision was influenced by two factors. First, there was the impossibility of assigning a Salesian priest as headmaster. True, he could satisfy the authorities by appointing someone as the nominal headmaster and have Salesians be staff members, but his fear was that such a person might possibly not be satisfied with merely being a figurehead but would want to be headmaster in fact. Then too, after all the tirades in court, the school authorities would closely watch the teachers and Salesians and easily find out if they were foreigners. The harassment would only continue. "Therefore," Father Rua concluded in his letter, "if Commendatore Dupraz is really determined to keep the school open, it might be better for him to run it with a non-Salesian French staff. Later, once things settle down, we may be able to return, especially if a boarding school is to be opened."

Don Bosco had quick insight into the heart of the problem: they had moved too fast to open a private school. Experience had taught him that any lasting foundation was to start with a festive oratory, and expansions would subsequently respond to time and circumstance. He suggested that Father Cays try once again along these lines, as follows:

Turin, December 12, 1879

Dearest Count:

I have received all your welcome letters which have both pleased and deeply grieved me. We should have known that the devil would try to gore us. Had we stuck to Commendatore Dupraz' original plan, we might have

been spared this upset. His idea called for opening just an oratory and an evening school this year, as we cast about for future developments. One always runs into trouble when ruffling the municipality's feelings. We are pretty much in the same predicament at Trinità near Mondovì. There the public school teachers are trying their best to take our pupils from us, and the municipal authorities are behind them. At any rate, we are now awaiting a court decision and will necessarily abide by it.

I think it best to restrict ourselves to the festive oratory and the charity school strictly for elementary grades. Father Rua will write to you about the rest.

We expect no trouble elsewhere, since at Nice, La Navarre and Marseille we teach only young artisans who live with us. At Marseille we also teach the choirboys, but the pastor is the responsible person.

Please pay my respects to Commendatore and Mrs. Dupraz, and assure them both that I pray for their good health and the success of our mutual concerns.

God bless you, dear Count, and may He bless your efforts and those of our dear confreres. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please do not worry about money in caring for your health and that of the confreres. Make sure they all have sufficient warm clothing.

The count could not return to Turin until January 1880. Then Don Bosco put the whole intricate situation to the superior chapter's study. We say "intricate" because on learning that the Salesians intended to withdraw, Commendatore Dupraz felt that it was a bad mistake and sent Father Rua a heated tirade against a plan which he indignantly interpreted as an act of disloyalty to him. In consequence of this, the chapter decided simply to curtail the Salesians' activities in Challonges lest they give the authorities any further excuse to intervene, and in the meantime to look for a new headmaster. Furthermore, it was decided to continue the renewed endeavor *ad experimentum* for one more year only, during which the superior chapter would subsidize the project. Count Cays was instructed to tell the commendatore of these decisions.

No sooner had Count Cays returned to Challonges than new obstacles arose to hinder the oratory's operation. He had written to the bishop of Annecy about the exercise of faculties granted to the

Salesian Congregation, informing him at the same time that the blessing of the oratory chapel was near at hand in accordance with his previous authorization. The bishop replied that because of the hostility toward all religious congregations, it might be wiser to avoid any pretext for new allegations, all the more so since the law required the government to approve the opening of such a chapel. In practice it was a law frequently ignored, but after the recent events, it was quite certain that the prefecture would invoke it and order the chapel closed. There was no way out but to put off the blessing to a happier occasion. In the meantime Commendatore Dupraz—the very soul of this undertaking—died. The Salesians, who had gone to Turin for their annual retreat with little if any likelihood to return to Challonges, withdrew altogether despite the insistence of the widow. Furthermore, the all-out war against religious congregations in France made it advisable not to focus attention on our Congregation, such as might happen were the Salesians to stay on at Challonges after the recent notoriety.¹⁸

Nor was Challonges the only instance when prudence prompted Don Bosco to keep a low profile and await a more propitious moment to expand his activities in France. A lengthy correspondence between Count Cays and both Father Comoy and Father Bologna running from January to June 1880, concerning the prospect of opening another house at Fourchambault in the district of Nièvre, was abruptly ended at Don Bosco's word as soon as the first decree clamping down on unapproved religious congregations was issued.

5. THE EPISODE AT ANNECY

Before leaving Savoy, we must not omit an episode in which Count Cays, acting as Don Bosco's French correspondence secretary, took part.¹⁹ When Saint Francis de Sales was proclaimed a "Doctor of the Church" in 1877, the Visitation nuns of Annecy set about to build a handsome shrine so that the sacred

¹⁸This had been Don Bosco's idea all along from the beginning of the year, as we can clearly see in his letter to Count Cays dated Marseille, February 4, 1880. [Author]

¹⁹Our information is drawn from a packet of relevant correspondence found among Count Cays' papers. [Author]

remains of their founder, enshrined until then in their convent, would find a resting place more honorable and more easily accessible to the public. Work on the shrine began in 1878. A year later, when the shrine's interior decorations still waited to be done, the funds had dwindled down to almost nothing. In May 1879 Don Bosco received a letter from Mother Mary Louise Bartolezzi, the prioress, who wished to have his name memorialized in the new church. Turin had sent her a good number of donations in marble, granite, statues and other art works, and it seemed natural for the shrine to contain also a tribute from the priest who had chosen Geneva's bishop as his Congregation's patron saint. She closed her letter by advising him that the convent's confessor would soon be calling on him.

Quite probably this visit never took place because no mention is made of it in Count Cays' draft of a reply written a month later and signed by Don Bosco. Among other things Don Bosco wrote:

It is truly my heartfelt wish that our Congregation, placed under the protection of this amiable saint, may erect an altar in your shrine as a token of our devotion, but I fear that we may not be up to the task. I must first know if a memorial altar is still available and how much it would cost. Should it be within our means, I would very gladly accept responsibility for it, but I cannot bind myself in advance or assume obligations before knowing how weighty a burden I am shouldering.

Delighted by his generous offer, the prioress immediately informed him that the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and that of Our Lady were still available as memorials.

"Either of these two marble altars," she added, "costs between three thousand and thirty-five hundred francs. Were you graciously to share in our shrine through a memorial altar, we would not ask for the entire sum. Whatever you can contribute will be accepted most gratefully and will enhance the beauty of a shrine built through the charity of our glorious saint's beloved sons."

Don Bosco waited for an estimate to come from Annecy based on the architect's drawing and so did not write any further, but he did not forget his promise to contribute according to his means. Indeed, while Count Cays was at Challonges, he had occasion to go to Annecy, and Don Bosco instructed him to deliver five hundred francs to the shrine's administrator. In the meantime, however, the

shrine at Annecy had gone ahead with the Sacred Heart altar now in place in a magnificently decorated chapel. The whole memorial was being charged to Don Bosco's account to the sum of five thousand francs, his donation of five hundred francs being accepted as a token payment. Annecy may have taken his silence to mean consent, but in Don Bosco's interpretation silence was nothing more than that, since he had clearly stated that he would suspend decision until he had all the facts. Had the cost been kept below three thousand francs, he would have managed to pay partly in cash and mostly in materials and stonework which friendly stonecutters in Turin would have supplied. But to come up with five thousand francs at the moment, when he was burdened with building several churches of his own, was an impossible task.

Again Divine Providence came to his aid. When Count Cays visited Turin from Challonges during the summer, he spoke about the situation to a zealous Salesian cooperator and old confidant of his, Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres. The baron gladly seized the opportunity to rid his conscience of an old scruple. He had bought a house in Turin which had once belonged to the Visitation nuns and had later been expropriated under the French regime.²⁰ It was true that the concordat between Pius VII and Napoleon I exonerated any buyer of expropriated religious property, but the baron had a very delicate conscience and sought peace of mind. So he called on Don Bosco with this proposal: he would pay the Visitation nuns of Annecy four thousand francs at the current rate of exchange in two equal installments; in turn, they would either buy back the property at the price he had paid, plus reimbursement for repairs, or they would obtain for him from the Visitation nuns of Turin a written statement that they had no objection to his retaining the property. The confessor of the Visitation convent at Annecy was to be asked to be a mediator. The happy conclusion is obvious. Never before were two birds so easily killed with the proverbial one stone.²¹

²⁰The Visitation convent in Piedmont's capital was founded by St. Jane Frances de Chantal in Via della Consolata in 1638. The house to which we refer was in front of it, at No. 5. [Author]

²¹The chapel of the Sacred Heart in Annecy contained the following inscription: *Salesianorum ordo—Feliciano Ricci des Ferres—Dinaste pedemontano—Adiuvante—Sacellum decoravit—Anno MDCCCLXXX* [The Salesian Congregation adorned this chapel with the help of the Piedmontese nobleman Feliciano Ricci des Ferres in 1880]. We said "contained" because the chapel no longer exists, having been demolished in 1910 after being legally expropriated to make room for a post office. [Author]

6. RANDAZZO

St. Basil's School at Randazzo is certainly a Salesian house which was and still is a shining credit to Don Bosco. In its fifty-three years of existence it has generated such a harvest of good that we can readily overlook whatever obstacles and setbacks at times threatened its very being. Its robust vitality has withstood every test, allaying the fears which many felt that memorable evening of October 24 [1879] when a long-expected handful of youthful clerics arrived, headed by a frail-looking priest, and dispelling the misgivings of others who never believed it possible for religious to open a private school at a time of rampant anticlericalism.

Randazzo, a small town of Sicily graced for centuries with the title of city, rests upon the lava of Etna and is built up with its black lava blocks. It practically nestles on the lap of the smoking, snow-capped giant which looms eight thousand feet above it. In 1879 there was no railroad to Randazzo, the nearest trunk line going from Messina to Catania. The nineteen remaining miles had to be made by stagecoach.²² It was in this remote area that Don Bosco sank his first roots into Sicilian soil.

Several ancestral families, renowned for both wealth and achievements, were living at Randazzo. They naturally realized the need for a modern school. Back in 1862 the municipality had planned to open a boarding school, but several serious difficulties had stood in the way. In 1867 the town resolutely took a step forward and got the government's permission to take over a former Basilian monastery, but for lack of funds and qualified personnel to run the school nothing was done until eleven years later, when some prominent citizens united and, overriding prejudice, proposed that they ask a religious congregation to help them.

The suggestion was accepted and implemented. One day the parish priest, Father Francis Fisauli, called upon his bishop at Acireale to explain their plans for a school and their search for a religious congregation to run it.

"Why not ask Don Bosco?" the bishop suggested.

"Who is he?"

"You mean you've never heard of Don Bosco?"

²²This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

And he went on to give him a brief account of Don Bosco's work. When Father Fisauli returned to Randazzo, he aroused his friends' enthusiasm, and they immediately got to work.²³

While Father Fisauli, son of a prominent local family, managed the project, the real heart and soul of the whole undertaking was a local layman, the noble, highly meriting Chevalier Joseph Vagliasindi. As a province council member, he submitted the project to the civil authorities and obtained their approval in a situation where Church authorities would never have won even a hearing. To the end of his life he was loyal to the Salesians, protecting and defending their school from everyone and everything. Although city officials were only worried about providing an education within a balanced budget, Chevalier Vagliasindi more nobly aimed at providing a Christian education for the new generation. A relatively young man, he was a strong politician endowed with a Christian conscience and, though Freemasons dominated politics, he succeeded in convincing the responsible civil officials to grant the needed authorization for this manifestly religious undertaking. Not only did prudence rule his every action during those troublesome times, but to prudence he coupled a humble reserve which, while concealing the full range of his activity until it was revealed at his death, allowed others to enjoy the limelight. Don Bosco, well aware of Vagliasindi's service, repeatedly expressed his cordial gratitude in writing for all he had done and would still do for St. Basil's School.²⁴

Formal negotiations with Don Bosco began after Father Fisauli's conversation with his bishop. A letter was drafted by Vagliasindi²⁵ and signed by Father Fisauli, and it was sent to Don Bosco with a fervent recommendation from the bishop himself.²⁶ However, it seems that, as early as April, Vagliasindi had already

²³Letter from Chevalier Joseph Vagliasindi to Don Bosco, Randazzo, October 16, 1884. [Author]

²⁴Letter from Father [Peter] Guidazio to Vagliasindi, Turin, September 1882, and to Father [Celestine] Durando, Turin, October 24, 1884. On one festive occasion—in the presence of Bishop [John] Cagliero and Randazzo's leading citizens—Father Guidazio's fertile imagination led him to liken Vagliasindi and the Salesian school to the best man in a wedding.

²⁵His son Francis found the draft in his father's handwriting among the family papers. [Author]

²⁶Letter from Father Fisauli to his bishop from Randazzo, August 1, 1878, and from the bishop to Don Bosco from Acireale, August 2, 1878. [Author]

broached the subject to Don Bosco in a personal letter to let him know about the school's site, the building, and other details of finances and moral conditions.²⁷

Don Bosco's reply was prompt and favorable. He was ready to open a technical and secondary school with facilities for boarders and at the same time assume control of the town's elementary school. As for salaries, he would send a copy of his contract with the municipality of Alassio to serve as a basis for negotiations, and he would also send someone to represent him. This last phrase referred to Father Cagliero's and Father Durando's planned trip to investigate the matter.²⁸ Formal mention of Don Bosco's name to the town's councilmen was first made at their meeting of January 28, 1879 by Joseph Vagliasindi,²⁹ who briefed his associates on the state of negotiations and got their unanimous approval. Father Cagliero and Father Durando arrived on March 3 and stayed there for six days. On March 9 Father Cagliero wrote to Don Bosco from Acireale: "The municipal authorities welcomed us officially. Their motivation is Christian, not just material; they seek a thorough, sound Christian education." In view of this promising environment and realizing that the Salesians "were the first religious Congregation being asked to build anew upon the ruins of religious orders which had been recently disbanded and suppressed in Sicily," Don Bosco's two representatives felt that they should act with wider latitude than they had been given by his instructions to them. On March 7, taking the less demanding contract of Alassio as a basis for discussion rather than the more stringent one of Varazze, which Don Bosco preferred and which they had brought with them, they worked out a five-year agreement with the municipality. It became effective immediately upon the provincial school board's approval on April 29. Don Bosco wrote to the mayor "a very courteous letter," which, states Father Fisauli,³⁰ "highly gratified the municipal councillors, and greatly pleased all who were fortunate enough to read or learn about it." Lastly, Don Bosco sent Father

²⁷This seems to transpire from a perusal of family papers, which the aforementioned Francis Vagliasindi, son of Joseph, allowed us to examine. [Author]

²⁸Letter to Father Fisauli, September 8 and 26, 1878. [Author]

²⁹Minutes of the municipal council, January 28, 1879. [Author]

³⁰Letter to Father Durando, Randazzo, May 31, 1879. Don Bosco's letter has not yet been found. [Author]

[Anthony] Sala, councillor of the superior chapter, to Randazzo to supervise the school's remodeling ordered by the municipality.

The contract stipulated that both day school and boarding school were to open at the start of the school year 1879-80. Father Peter Guidazio, called in from Montefiascone, was appointed director of the new house; he and his staff left for Randazzo on October 19. Their trip gave him an opportunity to realize how well known and deeply respected Don Bosco was in southern Italy. When he had a problem in Naples to get permission to celebrate Mass because he did not have a *celebret*,³¹ he no sooner said that he was one of Don Bosco's priests than he was not only allowed to say Mass but was given the finest vestments and was treated most courteously. Archbishop [Joseph] Guarino of Messina was also most amiable with all ten of them, personally serving them coffee and providing them with comfortable lodgings and meals at the seminary. Moreover, many priests and prominent laymen, eager to hear about the Salesians and their activities, called on Father Guidazio. The group left the following day, deeply impressed by the graciousness of their eminent host, who wished to be considered a Salesian. Not content with what he had done, the archbishop wrote a very heartwarming letter to Don Bosco, expressing the hope that he would have the pleasure of welcoming him personally to Messina, a possibility Don Bosco's two representatives had mentioned to him.

At Randazzo a large crowd and local clergy welcomed the Salesians, escorting them to the school. They were somewhat astonished at their youthful looks, but still deeply respectful. The civil authorities too paid them a courtesy call.

In his first letter to Don Bosco, dated October 28, 1879, Father Guidazio tells him how touched he had been by the townspeople's reception.

"For the moment everything is wonderful," he wrote. "The sky is beautiful, the town is pretty, and the school will look grandiose upon completion. The people are very good." He concluded, "We are bursting with good will, and, if we have to, we will, with God's help, work miracles. But we need the Oratory's prayers. Dear Don Bosco, commend us to Mary, Help of Christians and pray our

³¹A document stating that the owner is a priest in good standing and requesting that he be permitted to say Mass. It must be signed by his bishop or religious superior. [*Modern Catholic Dictionary* by John A. Hardon, S.J.] [Editor]

patron, St. Francis de Sales, to grant us some of that kindly zeal for souls which enabled him to work wonders for God's greater glory. Beloved Don Bosco, please send us your blessing. Be assured that we shall make every effort to become your ever worthier sons and Salesians."

Applications to the school already amounted to fifty. Father Sala, who had been there since early November, had transformed the old monastery and adjacent buildings into a bright and cheerful home for the lively youngsters due to arrive on November 12. A month later, writing of the boys' conduct to Don Bosco, Father Guidazio unintentionally revealed how helpful Don Bosco's system of education proved to be also in Sicily.³²

You would not believe how willingly these lads listen to and reverently accept the exhortations you send them. Were I even to talk to them about you for an hour, they would not relax their attention. They are so docile and obedient that even we are astonished. On Sundays and holy days they do not fail to receive the sacraments. . . . The parents are delighted to see their children so cheerful and happy that they would rather be in school than at home. Many families wished their boys home for Christmas, but I told them that our regulations would not allow it. Because they insisted, I called the boys themselves and asked them in front of their parents if they wished to go home for Christmas. Every one of them chose to stay with us. This satisfied the parents, who stopped pestering us and rather sent us donkey-loads of cookies for the boys and their superiors. We have found a very simple means to keep all these youngsters contented and happy—the Altar Boys' Society. Each day of the Christmas novena eight or ten served at the altar. . . . You should see how all of them—the older ones especially—are wild about serving in cassock and surplice. . . . We have already staged two plays exclusively for the boys.

No boarding school of Don Bosco's could do without a festive oratory. The sight of so many poor youngsters—uneducated, crammed in wretched hovels, abandoned to their own street ways—moved Father Stephen Trione to assume care of them by gathering them together on Sundays and keeping them pleasantly busy in a wholesome environment. He brought his plan to the bishop, who not only welcomed it, but urged him to act immediately. He

³²Letter to Father Rua, shortly after Christmas 1879. [Author]

commended it to the local clergy and gave him for his use an abandoned church and pews that had been stored away in a warehouse. Without delay Father Trione opened the oratory to some two hundred poor boys. The gradual moral change coming about in these foul-mouthed street lads who used to curse, blaspheme and call the devil a saint—a deplorable local habit—brought joy to Father Trione. Of course he tried various enticements to hold them, such as mini-lotteries, Punch and Judy shows, and outings. He was aided by a young cleric and some secondary school pupils who also acted as his interpreters of the Sicilian dialect and helped keep order in the church and on the playground. With the kindness he had learned from Don Bosco, Father Trione won the hearts of those poor youngsters, instructed them in their faith, and bettered the abject condition in which they were languishing.

During the spring of the first school year, St. Basil's School was honored by two very appreciated visits. Archbishop [Joseph] Guarino of Messina took a side trip to Randazzo from a neighboring town in his archdiocese to see for himself Don Bosco's highly-praised sons in action. He stayed a week with them, mingling with the pupils like one of them, talking to them and even joining in their games like the Salesians. He thoroughly enjoyed an assembly they gave him in his honor and left with the firm conviction that Don Bosco's work was truly a godsend to his era. A month later, Bishop Gerlando Genuardi, diocesan ordinary, graciously accepted the hospitality of the Salesians. He was given a fitting welcome and honored with the presentation of a Latin comedy—a feat that dazzled highly educated guests. Briefly, the school's excellent reputation was growing both locally and throughout the island.

Of course, every coin has its reverse side. Father Rua had cautioned Father Guidazio not to set too much store by first impressions, and in time events justified the advice. The director's stamina was often tried seriously by the anticlericalism of school supervisors and inspectors, the coldness of local civil authorities and problems within the school, but, thanks to his own ability and the capable assistance of the loyal Joseph Vagliasindi, he always managed to come out on top. When bidding Father Guidazio good-bye, Don Bosco had given him two explicit assurances: "Have no

fears! You will work wonders at Randazzo. I bless you and will pray for you.” Shortly before, the January 1880 issue of *Bollettino Salesiano*, taking a cue from Don Bosco, had expressed “the strongest confidence” that this first Salesian house of Sicily would thrive and become “the seed of many others.” Both predictions were most brilliantly confirmed by subsequent events.

CHAPTER 14

Gleanings from the Year 1879

THIS chapter is designed as a catch-all for certain matters which, though not insignificant in themselves, are unrelated to other areas of our narrative. We do not want anything of our founder's life pertaining to the year 1879 to escape us. For the most part we will cover a wide range of material dealing with the [Salesian] houses of Italy and France.

1. LANZO

We start with our school at Lanzo and its fulfillment of a vow which it had made back in 1873 when, just upon completion, the new building, which rises majestically against the background of the Alps, was threatened by the imminent collapse of the right wing when the sixth column of the longer portico began to give way. Emergency repairs began promptly, but Father Lemoyne, the director, was so alarmed that he immediately notified Don Bosco. Undismayed, Don Bosco recommended that he entrust the sagging column to St. Joseph, vowing to erect in the playground a pillar similar to the endangered one as a pedestal for a statue of the holy patriarch. The danger was soon past but, as usually happens with changes of personnel, the fulfillment of the vow was deferred until a near-disaster jogged people's memories. In 1877 a young boarder, a Turin lad named Victor Emanuel Salvini, while playing on the second landing of the main stairway, leaned so far over the railing that he lost his balance and fell to the ground. By strange coincidence, he landed squarely in the arms of the director, Father [Joseph] Scappini. Both he and the boy called out to St. Joseph at the split second of the fall, and both were unhurt. When Don Bosco was told about it, he earnestly reminded the community to carry out

its obligation, but the little shrine was not ready until March 19, 1879. Don Bosco, who attached great importance to religious celebrations, chose to attend the dedication, to which many visitors were invited. For the occasion, the cleric [John Baptist] Grosso,¹ who was later to merit high honors in sacred music, composed a hymn which the Oratory band accompanied under the direction of Maestro [Joseph] Dogliani.² In perpetual remembrance of the favor and the vow, Don Bosco prescribed that in honor of St. Joseph the school at Lanzo hold Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every Wednesday—a custom prevailing to the present day [1933].

Don Bosco kept making fairly frequent visits to Lanzo. He went one day at the height of the balmy spring weather. It was nesting time, and he took advantage of a little incident to teach a lesson. On one of their [weekly] walks, some of the boarders had found a blackbirds' nest and, taking it back to the school, hidden it inside a little box in the dormitory. It was not long before the poor little birds, under the inexperienced care of their masters, died one by one. With the death of the last fledgling the boys agreed to hold a solemn burial service. During recreation they formed a funeral cortege and escorted the bird to its last resting place with liturgical chant, holy water and even a eulogy. Don Bosco watched the entire scene from his window and later, while the boys were in the study hall, sent for the leader of the little demonstration. Gravely he pointed out what a deplorable thing the boy had done, saying that it was a serious profanation which was never again to be repeated. As soon as he saw that the young fellow was really sorry, he changed his tone, assuring him that he forgave him and his friends and dismissing him with a bag of candy to share with them. The lesson had to be taught, and he taught it, but in a way which revealed his loving heart and educational system.³

In September of that year his contract with the municipality of Lanzo ran out. In view of what we explained in Volume XIII,⁴ Don Bosco thought it advisable to feel out the real intentions of the municipal council and therefore wrote as follows to the mayor:

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²*Ibid.* [Editor]

³This young lad later became Professor John Giannetti of the teachers' college at Vercelli. [Author]

⁴See Vol. XIII, pp. 352f. [Editor]

Turin, August 23, 1879

Dear Sir:

When on a visit to Lanzo last month I spotted some major, indispensable repairs which must be attended to for the regular use and maintenance of the school building. To prevent further deterioration, I request that you issue necessary orders to have these repairs done during the good weather. At the same time, I wish to remind you that my contract with the municipality expires with the school year 1880-81. Please make known your intentions in this matter so that needed contract discussions can be held in ample time. Awaiting your courteous response and expressing my best wishes to you and the honorable town councillors of Lanzo, I am honored to remain

Yours sincerely,
Fr. John Bosco

The reply was far from satisfactory, and so he arranged for the Salesians to leave the old monastery and take up residence in the new building, transferring the elementary school there also. The mayor obviously did not take this amiss, as he showed on the eve of the school's reopening. The superintendent of education, who was then battling the Oratory's secondary school, turned his attention also to Lanzo, asking the mayor for a report on its operation and a list of the teachers in both the elementary and the secondary schools. When informed, Don Bosco drafted a reply reflecting his determination, and the mayor simply endorsed it.

MEMORANDUM

On receiving the memo of the superintendent of schools dated September 14, concerning the operation of the Lanzo school, the undersigned mayor summoned its director for questioning and found him cooperative in every way. Although in former years the director regularly submitted a teachers' list to the superintendent's office, this municipality intends, from the opening of the new school year, to send in the full name of each of the three elementary school teachers who have proper certification. As for the secondary school teachers, the superintendent is requested to solicit the list from the director of the school, this in view of the merely nominal funds this municipality supplies for the secondary school. For this reason the municipality is satisfied with capable teachers without insisting on certification. In this connection, responding to the superintendent's request, we take it not amiss if we give him ample

assurance that this school has always been completely satisfactory in all details of moral behavior, discipline, student progress, and so forth, for which we have only words of commendation. True, recently there were teachers . . .

Don Bosco submitted the requested information. As for the school's operation, we have a deposition which is very probably linked to a study then being carried out by the Department of Public Education in conjunction with a reorganization of reformatories.⁵ In 1879 Dr. Julius Benelli, director of Turin's prison facilities, visited the Salesian boarding schools, beginning with that of Lanzo, perhaps in his efforts to compile data which would help him formulate new regulations for the government's correctional institutions. An article he published nine years later in the *Rivista di Discipline Carcerarie*⁶ records his impressions. Most noteworthy is the following passage:

My findings in Don Bosco's schools have shown excellent discipline, genuine affection for superiors, remarkable progress in learning, and an unquestioning, limitless trust in their teachers. My first visit was to the Lanzo school in 1879. The entire running of the school was in the hands of very few priests. A mere hint, given with a smile, much like a request of a courteous friend, was obeyed in a flash. . . . The whole environment was one of peace and inexpressible joy. Imagine how impressed I was, having just a few hours before been at La Generala with its strident gates, iron bars and squads of prison guards and soldiers! I could then understand Count Connestabile's narrative of Don Bosco's taking three hundred inmates from La Generala⁷ on an excursion on foot to Stupinigi, unattended by officers, after wresting permission from Minister [Urban] Rattazzi, who wanted to have the youths escorted at least by plainclothesmen. From that moment I date the unswerving conviction I now have that, if there is at least a slim hope to reform and successfully rehabilitate misled or abandoned youngsters, it must be done by bringing them up in an environment of uncompromising discipline, accompanied by that gentle concern which one finds in a well-run, law-abiding family. The discipline in Don Bosco's institutions is not based on fear. One young

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 429f. [Editor]

⁶Year XVIII, pp. 87-88, Rome, 1888. [Author]

⁷A boys' reformatory on the south side of Turin. See Vol. II, pp. 143, 272; Vol. V, pp. 140ff. [Editor]

cleric can handle a large group of boys by himself. The first priority, even before classroom instruction, is the solicitous education of the heart. Some of the teacher-clerics are far from being geniuses, but they are all young men of attractive manner and sound moral training. Their constant presence among the boys exerts a great influence for good. Youngsters always model themselves on others, and in Don Bosco's schools the boys have excellent models to follow. This explains the excellent results.

In September Don Bosco presided over two spiritual retreats at Lanzo. The first one, from September 3 to 10, was attended by two hundred and fifty members, including the clerical novices. The latter had hiked from San Benigno to Ciriè and then continued by train to Mathi, where they visited the [Salesian] paper mill and joined up with those coming from Turin. Then all boarded a train for Lanzo where they were welcomed by Don Bosco who, the chronicle states, was "fairly well."⁸

In his "Good Night" on September 5, Don Bosco gave a definitive answer to a question which had been coming up for several years.⁹ On several occasions, as we have noted before, he had manifested his desire that triennial vows should be phased out, but he had reached no decision because several superiors felt that temporary profession offered an excellent opportunity to study a candidate more closely. This time Don Bosco laid all hesitation aside and put an end to the controversy. He spoke as follows:

Before you tell those who wish to join our Congregation to give their names, I must inform you that this is the last time that vows will be taken for three years. From now on, anyone taking vows must take them in perpetuity. Experience has shown that triennial vows are too serious a temptation for some to cope with. After living one year in the Congregation [as a novice] everyone should know whether God is calling him to it and whether he has enough strength to persevere. He can well say, "I shall take my final vows," or "I shall take another road." Triennial vows will still be taken this year since no advance notice was given. In fact, those who have applied for final vows are perfectly free to take them for three years only; so also those who have applied for triennial vows are free to take them in perpetuity.

⁸From Father Barberis' chronicle, next to the last notebook, with only twelve pages on various matters. [Author]

⁹See Vol. XI, pp. 322f. See also pp. 29f of this volume. [Editor]

He made the same announcement at each of the three other retreats which took place that year. However, his own practice made it clear that he was reluctant to impose a burden too heavy for some to carry or to extinguish the flickering flame in others. All we have to do is check out the membership lists and count the number of triennial professions which still continued to be made.

Don Bosco gave a sermon after the solemn rite of religious profession, but only his opening words remain.

Day by day—he said—the number of those who consecrate themselves body and soul to God in order to save their own souls and those of others swell our ranks. How deeply consoled this makes me—to see so many getting ready to go forth and do good, while the world knows nothing of it! It is truly the Lord who wishes and blesses this. The world knows nothing of it—no one save ourselves and those close to us. Many years ago we held our first spiritual retreat, and there were fourteen of us in all. At that time the Congregation was not yet born. Of the fourteen, twelve were day boys, because Don Bosco had only two boarders in those days. At our second retreat we were thirty-two. Later, when the Congregation began to take shape, we decided to hold our spiritual retreat at Trofarello, and I recall that the second retreat that year counted only sixteen. But it did not take very long for Trofarello to prove inadequate, and we had to leave it and come to Lanzo for our retreats. Here too our numbers increased so much that as of last year the usual two retreats a year were not enough and we had to add a third at Sampierdarena. This year we must hold a fourth at Alassio. We are two hundred and fifty on this retreat, and I am told that the next will not be any smaller. Is not God's hand manifest in this? Somewhere in the Holy Scriptures the Lord says: "You have multiplied the nation, and you have not increased the joy."¹⁰ Must He say this of us too? I hope not. Let us all be one in heart and resolve never to let that happen. Do you know what we need? It's just one word. I don't want to tell you many things to keep us moving forward as we should. One word alone: "Observance." Observance of the rules. Religious orders have always thrived as long as they abided by their rules. When did they decline? When observance slackened or completely broke down . . .

More and more this comparison between the Congregation's humble origin and its subsequent development became a favorite

¹⁰Is. 9, 3—new translation by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. [Editor]

topic of his, especially when he wished his young Salesians to enliven their love for their calling.

Also at the second retreat Don Bosco spoke after the religious profession. The chronicle has salvaged only a passage on temperance, commenting that it served to reveal his mind on the practice of this virtue. Referring to the moral harm done young people by intemperance, especially drinking, he urged his listeners:

Let each of you strive for moderation, eating and drinking only what you need, no more. When you are invited out to dinner, for example, and you must accept because of circumstances, you will find food and drink in abundance. Be pleasant and don't be stand-offish because there will be more than usual on such occasions. Just control yourself, and gauge what you need. No excess, no intemperance! On this point we must be strict with ourselves. At other times, however, you may find that there is hardly enough food. In that case welcome this opportunity to practice a little mortification. Say to yourself: *I must sometimes fast to overcome temptation, and since I have this chance today, I will do it now.* If you are hungrier than usual or have a lot of work to do, say: *This fast, this work of mine, done on an empty stomach, will gain me more merit since I have not chosen it and it has been given me by the Lord.*

2. VALLECROSIA

The Protestants of Vallecrosia who saw all their evil plans thwarted could not resign themselves to events. Both the evangelical minister and the director of the Waldensian hostel spat out their malice in a pamphlet entitled *A Few Words for the People of Vallecrosia and Adjacent Villages*. It was a travesty of history, truth and common decency. Its purpose was to incite the populace against the community of Mary, Help of Christians. The July issue of *Bollettino Salesiano* issued a stout reply, but more than words was needed.

The heretics were dying to see Salesians and the sisters pushed out of Vallecrosia. Don Bosco, on the other hand, had already been planning to replace the little chapel with a spacious church to serve the spiritual needs of the area's Catholics and to set up better facilities for the boys' and the girls' schools. The new bishop, Thomas Reggio of the noble Reggio family, following in the

footsteps of his predecessor, took to the project wholeheartedly. On June 12 he issued a pastoral letter to the “generous and pious souls” of his people, vividly portraying the perils of the Protestant inroads and appealing to the charity of both great and small, rich and poor, to contribute money, labor, objects of value, and materials of all kinds. He also appointed an *ad hoc* committee of five priests and four laymen to organize a public relations campaign for the project throughout the diocese. However, it was Don Bosco who had to shoulder the weightiest burden, and the bishop’s letter mentioned him twice in words of lofty praise.

Despite the conflicts in which he was then involved and the outlay of funds needed to build the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Don Bosco—ever calm and ready to help out—set himself to the task with all possible speed. First he had to get past some obstacles, neither minor nor few, to purchase the needed land. In August he wrote to the director, Father Cibrario:

Turin, August 24, 1879

My dear Father Cibrario:

So far I have not had the time to give serious thought to our project at Vallecrosia, but now I am ready to give it my full attention. Confer with Canon Cassini and others and let me know:

1. Has anyone written to the Holy Father, or is it agreed that I should write a letter with or without Bishop Reggio’s circular or pastoral?
2. Have you already received the brochure printed here at the Oratory? If so, is it satisfactory or are there changes to be made?
3. Has a covering letter been composed or am I to write one?

Answer my questions and tell me whatever else I need to know, and I shall do my best to take care of everything promptly. Regards to all our friends.

Yours ever in Jesus Christ, Our Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Are the sketches ready? Has work begun yet? It is useless to try to contact Duchess di Galliera, because she is not receiving anybody.

He then wrote a personal letter¹¹ to the Pope, hoping to obtain Leo XIII’s blessing and some funds as an enticement for the faithful to offer their generous support. The Holy Father sent his

¹¹Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

reply with his apostolic blessing and five hundred lire.¹²

In a petition addressed to the royal steward's office for vacant benefices, Don Bosco went into lengthy details regarding his Vallecrosia project:

[No date]

Dear Sir:

Father John Bosco respectfully calls your attention to the fact that in 1876, at the invitation of the late lamented Bishop Lawrence Biale, he opened two public elementary schools in the plains of Vallecrosia near Ventimiglia, one for boys, where forty pupils are in attendance, and one for girls, with sixty pupils. The provincial superintendent's attendance and report ledgers will show this. These are free schools, conforming to all prevailing rules concerning instruction. There is also a small church where services are held, the sacraments are administered and the word of God is preached.

Both the schools and the church—a counterbalance to the evangelical schools and chapel established some time before by the Protestants—were urgently demanded by the very nature of the area, which keeps attracting lower middle-class residents and vacationers. Without the church and schools these people would be an hour's walk from the existing parish and the local school in the rather unhealthy north. It would thus be very hard for them to fulfill their duties as Christians and citizens; all the more difficult would it be for the children to receive moral guidance and schooling. Up to now I have supported this most timely endeavor, though it has proven very costly in terms of rental fees and personnel salaries. I have drawn on the small, precarious offerings of the people and on the generous annual donation of one distinguished benefactor. The municipality itself, strapped with school expenses and salaries for the town doctor and municipal staff, has contributed nothing. Well over a year ago, this distinguished benefactor died, and now, what with the hard times we are living in and the sharp drop in good will offerings from the faithful, this badly needed work is in sore straits just to keep alive.

I find it too painful to walk out on these people who wholeheartedly respond to the loving care of those who patiently teach them and help them to live as Christians and good citizens. In dire need, I trustingly appeal to His Majesty's government—always known for its generous annual subsidies to more important religious and social ministries—to extend a helping hand to this work. A verifying report from the Royal Treasurer's

¹²We are also omitting an appeal for funds drafted by Don Bosco and sent to Father Cibrario for local distribution. [Editor]

office at Ventimiglia will be supplied on request.

Meanwhile, I humbly turn with respectful trust to your own noble heart and ask that you graciously grant from the funds of the General Steward's Office whatever subsidy may suit so critical and necessary a work. In lasting gratitude for your aid, I will not cease to invoke heaven's choicest blessings upon His Royal Majesty and upon his eminent councillors.

Despite the hardships brought on by the year's meager harvest, donations kept coming in, so that by the end of December the walls of the new building began to rise above ground.

3. BORGO SAN MARTINO

Even after Father Bonetti left as director, the boarding school of St. Charles at Borgo San Martino maintained its excellent standards and was deeply appreciated by the people. This became manifest when a shortage of personnel led the superiors to decide to serve notice that all Salesian teachers in the local municipal schools would be withdrawn. When word leaked out, the people immediately rose up in arms. Parents collected signatures and sent a petition to Don Bosco; the parish priest even threatened to resign. Don Bosco, unwilling to seem untouched by this public vote of confidence, had a letter sent to the school's director, Father [Dominic] Belmonte,¹³ instructing him not to serve notice and promising to go there himself to discuss further action. His masterful letter to the upperclassmen on the choice of one's vocation—which we have reported elsewhere—dates from this time of the year.¹⁴

4. VARAZZE

In the reshuffle of personnel for the school year 1879-80, Varazze's director, Father [John Baptist] Francesia, was transferred to Valsalice and was succeeded by Father [Joseph] Monateri,¹⁵ who was free for an assignment after the Salesian house at Albano was closed. Not feeling up to it, however, he balked a little at the

¹³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁴See pp. 90f. [Editor]

¹⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

responsibility, wishing that the position of director be entrusted to someone else. Don Bosco quickly eased his fears with his fatherly advice.

Turin, November 27, 1879

My dear Father Monateri:

If I felt I were ordering you to do anything contrary to God's will, I would certainly withdraw you from Varazze, but neither you nor I would want to do such a thing. So, be patient. Come to my help and do not aggravate the many troubles I already have; they are very heavy indeed.

Father Francesia will talk to you. Come to an understanding, both of you. I shall soon come and spend a few days with you.

God bless you and keep you always a good soldier of Christ!

In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

5. MAGLIANO SABINO

The seminary-boarding school at Magliano Sabino experienced constant improvement. In October Don Bosco assured the superiors there of the heartwarming comfort he had received from a letter written to him by Cardinal [Louis] Bilio, who had spent a month's vacation there, at the very heart of his suburban diocese, and had seen at close range the school's orderly routine. Seeing the progress it was making in both piety and learning, he felt he had to express his pleasure to Don Bosco.

I am truly happy—he wrote on October 14—and most grateful to you for all the good you have brought to my diocese in these trying, lamentable times. Your teachers, both priests and clerics, are men of zeal and exemplary conduct and, God willing, I am sure that our boys will receive a thorough, sound education under their guidance. All this while, my seminary has enjoyed an excellent reputation throughout the area, even as far as Rome. The enrollment has risen to some sixty students and is still growing. This is a token of the high regard in which the people rightly keep Don Bosco and the Salesians. Praised be God! On my own part I shall unfailingly do all I can do for your Institute and shall tell its praises to the Holy Father himself.

Before going back to Rome, the cardinal presided over the solemn awards ceremony, thus publicly manifesting his satisfaction and personal interest.

6. NICE

Three brief letters written by Don Bosco to Nice give us an idea of his relations with that house. All three, addressed to the director, were written in July. In the first one, after thanking him for the greetings sent him on his name day, he tells the director that a copy of the report on the state of the Congregation will soon reach him, and he voices his sincere gratitude to one family of benefactors, touching upon a little lottery which, he says, has also been extended to France.

Turin, July 14, 1879

Dearest Father Ronchail:

I shall get to replying to Father Bianchi's strange letter, hoping, with God's help, to calm him down. At the beginning of next week Canon Guiol will stop off at Nice.¹⁶ He will probably need at least ten thousand francs for Father Bologna. Try to approach Father Cauvin¹⁷ and others about a loan. Do what you can to help me relieve the embarrassment of our contractor in Marseille.

Let me know if Father Pirro and Father Macherau have been ordained, or are there any problems? What is the name of the other priest who wrote me from Annecy for my name day? Does he wish to become a Salesian? Has the cleric Pantore straightened out yet?

Please assure all that I was delighted at all the letters I received from St. Pierre's Hospice.¹⁸ Tell them I pray that God may reward them and keep them in His holy grace.

Let me have some good news soon because I am having a lot of problems.

God bless you all. Pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

¹⁶He was on his way back from Turin as we shall describe later on. July 14 was a Monday; July 20 was a Sunday. The canon was returning to Marseille and stopping over at Sampierdarena. [Author]

¹⁷See Vol. XIII, p. 548. [Editor]

¹⁸Greetings in French by the young Damascus boys we mentioned previously. [Author]

Although pressed by “a lot of problems,” Don Bosco was somewhat comforted by the love his sons showed him, by the solidarity of his schools’ directors who shirked no sacrifices to help him in his wide-ranging projects, and by the good reports he was receiving from the houses. All this we gather from his second letter:

Turin, July 4, 1879

My dear Father Ronchail:

I thank you and all my dear sons at Nice for your prayers and your best wishes. God bless each of you and keep you in His holy grace.

You will be getting two copies of my report [to the Holy See]¹⁹ by mail.

Your news of the Tibaut²⁰ brothers was most welcome. If you chance to see them, please give them my best regards; tell them that I thank them from my heart for the charity and good will they show our orphanage. Assure them of my daily prayers for them at Holy Mass.

How is our lottery coming along. Did you sell all the tickets? Do you have any to return? Can you use more?

Keep praying for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Just as Don Bosco kept his little room at the Oratory always open to anyone in the house who might want to see him, so also his distant sons were always free to write to him with trust; even if they sought but momentary relief from depression, they could be sure he would never let a letter of theirs go unanswered. When the young catechist at Nice, Father Lawrence Bianchi, yielded to spiritual discouragement, he poured out his anxious feelings in what Don Bosco styled a “strange” letter and found his father unfailingly sensitive.

Turin, July 23, 1879

Dearest Father Ronchail:

I wrote Father Bianchi a long letter which he has not received. Please check if it is still at the post office or somewhere in the house. If it is lost,

¹⁹See Chapter 8. [Editor]

²⁰In *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco* this name is spelled “Tibaut” in Vol. III, p. 335, Letter 1752, and “Tibau” in the same volume, p. 485, Letter 1941. [Editor]

let me know and I shall write another. Let Father Bianchi know and assure him that I have not forgotten him, and ask him not to forget me.

More some other time. God bless us all! Always in heartfelt love in Jesus Christ,

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I enjoyed reading the letters from the Damascus boys. Give them my regards.

In 1881 the five Damascus young men who had been sent to Nice from the Oratory were recalled to Turin by Don Bosco, who wished to train them as clerics. On learning that they would receive Latin rite orders, however, the Melchite patriarch of Antioch, Gregory Jussef, reacted. "They were sent to Nice," he wrote on October 20, 1881, "so that they might pursue priestly studies, and then they were to come back here and dedicate themselves to the care of souls." He asked Don Bosco to put them into the care of a priest at Marseille who would represent him and follow his instructions. The patriarch concluded his letter with the words: "I will not hide my dire need of apostolic workers throughout my dioceses, and I find it indispensable to have young men here at the service of my patriarchal see. I am most grateful to you for the care you have given these boys while they were in your houses." The patriarch's wish was promptly obeyed.

7. MARSEILLE

After the laying of the new building's cornerstone on May 24, construction at Marseille progressed rapidly. However, funds soon ran low, and Don Bosco needed a loan, as he mentioned in his first letter to Father Ronchail, which is a partner letter to that sent to the parish priest of St. Joseph's Church [Canon Guiol]. From it we learn how Don Bosco found means to keep up his undertaking by selling some farmland he had inherited from Baron Bianco di Barbania. Canon Guiol visited Don Bosco and the Oratory about mid-July and stayed only a few days because his pastoral duties

called him back to Marseille. Don Bosco then wrote to him as follows:

Turin, July 20, 1879

Dear Father:

Just a few lines to keep you abreast of our affairs. The photographs of St. Leo's Festive Oratory are ready, but I shall probably not be able to mail them to you before Wednesday, in which case I shall address them to Marseille, as we had agreed.

I have signed a contract for one of the Caselle farms, and by the end of this week it will be notarized. I hope this will put Father Bologna at ease. But if Father Ronchail has managed by now to contact the person I personally wrote to, he will probably have on hand the necessary sum.

At all events, I shall do my best to keep things moving and not stop halfway. The Salesian Congregation is but a child, and so its sons are younger still. But with God's help they will grow up and in due time reap a fruitful harvest from bothersome incidents. Let's be patient, persevering and prayerful.

We were all delighted to have you here with us. Too bad your stay was so short. Come again, please! I ask you to overlook our shortcomings in not giving you the hospitality you deserve and we wished to extend.²¹

God keep you in good health! In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had requested and obtained a papal decoration for Monsieur Rostand in acknowledgement of his work in directing the Beaujour Society, and he planned a solemn presentation. He wrote to Father Guiol:

Turin, July 29, 1879

Dear Father:

His Eminence Cardinal Nina has informed me that His Holiness has bestowed the knighthood of St. Gregory the Great on Monsieur Rostand. I am asking Father Bologna to see you and arrange for a fitting celebration.

The wording of the papal brief is not conventional but, as you will see from the copy I enclose, very pointed.

²¹A reference to a courteous invitation Don Bosco had made with a short note on July 3, 1879. [Editor]

The cardinal also hints at other favors to be granted by the Holy Father; I shall notify you as soon as they are final.

I'd like to settle everything²² at every cost, but I would need time—not much, but some.

Enclosed please find an unsealed letter for Monsieur Rostand. Read it for your own information and then please seal it and deliver it to him. Do what you think best. I am pressed for time but shall write again soon.

May God bless us all.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Write a good article for the *Bollettino Salesiano*.

Overwhelmed with gratitude, Monsieur Rostand thanked Don Bosco and sent his thanks to the Pope directly. He also finalized the process to give legal recognition to both the house in Marseille and the orphanage at Saint-Cyr. What Don Bosco was most anxious to settle “at every cost” was the situation of the choir school. It was a problem about which Father Guiol was still agitating and writing heated letters. Don Bosco had referred to it in his previous letter in the cryptic phrase “bothersome incidents,” meaning “unpleasant” incidents. The good curé was a generous, zealous man, but an easy prey to impulsive outbursts. Once he got an idea, he could not face any obstacles realistically, but ran head-on against them, without heeding either circumstances or consequences. For the time being, thanks to Don Bosco’s acquiescence, a settlement had been made, as we have already related.²³

On the eve of the Christmas novena, Don Bosco sent his very best wishes to three ladies of Marseille who had shown the Salesians particular kindness. Two of them we already know; the third was Monsieur Rostand’s wife.

Turin, December 15, 1879

Dear Madame Rostand:

Father Bologna has often spoken to me of the acts of kindness you and your daughter have performed to help the poor boys of St. Leo’s Festive

²²A reference to Canon Guiol’s demands for help from the Salesians as regards the choir school and other needs. [Editor]

²³See pp. 9ff. [Editor]

Oratory. I feel that I must express my heartfelt and humble thanks.

Please let me offer you a very special gift you will surely appreciate. Next Thursday, God willing, I shall celebrate Holy Mass at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians, and our boys will receive Holy Communion and offer special prayers for your intentions. It is our desire that God's blessings come upon you and your family. Good health, peace and prosperity be heaven's legacy to the Rostand family and their descendants to the last generation.

God bless all of you! I hope to see you next January. Pray for me. I am in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. My respects and best wishes to your worthy husband.

Turin, December 15, 1879

Good and dear Mother, Madame Jacques:

Not only your sons at the Beaujour Society, but all those in Turin remember their kind mother and her many kindnesses. Knowing we will please you, we shall pray very, very much for you during these few days. Furthermore, next Friday I shall celebrate Holy Mass and our boys will receive Holy Communion and pray particularly for your intentions.

God protect you, our dearest mother. May He bless and comfort you with those spiritual flowers which will one day form your crown in heaven.

God willing, I hope to see you again next January. Meanwhile, remember me in the charity of your prayers. I am honored to be filially

Your obedient son in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Turin, December 15, 1879

Dear Madame Noilly-Prat,

Your generous kindness has prompted you to extend your concern to the poor lads of St. Leo's Festive Oratory. I would like in a very special way to show my gratitude to you before God.

Next Saturday, the fifth day of the Christmas novena, I shall celebrate Mass, at which our boys will receive Holy Communion and pray particularly to the Child Jesus for your intentions. Our prayer will be that God may keep you in good health and in His holy grace, and that He may grant you to see with your own eyes the harvest which your charity has

reaped on earth. The reward which awaits you one day from Our Heavenly Father will exceed it more abundantly.

God bless you, my dear Madame Prat. I trust you will willingly accept this small token of my gratitude. Hopefully I shall see you personally some time this coming January.

Please be so kind as to pray for me. Always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Canon Guiol could not be forgotten in this instance, all the more so because Don Bosco had not written to him since July and was anxious to pave the way for his next visit to Marseille.

Turin, December 22, 1879

My dear Father:

Although some time has passed since my last letter, I have never forgotten to offer a *memento* for you in my daily Mass.

At this season it is only right that I extend my sincerest best wishes to you for a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, while I assure you of our continued remembrance throughout 1880 at the altar of the Blessed Virgin, Mary, Help of Christians. I trust that God will hear our prayers and make your coming year a happy one.

Meanwhile I'd like to inform you that about the middle of next January, God willing, I expect to be in Marseille to improve the financial organization of St. Leo's Festive Oratory and make sure that outstanding debts are paid and future obligations met. I would think a conference of Salesian cooperators and of other charitable, esteemed persons would be very apropos. I have no idea whether St. Leo's would have a hall for us or if we should use the chapel or maybe find a suitable place at the home of a benefactor. My purpose would be to let people know what we have already done and what our plans are and to discuss with the cooperators some easy ways they can come to our aid. Any comment you might care to make will be very helpful.

Should you meet any members of the Beaujour Society, please give them my regards.

I commend myself to the charity of your prayers. In Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Thank God, my eyesight has improved considerably.

Precisely on Christmas Eve Bishop Jean Louis Robert, who had succeeded Bishop Place at Marseille, publicly gave Don Bosco's sons a testimony of his good will. A building fund drive [for St. Leo's Festive Oratory] was in progress. The bishop not only gave it his blessing, but in a letter to his people warmly recommended it in terms of lofty praise. In this he was following the example of his predecessor, who, on being promoted to the archepiscopal see of Rennes, was in the habit of saying: "Even had I done nothing else as bishop of Marseille but bring the Salesians there, this alone would make me feel satisfied about my accomplishments." He wanted the Salesians at Rennes also, insisting that if they came he would die a happy man.

8. VALDOCCO [ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES]

At Valdocco too the superiors relied on the estate of Baron Bianco to balance the budget. Most of the money was being poured into the Church of St. John the Evangelist [in Turin] and that at Vallecrosia. Furthermore, an increase in the cost of living—which rose that year by one-third—strained the finances even more.

What—Don Bosco asked his Salesian cooperators in his circular of January 1880—can be done? Should we panic? Not at all! The good of souls and our civil society is at stake. In the past we met our weighty and pressing commitments with good will offerings and particularly with our recent lottery, a true godsend. I put all my trust for future projects in God's providence, for in similar urgent needs He has never failed me. Once again I rely upon your charity.

A decisive step had already been taken. When the financial crunch was brought to the table on May 29 and the heavy debts burdening each department of the administration were listed, the superiors agreed, with Don Bosco's consent, to draw a loan of one hundred thousand lire to be repaid by the sale of St. Ann's Villa²⁴ at Caselle. We find a reference to the Oratory's financial straits in a letter written somewhat later to Chevalier Charles Fava.

²⁴One of the properties of Baron Bianco. *See* Vol. XIII, p. 632. [Editor]

Turin, December 4, 1879

Dear Chevalier:

When you and your wife gave us a generous offering yesterday, you stated that you wished it for the Church of St. John the Evangelist. Although the church really needs it, I would prefer to use the money, if I may, for my many boys who are still wearing summer clothing. It would really be a case of clothing the naked.

With renewed thanks for your charity to me and to my poor children, I pray that God may shower His abundant blessings upon you, your wife and your daughter.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

In a postscript Don Bosco pointed out a drawback not so rare in boarding schools. The chevalier had asked him to revoke the threat of expulsion made to a young artisan. Don Bosco sent the following clarifications:

P.S. I spoke with Father Branda about young Peano, and he assures me that no expulsion is contemplated. He merely remarked that one of the boy's aunts kept breaking the rules by visiting him too frequently, making the lad promises and bringing him gifts.

Father Branda made it clear to her that all these gifts of food made the lad indifferent to admonition or threats of punishment, and that, were she to keep it up, the superiors would have to dismiss the boy at Christmas. The good lady's reply was that Christmas was too soon, and would they wait until spring? I would therefore suggest that if you happen to know this lady, you would ask her to let the school staff do its job, all the more so since he certainly is not in any kind of need. Do what you think best in your own right judgment.

We now come to another very different matter concerning the Oratory. In the course of these *Memoirs* we have often made mention of Don Bosco's solicitous efforts to aid wayward priests on their way back to a life of virtue. Sometimes he offered to house them at the Oratory, surrounding them with gentle care and sparing no effort to assist them in rehabilitating themselves. In this summer of 1879 he strove to aid a certain Father Machet, formerly a parish priest of Gravère in the diocese of Susa, who had gone over to the

Old Catholics²⁵ sect. Don Bosco personally appealed to Leo XIII to reinstate him.²⁶

A reply came in at the beginning of December from Monsignor Angelo Jacobini, assessor of the Holy Office, to which the secretariat of state had referred the petition. All we learn from the reply is that, having investigated the matter, the Sacred Congregation had sent instructions to the bishop of Susa, and Don Bosco was asked to get in touch with him.

It gave Don Bosco great comfort to know that every day his Oratory boys offered prayers to Mary, Help of Christians and received Holy Communion. They were for him a lasting spiritual treasure through which he could obtain God's help both to carry out his expanding arduous mission and to repay the generosity of his benefactors. How strong this trust of his was we find eloquently expressed in the following letter to Alphonse Fortis.²⁷

Turin, November 29, 1879

My dearest Alphonse:

I received your two letters, each giving me distressing news about your health. I am truly sorry but firmly believe that God will hear our prayers and you will recover. Do not worry about your teaching. We are mainly concerned that you be well. Health is our greatest asset after God's grace.

Also our dear Richard is not well. I am truly sorry. How worried his father and mother must be!

At any rate, I intend to storm the tower of David—Mary's power—to force her—so to speak—to make both of you recover, so that you may both consecrate your strength to the welfare of souls. Here is my plan. Every day during the coming month of December Holy Mass will be offered at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians and our boys will receive Communion and say special prayers throughout the month.

You and your family will say an Our Father to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and a Hail, Holy Queen to Mary Immaculate. I am fully confident that these joint feeble efforts of ours will compel Our Lord to heed and grant our prayers.

²⁵Old Catholics is a general name for various national churches that at different times separated from the Roman Catholic Church. [Editor]

²⁶We are omitting his letter in this edition. [Editor]

²⁷See Vol. XIII, p. 175. [Editor]

God bless you and my dear Richard, and Papa and Mamma. May He keep you in His holy grace.

I hope to see you again fully recovered. Till then, pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

9. THE YEAR'S END

On December 13 [1879], as the Christmas novena was approaching and the year was drawing to an end, Don Bosco mailed an appropriate message to all the Salesian houses and to their pupils.

Christmas Novena

The solemnity of Christmas should arouse within us the following desires and resolves to show our love to the Infant Jesus:

1. Observance of His holy Commandments.
2. Bearing with the faults of others.
3. Hope in God's infinite mercy and a steadfast resolve to avoid sin.
4. Making amends for scandal by good example.
5. Keeping modesty in even the smallest matters.
6. Checking one's conscience as to having had real sorrow in past confessions.
7. Reviewing the good resolutions made in past confessions to see they were carried out.
8. Reviewing the confessions of our past life as Jesus will do on Judgment Day.
9. Resolving to love Jesus and Mary unto death.
10. *On Christmas Day*: Holy Communion with the resolve to receive frequently in the future.

Best wishes for heavenly blessings from your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

When the Christmas celebration was over, he sent all the houses his usual *strenna*²⁸ worded as follows:

²⁸A 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]

Turin, December 26, 1879

DON BOSCO'S STRENNA
TO THE SALESIANS AND THEIR PUPILS
and
Greetings for 1880

1. *To All Without Distinction:* Give good example in word and deed. Be on guard against forming habits in unnecessary things even when they are neither good nor bad.

2. *To the Directors:* The patience of Job.

3. *To the Superiors:* The kindness of St. Francis de Sales in dealing with others.

4. *To All Pupils:* Use your time well; time is priceless.

5. *To All Salesians:* Strict observance of our rules.

Superiors are asked to read and explain the above repeatedly if needed.

God bless you all! My special thanks to those who sent me greetings.

Fr. John Bosco

10. PREDICTIONS

All we must do now is record a few predictions made by Don Bosco in 1879 which we could not suitably place elsewhere in this volume. One prediction was made to Sister Clementine of St. Joseph, who joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in Turin in 1875. Though she felt ever more drawn to the foreign missions, she could not make up her mind to tell her superiors; they in turn, a few years after her novitiate, appointed her mistress of novices. She would have liked to confer with Don Bosco but was held back by the thought of speaking to a saint. Finally, one day in 1879, having to take one of her students to visit a patient at the Cottolengo Hospital, she said to her, "While you are here visiting, I will call on Don Bosco at the Oratory." She plucked up her courage and asked to see our saintly founder, who listened to her and told her she should go to the missions.

"But my superiors will not be inclined to grant permission," she objected.

"All right, then, ask for a leave of absence from your congregation and join our own nuns on their next expedition to South America. When you get to Buenos Aires you can enter the

local convent opened by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Pinerolo.”

Delighted at this suggestion, Sister Clementine asked her superior for permission to go to the missions. She was turned down because she was a valuable asset to her own community and because the Sisters of St. Joseph of Turin had no foreign missions.

Some months later she again went to see Don Bosco, meeting him in the Oratory playground as he was on his way to church. She immediately told him that her request had been denied and asked for his advice. Don Bosco, raising his eyes to heaven, merely answered: “Be patient!” And, without another word, he went into the sacristy.

A few days later, the good sister fell sick of a strange ailment which brought her intense pain and kept her from attending her manifold duties. She repeated her request to go to the missions, but was again denied. Her ailment ran on for ten years more until finally in 1889 she asked to leave the Sisters of St. Joseph of Turin and switch to those of Chambéry. Their love for her prompted her superiors to refuse her request, but finally they yielded, and she was lovingly received in her new home. However, her illness now became an obstacle to her ardent desire, and so it never occurred to her to mention it. Hopeful that a change of climate might help her, her superior sent her to their convent in Rome, but her illness only worsened and she was recalled to Chambéry.

Meanwhile the superior of a flourishing Catholic hospital in Christiania, modern Oslo, run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chambéry, had died. Arrangements were made for a French nun to replace her, but the apostolic delegate would not hear of it. Distressed by his stand, the superior of Chambéry thought of Sister Clementine, and one day asked her abruptly, “Would you like to go to the missions?” In total surprise she replied that, were her ailment to relent a bit, she would gladly agree.

The superior said no more. Upset by both this reawakening of an old yearning and her natural hesitancy on finding herself on the verge of reaching a long-cherished and frustrated goal, the sister went to the chapel to ask Don Bosco in prayer to aid her at that moment of decision. She had been praying some thirty minutes when the superior approached her with a telegram from the apostolic delegate agreeing to having an Italian sister replace the deceased superior.

Sister Clementine was overjoyed. It took her but two weeks to regain her strength, make preparations and then leave. She did not return to see her family in Turin until 1891 and then immediately went back to her work in Oslo. While in Turin, she told Father Belmonte about Don Bosco's prediction, concluding: "Now I am truly happy. My health is strong enough for me to do my work. I have forty nuns and fifty patients. Protestant doctors gladly work in our hospital."

Don Bosco made another prediction in 1879, not to one sister but to the entire Turin community of the Sisters of St. Anne [founded by Marchioness Barolo].²⁹ The nuns had been invited to open a house in Rome, but they could not make up their minds, fearing rejection and perhaps lack of local support. On being asked, Don Bosco very decisively stated that they ought to go. To their objection that they could not afford a new foundation, he replied: "Go and don't worry. Soon you will have a fine convent." Relying on his word, they went to Rome and settled in a very poor house, where they stayed several years in utter poverty until two noble Roman ladies, who had set their hearts on the sisters and had even taken the veil, brought the congregation a handsome dowry and a magnificent residence which they ceded to their community in 1884. On moving into their new home, the sisters hesitated to remain, feeling such splendor to be ill-attuned to their evangelical poverty.

Two other predictions of Don Bosco concerned Salesians. Father Secundus Marchisio publicly recalled one at the twenty-fifth anniversary of his first Mass which he had celebrated in 1879. On that occasion, Don Bosco, placing his hand on his shoulder, had told him, "For twenty years you will be a prefect, and then . . . well, then we shall see!" It was precisely twenty years to the day that he had been prefect at Valdocco and at Borgo San Martino when his superiors told him he was appointed catechist at the Oratory.

The second prophecy concerned Father Francis Dalmazzo. In 1879 a farewell dinner was being tendered in his honor at Valsalice on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, and his successor, Father Francesia, was being welcomed. Father Dalmazzo was leaving Valsalice to be the Congregation's procurator general at

²⁹See Vol. II, p. 249. See also the Index of the same volume under "Barolo." [Editor]

Rome. Among the guests was the Oratory's physician, Dr. Vincent Gribaudo. Being on intimate terms with Don Bosco, the doctor begged him to leave Father Dalmazzo as director of the Valsalice College to please his mother, who was very upset at his departure. Turning to Father Dalmazzo, Don Bosco said, "You will return to Turin when the general chapter meets for the election of Don Bosco's successor." He did in fact return to Turin in January 1888, a few weeks before Don Bosco's death, and resided at the rectory of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

To these predictions of Don Bosco we must add another which took place at Lu in October 1879. Don Bosco was being hosted as usual by his generous friends, Joseph and Mary Rota, parents of Father Peter Rota, then a cleric at the Oratory and later provincial in Brazil.³⁰ Don Bosco was returning from a visit to a sick woman, Mrs. Isabelle Grossetti, and he was surrounded and followed by a crowd of people anxious to see him. At the corner of Via Montaldo and Via Circonvallazione Don Bosco noticed that in the crowd a barefoot boy in shirt sleeves kept staring at him. Don Bosco stopped to return his gaze and asked him, "What's your name?"

"Quartero."

"Do you want to come to Turin with me?"

"Sure! That's why I'm here!"

"Come, then. I have hobnails for your shoes there!"

The crowd was amused by his witty remark. After conferring with the boy's parents, Don Bosco accepted him into the Oratory, keeping him there until he finished his secondary schooling. If today Father Quartero is an excellent parish priest, he owes it to that providential encounter.³¹

Another and farther reaching prediction also dates from 1879. At that time rumors of an imminent persecution against religious congregations in France were rife. Don Bosco predicted, "The day will come when the Salesians will be dispersed and given shelter by the Salesian cooperators. But this will not last long, and the

³⁰See Appendix 1. [Editor]

³¹In some memoirs which Sister Josephine Rinaldi, niece of Father Philip Rinaldi, gave to Father [Peter] Ricaldone, Father Quartero wrote: "This anecdote is published in the life written by Father Lemoyne [*Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. VI, p. 613], though there is a serious error in the time sequence. The author ascribes it to the year 1861, when I had not yet been born. It actually occurred in 1879." [Author]

Congregation will then flourish more than before.” This dispersion of the Salesians in France took place when a law regarding associations was promulgated in 1901 and enforced in following years. Many confreres were able to stay at their posts only because then and there the cooperators generously offered them a home and protection. Later, wresting the law to suit their own needs, they helped the Salesians and enabled them to continue their apostolate. As we all know, events then took a favorable turn, and Salesian works gained new life, making flourishing progress year by year.³²

³²Father Cartier (letter to Father Lemoyne, Nice, October 12, 1907) wrote: “Such words made a deep impression upon me and stuck in my mind; they were my comfort in all my adversities in my last few years in Nice.” [Author]

CHAPTER 15

At the Beginning of a New Year

A GLANCE at the state of the Congregation at the dawn of 1880 is quite proper for gauging its progress. The superior chapter consisted of these members: Don Bosco, *Rector Major*; Father Michael Rua, *Prefect*; Father John Cagliero, *Spiritual Director*; Father Charles Ghivarello, *Economer*; Father Celestine Durando, *Prefect of Studies*; Father Joseph Lazzero, *Councillor*; Father Anthony Sala, *Councillor*; Father John Bonetti, *Coordinator of Religious Services*; Father Julius Barberis, *Novice Master*.

The directory lists Father Ghivarello as also director of the Saint-Cyr Orphanage. Don Bosco had indeed decided to send him there for a while in February 1879 since he was knowledgeable in agriculture and could easily absent himself from Turin, but he was not yet fluent in French and someone else took his place till about the end of the year.

Strictly speaking, neither Father Bonetti nor Father Barberis was a member of the superior chapter, but Don Bosco allowed them to take part in its meetings, and so the directory double-spaced their names from the rest. Doubtless, Don Bosco intended to enhance their standing before the confreres. From 1878 to 1880 the office of Coordinator of Religious Services actually meant “Rector of the Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians.”

The Congregation numbered seven hundred and thirty members, as follows:

Perpetually Professed	325
Triennially Professed	80
Novices	146
Postulants	181
Priests	127

It had four provinces named after their location: Piedmontese, Ligurian, [South] American, Roman. Father Francesia, Father Cerruti and Father Bodrato were respectively in charge of the first

three; from Turin Father Durando supervised the Roman province, which comprised four houses: Magliano Sabino, Randazzo, Brindisi and Rome (Tor de' Specchi).¹

Following a practice begun in 1875, the directory ran brief biographies of the confreres whom God had called to eternal life the previous year: a coadjutor brother, Charles Tonelli, and five clerics—Peter Scappini, Louis Bianchi, Clement Benna, Charles Trivero, and James Delmastro. The four brief pages dedicated to Benna, who came from a very prominent Turin family, sufficiently show us the many talents and charisms of this most promising young cleric who was “a delight to his companions and a solace to his superiors.”

Don Bosco attached great importance to the biographies of deceased Salesians but, foreseeing that the Congregation's spread would make it increasingly difficult to compile necessary data, he added a printed form to the 1880 directory with instructions that biographical notes [of the deceased] were to be jotted down immediately and promptly mailed to Turin to be used by appointed writers. The form bore ten headings: 1. Incidents or events of early years at home and native village. 2. Conduct as student or artisan in boarding school or hospice. 3. Deportment during novitiate or after religious profession. 4. Offices held. 5. Exercise of priestly and missionary ministry. 6. Outstanding virtues in word and deed. 7. Devotion and practices of piety. 8. Rapport with confreres and people. 9. Writings: books, papers, letters; maxims quoted from same. 10. Circumstances of final illness and death.

This survey shows the mentality of a man born not only to make history, but also to write it, had his undertakings not taken up all his time.

Father Francis Dalmazzo, once appointed procurator general² of the Salesian Congregation with the Holy See, set up his residence in Rome in an apartment which the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome had assigned to Don Bosco's use at Tor de' Specchi. The office of

¹See Vol. XIII, pp. 105, 360f. [Editor]

²In the Vatican directories, *La Gerarchia Cattolica* of 1877, 1878, and 1879, Father Michael Rua is listed as procurator general; not so in 1880, when Father Francis Dalmazzo's name appears for the first time. In the Salesian directory, however, he is listed as holding that office only in 1884. Don Bosco, as was his custom, wanted to see him in action before officially presenting him to the Congregation as its procurator general. [Author]

procurator general is very important for any religious order or congregation because the incumbent is the official liaison between his order or congregation and the Pope, the cardinals and the Sacred Roman Congregations; as such he safeguards its reputation and looks after its needs. For several years Father Rua was listed in *La Gerarchia Cattolica* as procurator of the Salesian Congregation.

Don Bosco sent Father Dalmazzo to Rome on January 12 with a letter of introduction to Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, secretary of state:

Turin, January 12, 1880

Your Eminence:

I have the honor of introducing the procurator [of the Salesian Congregation] Father Francis Dalmazzo, doctor of literature and former director of our college at Valsalice near Turin. He will keep Your Eminence informed about our Congregation, will carry out your wise directives, and, when asked, will pass on to you news of our motherhouse or of the Congregation's other houses.

Toward the end of February I also hope I will have the privilege of personally paying my respects to you and of thanking you particularly for the letter which you recently addressed to all Salesians. It is my honor to do homage to your sacred purple.

Most dutifully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

The cardinal's letter, dated January 6, 1880 and "addressed to all Salesians," was his reply to their New Year's greetings. The cardinal also informed Don Bosco that he had delivered his two letters of congratulations to the Holy Father, adding that His Holiness had been "greatly pleased" and that with all his heart he thanked and blessed the missionaries [in South America] and the Salesians in Italy.³

Compared to the spacious college at Valsalice, the new procurator's lodgings were drab indeed. They were nothing more than a cramped, unfurnished bedroom; in fact, when Don Bosco went to Rome in April, Father Dalmazzo had to make do with a sofa. Looking upon the rough wooden table covered by a moth-

³This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

eaten cloth, Don Bosco exclaimed with hearty laughter, "I really like this! It's a genuine Salesian house."

On January 30, *L'Unità Cattolica* carried this dispatch from Rome about the newly appointed procurator:

Our commendable Don Bosco has sent us the Reverend Father Francis Dalmazzo as procurator general of his Congregation. He received a welcome not only worthy of the Salesian Congregation which he represents, but also well suited to his personal merits. It is known that the most eminent cardinal vicar intends to avail himself of this scholarly and virtuous priest as a professor [of Latin literature] here in Rome.

Father Dalmazzo also referred to this last news item in a letter to Father Rua written shortly after mid-February:

I have not yet begun teaching because I am waiting for an elderly professor of Latin literature at the Roman Seminary to retire. The date should not be far off, since he is also in very poor health. In the meantime I am taking courses in canon law at the Apollinare University.

He was not spared his heartaches in those early days, as he himself admitted in that same letter: "I have finally been received or, I should rather say, lectured by Cardinal Ferrieri." The audience showed how ill-informed the cardinal was about "our revered Don Bosco," to quote the warm-hearted words of Father Dalmazzo, who closed his letter with these grief-laden words: *Nesciunt quid faciunt*. [They do not know what they are doing—Lk. 23, 34.]

At the beginning of January Don Bosco was busying himself particularly with boosting subscriptions to *Letture Cattoliche* and recruiting good coadjutors.

To say that Don Bosco loved *Letture Cattoliche* would merely restate the obvious, but today too many, perhaps, are unaware of all he did right up to his death to sustain, popularize and spread this publication throughout Italy. This year [1880] he again sent a circular, warmly appealing to religious-minded people to help him keep boosting the number of subscribers and readers and thus stem the flood of unwholesome literature harmful to so many people. His twenty-seven years' experience compelled him to affirm the beneficial influence of these inexpensive pamphlets.

He also had another circular printed and mailed particularly to parish priests, asking them to refer young men between the ages of twenty and thirty-five who wished to leave the world and become lay religious. Besides good morals and physical and mental health, the other requirements were: to be willing to engage in farming or work in the kitchen, bakery or dining room; to do housework or secretarial tasks, if qualified, or to continue to ply their trade if they were craftmasters. The circular aimed at making it known that the Salesian Congregation had also lay members whose status was not to be equated with that of the traditional monastic lay brothers. The expansion of Don Bosco's undertakings made it indeed necessary to recruit an adequate number of coadjutors.

As his reputation for holiness spread further, so did the number of people who daily sought his prayers, thus making it impossible for him to answer requests personally. To remedy this situation he had a form letter printed to assure his writers of his prayers and those of his boys. He also invited those who needed favors to join him and the Oratory community in a novena by saying three times daily the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be and Hail, Holy Queen, along with the invocations "Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us" and "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us." Furthermore, he exhorted them to frequent Holy Communion, "the source of every grace," and to do works of mercy, especially in favor of his poor boys. Today [1933] this has become the official novena of Don Bosco in honor of Mary, Help of Christians, but already long before he had been recommending it by word, specifying that the Our Father should be said to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.⁴

Even though, at the time of which we are now writing, people already held Don Bosco in a high concept of sanctity, we shall see his reputation grow ever stronger as time went by, but we shall also see it matched with Don Bosco's ever humbler opinion of himself. A revealing incident narrated by his secretary, Father Gioachino Berto, happened at this time. For a correct grasp of this priest's way of thinking and speaking, it helps to know that he was not worldly-wise; rather, he was naturally incapable of thinking up or using expressions which even remotely might smack of flattery. One day

⁴See Vol. VIII, pp. 225, 379. [Editor]

Don Bosco said to him, "Look, Father Berto, I'd like you to take note of any shortcoming you may see in me and tell me of it."

"I'd rather you did it for me," was the reply.

"No, no," Don Bosco insisted. "I really would like you to do me this favor."

Seeing that Don Bosco meant what he said, Father Berto answered, "Well, if you really want me to do it, you must promise to do as much for me."

"Agreed! Start right now and tell me what you think I should correct."

"Well, I noticed a few things, but they are trifles."

"Such as?"

"When you converse informally you keep starting nearly every sentence with, 'But' or 'I say that' when they are not called for. It pains me when others are present."

"What else?"

"Occasionally at Mass after the *Confiteor*, you say *Indulgentiam, absolutionem et remissionem peccatorum vestrorum* instead of *nostrorum*. Likewise, you sometimes say *tribuat vobis* instead of *tribuat nobis*."

Don Bosco listened with bowed head; then, smilingly, he asked, "What else?"

"After purifying the chalice, you swallow the water, but you swish it about your mouth. Anyone near you can hear it, and it sounds unpleasant. Since I care so much for you, I wish you would correct these things. Please pardon me if I have spoken too freely."

"Is that all?" Don Bosco answered. "I wish you would point out some serious shortcomings."

"Just now I have nothing else to call to your attention. In the future, if you wish, I shall not fail to point out other things I notice because I hold your honor far more important than my own. You are quite aware that Sallust says that even the smallest flaws of a very prominent person look enormous in the eyes of the masses."

At these words a serious look clouded Don Bosco's face and he changed the subject.

Since he had to absent himself from Turin on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco hastened to invite Mr. and Mrs. Charles Fava to preside at the festivities.

Turin, January 11, 1880

Dear Chevalier Fava:

Several times you and your wife Annette have been very generous to me and to this house. We all most heartily desire that both of you preside at the feast of St. Francis de Sales, our patron.

We shall provide vocal and instrumental music, the preacher, and whatever is needed for the church services.

If you are free, you and Annette will be welcome to attend some of the church services and possibly be our guests at dinner and at a stage performance in the evening. I also invite both of you to act as godparents when some of our pupils will receive the sacrament of confirmation.

Please note that all the prayers and Communions as well as the Community Mass will be offered up for your intentions.

My other self, Father Rua, will give you any needed information. I do hope your reply will be affirmative.

God bless you and your entire family.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

Chevalier Fava was not only thrilled by the invitation but generously sent a donation of three hundred lire.

We do not know the exact date of Don Bosco's departure for France, but it certainly fell between January 12 and 14. Before reaching the French border, he stayed for a while in our school at Alassio. We know this because of a prediction he made there after dinner which has still [1933] to be fulfilled.⁵

A pleasant scene took place at Ventimiglia. While awaiting the train for France, Don Bosco noticed a very lively seven- or eight-year-old lad, the son of the owner of the station's cafe. He was dashing about endlessly, talking with customers and waiters, and running from father to mother, as though he had quicksilver in his veins. From time to time he uttered the word "Chisto." Don Bosco kept eyeing the lad, until he came by with his mother.

"Come here, little boy," he said. Then, turning to the mother, he asked: "May I say something to your boy?"

"Surely," she replied.

⁵Don Bosco made this prediction during a conversation with Father Louis Rocca, who reported it to Father Lemoyne. Other priests were present, including Father Clement Bretto, who confirmed it in writing to the author of this volume. [Author]

"Listen," Don Bosco said to the boy, "would you like me to teach you how to pronounce words correctly?"

The lad did not dare to reply. "Speak up!" his mother told him, somewhat embarrassed.

"Yes," the little fellow replied rather brusquely.

"Then pay close attention," Don Bosco went on, "but first take off your cap."

The youngster stood still. "Come, take your cap off," the mother sternly ordered. He obeyed.

"Now pay attention. You should say 'Cristo,' not 'Chisto,' and do this. Look." He made the sign of the cross, pronouncing the words and continuing: "Praised be Jesus Christ. Remember: 'Cristo,' not 'Chisto.'"

In the meantime people, including the boy's father, had gathered about them. "You are right, Father," he exclaimed. "Grown-ups thoughtlessly pick up bad habits and the youngsters imitate them. I have this bad habit too and must rid myself of it one of these days."

"Soon, I hope," Don Bosco remarked.

The cafe owner then left to serve other customers, his son following him, while the others scattered. Some minutes later the boy's mother went up to Don Bosco.

"Would you kindly say a Mass for me?"

"Surely."

"Please accept this offering."

"No," Don Bosco replied. "I shall say Mass for you just the same."

"No, please, take it. I want you to."

"In that case, thank you."

The lady handed him ten lire in an envelope and then withdrew, visibly moved. Ever after, any time Don Bosco passed that way, the woman, who had come to know who he was, always gave him the same offering for a Mass. During the National Fair in Turin [in 1884] a woman greeted Don Bosco as he was passing before a food stand. She introduced herself as the co-owner of the Ventimiglia station cafe and asked if she could call on him at the Oratory. "Of course," Don Bosco told her, "but at this time of the year I am always out and it will not be easy to find me."

The woman did in fact call at the Oratory several times, but was never able to meet him. She wanted to enroll her son at the Salesian

school in Alassio, and was anxious to obtain Don Bosco's personal consent.

His loving ways were truly enchanting. Father James Cavalli, a priest of Canton Ticino,⁶ when writing to Father Rua on January 5 from Rasa, closed his letter with these heartwarming words: "Ask our beloved Don Bosco to say three Hail Marys for my intention and, if he can, to send me a memento with at least one line in his own handwriting for me to keep as a relic. He is personified goodness, and I trust he will do me this favor, not for any merit of mine, but for love of Jesus and Mary."

⁶One of the states of the Swiss confederation. [Editor]

CHAPTER 16

Don Bosco's Second Journey to France

THE need for a second trip to France stemmed mainly from problems at Marseille: a building program stalled for lack of funds; unresolved matters concerning parochial services; business negotiations with the Beaujour Society, not easily handled from a distance. Don Bosco, firmly determined to set Salesian works in France on a swift and sound course, put aside all other considerations and, paying no heed to physical discomfort, again set out for France. His achievements are a true proof that his journey was in accordance with God's mysterious designs.

He got to Nice safely on the evening of Wednesday, January 14 [1880], but very few Salesians were at the station to meet him, not so much because of the late hour, as for the fact that they had given up waiting for him. For the two previous days, morning and evening, the director, Father [Joseph] Ronchail, had vainly gone to the station. That night, after the arrival of the last train, he retired at about ten. Half an hour later, hearing footsteps and voices beneath his window, he leaned out and quite distinctly heard "the voice of our dear Papa," as he put it. He dashed downstairs to greet him and asked whether he had already paid for the coach. "What?" asked Don Bosco. "Do you think that a young man like me needs a coach to get here from the station?" But Brother [Joseph] Rossi,¹ who had come with him from Turin, and one or two confreres who, hoping against hope, had again gone to the station, assured Father Ronchail that, despite their insistence, Don Bosco had wanted to show them that he could still walk three quarters of an hour at ten o'clock at night.

Nor did he show any fatigue; in fact, he did not retire until past midnight. Although no one had been told that he would certainly

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

arrive on that day, the next morning saw such a constant flow of visitors to the Salesian house that he had to stay in his room until noon. Only when he came downstairs for dinner was he able to meet the boys in their dining room and talk with the Salesians at table. Toward the end of the meal some band music added to the general rejoicing. The brass band's repertoire was limited to eighteen numbers, but Don Bosco immediately remarked with pleasure that it had made considerable progress since his last visit.

On leaving the small dining room, he found the coach of Count Celebrini waiting to take him to bless the countess, who had been ailing for the past six months. Afterward, escorted by Father Ronchail, he made his round of visits, starting with a courtesy call on the bishop. At dusk, as they were on their way up the Carabacel hill to call on Count de Villeneuve,² they met Father Cagliero, who had just come in by train. He had traveled with Don Bosco but had stayed one extra day at Vallecrosia with Father Cibrario.

A brief incident, which in itself is of little historical value, took place, revealing the family spirit that united Don Bosco to his sons. Visibility was poor at dusk, but Father Ronchail, seeing a priest coming toward them, recognized Father Cagliero and greeted him in French with *Bon soir, mon révérend Père. Avez-vous fait bon voyage?* [Good evening, reverend Father. Did you have a pleasant trip?] *Très bon* [very nice], Father Cagliero answered. At this Don Bosco inquired of Father Ronchail in Italian who this priest was. Believing that Don Bosco was joking, Father Ronchail went along with him and said that he was a good friend of the Salesians and visited them from time to time. "Then he will spend the night with us," Don Bosco added. "Certainly," Father Ronchail answered. Father Cagliero, who had taken in the situation, immediately was about to go on his way without giving any hint that he was on to the game, when Don Bosco amiably remarked, *Alors à nous revoir dans quelques instants.* [Then we'll see each other again in a few minutes.] With these words, they parted. After a few steps further on, Don Bosco again asked Father Ronchail, "Who was that priest?"

"Father Cagliero!"

"What? Father Cagliero! I did not even recognize his voice!"

²See p. 19. [Editor]

He had not recognized him because Father Cagliero had a sore throat and had furthermore spoken in French. Father Ronchail had a hearty laugh, and both he and Don Bosco were still laughing when they got to the count's residence for dinner. They had more of a laugh that evening when they returned home, for Father Cagliero had kept up his game, fooling several of the confreres by speaking French and putting on a Spanish clerical hat which he would wear on his way to Seville.

Don Bosco departed for Fréjus with Father Ronchail on the morning of January 16; there Bishop [Ferdinand] Terris tendered him a dinner,³ to which he also invited his vicar general and other prominent people to honor Don Bosco. The after-dinner conversation lasted well past four-thirty, when it was time for Don Bosco to leave. On the train they were joined by Father Cagliero and Brother Rossi, who were going to Marseille; they traveled together just part of the way, until Don Bosco and his secretary changed trains for Hyères. This time there was no mix-up as the year before,⁴ because they were met at the station by Father [Peter] Perrot, director of St. Joseph's Hospice at La Navarre. He was waiting for them with a coach belonging to Monsieur De Bouting, who was delighted to host them during the three days they spent in the charming little town. On his arrival Don Bosco found a sizable group of Salesian cooperators awaiting them in the magnificent drawing room of the count's palace. As he made his appearance, they shouted joyfully and came forward to welcome him. After supper the conversation went on to eleven o'clock, so great was the desire of these noblemen to listen to Don Bosco.

As at Nice, so also at Hyères Don Bosco had hardly a moment to himself, receiving endless visits. There was not a devout person among the aristocracy and the upper middle class, both in Hyères and its surroundings, who was not anxious to meet him, seek his advice, confide troubles, and ask for his prayers. He also had to visit a good number of sick people who anxiously awaited his blessing.

On Sunday, January 18, he said Mass in the parish church at the magnificent altar of Our Lady of Lourdes. Two deacons served the

³In several European countries the main meal was and still is around noon. [Editor]

⁴See pp. 18f. [Editor]

Mass, which was attended by a throng of people, including many Salesian cooperators. So many in the congregation desired to receive Communion from his hand that an exception had to be made to the local rule of giving Holy Communion only at the main altar.

Meanwhile, a cheerful group of boys from La Navarre had arrived at Count De Bouting's palace. After breakfast, they escorted Don Bosco back to the church for the solemn High Mass at which they were going to sing. The score, known as the Mass in honor of St. Aloysius, was Father Cagliero's composition. In the afternoon, after solemn Vespers, during which the boys sang the *Dixit Dominus* and the *Magnificat*—also compositions of Father Cagliero—the assistant pastor of Solliès-Point, Father Isnard, a zealous Salesian cooperator, spoke to the exceptionally vast congregation about the Salesian school and foreign missions. After the sermon a collection was taken up for St. Joseph's Hospice which somewhat eased Father Perrot's financial straits.

After services Don Bosco was asked to step into the sacristy, where all the local priests and some from the area crowded about him, considering themselves really fortunate to hear his inspiring words—a piece of advice, a memento, or a blessing. It was a moving sight of humility and faith.

On Monday morning he said Mass for the Salesian cooperators and then he spoke to them. "Wasn't I bold to address such well-educated people in French for fifteen minutes?" he later laughingly remarked to Father Perrot. His poor French notwithstanding, his listeners enjoyed his talk, avidly absorbing his every word. Toward eleven o'clock he left for Toulon with Father Ronchail, while Father Perrot returned to La Navarre from where he wrote to Father Rua on January 21: "How much our good father goes out of his way for our sake! How grateful we should be to Our Lord for having given him to us! How gladly we work when we see our father work so unyieldingly, and how rewarding are our efforts for the exact and genuine observance of our holy rules in order to show ourselves worthy sons of his!"

They had to change trains at the station of La Pauline. They no sooner alighted than a young gentleman, about twenty, approached them and asked the secretary: *C'est bien le révérendissime Père Don Bosco que j'ai l'honneur de voir ici?* [Is it the Very Reverend

Don Bosco I have the honor of meeting?] Receiving an affirmative answer, he courteously picked up their modest luggage and took them to an emblazoned coach, sent by Monsieur De Vallavieille, who, with the help of the bishop of Fréjus, had obtained his wish that Don Bosco come to see and bless him. Having been ill for over a year, he had received word by letter that Don Bosco and a companion would be getting off further on at the Garde station, but he had informed them by telegram [before their departure] that for their better convenience he would have someone meet them at La Pauline. In his telegram addressed to Monsieur De Bouting, Don Bosco's name had been misspelled *Bomb-Asco*.

Monsieur De Vallavieille, former prefect of Lyons under [President Maurice] MacMahon, was an excellent Catholic from a deeply pious family. They all came with several friends to meet Don Bosco. They enjoyed his conversation at table and in the living room until four that afternoon when he had to leave for Marseille. At half past seven that evening Don Bosco arrived at St. Leo's Festive Oratory, welcomed by hundreds of shouts: *Vive Don Bosco!* [Long live Don Bosco!]

Don Bosco's first impression was that St. Leo's was growing in importance and that he would have to stay on longer than he had anticipated so as to plan its growth properly. This impression—which at first was only that and no more—later became a true necessity, as we shall see. Meanwhile his mind was on those problems which, to some extent, kept overshadowing the friendly relations between the parish church and the festive oratory. They seemed to vanish quickly “thanks to our warmhearted Papa Don Bosco,” as Father Ronchail remarked in a letter.⁵ In another⁶ he wrote, “The parish priest of St. Joseph's has regained his serenity, like the clearing after a storm.”

So there had been a storm—and what a storm! Don Bosco had received word of it before he set out for France. In fact, on January 12 he had written to Canon Guiol from Sampierdarena to inform him of his imminent arrival and especially to tell him, “I thought you were on more friendly terms with St. Leo's Oratory. I hope that these obstacles can be overcome when we shall meet and together

⁵Letter to Father Rua, Marseille, January 30, 1880. [Author]

⁶Letter to Father Rua, Marseille, February 17, 1880. [Author]

with Father Bologna try to straighten out our difficulties for the good of souls. This was our original purpose and God will help us accomplish it, if we make every sacrifice on our own part. I have always had complete trust in you and am convinced that we can count on your goodness.”⁷

The “problems” had peaked in September when Canon Guiol, the parish priest, had demanded services that the Salesians could not render; this stirred his animosity toward them and Don Bosco himself,⁸ who, he believed, was scheming to thwart him in accord with Father Bologna [St. Leo’s director]. But the grudge he bore them was older than that. It must be remembered that, occasionally, as many as three Salesian priests would be absent from the house at one time for religious services. This happened particularly at funerals which were very frequent and long-drawn-out due to certain local customs; then the ride to the cemetery and back took over an hour. In addition, the Salesians were expected to run the choir school, conduct the parish choir, train the altar boys and go with a group of them whenever Holy Viaticum was brought to the dying or whenever there was a burial. Furthermore, a Salesian had to say two Masses on Sunday in the parish church and, after the second Mass, which was always the last, bless mothers who had just had a baby or on foot escort the dead to the cemetery. Since the parish was very large, this would often call for three trips a day. Priests used to be paid one hundred and fifty francs a month for these services, but Canon Guiol had agreed on only one hundred with Don Bosco. It must also be borne in mind that, as people saw it, escorting the dead to the cemetery was somewhat of an embarrassing duty usually given to priests who had come from Italy to make money. Their conduct was not always the best, and they neither preached nor heard confessions. One day some Dominican Fathers asked Father Bologna, “What is this? Have the Salesians come to Marseille to be the parish undertakers?” It must be noted too that these unpleasant duties were to be permanent. When he signed the agreement, Don Bosco, who knew nothing of local customs, had no idea of the relentless

⁷The letter was dictated to Father Albera, as we can see from the handwriting, but was signed by Don Bosco. [Author]

⁸Letter from Father Anacletus Ghione to Father Lemoyne, Ivrea, August 30, 1912. [Author]

burden involved. He thought that Marseille would be no different than anywhere in Italy, where parochial services of Salesians simply meant cooperating for the spiritual welfare of the faithful without disrupting their routine duties toward their boys and without any appearance of servitude. We can readily understand why the Salesians incessantly complained to Turin, and why Don Bosco continued to exhort them to be patient a little longer.

Tension reached its height when Don Bosco arrived in Marseille. When Canon Guiol called on him, Don Bosco calmly broached the subject in the presence of Father Bologna, director, Father Ghione, prefect, and perhaps Father Ronchail, director at Nice. Canon Guiol, losing self-control, flew into a rage, charging Don Bosco with being a swindler, a trickster, and not a man of his word, and stepped out. Don Bosco had let him rant, keeping his cool and his patience, and making no attempt at a rebuttal as the canon inveighed against him.

That evening Canon Guiol wanted to come back to St. Leo's to resume discussing the duties which irritated the Salesians, but Don Bosco sent word to him kindly to defer negotiations to a more acceptable moment. In the meantime, he had invited a few benefactors to dinner the following day. Canon Guiol's impulsiveness made it seem wiser not to invite him, yet he might easily take it amiss and become more furious than he was, and so Don Bosco said to Father Bologna, "Come, let's pay a visit to the canon."

"What? To get more punishment?"

"No, just to calm him down and win him over. He is impulsive but good-hearted, and we shall settle everything satisfactorily. You will see."

And so it happened. "You were quite right in what you said, Father," Don Bosco assured him. "The Salesians will never forget all you have done for them and will always be grateful." He then added that he did not venture to invite him to dinner because he could not treat him as worthily as the canon deserved. Rather, he himself would come to the canon's rectory the day after tomorrow for dinner and enjoy the day, since his home was far more comfortable than St. Leo's. As they took their leave, the parish priest was still somewhat standoffish, but he omitted supper that evening and spent a sleepless night. Early the next morning he

called at St. Leo's Oratory, asked Don Bosco to call a house chapter, and in their presence apologized, saying that he was retracting all he had said as well as his demands. He pointed out that his only reason for inviting the Salesians to Marseille had been to have them conduct the choir school; as for Masses and parochial funeral services, he would be content with whatever they could do. In short, an agreement was reached, and peace was restored.

Canon Guiol was so taken aback by Don Bosco's humility and so impressed that from then on he loyally stood by him and his undertakings. After Don Bosco's death, when a new building was needed at St. Leo's but funds were not available, he came to Turin with Father Bologna for a triduum of prayer at Don Bosco's tomb to obtain the needed funds through his intercession. His prayers were answered.⁹

Since the feast of St. Francis de Sales was near at hand, Don Bosco wanted to hold a conference for the Salesian cooperators of Marseille, but he had to give up the idea because the city was then undergoing an epidemic and any meeting was unthinkable. Nevertheless, there was a festive celebration of sorts on January 29—the saint's feast day—including a stage performance, which became the occasion for a singular incident. The play's youthful hero had caught a severe cold and had totally lost his voice. Upset, the director spoke to Don Bosco of the predicament and of the sorry figure he would cut if he canceled the show. After a moment's thought, Don Bosco asked to see the young actor. When the boy came, he knelt for Don Bosco's blessing, but, before giving it, Don Bosco amiably told him, "Leave it to me. I will lend you my voice, and you will be able to play your part well." The boy regained his voice instantly, while Don Bosco immediately lost his. The performance went off very well, but as soon as it was over, Don Bosco too regained his voice.

The local press had till then left him in peace, but the stream of visitors lasted from morning until night. It would be no exaggeration at all to say that this incessant flow gave him no respite. Ten days had passed since his arrival, and he had still not had a chance to go through the house and inspect the work in

⁹This was mentioned several times during the apostolic process [for Don Bosco's beatification]. Cardinal Cagliero testified to it with new details (*Summarium*, Vol. 16, p. 744, No. 62). [Author]

progress. However, despite that, he did not forget his far-away sons. On January 22 he wrote to Father Rua:

Marseille, January 22, 1880

My dear Father Rua:

I received your newsy letter. Blessed be the Lord in all things. Tell Madame Legrand that I immediately sent her the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians and have said special prayers for her. Nor shall I forget to pray for the late Miss Occelletti and for our good Pauline, who continues to help us.

I am saddened by the loss of Della Torre, but I thank God that he was well prepared to die. I shall pray for his soul.

I am afraid that the other person is not preparing himself properly. I think you should give a general caution which may hopefully have a salutary effect on those who may feel ill at ease in their conscience.

I received Father Bonetti's letter about the house at Penango. If you think it wise, I have no objection. We could start at twenty thousand lire, since we sold a princely castle at Strambino with adjacent lands for twenty-five thousand.¹⁰

So far I have been rushing things and will review them on my return. I shall remain in Marseille the whole month to attend to business and fund raising.

I badly need prayers and urge our dear boys to offer a Holy Communion for these urgent needs of mine.

Father Cagliero left for Seville last Sunday evening and has already written from Barcelona that his journey has been pleasant. Others will give you more news. May God keep you in good health, dear Father Rua, and preserve all the Oratory boys in His holy grace, including Father Lago and Father Riccardi.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The reference to someone who had died and one about to die needs to be explained. Before leaving the Oratory, Don Bosco had had no time to address the boys and so he had instructed Father Lazzero to tell them that two of them would leave this world for

¹⁰In 1880 Don Bosco was negotiating the purchase of a building at Penango, where that year he opened a boarding grammar school to relieve crowding at the neighboring junior seminary in Borgo San Martino. [Editor]

eternity during his absence. One boy—Louis Della Torre of Mezzana Bigli, an artisan of eighteen—had died on January 14; the other—Anthony Borello of Grugliasco, also an artisan, fifteen—prepared himself well when his condition suddenly turned critical. He died on March 9, 1880.

Before the end of the month Don Bosco also wrote a brief note to Father Barberis, giving him words of encouragement and suggestions for the novices.

Marseille, January 30, 1880

My dear Father Barberis:

... *omnes quidem currunt, sed non omnes accipiunt bravium*. [...all indeed run, but one receives the prize—1 Cor. 9, 24]. As you see, Father Molini¹¹ wishes to return home. Handle that as best you can. I hope that all our dear novices are in good health. Tell them I expect great things of their goodness, studies and health.

Every day our harvest of souls is growing, so take heart, my dear novices. God has graces, work and paradise in store for you. May He bless you all. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

It does not seem that he wrote to anyone else while at Marseille. It was a near miracle that he did not collapse under the relentless and intense strain of receiving all who thronged his door. We must now recount a few incidents which explain the presence of such an exceptional crowd. Our sources are the diocesan and apostolic processes, private correspondence, and oral depositions gathered by Father Lemoyne.

On January 30 Don Bosco went to say Mass for the Sisters of the Visitation. In that convent lived a certain Mademoiselle Périer, former pupil of the institute and niece of one of the superiors. Stricken with terminal cancer, she was awaiting her end. Receiving permission to enter the cloister, Don Bosco went to the infirmary, where he found several sick sisters, to each of whom he addressed words of comfort. Coming to the young lady's bedside, he asked her, "Why don't you ask for permission to get up? Come, rise."

¹¹A postulant priest. [Editor]

"She cannot," the superior softly whispered. "She has terminal cancer."

"Get up at noon," Don Bosco continued, "and have dinner with the others."

He blessed her and left. No sooner had he left the room than the sick girl began to say, "I no longer feel any pain. I am cured and I want to get up. Please, give me my clothes." In fact, her malignant tumor had vanished.

A curious event then took place. Don Bosco had told the mother superior to ask the doctor to confirm the miraculous recovery in writing. A practicing Catholic, the doctor took offense at the request and insisted on asking Don Bosco for an explanation. While he waited to be introduced, he remarked to Father Bologna, the director, "Isn't humility one of Don Bosco's virtues? Doesn't this request smack of vainglory? Is he trying to take advantage of this recovery for his own purpose?" Father Bologna tried to put the situation in the proper light, but he might as well have been talking to a stone wall. Then came the doctor's turn to see Don Bosco. No one knows what went on between them, but when an hour later Father Bologna pushed the door ajar to tell Don Bosco that the people waiting outside were growing impatient, he saw that the doctor was on his knees in tears, his hands clasped as in prayer, and Don Bosco was in the act of blessing him. When the doctor emerged from the room, he told Father Bologna, "No, it is not for himself. Not at all! It's for the sake of others and for Our Lady's glory!"

Later, Mademoiselle P rier became a Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians, and lived until 1886 when she died in the motherhouse at Nizza Monferrato.¹²

Other extraordinary events taking place before and after this miraculous healing helped to spread the fame Don Bosco already enjoyed as a wonder-worker. We will now recount those that are best documented.

Mademoiselle Barbarin, paralyzed for nearly four years, had long been bedridden. At times a lump in her throat forced her tongue to protrude through her teeth and caused her eyes to roll.

¹²Letter from the superior of the Sisters of the Visitation, Mother Mary Gabrielle Guiscard, to Father Rua, Marseille, January 25, 1888. The letter mistakenly states that the nun died at Saint-Cyr. [Author]

Invited by her family to dinner, Don Bosco took Father Bologna with him. After the usual greetings, he was taken to see the sick woman. He exhorted her to put her faith in the Madonna, said a few prayers with those present in the room, and blessed her.

"Now," he ordered, "get up and have dinner with us."

"Impossible!" cried her mother, almost in a frenzy. "She has not been able to move for the last four years."

"What does that matter?" Don Bosco replied. "The past is past. I will leave the room. Get her out of bed. Let her dress and come down to dine with us." Some thirty people, between relatives and guests, were waiting in the dining room, and Don Bosco, wholly at ease, joined them. Fifteen minutes later at the most, the door was flung wide open, and the young lady briskly strode in, followed by her mother and others. Dismayed beyond all telling, the bystanders stared at her as in a trance, afraid even to speak. The young lady broke the silence herself and asked them all to take their places at table.

She sat beside Don Bosco and helped herself to everything with relish. Soon the astonishment gave way to overwhelming joy. Only the girl's mother seemed untouched, taking no part in the conversation. Rather gullible, she had been taken in by a sorceress who had persuaded her to give her daughter some water over which the sorceress had cast a spell. This supposedly would cure her. Even now the mother had that water brought to the table.

"Why this brackish water?" Don Bosco asked. "A little wine would be much better. If she wants water, give her that water," and he pointed to a pitcher of tap water on the table, while he poured good wine into her glass.

"At least bless this tap water," the mother begged. Don Bosco did so but had the other water removed. The girl who had been sick felt so well that the next day she returned Don Bosco's visit and called on him with her mother.

Another remarkable case was that of Monsieur Bonnet of Marseille, who had gone to a mineral spring at Allevard, Grenoble, to treat a stomach ailment. He felt so well that, before returning home, he called on Dr. Émile Chatain to thank him for his care. However, just as he was about to take leave of him, he felt a sharp pain in the lower back and mentioned it to the doctor. The diagnosis

was that he was suffering from tuberculosis of the bone, and he was advised to return to Marseille for surgery.

Monsieur Bonnet obeyed without delay. In Marseille he consulted specialists and underwent several operations which racked him with pain for six or seven months without any sign of improvement. In deep depression he came to know that Don Bosco was in town and immediately dragged himself to him, fully trusting in a cure. Don Bosco received him graciously, blessed him and encouraged him to stop worrying because he would fully recover and enjoy a successful career. Those words restored him to life, so to speak, but, better still, he no sooner got home than a sudden discharge of pus eased him of his illness.

Dr. Chatain, a fervent Catholic, while speaking of this occurrence, added that not only had the first part of the prediction come true, but the second as well, since Monsieur Bonnet lived to fill a very important office and became the proud father of two lovely boys, as healthy and beautiful as cherubs.

No less interesting is the account given by a Genoese priest¹³ to his friend, Father Lemoyne. While Don Bosco was in Marseille a lady called on him, sadly lamenting that her husband was a stubborn atheist and their five-year-old child was mute. Don Bosco comforted her, promising to pray for the conversion of her husband and for the recovery of her child, but he also urged her to pray and make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians.

On returning home, the lady informed her husband that she had been to see Don Bosco. He ranted and raved that Don Bosco was a priest and that he had no use for priests. Worse, he punctuated his anger with blasphemies and curses directed to his wife. After he calmed down, they had dinner during which his wife mentioned that she had asked Don Bosco to cure their child. At this he merely shrugged his shoulders. Just then the little boy suddenly cried out, "Papa! Papa!" It was the first time they had ever heard him speak. Moved but still stubborn in his views, the father felt deeply shaken and withdrew to his room. The next morning he called on Don Bosco and told him quite frankly that he was loath to put any faith in priests. "Well, if you don't like me as a priest, think of me as a

¹³Letter of Father Charles Moro, chaplain to the Sisters of the Annunciation at Castelletto, dated Genoa, January 5, 1902. At the time of the incident he was residing at Nice, but he heard about it shortly after it had happened from a trustworthy source. [Author]

friend," Don Bosco replied. Then, little by little, he dispelled the man's misconceptions so that the atheist, whose heart was already deeply troubled by the miracle of the previous day, gave way, charmed also by Don Bosco's kindness. Their discussion ended with the confession of the erstwhile atheist, who slipped a generous donation into Don Bosco's hand before leaving.

We have documentation too of a singular mind-reading and of genuine predictions. In one case, a widowed mother, named Mrs. Ponge, brought her two sons to Don Bosco for his blessing. She was about to explain that one of them was causing her great distress, but he would not give her a chance to say a word. Rather, placing his hand on the young culprit's shoulder, he told him, "Now, Charles, try to be the pride and joy of your good mamma." No one had mentioned the boy's name or his behavior to Don Bosco. The lad was so impressed that, as the document in our archives states, he never again gave his mother any reason for complaint.

Don Bosco also predicted the end of an illness to a sick nun, but he did so in such a way that his words were not immediately understood. He called one day at the convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart and was asked to visit one of the nuns who was having much trouble with her eyes. The sister begged for a healing. "Yes, yes," he replied smilingly. "The day after tomorrow you will be seeing some wonderful things!" That day the sister died and passed on to her reward.

The wonders keep coming in greater numbers. Astonishing things took place in a girls' convent school of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.¹⁴ The boarders were all gathered in a hall to welcome Don Bosco. He came in, saying very amiably, "You are waiting for Don Bosco, aren't you? Well, here I am!" Directly behind him came a poor woman who was carrying a little girl who had no strength in her legs. The woman had gone to find Don Bosco at the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, where he had been visiting moments before, and so had followed him to his next appointment. Boldly pushing her way into the hall, she placed her daughter before Don Bosco and implored him to give the girl his blessing. Don Bosco did so and told her to have trust in Mary, Help

¹⁴Today [1933] it is known as the Joan of Arc Boarding School run by the same nuns wearing civilian clothes. [Author]

of Christians. Then he ordered her to walk. At first she hesitated for fear of falling, and her mother darted forward to help her, but Don Bosco stopped her, saying, "She needs no help." Then he told the girl, "Get up and go to the chapel and thank Our Lady!" The child stood up and walked to the chapel, tearfully followed by several people. Father Cagliero, who was present, saw her leave the convent, walking all by herself and merely leaning on her mother's arm.¹⁵

Now let us return to the boarders. When the excitement was over, two girls who had been waiting for the right moment welcomed Don Bosco officially. The younger one gave him a bouquet of flowers with many tiny envelopes holding half francs—a donation for his work. The older girl read a speech welcoming him in the name of the superiors and her schoolmates. He listened to the formal address and then spoke to the whole community. Afterward, those who wished had time to receive some brief advice from him.

After the reception, each of the pupils preparing for certification as teachers was presented to him individually. Don Bosco assured them all that they would pass the exam with top grades. When one girl who was taking a test for a higher degree came to him, he opened the book she was holding and, without saying a word, pointed out something to her. The girl who had formally welcomed him moments before, whose name was Aiguier, wished to become a sister of the Immaculate Conception, but as a cloistered nun, so as to give herself to the contemplative life. The mother general, however, was against the idea, insisting that she take her degree and be a teaching sister. Holding to her resolve, the young lady refused to take the exams and confided her hope to Don Bosco. He gave her a glance she could never forget, and at random opened Meneket's *Littérature* for her, saying, "You will never become a nun and you will need a job. Take the exams. You'll do extremely well. Your teacher certification will come in handy some day." Mademoiselle Aiguier, still residing at Marseille [in 1933],¹⁶ recounted this event, saying that Don Bosco's glance seemed to tell

¹⁵Cardinal Cagliero ascribed this incident to the year 1881 in the *Summarium* of the apostolic processes which dealt with the miracles performed by Don Bosco during his lifetime. If the date is not a typographical error, it is certainly a lapse of memory. [Author]

¹⁶Her address is Rue Escat No. 39 (formerly Sainte Philomène), and she has her writings printed at St. Leo's printshop. [Author]

her that while she would never become a nun, she would nevertheless always live like one. She also added that then and there his remark "You will never become a nun" had vexed her considerably.

Everything happened as he had foretold. At the exams the page which Don Bosco had pointed out was the one chosen. Among the candidates, Mademoiselle Aiguier received the highest grades and all her classmates did better than everyone else. The girl who took the test for a higher degree was interrogated precisely on the page which Don Bosco had pointed out and received excellent marks. Mademoiselle Aiguier did not become a nun, though her confessor was somewhat skeptical about Don Bosco's prediction. Being the daughter of a wealthy merchant family, she looked forward to a comfortable life, with no need to teach, but suddenly the family's fortunes unexpectedly plunged. An ill-fated business transaction ended in bankruptcy, and she began her painful career as a schoolteacher. Thanks to the certification she had providentially obtained, she was able to help her family in their need. She had received some excellent marriage proposals when life had been easier, but she had declined all offers. At this date [1933] she lives alone like a cloistered nun.

The report of these and similar wonders—not all of them are known to us—spread rapidly and drew a stream of visitors, causing lively excitement in the house for days on end. On returning from Seville, Father Cagliero wrote to Father Rua:¹⁷

Marseille is topsy-turvy. People come and go, and their bursting enthusiasm for Don Bosco reminds me of Rome in 1864, when he performed there the marvels he is doing now. There seems to be a magic communications line which tells the whole city all that Don Bosco has said and done and is about to do to meet the town's spiritual or temporal needs. This unprecedented flow of people, great and small, rich and poor, religious and lay, keeps swelling every day. Since all these needs do not go unheeded, we must delay our departure to Sunday. Marseille is a city of fat wallets, deep faith and grievous needs. I do not exaggerate when I say that, were time to permit, Don Bosco could accomplish here what Jonah achieved at Nineveh. Men with frightening moustaches, hardened sinners, silly women and lukewarm religious drop at his feet in tears. What arouses the highest wonder and astonishment is that purses once kept tightly

¹⁷Letter, February 17, 1880. [Author]

closed, insensitive to the needs of the poor, are now opening up to Christian deeds of kindness and charity.

However, during the first few weeks this was not true of the wallets. "Lots of enthusiasm, but no money," wrote Father Ronchail to Father Rua on January 30, 1880. But we should add that Don Bosco did not regularly ask for alms directly, but rather, if asked, would personally make known some pressing needs, leaving it to each individual to follow the promptings of the heart. This preference caused misunderstandings, but he did nothing to clear them up. One day, in the company of Canon Guiol, he paid a first visit to Madame Prat-Noilly who was eager to help Salesian work and was only waiting for Don Bosco to ask. Purposely she steered their talk to his works, asking questions and receiving information, but she never heard Don Bosco mention that he needed financial assistance. She went on to remark that the Church's many charitable undertakings needed generous supporters. Don Bosco agreed. Finally she told him of her generous subsidies to the Daughters of Charity and to the Little Sisters of the Poor. Don Bosco praised her and urged her to continue. Astounded that he asked for nothing for himself, she told him that her vast wealth was enough to assist other charitable works. Don Bosco warmly agreed, adding that Marseille truly had enough needs to absorb all kinds of charity. In short, no matter how the good lady tried to get him to admit his own needs, she was unsuccessful. Don Bosco finally said goodbye, leaving her shocked and quite unable to understand his attitude. She could not hide her surprise and confidentially told Canon Guiol that she was anxious to help, but Don Bosco would not ask for a thing. The parish priest solved the puzzle for her and suggested that she herself broach the subject since Don Bosco was not in the habit of asking for himself. Once knowing this, she immediately arranged for another meeting with Don Bosco on the following day.

The next morning Don Bosco and Canon Guiol returned to the lady's home. She again spoke of charity, but again there was no way to make Don Bosco manifest his needs. Just as he was about to leave as he had done the day before, she broke the ice.

"But Don Bosco, don't you need anything?"

"I need everything," Don Bosco answered with a smile.

"Why didn't you say so?"

"Divine Providence knows my needs."

"What if Divine Providence has chosen me to come to your aid?"

"I would be most thankful to you."

"What do you need?"

"Many important things. We owe for buildings we have put up and for others we are now planning . . ."

"How much do you owe for the buildings already completed?"

"At the moment I am not sure."

"Would you please find out?"

"I will ask the architect."

"And I will gladly assist you."

They parted with this understanding. Don Bosco lost no time in sending her a detailed list of debts amounting to sixty thousand francs. Madame Prat-Noilly agreed to pay the entire sum in several installments by the end of the year.

Whether it was the fruit of his experience or merely a natural intuition, Don Bosco had his own point of view in these matters. He described it as follows: "When you ask for alms outright, people may give you ten, twenty, or fifty lire, and that ends it. Furthermore, if they have given once, they will be unlikely to give again, feeling they have done their duty. On the contrary, when a potential benefactor is left to ask in what way he may assist, you may cite even a large sum without being embarrassed, and the benefactor, though he may not offer the entire sum, will give hundreds or thousands of lire. In that case he is the one embarrassed if he withdraws his own offer of help."

The money came, enough to pay off old debts, draw up a contract to purchase the land adjoining the Beaujour residence, and make Saint-Cyr and La Navarre financially solvent. Furthermore, it made it possible for Father Savio to start construction on a second wing of the building and to add a floor to the main house, without fear of finding himself without funds halfway through the project. It was all so astounding, just as it was astounding to hear Don Bosco speak French boldly and give the people a display of heroic courage.

His health seemed fairly good, despite the heavy strain caused by his audiences, but he was not fully free of physical pain. He liked to talk, occasionally at great length, after night prayers because that was his only free time. One night, for instance, he confided to

Father Anacletus Ghione that he suffered severe pains on rising in the morning, most likely when he tried to put on the elastic stockings he needed for his varicose veins. The Salesian community, noticing that they were badly worn, bought him a new pair. Ordinarily Father Berto helped him put them on and take them off, and having to do so by himself undoubtedly increased his pain. One night Father Berto was so moved on seeing the condition of Don Bosco's legs that he kissed his feet. "You have kissed the feet of a Judas!" Don Bosco stated in deep humility.¹⁸

Father Belmonte once caught a glimpse of the sad state of Don Bosco's legs during his first year as director of the hospice at Sampierdarena and mentioned it to the priest who was preaching the Lenten mission at the parish church.¹⁹ It happened one day when Don Bosco stopped at the hospice on his way home from a visit to the Salesian houses on the western Riviera. Father Belmonte took the occasion to tell Don Bosco that he was so exhausted he could no longer carry on. "I cannot go on like this," he lamented. "I never have a free moment." Without saying a word, Don Bosco bent down and, lifting his cassock, showed him his legs. They were so swollen that they looked like two small columns. "Take heart, dear son," he said. "We shall rest in paradise."

The Father Ghione we just mentioned was prefect of the house at Marseille. One evening he met Don Bosco alone in a hallway, and, seeing that he looked somewhat apprehensive, so different from his usual self, he asked if he were feeling ill. Don Bosco answered no, but admitted that he was upset because a lady who had an eye ailment had demanded that he place his hands over her eyes. "I will never do that for any woman, not for all the money in the world!" he protested. Something else also deeply hurt him. "People are very ignorant in matters of religion," he went on sadly. "They believe that it is Don Bosco who works the wonders that have taken place during these days. It's not Don Bosco, but Mary, Help of Christians who wins these favors through Her intercession." At this point, Father Ghione, anxious to satisfy a nagging curiosity of his own, asked very confidently, "Don Bosco, when people request

¹⁸This was what Father Berto wrote in a note kept in our archives. [Author]

¹⁹Letter from Canon James Gesnino to Father Lemoyne, Genoa, March 23, 1891. [Author]

your blessing for some spiritual or physical favor, do you already know whether or not they will receive it?" "No, I do not," Don Bosco replied. "When I bless them, I feel inspired to say, 'Stand up and go to thank the Madonna.' And at that moment the person really becomes healed."²⁰

During the first week of February Don Bosco visited our houses at Saint-Cyr and at La Navarre and then returned to Marseille.²¹ He was accompanied by Father Ronchail, who was later replaced by Father Cagliero on his return from Spain. Father Cagliero found that Don Bosco's legs felt better, but that he had trouble seeing, his left eye being painfully inflamed.²²

We have no information on his visit to Saint-Cyr and very little about his visit to La Navarre, but the Salesian, Father Michael Blain, still living [1933]—the little "Mickey" whom Don Bosco had mentioned in describing his dream in 1877 about the agricultural school at La Navarre²³—still recalls it vaguely. A fatherless child, he lost his mother on July 8, 1881, the very day St. Joseph's Hospice was officially opened. An aunt, a Carmelite nun, sent him to the Salesians, who accepted him on October 16. Since he had a fine voice and a good musical ear, he was immediately given singing lessons. We have already recounted how Don Bosco recognized him by his singing as the boy he had seen in his dream.

As the day of his departure from Marseille drew closer, Don Bosco called a conference of Salesian cooperators which he had been unable to hold on the feast day of St. Francis de Sales. He was very eager to open the newly completed wing [of St. Leo's Festive Oratory] with an official, solemn ceremony, so as to give his benefactors a concrete proof of his determination to develop it

²⁰Letter from Father Ghione to Father Lemoyne, Ivrea, August 30, 1912. [Author]

²¹The chronicle kept by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Saint-Cyr states that Don Bosco visited them in January, but this is in error, because Father Cagliero wrote to Father Rua from Marseille on February 5: "We arrived in Marseille this morning on our return home from Spain. While we were stepping off our train, Don Bosco and Father Ronchail were boarding theirs for Toulon, without our having a chance to see each other. Tomorrow we set out for Saint-Cyr and the next day for La Navarre in the hope of seeing Papa, who must be back in Marseille by the middle of the month. I will find out what he wants me to do." Then, on his return to Marseille on February 12, he writes, "We found Don Bosco at Saint-Cyr. He sent Father Ronchail off and kept me as his . . . coach driver. Brother Rossi is on his way, and you will soon see him. We visited the house at La Navarre and then returned to Marseille, where we are now, as I write this letter to you." [Author]

²²Letter of February 12 previously quoted. [Author]

²³See Vol. XIII, p. 417. [Editor]

further. The conference was set for Friday, February 20, the anniversary of Leo XIII's election as Pope. Bishop [Jean Louis] Robert agreed to preside. Don Bosco, Canon Guiol and members of the Beaujour Society formed a semicircle with the bishop in the center, and a large number of priests, prominent lay persons and the general public attended. A boy read an address to Don Bosco, greeting him as "our good father and beloved benefactor," and going on to say that, having just discovered a treasure, he was hastening to lay it at Don Bosco's feet, realizing how urgently he needed money for his many projects. Unfortunately, he said, this had all taken place only in a dream, which he hoped the generosity of the Salesian cooperators of Marseille would turn into a reality. Then a young cleric offered a word of homage to the bishop, voicing devout sentiments and placing St. Leo's Festive Oratory under his kindly, fatherly protection. Don Bosco gave the closing talk. In a lengthy account of the conference which *La Gazette du Midi* published on February 23 and 24, we read:

It does not come as news to our readers to say that Don Bosco is a miracle of charity and zeal, so it is no surprise that he enthralled his huge audience in spite of his poor French. His heart did the speaking. Apostles are given the gift of tongues, and souls can understand and communicate in a language which is heaven's echo.

Don Bosco explained to his audience that the Salesian Congregation's aim was to aid endangered youth. He told them how the idea had first come to him and how he had reacted to it since 1841. He sketched the results he had already obtained and then spoke of the houses at Saint-Cyr and La Navarre, acquainting his listeners with their accomplishments and future plans. He narrated a recent episode to illustrate the love his former pupils had for him. One of them living in Barcelona had heard that Don Bosco was in Marseille, and he could not restrain his longing, his need, to see his beloved benefactor again. So he took a ship [for Marseille] and, to Don Bosco's astonishment, stood before him in utter delight that he could spend some time with Don Bosco and talk about himself after such a long separation. "I have faithfully followed your advice and teaching," he told Don Bosco, "and I consider myself very fortunate. I am married, I am doing quite well in business, and I am satisfied with the Lord's gifts. I wanted to see

you once more, my dear Father, to receive your blessing for my wife, my children and myself, and to make my confession to you again as I joyfully used to do thirty-five years ago.”

Don Bosco then went on to tell the story of the Salesian foundation in Marseille: how he had gone there in 1876 and, noting the large number of boys walking the streets, had spoken about it to Canon Guiol, pastor of St. Joseph’s Church, and how both agreed that they would care for these disadvantaged lads materially and spiritually. But how were they to go about it? They sought the bishop’s advice, and it was not long before St. Leo’s Festive Oratory on Beaujour Street was born with God’s help. It could honestly be said that Divine Providence had held out an inexhaustible helping hand. He pointed out how the Beaujour Society deserved that help because its activities reached out to all. It was also fair therefore that everyone should help it.

He concluded with a story. One evening that same winter, on leaving St. Leo’s to go into town, Don Bosco had chanced upon a young man on a deserted street whose appearance aroused both fear and compassion in the beholder. Don Bosco got into a conversation with him and, as he usually did, he reconstructed the dialogue for his audience.

“What are you doing here, my friend?”

“I am cold,” the youth answered with a shiver.

“Have you no home?”

“I am hungry . . .” he said and, raising his arms, he fell helplessly at Don Bosco’s feet. Exerting himself, Don Bosco raised him up as best he could and half-carried him to St. Leo’s, where he was immediately given care. Having partially regained his strength, he exclaimed, “Father, you have done a very good deed. You have saved my life and stopped me from committing a crime to which I would have been led by my desperate need. Will you keep me here with you?” The house was full, but somehow room was made for him. The youth was still there, praying, working and giving good example. “This is what we must do for everybody, for our ailing society,” Don Bosco concluded, “and we must do it for the love of God, who told us, ‘Love one another.’”

Speaking for the audience, Monsieur Henri Bergasse, president of the local chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, glowingly referred to him as another Vincent de Paul who sheltered vagrant

youngsters and freed their souls from the loathsome slavery of corruption and vice. The speaker took the occasion to extol the ceaseless fruitfulness of the Church in providing remedies for all evils, and to exalt God's goodness in constantly raising providential men according to the needs of the times. To this ailing world God was still sending healers like Don Bosco, quickly acknowledged and hailed as such by the people. "We have an example of this right here at St. Leo's on Beaujour Street," he said. "Hidden and unknown until yesterday, it has become today the meeting point of every charitable soul in the city, a pilgrims' center for people who continuously throng about this man of God. Thus does the Lord choose to initiate His servants' works and give them strength. From humble beginnings, from the microscopic mustard seed grows a tree which quickly spreads its friendly branches over a land blessed by its presence."

When the bishop stood up to speak he found a friendly audience. He stressed the providential nature of Don Bosco's work as bearing all the hallmarks of a true Catholic enterprise dear to God. Then he went on to say that saints are God's instruments, led by His hand to unknown missions, as was the case of St. Francis de Sales, whom Don Bosco had chosen as his Society's patron and who had also accomplished memorable missions whose significance and influence he had not foreseen. The bishop closed by expressing his strong support of St. Leo's Oratory.

After the bishop's blessing, Don Bosco stood at the doorway, as was customary, and held out a basket for donations. Many kissed his hand. Monsieur Émile Sumien, who furnished the above details, remarked:

We stood about for some time, enjoying the touching sight at our ease. Many persons, on passing Don Bosco, whispered a few words into his ear, and with incomparable patience he replied to each, blessing the children with a smile. Gold as well as lowly copper coins were dropped into the basket by hands that quickly were withdrawn lest their contribution be detected; the greater the offering, the more discreet were the donors, who were truly inspired by charity. Don Bosco thanked each with a kindly word, and we saw that often, when the gift was but a few pennies, he gave the donors a look of thanks. Men like Don Bosco know the value of the poor widow's mite.

Several people stayed on to talk to Don Bosco, seek his blessing or prayer, or perhaps to confide some secret sorrow. He satisfied all, without betraying the least annoyance or fatigue, until those concerned for his health forced him to sit and rest. People kept staying around.

This is a daily scene—the reporter continued—though we read of such happenings only in the lives of the saints. Such heart-touching incidents, willed by God as comforts for the Church in its present sorrows, fill the hearts of the faithful with boundless hope.²⁴

To keep the enthusiasm which his presence aroused from dying quickly like a flash in the pan, Don Bosco set up two committees, as he intended to do also in Nice, one of men, the other of women, who would regularly meet and in accord with each other would then keep up the city's concern and cooperation to expand the Salesians' work. As we shall see later, he never lost sight of his hard-working cooperators even when far away.

We managed to get very detailed minutes of the women's meetings held from March 1880 to February 1895 under the chairmanship of Canon Guiol. Quoting from them here and elsewhere will add interest to our account. From March 4 to December 30, 1880, twenty-one meetings were held, of which the first four may be considered organizational. Several practical means of raising funds were suggested, such as annual pledges of contributions of twenty-five, fifty, or a hundred francs, scholarships, forming groups of ten people with each promising two francs a year, and business firms adopting a pupil for three hundred francs a year. The groups of ten contained for the most part the six hundred Salesian cooperators.²⁵

On February 22, the eve of Don Bosco's departure from Marseille, the playground and halls of the house were jammed with friends who were hoping for a last chance to speak with Don Bosco. A stately lady, hoping to see him, went so far as to hide behind the

²⁴*L'Osservatore Cattolico* of Milan published a slightly edited translation of both articles of *La Gazette du Midi* in its March 17 and 18 issues. *Le Citoyen* of Marseille also carried a brief report on the events on February 21, and the article, reprinted in the March number of the *Bulletin Salésien*, was translated into Italian for the same issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. [Author]

²⁵We are omitting a few more details concerning the internal government of the ladies' committee. [Editor]

door to the boys' dormitory, so determined indeed that she stayed there from six in the morning to six in the evening, emerging for a moment only at midday for lunch. "Had I not spotted her and asked what she wanted," Father Ghione wrote, "the good lady would never have gotten a glimpse of Don Bosco. I managed to get her a three-minute audience with Don Bosco, just as he was on the verge of leaving."

More touching is the story of a poorer woman who came in the morning and settled herself in a corner of the waiting room, leaning against the wall and holding a pallid, motionless blind child in her arms. Full of faith and resignation to God's will, the woman waited her turn to see Don Bosco, as visitors kept coming and going. Her personal shyness kept her from asserting herself before more important people. The few paltry attempts she made were useless, because the flow of visitors repeatedly forced her back into her corner. At eleven Canon Guiol came to take Don Bosco to lunch at Madame Prat-Noilly's. As he walked through the room, everybody crowded about him and the poor woman knew she could never push her way through them, and so she stayed in her corner. For two more hours she did not leave her place, unyielding and silent.

On Don Bosco's return, she again pushed forward but was blocked by the rush of people. Don Bosco entered his room, and she retreated to her corner. Shortly afterward he returned in his traveling garb. An unyielding crowd of some three hundred people thronged the waiting room. With Don Bosco's departure the poor woman's hopes would be crushed. She was the very picture of suffering. Father Cagliero again spotted her.

"Don Bosco," he said, "that woman wishes your blessing."

"I have no time. I'm late and I'll miss the train."

"She has been here all day," Father Cagliero insisted. He turned to her and called out loudly and firmly. A path was forced open for her to reach Don Bosco. The child lay motionless in her arms. Don Bosco raised his right hand and blessed it. Instantly the child clapped its tiny hands and aroused itself, rubbing its eyes in the sudden glare of light. It all happened so very fast, without Don Bosco's stopping as the crowd moved to make way for him, and anxious hands reached out to him on all sides. In the confusion the woman squeezed through the crowd, beside herself with joy, while the rest of the people hardly noticed anything. Father Cagliero was

probably the only one who really knew what had taken place.²⁶

Until Don Bosco got into his coach, the crowd pressed about him to kiss his hand or to try to touch his garments at least, holding out rosaries and handkerchiefs for him to touch. From Father Ghione's account of that day we gather the following details:

I walked beside him and did my best to open a path for him. Midway down the stairs Don Bosco gave me a passing glance which I could not understand. Loudly he told me, "Can't you see?" I saw that in the crowd which was almost sweeping him off his feet, two women stood blocking his way. Without waiting for my help he pushed past them with surprising strength. Once inside the coach, I noticed that his cassock had been so badly cut up all over that we had to get him another for his journey. Everything that he came into contact with in his room was stolen, with the connivance of family members, to please some Salesian cooperators. Not even the bed sheets were spared.

Instead of going directly to Nice, he stopped overnight at Aubagne, less than an hour away from Marseille. Once he was alone with Father Cagliero in their compartment, he remarked in astonishment and embarrassment, "How wonderful is the Lord, and how immense His mercy! He chose a peasant boy of Becchi to be His instrument in performing His wonders before such a host of people."²⁷ They arrived in Nice late on February 24. Don Bosco probably stayed a couple of days with the count of Villeneuve, whose chateau was in the neighborhood. Deeply attached to Don Bosco, the count was certainly thrilled to offer him hospitality and afford him the rest he so badly needed.

Nice was no different from Marseille: a daily host of visitors, the same heroic patience on Don Bosco's part, the same marvels, even though any reliable information is really scarce. Between February 24 and March 6, furthermore, a flood of mail reached him, well over eight hundred letters from all over France. The financial picture of St. Pierre's Hospice was no better than that of St. Leo's in Marseille had been before his visit. They owed money for real estate they had had to purchase; they had run up the cost of feeding

²⁶In the two-volume biography [by Father Lemoyne, Vol. II, p. 518] this episode is quoted as having taken place in 1881. But from mid-January to Easter 1881, Father Cagliero was in Spain. Don Bosco left Marseille at the end of February. [Author]

²⁷*Summarium super virtutes*, Vol. XVI, No. 90, p. 966. [Author]

over a hundred boys and they had debts for workshop equipment. More distressing was the need for larger premises to accommodate the crowds of needy youngsters who kept asking for admission. In addition, they needed a larger and more dignified chapel, as well as a new study hall to replace the low-ceilinged one they had, which was sadly inadequate and badly placed. Substantial funds were needed, while their daily income could not even cover the growing heap of outstanding expenses.

Fortunately, Divine Providence again visibly came to Don Bosco's aid in stirring up public sympathy, with notable results, although, as we have already remarked, we are not sure how it all happened. We are positive of one instance. A certain Monsieur G., fifty-six, a government employee, made his confession to Don Bosco, who listened and then asked him, "Have you forgotten to confess such and such a sin . . .?" He reminded him of all the circumstances, including his age, eighteen at the time. After receiving absolution the man, totally astonished, rushed to Father Ronchail, the director. Telling him all that had happened, he declared he had really forgotten that sin and that he had enough proof that Don Bosco was a saint.

The people's generosity was manifest both privately and publicly. Sixteen guests were present at a dinner given in his honor; what they enjoyed most was his presence and his edifying, pleasant conversation. Toward the end of the meal, as conversation picked up, a wealthy, kind-hearted gentleman stood up and addressed his fellow guests. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "it is all well and good that we admire Don Bosco's work, but we will do better to share his merit by coming to his aid. How do we expect him to enlarge his house and take in more helpless youngsters if he has no money?" He then passed a plate around; four guests put in a thousand francs each and the rest contributed an additional seven hundred.

Ernest Harmel, brother of Léon, known as "the [workers'] good father,"²⁸ gave a lavish banquet for his friends to honor Don Bosco. The previous year at a convention in Angers²⁹ he had read a paper on the scope and growth of the Salesian Congregation. This time,

²⁸See Vol. IV, p. 56. [Editor]

²⁹See p. 213. [Editor]

like his fellow guests, Ernest Harmel would normally have been wintering at La Côte d'Azur [on the French Riviera] for his health. While the guests were chatting at their ease before dinner, Don Bosco talked to them about the school chapel, stating that it was too small for the pupils and hardly a suitable home for the Lord. "I have seen a plan of our architect, Monsieur Levrot," he said, "but that would run into thirty thousand francs."

"Thirty thousand!" echoed Attorney Michel. "I really fear we shall never raise that much money just now here in Nice. This winter we have had so many lotteries and fund drives that our purses are empty."

"Still that's the amount I need this very day," Don Bosco replied.

The guests took their places at table. As dessert was being served, Saietto, a notary public, stood up and said to Don Bosco, "I want you to know that a generous person has asked me to give you thirty thousand francs. You may collect it at your convenience at my office." Don Bosco joined his hands and, raising his eyes to heaven, thanked Mary, Help of Christians for the singular favor.

Two appeals were also made to the general public. The first was made in the parish church of Notre-Dame by Father Lacouture, S.J., the Lenten preacher. Don Bosco was present and the collection surpassed all expectations. Don Bosco himself set up the second appeal through a conference to the Salesian cooperators. In a news report from Nice³⁰ we read:

The pious and generous people listened attentively to all Don Bosco told them of Salesian work in general, and of the work on the local level. He spoke in French, of which he has a better reading than speaking knowledge. His plain, simple way of speaking, expressed in an Italian literary style, seemed to delight his listeners, but they were most captivated by his apostolic message.

The collection proved the assertion, for when Don Bosco made his rounds with the basket, everyone, from the bishop to the least of the congregation, gave generously. One man put in a gold coin. "God reward you," Don Bosco said. "Let it be doubled," the man countered and dropped in a second gold coin. Several families, not

³⁰*Bulletin Salésien*, March 1880 p. 12. [Author]

satisfied with their offerings in the two appeals, sent larger donations by mail.

Our account of Marseille sufficiently explains why Don Bosco could not give his attention to certain courtesies, particularly saying goodbye to the bishop and other important people. He rushed a letter to Canon Guiol. His handwriting, more illegible than usual, tells us what he meant by saying he was tired, but that did not keep him from adding a remark about his deep personal concern for the wonders God performed through him.

Nice, March 4, 1880

Dear Father:

I am in Nice, and [regret that I] had to leave without seeing you again or thanking you for the generous charity and kindness you have shown me and my humble Salesians. I speak also on behalf of Father Cagliero. May God reward you. You have our sincerest thanks.

I would appreciate your doing me a great favor by calling on your bishop, to whom I cannot write, and to apologize in my name for my having left without first receiving his instructions for Rome, and without thanking him for his fatherly goodness, his donation and the excellent recommendation he voiced for our St. Leo's Oratory. If I can ever be of service to him in Rome, I shall be delighted to do so.

I planned to take some rest in the first few days after my arrival in this city, but instantly the usual line of callers began, and I am so exhausted that I can take no more. The day after tomorrow I shall leave for Rome without having had a chance to do anything for our hospice. How easily people fool themselves! They attribute to men the wonders which God performs through His infinite mercy.

I have not yet been able to write to Father Bologna. Should you have the chance, please pass this news on to him. I promise that somewhere I shall find time to write to some of the people in Marseille who insist on receiving an answer.

God bless them all, my good Father, and may He keep you in good health. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

We have two remaining small incidents which we feel are not insignificant for those who seek a fuller understanding of Don Bosco's spirit.

While in Nice he took a public coach one day, and when he got to his stop he realized that he had taken no money. He told the coachman that he had left his wallet at home and asked him kindly to drive to St. Pierre's Hospice, and there he would be paid his fare.

"Whom should I ask for?" the man inquired.

"Ask for me."

"What's your name?"

"Abbé Bonhomme."

The coachman drove there toward evening. Don Bosco had forgotten to notify anyone, so that when the man was asked whom he wished to see, he replied as he had been told. "We have no Abbé Bonhomme here," the secretary said, rather annoyed, and showed him the door. The coachman raised his voice, so that Don Bosco heard the commotion and, understanding what it was all about, rushed over. "There is l'Abbé Bonhomme!" exclaimed the coachman in triumph. With a hearty laugh Don Bosco paid him and added a generous tip.

The second incident is altogether different. One evening, as he and Father Ronchail were returning home after having dined with a benefactor, they took a short-cut through back alleyways and badly soiled their shoes. Back in his room at St. Pierre's Hospice, Don Bosco found the stench unbearable, but, unwilling to ask anyone to do so demeaning and repugnant a task, he began to clean the shoes himself. As he was almost finished, Father Ronchail, noticing the light in his room, walked in, surprising Don Bosco at his task. He snatched the shoes and finished the job himself, moved by Don Bosco's humility.

In his last week at Nice, Don Bosco found himself in a bind because his two best assistants, Father Ronchail and Father Bonetti, who had come to replace Father Cagliero, were sick in bed. The Piedmontese saying which he quotes in this little note to the director of the house at Vallecrosia to tell him of his forthcoming visit alludes to his lack of secretaries.

Nice, March 4, 1880

Dear Father Cibrario:

If Father Bonetti can manage to leave his bed, I shall arrive at Ventimiglia next Saturday at about four in the afternoon. If you cannot provide accommodations for the two of us, speak to Canon Cassini.

I had to write this myself because "in the absence of horses, a donkey has to do the trotting."

God bless us.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

A brief memo sketched by Father Bonetti for Don Bosco tells us that at his request the Italian Southern Railways had granted all the members of the Salesian Society the fifty percent discount which they were already enjoying in northern Italy. Thanking the management, Don Bosco assured them that he would henceforth "give every preference and consideration" to orphans of the railway employees in his schools. At the same time, he pointed out that the "nuns known as Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians" and "the young girls they cared for" were also dependent on him, since they resided at the nuns' convents under his own direction. Pointing out that the Northern Italian Railway had granted them the same discount fares, he expressed the hope that the same concession would be extended to them. His request was approved.³¹

As he was about to return to Italy, he could already see the storm clouds gathering over his Salesians in France—the threat of persecution against religious congregations. In January the two assemblies had already been debating the problem of public education with a barely concealed goal of striking a mortal blow against the flourishing private schools run by religious communities. Meeting with Canon Guiol and Messieurs Rostand and Bergasse in Marseille, Don Bosco had discussed what they could do to ward off any unpleasant measures. He developed his own opinion on the matter, one he would clarify in due time, but he stressed that they should not take too dim a view of the future. "Suppressing religious congregations," he said, "is like clapping your hands to frighten birds who plunge from the air to peck at the wheat on the threshing floor. They will fly off immediately, only to return as soon as the hand-clapping stops. So, too, once the wave of suppression is over, the religious communities will quietly come back and resume their work.

³¹Confirmation of this was given by Sister Caroline Sorbone, who together with other nuns traveled from Turin to Bronte in Sicily in 1880. [Author]

CHAPTER 17

To Rome and Naples from Liguria

DESPITE his anxious desire to see the Oratory after being away two months, Don Bosco felt that he had to continue his journey to Rome without a stopover, for he had pressing business there which brooked no delay. For one thing, he had to come to a firm proposal on organizing the Rio Negro missions, and this entailed negotiations involving the Holy See and the Argentine government. Then he also had to face the Oratory school controversy, the unpleasant events of Chieri, and other matters. However, he first stopped for a few days for a necessary visit to Liguria.

Vallecrosia was his first stop on Italian soil. There he was to bless and lay the cornerstone of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians since construction was nearing completion. The ceremony, held on the evening of March 7, was given extraordinary solemnity by the presence of three prelates: Bishop [Thomas] Reggio, ordinary of the diocese, Bishop Allegro of Albenga, and Bishop Boraggini of Savona. The latter two, who had come to Ventimiglia for the consecration of the restored cathedral, gladly accepted the Salesians' invitation to attend the evening ceremony. It was an area event: thousands thronged into the Vallecrosia plain from all over the province. As usual, Don Bosco did not overlook anything that might enhance the ceremony, and so our pupils of Alassio and Sampierdarena came to brighten the festivity with their singing. The elderly Chevalier Joseph Moreno of Bordighera, a very religious man, chairman of the celebration, was the first to cement the stone after its blessing. The official document usually sealed within the stone, besides listing the customary data, contained Don Bosco's opening talk to the people:

I joyfully express my thanks to you today, gentlemen, for attending this religious ceremony and, most importantly, to those who shared in the

construction of this church by their donations, work and prayers. There await us still rather burdensome sacrifices to make, but your generosity will not lessen, nor will heaven's aid and the protection of the great Mother of God fail us. You will merit the thanks and prayers of people now and forever. Generations to come will praise your faith and zeal for God's glory and the welfare of souls, and the all-merciful Lord will generously reward you even in this life and grant you the eternal glory reserved for you in heaven. He himself has assured us: "*But My mercy I will not take away from him who shall build a house to My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*" [2 Kgs. 7, 15 and 13].

After sealing the cornerstone the bishop addressed the audience, calling the new church a bulwark of defense for the faith.

It seems clear that Don Bosco stopped off at Alassio and from there proceeded to Sampierdarena,¹ where he had asked Father Rua to meet him to discuss several matters. "I met with Don Bosco," Father Rua wrote,² "and he looked fairly well, though very, very tired." While he was staying at St. Vincent de Paul Hospice, Don Bosco, in one simple deed, greatly edified all and showed his inner goodness. At eight o'clock one morning, on his way to the church, he met a janitor who was sweeping the porticoes, and he noticed that, because he either could not do better or was very careless, the janitor was doing a poor job. "Would you like me to show you how to sweep properly?" he asked. He took the broom and quietly swept almost a third of the passageway, while the janitor stared at him with open mouth. "See, this is the way to sweep," Don Bosco told him and gave him back the broom. Then, bidding him good-day, he went into the church.

Toward midnight on March 11 he entrained for Rome, accompanied by his secretary, Father Berto, whom he had summoned from Turin. They were met by Father Dalmazzo, who had been notified beforehand by a cable from Father Rua, and escorted by him to Tor de' Specchi. On the evening of their arrival Don Bosco called on Cardinal [Raphael] Monaco La Valletta, vicar of Rome, and the next morning on Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, secretary of state and protector of the Congregation, who told him

¹Letter from Father Cagliero to Father Rua, Marseille, February 12, 1880: "We shall go to Ventimiglia, then to Alassio and immediately after to Sampierdarena." [Author]

²Letter to Count Cays, March 15, 1880. [Author]

that he had heard of what Don Bosco had accomplished in Marseille. The cardinal was probably not referring to financial success, but, interpreting the remark literally, Don Bosco replied: "Yes, Your Eminence, and I have done equally well for the Holy Father too." Indeed, he was bringing a generous donation for Peter's Pence given to him by a French gentleman.

Father Berto's diary for March 14-22 supplies the following factual details:

On Sunday evening we went to greet Mrs. Matilda Sigismondi for her name day, March 14, the feast of St. Matilda. Monday, March 15: Don Bosco and Father Daghero tried to cash a French money order but could not. We had lunch with Mr. Matthew Pesce, secretary general of the Post Office. That evening we visited Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda, who agreed to speak at the Salesian cooperators' meeting in Rome. March 17, Wednesday: We were at Archbishop [Ludwig] Jacobini's to discuss our missions; then at the Stigmatine Sisters for Benediction, where Father Dalmazzo was giving a spiritual retreat; then back home. March 18: We visited Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, where we met Monsignor Paul Fortini, editor of *Fiaccola* of Rome. Then to Monsignor [Vincent] Sallúa [assessor of the Holy Office], to see him about Father Machet,³ former pastor who had joined the "Old Catholics."⁴ Then to Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia and later to Cardinal [Dominic] Bartolini. March 19: Feast of St. Joseph. Don Bosco dined with Marquis [Angelo] Vitelleschi and his family. March 20: Visited Princess [Mary] Odescalchi; that evening at Cardinal [Dominic] Consolini's. March 21: In the evening Don Bosco and Father Dalmazzo called on Deputy Sanguinetti; also on Chevalier Moreno and Vignola to discuss purchase of a house. March 22, Monday: Don Bosco and Father Dalmazzo visited Princess Odescalchi; that evening, Don Bosco visited Cardinal Consolini.

In his first few days in Rome, Don Bosco cleared up a situation that had long been very hazy. Matthew Grochowski, the first Polish applicant to join the Congregation, had spent four years at the Oratory. After his ordination he apparently obtained permission to return to Poland in the fall of 1879 to gather funds for the Church of St. John Evangelist. However, no word was ever heard from him again. Since Father Cagliero, as catechist of the Congregation, had

³See pp. 290f. [Editor]

⁴See p. 291, [Editor]

charge of these situations, he wrote for information to the superior of the Pious Schools of Cracow, who, despite a careful search, could not trace his whereabouts. Meanwhile, the parish priest of Beuthem wrote [to Turin] inquiring about him, and almost at the same time a very serious anonymous charge was brought against him from Cracow, where it seems he was living with the local Franciscan community. Without further ado, Father Cagliero notified him that he had been *ipso facto* suspended as a “vagrant” and ordered him to return the letters of recommendation he had been given before leaving Turin. The priest first excused himself as best he could, but then he obviously hired a professional to draft for him a concise tirade in Latin, justifying his actions and requesting secularization so as to care for his elderly mother, who was alone. Don Bosco waited until he got to Rome, where he could seek competent advice and take legal steps to settle the issue without leaving loopholes for quibbles or unjustified criticism. With Father Dalmazzo’s help he drew up a statement releasing the priest from vows; he also informed Church authorities that the priest was suspended from ministry until such time as he could find a benevolent bishop to accept him into his diocese, stating too that Father Grochowski had not yet completed his courses in dogmatic theology and had not taken examinations for hearing confessions. However, with his genuine goodness he affirmed the priest’s good conduct during his stay in the Salesian Congregation and respectfully recommended him to the good graces of his bishop, calling heaven’s blessings on those who would assist him. In the end, inexplicably, this same Grochowski suddenly showed up at Tor de’ Specchi in Rome, apparently on his way to Turin.⁵ After this, we lose all track of him.

Between visits, while waiting for a papal audience, Don Bosco wrote letters to Turin, France, and elsewhere, of which only six have come down to us. Having to reply to Father Durando concerning negotiations to take over a farm being offered him by a certain Mrs. [Elizabeth Bellavite] Astori of Mogliano Veneto, he hastily wrote a few words because the thought of the Oratory immediately brought to his mind the boys and Salesians at Valdocco.

⁵Letter from Father Berto to Father Rua, April 14, 1880. [Author]

Rome, March 16, 1880

My dear Father Durando:

I have promptly replied to Mrs. Astori that Father Sala will be going there. Enclosed is a letter with instructions for him.

I am delighted that God keeps all our boys in good health and that they are devoutly making St. Joseph's novena. Tell them all that on the feast I shall celebrate Holy Mass for them, and I urge them all to receive Holy Communion.

I can't wait to be back with them. I shall speed up my return to Turin. Assure them that all my efforts are for them.

Tell Father Lazzero that I shall ask the Holy Father to grant him a special blessing for the sake of his dear patron, St. Joseph.

My best to Father Leveratto, Father Bertello, Buzzetti, and all my dearest confreres. Never forget that God has called you to sanctify yourself and others.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

That day, too, his concern turned to Marseille, and he wrote to the cleric [Louis] Cartier who, though not yet in orders, was a member of the house council.

Rome, March 16, 1880

My dear Cartier,

I shall gladly pray for our well-deserving and beloved Albrieux, who has been ailing for so long, and will ask others to pray also. I enclose a holy card of Mary, Help of Christians, asking Our Heavenly Mother to give him Her blessing. Let him continue to help our poor boys and we shall redouble prayers to God for him.

You say little about our confreres at St. Leo's, and so I assume everything is going well. Please greet them in my name, especially Father Director and Odaglia,⁶ in whose hands the whole festive oratory rests.

Are Antoine, Brogly and Bardon well? Is Father Savio speeding the new building along?

God bless you all. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

⁶Brother John Odaglia, a lay Salesian. [Editor]

Five days later he wrote to the director for an exchange of news, urging him to help Father Rua and touching upon relations with Canon Guiol of St. Joseph's Church. More importantly, his letter sparkles with that golden word of advice which was a secret ingredient of his educational system: "At this present time we must be ready to make some sacrifice in order to maintain friendly relations with the parish priest and his vicar, Father Louis Mendre."⁷

On Holy Thursday he sent Father Rua a brief note⁸ to tell him of a visit he had received from a French gentleman who had stopped off at the Oratory on his trip to Rome.

A painful loss which had afflicted a family very dear to him prompted Don Bosco to write a letter of Christian condolence. It is dated Good Friday. The father of the Fortis family had died,⁹ and as soon as he could find time and his eyes felt better, Don Bosco wrote a few words of comfort to the eldest son.

Good Friday, Rome, March 26, 1880

My dear Richard:

Our dear Papa is no longer with us. Let us bow to God's will. We all knew this blow was coming and feared it, though we did not expect it so soon. I can understand your own surprise and Alphonse's and mostly your mother's. In this hour of tragedy we Catholics feel a deep comfort which is our only consolation: prayer and good works during our lifetime in supplication for the soul of the deceased, as we comfort one another with the firm hope that we shall see our dear one again, soon, perhaps, in a happier life than this. For our mutual consolation, I assure you that I have prayed much for the soul of your dear father, and all the communities of our Congregation have offered their prayers and Holy Communions.

As best you and Alphonse can, try not to make any decisions now. Comfort your mother by your thoughtfulness, your resignation and your prayers.

I expect to be back in Turin about April 20. Could you spend a day or two with me? I would be delighted and we might talk things over. God bless you all. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

⁷This sentence is an excerpt from Don Bosco's letter to Father Bologna. [Editor]

⁸Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

⁹See Vol. XIII, p. 175. [Editor]

We have a very brief note, dated Easter Sunday, which tells us much between the lines. It is impossible to identify the person he is referring to, since prudence and charity would not let him be more explicit in writing, but we can readily hazard a guess. He was replying to a request for advice from Father John Piccini, pastor at Rive d'Arcano in Friuli.¹⁰

Rome, Easter, 1880

My friend in Jesus Christ:

The cedars of Lebanon have fallen and continue to fall. They are painful losses, and we must pray for the fallen and for ourselves, that God will save us.

Let it remain a secret. Should repercussions follow, only then let them quickly and secretly send away the woman so that nobody may discover her whereabouts.

Should he also seek to move elsewhere, let him go in the opposite direction.

I have received the seven lire you sent; your intention will be respected. God bless you. Pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

A group of French pilgrims was in Rome during Holy Week. On the morning of March 24, while calling on Cardinal Nina with Father Dalmazzo, Don Bosco found the cardinal's waiting room crowded with pilgrims, among them a group of ladies and gentlemen from Marseille who instantly recognized him and in one voice greeted him with, "It's Don Bosco!" All rushed forward to meet him, falling to their knees and asking for his blessing. Astounded by this sudden welcome, Don Bosco stepped back and excused himself, saying that no priest was allowed to give his blessing in that place, since this was the Pope's prerogative. However, they kept insisting on his blessing. We have to remark that in rushing toward Don Bosco and dropping to their knees the pilgrims had so shaken the floor that people above and in the adjoining rooms felt the quiver. Several monsignors came downstairs to investigate. Even the cardinal looked in and, touched

¹⁰The original is kept by the family of Mr. Ermenegildo Piccini at Pozzo di Codroipo (Udine). [Author]

by this singular display, told Don Bosco, "Please bless them, or they will never rise to their feet." Don Bosco complied.

Two days before, he has asked this distinguished cardinal for a long-delayed private audience with the Holy Father. In fact, he had filled out an application as soon as he had arrived in Rome, and he had orally renewed his request several days later. Since he had received no answer, he wrote as follows:

Rome, March 22, 1880
Tor de' Specchi, 36

Your Eminence:

Those who need an exceptional favor have to appeal to some saint who in heaven is very close to God. I, likewise, have to appeal to you. I have been in Rome ten days now, having come, as you well know, on urgent business of our Congregation, particularly concerning our missions in Patagonia, for which important decisions have to be made requiring the Holy Father's prior approval. For nine days I have sought a private audience. Yesterday I asked the papal chamberlain for his personal help, stating that I had brought a sizable contribution to the Peter's Pence fund. I was told that an audience was impossible this week and hardly possible for the next. Several times I have called on His Eminence Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri and have renewed my written request, but still I see no hope of an audience.

Since I must reply to the Argentinian government's proposal for the evangelization of the Rio Negro area (Pampas and Patagonia), I presume to appeal to Your Eminence, as our cherished patron and benefactor, and ask that you personally recommend us to the Holy Father.

Should this, however, inconvenience him, or should he not see fit to receive me in audience for any reason, I accept and defer to his decision. I shall call momentarily upon you for your answer.

Deeply grateful, I am honored to be,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco tried unsuccessfully at least seven times during his stay in Rome to obtain an audience with Cardinal Ferrieri, prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. On his last attempt, as he was talking with the cardinal's chamberlain and asking when he might see him, the chamberlain kept giving evasive

replies, citing His Eminence's multiple commitments. Just then the cardinal's secretary came out of the room. Don Bosco turned to him and, with a slight break in his unalterable calm, asked, "Are not the heads of congregations appointed to expedite Church matters? Where and when do they do so?" The secretary shrugged his shoulders.

Don Bosco always had a number of things to discuss with the prefect of Bishops and Regulars, but Cardinal Ferrieri's mind had been poisoned against him by the sinister prejudices which were ever more deeply being rooted in him by the endless barrage of accusations hurled against Don Bosco from Turin. The persistent portrayal of Don Bosco as some kind of headstrong rebel set against diocesan authority and as a systematic violator of Church laws would have antagonized even a prefect of a Roman Congregation who did not have, as Cardinal Ferrieri did, a close rapport with Turin's archbishop, and it would have put him on guard to safeguard the bishop's jurisdictional rights and the Church's laws. To a mind thus predisposed, Don Bosco's steadfast defense of his Congregation's honor and its interests against charges and prejudicial actions could easily give a false impression of his real attitude. Nothing can better help us to understand the painfulness of Don Bosco's situation in this regard or to better appreciate the hurts he was later forced to endure on this account than the first audience between Cardinal Ferrieri and Father Dalmazzo, the Congregation's procurator general, who recorded it in a letter to Father Rua.¹¹ We quote it in full, just as Father Dalmazzo himself reported it to Father Lemoyne. Lest we misjudge the cardinal we must first sketch the profile of the man in the words of Soderini:¹² "His Eminence was a man of sharp acumen and learning; his manner was both raw and severe, perhaps quite too caustic."

On his very first visit to the cardinal Father Dalmazzo was told he was not in. He returned a second and a third time, again to be told that His Eminence could not receive him. He then asked the secretary to inform the cardinal that he, Father Dalmazzo, urgently needed to confer with him, and would he graciously set a date and time for an audience sometime within the month? He was told to

¹¹See p. 301. [Editor]

¹²Eduardo Soderini, *Il Pontificato di Leone XIII* [The Pontificate of Leo XIII], Vol. I, p. 225, Mondadori, Milan, 1951. [Author]

return at nine on the following Saturday morning.

Father Dalmazzo kept the appointment punctually. After some delay—the cardinal was just rising at that hour—he was shown into the study. His Eminence, simply dressed in a priest's cassock, almost cowered Father Dalmazzo by his look, even though the latter was by no means timid, being a man of imposing stature and appearance.

“What do you want from me?” the cardinal brusquely asked.

“Don Bosco has sent me from Turin in his name,” Father Dalmazzo replied, “to offer Your Eminence his respects and to request that you kindly inform him of the observations that have been made on the Salesian Society and things it must correct. Don Bosco’s only desire is to be in all things and in every way obedient to his superiors’ wishes.”

“Don Bosco!” retorted the cardinal. “Don Bosco is a liar! Don Bosco is an impostor! Don Bosco is an overbearing man who is trying to force himself upon the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars]!”

“With all due respect, Your Eminence, Don Bosco has never meant to force himself upon your Sacred Congregation. If he must repeatedly appeal to it, it is only because the archbishop of Turin leaves him no other choice.”

“That one too is a fine specimen, heaping trouble upon trouble for us! Anyway, what can Don Bosco expect? He is a man neither of learning nor of holiness. He would have done far better if he had restricted himself to directing a festive oratory rather than insisted upon founding a Congregation.”

“You must forgive me, Your Eminence, but we who know him have quite a different opinion of him. And we are two hundred priests!”

“You would all do better if you were to leave him, return to your different dioceses, and ask your bishops for an assignment. Don Bosco is not the kind of man to found a Congregation.”

“With all respect, do you believe we are all so foolish as to place ourselves under Don Bosco’s guidance without really knowing the man? Be assured, Your Eminence, that we respect and love him and are offended to hear him abused and see his work held in contempt.”

“I meant no offense,” replied the cardinal in a more courteous

manner. "I merely say that Don Bosco should not have dared to try to found a Congregation. But, apart from that, what are you here for?"

"I am staying at Tor de' Specchi and am at your service should Your Eminence have any directives for me."

"Very well."

"I am prepared to provide any explanation whenever you wish."

"We shall see."

"In all things Don Bosco is anxious to obey the instructions of the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars]."

"That remains to be seen," said the cardinal as he dismissed his visitor, courteously accompanying him to the door.

His severity toward Don Bosco never slackened. Certainly, being one who cherished peace so dearly that he would have undergone any sacrifice consonant with his conscience to be at peace with all, Don Bosco must have felt it the most painful of experiences to find himself rejected by such a high authority. However, as history teaches us, these are the crosses visited in varying degrees upon all great religious founders in God's inscrutable designs. Their humble, kindly, and dauntless response under such painful and trying circumstances is the most eloquent witness of their holiness.

Father Berto's diary continues:

March 23: This evening Don Bosco calls on Cardinal [Bartholomew] D'Avanzo. March 24: This morning Don Bosco visits the cardinal secretary of state. March 25, Maundy Thursday: Lunch with Bishop Kirby, director of the Irish seminary. Visit to the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is to be built in Rome's new Macao district. March 27, Holy Saturday: Visit to the Church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte; later to Cardinal [John] Simeoni at the Propaganda Fide. Easter Sunday, March 28: Fathers Gatti and Menghini called on Don Bosco. Then Don Bosco and Father Dalmazzo called on the cardinal vicar, who definitively entrusted the Salesians with the commission to build the new Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with an adjoining hospice as a memorial to the revered memory of Pius IX.

The diary omits Good Friday, March 26. The parish files of St. Joseph's Church in Marseille contain a letter addressed to Canon Guiol and dictated by Don Bosco on that day, which bears only his

signature. It shows Don Bosco's anxious concern that the harmony existing between the Salesian house and the parish be not disrupted. The fear which he voices about the government's repressive measures we will explain later when speaking of the law promulgated in March against religious congregations.

Rome, March 26, 1880
Tor de' Specchi, 36

My dear Father:

Your gracious letters are ample proof of the kindly solicitude which you show to St. Leo's Festive Oratory. I can only thank you and pray God to continue, in His holy grace, to help us complete what we have begun solely for His glory and for the welfare of souls.

Please thank Monsieur Jules Rostand for the most recent act of charity of which he told me. As soon as his friend from Paris gets to Rome, I shall not fail to show him all the regard he deserves and do all I can to promote his excellent plan for the agricultural school, as he desires.

I have not yet managed to obtain an audience with the Holy Father, both because of the flood of requests being made and because of His Holiness' illness. But I trust that I shall soon get to see him. Therefore, please send me the full names and positions of the chairpersons of our charity committees, because I hope I can obtain spiritual favors for them and for all the committee members.

Father Bologna writes that he is very happy with St. Leo's Festive Oratory and the excellent relations it enjoys with the city and particularly with St. Joseph's Parish. I trust that the Lord will keep us one in that spirit of charity which is indispensable if we are to continue our holy ministry for the benefit of the people. Father Bologna has also told me of the successes achieved by the committee which you zealously set up. Blessed be the Lord.

We are apprehensive that when a survey is taken—or, better, when a directory of religious institutes in France is compiled—a questionnaire may also be sent to the Beaujour Society. Should that happen, please advise Father Bologna to list as its director Taulaigo, who is French, and Father Brogly, also French, as its administrator. As for the school, ask him to list only the choir school, which is run under your direction, and you will submit the teachers' qualifications, as required. This is a precaution, because, as you know, "anticipated blows hurt less."

At your earliest convenience please reassure the committees of my heartfelt thanks. Tell them I shall not fail to remember them to God at my

daily Mass. May the Lord preserve you in good health. Pray for me. Always with sincere love in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I am using the services of my secretary only because it is late and I have trouble writing at night.

Since there was not the slightest hope of an early audience with the Pope, Don Bosco left Rome for Naples on Easter Monday. He certainly did not take the trip to relax or to enjoy the beauty of the countryside and the Neapolitan shore. Once, when Father Barberis was Don Bosco's companion in Marseille—so the apostolic process records—he tried to get Don Bosco to relax by taking him to see some religious monuments, but Don Bosco replied, "We are here for another much more important reason." Don Bosco never lost time or spent money on pleasure trips that are occasionally passed off as "educational trips." We think he went to Naples to discuss opening a house there. In fact, *L'Osservatore Romano* on April 9 [1880] referred to the fact that "Don Bosco had had to go to Naples in connection with the foundation of an agricultural school as well as a hospice for homeless boys to be trained in some art or craft." This article was certainly authorized, and perhaps even provided by the Salesian procurator. Then too, in a letter to Father Rua, dated April 8, the secretary wrote: "I ought to tell you about the trip to Naples, too; Don Bosco has arranged something with the person you know." These remarks entitle us to believe that the person with whom he had conferred may have been Marchioness [Carmela] Gargallo, and that the planned foundation concerned Syracuse, as we shall narrate in Volume XV.

The details of the journey are described in Father Berto's diary at greater length than usual:

March 29: Don Bosco and I entrained for Naples at 8:30 this morning and arrived there about 3:40 in the afternoon. We took a coach directly to our lodgings at the home of Father Fortunato Neri, chaplain of the small hospital near St. Joseph's Church. After dinner we called on Marchioness Carmela Gargallo, Via Santa Lucia 64, third floor. From there we saw the magnificence and splendor of Naples' harbor and bay. On the morning of

March 30, toward 10:30, Canon Pacilio came to escort Don Bosco to several schools, then to the Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, and finally to the convent of the Sisters of Charity, where the archbishop of Naples was serving dinner to four hundred of the poorest in town. As Don Bosco arrived, he was greeted by Father Ludovico¹³ of Casoria [near Naples]. Then we were led into a quadrilateral courtyard enclosing a garden and lined with porticoes, where two rows of tables were set up. Here Don Bosco spoke on and off with Father Ludovico. Shortly afterward the archbishop arrived, and Don Bosco paid his respects. He was then introduced to Commendatore Giusso, a good Catholic and mayor of Naples. It was edifying to see the archbishop don an apron, pour the wine, and serve the food. Bishop Anthony Izzo of Isernia and Venafrò was also there serving the poor. Toward 2:30 in the afternoon Father Ludovico called on Don Bosco. Then we went again to Marchioness Gargallo and from there to the railway station. Since the train had already left, Don Bosco took a coach and called on the Salesian Sisters, also known as the Visitation Nuns,¹⁴ at the Convent of Peace, where we stayed from about 3:30 to 6:30. They served us supper, after which the doorkeeper accompanied us to the train. We rode through the night from 9:05 and reached Rome at 6:30 the following morning. We celebrated Holy Mass in the convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Via Viminale and then walked to Trajan's Forum and home.

A letter to Father Rua from Rome on April 8 by Father Berto contains more details. While serving dinner to the poor of Naples, Archbishop Sanfelice kept Don Bosco at his right and Father Ludovico of Casoria, named "the Don Bosco of Naples," on his left. Don Bosco also had the opportunity to converse "with some of Naples' leading citizens, generous-hearted men, who expressed their delight at seeing him in Naples that day, regretting only that his stay was so short." Father Lemoyne writes that Don Bosco also met with the Church historian, Bishop Salzano, a Dominican, titular bishop of Edessa, who never forgot that meeting. Another young priest was present who kept watching him with vivid interest; he too treasured the memory of that day with fondness. He was Monsignor Salvatore Meo, later vicar general of Naples and titular

¹³Ludovico is the religious name taken by Father Arcangelo Parmentiere (1814-1885), founder of the "Fratelli della Carità (Fathers of Charity) or "Fratelli Bigli." [Editor]

¹⁴Founded in 1610 in France by St. Francis de Sales and St. Jane Frances de Chantal. [Editor]

bishop of Metone.¹⁵ To this prelate, who stated that he was happy at having obtained for Don Bosco an audience with the archbishop, we owe a tidbit of information which shows us how highly the future cardinal [of Naples] thought of Don Bosco even then: he kept Don Bosco's portrait hanging over the armchair in which Don Bosco sat, and it stayed there until his death.¹⁶ From Rome Don Bosco sent him a Salesian cooperator diploma, for which the worthy prelate was thankful, assuring him of his gratitude and asking to be informed "if I can in any way help out your undertakings."¹⁷ The number of cooperators in Naples, although already considerable, increased remarkably with Don Bosco's visit.

The reference to the Convent of the Visitation recalls a remarkable episode mentioned by Salesian Father Thomas Chiappello in the above-cited pamphlet. The present mother superior has a perfect recollection of Don Bosco's visit and remembers how he enjoyed the modest repast they served him in the parlor. But there was much more to it than that. Two nuns, professed there in 1876, were ill, one suffering from headaches, the other from internal trouble. Both went to Don Bosco in the hope that his blessing might heal them. As he blessed the first he told her, "Jesus wants you to share His crown of thorns. Nevertheless, you will do much good for your convent." Indeed, she lived until 1920, holding important posts, but always plagued with headaches. He blessed the second and encouraged her in her suffering; then, speaking privately with the superior, who died in 1881, he stated, "This sister is ready for heaven." She died but a few months later.

Don Bosco's return to Tor de' Specchi was marred by an unpleasant happening of the day before. On the morning of March 31 Father Dalmazzo was awakened by an acrid smell of smoke. Stepping out into the hall, he saw smoke issuing from Father Berto's bedroom. As he pushed the door open, he observed

¹⁵Tommaso Chiappello, *Il Beato Don Giovanni Bosco nella Visione e nelle Previsioni di Quarant'anni Fa* [Blessed John Bosco in the Reality and Expectations of Forty Years Ago], Federico and Ardia Publishers, Naples, 1929, p. 86. [Author]

¹⁶Letter from Monsignor Meo to the new rector major, Father Peter Ricaldone, Naples, June 19, 1932. [Author]

¹⁷Letter to Don Bosco, Naples, April 16, 1880. [Author]

live embers glittering through a thick swirl of smoke just over a large suitcase lying on the floor by the bed, while a tongue of fire darted at the foot of the bed. He immediately snatched up the suitcase, stamping out the flames, and gave the alarm. The neighbors hastened over and the firemen rushed to the scene, extinguishing the fire before it could spread. When all was over, Father Dalmazzo checked the suitcase and found that the lock had been torn out. An inner pocket still held a small box which he knew to have contained a sum of money; it was undamaged, but empty. Obviously the thief had set fire to the suitcase, hoping that it would be reduced to ashes and leave no traces, but the fire had spread slowly, without flames, and reached the blanket and straw mattress of the bed, which burst into flame when the door was opened. Six thousand francs in six French bank notes were gone, five thousand the gift of Madame Noilly-Prat; the remaining one thousand had been given by the baron of Monremy, who had asked Don Bosco to present it as Peter's Pence to the Pope. The thief must have suspected that the money was there, since days before Father Dalmazzo had tried unsuccessfully to cash the bank notes; the burglar must also have known where it had been hidden. That meant he could not be far off. When the theft was reported, the police carried out a search twice, checking the premises minutely, questioning a cleric, the cook, and Father Dalmazzo himself. The police report, reconstructing the crime, concluded that the thief had started the fire as a cover-up and that the theft was an inside job or made to look like one. Fortunately the matter ended there, for who knows what the investigation might have dug up? On April 3, *La Capitale* published a news item, inflating it with lies and quips worthy only of the party it spoke for. *L'Osservatore Romano* gave an objective report on April 9. On April 8, Father Berto wrote to Father Rua, "I was furious, but Don Bosco listened very calmly to the shocking news without batting an eyelash, without change of expression, with truly wonderful aplomb—not a word of blame or impatience came from his lips. I observed in him a man who docilely accepts both happy and distressing events, and I felt greater admiration for him on this occasion than I might have felt in witnessing his glory at Marseille."

There is no doubt that this unfortunate occurrence grieved Don

Bosco,¹⁸ but his habitual submission to God's will, even in unexpected and bitter reversals, would not let anything upset his calm. Rather, as though nothing had happened, he kept going about his work. He wrote two petitions to the Holy See for favors. The first was quite original:

Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, Father John Bosco begs to inform you that Countess [Charlotte] Callori, a wealthy, devout Catholic lady, would like to donate a generous sum for the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, now being built in Turin close to the Protestant church and school. However, for her own and her family's spiritual gratification she asks that the sum to be donated be filled in by the venerable hand of Your Holiness. Prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, the Reverend John Bosco humbly implores this favor.

The countess, who was subject to scruples of conscience, might have been torn between her desire to make a generous offer and her fear that by offering too great a sum she might be hurting her own family. This seemed to be a reassuring way out. The Pope agreed to her request, but we do not know the sum specified.

Don Bosco's second petition requested a plenary indulgence to be gained on a number of feasts by all the faithful, and by the boys boarding in Salesian houses on the occasion of the Exercise for a Happy Death. He also asked that these favors, already granted in part and for a time by Leo XIII, be extended in perpetuity. His aim was to encourage and spread the practice of frequent Communion. We do not have the wording of the reply.

Two further diary entries: "April 3: Today Senator [John] Agnelli¹⁹ and another gentleman came to comfort Don Bosco, who was exorcising a possessed woman. April 4, Sunday *in Albis*: Don Bosco had lunch with the Sigismondis. Marquis August of Bavaria called on Don Bosco again. He is a colonel in the Noble Guards of His Holiness and brought a note stating that he had spoken with the

¹⁸Father Berto writes: "After returning from Naples and hearing again about the theft of six thousand lire, Don Bosco and the rest of us went to bed much distressed. At about three or four in the morning of April 2, I woke up in a great fright at hearing Don Bosco screaming. I made some noise, in the belief that there were thieves. Don Bosco was dreaming." [Author]

¹⁹Founder of the giant Fiat Company in Turin (Fabbrica Italiana Automobili Torino). [Editor]

prelate handling the audiences, and he hoped that he could obtain one for Don Bosco very shortly. Moments later he came back and showed me a note from Monsignor [Gabriel] Boccali, informing him that the Pope was not predisposed against Don Bosco, and would issue instructions for an audience." From this we infer that Don Bosco, fearing that he had fallen out of the Pope's favor, had sounded out the Pope's private chamberlain, a friend of his.

The possessed woman had been brought to Don Bosco from somewhere outside Rome; the exorcism was done in private. When he blessed her and invoked upon her the names of Jesus and of Mary, Help of Christians, the devil all but choked his victim. Don Bosco ordered the evil spirit in Latin to disclose his name. The answer was *Petrus*. Although that poor woman was an ordinary peasant, she spoke even English in her diabolic seizures. The spirit was abjured in God's name to say how long he had possessed that woman. "Two to three years!" he answered.

"Why are you here?"

"I am Santa's guardian." (Santa was the woman's name.)

"Where were you before that?"

"Floating around. You won't have an easy time in chasing me out of her."

"Why won't you leave her? Don't you realize that you are adding to your own sufferings and sinking deeper into evil?"

"I love evil."

The demon then made it known that only a solemn exorcism would drive it out. Since the cardinal vicar's express permission was necessary and he was away until April 21, the petition was sent to Archbishop [Julius] Lenti, his vicar, and nothing more was heard about it. Nevertheless, some good did come of it, for when the man who accompanied Senator Agnelli heard the replies and saw the antics of the possessed woman, he admitted, "I had never believed in the devil, but now I do."

April 5 was a most comforting day. Once he had been assured that the Pope had no ill feeling toward him, Don Bosco had sent him a personal letter. This put an end to any delay, for early that day a messenger brought Don Bosco a note informing him that the Holy Father would graciously receive him in private audience that very evening at 6:45. He immediately drew up his usual memo of matters to discuss.

*Audience with the Holy Father**April 5, 1880*

1. Money stolen.
2. Affairs in France.
3. Patagonia, apostolic prefecture, apostolic vicariate, government proposal, seminary for the foreign missions.
4. Business with the [Congregation of] Bishops and Regulars, suspended faculties, inaccessibility of the cardinal prefect, papal blessing for cooperators, benefactors, boys.
5. Monthly audience of one minute only when called for by business, procurator and secretary.

The monthly audience he was requesting was meant for the procurator general, whom he was introducing to the Holy Father that evening with his secretary. In a later chapter we shall recount what he and the Pope discussed concerning the missions. What he told the Holy Father about France we find in a letter from Don Bosco to Canon Guiol in this chapter. As for the matters pending before the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, he needed to find out what his standing was, but when he went to the secretariat that very morning, he was told that Cardinal Ferrieri had reserved everything to himself.

Don Bosco had scheduled his third conference to the Salesian cooperators at four that afternoon, and he held it in the chapel of the Oblates at Tor de' Specchi, honored by the presence of three cardinals: Nina, Sbarretti, and Alimonda. Father Dalmazzo first read a chapter from a biography of St. Francis de Sales; then a few nuns sang a motet which prepared the audience for Don Bosco's message. In a thirty-minute talk he told them of the achievements accomplished by the cooperators' charity, stressing particularly measures taken to counteract Protestant propaganda. He then passed on to the development of Salesian work in South America, dwelling in particular on Patagonia and the futile efforts made over the past three centuries to convert that land. He told them of his well-founded hopes that his sons would soon find a way to reach the savages and have them reborn in Jesus Christ.²⁰

Don Bosco was followed by Cardinal Alimonda, who thrilled his

²⁰We are omitting the outline of his talk. [Editor]

audience with his unique eloquence, a blend of deep thought, historic anecdotes, and learned allusions, all enlivened by vivid imagery and current language. His text was taken from St. Paul: "We are God's helpers." He opened by expressing his joy at being among so many who had never trod the path of Cain nor bent the knee to Baal—an allusion to the aberrations among Roman followers of the new regime. He was proud, he said, of being a Salesian cooperator. Then he went on to speak of everyone's duty to cooperate with God for the good of souls and their salvation, pointing out where they could focus their energy: themselves, abandoned children, priestly vocations, missions. He cited the means available to them, such as the sacraments, good reading, Christian instruction, almsgiving and prayer. The meeting was closed with another motet and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament imparted by the cardinal secretary of state. When all was over, the cooperators went up to Don Bosco to greet him personally before leaving.

Time was now running short. He rushed home, took his ecclesiastical cloak, and with his procurator general and secretary hurried to the Vatican. They got there at exactly 6:45, only to be kept waiting until 7:30, when Monsignor Boccali, then on duty, ushered Don Bosco into the Pope's presence. The audience had been going on for about half an hour when Cardinal [Henry Edward] Manning, who had arrived that day from England, was introduced into the antechamber where Don Bosco's procurator general and secretary were waiting. Since cardinals are not kept waiting, Monsignor Boccali immediately announced his presence to the Pope and ushered him in. Promptly Don Bosco tried to withdraw, but the Pope took hold of his hand and said, "Stay." Monsignor Boccali, instead, kept tugging at his cassock and whispering, "Don Bosco, wait outside," but the Pope kept a firm grip on his hand. It was a strange scene. The Holy Father then scheduled the cardinal for another day and resumed his conversation with Don Bosco. When we stop to think that Leo XIII was a stickler for protocol, we can infer that he was uniquely honoring Don Bosco at that moment. The conversation must indeed have been quite interesting too. At this time we shall only report whatever Don Bosco's two companions heard from him and mentioned in their letters—which is not much—rounding it out

from Father Lemoyne's recollections. However, we will never know everything of the interview because in certain matters Don Bosco kept an impenetrable reserve.

He told the Pope about the theft of the six thousand lire.

"Why did you not deliver the money to me at once?" the Pope asked.

"Your Holiness, twenty days ago I applied for an audience and renewed my request three or four times before my trip to Naples. Monsignor Macchi just told me it was impossible and kept postponing it from week to week."

"I am very sorry to hear that," the Pope remarked. "Monsignor Macchi never said a word of it to me. You could at least have told one of my chamberlains."

"I did," Don Bosco replied.

"I surely would have received you," the Pope went on. "Every day I give audiences to people who have nothing particular to say, who come only to ask how I am, pay their respects, and take up my time. You may be sure I would certainly receive the founder and superior of a Congregation who had come from a distance to see me. Trust me, I hold nothing against you or your Congregation. Rather, I am grateful for what you are doing for the Church. But why did you not tell Monsignor Macchi that you had money for me?"

"I did."

"You might have told Cardinal Nina."

"I told him, too."

"And what did he say?"

"He said all he could do for me was to put in a good word with Monsignor Macchi."

"As soon as I received your letter, I asked Monsignor Macchi why he had not granted you an audience," the Holy Father explained. "He replied that you had told him you were going to Naples."

"Just because of that, I promptly requested an audience several times. I was anxious to deliver the money because it was worrying me."

"I am truly displeased and disappointed that they kept me in the dark. In the future do this: come to a public audience, and when I see you there, I will set up a private audience for you myself."

Then they spoke of privileges, the Pope saying that as a rule he was opposed to privileges for religious. Don Bosco quipped facetiously, "But then religious could not exist! Besides, privileges are a token of good will which the Church is free to grant and withdraw as it sees fit."

"What is your request?"

"I am asking for two or three privileges which all other religious orders enjoy, and these only for a renewal or a confirmation."

"Fine!" the Pope replied. "If that is all you wish, see Cardinal Alimonda about it and it will be taken care of. So too for the missions; see Cardinal Alimonda and Archbishop Jacobini."

"I would also ask you to confer the title of Monsignor on Father [Peter] Ceccarelli, parish priest of San Nicolás de los Arroyos in Argentina."

"Yes, of course," the Pope replied.

"And I also ask you the same favor for Father [Mario] Migone, who gave us the land for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians at Vallecrosia." The Pope agreed.

"I have a procurator general here in Rome," Don Bosco went on. "I beg Your Holiness to let him see you once or twice a month to keep you informed or to at least pay his respects in the company of Cardinal Alimonda."

"Yes, tell him he may come," the Pope replied.

The audience lasted forty minutes. Father Dalmazzo and Father Berto were then introduced to the Pope, who greeted them very graciously. Besides objects to be blessed, they brought a set of Father Durando's Latin dictionaries, which Don Bosco presented to the Pope, telling him that they were the work of a Salesian teacher who had carefully expurgated them of words improper for youngsters. The Pope bade him put them on his desk. He finally dismissed them with a blessing, saying:

I bless you, your relatives, your Congregation, your sick confreres, and, above all, your pupils and your missionaries. May your numbers increase! May you all work for the goals of your Congregation, which was inspired by God to your founder and which has already experienced a marvelous growth. May you work constantly for God's glory and the welfare of the Church. May you be ready to sacrifice anything, even your life, for the Church, and may you always uphold God's glory and interests, as well as

the welfare of souls, with fortitude, strength, and perseverance in God's service and in the vocation to which you have been called.

"As you see," Father Berto told Father Rua in the letter we have mentioned,²¹ "the Pope's blessing was a truly magnificent encouragement and comfort. His voice was so gentle, cordial and warm, that we, at seeing so much love and benevolence for our dear father and our Congregation, felt truly ecstatic. In those precious, priceless moments we felt that we were once more beholding our beloved Pius IX living again in the person of Leo XIII."

Under the Pope's instructions Don Bosco drafted two formal petitions to the secretary of state requesting honorific papal titles for Father Ceccarelli and Father Migone.²² He also renewed his request for a similar title for Canon Guiol, to whom most solicitously he wrote the following letter, which contains further details about the audience.

Rome, April 6, 1880

Dearest Father:

I have just returned from an audience with the Holy Father and have many things to tell you. Just now let me say that the Holy Father listened with great interest to what I told him of the generosity and zeal of Marseille's people and of the committees set up to provide for the needs of our boys. He was touched and sends his particular blessing to all the committee members, promising to send them a word in writing soon.

Had you been present, my dear father, to hear the Holy Father's warm praise of the Salesians and their pupils, and the lofty terms in which he spoke of the cooperators, you would have been most wonderfully consoled. However, it was when he spoke of St. Leo's Festive Oratory, of what it has done and hopes to do, of the zeal and generosity of its benefactors, of the kindness of the bishop and the Beaujour Society, that both the Holy Father and I were deeply moved. After a lengthy talk he concluded, "This is the real way to assist the Church and to improve the well-being of the common people afflicted by so many evils."

I will tell you the rest in a later letter or publish it in the *Bulletin Salésien*.

Take heart, my ever beloved father. True, we have work to do and the devil tries to block us by his lies, but we are unafraid, for God is with us

²¹See p. 350. [Editor]

²²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

and His help shall never fail us.

Sincerest greetings to our most cherished benefactors, the members of the Beaujour Society, Father Mendre and the ladies of our committees.

Now, here is a thought of mine: might we not form a third committee with Mademoiselle Gabrielle Arman and other young ladies who have shown such interest in our work?

When you can, speak to Father Bologna and tell him in confidence that the Holy Father does not wish us to submit a copy of our Salesian rules to the government, should it request them. In case it does, he should promptly write me a full account.

Perhaps I shall shortly have something to tell you about an idea of the Holy Father which will astonish both of us. Let us pray! God will guide us.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Pray for me. Always, with all my heart,

Yours most affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

“An idea of the Holy Father” alluded to a plan about which he was shortly to write again from Turin. “A word in writing,” mentioned at the beginning of this letter, dealt with a spiritual favor. As Don Bosco took leave of the Pope’s private chamberlain, Monsignor Boccali, he gave the monsignor four papal blessings with a plenary indulgence for each of the chairmen of the four committees who were collecting funds for St. Leo’s Oratory and St. Pierre’s Hospice [in Nice]. He also asked the chamberlain to have the Holy Father sign them and then to pass them on to Cardinal Alimonda. It took some time for the papers to go through, but the papal blessings finally arrived. In fact, after repeated inquiries, Monsignor [Seraphim] Cretoni, acting deputy of the secretary of state, wrote him in Cardinal Nina’s name on August 30:

The Holy Father has received your requests of April 20, and is deeply pleased to learn of the support being given to the Salesians in Marseille. His Holiness wishes to encourage the members of the various committees with a spiritual favor over and above the blessing which he imparts to them from his heart. He therefore grants to all members of the aforesaid committees a plenary indulgence to be gained at the hour of death under the customary conditions. I am happy to inform you of this and trust that you will forward this reply to the parish priest of St. Joseph’s Church in Marseille for the information of those concerned.

We have another document which tells us more about the little treasure of news regarding the audience of April 5. It is a draft written personally by Don Bosco for Father Dalmazzo, probably for his information and guidance. It contains several ideas which he intended to submit to the Holy Father.

URGENT MATTERS IN WHICH ONLY THE VICAR OF JESUS CHRIST CAN TAKE ACTION

For the Young

Catechism classes for children at least on Sundays and holy days. Generally, few villages and very few cities offer catechetical instruction for all; still less is offered to poor, homeless children. Very little is done to attract them and to hear their confessions.

For the Clergy

Greater zeal is needed in giving adult education to the faithful according to the norms set by the *Catechism for Parish Priests*, published by order of the Sacred Council of Trent. Apart from the towns of northern Italy, it is rare to find a parish where this instruction is given.

More care and greater charity in hearing confessions. Most priests never administer this sacrament, and the rest, if ever, hear confessions only at the Easter season.

For Priestly Vocations

Priestly vocations are dropping at an alarming rate. The few vocations we have are dangerously exposed to being lost during the mandatory military service.

A highly effective way to encourage and develop vocations to the priesthood is the Sons of Mary Program under the auspices of Mary, Help of Christians, commended and enriched with indulgences by Pope Pius IX. Its purpose is to bring together willing young men who have the necessary qualifications.

It must be noted that of every hundred boys who begin their studies for the priesthood, no more than six or seven reach the goal. On the other hand, it has been observed that of one hundred adults approximately ninety-three persevere to ordination.

Religious Orders

Religious orders are passing through a frightening crisis. Two things must be done: provide housing for disbanded religious and insist that they

live in community and resume their respective novitiates.

Let contemplative religious zealously reach out to teach catechism to children and adults and to hear confessions.

The Holy See should generously aid, counsel, support, and guide the new religious congregations so that they may fulfill their purpose and contribute this help to the growing needs of Holy Church assaulted and embattled in such diverse ways.

In his lengthy audience with the Holy Father, Don Bosco did not forget his most distinguished benefactors, his schools, and those who most befriended them. In the next few days his secretary was burdened with work. He wrote in Don Bosco's name to all the most important benefactors to tell them of the plenary indulgence the Holy Father was granting them. He also sent letters to all the Salesian directors, informing them of the Pope's special blessing to them and their pupils and asking them to notify all their benefactors by means of a form letter, a copy of which he was enclosing for their use. Though we do not have the original of this letter, we have a copy sent to Father [Charles] Cays, director of the house at Challonges. The style is typically Don Bosco's.

Name of City

Dear Sir (or Madam):

I hasten to inform you that our superior, Father John Bosco, had the signal honor of a private audience with His Holiness Leo XIII the evening of April 5.

On that memorable occasion, the Holy Father graciously deigned to grant his apostolic blessing on all of our benefactors and on the Salesian cooperators, most particularly you and your whole family, for whom he implores God's abundant spiritual and temporal graces.

It is my pleasure to inform you of the Holy Father's benevolence. Our boys join me in praying that God will preserve your good health, while I am personally happy to be,

Yours devotedly,

Fr. _____

(Name of Director)

Here it is only proper that we give some space to Father [Joachim] Berto who, as Don Bosco's secretary, untiringly day and night waited upon him. It is not surprising to find an entry in Father

Berto's diary of 1880 stating how our gentle father, always so thankful for every tiny service and favor, asked him, "Father Berto, how can I thank you for all you do for me, for your kind attentions to poor Don Bosco?"

"I am more than repaid," Father Berto replied, "by my pleasure in serving you as best I can. I am only sorry that I cannot do as much as you deserve and as I would like to do."

"Well, then, I want you to know that Don Bosco looks upon you as the apple of his eye. When I, hopefully, get to paradise, if the Lord allows me a little free space at my side, I shall keep it reserved for you."

We now take another glance at the diary:

April 6: Don Bosco has dinner with Cardinal Alimonda. April 7: He goes to Archbishop Jacobini's office to discuss our missions. The cleric Zoia, an alumnus of ours, and a French seminarian who also is a Barnabite, paid a visit to Don Bosco; so did Canon Colombi, Father Leonori [a Vatican attorney], and a certain Eliseus Ambrosi, an official of the postal service, who sought news of his brother, Natalino Ambrosi. During the night of April 6 Don Bosco again cried out in his sleep.²³ Upon being asked about it the following morning, he told me that he had had a horrible dream. April 8, Thursday: Don Bosco went to the secretariat of state on mission business. April 9, Friday: Don Bosco had dinner with Mr. [Joseph] Colonna²⁴ and with Father Omodei Zorini who lodges there. April 10: Today Don Bosco and Father Dalmazzo went to Archbishop Jacobini's to discuss our missions. April 11, Sunday: Don Bosco stayed indoors practically the whole day; Mr. [John Baptist] Conti was his only visitor. April 12: Archbishop [Peter] Rota came to see Don Bosco and invite him to dinner on Wednesday. April 13: Today Don Bosco dined with Mr. Conti and in the evening went to visit Cardinal Alimonda. April 14: Don Bosco called on Archbishop Rota and in the evening again went to see Cardinal Alimonda. Toward 5 o'clock, Cardinal [Anthony] De Luca came to Tor de' Specchi to inquire if Don Bosco were at home; regretfully we had to tell him he was out. April 15: Don Bosco called on Cardinal De Luca and Archbishop Agnozzi. Later the four of us—Don Bosco, Father Dalmazzo, Zucchini and I—lunched with Bishop Kirby at the Irish seminary. At midday I took the papers about a vicariate in Patagonia to Cardinal Alimonda, who said to me, "You are really blessed

²³See footnote 18 on p. 354. [Editor]

²⁴He was the son of Stephen, deceased, of whom mention has been made in previous volumes. He too was a Vatican expediter. [Author]

to live with a man who is indeed a saint." April 16: Don Bosco walked to the post office. April 17: Don Bosco went to the chancery. Father Gregory Francis Palmieri came to dine with us. April 18, Sunday: In the evening Don Bosco went to the cardinal vicar to give him a memorandum for the Holy Father concerning the construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome.

The cleric Zoia, an alumnus of our Valsalice College, spent almost an hour with Don Bosco discussing various systems of education, especially the one followed by the Barnabite Fathers. Today [1933], as an outstanding member of his congregation, he recalls that when their talk turned to administrative matters particularly in technical and trade schools, he facetiously remarked, "I'll nominate you for secretary of the treasury the next time the government runs into trouble. I'm sure it wouldn't take you long to pay off the national debt."

"One should not contract debts," Don Bosco replied with a smile. "Don Bosco is afraid of debts. Debts won't let you sleep. . . ."

"Still, you built the Church of Mary, Help of Christians by running up debts."

"Not really," he explained. "I began building with the few pennies I had in my pocket, and I kept it up to the end, never spending more than what Divine Providence kept sending me."

In fact, once the church was built, Don Bosco did not proceed to decorate the interior; this was done after his death. This means that he did not believe that Divine Providence was then sending him the needed funds. It wasn't so with the Church of St. John Evangelist [in Turin] which was magnificently decorated without delay.

We are now at about the eve of his departure [from Rome]. Before closing the chapter, we might do well to glance through the rest of his correspondence from Rome which we have in our possession. We will merely quote a few lines here and there from the first two letters in chronological order, omitting business matters. He wrote to Father Ronchail, director at Nice, on April 9 and considered six points, the last dealing with the theft and repeating a suggestion he had already given to him: "Try to call on Baron de Monremy and tell him that the Holy Father was quite downhearted over [the theft], that he thanks him with all his heart and sends a special blessing to him and to Madame Ménier,

praying God to keep them both in good health. Should he in the future have another offering for the Holy Father, ask him please to use my services, so that I may make up for the embarrassment the theft cost us. I hope very soon to write to this loyal friend and benefactor of ours.

“Make sure that duties are properly parceled out and that our rules are observed from sunrise to sunset. ‘The same rest, the same work for all,’ says Virgil in his fourth book of the *Georgics*.”

The second letter, dated April 12, was addressed to Father Rua: “I hope to be with you for our dear boys’ spiritual retreat,” it began. “So, postpone it to any day after April 26.” Then, after suggesting various ways to rid oneself of the “nightmare” of debts, he went on to say, “I am speeding up my return to Turin to help you look for funds. Regretfully, wherever I go, my pockets are emptied out, and so I can bring very little back to Turin.” Nevertheless, we know that just two days later, with fatherly concern, he sent Father Rua three money orders of a thousand lire each, “the fruits of his labors,” “a few donations collected here and there.”²⁵ He closes thus: “Remember me very warmly to all our dear boys. Tell them that on Sunday, feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, I shall say Holy Mass for them and I ask that they offer Communion for my intention. I have many serious matters on hand. I am also hatching a plot against Father Cagliero.” This was probably an allusion to his negotiations in setting up a vicariate in Patagonia with Father Cagliero the presumed bishop.

He sent the third letter to Father Barberis and his novices at San Benigno. The examinations for which he commends them were end-of-term tests.

Rome, April 16, 1880

Dear Father Barberis:

I have sent the Holy Father’s blessings to everyone, but most especially to our dear novices. He spoke of them with evident pleasure, and I shall tell you in person what he said when I come to San Benigno. You may assure them that the Holy Father is very fond of us and is deeply interested in all our work.

Tell them too that I am quite pleased with their exams, pleased with

²⁵Letter from Father Berto to Father Rua, Rome, April 14, 1880. [Author]

those who got good marks and with those who are determined to do better next time.

Meanwhile, my dear children, my delight and my crown, take up, all of you, the shield of faith, that you may be able to fight against the snares of the devil. For Our Lord Jesus became obedient for our sake even unto death, so that we too, through the practice of obedience and mortification, might enter with Him and through Him into the glory of Our Heavenly Father. Fight manfully, then, that you may all be crowned with glory. Receive Holy Communion for my intention, and every day I shall remember you in the Sacrifice of the Mass. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with you. Greetings!

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Just so that you may know, I have written to Father Verolfo to help us. Do not mention this to him unless he first broaches the subject.

When he felt that the widow of Mr. Fortis had gotten over her grief sufficiently, he wrote her a personal letter, as he had written to her son.²⁶ Having experienced her generosity, he added to his words of sympathy an appeal for aid in his financial need. Time and work usually assuage even overwhelming grief, but for those who have faith sorrow is sanctified by works of mercy.

Rome, April 16, 1880

Dear Mrs. Josephine Fortis,

I have received your letter informing me of the tragic loss of your husband and I deeply share your grief. We have already offered prayers for the eternal repose of his soul, and we are still praying, though we firmly believe that Our Merciful God has already welcomed him into heaven.

I have just come from an audience with the Holy Father from whom I asked a special blessing for you and for our dear Alphonse and Richard that you may all enjoy good health and the grace of a happy life and a holy death. He graciously sends his blessings.

As for our work in Turin, Father Rua has written to tell me that he is in tight financial straits, particularly to meet expenses for our South American missions and for feeding our poor boys. I appeal to your charity if you possibly can help us. We have many projects on hand, and this year we are feeling the pinch of the rise in the cost of living.

²⁶See p. 343. [Editor]

I hope to be in Turin by the end of the month and may get to see you and your sons.

I enclose a miraculous picture of the Blessed Virgin, hoping that it may bring blessings to your family.

Pray for me. Ever in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

Since the audience with the Pope had taken place on April 5, the "I have just come" is to be taken in a broad sense, as a timely touch.

There is also a most charming fifth letter to an Oratory alumnus who later became a distinguished Salesian priest, brother of the unforgettable Father Dominic Ruffino. On graduating from the Oratory, he ran into a series of problems, working as a tutor and teacher in several places, until nostalgia for the days he had spent in the shadow of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians led him back to Don Bosco in September 1880.

Rome, April 17, 1880
Tor de' Specchi, 36

My dearest James Ruffino,

Your letter was truly a comfort to me. My love for you is always great, and now that you tell me you wish to come back to the nest, I reminisce about the past return, recalling the things you told me in confidence, and other fond recollections. Should you decide to become a Salesian, all you have to do is to return to the Oratory and say, "Here's a blackbird returning to the nest." The rest will be the same as it was and as you have always known it.

I do not want you to embarrass your present employers, and so if you have to defer your journey to Turin for some time, feel free to do so, provided that you are not being spiritually hurt.

I shall be at the Oratory at the end of this month and wait for you there, like a father eager to welcome his son. We shall talk about everything then.

God bless you, dearest Ruffino. Pray for me, who has always been, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

A sixth letter, written to the director of the house in Marseille, shows us that Don Bosco's fatherly heart never dissociated his concern for major community interests from detailed attention to the needs of the individual.

Rome, April 18, 1880

Dear Father Bologna,

Since I am leaving Rome the day after tomorrow, I am enclosing a few letters for you to put into envelopes and hand-deliver to the addressees.

As you already know, the Holy Father sends a special blessing to you, our dear boys, all our benefactors and our confreres, including Borghi and Bernard,²⁷ who are doing little if they don't strive to become saints.

It is necessary for you to speak often and at ease with Father Ghione and Father Pirro. They are both excellent individuals. You will get whatever you wish from them if you handle them properly.

Father Rua writes to me that he is in dire need of money. I sent what I could—less than a mere pittance! Please send him what you can. You could have given the contractor only twenty-five thousand francs, considering that you had already paid him six thousand. But it's all done and over now.

It seems that the parish priest [Canon Guiol] has gotten some funds together by now, but proceed with great patience and prudence. Offer as a reason that Father Rua has run up a debt of fifteen thousand francs for St. Leo's Festive Oratory. I have been writing to people, and they all promise to send a donation.

If you write to me, address your letters to Lucca until April 25; thereafter, write to Sampierdarena, and in May to Turin.

May God keep all of you in His holy grace! Give my special regards to the boys and the confreres. Ask them all to pray for me. In Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

He also wrote a heartening letter to Baron Héraud of Nice, whose lasting cheerfulness he loved. Whenever the good baron would meet Don Bosco, especially if they were away from Nice and the baron was unknown, he would come up with some highly original and zany antics which brought many a chuckle to Don

²⁷Two lay Salesians. *See* Vol. XIII, p. 558. [Editor]

Bosco and his friends.²⁸ As papal chamberlain he had recently been on duty at the Vatican.

Rome, April 18, 1880

My dear Baron:

Before leaving Rome, I feel that I must drop you a line. I've been on the run, what with business and with both devout and curious visitors, and I've had little time to myself. However, I did manage to call on Cardinals Bartolini, Bilio, Oreglia, and Nina, and on Monsignors Boccali, Ciccolini, and others. They all recall your enthusiasm and cheerful wit and send you their regards and best wishes, hoping that you will soon return to Rome.

I felt perfectly at ease during my audience with the Holy Father, and he readily recalled your stay at the Vatican, remarking, "What a charming man—always so cheerful! I am sure his good example of devotion and his works of charity accomplish much good. I know too that he has helped your Congregation a great deal. Hold him very dear!"

He asked about your family. When I told him that there are just you and your wife, and that her health is not strong, he replied, "May God grant him peace of mind and restore his wife's health. Give him my blessing."

I thought it only fair to tell him of your work for Peter's Pence. "I know," His Holiness said. "That is why I remember him as a very special person."

As for myself, I had a visitor while staying in Naples who, I'm sure, felt he was doing me a big favor by relieving me of some clothing, breaking open trunks and suitcases, and pocketing some six thousand lire from the Peter's Pence fund which I was taking to the Holy Father. I don't know why, but as these "confiscators"²⁹ were leaving, they set fire to my secretary's room, alarming the entire neighborhood. Such is life in this sad world of ours.

I have asked Our Blessed Lady, Mary, Help of Christians, to visit your home with an abundance of blessings and to be the watchful protector and guardian of your whole family and your dear ones—not of your money,

²⁸Once, for example, at La Navarre he visited Don Bosco as the latter was having dinner with several important guests. He managed to fool the doorkeeper and convinced him that he was a beggar, asking him to get him a plate of soup from Don Bosco. Don Bosco of course gladly acceded, and the baron very simply sat outside on a bench and ate. When he finished, he walked into the dining room, went straight to Don Bosco, and said, "Thank you for the soup. It was delicious." The formality of the moment was shattered, the guests burst into laughter, and the baron's humorous antics endeared him even more to Don Bosco. [Author]

²⁹"Confiscators" were government officials who either usurped or stole Church property. This word was then very much in use among Catholic journalists. Especially in Rome, Don Bosco's turn of the phrase was particularly apt. [Author]

however, for that She must bring to me to build a chapel in St. Pierre's Hospice. When you see Engineer Levrot and the Bonin brothers, please give them my regards.

I leave Rome the day after tomorrow and will be back in Turin, God willing, by the end of the month.

Please remember me in the kindness of your prayers. Be assured that I am always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours most devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I had no time to acknowledge your letter asking me to pray for a gentleman whose young nephew is very ill. I immediately gave word for special prayers, Masses, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin. I also have prayed very fervently for him at my daily Mass. Perhaps God has granted our request. If His holy will has been done in some other way, I would really like to know, for he promised a substantial donation for the chapel at the hospice.

The diary cites some last visits and records the departure:

April 19: Don Bosco called on Cardinal [Bartholomew] D'Avanzo, who told him he would like to become a Salesian cooperator. That evening Don Bosco again went to see Archbishop [Ludwig] Jacobini and then Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina. Father Dalmazzo and I are to dine with the Vitelleschis. April 20: In the morning Don Bosco called on Baron Thomas Celesia, Via S. Eustachio, and then on Cardinals [Teodolfo] Mertel and [Thomas] Martinelli, Marchioness Cavalletti and the Vitelleschi family. I went to say farewell to Alexander and Matilda Sigismondi and Adelaide. Then we left for Magliano by the 6:30 train; the ticket agent, an alumnus named Miglietta, greeted Don Bosco in Piedmontese.

Don Bosco's departure, however, did not mean that everything had been done. Father Dalmazzo was to follow up according to Don Bosco's instructions. Hence the following memo which Don Bosco left for him:

Two papal decorations have been definitively approved for Baron de Monremy of Verdun and for Mr. Joseph Bruschi of La Spezia.

Decoration for Engineer Levrot, promised by the cardinal secretary. The request has been filed by the ordinary, who has highly recommended him.

I could not see the Holy Father again, nor was I allowed to attend the audience to which he had invited me.

The business of our missions and the vicariate in Patagonia have been left hanging.

Heartfelt thanks to Cardinal Alimonda. Ask him about the faculties which were taken away from us. He has a copy, as does the Holy Father.

Tell Monsignor [Mariano] Rampolla³⁰ that all documents relating to the vicariate are to be found in the secretariat for extraordinary ecclesiastical affairs.

While Don Bosco was in Rome, Father Dalmazzo witnessed a very specific prediction of his and its fulfillment. Don Bosco received a letter in which a French lady requested a blessing for her only daughter who was very ill. "Here is a lady who wants me to pray especially for the recovery of her daughter, barely two years old," he said to Father Dalmazzo. "But what can I answer? The child will most certainly die."

"It's a harsh reply to make," commented Father Dalmazzo.

"You answer the letter, please."

"What shall I tell her?"

"Tell her that I shall pray for her to be resigned to God's holy will."

Father Dalmazzo softened the blow by urging the lady to leave everything to God, assuring her that prayers were being offered for the child. She read Don Bosco's meaning between the lines and immediately telegraphed him to renew her plea for his prayers, saying that a letter would follow. Father Dalmazzo handed Don Bosco the telegram and asked what response he should make. "None," Don Bosco replied. Then the letter arrived. Distraught by the fear of losing her child, the grieving mother expressed her conviction that the girl would recover through Don Bosco's prayers. Again Father Dalmazzo asked what answer he should send. "None," Don Bosco repeated. "She would not be able to bring up her daughter properly, and so it would be better if the girl passed away for her own soul's good." Five days later a telegram announced the girl's death.

It is always the biographer's pleasure to collect testimonials of

³⁰He was then with the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith as secretary for matters concerning the Eastern rites. [Author]

the powerful impact made by Don Bosco's kindly ways on all who approached him or even merely laid eyes on him. These statements, issued at different times in widely scattered places, are all reiterated proofs of his unchallenged greatness as a man and of his spiritual stature as a saint. That year, a cleric—Peri-Morosini, who later became a bishop and apostolic administrator of Canton Ticino—was studying philosophy in Rome. One day he and his fellow students were taking a walk as a group. As they crossed Piazza San Luigi dei Francesi, they spotted a priest, whom a few recognized as Don Bosco, pointing him out to others. The young cleric broke ranks, contrary to rules, and, dashing over to him, greeted him. "I could never tell you the impression he made on me," the bishop once stated at a formal commemorative service being held for Don Bosco at Ascona.³¹ "Don Bosco," I thought, "is the living image of Jesus of Nazareth: amiable, meek, kind, humble, modest. So must Jesus have impressed others!"

³¹*Bollettino Salesiano*, July 1908. [Author]

CHAPTER 18

Roundabout Return to Turin from Rome

SHORTLY after Don Bosco left Rome, he was honored at an impressive gathering. The National Organization of Catholic Conventions, whose aim was to unify Italian Catholics in defense of the Church and of the Roman Pontiff, had formed regional committees which were to meet as often as they felt necessary to discuss Church affairs. The Roman committee held its first regional meeting on April 21 and 22 [1880] in the magnificent Altemps Palace under the honorary chairmanship of Rome's cardinal vicar. At his right among others sat Duke [Scipione] Salviati, chairman, and Prince Camillus Rospigliosi, spiritual moderator, while several bishops sat at his left. At the morning session of April 22, Attorney Frascari proposed that one of the existing Catholic societies should draw up a plan to take throngs of roaming youngsters off the streets and give them a Christian education. He suggested that, to achieve this end, the society should enlist the aid of Don Bosco's Salesians. Put to a vote, the proposal was unanimously approved. Don Bosco read of this in the Catholic press just as he was about to leave Magliano. The publicity stirred by such an authoritative endorsement of so august a body certainly gave all his work a great moral boost.

Don Bosco stayed at the seminary in Magliano from the evening of April 20 to the morning of April 23. The usual annual outing, held regularly just after Easter, was set in his honor to coincide with his visit. He had already agreed, to everyone's joy, since he meant to take part in it. Their goal was the seminary summer home on the hills of Calvi in Umbria. Such a pleasant excursion disposed the young seminarians to be all the more responsive to their superiors' suggestions that they take advantage of Don Bosco's presence for their spiritual benefit. Don Bosco heard their confessions and then

placed himself at the disposal of the staff so that all might be able to talk with him. How they were affected may be gleaned from a random remark jotted down by his secretary, "Papa is really exhausted. At Magliano they nearly tired him to death."¹

And yet there were some who did not respond. One—a certain Mari—is particularly singled out. No angel to begin with, he harbored a long-standing hatred for priests and monks because his parents had forced him to attend a boarding school. Meeting him by chance, Don Bosco placed his hand on the boy's head and remarked, "One day you will be a priest in a religious congregation." The boy's response was a sarcastic grunt of contempt, but it was short-lived, for ten years later, in 1890, he passed through Turin as a Franciscan priest on his way to the South American missions. On the occasion of his visit to the Oratory, Father Rua asked him to dinner, and there he told the superiors of that incident.

On the morning of April 23, the whole community walked with Don Bosco to the railway station where he was to board a train for Florence. They were a joyous, noisy and loving escort marked by an intimacy between pupils and superiors which was quite unknown in that locality, and which Don Bosco felt to be a powerful means of education. Father [Joseph] Daghero accompanied him as far as Orte where Don Bosco changed trains for Florence, where he arrived at one in the morning. Good mother to all the Salesians as she was, Marchioness [Gerolama] Uguccioni hosted him in her residence. Marchioness [Henrietta] Nerli was also her usual gracious self. Don Bosco's secretary tells us that he stayed there two days, making and receiving calls, but we learn little of biographical interest.

We have abundant documentation in our archives, to which we shall refer in due course, telling us that a committee had been set up two years before in Florence to establish a Salesian house and that its more influential members had repeatedly been in touch with Don Bosco to speed up its realization. In all truth he needed no prodding because his knowledge of the area's needs and his zeal for the salvation of youth were ample inducement. During this stopover in Florence he had an experience which touched his heart

¹Letter to Father Rua from Father Berto, Florence, April 24, 1880. [Author]

and caused him deep pain because he could not give immediate aid. While walking through town he came across large groups of boys and, upon asking who they were, was told that they were Catholic youngsters on their way to the Protestant school and church; other groups were already there and more were about to follow. Stunned and hurt by the sight of these simple souls being wrested from the arms of the Church, he tearfully begged the committee not to waste more time, to redouble their efforts and to put a stop to such harm. When writing to Cardinal Nina from Lucca, he told him what he had seen. On May 5 the cardinal replied:

Thank you for the information you sent me in your letter of April 29. While your experience in Florence brought you much grief, both the Holy Father and I felt comforted by the thought of the truly exceptional zeal you show in striving to stem the tide of corruption and heresy at its strongest. Grateful for your outstanding efforts in this regard, His Holiness gladly imparts his apostolic blessing upon you and prays that God will grant you strength and courage to continue in your holy undertaking with increasing success.

The news that Don Bosco was again visiting Lucca reawakened the previous year's enthusiasm among the Salesian cooperators,² whom Father [John] Marengo, the director, had summoned to the Holy Cross Church. Every day, from April 26 to May 1, Don Bosco spent his time hearing confessions, receiving visitors, and making calls. He met with cooperators on the evening of April 29. Lucca's most prominent citizens flocked to the little Salesian church. After the usual formal introductions, Don Bosco addressed his audience in a gentle, humble tone. He first warmly thanked them for their help during the past year and also urged them to thank God for benefits received. He then spoke of cooperating with the Salesians locally and at large, urging them to support the South American missions, the houses being opened in Italy and France, and the Holy Cross Festive Oratory. After citing the more recent foundations, he stressed the value of the missionary action recently undertaken in Patagonia, where all heroic attempts of the last three

²See pp. 39-45. [Editor]

centuries had failed to overcome the Indians' savagery. Now, he said, the Salesians had well-founded hopes of success. He then continued:

The danger is over, and we feel that Our Merciful God now wishes to reach out to those who still live in the darkness of idolatry. We have already set up our mission headquarters at Carmen de Patagónes at the mouth of the Rio Negro. This river rises in the remote Andes, which themselves range the entire length of South America and separate the Pampas and Patagonia from Chile, and, after coursing some six hundred and thirty miles, flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Both banks of this huge river open up an endless field for the zeal of Salesian missionaries. Presently they are too few for so gigantic a task, and we must reinforce their ranks as soon as we can with another missionary expedition. But how? We must rely on the charity of our cooperators. We appeal to each of you to contribute what funds you can. If your own means are inadequate, enlist the help of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. The missionaries gladly give their lives to spread the faith; we can at least give some of our money.

Now let me say something about what you have done on a local level. I owe all of you my heartfelt thanks. Let this be said first to God's glory and then to the honor of your city of Lucca. Here, too, thanks to your generosity, we have opened a festive oratory, a day and evening school, and even a hospice where some forty boys are already housed, learning a trade or following a course of studies to prepare them for a profession. They all receive a Catholic education, growing up as good Christians and upright citizens. We purchased this building at a good price but still owe forty thousand lire. Since we must also feed the boys and staff, we have decided, after conferring with our most reverend archbishop, to write to all our cooperators and ask them to pledge whatever amount they can afford and to ask others to do the same. In this way every cooperator will become a campaigner as well and at the end of every month will be able to send to the director whatever he or she may have been able to collect; otherwise the director himself will make the collection rounds. Thus, toil and expenses will be parceled out, making things lighter for all.

But there are also other ways of helping. For instance, I know that last year the kind Benedictine nuns provided the Salesians with homemade soup three times a week; other people donated linen, kitchen utensils, chairs and classroom desks.

"What will we gain from all this?" you may ask. This question is quite proper. Anyone planning to do something good asks the question. Your reward will be to know that you have contributed to the rescue of a great

many boys from spiritual and, possibly, also temporal ruin. Perhaps these youngsters could have taken the wrong path and become the scourge of society, ending their days in jail. Believe me, if you do not now contribute to their Christian formation, the day will come when they will rob you of your money. But if you help them now, they will pose no such danger. Rather, they will bless you, look upon you as benefactors, and, if necessary, readily come to your defense and lay down their lives for you. Furthermore, they will always pray for their benefactors. The prayers of the poor reach the throne of the Most High. All Salesian houses and churches offer special prayers for Salesian cooperators every day.

However, since we are Christians we must act for a nobler motive—faith. The Lord already promises us a hundredfold in this world and eternal happiness in the next for every act of mercy done for His sake. But the Gospel goes further and makes almsgiving a duty: “Give your surplus to the poor.” [Cf. Lk. 11, 41.] But where can this surplus be found? We can bring it about by economizing on pleasure trips, clothes, meals, rugs, and so on, and in avoiding dance halls and theaters. Of course these two items are no problem to you, but to the worldly-minded.

Now, going back to the reward which Our Lord promised would be a hundredfold, who of you would not be eager to give, if at this moment someone were to come and say, “Would anyone like to invest money at a hundred percent interest?” Certainly no one would reject such an opportunity. Well, it is just as certain that the Lord gives us this hundredfold on earth in many ways—a plentiful harvest, family peace, and good health, thus saving you a lot of money. At other times he may shield you from ruinous lawsuits, bless you and your children with mutual love and respect, and safeguard you from physical dangers. In short, the Lord has countless ways of blessing us and repaying us a hundredfold for the works of mercy we perform on behalf of poor boys besides promising us life everlasting.

But the most comforting reward is what the Lord will say to each of us at His judgment seat. The Gospel tells us that He will consider as done to Himself whatever we do for the least of His brethren, the poor children. “I was naked,” He will say to us, “and you clothed Me; I was hungry and you fed Me; I was homeless and you gave Me shelter. I was forsaken and you took Me in and looked after Me. Come now and receive your everlasting reward which has been waiting for you from all eternity.” On the contrary, He will say to those who failed to do these things, “I was naked and you did not clothe Me; I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was homeless and you did not take Me in.”

Lastly, we shall experience the deepest consolation at the moment of death because then the boys whom we helped will turn to God and say,

“They saved our souls, so please save theirs.” As St. Augustine said, “By saving a soul you assured your own salvation.”

The convents of Lucca considered themselves fortunate if they could host Don Bosco for even a few minutes. The Benedictine nuns asked him to visit them and bless one of their sick sisters. Since it was evening, they probably had supper ready for him. The present abbess [1933] is always glad to point out to visitors the table at which Don Bosco sat with several Salesians. Later, when he received the news that the ailing sister had passed on to a happier life, he dropped them a note, recalling their warm courtesy.

Turin, June 11, 1880

May Our Merciful God bless Mother Nazzarena, Benedictine abbess at Lucca, and her entire religious family. May He grant heaven’s reward to the nun whom He called to her eternal rest, and good health to all who survive her. Through His mercy, may they without exception enjoy a long life and then receive their reward for the homemade soup they served to the Salesians and for their many other works of mercy. Amen.

Pray for me.

Yours gratefully in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

As for Don Bosco’s assurance that he would pray for the “long life” of her fellow religious, the present [1933] superior is fond of saying that they all lived to be over eighty and that one of them was well past ninety when she went to her reward.

The foremost families of Lucca also vied with each other for the honor of having him at dinner, because they regarded him as a saint. The day before he spoke to the Salesian cooperators, he accepted an invitation from Mr. Bertocchini who had sold him a home at a reasonable price on an installment plan. It was turned into a boarding school. The family welcomed Don Bosco at their villa, a short distance from town. Don Bosco was accompanied by the director and the catechist, Father Maggiorino Borgatello.³ The latter testified in writing that at dinner, as the conversation turned to Salesian works and the Valdocco Oratory in particular, Don

³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Bosco thrilled the guests by telling them, with utmost simplicity, two surprising incidents which he had personally witnessed in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. We quote Don Bosco as Father Borgatello did, since he maintained that they were his “exact” words. “Many people,” Don Bosco said, “ascribe to me the little good the Salesian Congregation has accomplished, but they are mistaken. If Don Bosco has done and still does some good, he owes it to his sons. The Lord has given Don Bosco such virtuous sons that they perform genuine miracles; thanks to them Don Bosco is borne, as it were, in triumph. People credit all to Don Bosco’s doing, whereas it is all due to his sons. I could offer ample proof of what I am saying, but let the following suffice. One day I entered the main door of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. It was nearly dusk. When I got to the middle of the church I looked up at the painting and noticed that [something like] a dark drape covered the Madonna.⁴ I instantly wondered, *Why on earth would the sacristan cover Our Lady’s picture?* I stepped closer to the sanctuary and saw that the drape was moving. Shortly afterward, it slowly dropped until it touched the floor, genuflected to the Blessed Sacrament, made the sign of the cross and walked out of the church through the sacristy. What I thought was a drape was rather one of my sons who, in an ecstasy of love, had been raised the better to see the picture of the Virgin Mary and lovingly contemplate Her and kiss Her immaculate feet. On another occasion I walked into the church from the sacristy and saw a boy kneeling, high in the air, on a level with the tabernacle door facing the apse,⁵ as he was adoring the Blessed Sacrament, his head bowed, resting against the tabernacle door in a tender ecstasy of love like a seraphim. I called him by name. He aroused himself and came down, abashed, begging me not to tell anyone. I repeat, I can cite many such instances in proof that all the good Don Bosco has accomplished is due in most part to his sons.”⁶

⁴Don Bosco’s sight, especially in his right eye, had begun to deteriorate in 1864. See Vol. VII, p. 390 and Vol. XIII, pp. 588f. [Editor]

⁵The tabernacle was in the center of the main altar, extending through its depth. There was a second door in the back facing the apse because Holy Communion was often given before, during and after Mass or outside of Mass by other priests than the celebrant of the Mass. A suitable footstool enabled the priest to reach the tabernacle door. [Editor]

⁶Letter to Father Lemoyne from Father Maggiorino Borgatello, Punta Arenas (Magallanes), September 22, 1905. Father Borgatello goes on: “Father Marengo must

We will also mention another incident which happened the day after the conference. That morning Don Bosco celebrated Mass at eight o'clock at Holy Cross Church, crowded with all kinds of people. During Mass a sixteen-year-old boy allegedly suffering from diabolic vexations was brought to the Salesian house. In all truth, certain fairly plausible signs of evil possession were present. He lived in a neighboring village and was brought to the church by his parents and another man in the hope that Don Bosco would bless him. The youth walked quietly up to the door of the school, but, on seeing a priest, he went berserk and both men struggled as hard as they could to drag him inside, so violent was his opposition. Once he was in, he hurled himself to the ground where, unable to speak, he tried to crawl away, striking out with fists and feet at anyone who tried to approach him, especially a priest. Firmly gripped and immobilized hand and foot by those around, he snapped out at them and threw himself upon them. At the end of the Mass, despite his struggle and resistance, they exerted enormous effort and carried him bodily through the church and into the sacristy. The bystanders were horrified to see the poor lad frighteningly grind his teeth while emitting a ghastly, drawn-out shriek as if in fiery torment when he was taken past the tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament. He was finally brought to Don Bosco, who was then saying his thanksgiving prayers. He rose from the kneeler, looked with deep compassion upon the youth, blessed him, and said a prayer over him. After asking the young man's parents to say special prayers throughout the month of May, he asked the boy several questions, but the answers were the groans of a mute. When Don Bosco held out a medal to him to kiss, he spat on it, struggling to free himself and snatch it to fling it away, trying to bite and crush it. Father Marengo kept an alleged relic of Our Lady, a hair, in a tiny reliquary and, hoping to test its authenticity, drew close to the youth, keeping the miniature case tightly in his closed hand lest the young man see it. The demoniac immediately began to rave so fiercely that he cast terror on all. The parents said that the boy was

certainly recall what I have just written. . . . Although several years have gone by, I still remember perfectly well, as if it were only yesterday, how I heard Don Bosco tell these things, so deep an impression did it make on me. Do what you think best with this for the honor of our good father, Don Bosco. You may be perfectly sure that what I have told you is authentic." [Author]

named Francis, that they had found it impossible to get him to pray, and that neither would he let any member of his family pray. They also said that his condition dated from the feast of St. Joseph and that twice he had hurled himself from a window some eighteen feet above the ground without being hurt.

Once he was forcibly taken out of the sight of priests and sacred things, he began to walk along without restraint, chatting quite normally, saying, among other things, that he would accept the medal only when he had crossed the city limits, never within them, because if he did he would be killed. Though we know nothing more of him, we sincerely hope that his obsession ceased at the end of Mary's month, thanks to the prayers requested by Don Bosco.

Two long-time friends of Don Bosco, Marquis Massoni and Mr. Burlamacchi, had bought a small house at Viareggio, intending to turn it over to the Salesians for the care of local youngsters, who were very much neglected. They were waiting for him to inspect it and decide what was to be done with it. Don Bosco obliged. We do not know what arrangements were made. We only know of an incident which reveals how anyone who came in touch with him esteemed him. After greeting him, Mrs. Burlamacchi took him to an upper floor apartment, tactfully dismissing all visitors and then sending each member of the family up to Don Bosco for a word of good advice and a blessing.

That same evening Don Bosco [and his secretary] left for La Spezia, where they lodged with Chevalier [Joseph] Bruschi,⁷ since there were no spare rooms in the Salesians' small rented apartment. Seeing at first hand how badly larger premises were needed if his work was to expand, Don Bosco left no doubt in the mind of Father [Louis] Rocca that he was to come up with some plan to raise funds for a building that would allow for future expansion. Undeniably the first efforts were disheartening; Father Rocca's letters, visits and meetings called forth a meager response. But Don Bosco did not lose heart, for he had his own reasons against living in a rented apartment. Satisfied at the moment with the little money received, he started laying the foundations of a small house on August 16, 1880, asserting that the rest would come later on, as indeed it did. Rather than having to return to the beginnings of this expansion

⁷See p. 38. [Editor]

program, we will add one detail now. At the start of the work Don Bosco had to send a routine report to the cardinal protector on the whole Congregation's progress and the temporal and spiritual benefits it brought to the people. He took this opportunity to acquaint Cardinal Nina with the situation at La Spezia and the pressing need of adequate living quarters. He therefore asked the cardinal to propose that the Holy Father grant him, Don Bosco, a substantial advance on the monthly subsidy of five hundred lire, which had been set in November 1877, to speed up on the planned expansion. The cardinal answered on August 16. After citing current exceptional demands made on the Holy See and its many urgent needs in that critical period of strife and conflict, he informed Don Bosco that, despite the financial crunch, the Holy Father was willing to help him as best he could. He ordered six thousand lire to be loaned to Don Bosco, with repayment to be made by deducting one hundred lire per month from his subsidy. In addition, two thousand more lire were to be sent to him for the celebration of Masses. On receiving this twofold donation, Don Bosco, who had planned for a temporary structure of one story, asked Father Rua to instruct the contractor to add a second story, thus making room for a thirty-bed dormitory once a hospice was opened.⁸

Step by step Don Bosco was now slowly getting closer to Turin. On May 3 he was at Sampierdarena. All that we know of his stay there is contained in these brief notes of Father Berto:

Monday, May 3: we set out for Genoa at two o'clock, arriving there at six-thirty. The following day, May 4, Don Bosco and Father Albera had dinner with the archbishop. Father Ronchail was also at the hospice [in Sampierdarena]. On Wednesday, May 5, Don Bosco dined at home with Baron Héraud. At four-thirty some one hundred and eighty cooperators gathered in the chapel. After the reading of Chapter 14 of the life of St. Francis de Sales, dealing with his love of neighbor, Don Bosco took the pulpit and spoke to the congregation for nearly an hour and a half.⁹ People listened to him with rapt attention. The motet *Tota pulchra es Maria* was sung after the reading, and *Sit nomen Domini benedictum* after the

⁸In October Don Bosco issued an appeal to public charity, particularly for construction of the church. [Author]

⁹Thanks to Father Berto's notes, the June issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* reported this first conference of the Salesian cooperators in Sampierdarena. [Author]

sermon. The *Tantum ergo* followed, and then Don Bosco gave Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Afterward priests and laity crowded about him in the sacristy, eager for a word with him, to kiss his hand, commend themselves to his prayers, and receive a blessing and holy medal from him. He satisfied them all. The collection netted close to six hundred lire. Because it was the vigil of the Lord's Ascension, neither the archbishop nor several priests could attend. The archbishop, however, sent a blessing to all present at the conference. Before leaving the pulpit, Don Bosco informed the audience that an entertainment would follow in the inner playground of the hospice. There the guests enjoyed choice selections from famous classical music excellently rendered by the band. Don Bosco had no time for himself until practically suppertime. The next day, Ascension Thursday, May 6, he stayed at Sampierdarena. On May 7, at seven-fifteen, we walked to the railway station in the company of Father Cerruti and Father Francesia. We arrived at the Oratory in Turin at twelve-thirty. Boys, priests and clerics lined both sides of the walk from the main entrance to the dining room. The band was also there to welcome Don Bosco. The boys sang for him during dinner. The whole house was bursting with joy at his return after an absence of almost four months.

Before leaving Sampierdarena, Don Bosco would gladly have pleased his sons at Varazze by a visit, and the Sisters of Mercy at Savona also begged him to visit them and bless their superior, who was gravely ill. But he had to forego both visits and wrote to tell this to the newly appointed director, Father Monateri:

Sampierdarena, May 7, 1880

My dear Father Monateri,

It is most urgent that I return to Turin, and I must forego the pleasure of visiting Varazze and Savona.

I shall expect you in Turin when you can manage to come. Meanwhile, assure the Sisters of Mercy that I will pray for them and for their mother superior. Also, once I get to Turin I will ask God at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians to spare the life of the sister who is the very foundation of that wonderful institute.

God bless you, dear Father Monateri. Remember me to all my dear confreres and boys and ask them to pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Hardly recovered from the fatigue of his long, wearying journey, he had to reply to two letters of Canon Guiol concerning the [Salesian] construction work at Marseille. They had been forwarded to him during his travels. Both the tone and the length of the letter tell us how much Don Bosco appreciated the cooperation of the zealous pastor of St. Joseph's Church and how anxious he was not to hurt him in any way. We also gather some interesting details about his audience with the Holy Father.

Turin, May 9, 1880

My dear Father,

Your letters of April 25 and May 5 reached me respectively at Lucca and at Sampierdarena. I am now back in Turin to stay. Your letters are a great comfort and convince me even more that my comment to the Holy Father on your zeal for works of mercy was no exaggeration. Father Bologna has often written to me of your tireless solicitude for St. Leo's Festive Oratory and has urged me to thank you, as I now do, in this letter.

When you told me in your letter that a parcel of land, some two thousand square meters, was for sale in the immediate neighborhood of our workshops, I started praying. I had our boys offer special prayers morning and evening before the altar of Mary, Help of Christians that She would help us find the necessary funds. If our plans will redound to God's greater glory—as I hope—I am sure that God will send us the means. I shall write to Madame Prat-Noilly about it, without, however, making any explicit request.

I have already informed her by mail, as I inform you now, dear Father, that the Pope is establishing an apostolic vicariate for the Salesian missions in Patagonia. Of course, this calls for well-studied plans and for missionaries specially trained for those endless savage lands. Besides, the Holy Father himself suggested that possibly a boarding school, to be called Seminary for the Patagonian Missions, might be attached to the festive oratory which already bears his name. "Marseille is an eminently Catholic community," he said, "also a generous city, a central location for both Europe and South America. Write on my behalf to the benevolent [Beaujour] Society which, with genuine Christian zeal, supports your hostels in that city, and tell them that I recommend a very important undertaking to their charity. Let me know their reply."

Meanwhile, dear Father, speak with Monsieur Rostand about it and, if he is of the same opinion, take it to the councillors of the Beaujour Society and to our own committee. Then let me know so that I can carry out the

Holy Father's wish. As you see, the Beaujour Society and our own committees have certainly been chosen for extraordinary tasks. We can do all things in Him who strengthens us.

The paper which I left in the Holy Father's hands concerning a few spiritual favors for our committee members is in your wording, but it will take time. Cardinal Alimonda will pick it up with another paper as soon as they have been signed.¹⁰

I arrived in Turin very tired. In every Salesian house crowds of people would promptly lay siege to me without a break. Yet, despite that, the oneness, the love, and the observance of the rules which reign among all the Salesians have given me great joy. The Holy Father, who was already informed of this, told me that what we have accomplished with God's help is truly amazing. Our pupils truly love God, and possibly the number of vocations to our Congregation will be doubled this year.

In conclusion, dear Father, please inform our worthy committee members that on May 16, the solemnity of Pentecost and the second day of our novena to Mary, Help of Christians, I intend to celebrate a special Mass invoking God's blessings upon them and their families, with all our boys offering particular prayers and their Holy Communions.

Father Cagliero was delighted with the handsome offer Madame Jacques generously made to our sisters. I shall write her personally.

Step by step, let us climb the ladder to heaven. All at the Oratory—Father Rua, Father Cagliero, Father Durando, all the rest and I—extend a formal invitation to you to visit us on the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. Will you do us this great favor? Please feel free to bring anyone you wish with you.

May the Lord keep you and reward you. If you can, please inform Father Bologna of the contents of this letter because I have little time to write to him. Pray for me.

Ever gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Two days later, France again offered Don Bosco a welcome opportunity to express his feelings toward its Catholics. On May 11 Father [Francis] Picard and the viscount of Damas, who were leading a French pilgrimage to Rome, visited the Oratory. Don Bosco invited both gentlemen to dinner, while the pilgrims were

¹⁰The "other paper" probably concerns a papal title he had requested for Canon Guiol. A letter from Monsignor Cantoni (August 26, 1880) of the secretariat of state informed Don Bosco on behalf of the Holy Father that it was not desirable. [Author]

hosted at the headquarters of the Catholic Youth Association. Shortly after their lunch, about a hundred pilgrims, most anxious to meet Don Bosco, were allowed into the Oratory's dining room where he was lunching with both guests and several other priests. They were later given a tour of the premises. After Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, they joined the other pilgrims and were welcomed by the Oratory band in the students' porticoes.

Speeches followed the singing of a suitable anthem. Marquis Garassini, president of the Catholic Youth Association, welcomed the pilgrims [to Turin] and then Don Bosco addressed them in French. After first asking them to heed his sentiments rather than his French, he thanked them for honoring the Oratory with their visit, regretting only his inability to host them, as he would have wished, in more pleasurable surroundings. He praised their inspiring example of faith and devotion to the Holy See and the Supreme Pontiff. He commended their willingness to bear the discomforts of such a long journey precisely to offer their homage to the Holy Father in Rome. He pointed out, too, the fine example they were giving the Italian people by their open manifestation of faith. Next he spoke of the Salesian houses in France, and, after a brief explanation of the Association of Salesian Cooperators, he invited them all to become members. He concluded by asking them, on their return home, to remember the Salesians and the Oratory, where they had many friends praying for them and sharing their sentiments of piety and faith.¹¹ Father Picard eloquently thanked Don Bosco, the Salesians and the Catholic Youth Association, and offered a toast to Don Bosco, his sons and the people of Turin. The last speaker was that staunch Catholic, engineer [Albert] Buffa, secretary of the Catholic Youth Association and close friend of Don Bosco. Our present generation of Italian Catholics would do him great wrong should they forget his memory.

When he finished speaking, the members of the Catholic Youth Association gave the pilgrims a photograph of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and one of Don Bosco as souvenirs of their visit. In turn, Father Picard gave Don Bosco a thousand or so medals blessed by Leo XIII for him to give out to the Oratory boys. Before

¹¹Excerpts of Don Bosco's speech can be seen in the *Bulletin Salésien*, June 1880. [Author]

departing, the pilgrims clustered about Don Bosco for a last word and his blessing. Several ladies who managed to exchanged a few words with him wept with joy.

Don Bosco's invitation to the pilgrims to become Salesian cooperators was not an empty gesture, for as the choir and the band were performing their final presentation, the pilgrims were vying with each other to give in their names and addresses. Later, when Don Bosco had leisure to scan the list of names, he sent the cooperators' diploma to those whom he deemed suitable.

Meanwhile the people of Marseille, remembering the miracles they had seen with their own eyes, kept writing to Don Bosco, who could never catch up with his mail. When he answered their letters he always recommended St. Leo's Oratory and its needs to their charity. Writing to its director, he hinted at something which troubled him considerably.

Turin, May 13, 1880

My dear Father Bologna,

Enclosed is a letter for you to deliver and another to be forwarded by mail to Madame Jacques.

I keep answering letters which I receive every day from Marseille; *I am praying for them but, please, tell them to come to the aid of the poor youngsters in St. Leo's Hospice*. I don't know if my plea brings any results; some donations also reach me in Turin.

Brogly has expressed the wish to come to Turin. If you come for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, take him along if he is deserving.

I have invited our good Canon Guiol in writing to attend our celebration. Try to persuade him to come; we all want to see him, and we have a lot of things to talk over.

Give my heartiest best wishes to all our dear confreres and pupils. God bless them all! Tell them to pray for me. Always in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I am writing a letter to Father Pirro,¹² to reprimand him for going back on his word, the Congregation and the Church. I am exhorting him to open his eyes and look at the abyss. He will see you about it.

¹²He had decided to leave the Congregation. [Editor]

The sad comments on the cleric Brogly and Father Pirro will become clearer in Chapter 20. We must now return to Don Bosco amid the boys and confreres of his beloved Valdocco Oratory.

CHAPTER 19

At the Oratory with Don Bosco from May to December 1880

THIS chapter will bring together celebrations, conferences, noteworthy events, memorable sayings, dreams, letters, and other scattered items which would not really fit elsewhere. They will make for varied and pleasant reading.

1. THE FEAST OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Year by year three outstanding features of the novena and feast kept becoming more and more impressive: the crowds flocking to the shrine, the increase of spiritual and temporal favors granted through the intercession of Don Bosco's Madonna, and the throngs swarming about Don Bosco himself asking him for the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. Citing the extraordinary number of pilgrims, the *Bollettino Salesiano* stated in its June issue: "The Church of Mary, Help of Christians has never seen such a vast multitude beneath its majestic dome from the day of its consecration." Hundreds of spiritual favors were properly recorded in the church registers. The same periodical briefly wrote up a "few samples" of eleven favors received or reported during those days in various localities of Italy and France. Such manifest graciousness on the part of Our Blessed Mother naturally drew the pilgrims' attention to Her faithful servant, obliging him to spend long hours in a sacristy room to satisfy the countless people who begged for his blessing.

During the novena Don Bosco gave two conferences to the Salesian cooperators of Turin in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. The first conference, for men, took place on the afternoon of May 20. Don Bosco began by pointing out the difference between "operator" and "cooperator," between one who runs an enterprise and one who works for it under his direction.

However talented and active a leader may be—he said—he will achieve but little without helpers. For instance, anyone directing a festive oratory for several hundred boys could not run it alone, regardless of intelligence and zeal. He would destroy his health in vainly striving to keep order in church and outside. Things would be different if he were helped by others who might be talented to teach catechism, prepare and supervise church services, direct the choir, handle sport activities, dramatics, gymnastics, and so on. This would enable an undertaking which from its start could easily deteriorate to make headway, become stronger and end up as a great success. This is true of any machine; it is very productive when all its working parts function properly. Alone, Don Bosco would have accomplished nothing, but his cooperators have multiplied his undertakings and insured their progress. This is the reason why Pius IX and Leo XIII have blessed the Association of Salesian Cooperators.

After these opening comments, Don Bosco summed up the Salesians' activities of the past year: schools and churches to counteract Protestant proselytizing, missions in Patagonia, and the expansion of existing works.

The women's conference was held on the evening of May 22. After expressing his delight in their large number and briefly mentioning God's blessings upon the endeavors of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians during the past year, he went on to enlarge upon the good work for girls being done by the [Salesian] sisters, vividly detailing the history of their Institute from its birth to its latest recent foundations in Italy, France, colonial South America and the wilds of Patagonia.

Don Bosco had already chosen chairpersons for the festivities, as we realize from a note dated May 19, in which, employing roundabout rhetoric, he wrote, "Father John Bosco invites the Count of Pamparato and his gracious wife to offer the Blessed Virgin Mary their protection by accepting the joint chairmanship of the solemn feast of Mary, Help of Christians, May 24." The noble couple obliged not by making a personal appearance—that was not necessary—but by offering gifts, as we gather from the following letter of Don Bosco.

Turin, May 30, 1880

Dear Countess:

I had hoped to thank you in person, but since it is so hard for me to leave

the house, let me take this occasion to begin thanking you at least in writing.

I received the two baskets of cheer which you and your kind husband have graciously donated with an offering of two hundred lire. Thank you most heartily. I pray God to grant you a long and happy life, good health, and the attainment of every holy wish. Our boys too will offer special prayers for this intention.

Hoping that I may be honored by a visit from you both, I am,

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

As we know, he had invited Canon Guiol to the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. The canon came, as the minutes of the Marseille committee state. Don Bosco was very delighted to see him and many other distinguished cooperators of his who became his personal guests. He also was very concerned that his absent friends and benefactors fully realize that he had not forgotten and would not forget them on this solemn occasion. Accordingly, he wrote to Count Eugene De Maistre, who could not attend the festivities in Turin that year.

Turin, May 18, 1880

Dear Count Eugene:

This year we will miss the pleasure of having you with us, but you are not forgotten. We daily remember you in our community prayers, and this Sunday, the vigil of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, we shall pray for you particularly. I shall celebrate Holy Mass for you, while our boys will receive Communion and ask God's blessings upon you and your entire family. I understand that your aunt, the duchess, will soon pay you a visit. Many have tried to dissuade her, but she is determined to do so. I hope to drop in at Borgo [San Martino] on the 26th of this month for a visit, and then I shall get the latest news of her entire family. I believe they are all in good health.

I have just received word from Countess Carla De Maistre about Mama. She says that Mama has improved a bit over the last few days, but that she is still quite ill. We are praying for her every morning and evening.

May heavenly blessings come abundantly upon you and your family. Please pray for me.

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

Every evening during the novena, local Church dignitaries and pastors imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. On the eve of the feast itself, however, the honor was reserved to Monsignor Louis Anglesio, Blessed Cottolengo's¹ successor. At this time, just a few hours before May 24, there was still no assurance that a bishop would be available for pontifical Mass, but God's Providence so arranged matters that not one but three bishops would enhance the solemnity of this cherished day. For quite some time Don Bosco had fondly thought of inviting the eloquent Dominican friar, Lawrence Pampirio, to speak at the triduum and on the solemn feast itself, but the renowned preacher had recently been named bishop of Alba and was just about to be installed in his diocese. Though preparations took up all his time, his warm love for Don Bosco prompted him to satisfy the latter's desire. Then there was Bishop James Corna-Pellegrini, titular of Samaria and auxiliary bishop of Brescia, who had come to Turin for his personal devotion. He was invited to celebrate the community Mass. Finally, Bishop Daniel Comboni,² titular of Claudiopoli and apostolic vicar of Central Africa, unexpectedly arrived and was asked to celebrate the solemn high Mass. His majestic figure, his full flowing beard, his resonant voice which filled the entire church and was heard in the square outside, and the rich devotion manifest in his tone and gesture riveted the congregation's attention upon him and convinced everyone that he was a great apostle.

In fact he was a most illustrious missionary. After his seminary studies at a missionary college in Verona, he undertook many very dangerous apostolic journeys through Nubia from 1859 onward. Appointed apostolic pro-vicar for Central Africa in 1872 and vicar in 1877, he built churches, opened schools in Cairo and Khartoum, and set up mission outposts in his vicariate; his plan was to evangelize the people through a native clergy. He forcefully opposed the slave trade. On his periodic visits to Italy to raise needed funds for the advancement of Africa, he invariably went

¹Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842) was canonized in 1934. In 1832 he founded *La Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza* [The Little House of Divine Providence] which is now a vast hospital and medical center, housing more than six thousand patients. Doctors and surgeons freely donate their services. [Editor]

²Daniel Comboni (1831-1881) founded the missionary order of Sons of the Sacred Heart of Verona in 1867. [Editor]

also to Paris, and whenever he stopped in Turin he called on Don Bosco. In 1864 he stopped at the Oratory, arousing very lively enthusiasm among the boys with his tales of Nigritia.³ He died at Khartoum on October 10, 1881, hailed as “the bishop of the blacks.”

After dining with Don Bosco on the evening of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, the bishop volunteered to speak to the boys after night prayers. He referred to the feast as heavenly and to the shrine as one of Italy’s most renowned, voicing the fervent hope that Don Bosco would send Salesians to help him. Either before or soon after the feast, he visited the Valsalice College, where he gave First Holy Communion to some of the students. As he was about to take leave of Don Bosco, seeing himself surrounded by the students and noticing their eagerness to hear something more from him, he gladly obliged and entertained them for almost an hour, which flashed by like an instant.

Commenting on the celebration of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, Father Lazzero noted: “It was a lovely feast, and the crowds were extraordinary.” The valiant Catholic journal of Turin, *Unità Cattolica*, which was under orders to keep low-keyed when mentioning anything about Don Bosco, reported on May 30 as follows:

It was a sight truly worthy of Turin’s devotion. Not an irreverent remark or snicker of any kind—just devotion and fervor that brought tears to the eyes of the impressive pilgrim crowds which flocked to the vast church from dawn to dusk. Very many were the people receiving Holy Communion throughout the novena, but their numbers soared to the thousands on the feast itself.

The same article referred to the exceptionally grand sacred choral music:

Above all else, we fondly recall the Mass composed by Benedict Marcello.⁴ We are at a loss to decide which we admired most, the sublime harmony, truly in keeping with the majesty of sacred mystery, or the

³Now known as Sudan. [Editor]

⁴Benedict Marcello (1686-1739) was an outstanding writer and composer of both secular and sacred music. [Editor]

artistry with which the choir boys interpreted and gave voice to the great composer's genius.

The article closed as follows:

Praised be God, who in these tragic times allows us to witness such pageantry of piety and faith. We need not fear that Satan's power will prevail in our country as long as Mary, Help of Christians benevolently reaches out to protect us and we lovingly devote ourselves to Her.

This enables us to understand the impromptu remark made by Bishop Comboni during the pontifical Mass. Gazing about at the devout multitude as he presided at the Mass, he exclaimed with profound emotion, "*Digitus Dei est hic*—the finger of God is here!"

We have at random quoted some of Father Lazzero's comments which he jotted down in several notebooks. Though they are not many to speak of and quite brief, they prompt the following observation. Some nine-tenths of these notes refer to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Now when we consider that Father Lazzero was the director of the whole Oratory, we must conclude that under Don Bosco's leadership the entire house was solidly united in the functioning of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

One further detail. On the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, the Oratory family became practically doubled because, besides the many guests, the Oratory hosted the pupils of the neighboring Salesian schools and of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, along with many women who lived with the sisters. They too were Don Bosco's concern. How were so many to be fed? Don Bosco's Madonna took care of that by inspiring Her charitable devotees. As though someone had issued an order, a few days before the feast groceries of all kinds and fresh fruit and pastries began to heap up in such quantities that there was plenty for all. It was certainly no stretch of imagination to see in this the fulfillment of the Lord's words: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."⁵ [Mt. 6, 33]

We will not disrupt our chain of thought if we linger a bit further

⁵ *Bollettino Salesiano*, June 1880, p. 6. [Author]

on this topic and seek out a few news items scattered randomly in our archives which touch on the 1880 feast of Mary, Help of Christians.⁶ Anxiously eager to participate in all the solemn festivities personally, Father Anthony Agnolutto, a zealous Salesian cooperator, arrived at the Oratory on the evening of May 18, most cordially welcomed by Father Rua and the other superiors. He met Don Bosco the following morning but only toward seven that evening of May 20 did Don Bosco find time to chat with him as they both desired. They conversed until eight o'clock. The good priest, who brought him several donations, described his feelings as follows:

He made me feel so much at ease that I kept chatting on and on without restraint, much as one does with a very intimate friend. I must admit that I talked far more than he. I noticed that whereas I carelessly interrupted him, he never did so to me. Rather, he seemed ready to break off what he was saying as soon as I opened my mouth. He patiently heard me out as I told him about the various requests of the donors and then silently waited for me to total the donations, something I should have done before. I observed too that, lest he embarrass me, he handed me a pencil and then withdrew a bit from me as though to attend to some other matter.

Father Agnolutto also gave him a letter jointly written by four of his seminarians at Portogruaro [Venice]. Their conversation lasted until suppertime. After supper, Don Bosco kindly said to him, "If I did not fear to wrong your bishop, I would lock the doors and keep you always here."

"I would not mind that," Father Agnolutto replied, "but I think I would only be a hindrance here."

"How would you like a parish containing ten thousand souls in South America?" Don Bosco went on.

"I would accept it, if God so wished; but you would have to make me all over again and give me a lot more gifts."

"How about a parish of fifteen thousand souls?"

"All the more would I be unequal to the task."

Wishing each other good night they ended their conversation. Don Bosco's words made such an impression on the good priest

⁶Letter to Father Lemoyne from Father Antonio Agnolutto, Bagnarola (Udine), March 10, 1891. [Author]

that he began to wonder if they were an expression of God's will. The next morning, May 25, determined not to leave without a second interview with Don Bosco, he waited quietly in his room, knowing that Don Bosco had to pass that way to go downstairs. Hearing footsteps, he stepped out and, kneeling on the landing, asked for his blessing and then walked with him to the sacristy, where he finally plucked up his courage and asked Don Bosco's advice. After a moment's thought, Don Bosco told him to return to his diocese and continue always to be a good Salesian cooperator. He also promised him a letter as soon as possible. He kept his promise on June 17 and enclosed a note for the four seminarians we mentioned above.

Turin, June 17, 1880

My dear Father Agnolutto,

I am somewhat late, but I want to keep my promise. Please forward the enclosed note at your convenience; separately you will receive some holy pictures of Mary, Help of Christians for each of the four good clerics. Please tell them that I love them dearly in Jesus Christ.

Dear Father, I am grateful for all you are doing as a cooperator. God reward, bless and protect you! Anytime cooperator friends of yours come through Turin, please tell them that our home is theirs. I pray for them every day, and beg them to remember me also, so that we may mutually help each other in gaining souls for God while on earth, and one day be joined together in the Kingdom of glory.

God bless you and all our beloved cooperators. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I beg you and the four seminarians to bear with my poor handwriting.

Don Bosco had had a very important visitor on the eve of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians. He was Anton Lonkay, valiant editor of the Catholic journal *Idok Tannuja* of Budapest, passing through Turin on his way from Rome, where he had headed a group of Hungarian pilgrims, because he wished to meet Don Bosco, whom he only knew by reputation. He called at the Oratory toward evening, and Don Bosco welcomed him with his usual friendliness,

talking in Latin, which the journalist spoke fluently. He also left a donation and asked Don Bosco to enroll him as a Salesian cooperator; his piety edified all who had the good fortune to meet him.

2. DON BOSCO'S NAME DAY⁷

The yearly demonstrations of love and esteem customarily held on June 24 [feast of St. John the Baptist] were becoming ever more solemn, thanks to the attendance of men in high positions and of alumni, the broad range of gifts, the testimonial community gathering and the general enthusiasm. On the evening of June 23 Don Bosco expressed his thanks, deeply moved by the handsome tributes paid him at the opening of his name day celebration. He ended up by comparing himself to a cricket. "I am naught but a cricket which chirps and dies," he said. The next evening, during the second testimonial in his honor, the cricket simile prompted a genial speech given by one of the priests and a delightful dialogue given by three boys who spoke for their companions, saying, "Don Bosco is the mother cricket chirping to tell us we are to help him save our souls, while we baby crickets eagerly respond to his invitation." One huge transparency in a flood of colors flashed out the names of thirty-eight places where major Salesian houses were situated.

We have found inside a large envelope twenty-nine letters of good wishes written that year by Oratory boys on Don Bosco's name day. Most of them became Salesians; a few are still alive [1933]. We shall pick from each letter—in the same order we took them from the envelope—the most personally significant phrases. This will give us a better understanding of the intimate life of the Oratory in Don Bosco's time.

Joseph Zaio asks Don Bosco to pray for his vocation.

⁷In Italy, as in many other countries, the name day is observed with greater festivity than the birthday. It is a reminder that the child at baptism—his spiritual birthday—is placed under the protection of a saint whose virtues he should imitate. At his baptism Don Bosco had been named after the apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist—a very popular saint in Turin—began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. [Editor]

Maggiorino Olivazzo wants Don Bosco to call him "my son." *Joseph Rossi*, a third-year Latin student, would like to attend the spiritual retreat at Lanzo but is afraid that his parents may not allow it, and so he seeks Don Bosco's advice on the matter. The two *Fracchia brothers* tell their spiritual father that they sincerely love him. *Ramiro Lombardi* desires to become a missionary. *Emanuel Baudo* is eager to grow ever more worthy of Don Bosco's kindness. *Alvin Carmagnola* asks for Don Bosco's prayers that the good Lord may keep him humble and pure and may obtain for him exemption from military service. *John Aceto*, a bricklayer, asks to become a missionary at any cost; in fact he did become a priest and a most zealous missionary. *Albert Coatto* states that in his heart he will always be grateful to Don Bosco for his loving care. *Francis Guazzotti* feels moved to tears at the thought of all the benefits he receives from Don Bosco. *John Baptist Fauda*, a senior at Lanzo's secondary school, confides his steadfast resolve to become a Salesian missionary. *Horace Carlando* expresses truly moving words of humble gratitude. *Celestine Pirola* expresses himself as a poor lad anxious to repay Don Bosco for all he is doing but can repay him only with prayer. *Attilio Renzoni* asks him to intercede with God that he may improve his behavior. *James Agosta* offers his beloved father filial good wishes. *Linus Bongiovanni* desires Don Bosco's friendship and asks for an appointment to make his general confession. *Dominic Magistrini* requests Don Bosco's prayers for two people who have long neglected their religious duties. *Louis Trezzi* ask Don Bosco to pray that Mary, Help of Christians help him with his vocation. *Evasio Garrone*, recently discharged from military service, pleads with Don Bosco to admit him very soon as a cleric. *Thomas Dell'Antonio* regrets not having fully confided in Don Bosco and mentions the resulting spiritual suffering he underwent. *Francis Ansaldi* asks if he may attend the spiritual retreat at Lanzo. *Louis Crosazzo*, who worked in the Oratory bookstore, begs Don Bosco to obtain a spiritual grace for him from God. *Edward Rosatto* reminds him of a spiritual favor he had asked for a short time before. *Paul Graziano* seeks Don Bosco's continued help. *Edward Melandri* hopes to be one of Don Bosco's sons one day. *Camillo Rappa*, a typesetter in the Oratory printshop, promises to mend his ways. *Victor Mazzoni* asks Don Bosco to pray that the Lord will keep strengthening his

vocation. *Angelo Rossi*, a third-year Latin student, promises to mend his ways and asks Don Bosco's help. *Joseph Cazzaniga*, a bookstore worker, tells Don Bosco that he wants to stay with him always.⁸

Speaking to the alumni delegation, Don Bosco informed them that this time there would be two separate receptions for them: one on Sunday, July 25, for the laity, and one on the following Thursday for priests.

At the first assembly on the eve of Don Bosco's name day, there was an Italian Capuchin from Smyrna [now Izmir]. This good religious had never before witnessed such a manifestation of gratitude and voiced his feeling at table. "If the tree is known by its fruit," he said among other things, "then I must say that your demeanor, your gratitude, your avowals of love and your promises of loyalty prove to me that the Oratory is a healthy tree, one which should extend its roots through all the earth." Don Bosco spoke last, expressing his delight at seeing so many of his former pupils around him. He then reminisced about the early days of the Oratory: a poor little dwelling, a tiny chapel, an inadequate playground. Yet such humble beginnings gave rise to all that they could then see as well as what they could not see beyond Turin, in Italy and in all Europe. He then went on:⁹

I am delighted to know that you always conduct yourselves as good Christians and upright citizens. One of you made a comment in his speech on some ungrateful individual who has turned against his alma mater, causing us grief, but on this point we should remember two things. To start with, there were no ingrates among the first Oratory boys. Secondly, the ingrates were those who did not complete their studies because their bad conduct caused their dismissal. Anyway, we should not be surprised at finding some ingrates; there was one even among the twelve apostles, notwithstanding the fact that he had been educated for three years by the teacher par excellence, the Son of God Himself made man. We must pity

⁸Five days later, on the feast of St. Peter the Apostle, Don Bosco sent this telegram of good wishes to the Pope: "Most Holy Father, Rome. On this day sacred to the Prince of the Apostles, the Salesians humbly pay homage to his successor in the person of Your Holiness, invoking your apostolic benediction." Cardinal Nina, secretary of state, replied: "Holy Father graciously accepts pious Salesian homage; with paternal affection imparts the implored apostolic benediction." [Author]

⁹This speech of Don Bosco and one that followed were jotted down by Father Bonetti and published in the September issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. [Author]

them, because they are unhappy; let our revenge be in praying that they may see the light before they die. We are Salesians, and, as such, we forgive and forget and will continue to do all the good we can without ever hurting anyone. But though we must show charity to all, we should not become intimate with those who do not share our spirit. We must conduct ourselves with the simplicity of the dove and the cunning of the serpent, and guard ourselves from traitors.¹⁰

But, my dear sons, one thing alone I recommend to you above all else: wherever you may be, always conduct yourselves as good Christians and upright citizens. Love, respect and practice our holy faith, in which I have brought you up and shielded you from the dangers and corruption of the world; the faith which aids us in our earthly afflictions comforts us at the point of death and opens to us the gates of everlasting happiness.

Many of you already have a family. Give your children the same education you received from Don Bosco here at the Oratory. In this way, while many of your schoolmates traveled as far as South America to save souls and strove to spread the light of truth and true wisdom in the kingdom of darkness, error and vice, you can do the same within your possibilities here. Thus all of us together will promote God's greater glory throughout the world, share in saving souls, and lessen the evil let loose upon society. By so doing you will prove yourselves to be good Salesians and true sons of Don Bosco, whose only aim has been to populate heaven and depopulate hell. Our joyous banquet is at an end, but I invite you all to another which shall know no end. In the name of God and of Mary, Help of Christians I invite you to the banquet of heaven and ardently pray that none of you will be missing.

At the gathering of alumni priests, Father Felix Reviglio, pastor of St. Augustine's, was the one who best interpreted everyone's feelings. A huge poster on the front wall of the dining room bore the inscription: GRATEFUL AND DEVOTED SONS GATHER HERE FROM DIFFERENT CITIES AND TOWNS TO JOIN THE BEST OF FATHERS AT A JOYFUL BANQUET. Taking his cue from it, Father Reviglio commented:

Yes, grateful indeed we are, and it's a pleasure for us to proclaim it. How can we ever forget the loving care Don Bosco lavished upon us when we were inexperienced and immature young men? Who of us does not feel

¹⁰Probably the former pupils were alluding to [E. A. Giustina] the wretched editor of *La Cronaca dei Tribunali*. [Author]

a surge of gratitude to him as we recall his ineffable goodness, his loving exhortations to advance in virtue, his inexhaustible patience, his endless efforts to make us better? No, there are no ingrates among us, nor shall there ever be. We shall manifest our gratitude by conducting ourselves at all times and in all places as zealous, exemplary priests, just as Don Bosco would have us do, by publicizing his works, by supporting and boosting them, and by rising to his defense whenever ignorance or malice prompts anyone to question his intentions or distort facts, even if he be a person of high station.¹¹

The priests understood this final allusion. No speech could have met with heartier applause. In his calm way, as always, Don Bosco then addressed the gathering and all listened to him in reverent silence.

My dear sons, you cannot imagine the joy I feel at seeing you around me once again; I myself can never put it into words. (*His voice broke and everyone was deeply moved.*) I have always known that I care for you, but today my heart incontestably proves it. I am and always will be your most affectionate and loving father. I would dearly love to see you and talk more frequently with you, but most of you rarely get to Turin, and more often than not I am away, and so we miss each other. I hope that from now on we shall be able to get together at least once a year. I mean to continue holding this celebration for as long as God gives us life.

I have many things to tell you. Mainly I ask you to do all the good you can for the youth of your parish, your town, your village, and your own family. Don Bosco and his Salesians cannot be everywhere, nor can they open schools and festive oratories wherever there is need. My dearly beloved, you received your early education in this very house. You are imbued with the spirit of St. Francis de Sales and have learned how to help youngsters improve themselves. Fill in for us according to your ability. Come to Don Bosco's aid to attain all the more readily and on a larger scale our noble goals—the welfare of the Church and of civil society—by caring for destitute youngsters. I am not saying that you are to neglect adults, but these, with few exceptions, you well know are hardly responsive to our efforts. Let us therefore concentrate on young ones, shielding them from danger, drawing them to catechetical instruction, exhorting them to receive the sacraments, safeguarding them from evil, and leading them back to virtue. By so doing you will see the fruits of your

¹¹See p. 207 and the Index under "*Cronaca dei Tribunali.*" [Editor]

efforts, you will cooperate in the upbringing of good Christians, good families, good people, and you will stem the present and future flood of irreligion and corruption.

In order to succeed with youngsters, take great pains to be kind to them; win their love, not their fear. Show them convincingly that you are working for their spiritual well-being; be patient and gentle in correcting them, and, above all, do not strike them. In a word, act in such a way that once they spot you, they will run over to you rather than dash off, as so often happens, and justifiably so because they fear a beating. Perhaps in some cases your sacrifices may seem wasted. Perhaps then and there, yes, but not for long, not even with the most unruly. Your good advice, welcome or unwelcome at the moment, and your kindness will leave an impression on their minds and hearts. The time will come when the good seed will sprout, bloom, and bear fruit.

Let me tell you what happened to me just a few weeks ago. Early this month an army captain was seen walking around the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and the Oratory wall. He seemed to be looking for something which was no longer there. After a futile search, he asked one of us who was walking into the grounds, "Would you please tell me where Don Bosco's Oratory is?"

"Right here, sir."

"Really? There used to be a meadow here once, and a shabby little house over there which threatened to fall at any moment. Then there was also a shabby looking shed which served as a chapel and could not be seen from the outside."

"I have often heard how things were at the beginning, just as you described them," came the answer, "but I did not have the chance to see them. Definitely this is the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales or, as you call it, Don Bosco's Oratory. If you would like to come inside, you are most welcome."

The captain came in, thoroughly looked at everything, and then asked with astonishment, "And where is Don Bosco's room?"

"Up there."

"Could I talk to him?"

"I believe so."

He was introduced to me. As soon as he saw me, he exclaimed, "Oh, Don Bosco, do you still recognize me?"

"I don't recall having ever seen you before."

"Yet you did see me, and you talked to me and were concerned about me several times. Don't you remember a certain V . . . who caused you so much trouble and worry in 1847, 1848 and 1849? Don't you recall the many times you told me to keep quiet in church and kept me close to you

during catechism class lest I cause trouble? And how seldom I went to confession?"

"Oh, I surely remember that. Yes, I even recall how, when the bell rang, you used to duck into the church by one door and dash out the other, forcing me to chase you."

Then, after telling me the main events of his past thirty years, the captain added, "I never forgot you or the Oratory. I got to Turin just a short while ago and came right over to see you. Now I want you to hear my confession." I gladly agreed. Before letting him go, I asked him, "What prompted you to make your confession?" Do you know his answer? "Seeing you again," he said, "reminded me of all the tricks you used to keep me on the right path: the words you used to whisper in my ear, and your exhortations to go to confession. These things prompted me to do it."

My dear sons, if a soldier can still remember the religious doctrines taught to him in his youth, notwithstanding the moral perils of military life and, when given the opportunity, asks to make his confession, why should we lose heart and become depressed if we do not get immediate results from our youngsters? Let us sow the seed and then, as all farmers do, patiently wait for the harvest. However, I stress again, never forget loving kindness: win over the boys' hearts through love. Always bear in mind the maxim of St. Francis de Sales, "More flies are caught with a cup of honey than with a barrel of vinegar."

Don Bosco continued his talk, but we do not have the rest of it. We should not pass over in silence the humorous way in which he scheduled the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of his first Mass on the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity in 1891.

It's quite true that eleven years is plenty of time for advance notice and invitations. Nevertheless, as of now I invite all of you here present to dine with me on that occasion, and I hope that nobody will be missing. In fact, I am already appointing my assistants at Mass. Father [Felix] Reviglio, the pastor of St. Augustine's, will be deacon; Father [Charles] Vaschetti, vicar forane of Volpiano, subdeacon; Father [Hyacinth] Ballesio, pastor and vicar forane of Moncalieri, assisting priest; Father Ascanio Savio, rector of the Rifugio,¹² master of ceremonies. We'll plan the rest in due course. Should the Most High dispose otherwise for us, then let us strive, my dear children, to meet unfailingly in heaven for a celebration that will have no end.

¹²An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco had served as chaplain. See Vol. II, pp. 184f. [Editor]

3. TWO ATTEMPTS ON DON BOSCO'S LIFE

Don Bosco's many successes so deprived the enemies of God and the Church of their sleep that they settled on extreme measures to get rid of him. Our readers already know of many other attempts made against his life,¹³ but one would think that once his works won public admiration, resort would not be had to such savage and brutal designs. Yet in 1880, two possibly related attempts, plotted by anticlericals, were made on his life within a short time.

The first had been set for the latter weeks of June by one Alexander Dasso, a former Oratory pupil who worked at his trade in Turin. The young man came to the Oratory gate and asked to speak with Don Bosco. Since he knew his way about the house, he went straight to the room and was taken to Don Bosco.

Distraught in appearance, he seemed to be totally lost in anxious cares of his own, far distant from the priest facing him. Don Bosco's greeting was as usual cordial, but the youth kept silent and seemed to grow ever more nervous, so that Don Bosco asked him, "What do you want? Speak. You know Don Bosco cares for you." At that the visitor fell on his knees, burst into tears, and sobbingly told him that he had joined the Freemasons and they had decreed Don Bosco's death. Twelve members had been chosen by lot to assassinate him and he was first in line. "I had to be the first, me of all persons!" he cried. "That's why I'm here, but I shall never do such a thing! I know they will get back at me and kill me for telling you, but I could never murder Don Bosco. Never!" With these words he took out his concealed weapon and threw it to the floor.

Don Bosco helped him to his feet and tried to soothe and support him, but he could not. The poor fellow dashed out of the room as though driven into an abyss by a mysterious force. Don Bosco immediately sent a note to the boy's father, a level-headed person, to come immediately to the Oratory. He obliged, and Don Bosco told him the whole story. The young man, however, torn by remorse, plunged into the Po River on June 23. Fortunately two customs officers,¹⁴ who happened to be nearby, managed to rescue him. They turned him over to two policemen to escort him home.

¹³See Vol. III, pp. 211f; Vol. IV, pp. 54f, 118, 486-496. [Editor]

¹⁴At this time people entering the city from the outside had to pay duty on certain goods. [Editor]

Two days later his father informed Don Bosco about the boy's attempt and asked for help. "Dear Don Bosco," he wrote, "you are the father of wayward boys. I entrust my son to your endless charity." Don Bosco repeatedly spoke with this heartbroken father on how best to bring his son back to the right path and protect him from the Freemasons' wrath. In addition to giving him generous assistance, Don Bosco quietly got him out of Italy to a safe refuge where he lived incognito until the end of his days.

The second attempt on Don Bosco's life was made in December and was even more startling. A young gentleman in his mid-twenties called on Don Bosco, who courteously asked him to sit beside him on the sofa. A quick look at the visitor's appearance was quite discouraging. His eyes had a sinister flash, and an ill-concealed nervousness immediately warned Don Bosco to be on his guard. The young man sat and talked and rambled from topic to topic, sometimes becoming excited and gesticulating madly. In one of his frantic flailings, a small six-chambered handgun slid out of his pocket onto the sofa. Unnoticed, Don Bosco put his hand over it and deftly pocketed it. Meanwhile, his visitor began provoking him into a quarrel. At a certain point he suddenly looked swiftly about him and thrust his hand into his pocket. Rummaging with increasing surprise and anger, he sprang to his feet, looking about him, unable to regain his composure. Don Bosco also stood up and, as the young man kept searching anxiously, asked with great calm, "What are you looking for?"

"I had something here, in my pocket, and I can't find it. Where did it go?"

"Maybe you only thought you had it with you," Don Bosco suggested.

"Nonsense!" the young man replied, and fidgeted about the room, straying also into the next room.

Don Bosco quickly stepped to the outer door of that room. Grasping the doorknob with his left hand so as to be able to open it quickly, he leveled the revolver against the man and calmly stated, "This is what you were looking for, isn't it?"

At first the scoundrel stood dumbfounded, but as he moved to get his hands on the gun, Don Bosco firmly told him, "Get out fast and may God have mercy on you!" He flung the door open and bade several people waiting in the anteroom to escort the man out of the

Oratory. The would-be murderer hesitated, but Don Bosco firmly stated, "Get out and never return." He finally complied, and two members of the Oratory took him as far as the street, where a group of hoodlums clustered in conversation beside a waiting coach. As soon as they realized that the attempt had failed, some leaped into the coach and dashed off, while the others took to their heels. The young man was left alone and walked off, crestfallen, along Via Cottolengo.

On escaping unscathed from this second attempt on his life, Don Bosco called for Father Margotti and asked him if the police should be notified. After mature deliberation they decided to take no action. Father Cagliero was present at their discussion.

4. THE NELVA ESTATE

Don Bosco took steps to acquire more land to extend the Oratory's property. The building, which today [1933] parallels the auditorium and whose lobby displays a marble bust of Father [Joseph] Pavia,¹⁵ was free-standing in those days and, with a strip of land measuring 2,015 square meters and stretching as far as Via Cottolengo,¹⁶ belonged to Mr. John Baptist Nelva. On learning that both house and land were on the market, Don Bosco moved to buy them. Difficulties arose on both sides, but Father Rua, who was free to act in Don Bosco's name, signed the contract on August 17, 1880, a few days before going to Marseille to preside over the annual spiritual retreat. The sale was made for 13,500 lire and bound Don Bosco to sell Mr. Nelva a building lot at the corner of Via Cottolengo and Via Allione, known today as Via Salerno, for the sum of twelve thousand lire. For many years the Nelva house and land served respectively as residence and playground for the Valdocco festive oratory.

5. THE SECOND GENERAL CHAPTER

We have much less to record about the second general chapter, convoked in 1880, than we did about the first¹⁷ because we as yet

¹⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁶See Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*, Plate VIII-C. [Author]

¹⁷See Vol. XIII, pp. 177-219. [Editor]

have to see any records of it. The minutes were either never formally drawn up or were lost. Only one of the participants survives, Father Angelo Rocca,¹⁸ who was then director of our hospice at La Spezia. From his few and fading recollections of this distant event, it would seem that the chapter was conducted with a minimum of formalities.

As before, the chapter was held at Lanzo in September, but, unlike the first time, Don Bosco did not feel that any special preparations for this general chapter had to be made. Then too, as Father Rocca wrote, quite a few of the directors and delegates were very young, not sufficiently mature to make substantial contributions to the discussions. The older members, Father Rocca remarked, looked quite haggard and in need of rest. Topics themselves were not such as to generate interest or call for serious study. The most important decision came at the close of the chapter, when it was unanimously agreed to entrust all deliberations to the superior chapter which would continue working to finalize them.

Only three documents of this general chapter remain. The first is the letter of convocation which notifies the participants that since the terms of office of all the members of the superior chapter, except the rector major, were expiring, new elections would be held.¹⁹ The second document, a circular written by Don Bosco in Latin to the directors and other superiors of the various houses, is dated the first day of the novena of the Immaculate Conception and was mailed from Turin. Since time was needed to concretize, organize and publish the chapter's deliberations, Don Bosco felt that he should call attention to the following items:

1. Study the deliberations of the first general chapter, especially items on morality and thrift.
2. Make the monthly manifestation and Exercise for a Happy Death.
3. No sea bathing, unless prescribed by a doctor.
4. Sincere obedience to superiors. Do not leave the house without proper permission and just reason. Do not keep money or spend it without need or

¹⁸See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁹The letter was written by Father Rua and signed by Don Bosco who added in his own hand: "P.S. Our present directory lists all members of the superior chapter and points out the professed members who qualify as candidates for election." This circular had been mailed to all directors. [Author]

beyond limits allowed by the superior. 5. Eradicate that one source of all evil: summer vacations at home or in friends' homes. 6. Lead an exemplary life; avoid all that might have even the appearance of scandal. 7. Be patient, loving and kind in deed and word. 8. All should write to the rector major in February or March to tell him of their health and vocation.

The directors were asked to give conferences to the confreres on these topics, so essential to practicing the Salesian lifestyle.

The third and most important document is the booklet entitled *Deliberations* published two years later.²⁰ Reading it and comparing it with the decisions of the former chapter make it clear that the second general chapter was only a revision and supplement of the first. A few things were slightly amended in the light of experience; some points, hitherto undecided, were added. The few provisional statements of 1877 which had formed the brief chapter, entitled *Studies in the Salesian Society*, were replaced by two long paragraphs under the heading *Ecclesiastical Studies* and *Philosophic and Literary Studies*. Moreover, previous regulations concerning provincials, directors, general chapters, and the government of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians which had already been amended or expanded were further expanded by the addition of two more regulations which had been under study since 1877; they dealt with the election of members of the superior chapter and the duties of each confrere. From this we realize that the second general chapter was not considered as important as the first by the chapter members themselves and by the confreres.

In presenting the new handbook of *Deliberations* to the Salesians, Don Bosco wrote: "The growth of our Pious Society in Europe and South America is a sure sign that God is blessing it most particularly. Therefore let every Salesian resolve to become ever more worthy of God's grace by his spirit of prayer, obedience and sacrifice. We can attain this spirit by the exact observance of our constitutions and of these deliberations." Previously he had also stated that, to a very great extent, the growth of our Society and the spiritual progress of its members hinged on the observance of its rules and of the deliberations of the general chapter.

²⁰*Deliberazioni del secondo Capitolo Generale della Pia Società Salesiana tenuto in Lanzo Torinese nel Settembre 1880, Torino, Tipografia Salesiana, 1881.* [Author]

CHAPTER 20

Accusations, a Misunderstanding and a Revealing Dream

We now resume the painful account of new ordeals which Don Bosco had to endure as, with single heart, he sought the glory of God and the Church and labored for the spiritual advantage of souls. We begin with the closing phase of the conflict which was sparked by the publicizing of graces that the faithful attributed to the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians.¹ It was soon after the beautiful celebration of [this feast on] May 24, 1880 that Archbishop [Lawrence] Gastaldi brought charges against Don Bosco to the Holy See for having published without his consent accounts of miracles performed by the Blessed Virgin. It is advisable to read the entire document.²

[No date]

Most Holy Father:

In 1868 the newly founded Salesian Congregation erected a church in Turin and dedicated it to Mary, Help of Christians; a few years later they came out with a book full of *wondrous favors and miracles* said to have taken place in that church and elsewhere through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians. The book was submitted to my chancery and passed on to a censor, a priest who gave it his *nihil obstat*. Thereupon the book was published, though it bore neither the signature of my vicar general nor

¹See Vol. XI, pp. 420-425. [Editor]

²This is a copy of the draft written in the archbishop's hand and kept by Father [Dominic] Franchetti³ of Turin, whom we have already mentioned on several occasions. From this original the chancery secretary made the copy that was forwarded to Rome. The italicized words were emphasized in the original. [Author]

³At the death of Canon Thomas Chiuso, private secretary of Archbishop Gastaldi, Father Franchetti bought the canon's library and found among the books a bundle of letters and manuscripts concerning the conflicts between the archbishop and Don Bosco. He generously made them available to the Salesians. [Editor]

that of any *official of my chancery*. After publication it was announced in the press that *the archbishop had approved the book*. I was thus forced to declare through the diocesan paper that the *nihil obstat* of one of my revisors in no way implied the archbishop's *approval*.

Soon after, the Salesians put out a second edition of the book, tacking on further miracles. This time the book was sent for approval to the chancery of Genoa, which gave its *nihil obstat*, and this second edition was distributed throughout the archdiocese of Turin under the imprint of the Salesian Press of Sampierdarena.

This year, 1880, a book entitled . . . ,⁴ most certainly printed in Turin but purported to have been issued by the Sampierdarena Press, has been published by the Salesians with the imprimatur of the chancery of Genoa. It is full of accounts of wondrous favors obtained in the past few years through the invocation of Mary, Help of Christians, venerated in her church in Turin.

The Council of Trent in the decree issued in its twenty-fifth session on the invocation and veneration [of saints] stated: "*This holy Synod orders . . . nowhere, not even in an exempt church, are any new miracles to be proclaimed unless the bishop has examined and approved them.*" And the canonist Ferraris, under the word "miracles," proves conclusively that the bishop has the right to veil all images and to shut down a church, even one owned by religious, until an investigation has been conducted into the so-called miracles reported to have been wrought by those images or in that particular church.

I therefore wrote to the superior general of the Salesians, asking him to send the chancery all evidence and testimonies to show that these wondrous graces are authentic, but, apart from an inconclusive reply, I have received nothing.

In the meantime this book is circulating by the thousands all over the city and diocese of Turin and all over Italy as well, proclaiming that these wondrous events have been taking place over the past eight years. They are so presented that, if real, they would have taken place under my very eyes. They are publicized far and wide without my investigation, without my approval, without my slightest consent, indeed—it would appear—in defiance of my orders published in the archdiocesan liturgical calendar of 1878.

True, these books carry a disclaimer, in conformity with the decrees of Urban VIII, stating that the accounts of these miracles carry no more than

⁴No title is cited in the original. It probably alludes to *La Città di rifugio* [The City of Refuge] edited by Father Lemoyne and published in May 1880's *Letture Cattoliche*, Issue No. 330. [Author]

purely human authority. But does this meet the requirements of the Council of Trent? I do not think so, for these are not events that took place in the *ancient past* or in *far-off places*; they are said to be happening in our time, in this archdiocesan see, and as if *under the very gaze* of the archbishop of Turin, whom the Council of Trent charges to investigate and authenticate those so-called miracles before they are publicly proclaimed. It is obvious, therefore, that, if we abide by the decree of Trent, such wondrous events are in no way to be publicized, most especially in the diocese where they are said to have occurred, without previous *investigation and authentication by the local bishop*.

Furthermore, what kind of human authority are we talking about here? Does it not mean that the competent authority is to study and approve the testimony of witnesses? And who is the authority competent to interrogate witnesses, judge their credibility, and determine whether or not the events they have witnessed are miraculous? The Council of Trent has decreed that it must be the bishop of that diocese. Therefore there is no such thing as a *human authority* in regard to miracles prior to the bishop's investigation and determination.

Let me also say that Turin has a population of 240,000, with a good number of learned people, university professors and students, and numerous highly respected magistrates. If these events are heedlessly publicized as miracles to the belief of thousands—not without a semblance of prospective and substantial profit-making—the Church authorities cannot help but conclude that the educated world of today, already inclined either to incredulity or to obstinate rejection of any and every supernatural principle, will react by scoffing at the miracles recorded in Sacred Scripture or in Church history. Let us not forget that in 1877 a young woman hospitalized in The Little House of Divine Providence carried on a grand deception in Turin for nine months by fraudently claiming to be *hypnotized*.

It is therefore my considered opinion that the Salesians are to be strictly enjoined from publishing further reports of any kind of miracle wrought in Turin's Church of Mary, Help of Christians without the previous authorization of the Church authorities, and that they should be ordered to withdraw from circulation and destroy all literature hitherto published concerning these so-called miracles.

I feel that it is very gravely incumbent upon me to inform Your Holiness of these matters, so that, in your wisdom, you may take such measures as you deem advisable.

Imploring your apostolic blessing upon myself and my diocese, I remain, etc.

The Pope passed the letter on to Cardinal Bartolini, prefect of the Congregation of Rites, who asked the archbishop for copies of the books in question, assuring him of a thorough investigation. The archbishop sent the books with a fiery covering letter.⁵ The investigation was entrusted officially to Monsignor Lawrence Salvati, promoter of the faith. His report on the veracity of events was issued on July 16. In substance he made the following points: there is no doubt that any canonical investigation and decision on miracles attributed to God's power or to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary or the saints is the exclusive concern of the bishop; nevertheless, it is not always easy or advisable to conduct such a canonical investigation and approval, one reason being that some miraculous events "such as those of Turin are often more apparently favors rather than miracles." In such cases—Monsignor Salvati continued—he was of the opinion that, according to a decree of the Holy Inquisition, dated May 23, 1668, it was the bishops' duty to examine and approve books beforehand lest they contain doctrinal errors or statements which sound odd, ridiculous or contrary to sound critique. At the same time they were not to express an opinion or positively assert the truthfulness of miraculous events; rather, they were only to allow their publication as simple accounts resting solely on grounds of human probability, sufficient to give some degree of certainty. Hence, an explicit statement of the author to this effect, conforming to the standard decree of Urban VIII, is sufficient. These were the norms—as the promoter of the faith explained in detail—which were recently applied by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in two recent decrees concerning two cases presented respectively by the bishop of Santiago, Chile, and the bishop of Capua.⁶ He stated further:

⁵We have the letter sent to the cardinal. It was written by the archbishop's secretary, only the date and the signature being in the archbishop's hand. It was notarized by B. Natale under No. 2993. (Editor's note: This letter is filed as Document 59 in the Appendix of this volume in the Italian original.) [Author]

⁶The former asked about the authenticity of Our Lady's apparition to St. Peter Nolasco in Barcelona and about publishing this apparition as miraculous. The reply stated that the Sacred Congregation neither approved nor rejected the apparition, but allowed its publication as something worthy of simple human credence; it might therefore be published or publicized by word of mouth if the usual norms were followed. The bishop of Capua, who had made a similar request concerning the miracles at Lourdes and La Salette, received an identical reply. [Author]

These are the norms commonly followed nowadays everywhere, including Rome. Properly run shrines keep a record of favors received, which occasionally bear marks of the supernatural and which the faithful report they have personally witnessed. Being convinced that they obtained these favors from the Queen of Heaven, they fulfill the vows they made. When advisable, an edifying collection of these accounts, well documented, is published in booklet form with the approval of the competent Church reviewers, who follow the norms set for biographies and accounts of miracles attributed to the saints, the blessed, and the servants of God.

Monsignor Salvati did not brush off the very serious insinuation of sordid gain. Rather, he superbly rebutted Archbishop Gastaldi's charge as follows:

Donations of money and precious objects generously given to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians do not constitute sordid gain because they are all free-will offerings prompted by a simple religious feeling of gratitude and are in themselves eloquent affirmations of favors having been granted. They are signs and acknowledgments which God in every age and time has always welcomed for His greater glory and the edification of His people. Every shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary boasts of similar precious ex-voto gifts and donations as well as many votive plaques which over the years witness to miraculous cures and marvelous favors. Newer shrines—such as that at Lourdes—owe their origin to a long succession of miracles and generous votive offerings made by persons who have been the recipients of favors.

Monsignor Salvati then offered a personal word of advice, counseling a more dignified presentation and more careful regard to detail. He planned to suggest to the “good Salesian Fathers” to better achieve their pious intents by publishing as soon as they could a new, thoroughly revised edition of at least their main publications endorsed with the nihil obstat of the local bishop. That the ordinary of another diocese was requested to approve a publication narrating miraculous events which took place in Turin, in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, he felt was an unintentional oversight.

Don Bosco received a copy of this report. In turn, he submitted the matter to the learned Jesuit canonist, Father [John Baptist] Rostagno, who drew up a report proving four points: 1. Miracles attributed to canonized saints do not require the ordinary's rigorous

investigation before being published, but only a simple reading to guarantee that the publication contains nothing smacking of superstition or offensive to doctrine and devotion. 2. As Avanzini⁷ wrote in the *Acta Sanctae Sedis*—with the approval of the Master of Sacred Palaces—ecclesiastical review was not required either in Italy or in Belgium and France; in fact, the requirement of the bishop's review was not observed by the clergy even in Turin.⁸ 3. The Salesians had obtained the approval of the ordinary of the diocese where the book was printed, and that was sufficient. The objection that the pamphlets had actually been printed in Turin could be rebutted by the fact that Archbishop Gastaldi had himself approved books published in other dioceses by authors not under his own jurisdiction. 4. The archbishop's demand to investigate the miracles because they were related to an image venerated in a church of his archdiocese was inadmissible, since the rigorous investigation ordered by the Council of Trent concerned cases very different from this.

To clarify matters Don Bosco sent Father Rostagno's report to Cardinal Bartolini and at the same time got in touch with Monsignor Salvati, inviting him to the Oratory. We regret that we have no copy of this letter, for, as we gather from the monsignor's reply, it states his readiness to do everything he could to eliminate all causes of disagreement. We quote from Monsignor Salvati's answer of August 26:

Let me dutifully assure you of my deep esteem for your most worthy person and of my thanks for the noble, courteous tenor of your letter; I did nothing more than carry out my office. As for the controversy, I draw your attention to the remarks I made for the future after I checked out the facts as they appear in the documents. I think that the most important point is the practical suggestion of how we might work out some solution to this regrettable difference of opinion. I am delighted to learn from you that the

⁷Father Peter Avanzini (1832-1874) was the founder of the *Acta Sanctae Sedis* (1865) which in 1871 became officially the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. [Editor]

⁸Among other cases, Father Rostagno cited that of Father Corte, a Rosminian who published a series of vicious articles defending his philosophy course against the attacks of a Jesuit and against the entire Society of Jesus. He drew heavily from Pascal's⁹ *Provincial Letters* and from his annotator, and then collected his own articles in one volume which he published [in Turin] without ecclesiastical approval. The chancery office said not a word about it. [Author]

⁹Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), philosopher, mathematician and apologist. [Editor]

whole matter is without foundation. This is not the first time the devil has built up on nothing a mountain of obstacles against God's finest works. Once we are aware of the deceit, we can easily guard against it and, using the prudence which is your hallmark, come up with a victory. As for coming to Turin, I gratefully accept your cordial offer and shall avail myself of it at my first suitable opportunity. I will be happy and honored to meet you personally.

We have narrated the sequel of the clarification given above in Volume XI.¹⁰ One weak point of the archbishop's charges was that he labeled as "miracles" what were presented simply as "favours." The whole controversy proves our assertion, and an incident on November 6 confirms it. The owner of Binelli Press, which was publishing Agreda's¹¹ *Mystical City of God*, personally presented a complimentary copy of the first volume to Archbishop Gastaldi. After glancing through the book, the archbishop was not pleased with the offer and stated that at best he would not forbid its publication.¹²

"How do you hope to market the book?" he asked.

"Hopefully some friendly readers will help me. Besides, I shall give a sizable number of copies on consignment to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales."

"The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales?" echoed the archbishop in wonderment.

"Yes, at Don Bosco's bookstore."

"Quite proper! The miracles related in the *Mystical City of God* are very similar to Don Bosco's 'miraculous wonders.' If Our Lady really works them, fine! If not, he makes them up and sells them."

The May issue of *Catholic Readings* kept carrying accounts of these favours year after year, with the ready approval of the bishop of Genoa, as if they were printed at Sampierdarena. However, great caution was taken not to mislead readers into judging as

¹⁰Pages 424f. [Editor]

¹¹Maria de Agreda (1602-1665), a discalced Franciscan nun, was a Spanish mystic writer. [Editor]

¹²The original work *Mística ciudad de Dios*, a detailed biography of the Blessed Virgin Mary purportedly revealed by angels to Maria de Agreda, aroused both great acclaim and harsh condemnation when it was published in 1670. In 1683 it was placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books*, but eventually it was removed from it since it did not contain doctrinal errors. It did, however, affect adversely Maria de Agreda's process of beatification. [Editor]

“miracles” events which were only simple favors in response to prayer.

To this year also belongs a despicable house search of the Oratory. On the morning of August 28 a city official and a squad of police descended on the Oratory printshop and ordered all hands to remain at their posts, while guards took up strategic positions. Then a careful search began, though no one knew what the police were looking for. Only when the galley proofs of the *Bollettino Salesiano* were confiscated was the secret let out, but nobody knew why. Officially the periodical carried the imprint of Sampierdarena, but frequently circumstances made it necessary to have it printed at the Oratory. This was an expedient to avoid endless conflicts with the Turin chancery and consequent delays caused by submitting it for ecclesiastical approval. The official pulled the police out, announced that the search was over, and, when asked for an explanation, sarcastically replied, “Conflict of rights!” Before leaving, however, he was made to draw up a report stating that de facto the printshops of Turin and Sampierdarena were really one.

Don Bosco was not at the Oratory at the time. He was preaching a spiritual retreat to some women and subsequently to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato. When informed of what had happened, he wrote Father Rua this note:

Nizza Monferrato, August 21, 1880

Dear Father Rua,

I have no idea why the police conducted a house search. We have always considered the printshop at Sampierdarena a branch of the one in Turin and sent jobs there only to give our boys work to do. Both shops are approved by the government. If we have to go through more formalities, let them tell us and we shall comply.

Come to me here so we can talk. You can leave Turin on Sunday at nine in the morning via the Turin-Bra-Nizza line. You’d get here by two in the afternoon and you can leave for Genoa at six-thirty in the evening.¹³

If you intend to spend the night here, come on any train you like. The Asti-Castagnole train leaves Turin at one in the afternoon, arriving at

¹³Father Rua was to leave for Marseille to conduct the spiritual retreat for the Salesians.
[Author]

Nizza at six. Check the timetable.

Until we meet, may God bless us all. Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Anxious as always to protect his Oratory from harmful suspicions, he wrote directly to the king's procurator on his return to Turin to find out the real reason for the unexpected house search.

Turin, August 31, 1880

Dear Sir:

The police came to this home on the eighteenth of this month and conducted a search to ascertain where—it was said—the *Bollettino Salesiano* is being printed, at Valdocco or at Sampierdarena.

Since I was away at the time and the person interrogated probably could not give the police satisfactory answers, I feel that I should sum up the situation briefly and exactly.

The *Bollettino* was originally known as the *Bibliofilo* [Booklover]. While it was being printed in Turin we followed all laws and dutifully sent sample copies to the proper officials, as may be verified from receipts signed by your office.

In September 1877 the poor boys at our hospice in Sampierdarena needed work to do, and so from Turin we sent the necessary equipment along with a group of instructions for the printing of the *Bibliofilo* or *Bollettino Salesiano*.

Please note that all the time the magazine was being printed here in Turin, the city did not demand that a manager be named, since it was merely a catalogue of books we printed and sold. It was only in September 1877 that the king's procurator in Genoa required that it have a manager, and Mr. Joseph Ferrari was immediately named and is still in office.

From September 1877 to August 13 of this year all government regulations on publishing have been complied with, as you may ascertain from the public reports issued by the king's procurator. But the binding and the mailing of the *Bollettino* continued to be done in Turin, where we have more young apprentices for that work.

Printing instead continued to be done, totally or in part, at Sampierdarena; it is done here in Turin only when the printshop at Sampierdarena cannot fit it into its other jobs, since the *Bollettino* must meet deadlines.

It is quite obvious from all this that our printshop here in Turin forms

one entity with that at Sampierdarena, since both have a single owner responsible for all the work and the presses, and also because all my poor boys work on a temporary basis in either shop, depending on demand, so that both shops are really two branches of a single publishing house. In this and in all matters I have made it my sacred duty to comply with the law. I never felt that the present set-up violated the law in any way. Should there be any other formalities I must conform with—I do not know of any—please notify me, so that I may continue educating these poor working lads to whose moral and social betterment I have dedicated my life, without all the upset and worry that this house searched caused us.

If the search was prompted by some other violation of law or for political reasons, I respectfully and earnestly ask you to tell me of it for my own guidance and for that of my other hostels, unless it is a confidential matter reserved to your office.

I am sure you will understand my frankness in writing. I am honored to remain,

Your most humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

In time it came to be known through a young man named Vallero, an Oratory alumnus employed at the civil court at Borgo Dora, that the house search had been prompted by two anonymous letters alleging that secret publications were being run off by the Oratory presses. One copy of the above letter carries a note of Father Berto stating that the whole thing seems to have been masterminded by Canon [Emanuel] Colomiatti, fiscal attorney for the archdiocesan chancery. Whatever the magistrate replied to Don Bosco's letter, the charges apparently never reached the courts.

While all this was going on, two other complaints were filed [against Don Bosco], one with the Salesians' cardinal protector, the other with the Sacred Congregation of the Council. We do not know the contents of Archbishop Gastaldi's letter to Cardinal Nina, but we do have the actual text of the second.¹⁴ Among other charges we read:

This past year, as a public sign of my esteem and trust in Don Bosco, I offered him *ownership* of a private house and garden of mine in Turin,

¹⁴Letter from Archbishop Gastaldi to the cardinals of the Congregation of the Council, Turin, December 5, 1880. [Author]

with the sole condition that two of his religious run free classes and a festive oratory for the poor boys of the neighborhood. However, I have not received even the courtesy of an answer.

The facts are as follows. Archbishop Gastaldi, anxious to annex to the new Church of the Sacred Heart a free school and a festive oratory for boys, addressed a letter to Father Cagliero on March 22, 1880 in which he stated that he was offering him and, through him, to the Salesian Congregation a home and property of his own, along with six thousand lire, on condition that the Salesians agree to run in perpetuity two elementary grades for poor boys through ten months of the year, as well as a festive oratory. Two contracts were to be drawn up: a notarized deed of sale to three members of the Congregation, and a contract between the archbishop, Father Rua, Father Cagliero and the three property recipients who would accept the aforesaid obligations in the name of the Congregation. If the conditions were not met, the property would temporarily revert to the archbishop of Turin. This agreement would be submitted to the approval of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He enclosed a plan of the building in the letter and expected an affirmative reply.

Since Archbishop Gastaldi addressed the letter to Father Cagliero, he knew that Don Bosco was away in Rome at the time. Father Cagliero did not reply immediately, because he wanted to wait until Don Bosco's return. The archbishop wrote to him again on April 8: "Please come to see me as soon as possible to discuss the matter I wrote to you about, since I am most anxious to settle it as quickly as possible." Father Cagliero then called on the archbishop.

He and other superiors knew that the same offer had been made to other religious communities and been turned down. After carefully checking the matter out, Father Cagliero told the archbishop that, for lack of personnel and funds, the Salesian Congregation could not accept a new undertaking and its obligations on only three hundred lire a year, which is what the six thousand lire came down to. He therefore concluded that for the time being it would be impossible to take on a burden of such size.

The archbishop concurred with Father Cagliero that an annual stipend of only three hundred lire a year would be inadequate to run the project, and so they agreed to suspend negotiations until the opening of the new church and house of St. John the Evangelist, not very far from the locality. Then it would not be a strain to send two teachers from there to run the projected classes every morning and afternoon.

Everything seemed now to be running smoothly, but then Don Bosco received this letter from Cardinal Nina:

Rome, June 23, 1880

My dear Father,

I understand from reliable sources that several months ago the archbishop of Turin offered to donate to the Salesian Congregation a handsome home and spacious grounds, his personal property, in the area of the new parish church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It was his wish that the Salesians open two free elementary grades for poor boys of the neighborhood, since such facilities are badly needed in that new development. Besides the property he also offered six thousand lire, a sum he would readily increase should he have to do so to enhance his offer.

As I was told, the offering was coldly received on the part of your Congregation, so much so that the archbishop finally had to write and ask you to call on him to discuss the matter.

Rather than see him personally, it seems that you sent a member of your Congregation to ascertain his wishes, and he was told to wait for your decision and has yet to receive a definite reply.

I will not hide my disappointment on learning of this. After all the differences that have come between you and the archbishop, I should think you would have done all you could to go along with his kind offer and give him a token of your anxious care to keep friendly relations with him. Since I do not doubt this concern of yours, I must conclude that some serious reasons are keeping you from making a decision to accept or refuse the offer; nevertheless, I feel that your attitude in this matter is not conducive to ease the tension which you yourself have often deplored.

Since I do not intend to base my opinion only on hearsay, please send me your clarifications on this matter. With great esteem,

Affectionately yours,
Lawrence Cardinal Nina

Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, July 10, 1880

Your Eminence,

Since the request of the archbishop of Turin which your letter of June 23 treats of was handled by others in my absence, I thought it best to ask the person who dealt with it to give you an honest account of what happened. I cannot help but feel deeply distressed by such a distortion of facts.

This is the manner also in which Father Joseph Lazzero, director of our motherhouse, was abruptly suspended from hearing confessions,¹⁵ with no canonical procedure of any kind. So also has Father John Bonetti been kept out of Chieri for more than eighteen months,¹⁶ and, despite reiterated requests of the Sacred Congregation of the Council for an explanation of that censure, no answer has been received and the punishment still holds. I too incurred a [threat of] suspension, and at the moment I am under the cloud of two warnings issued to me on November 25 and on December 1, 1887, which threaten automatic suspension.¹⁷

If personally or through others I write or publish anything which in any way touches upon the archbishop of Turin, I send it to no one except the Supreme Pontiff, while His Excellency the archbishop writes whatever he pleases, maligning the Salesians even to the Sacred Roman Congregations, without my being able to respond as I have the right to.

Notwithstanding this situation, there are more than three hundred Salesians working zealously in the archdiocese of Turin, and they seek neither honors nor compensation of any kind. So far no one has uttered a single word of reproach against them.

I have never asked the archbishop of Turin for anything except to tell me any complaint he may have against me and not to send the Holy See distorted reports. So far all has been in vain. This is the source of the grave difficulties we keep running into when we ask the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars to normalize our humble Salesian Society and give it the same status which other religious institutions definitively approved by the Holy See enjoy.

I do not say this to lodge a complaint; the times are too risky. We must strengthen our good will to work for God's glory and nothing else.

The Salesians join me in thanking Your Eminence for your kind

¹⁵See Vol. XIII, pp. 254, 260. [Editor]

¹⁶See pp. 46, 172. [Editor]

¹⁷See Vol. XIII, p. 285. [Editor]

concern. We ask God to keep you in good health as we request your holy blessing in profound thanks. On behalf of all, I am honored to be,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

With his own, Don Bosco enclosed a letter from Father Cagliero, relating how the discussion with the archbishop had ended in agreeing to a temporary suspension of negotiations. He concluded as follows:

Don Bosco, Father Rua and I, as well as all those who were told of the archbishop's project, had not the slightest idea of the serious import of this proposal, nor could we foresee the regrettable consequences which would fall upon our heads. After all, other religious communities had given a definitely negative answer, whereas we had only asked for an extension of time.

This case had more surprises in store. At this stage Don Bosco was giving the matter no further thought, confident that the explanations had been quite sufficient, but on August 16 he received a letter from Cardinal Nina which opened as follows: "I have been awaiting an answer to my letter of last June 23 with an anxiety warranted by the gravity of the matter and my desire to end the hostility which is deplorable under every aspect."

This meant that both letters of July 10 had not reached the cardinal. They were rewritten on September 3. After that, we find no further official reference to the matter in Rome, although, as we stated in the beginning, the archbishop of Turin thought that he could bring up the case again in December.

Another misunderstanding occurred that year, hardly significant in itself, but not so insignificant that we can ignore it, for, after all, the hues of a painting may vary in brightness, but all are essential to the overall effect.

On October 12, while making a pastoral visit to Volpiano on the outskirts of his archdiocese, Archbishop Gastaldi unexpectedly dropped in at the neighboring Salesian house of San Benigno. Arriving without notice, he walked into the workshops, where he could not have expected the poor young lads, hands smeared with cobbler's wax or printer's ink, to dash over and kiss his ring.

Nevertheless, some ten days later he wrote to Don Bosco to praise the courtesy of the superiors who happened to be present, but censuring the conduct of the boys in three of the workshops and blaming a few clerics who had hastily scooted out of the playground on seeing him.

Father Barberis, the director, answered the letter, explaining the situation as we have described it and saying that the clerics had scurried out of the playground because they had been doing manual labor and were in no condition to greet an archbishop.

How endless were misunderstandings that occurred within a span of ten years! The worst of them all was always the archbishop's obsession that Don Bosco and his Salesians were deliberately and obstinately waging war against their ordinary's authority. He said as much once more on October 18 in a letter to Monsignor [Anthony] Belasio¹⁸ who, trusting in their long-standing friendship, tried to use his influence to soften his adamant stand toward Don Bosco. God allowed all this to happen in the secret designs of His infinite wisdom, but He did not leave His servant without comfort, endowing him with insights and heavenly graces.

In the summer of 1880 Don Bosco had a dream in which he foresaw, under the guise of symbols, future events. On the night of July 9 he saw a mysterious rainfall, whose meaning we may detect from the following notes of Father Lemoyne: "The conflict with Archbishop Gastaldi had reached its climax. The matter of Father Bonetti's suspension was at the peak of tension; Rome seemed to favor the archbishop against us; all human hopes seemed to have vanished. Under these circumstances an unfavorable verdict would have been disastrous."

This was Don Bosco's dream. He found himself conferring with his chapter in the room adjoining his own, known as the bishop's room. While he was talking of the Congregation's affairs, the sky darkened and a storm broke out with frightful lightning and thunderbolts. One thunderclap louder than all the rest shook the entire house. Father Bonetti stood up and dashed into the corridor, crying aloud after a moment, "It's raining thorns!" In fact thorns were falling like thick drops of water in a torrential downpour. Then

¹⁸See Vol. XII, pp. 230, 240f; Vol. XIII, p. 577. [Editor]

came a second mighty clap of thunder as powerful as the first, and immediately the sky brightened somewhat. Father Bonetti was heard to shout in the corridor, "How wonderful! It is raining flower buds!" The air was full of blossoms which covered the ground in a thick layer.

Then came a third deafening roar of thunder, and patches of clear blue sky appeared with glimpses of the sun. Father Bonetti cried out, "Now it's raining flowers!" Flowers of every kind and size and color filled the air, blanketing the ground and roofs of houses in a splendor of colors in the twinkling of an eye.

A fourth burst of thunder resounded across the heavens. The sky turned sparkling blue, and the sun shone brightly. Father Bonetti shouted, "Come, look! It's raining roses." Indeed fragrant roses were falling through the sky. "At last!" Father Bonetti exclaimed.

The next morning Don Bosco called the superior chapter together to tell them of his dream. Taking a quick look at the flow of events we can probably detect the successive phases of this lengthy conflict in the distinct parts of this extraordinary dream. Till then all had been thorns. Later, however slowly, matters began to take a turn for the better. Two verdicts issued by Rome were favorable to Don Bosco; then Leo XIII took the whole affair into his own hands and personally laid down the terms of an amicable settlement of Archbishop Gastaldi's conflict with Don Bosco, who impressed the Roman prelates by his humility. However, the war was not ended. In 1883, when Archbishop Gastaldi learned that Don Bosco was going to France, he wrote to the ordinaries of Lyons and Marseille not to allow Don Bosco to preach. The letters arrived after Archbishop Gastaldi's sudden death [midmorning on March 25]. Still, Don Bosco was not allowed to speak in public in Lyons. The archbishop of Paris, instead, invited him to preach in one of the city's principal churches, assuring him that, even were the archbishop of Turin still alive, he would have paid no heed to his request. Soon after, the arrival of Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda to the archdiocese of Turin proved a cherished blessing for Don Bosco. Then, on March 24, 1884, the eve of the feast of the Annunciation, Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri, who had fallen victim to a severe nervous condition, removed his objections to granting Don Bosco the privileges he had for years been requesting. The

decree reached the Oratory at long last on July 9, 1884 amid singular circumstances, as we shall see. From then on, a period of peace opened for Don Bosco, lasting to the not too distant day of his death.

CHAPTER 21

Cooperators at San Benigno and Borgo San Martino

DESPITE all the work and harassment, Don Bosco still found not only the time but, more surprisingly, the peace of mind to keep in touch with his cooperators, discuss his projects with them and solicit their help. And so it was that in the summer of 1880 he went to San Benigno Canavese and to Borgo San Martino to conduct the first conference of Salesian cooperators in each of those towns.¹

The conference at San Benigno was held on June 4. Following is the main tenor of his talk. He was pleased, he said, to meet for the first time the local cooperators, and he went on to acquaint them with the spiritual benefits they were entitled to as members of the pious association and showed them how as cooperators they might, by observing the rules, live like religious in the world. In fact, this association might well be considered a kind of third order of older times but updated to meet current needs. Today, he said, the hue and cry goes up, *Work, Education, Humaneness*. Well, thanks to these cooperators, Salesians were accomplishing three things: setting up workshops in the cities and agricultural schools in farming areas; opening boarding schools for boys and girls, as well as day schools, night schools and Sunday classes; establishing hospices for orphaned and abandoned children by the thousands. They were reaching out even to the heathens with the blessings of civilization. The cooperators, he observed, by prayer, moral support, and material assistance, are so many arms of Don Bosco and of the Salesians in maintaining this threefold benefit. Time was when society was imbued by faith, and all one had to do was to join religious in their practices of piety, but now—besides praying,

¹See *Bollettino Salesiano*, July and August 1880. [Author]

which is never to be neglected—one must be engaged, actively engaged in work, if we are not to court disaster.

More positively, he cited the religious instruction of youth as the special task of the cooperators. Men and women cooperators both can do much good by giving alms and good advice, he said, but they can do even more by offering their services to their pastors and teaching catechism to children. The Catholic catechism class in the festive oratories is the only hope of salvation for so many poor young people adrift in a perverted society. Despite all their zeal, pastors and parish priests cannot reach everywhere; they need helpers in their ministry of catechizing who can get the children into church, urge parents to send them, supervise the classes and teach catechism. He cited a fine example. In a village of six thousand people, only some forty children were attending catechism classes. Well, under the pastor's leadership, the cooperators soon rounded up as many as four hundred youngsters and, during the Easter season, managed to convince nearly seven hundred to go to confession and Communion; of them, some four hundred boys and girls made their First Communion.

He then listed other works of mercy which cooperators could easily do, such as being peacemakers in families, redirecting the wayward to the right path, and providing funds for the poor. All this, however, was to be done with *gentleness, charity and discretion*, the three characteristic virtues of the true Salesian cooperator. He especially recommended to his hearers—as we might well understand—the new hospice being then opened at San Benigno.

As for the cooperators' conference at Borgo San Martino on July 1, we can fortunately give our readers various highlights in Don Bosco's own words:

I happened to be in Rome when the unforgettable Pius IX of saintly memory received the representatives of the Catholic press in public audience, and I can still recall the magnificent speech he delivered that day. To animate Catholic writers to wage a winning battle against the enemy of God and the Church, he urged unity among themselves and used, as an example, a Spanish bullfight. Without in the least endorsing this form of sport, which recalls Moorish supremacy in Spain, the Holy Father described how the toreadors go about subduing and killing the fiery animal. The huge beast is let loose into a vast arena that has been fenced in

to protect the immense crowd of spectators. Goaded on by shouting, pursued by picadors, and driven wild by fury, the bull roars tremendously and charges at random with lowered head, seeking to impale his attackers, but as the combatant sees it approach, he leaps to one side and jabs the bull's nostrils or neck with his sword. The wounded beast swerves to charge another, and he too thrusts his weapon into it. Thoroughly enraged, the bull then roars in panic, dashing about the arena and trying to run down those who block its way, but it faces enemies at every step and, waiting for an opening, they stab its flanks, head and neck. Finally the matador thrusts his sword into the back of its neck and, after a futile struggle, the beast at last sinks to the ground and dies. It is the combatants' unified front which tires, overcomes and wears down the ferocity of the bull, commented Pius IX. Holy Scripture calls the enemies of God and the Church, with whom we contend in battle, bulls. *Tauri pingues . . . obsederunt me* [Ps. 21, 13], the royal prophet laments—fierce men like bulls have besieged me. We can voice the same lament in these sorry times of ours. Do we want to overthrow these enemies and be victorious? Then we must stand united against them, a solid front, alert to all assaults, careful not to wield either pen or spoken word against one another. These are not Pius XI's precise words, but they pretty much tell his message.

I have brought this incident and these words to your attention, my dear friends, so that you may better understand the necessity we good Christians have today to stand united in furthering good projects and halting the bad, for uniting creates strength.

Back in 1841 when I first began to gather boys together on Sundays to save them from the streets, give them a chance for clean fun, and teach them their holy religion, I realized my need for people to give me a helping hand. Even then many of the city's priests and laymen, and later several wonderful women, responded to my plea and came to help me, some by gathering the youngsters for me, others by staying with them and teaching them catechism. The ladies and, later, women religious helped me by washing and mending the lads' clothing and providing linen for the poorest and neediest. God's help and the kindness of these good people enabled me and all my Salesians to accomplish the works you read of in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, which I need not recount now.

Once it became apparent how much people united together could do to help out poor youngsters, we decided to found a formal association under the name of the Association of Salesian Cooperators and sought to have it approved by the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Many bishops gave it official recognition in their own dioceses and commended it to the Holy See; among the heartiest sponsors, I am proud to say, was His Excellency, Bishop Peter Ferrè, our beloved shepherd. Pope Pius IX, of saintly

memory, examined and approved the project; indeed, concerned that the Association should grow, he opened to it the Church's treasury of indulgences. From the year of its approval, 1876, to the present day the cooperators, men and women, have grown to thirty thousand and continue to grow every day as more faithful come to learn about it.

He then briefly summarized Salesian projects which the generosity of the cooperators had made possible, all of which we already know. He then explained what they had to do to become true Salesian cooperators and to benefit by the special favors granted the Association by the Church.

First, let me say that to gain the indulgences that the Vicar of Jesus Christ has granted us, we must carry out certain requirements. We must visit a stated church or receive confession and Communion when such requirements have been attached to the indulgence; the Salesian cooperators are held to this as are the Franciscan tertiaries. Then, too, to gain the indulgences, one must be a member of the Association of Salesian Cooperators and carry out its aims.

How does one belong? One must be enrolled by the superior of the Salesian Congregation or his delegate and be a member in good standing. At one's induction he or she receives a diploma and a copy of the regulations and then is expected to practice works of mercy in the spirit of the Association and according to its aims.

Is it really necessary, you may ask, to carry out each single act of mercy listed in the rules? No, of course not, nor do you have to do so within a prescribed period of time, as long as you practice charity when the occasion presents itself. But, I say, some deeds of charity must be done. The aim of the Association is to give the Salesian Congregation helpers who will take special care of young people. Obviously, then, all cooperators, men and women, must engage in some works of mercy consonant with this noble aim so that the Church's intention in granting the indulgences may be honored. Years ago all one had to do was to share in practices of piety. Today, however, faced with multiple means of corruption which threaten boys and girls, we must join forces and work together. I have stated that a good cooperator is one who practices a deed of charity as the occasion arises. This is not too difficult a task for any good Christian. See how many great opportunities come up—a word of good advice to youngsters to guide them in virtue and save them from evil ways, a suggestion to parents on how they can give their children a Christian upbringing, a reminder to send them to church, to choose a

school or a job where they will have upright teachers and honest employers. You can see to it that schools hire only reputable teachers. You can help out in teaching catechism in your parish. You can give or lend good books, spread good literature, and offer a Catholic paper to replace a bad one. You can help one complete his work, donate clothing, seek jobs for the unemployed, or support a homeless and abandoned boy or girl by paying for that child's tuition. You can cut down on your own expenses and put money aside for alms. You can promote undertakings which will glorify God, honor the Church, and benefit souls. At the very least, you can exhort others to do these things. There is never any lack of opportunity to do good or prevent evil. Let us not be wanting in good will or courage, in love for God and neighbor. Without becoming aware of it, as father or mother, teacher, priest, layman, rich man or pauper, we shall be true cooperators, thwarting evil and accomplishing much good.

You might remark, "As long as it's a matter of helping others by speaking, I can do that, but I am poor and my material means are limited." Let the poor do just what they can, but, regardless of one's poverty, any cooperator who so wishes will always be able to contribute also financially. The widow in the Gospel was also very poor, owning no more than a single mite, yet she too wished to help in beautifying the temple along with wealthy donors, and this elicited Jesus' praise. Let me say too that there are many, many people who forever keep bemoaning their poverty when they are asked to do a good deed, to clothe a poor orphan, help a destitute family, or adorn a church. But when it comes to buying clothes or a luxury garment, arranging a dinner party or a lavish entertainment, a pleasure trip, a dance, making a good impression on people—then they no longer plead poverty. Then the money which they did not have suddenly appears and they find the means of putting up a good show and of displaying a lavishness beyond their means.

Then there are those who forever fear that the ground will sink beneath them, and both present and future loom in sinister colors before their imagination. They are those, I think, who, in the words of the Savior, are always asking in fear and trembling: "What shall we eat tomorrow? What shall we drink? How shall we clothe ourselves?" And so they forever pile up and hoard, storing everything until death overtakes them before they have done any good to others, and they leave their possessions to the greed and contention of their relatives, who will either quickly use them up or let lawyers and executors consume them in litigation. Do not imitate them, my dear cooperators. To keep you from that, let me offer you two reflections.

Many people today deposit their money into a bank to earn interest, but, regardless of rating, all banks run the risk of bankruptcy and many do fail.

How many families have been thus ruined! Again, no matter how sound a bank may be, the interest it pays is no better than five or six percent. However, I know of a bank with endless assets which can never possibly go bankrupt and which pays not a mere five, ten, thirty, or fifty percent, but one hundred! Who is this all-powerful banker? God, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, who promises to pay now, in this life, one hundred percent to those who give of their substance for His greater glory to benefit His poor! Those who leave what they own for His sake shall receive "*a hundredfold in this age*," Jesus Christ assures us in the Gospel, "and in the age to come life eternal." [Mk. 10, 30] That hundredfold they shall receive is the blessings which God will shower upon them, upon their possessions, upon their business dealings: a hundredfold in peace of mind, in family harmony, in spiritual graces in life and in death. Nor is this all, for in the life to come Our Lord has stored an everlasting reward: "*and in the age to come life everlasting*." Let us rekindle our faith, my worthy friends, and let us strive to earn such a bounty for ourselves.

My second reflection is this. Some people consider almsgiving a counsel, not a command, and so they believe that they are doing enough for their salvation if they do not turn their wealth to evil. This is a fatal blunder, one which blocks many a good deed in the world and which drags countless souls to eternal damnation, much as it did Dives. Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved, if he puts his heart where his riches are and pays no heed to the poor. He may not be sinning against justice, but he will be sinning against charity. And what difference does it make to go to hell for a crime against justice or for a sin against charity? Holy Scripture makes it clear enough that when we are asked to help the poor, it is not a counsel but a command. The poor shall not be wanting in the land of your dwelling, God says in the old law, "and therefore I command you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman." [Deut. 15, 11] When speaking of alms, Our Divine Savior used the imperative, saying: "What is left over, give as alms." [Lk. 11, 41] To leave no doubt in this regard, He declared that at judgment day He shall welcome into His eternal Kingdom those who were charitable in deed here on earth and shall cast into hell those who were not. [Mt. 25, 34-46] On another occasion He said: "Not the one who says *Domine, Domine*, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father" [Mt. 7, 21], who is not satisfied with words, but desires good deeds. [Mt. 7, 21] Then the apostle St. James wrote that even faith itself is of no avail to salvation unless accompanied by good works. Faith without works, he said, is useless. [Jas. 2, 20]

I have spoken more at length on this topic, not because I believe you have been lax in this regard, but that you may know what to say when you have to dispel prejudice from the minds of others. I am daily aware of how much the Salesian cooperators are doing and how they not only practice charity but also urge others to do so. I trust that they will continue showing that they are true disciples of St. Francis de Sales, who became all things to all people in order to win all to God. "Give me souls and take all the rest," he often used to say. You have heard and every month you can read [in the *Bollettino Salesiano*] how your alms are used. The hope, indeed the certainty, that you are helping so many poor boys, safeguarding them from worldly dangers and bringing them up for God, the Church, and heaven, should be a great comfort to you and lighten every sacrifice you make. Let's take heart, then, and follow the advice Our Divine Savior has left us: "Make friends for yourselves through your use of this world's goods, so that when they fail you, a lasting reception will be yours." [Lk. 16, 9] These friends of ours will be all the souls whom our efforts have saved, and also the guardian angels of those souls along with the saints to whom we have brought companions in heaven. Above all, our friend will be Jesus Christ who assures us that He considers as done to Himself any good deed we do to benefit the humblest of His disciples: "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of My brethren, you did it for Me." [Mt. 24, 40]

Before leaving the stand, Don Bosco, who professed and instilled that reverence to bishops which is today traditional in our houses, humbly requested Bishop Ferrè to address a few words to the gathering. A master speaker, the bishop warmly dwelt on society's needs and on the works which Divine Providence had entrusted to Don Bosco's sons, recommending the Salesian Congregation to the industrious love of his listeners. That evening the boarders staged a Latin play *Phasmatonices*,² mentioned in Volume XII. It was the same drama which had recently been performed at the Valsalice College and in 1882 would be staged at Randazzo, the first Salesian boarding school in Sicily. The tradition of Latin plays lived on in Salesian houses until a few years after Don Bosco's death.

²See Vol. XII, p. 230. [Editor]

CHAPTER 22

Precious Documents about the Spiritual Life

CHASTITY, poverty and good confessions were three favorite topics which Don Bosco frequently stressed in speaking to his boys personally or through their superiors. In 1880 we encounter these topics in two incidents, three practical norms, a warning and a dream.

A former Salesian pupil gave Bishop [James] Costamagna blanket permission to tell Don Bosco's first biographer the incident we are about to narrate on condition that he remain anonymous.¹ An Oratory boy habitually sinned grievously against purity, particularly during the summer vacations. On returning to the Oratory in the fall of 1880—his soul laden down with sin—he hurried to go to confession to Don Bosco who did something that, as far as we know, he never did to anyone else. He listened to the confession and then, pressing the boy's face strongly to his own, told him, "I don't want you to commit sins of this kind ever again for the rest of your life!" We might say that at that moment all his love for purity was profusely poured into the young sinner's soul. In 1899, the latter—then a religious—stated that he was ready to reveal under oath the marvelous change wrought in him by what the bishop calls "that extraordinary, most exceptional embrace of Don Bosco." At that instant the boy felt his sinful attachment being uprooted from his heart, so that when again home on vacation and, later in the military service, he never slipped into his old habit, regardless of the number of temptations.

Acutely sensitive to Salesian poverty, Don Bosco reacted forcefully not only against infractions but also against anything else which he saw even as a remote threat to its perfect observance.

¹Letter to Father Lemoyne, Santiago, Chile, February 22, 1899. [Author]

During the second winter at San Benigno, one of the superiors insisted that every cleric be given a new overcoat and that curtains be purchased for the windows of private rooms. Caught between this confrere's relentlessness and the house's tight finances, the prefect, Father [Louis] Nai,² not knowing where to turn, took advantage of Don Bosco's visit to the house to seek his advice. Saddened greatly by the request, Don Bosco replied, "This evening I'll talk to the confreres." When all gathered in the library, he spoke very strongly and pointedly on poverty in clothing and room furnishings. The superior felt that Don Bosco was being too strict, and so, when Don Bosco asked the confreres to speak up at the end of his talk, the superior stated that he felt decorum was compatible with poverty. With firm kindness Don Bosco replied, "The decorum of a religious lies in his poverty."

Philip Rinaldi—then a young cleric—was present. In December 1930, speaking to the Oratory confreres at the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, he recalled the episode, remarking that, as he listened to Don Bosco, the thought came to him that not even the Capuchins and the Franciscans were as severe in their poverty as Don Bosco demanded that his Salesians be. Father Rinaldi also commented that Don Bosco thus expressed his views on poverty just when he was equipping his printshops with machinery as up to date as in the best of Turin's shops and was also building an imposing boarding school adjoining the Church of St. John the Evangelist. The coincidence prompted Father Rinaldi to make a critical distinction: "We are not to lump together the interior, personal poverty of the Salesians with the requirements of the Salesian mission which calls for Don Bosco to be always in the forefront of progress," as he himself had said when speaking with the future Pope Pius XI.³

In a meeting of the superior chapter, Don Bosco presented and solved three important cases of admission to the novitiate and vows. The first concerned a young man's application for the novitiate. He had had a sad, long history of moral falls up to the

²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

³*Memorie Biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XVI, p. 323: "In queste cose Don Bosco vuole essere sempre all'avanguardia del progresso." (In these matters Don Bosco wants to be always in the forefront of progress.) [Editor]

time of his spiritual retreat, but was then firmly determined to turn over a new leaf. "He should be given a chance," Don Bosco declared. The second case was that of another young man requesting admission to vows. His conduct had been good, but before his religious profession he visited his family and, while at home, *abyssus abyseum invocat* [deep calls unto deep], fell miserably into immorality. On hearing the chapter's opinion (unknown to us), Don Bosco said: "I see no chance whatever! I always say to the young men who mess up their lives morally to the very end, 'Do not become a cleric!' They manage to keep themselves under control during the novitiate, but soon their suppressed desires flare up anew. We must all agree on greater strictness because incentives to evil daily keep increasing and we learn of moral lapses that are truly frightening."

This remark of Don Bosco obviously applied also to admission to the novitiate, but he was not really contradicting himself. The words "mess up their lives morally" must be understood in the same sense as the biblical phrase "Deep calls unto deep" [Ps. 41, 8], which alludes not just to personal frailty, but to rejection of morality. In fact, when speaking of the second case, he had also said, "How can such a person return later to his home town to preach?" It was his opinion that anyone who had given moral scandal "to the very end" was to be barred not only from religious profession, but also from donning the clerical habit.

The third case dealt with a man who, after a licentious youth, had turned over a new leaf and, having gone through a year of good moral conduct, asked to enter the novitiate and become a priest. Don Bosco would not even advise a man of this kind to undergo a trial period at all, especially if homosexuality had played a part in his past. "Let all of you help me to keep such people always out of our Congregation."

He also issued a warning on November 14 during a session of the superior chapter concerning the regulations drafted by the second general chapter. "I now see that we must safeguard the Congregation from spiritual coldness and decay by promoting the spirit of piety and religious community life. I want to wipe out this craze for sea bathing when not prescribed by a doctor. There are some who contravene their superiors' orders in this. The moral danger is even greater for our young clerics. It will be extremely difficult to

prevent boys who live on the coast from bathing, but as regards our pupils it is well worth stressing our rules on morals. Let this matter be carefully examined. We know of boarding schools being closed down and of faculty members being jailed. People here in Italy are not so evil-minded as to entertain doubts about us. We blindly took over La Navarre and Saint-Cyr, but, before our coming, some terrible things had occurred there. At the beginning of the year I will send all the directors a letter dealing with the chief safeguards of morality. Let us very conscientiously see to it that priests, clerics and coadjutors make the Exercise for a Happy Death. Keep an eye on everyone, and let all rise promptly each morning and be present at meditation. Good morals are at all times, but most particularly now, a matter of life and death for us. God help us if the public were ever to hear of scandals among us. Even at the cost of sacrificing our lives, let us always victoriously uphold morality.”

During the night between August 8 and 9 Don Bosco had a dream concerning the young men who were the hopes of the Congregation; he narrated it on the evening of August 10 at the novices’ spiritual retreat. We have two versions of this dream: one hurriedly recorded by Father Barberis and a second which is clearly a clumsy translation from the French. That year there were several French novices at San Benigno. We shall combine the second with the first. The dream might well be entitled “A Mysterious Banquet.” Don Bosco spoke more or less as follows:

First remember that dreams come in sleep. I dreamt that I was here at San Benigno (which is strange, because we usually dream of being elsewhere in different circumstances). I was in a large hall, somewhat bigger than our dining room.

It was brightly lighted and I thought, *Can this be Father Barberis’ doing? Where could he have dug up all the money?*

Many boys were sitting at the several tables, but nobody was eating. When I walked in with another man they all picked up their bread as though about to eat.

The hall was very beautifully lit up, but no one could tell where the light came from. The silverware, tablecloths and napkins were so dazzlingly white that by comparison even our cleanest linen would seem dirty. Everything shone so brightly and beautifully that I was sure I must be dreaming, and I thought, *This is certainly a dream! Never could we afford such luxury at San Benigno! Yet here I am and I am not asleep.*

Meanwhile I looked up and noted that the boys were not eating. "What's wrong? Why aren't they eating?" I asked. At this they all began to eat.

Among the boys I could identify many from our schools and some who are now here on retreat. Puzzled, I asked my companion what it all meant. "Give me your attention," he replied, "and you will know."

As I was speaking, the light became ever more intense. I was trying to understand this when a throng of very handsome looking boys, bright as angels, suddenly appeared from nowhere holding lilies and borne along above the tables. At this sight, the other lads immediately rose to their feet and stood watching with joy. The angelic-featured youngsters were now handing out lilies, and those who received them were likewise borne aloft. I recognized the boys who had lilies; they were so comely and resplendent that I could not imagine anything lovelier in heaven. I asked what the lilies symbolized and was told: "Haven't you many times extolled the beautiful virtue of purity?"

"Yes," I said. "I have, and I also earnestly tried to instill it into my boys' hearts."

"Well, then, the lads holding a lily are those who were able to preserve it," my companion explained.

I was truly bewildered. While I stood speechless another throng of boys appeared, this time holding roses; they too were being borne along above the tables and were handing out roses. When a boy received one, his face immediately beamed with splendor.

I again asked my companion the meaning of this. "They are the boys who are aflame with God's love," he answered. I then noticed that their foreheads all bore their names in gold letters. No sooner did I move forward to see and record their names than they all instantly disappeared. The light too went out and I was left in semi-darkness.

I then noticed that the lads who had received neither lily nor rose had features as scarlet as fire. I also saw others who were trying to pull themselves up a slimy rope hooked to the ceiling, but all in vain, for the rope always sagged and they kept sliding down to the floor in a heap of mud.

Dumbfounded to see anything like this in the dining hall, I insisted that I be told what it meant. "The rope is a symbol of confession. Those who can grip it firmly will certainly reach heaven. These boys still keep going to confession and use this rope to lift themselves up, but they receive the sacrament without the necessary dispositions; their sorrow and resolve are feeble. Consequently they cannot pull themselves up; the rope keeps sagging as they try to lift themselves up; they keep sliding down and are always at ground level."

I wanted to take down the names of these boys also, but hardly had I written two or three names when all vanished. Even the dim light disappeared, and I was left in total darkness.

In the midst of that darkness, however, I could make out an even more heart-rending sight. Some dejected-looking boys had hideous serpents coiled about their necks, the snake's tail resting on the boy's heart, the head facing each wretched lad's mouth as though ready to sting his tongue should he ever open his lips. These boys' features were terrifyingly hideous, their eyes wild, their mouths contorted, and their stance menacing.

All atremble, I again asked what this meant. "Can't you see?" I was told. "The ancient serpent is doubly coiled around these wretches' throats to keep them from confessing their sins, and poisoned fangs are ready to sting them should they open their lips. Poor boys! Could they only speak, they would make a good confession and the devil would no longer have sway over them. But they clam up with shame. They repeatedly go to confession and never dare to rid their hearts of poison."

Then I said to my companion, "Tell me their names so that I can remember them."

"Yes, write them down," he answered.

"But there is no time," I objected.

"Go on, write."

I managed to jot down only a few names because all the boys vanished. My companion then said, "Go tell your boys to be on guard. Explain what you have seen."

"Give me a sign," I asked, "to make me know clearly whether this is a dream or an actual warning that the Lord is giving my boys."

"All right," he answered. "Just watch."

A brilliant light again flooded the hall, and once more I saw the boys with lilies and roses. The light kept increasing in its intensity and I could see the happiness of those boys, as a heavenly joy irradiated their faces.

I looked with indescribable surprise as the light kept intensifying until it burst into an awesome roar of sound. It jolted me out of my sleep, and I became so exhausted that even now I still feel I have no strength.

Make what you wish of this dream. As for me, I find something believable in it. Yesterday evening and today I did some testing which confirmed that my dream was not merely a dream. Only God's extraordinary mercy can save some miserable wretches.

At this point we would like to add two wholesome admonitions which Don Bosco gave to priests to win them away from empty worldly vanity and from a certain unpleasant obstinacy in doing

things their own way. His cautions were unusually effective, couched as they skillfully were in witticisms.

One day in 1880 he and others were dinner guests at the villa of a certain gentleman at Moncalieri. To honor their host, most of the guests—including several priests—were wearing their knightly decorations. As the conversation warmed up, Don Bosco remarked, “How fine a figure I am cutting without decorations! I am neither commendatore, knight nor professor. I am not even certified to teach the first grade. When I show up at St. Peter’s pearly gates he will ask me, ‘What is this? Was it worth your while to live so long and never earn a single diploma or decoration? Out with you!’ ”

They all laughed. When the guests were again quiet, the lady of the house remarked, “You have nothing because you never wanted to accept anything.”

“Did you say I never wanted to accept anything?” he retaliated. “Just try to give me a few thousand lire for my poor boys and you will soon see whether or not I accept things!”

Embarrassed by this unexpected rejoinder, the woman tried to talk herself out of her predicament, but to no avail. Adroitly Don Bosco went to her rescue and gracefully steered the conversation to other topics.

His words were that time directed to the priests’ vanity. A second admonition, also given at a dinner, occurred elsewhere. In November Don Bosco went to San Martino Tánaro to preach on All Souls Day. The parish priest had the reputation of being very stubborn and opinionated. He had invested twelve thousand lire in founding a small religious congregation of women and was demanding a one thousand lire dowry from every postulant. He made sure that such a sum would come to him through insurance, if it was not paid immediately upon admission. One day he invited several priests to dinner, and a fine turkey was being served. Don Bosco selected the head for himself and, striking it with his knife, repeatedly remarked, “What a hard head! What a hard head!” The parish priest again handed him the platter to help himself to something more appetizing. “No,” he replied, “let me deal with this thing here.” Again and again he knocked on the turkey’s head with the knife, repeating, “What a hard head!” At last he managed

to crack it. “Who would have thought that such a hard head had such a tiny brain?” he exclaimed. Those closer to him heard and understood his reference. But the pastor apparently paid no heed. In 1890, when the priest died, it became evident that indeed he had stood in need of the lesson, for his last will and testament was so injudicious that the municipal authorities, though acknowledging his merits, could not find the courage to set up a suggested commemorative tablet to his memory.

CHAPTER 23

Looking Through Don Bosco's Letters

THE published letters of Don Bosco are far fewer than those which either were destroyed or just were lost.¹ Generally the handwriting shows that they were scribbled hurriedly, but their genuine spontaneity is delightful. They breathe forth that same self-control and unshakable calm which were so evident in his daily life. Merely running through a few of them puts the reader in a peaceful frame of mind. The spirit of God which lives in His saints guides their pens as much as their thoughts.

We open our little series in this chapter with three fatherly letters.

1. THREE FATHERLY LETTERS

The first, addressed to Father Monateri, director at Varazze, shows that Father Monateri was anxiously awaiting an answer. The style betrays Don Bosco's haste.

Turin, June 8, 1880

Dear Father Monateri:

One can answer only as soon as he can, and so be patient. To start off:

1. As of now I cannot give our dear friend, the designated parish priest at Varazze, another priest. The only help he can expect must come from the priests at our school, and they will certainly do all they can.

2. Ask the upperclassman Fassio kindly to send me another letter because, though I received his first, I just can't find it anywhere in my pile of mail.

3. I gladly bless and pray for young Cyril Corazzale and for his ailing three-year-old brother.

4. God grant you health, knowledge and holiness, so that you may

¹The four-volume *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco* compiled by Fr. Eugenio Ceria and published between 1955 and 1959 by the Società Editrice Internazionale, Turin, contains 2,845 letters dating from 1835 to 1888. [Editor]

direct your young charges in such a way as to turn each of them into a St. Aloysius and a dauntless Salesian.

God bless you, ever dear Father Monateri, and all our beloved confreres and pupils. Pray for me too.

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Two other letters were addressed to [Father Tamietti], the director of the Manfredini School at Este. The first was a reply to the good wishes he received on his name day. The letter includes a list of things to be done in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, in the hope that the director would find somebody willing to shoulder the expense.

Turin, July 9, 1880

Dear Father Tamietti:

I received your good wishes and the greetings of all the confreres and boys. I was very pleased and heartily thank all of you. I am enclosing a list [of things to be done]. Try to find people willing to foot at least part of the expense.

Remember me particularly to our friends, confreres and pupils. God bless you all. Pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. If Father Gallo is still alive,² give him my warm regards.

Don Bosco was looking forward to the summer spiritual retreats when he could see his Salesians again; they, in turn, were just as eagerly waiting for the pleasure of going to confession to him and conferring with him.

Turin, August 25, 1880

Dear Father Tamietti:

See that Berra³ does not make a mistake. Tell him to come to the retreat where we can discuss the situation and do what is best for him.

²A joking allusion to the fact that he had not written for quite a time. [Editor]

³Eligio Berra, a cleric. [Editor]

I am enclosing a letter for Chevalier Pelà.⁴ Goodbye and God bless you all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Your sister, the nun at Nizza Monferrato, sends her regards and asks about you. She is well and is doing much good.

Another batch of six letters tells us about some of Don Bosco's activities.

2. THE CHURCH OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST

Turin's Church of St. John the Evangelist was now a landmark in Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, but it needed much interior work. To show how Don Bosco left no stone unturned to raise the needed funds, we managed to put together this small batch of documents. They reveal the frank simplicity of the saints in soliciting financial support for their undertakings from the wealthy. For instance, he wrote⁵ to Baron [Joseph] Ceriana, who had laid the cornerstone,⁶ reminding him of a half-promise made in 1878. The baron did not turn a deaf ear to the invitation.

[No date]

My dear Baron Ceriana,

Last year I presumed to invite you to dedicate a memorial to your family, as you had officially laid the cornerstone of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. You gave me some hope then that your choice would be the magnificent main altar, which is actually a double altar, and the altar rail enclosing the sanctuary. The cost has now appreciably come down because those competing for prestige in this kind of work have lowered their fees from fourteen thousand to eight thousand lire—five thousand for the double altar and three thousand for the altar rail.

Should your generosity prompt you to sponsor one or both of these

⁴A benefactor of the school at Este. See p. 74. [Editor]

⁵Don Bosco's letter is undated, but it certainly belongs to 1880 since it is connected with the work yet to be done in the interior of the church. [Author]

⁶See Vol. XIII, p. 463. [Editor]

memorials, I would be most grateful to you and will pray with all my heart that God will bless you and your family.

A decision on this matter is needed now, though its implementation and payment would not come due until early 1881.

God bless you and keep you in good health.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

A printed list of memorials and their relative cost had been drawn up by Don Bosco and prefaced with the following presentation:

The work to be done in the Church of St. John the Evangelist and its cost are humbly brought to the attention of charitable Catholics, especially Salesian cooperators, as a tribute to the late great Pontiff, Pope Pius IX.

Don Bosco personally included this list with a covering letter to a few persons, such as Attorney Charles Comaschi⁷ in Milan, whose veneration for Don Bosco our readers well know.

Turin, June 27, 1880

Dear Mr. Comaschi,

The apostle of love and beloved disciple of Our Divine Savior is looking for someone to help build the church being constructed to promote God's glory. In his name I commend to your charity one or more of the memorials on the enclosed list. From heaven St. John the Evangelist will not fail to protect you and your family, while I and my dear boys will offer up special prayers every day to the Giver of all good, that you, your wife and your son Alphonsus may enjoy good health and His holy grace.

As always, with great pleasure,

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

This kindly gentleman obliged and Don Bosco warmly thanked him in the following note.

⁷The Comaschi house always stood open, not only to Don Bosco but to every Salesian who happened to be passing through the Lombard capital. [Author]

Turin, July 17, 1880

Dear Chevalier,

Everything is going well. Thank you for your generous donation to the Church of St. John the Evangelist.

When you come to Turin, please be our guest. Just send us a simple note in advance lest I again have to regret being away on that day. I shall also be delighted to see Alphonsus.

My dear Attorney, God bless you and your whole family.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Our readers may recall Alphonsus Fortis, who was on the verge of decisively following the example of Count Cays⁸ and whose father had died in the month of April. Don Bosco asked him also to share the expense of these memorials.

Turin, June 29, 1880

My dear Alphonsus,

I trust that your complete rest at Carbia has considerably improved your health, and that Richard and Mamma are well, as I continually pray. Please let me know how you are doing.

The Church of St. John the Evangelist has run into a few snags because of lack of funds, and I would wish that your family might particularly help us by sponsoring one of the memorials on the enclosed list. If you wish, I would gladly have "The Fortis Family" or any other words inscribed on it. Talk it over with Mamma and Richard, and if you like my suggestion, please let me know. If not, please overlook this inconvenience.

God bless you, my ever beloved Alphonsus, and your entire family. May He grant to all of you a long and healthy life. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

While Don Bosco was at San Benigno in August, he sent the memorial list with a personal note to two persons in the area. One was a certain Mr. Cena, probably a Salesian cooperador in Montanaro, a town near San Benigno.

⁸See Vol. XIII, p. 175. [Editor]

San Benigno, August 13, 1880

Dear Mr. Cena,

I have no time to visit and pay my respects to you personally, but I would not wish to leave without telling you how deeply saddened I was over your recent accident. I assure you that I have prayed and will continue to pray that God will restore you to your former full health.

I take this opportunity to suggest a deed of charity which God will most certainly reward. Please consider the possibility of sponsoring one or more of the interior projects which still have to be done in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, as they are listed in the enclosed brochure.

You are a generous Salesian cooperator, deserving of our thanks. God bless you and grant you the precious gift of health and His holy grace. Pardon my boldness and please pray for me.

Most gratefully yours,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. My humble respects to your devout wife and best wishes for her good health and for God's blessings.

For the same purpose he wrote that day to Mrs. Merlini of Volpiano, another nearby town.

San Benigno, August 13, 1880

Dear Mrs. Merlini,

Yesterday evening you came to see me while I was hearing confessions. I am sorry I missed you because I wanted to speak to you about a plan which will further God's glory.

I know how involved you are in many deeds of charity, and therefore I ask you to help us complete work still to be done in the Church of St. John the Evangelist. The enclosed list tells you what it is. Should you be unable to help out, please be assured that you shall always be in my prayers.

God bless you and keep you in His holy grace. Pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Following are a few newsy letters which have no appropriate place elsewhere.

3. VARIOUS LETTERS

The first is addressed to Father Eugene Bianchi, who had decided to join the Salesians four years after ordination while he was assistant pastor at Verucchio, historic stronghold of the Malatesta family, in the Rimini diocese. He must not have considered this letter the final word on his vocation, for he himself told us that in September of that year he took advantage of reduced train fares to tour several important cities in Italy. The decisive factor was actually the talk he had with Don Bosco when he passed through Turin. He had no sooner spoken with him than he broke off his planned trip and went directly to Lanzo for the spiritual retreat, at the end of which he decisively resolved to remain with Don Bosco. After a brief return to his family, he entered the novitiate at San Benigno in October.

[No date]⁹

Beloved in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is always my joy to add another brave warrior to the lowly ranks of the Salesians. Please come—but, as you say, at least for a few weeks. You might this time make a spiritual retreat at Lanzo from September 9 to 16. If the dates are inconvenient, let me know and I shall arrange for a retreat at some other time during which we can discuss what will redound to God's greater glory.

I look forward with great pleasure to seeing you. Please pray for me.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Settle all your affairs before leaving Rimini so that you may be free to absent yourself for whatever time you need.

After being Father Barberis' right-hand man in the care and formation of the novices, Father Bianchi was appointed director and novice master by Don Bosco himself when the clerical novitiate was relocated in Foglizzo. Eleven years later his health required that he be assigned to less strenuous work. In 1912 he went to our agricultural school at Beit Gemal in Israel, where he

⁹According to the *Epistolario di San Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. III, p. 622, Letter 2089, Don Bosco most probably wrote this letter in August 1880. [Editor]

worked intensely for nineteen years, first as director and then as confessor until his death in 1931. A Salesian at heart before joining the Congregation, he put himself unreservedly into the hands of Don Bosco and of his worthy representative, Father Barberis. Athletic in build, he was a warm friend and a saintly loving father, one of those who, on joining Don Bosco as older men, proved by their actions that Don Bosco's spirit can be in its simplicity a guide to holiness for all who docilely accept it in trust.

The next letter is to the cleric Louis Cartier, who was home at Saint-Jean de Maurienne (Savoy) in September 1880. Knowing that he had received only minor orders, Bishop Rosset, the local ordinary, was surprised that he had not been asked to give dimissorial letters for the cleric's ordination, but he did not know that all canonical prescriptions had been duly followed. Once Don Bosco sent him an explanation, he had no objection.

Turin, September 17, 1880

My dear Cartier,

Be at ease with your ordination and your ordinary bishop. Our Congregation has definitive approval [of the Holy See] and we may present candidates for holy orders without dimissorials of the bishop of their birthplace or of those who had any other canonical jurisdiction. Enjoy your vacation, but don't forget that you must be a Salesian wherever you are, that is to say, you are to be "salt of the earth" in your words and "light of the world" in your deeds. Give my regards to your parents and to your parish priest. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Remember to get back in time after your vacation.

Marquis [Alphonse] Landi of Piacenza, to whom the third letter is addressed, was keeping a considerable amount of money for Don Bosco, meaning to deliver it to him personally as soon as he went to Turin. He had gone there in September, but Don Bosco had been away, either at Lanzo for the general chapter or, possibly, at Sampierdarena for the Salesians' spiritual retreat. The letter, undated, was most likely written in October.¹⁰

¹⁰The original is kept by the noble Nasalli-Rocca family of Piacenza. [Author]

[No date]

Dearest Marquis,

You were so kind as to come all the way to Valdocco to bring me money, and yet no one said a word to me. Had I known, I would have dropped everything and hurried to pay you my respects indeed so well deserved.

I could wait for a second visit late in the fall, but since the money is ready and we badly need it, I accept your suggestion. You may send the money by registered mail to this address, and it will be promptly forwarded to me at Lanzo, where I shall be staying until October 16.

You ask me to pray for you and your family. I shall do so most willingly, my dear marquis, and I assure you that over the years I have made a special memento every morning for you and your whole family. I am confident that you too will pray for me and my whole army of some sixty thousand fearless warriors, who can demolish tons of bread.

God bless us all! May He strengthen us in His holy service with a saintly life and a holy death.

Yours most gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

We have room here for a letter which Don Bosco had his secretary write to Chevalier Charles Fava, although he signed it. Along with the letter he sent a gracious gift for the chevalier's name day.

Turin, November 3, 1880

To the generous-hearted Chevalier Charles Fava on his name day:

Long live St. Charles and all who bear his name!

Tomorrow morning I shall duly celebrate Holy Mass for you and your whole family, and our boys will offer prayers and receive Holy Communion at the Altar of Mary, Help of Christians, praying that health, peace and harmony will reign forever in your household.

You are probably receiving a host of letters which you cannot promptly acknowledge. Hence, please accept the letter file as a fitting place to keep them.

Again, hurrah for St. Charles and those who bear his name!

Gratefully yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The generous gentleman re-echoed the letter in reply:

Long live Don Bosco and his host of friends! I hope that I can rightfully boast of being one, considering your most gracious gesture in sending me such a cherished gift for my name day. I shall treasure this lovely letter file as a cherished token of your kindness to me and feel great joy at expressing my cordial thanks. My wife joins me in these sentiments and in thanking you for your efficacious prayers for our family. Please continue to remember us in your Holy Masses, and accept our respectful regards.

Remarkably, Don Bosco's most distinguished benefactors to whom he incessantly appealed directly or indirectly did not feel annoyed; on the contrary, they gave him ever more frequent proofs of their devotedness to him. It most certainly stemmed from their firm belief that they were dealing with a great servant of God.

The Oratory's financial situation was grave indeed. We are touched by Don Bosco's circular to the Salesian directors, appealing for solidarity with the motherhouse in its serious straits. The means he suggested could not have been simpler or easier, and the season was most opportune—Christmas.

Oratory, Turin, December 21, 1880

My dear Father Director,

When a mother is in sore need, she turns trustingly to her children for help.

Our poor motherhouse is in just such a situation. Our expenses in Turin and at Bordighera, La Spezia, Rome and elsewhere, the forthcoming missionary expedition which is now being readied, and the need to subsidize new houses (among others, the novitiate at San Benigno) have all reduced this poor motherhouse of ours to a very sad state of affairs, and we are forced to call upon the enterprising generosity of all our directors to rush to our aid in any of the following ways:

(1) by delaying for several months all outlays of money and undertakings not strictly essential;

(2) by diligently collecting all accounts receivable and minor debts owed us;

(3) by humbly and warmly asking our cooperators and benefactors to help us, either with personal donations or by doing some fund-raising. Please send all available money as soon as possible.

Meanwhile let us ask Our Lord, who is so generous with all, to be generous with us too. I ask that all priests make a special memento at

Mass and that all confreres and pupils frequently offer Holy Communion to this end.

God bless us and keep us in His holy grace.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had recently sent Father Emmanuel Casari as prefect to Father Bologna, director in Marseille, in answer to his request for more personnel, and had promised to consider other needs in a forthcoming visit. Meanwhile, wishing to be ready for a meeting of the Marseille cooperators, he asked the director to send him varied information.

Turin, December 23, 1880

Dear Father Bologna,

I received your letters and those of Lassepas¹¹ and the other dear boys of St. Leo's Festive Oratory. Thank them for me and give them my regards. I shall have a personal answer for each of them when I come.

I would guess that Casari is at his post by now. Be patient till I come, and then we shall straighten things out.

Our missionaries for South America will sail from Genoa on January 22. After that I shall leave for Marseille, but I'll let you know when to expect me: probably sometime in the first few days of February.

I need a report on the state of St. Pierre's Hospice. Let me know:

- (1) what work has been completed and the use to which it has been put;
- (2) the number of resident and day students and their school records;
- (3) the work that must be done in the right wing of the house and its approximate cost;

(4) the number of accounts due and accounts receivable, the committee's accomplishments, the funds received, their activities—in short, anything which I can use for a thorough briefing of our cooperators in a conference which I plan to give several days after my arrival. Make out your report in French, as this will be all the easier for me.

When you have the opportunity, give my regards to Madame Jacques, Madame Prat, Madame Broquier, etc.

God bless you, dear Father Bologna, and may He also bless our dear Salesians and boys, for whom I pray that God will grant good health and perseverance in His love.

¹¹Louis Lassepas, a young cleric. [Editor]

Ask everyone to receive Holy Communion for my intention.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Is Taulaígo feeling well? Has he begun to work miracles?

This laconic postscript is meaningful when we realize that this confrere was causing considerable trouble in the house, and Don Bosco was well aware of it.

The following note offers Father Dominic Griglia, provost at Bagnasco in the diocese of Mondovì, some good advice.

Turin, December 30, 1880

Dear Father,

I understand your position perfectly. If you want to be at peace now and always, abide fully by the directives of your ecclesiastical superior. Should he advise you to continue in your present ministry, do so.

I shall not fail to pray for you to God. Please pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I will remember to pray for your mother.

Being a model of discretion in his writing, for there was the ever-present risk of his letters falling into strangers' hands, Don Bosco never committed to paper anything which, if known to others not concerned, might jeopardize the reputation of the persons of whom or to whom he was writing. This cautious reticence is evident in this and in other letters even though he does not openly state it, but, occasionally, he mentions it as, for instance, in the following letter addressed to [a young man at] Varzo not far from Domodossola:¹²

Lanzo, September 7, 1880

My dear George Borello,

I cannot entrust my truthful answer to paper. However, recall to mind

¹²A center of international highway and railway transit in northwest Italy near the end of the Simplon Tunnel. [Editor]

what I told you verbally and you will find some norms to guide your deliberations.

I advise you to open your heart to your confessor and do whatever he may tell you.

God bless you, my dear Borello. Pray for me.

Always yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 24

The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome

ALL founders of religious orders, both of men and of women, always sought to set up their residence in Rome. A divine urge was driving them by varied paths to the very heart of unity, authority and teaching, so as to enable them, as it were, to draw from the spring of those limpid life-giving waters which they themselves would spread around the world through many diverse channels. Years before the Church approved his rule, Don Bosco also cherished the prospect of opening a house in the papal city, but up to 1880 all his attempts were in vain until, most astonishingly, his nurtured dream seemed suddenly to break forth into reality. Undeniably it cost him seven years of almost constant spiritual and physical suffering, but in the long run it won him blessings from God and admiration from men. This chapter will recount the circumstances which led to and accompanied the beginnings of the church and hospice of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Castro Pretorio neighborhood.¹

The urban plan designed by Bishop Francis de Mérode, minister of Pius IX, aimed at developing the city's outlying hills, particularly the Castro Pretorio district. That his plan was well thought out with foresight is borne out by the fact that, after September 20, 1870,² Rome's expansion not only did not stop but it accelerated, so that a whole new city seemed to grow up in the area. However at that time the expansion provided for everything but the spiritual needs of the ever growing population that poured into the district. The hard-pressed Pope Pius IX, whose source of revenues was drained with the loss of the Papal States, was the only

¹This quarter of the city belonged to the ancient Esquiline district lying east of the Termini Station. It was named after the fortified camp set up there by Emperor Tiberius for his Praetorian guard, *Castrum Praetorium*. [Author]

²Date of the seizure of Rome by Italy. [Editor]

one who kept coping with the spiritual needs of his city.

On December 8, 1870 he had proclaimed St. Joseph patron of the universal Church and shortly afterward had purchased at his own expense a piece of land on the Esquiline Hill, intending to erect there a church dedicated to the beloved patriarch. But he soon changed his mind when in 1871 the Italian bishops vied with one another in solemnly consecrating their respective dioceses to the adorable Heart of Jesus. In Rome this generated the idea that in the city of Christ's Vicar a grand shrine be dedicated to His Divine Heart, from which, as from an eternal hearth, a new fire of piety might spread from Rome to the world. Father [Anthony] Maresca, a Barnabite, editor of the *Messaggero del Sacro Cuore* [Messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus], publicized the project. And so the saintly Pius IX decided that the land should be used not for a church to St. Joseph but for a temple to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, rejoicing in the thought that from that highest point of the Eternal City the adorable heart of the Redeemer would bless the whole world as from a lofty throne.

Unfortunately, the project kept dragging on endlessly, so that while the new district spread out in every direction, the neighboring parishes of St. Mary of the Angels, St. Bernard, St. Mary Major and St. Lawrence Outside the Walls proved inadequate for the pastoral care of so many people. That saintly Franciscan, Father Ludovico da Casoria [Naples], helped by young members of Catholic Action—outstanding among them Attorney Pericoli—did his best to provide spiritual assistance in a small chapel not far from the site of the planned church. Meantime death claimed the great Pius IX, and nothing had yet been done to realize his project.

Leo XIII's ascent to the papal throne signaled the actual beginning of the enterprise. As bishop of Perugia he had been one of the first to consecrate his diocese to the Sacred Heart, and so he immediately endorsed Pius IX's plans and energetically moved to implement them. As early as August 1, 1878, through his vicar, Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, he sent a letter to all the bishops of the Catholic world (except those of France, who were already committed to building the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on Montmartre), asking them to contribute to this grandiose undertaking through fund-raising drives in their dioceses. The Piana Federation of Catholic Associations in Rome was charged with the task of

collecting the funds, and a committee of Roman patricians under the chairmanship of Marquis Julius Merighi was to supervise the construction of the shrine.

The project moved rapidly once it got started. Work was begun to level a hilly area which rose several yards above the street and blocked construction. Then excavating for foundations was started. But here the workmen ran into a big obstacle not uncommon in Rome's subsoil. They struck tall bricked passageways and corridors, once part of ancient structures that had been built for mining a sort of clay, then commonly used in Rome to replace sand in mixing mortar. They were forced to go down some fifty feet to find solid ground on which to rest the foundations. The cardinal blessed the first stone which was lowered in place on August 17, 1879, feast of St. Joachim and name day of the reigning Pontiff.

The plans of the church, in Bramante's style, had been drawn up by Count Francis Vespignani, Vatican architect, but word from Belgium³ intervened to cause a curious incident. The cardinal vicar's circular of 1878 to the bishops had caught the attention of Baroness De Monier, who offered a hundred thousand francs for the church, but on condition that the design of a Belgian architect, Baron De Béthune, be followed. Furthermore, the good lady clearly stated that she would not contribute a single cent to build any church in Renaissance style: she wanted either a Gothic or a Romanesque church in Rome. Cardinal [Victor] Dechamps, archbishop of Malines, agreed to contact the cardinal vicar.

This condition, of course, created serious problems, especially since the foundations, already under construction, followed Count Vespignani's design. Nevertheless, the cardinal vicar asked Cardinal Dechamps to send him the design he favored, informing him, however, that neither Gothic nor Romanesque was acceptable in Rome. To this the archbishop of Malines replied, on sending the drawing, "Rome, the heart of Catholicism, should possess monuments of every important epoch in her history, and it is certainly regrettable that alongside her Constantinian and classical Renaissance basilicas there be nothing to remind us of the style of

³We draw the details from a copy of a letter from the cardinal of Malines to the cardinal vicar of Rome. Don Bosco was forwarded this copy by Father [Anthony] Maresca in 1880. [Author]

the cathedrals of Cologne, Amiens, York, Rheims, and Westminster, and so many other marvelous churches of the Catholic world, not to speak of the cathedral of Milan. I realize that this exclusiveness is a result of historical events, but this is an opportunity to dispel it."

At any rate, the plans submitted by De Béthune were given careful consideration.

Certainly—the cardinal vicar replied—if we had to put up a church in pure Gothic style, the design you submitted would be excellent, but Roman taste in churches runs to the classic structure. Furthermore, assuming that the design's dimensions and style were to be carried out, the sum of one hundred thousand lire, though handsome in itself, would not be adequate, according to our calculations.

In turn, Count Vespignani, distinguished exponent of Roman classical architecture, added his own comment to the report sent to the cardinal vicar: "In Rome, seat of the fine arts, the pure Gothic construction which traces its origin to barbaric styles never won approval and is in fact being adopted now only in erecting Protestant churches."

Father Maresca begged to differ, and so he advised the baroness to get Cardinal Dechamps to bring the matter up to the Pope, but the cardinal declined, feeling that he had nothing to add to what he had already written to Rome. Hence, because of these specious reasons, the generous offer was withdrawn. We are convinced that Don Bosco, to use a popular maxim, with his ingeniousness would have found a way to have his cake and eat it, but at this time he had as yet nothing to do with this project.

Certainly very few people were as gifted as Don Bosco in raising funds to finance so many and such grand beneficial projects. Take this Roman venture, for example. It foundered and ground to a standstill after the initial thrust, even though it had been launched by the highest authority and was under the sponsorship of powerful, aristocratic families. Lack of funds forced the suspension of all work no sooner than construction had reached ground level. The Pope, already overburdened with the monumental task of building the apse of the Church of St. John Lateran and the grand hospital of St. Martha in the Vatican, felt keenly disappointed and could not endure that kind of failure. Soon, however, Divine Providence came to his rescue. The information we pass on here was supplied a

few years later by Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda.⁴ One day, speaking in consultation with the cardinals, Leo XIII voiced his deep grief over the enforced suspension of this work. It hindered God's glory, he said, it hurt the Holy See's honor, and it imperiled the spiritual welfare of a huge multitude.

"Holy Father, I have a suggestion that will guarantee the success of this project," Cardinal Alimonda said.

"What is it?" asked the Pope with some surprise.

"Entrust it to Don Bosco."

"Would Don Bosco accept?"

"Your Holiness, I know Don Bosco and his total, boundless devotion to the Pope. Let Your Holiness suggest it, and I am convinced he will accept."

Since this conversation took place in March 1880, at the very time that Don Bosco was in Rome, Leo XIII asked his cardinal vicar to take the matter up with him. The cardinal approached Don Bosco about it on the evening of March 24, without, however, mentioning that it was the Pope's wish. On March 28 he brought it up again with greater insistence, still speaking as though it were his own idea. Don Bosco, visualizing the many grave problems he would have to face, did not commit himself either way, as we know from the testimony given in the canonization process.

First, as regards finances, he had little to hope for from the Romans. He knew this from past experience, and the cardinal vicar had written to say as much;⁵ the Romans were not generous. Nor could he expect much from the French people, who were concentrating all their efforts on their own great national shrine of the Sacred Heart and their private schools. He also had reason to believe that, generous as they had always been in helping to support his boys, they would take no interest in a new church for Rome.

⁴*Summarium super virtutibus*, Part III, *De operibus et foundationibus*. No. 65-66, as reported by Fr. Francis Cerruti. [Author]

⁵See Vol. XIII, p. 504. The facts confirmed this. At dinner on the day of the church's consecration, May 14, 1887, Fr. Dalmazzo, our procurator at the Vatican and the church's pastor, rose to propose a toast to the benefactors. When he singled out the Romans for first place, Don Bosco tapped his glass several times with a knife, breaking into his speech and amid general silence serenely remarked, "That is not true. Now you may continue." At that moment Don Bosco must have been thinking back to his exceptionally exhausting journeys to raise funds for the church. One of the guests who was struck by Don Bosco's frankness and often recounted this episode was Bishop [Raymond] Jara, former bishop of Ancud in Chile. [Author]

Not even Italy, he feared, could be relied upon because of the country's ruinous economy, its overburdening taxation, and the crying need of maintaining the promised essential welfare services. He realized too the high cost of building in Rome, far higher than in any other Italian city. And did he not already have a good number of building projects weighing him down, such as the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin and that of Mary, Help of Christians in Vallecrosia, and other projects at Marseille, Nice, and La Spezia? Was it wise to put more irons into the fire?

Another reason too for not getting into this venture was the cool response he detected to the planned church at Castro Pretorio. The whole world had been told that the shrine was being planned as a monument in honor of Pius IX, and every bishop in the Catholic world had been asked to collect donations for it, but hardly had one hundred thousand lire been raised when the whole campaign died out, and all resources seemed to dry up.

There was also another problem. In accepting the commitment, Don Bosco would have bound himself to ratify the contracts drawn up by the previous administration, which still had a voice in the enterprise; furthermore, those contracts ran into substantial sums, as was customary for any work being contracted with the Holy See.⁶

However, beyond these worldly considerations, Don Bosco never lost sight of two loftier concerns: the honor of the Church and of the Holy See. What a disgrace that Catholic Rome should cut so sorry a figure before Protestants, who with impressive funds had already erected several churches while the Catholics had not

⁶Here it bears repeating what we have already written elsewhere about the mistrust with which the Romans looked upon the so-called aliens, the Piedmontese [who had come in after Rome's annexation in 1870]. Choosing a Piedmontese [Don Bosco] in so important a project could not but arouse jealousy, a natural reaction given the prevailing mood. No sooner did word get around than a committee of priests asked a prelate to get them an audience with the cardinal vicar to protest the humiliation being planned against the Roman clergy. The cardinal received them graciously and made no attempt to counter their arguments. He merely asked them in a friendly way if they felt they could accept the burden, adding that it was not too late. "Yes," they replied. The cardinal promised to satisfy their wishes. "There will be no problem with Don Bosco," he went on. "I'll confer with the Holy Father. Don Bosco will have no difficulty in giving up this project." Elated, the priests told him that they would form a committee. "How much," they asked, "had the Holy See allotted to Don Bosco for the construction?" "Nothing," the cardinal replied, and he briefly acquainted them with major expenses they would be faced with, assuring them he was convinced that they would find meager funds in Rome. This was like a cold shower instantly quenching their enthusiasm. [Author]

succeeded in building even one! It was a shame that it could actually be said that the Pope's call had elicited such a feeble echo throughout the world. Hence, while weighing the pros and cons for quite some time, Don Bosco found it hard to excuse himself from this heavy burden.

In the end it was the Pope's own word which dispelled all Don Bosco's doubts. In his long-awaited audience with Leo XIII on April 5, the Pope manifested his wish to him, assuring him that by accepting he would be doing something holy and most pleasing to the Vicar of Christ who was exceedingly disappointed at finding himself unable to continue the project.

"For me the wish of the Pope is a command," Don Bosco replied. "I accept the trust that Your Holiness has graciously given me."

"But I shall not be able to give you any money," the Pope said.

"I do not ask Your Holiness for money. All I ask is your blessing and all those spiritual favors you may see fit to grant to me and to those who will contribute to build this temple to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the capital of the Catholic world. Indeed, if Your Holiness will allow me, I shall also build next to the church a festive oratory, and a large hospice where very many poor boys, abounding in that district, can be sheltered and be taught some skill or trade."

"Willingly I bless you and all those who shall work with you in so holy an undertaking," the Pope answered, "and I call down God's blessing upon it now. Work out the details with the cardinal vicar."

Once word got about in Rome that the Holy Father had commissioned Don Bosco to build a boarding school at Castro Pretorio in addition to a shrine to the Sacred Heart, several new and unseasoned members of the city council called on the minister of justice, [Thomas] Villa, to ask how they were to look upon the new institute which probably would vastly expand. Ten years had not yet elapsed since Italian troops had stormed through Porta Pia, and so the anticlericals sounded the alarm at every breeze that wafted from the Vatican. The minister, though true to his kind, knew Don Bosco fairly well and, as deputy, represented the constituency of Castelnuovo. Having silently heard them out, he stated forthrightly, "Don Bosco is doing a lot of good to many boys by rescuing them from evil ways and giving them an education. He

does not meddle in politics. Leave him alone.”

When Don Bosco told Marquis Scati about this at the end of 1880,⁷ the latter could not help but voice his apprehension that the Freemasons in both the city and state governments might wage war against him. “That’s why we must move cautiously—guileless as doves, but cunning as serpents. I have always scrupulously abided by the law, giving to Caesar what is Caesar’s, nothing more and nothing less. God help me if I acted imprudently. That would throw too many boys back into the streets!”

After the papal audience, Don Bosco drafted a memorandum and personally handed it to the cardinal vicar on the evening of April 18, two days before leaving Rome.⁸ The brief document summarized the chief points which were later drafted into the definitive contract.

Rome, April 10, 1880

To His Eminence Cardinal Raphael Monaco La Valletta, Vicar of His Holiness in Rome.

I. *Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus,
Monument to His Holiness Pius IX of Beloved Memory*

With the sole aim of promoting God’s greater glory and the honor of our holy religion, joined by all my religious, I gladly cooperate with Your Eminence in the construction already in progress of the church to be dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a tribute to the glorious and ever beloved memory of the Supreme Pontiff, Pius IX.

As for the conditions of a contract, it is my wish that Your Eminence represent both parties: the ecclesiastical authorities and the Salesian Congregation, upon which Your Eminence has always looked with fatherly concern. However, since you have asked me to express my own thoughts on this matter, I do so willingly, leaving it entirely to your own experience and prudence to modify any and all articles, as Your Eminence deems best.

II. *The Congregation of St. Francis de Sales*

1. In the person of its rector, the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales

⁷During a visit to Don Bosco on December 22, 1880, the marquis had a long conversation with him, as he reported in a memo of his now in our archives. [Author]

⁸Chronicle of Fr. Berto: “Sunday, April 18. This evening Don Bosco went to the cardinal vicar and gave him a memorandum to be handed to the Holy Father concerning the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome.” [Author]

commits itself to cooperate with every means available to further the work in progress, raise funds and procure construction materials needed to complete this holy enterprise hopefully within two and a half or, at the latest, three years.

2. Once the construction is completed, the Salesian Congregation will take the responsibility of providing all church furnishings, sacred vessels and vestments, and assume payment of fees, maintenance, repairs and so on.

3. We shall provide personnel for pastoral care—i.e., priests to offer Mass for the people, hear confessions, preach, and teach the children catechism.

4. Either while the church is being constructed or after, the hospice will have a festive oratory for neighborhood youngsters to teach them their catechism, conduct evening classes and, if necessary, also run a day school, as is the tradition of the Congregation's houses founded for this purpose.

5. After the church's construction, the Salesian staff will be subject to the authority of the ordinary in the same way as all churches belonging to religious congregations. If the ordinary decides to establish the Church of the Sacred Heart as a parish, the rector shall choose the pastor from the Salesians, and the rector major of the Congregation will present the candidates to His Eminence, the cardinal vicar of Rome, who will select the priest he judges best qualified for that position to further God's glory and the good of souls.

III. *The Church Authority*

1. His Eminence the cardinal vicar shall continue his material and moral support to this undertaking which he himself began and promoted with such dedication; he shall hand over the grounds and building in their present state to the disposal of the Reverend John Bosco. All moneys collected for this purpose by His Eminence or others shall be wholly and exclusively used for the construction of this memorial church.

2. He shall allow fund-raising to continue in those places and with appeals to those people whom it shall be deemed wise to approach.

3. The cardinal vicar shall have no responsibility for either the material construction or for purchasing further property needed for the aforesaid construction.

4. I respectfully request the cardinal vicar to submit these articles to the Holy Father, asking him to modify them as he wishes. They shall not be binding until they bear the approval and blessing of His Holiness.

Fr. John Bosco

As required by the [Salesian] constitutions Don Bosco could not fully commit himself to a project of such magnitude without first consulting his chapter. Hence, on arriving in Turin, he summoned his councilors and presented the Holy Father's proposal to them. The ensuing discussion was a long one. All agreed that the Pope's proposal was a distinguished honor, but also a most weighty burden, since they already were laden with debts amounting to three hundred thousand lire. Under the circumstances it seemed neither wise nor conscionable to take up an enterprise that would swallow up millions more. The vote that followed was six negative and only one positive—the last most certainly Don Bosco's own. Seeing that the Holy Father's proposal had been rejected, he said with a smile, "You have all given me a resounding *no* for an answer, and that is fine, because you acted with all the prudence needed to make serious, major decisions such as this. However, were you to give me a *yes* answer, I can promise you that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will supply the funds to build the Church, He will pay off our debts, and He will even give us a handsome bonus as well." His words, vibrant with such trust in Divine Providence, instantly overturned their decision and, on a second ballot, they all voted affirmatively. Moreover, on studying the blueprints of the church, the chapter members thought it too small and immediately, at that same session, agreed to submit to the Holy Father a vaster project which would be more worthy of the Sacred Heart and of Rome. It was done. The "bonus" was the hospice itself, which did not figure in the Pope's intentions, but was an extra, almost a kind of reward offered by the Sacred Heart. The Congregation's debts, as Cardinal Cagliero testified at the apostolic process,⁹ were paid with no strain, as Don Bosco had promised.

No time was lost in opening negotiations, and during the discussions a new idea came up. The Superior Council of the Italian Catholic Youth Association, situated in Bologna with Count Acquaderni as its president, had decided to erect a monument to the saintly memory of Pius IX, but had not as yet agreed on the form it should take. In view of this, in May 1880 the cardinal vicar told the president that he hoped they would merge their project with

⁹*Summarium super virtutibus*, No. VI, *De heroica spe*, Paragraph 149. [Author]

that of the new church. Several proposals were sent in, the most acceptable being that a building be added to the Church of the Sacred Heart and named after the deceased Pontiff for training good and wise educators. The idea of honoring the memory of Pius IX was already contained in the project to build the church, but this later plan gave it more explicit expression. Count Acquaderni therefore asked Don Bosco if he would be willing to go along with this plan.¹⁰ According to a note jotted on the count's letter, Don Bosco replied that he agreed to the project in the terms outlined by the cardinal vicar. All our research in Bologna to find out what happened to this plan turned up nothing, but from the tenor of Don Bosco's reply so vaguely expressed in that note, it would appear that Don Bosco probably let the matter drop so as to forestall inevitable complications and interference.

While a final agreement was still being drafted in Turin, Don Bosco quickly purchased a property adjoining the original piece of land; it had a small house on it at its extreme end where the hospice today lies along the corner of Via Marsala and Via Marghera. The sale was for forty-nine thousand, five hundred lire. This little two-storyed house served as the first Salesian residence during the period of construction. Don Bosco's intent in enlarging the building site was to allow room for extending the length of the church and putting up the hospice. He had no idea that he had just blasted the Protestant plans to erect a church of their own there. However, the cardinal vicar knew it and stated that he was delighted with the purchase.¹¹ But when it came to the question of enlarging the church, His Eminence was not so delighted. Maybe he still felt responsible for the enterprise and feared a second failure. It certainly took a great deal to convince him, but at long last the

¹⁰Letter from the count to Don Bosco, Bologna, June 1, 1880. [Author]

¹¹Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, June 14, 1880: "I heard from Father Louis of Casoria this morning; he asks me to give you his regards and says that he would buy the land rather than let the Protestants pitch camp alongside the Sacred Heart Church." Father Dalmazzo might well have added that Father Louis, accompanied by Father Bonaventure, his first successor, had come posthaste from Naples to Rome the evening before in order to buy the property, and that he had met them on the steps of the Tiberina Bank, just as he was leaving the building after signing the deed. They recognized each other, stopped to exchange greetings and talk about Don Bosco, and together went home part of the way. Pleased that the danger had been averted, this saintly son of St. Francis took the train back to Naples the following day.

determined intervention of the architect overcame his opposition.¹²

Just how Don Bosco felt in that initial period and what ingenious expedients he used from the very beginning to finance the overwhelming expenses we learn from three letters which he wrote to his procurator general. The reader should bear in mind that the property then belonged to the Tiberina Bank, the president of which was Commendatore Caranti, whose name frequently comes up in the correspondence. The first of these three letters needs no comment.

Turin, July 7, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

As soon as I arrived from Casale, I read over the project of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. I have seen to it that it incorporates our own proposal as well as the observations made by the cardinal vicar. I am giving you full powers to amend and make decisions according to the mind of and within the limits set by His Eminence. We enthusiastically support him with every possible effort.

I would only beg him to side with us in ensuring that the church is large enough. As the present plans stand, its public space is barely four hundred meters long whereas it should be twice that length. I foresee that before the church is even completed the new parish will have no less than six thousand souls. To accommodate one-third of this population, the church should be nine hundred meters long.

As for money, I have someone who is offering to lend us one hundred thousand lire at five and a half percent, including revenues from personal property. But if the Tiberina Bank is ready to give us a checking account, we would be doing better because, if we can sell the property we talked about, as it seems we can, we shall be running on our own steam.

Talk it over with our good friend Mr. Sigismondi, and if he can get us better terms, we shall take them gratefully. Tell this truly good Papa of ours that we are head over heels in a grand project, but that God is with us and so we have nothing to fear.

Give my humble respects to the cardinal vicar. Assure him again that the Salesians will always be his loyal, obedient sons and that he can admonish us any time we mess things up!

God bless us all and keep us in His holy grace! Give my regards to my dear sons Zucchini and Giaretto.¹³ Please pray for me. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

¹²The church's width remaining as stated in the plans, its length was increased from thirty-five to forty-six meters for two new naves, and another eighteen meters for the apse. [Author]

¹³A cleric and a lay Salesian assisting the procurator. [Editor]

To inspire wealthy, generous and pious people to contribute, Don Bosco drew them closer to the Church and to the papacy by obtaining for them from the Holy See suitable honorific titles and spiritual favors. As they felt they were being held especially closer and dearer to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, they strove to become worthy of this honor by doing their best to cooperate in those projects which they thought would please the Holy Father.

Don Bosco's second letter begins with reference to a double petition, whose favorable outcome he was sure would bring about considerable advantages also for the Church of the Sacred Heart. He asked for the privilege of a private chapel for the widowed Madame Prat, whom we have already met,¹⁴ and her mother. To make his gift to them complete he took care of the usual fees. He was granted the favor with a promptness he did not expect. The letter also mentions a preliminary contract on the purchase of a new piece of land, and speaks of the legal transfer of the property adjacent to the old site and the initial construction. Mr. Sigismondi had advanced Don Bosco twenty thousand lire. Even in the midst of such dry business talk, his touch of humor makes his utter serenity rub off on the reader.

Turin, July 9, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

I am enclosing two petitions for you to submit to Cardinal Giannelli, or perhaps you might do better to give them to Cardinal [Theodolph] Mertel. They are for two distinguished benefactors of ours, both fervent Catholics. Madame Prat has already contributed sixty-five thousand lire for Peter's Pence, and she will be sending further sums soon.

I realize that there may be fees to be paid, but I will pay them myself, so that I can say this is a gift. It will bear much fruit.

Mr. Caranti has been notified by Commendatore Fontana that we were also purchasing the little house at a reasonable price, and he said yes. It would be good to talk to him. The agreement gives us time to raise the money, and that is fine. I'll take care of everything, especially the loan. I have high hopes.

Notify me immediately as soon as the notary's deed of transfer [of the land for the Sacred Heart Church] has been made out to us.

The final draft we read in our chapter meeting has been totally approved.

¹⁴See pp. 323f. [Editor]

Be at ease. If we go bankrupt we can always sneak off to Patagonia. So go on tranquilly.

Should Mr. Sigismondi have need of the sum he advanced, draw it from the money we have already deposited, or write and I shall provide.

God bless us all. Always in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The "clause" about which Don Bosco says in his third letter he has reflected on at length refers to Article 3 of the agreement, which was then modified to meet his suggestion.

We quote only the first half of the letter here, since the rest refers to a topic to be discussed in Chapter 26.

Turin, July 14, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

I have reflected at great length on the clause concerning the possibility that our Congregation may cease to exist. In the eyes of the law we are neither a moral nor a legal body. At any rate, in the event of default, a parish church belonging to the ecclesiastical authority will always be respected more than property which we can possess only as individuals.

I believe that we can still make an arrangement if it is not too late: church and rectory belong to the ordinary of Rome in perpetuity, while their use shall likewise belong to the Society of St. Francis de Sales in perpetuity. Let's leave the rest in the hands of Divine Providence. Unless the matter has already been settled and sealed, you might mention the above idea to the cardinal vicar. Otherwise, let everything stand as written.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

While discussing this with Father Dalmazzo, the good cardinal vicar let slip a remark: "Everyone says that Don Bosco is the Salesian Congregation. As long as he lives, fine, but once he dies, everything will vanish like a mist before the sun." However, he willingly listened to all Father Dalmazzo had to say in defense of the stability of the Congregation. Father Dalmazzo closed his argument by remarking that Don Bosco would not have set such stress on the question of ownership if he and the Congregation would always be fortunate enough to have as cardinal vicar

someone like His Eminence, who was truly a father to the Salesians. He would then leave everything in his hands. However, since times change, prudence counseled him not to yield on this point. The cardinal was pleased, and he said that he would speak of the matter as Don Bosco understood it to the Holy Father.¹⁵

On July 14 Father Dalmazzo wrote to Don Bosco: "The cardinal vicar spoke at length about this question to the Holy Father, who replied, 'Get in touch with Father Dalmazzo and have him write to Don Bosco to ask him in my name not to raise any obstacles to this project because the salvation of souls is at stake.' " Don Bosco reiterated his instructions to his procurator by return mail, as follows: "Ownership of the church must remain forever in the hands of the ecclesiastical authority; its use forever belongs to our Congregation. But let the cardinal vicar know that I have put myself entirely into his hands. He is good to us, and we all have full trust in him. Therefore, as I have written to him before, let him act as agent for both parties of the contract as he judges best for God's greater glory. Since the Holy Father has asked us to clear all obstacles, let them all the more be removed by the charity and prudence of the cardinal vicar."

For a long time questions and answers kept being tossed back and forth between the vicariate of Rome and the superior chapter as they tried to settle on the language of the contract. It was still being discussed when Don Bosco officially presented his candidate for the pastor of the parish, which had already been given official state recognition at the end of March; it had been canonically established on February 2 of the previous year.

Turin, July 31, 1880

Your Eminence,

From various sources I understand that it is your intention to entrust the administration of the new parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the Salesians. In this case I would suggest that your choice fall on our general procurator, Father Francis Dalmazzo, doctor of letters. As soon as the appointment becomes effective, I shall assign an adequate number of priests to assist him, with the assurance that they have the qualifications proper to those who dedicate their lives to the sacred care of souls.

Our humble Congregation has already many reasons to be deeply

¹⁵Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, July 10, 1880. [Author]

thankful to Your Eminence, and on behalf of all of us I assure you that we shall endeavor to repay the benefits you lavishly bestow on us daily. I am greatly honored to pay you my respects.

Your most devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The decree of appointment was not issued until July 12, 1881, and Father Dalmazzo, the appointee, was not informed until the following August 3.

Despite the good will of both contracting parties, disagreements on certain points kept emerging until the fall, while Don Bosco kept striving to eliminate any and all future causes of friction. In the first half of October, discussions were still being held concerning parish salaries. The superiors in Turin were undecided about asking for a stipend and, if so, to whom they should apply: to the municipal authorities, the state government, or the Holy See. At last on October 18 Don Bosco wrote to the procurator, "As for a parish stipend, we will abide by whatever the Holy Father decides or whatever His Eminence the cardinal vicar advises." In the end the tenth article of the agreement settled the matter. In the meantime, the construction crews very slowly resuming, Father [Anthony] Sala [the economer general] began shopping for the granite columns specified by the architect. In the above letter Don Bosco wrote, "Father Sala is getting estimates on the columns for the Sacred Heart Church. I shall keep in touch with you, and if you have any question, let me know immediately. . . . Faith, prayer, and let's go forward.

In November payment fell due to the Tiberina Bank for a considerable portion of the loan obtained to purchase the land, house and construction materials, and no one knew where the money was to come from. A public appeal could not yet be made through the press because final formalities were still incomplete. Don Bosco's concern is quite apparent in this letter.

Turin, November 24, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

I have received a letter stating that we have an outstanding debt of thirty-nine thousand five hundred lire with Caranti. I had not adverted to this proviso. In this financial crisis everyone is yelling and drawing their

purse strings tighter! Is there anyone we can rely on in Rome? Look about far and near and get back to me.

It is absolutely essential that we start a campaign for raising funds for the Sacred Heart Church, but until negotiations are closed, we cannot go public. Still, we haven't a penny to our name. So get things over with! God be with you and stay well.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

However the situation kept dragging because Don Bosco had his doubts about two articles. Article 8 imposed a deadline for terminating construction, and Article 13 concerned the eventuality that, if ever no qualified Salesian would be available, the ecclesiastical authority might appoint a pastor and administrator *even for life*. "The article obliging us [to complete the construction of the church] within six years from now [and the construction of the rectory within nine years] and the article on a lifelong appointment of an administrator must be amended," Don Bosco wrote on December 9. To emphasize this, he enclosed a note written by Father Rua on behalf of the superior chapter and signed by himself. Its enlightened prudence and holy simplicity reflect the spirit of our beloved founder very clearly.

Turin, December 11, 1880

Your Eminence,

The superior chapter of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, through its rector major, asks that you approve two minor amendments in the articles of agreement concerning the Church of the Sacred Heart. If we were assured that we would always be dealing with Your Eminence, we would accept these and all other conditions. But we are trying to forestall disagreements which may all too easily arise when you and I have passed on and the administration falls into the hands of others.

Article 8. We have made the following addition: "Provided circumstances do not arise beyond our control, all needed work on the parish house must be completed in the ninth year."

Article 13. We have eliminated the phrase "even for life" after the words "vicar or administrator" to give the ecclesiastical authority complete freedom of action and to make it possible for the Salesian Congregation to resume normal administration of the parish and forestall eventual problems certain to arise if the boys of the hospice and those of

the festive oratory or day school ever had to use the parish church facilities and the church were being administered by a non-Salesian priest.

For myself, however, I believe I would wrong Divine Providence were I to so much as harbor any doubt that either of the possibilities cited in Articles 8 and 13 might come to pass, or that the unlimited confidence which has led us into this vast, costly undertaking might not win for us the continued benevolence of Your Eminence.

I am not sure if I have made myself clear, but your enlightened wisdom will supply for my lack of clarity or our procurator general will explain to you. I have given him full powers in this and in all affairs of the Congregation.

In deepest gratitude, I am honored to remain,

Yours devotedly,
Fr. John Bosco

The cardinal vicar was agreeable to the two amendments Don Bosco requested, i.e., the added reservation in the event of circumstances beyond control and the substitution of “temporary” in place of “even for life.” This ended the dispute on the terms of the agreement, which was signed by Don Bosco on December 11 and by the cardinal vicar, with the Pope’s approval, on December 18, 1880. In the intervening week, when Father Dalmazzo called on the Pope to offer him the best wishes and respects of Don Bosco and the Salesians, the Holy Father asked him if the signing had taken place. When he was told that the cardinal vicar would be signing very shortly, he said, “Act quickly. Do all the good you can!”

Meanwhile the overdue note amounting to forty-two thousand lire had to be paid to the Tiberina Bank before the end of December. “We have no hope of finding any money here,” wrote Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco on December 1. “We’d have a good chance if you were here!” And he kept insisting on the need for some money.¹⁶

Don Bosco’s thinking on this point is clear in the following advice he gave his despairing procurator in a letter dated December 9: “To settle our debt with the Tiberina Bank, let them understand that since we have not been able to sell the property we have put on

¹⁶Letters from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, December 1, 4, 17, and 21, 1880.
[Author]

the market, we do not have the cash available. So, if they can wait, we will now pay the interest as we are doing for the other loan. Otherwise ask them to grant us an extension and allow us to pay it off in installments. We will endeavor to pay off the whole sum in a short period of time. On your part, do your utmost to get more donations. If you can't succeed, rob some bank or, better still, help yourself to some banker's coffers! You'll get more mail on other matters from the others."

Once the bank realized the power of Don Bosco's influence, it agreed to an extended period of installments. In fact, Father Dalmazzo, who had power of attorney from Don Bosco, was allowed substantial loans over a period of seven years, with no collateral beyond a receipt slip. On one occasion the bank president even gave him a loan of eighty thousand lire, saying, "It is for Don Bosco. He has Divine Providence at his disposal, so we can't lose."¹⁷

Indeed, only unlimited trust in Divine Providence convinced Don Bosco to shoulder this weighty burden. Those who were looking at this project with merely human wisdom were shaking their head at such unheard-of boldness. An important personage once asked him where he hoped to raise that kind of money in those exceptionally critical times. "From Divine Providence!" he replied. When the other asked him if he was being given special treatment by Divine Providence, he answered, "Thank God, He has never failed us."¹⁸ Indeed, we shall see that he spent two million lire on the church and one and a half million on the hospice—in those days astronomical sums!

However, we must rightly add that he never tempted Divine Providence and did all he could to help himself. We can hardly believe how much he toiled and suffered in carrying out the Pope's desire—agonies and pains which, says Father Cerruti who witnessed them, shortened his life.¹⁹ When all was done, Leo XIII, considering everything, told Don Bosco's successor some time after the former's death: "It was truly a happy thought to entrust Don

¹⁷*Summarium super virtutibus*, No. X. *De heroica iustitia*. Paragraph 110. (Witness Father Dalmazzo.) [Author]

¹⁸*Ibid.*, No. VI, *De heroica spe*. Paragraph 135. (Witness Father Dalmazzo.) [Author]

¹⁹*Ibid.*, No. III, *De operibus ac foundationibus*, Paragraph 67. [Author]

Bosco with the construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart at Castro Pretorio!”²⁰

But Don Bosco looked further into the future. Our own Bishop John Marengo recalled a mysterious remark he made which we should not let time obliterate. On the very day he accepted that burdensome assignment, Don Bosco asked him, “Do you know why we accepted that house in Rome?”

“No,” he answered.

“Listen, then. We agreed because one day, when there will be another Pope and he shall be the right one, we shall set up our headquarters there to evangelize the Roman countryside. It will be no less important a task than that of evangelizing Patagonia. Then will the Salesians be acknowledged and their glory shine forth!”

A prophecy? True, the Pope of today [Pius XI] is not the Pope of those days, but he is just as he should be. As for the rest, time alone will give the answer. However, prophecy or not, we see at least the flash of the zeal which constantly burned in the heart of our saintly father who, while working on some project, was also contemplating future ones.

²⁰*Ibid.*, No. VI, *De heroica spe*, Paragraph 13. (Witness Father Rua.) [Author]

CHAPTER 25

The Salesians in France during the Religious Persecution

THE storm which had been brewing for months when Don Bosco left France¹ finally burst at the end of March [1880]. This forms a very important chapter of Church history.

A bill drafted by Jules Ferry and presented to the French Assembly by Premier [Charles] Freycinet for the purpose of dealing a deathblow to five recently opened Catholic universities contained an article, the seventh, which barred religious who had not received government recognition from teaching in public schools. The house of representatives approved the entire bill, but the senate twice rejected that particular article and sent the amended bill to the other legislative assembly. Vexed, the government decided to pursue its goal by resorting to its executive power. Exhuming long-abrogated laws and grossly misinterpreting those still in force, it issued two decrees on March 29, 1880. The first mandated the expulsion of the Jesuits from all their houses and the shutdown of all their educational facilities; the second ordered all unauthorized religious congregations to apply for government recognition within three months under penalty of expulsion. A subsequent bill extended both decrees to the French colonies. There was no longer reason to doubt that this was an attempt to bar the youth of France from a Christian education.

A census conducted in 1877 had turned up five hundred religious congregations, with a total membership of twenty thousand men and women, which had no government recognition. Most of the bigger congregations promptly decided to throw in their lot with the Jesuits and to refuse to seek state recognition. They had every good reason to do so because of the government's demands that their superiors general reside in France and that the congregations submit their rules and statutes to its examination. Very soon the

¹See Chapter 16. [Editor]

French bishops organized a letter-writing campaign to President François Grévy, the senate, the foreign secretary, and the premier, making it very clear that the March 29 decrees were an outrage against the Church, a calculated erosion of the most sacred religious values and an insult to freedom of conscience. Lawyers did their share in the legal domain. But they all proved to be voices crying in the wind. The tyranny of Léon Gambetta and fellow radicals choked the cries of outraged justice.

The abominable decrees against the Jesuits began to be enforced on June 30. At four in the morning of that day, all through France police and military forced their way into the Jesuit houses, breaking down doors and physically evicting the religious. Then the houses were shut with the government seal. We need not describe the indignation of honest citizens who reacted against the expulsion order, but we must state that Catholics all over the world welcomed the exiles with generous hearts.

Don Bosco too followed the impulse of his love. In fact, even before violence broke out he yielded to his heart's promptings. Knowing that the Jesuits would inevitably be the first to suffer eviction, as soon as the decrees were promulgated he wrote to Father [Peter] Beckx, the Jesuit superior general, to say that "in this common upheaval our houses were at his service in whatever way needed."² Father Beckx expressed his thanks for the "generous, spontaneous and unconditional offer," as he called it in the letter that follows:³

How gracious is Our Lord's love! How well was our beloved St. Francis de Sales imbued by it! How worthily do they bear his name who have so thoroughly inherited his spirit of charity! This is one of the most consoling benefits which God, in His infinite wisdom, draws from the bitter persecutions which He permits His servants to endure. He inspires good-hearted people to share the sorrows of others and help them at the price of any sacrifice. I do not know if we shall have occasion to accept your generous offer, but I assure you that we shall never forget your generosity, and we shall heartily pray that God will begin to reward you even in this life by blessing, expanding and prospering the zealous works which you and your holy Congregation have undertaken for God's greater glory. In

²Letter from Don Bosco to Father Ronchail, Rome, April 9, 1880. [Author]

³Letter from Fiesole, April 5, 1880. [Author]

your charity pray for me too, and for our embattled Society of Jesus. Respectfully and gratefully yours, etc.

Our three Salesian directors in France were not caught by surprise because even before March 29 they were ready with preventive measures. Father [Joseph] Ronchail, senior member and interpreter of Don Bosco's directives for his confreres, had already sought Don Bosco's advice on what to do in any eventuality. From Rome Don Bosco sent instructions for himself, Father Bologna and Father Perrot.

Torre de' Specchi 36
Rome, March 23, 1880

Dear Father Ronchail,

1. Start from the position that we are not a religious congregation, but a society whose members enjoy full civil status. We came to France to care for poor, homeless boys, and our services are given completely free. We responded to the call of individual bishops to help them shelter civil society's most destitute and abandoned boys.

If they ask for our constitutions, give them the Latin text. Insist on Chapter 1, which describes the scope of our Society. Point out the chapter dealing with the individual houses, and show that income and expenses must remain in those houses to which charitable donations have been given.

2. You may state that our headquarters are at Nice but that everywhere else [in France] we are merely tenants and employees of the Beaujour Society.

3. Don't worry about the principality of Monaco. Things won't get that bad, but if they do, write me immediately and I shall give you needed instructions. Spain, Uruguay, Argentina and Patagonia are waiting for us.

4. As for applying for government recognition, I think it best to let things simmer for the time being. "Day pours out the word to day, and night to night imparts knowledge" [Ps. 18, 2].

5. Rush me any news you may have in this matter.

6. As to our other houses in France, stand firm on the principle that we stand for farming, trades and work skills. If we ever teach academic subjects, like Latin, to any of our pupils, we do so only to train supervisors, teachers and master craftsmen, particularly in the printing trades.

7. Once I get a copy of our good Mamma's will, I shall study it.

8. As to the work that has to be done, see Monsieur Levrot and no one else, but the church must be foremost in your mind, the focal point to

which every other part of the building must have access. Everything passes; every day has its share of good and evil. Keep me briefed on matters touching our other houses in France. Let us pray a great deal that God may avert the tempest now threatening the bark of Peter.

God bless us all. Give my regards to all our confreres, and strengthen them.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also wrote twice to Canon Guiol on behalf of Father Bologna. The first letter, dated March 26, read as follows:

We have reason to fear that in questioning or, rather, in actually compiling a directory of religious institutes in France, the Beaujour Society will be contacted. In that event, please instruct Father Bologna to state that Taulaigo, who is French, is the head of the house, and that a Frenchman, Father Brogly, for example, is the administrator. As for the school curriculum, mention only the choir school, which is under your control and for which you have required legal qualifications. This is only in view of what may happen; forewarned is forearmed.

The second letter, dated April 6, added: "Tell [Father Bologna] privately that the Holy Father does not want our rules to be shown to the government should it request them. If it does, take the time to notify me." He also wrote twice to Father Ronchail. The first time was from Rome, on April 9: "When asked, remember to state that we are a charitable, not a religious, society, and that every member is perfectly free to exercise all his civil rights and does so." On April 26 he wrote again from Florence: "Do what the other religious congregations are doing, but I think it wise first to check with the local bishops, who, I know, are well informed on what the religious congregations are doing." [Presently, 1933] Father [Louis] Cartier⁴ tells us that, while other congregations were debating whether or not to apply for government recognition, Don Bosco wrote to Father Ronchail that he was not to compromise himself by submitting an application. "Let things simmer for the time being," we recall that he told him.

To some of our readers it may seem quibbling to state that the Salesians were a "charitable, not a religious society." Yet that is

⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

what they were before the government, to which they were answerable only in matters within its competence. As far as it was concerned, the Salesians were simply free citizens who banded together for a worthy purpose according to common law. This was the sense in which they had sought authorization from local governments to open houses for poor, destitute youth. If the Church saw them in an additional light, it was not the government's concern, since the latter had no right to demand from its citizens a public profession of religious belief before allowing them to reside in the country or take up a lawful occupation of their choice.⁵

Thanks to all of Don Bosco's instructions, the directors had a very good idea of what they were to do—and actually did—when questioned by government officials about their organization and assets.

As we skim over the minutes of the ladies' committee of Marseille, we have to admire the calmness with which they continued to hold their regular meetings under the chairmanship of Canon Guiol to deal with the many needs of St. Leo's Festive Oratory, as though nothing untoward were happening all around them. They even organized a successful, well advertised celebration for the bishop's blessing of the new chapel on June 17. However, the day was not far off when what was happening generally throughout the country would touch their tranquil meetings, but we have no indication of anything like that in the minutes.

The first hint of any problem crops up in the minutes of July 1, the day following the Jesuits' stormy eviction from their houses. Don Bosco had stated that he might visit Marseille in August. Canon Guiol duly informed the ladies and asked that they keep the news to themselves, for two reasons, as follows:

Don Bosco, the saintly founder, will be in Marseille for a very short time and will be very busy, as he will preside over the Salesians' spiritual retreat. We must spare him the crush of visitors which overwhelmed him last winter. Besides this principal reason, we must also keep a certain measure of prudence, for we are living in critical times and we dare not arouse attention. People attribute many predictions to Don Bosco, but when you mention this to him, he laughs it off, and this in no way detracts from his indisputable holiness. The trait which most strikingly impresses

⁵No mention is made of the Salesians in a Paris publication of that year (*Mémoire pour la défense des Congrégations religieuses*) listing the congregations tagged for expulsion. [Author]

us is his unyielding, unshakable calm, which shows his great self-mastery. Now he tells us to trust in God and push forward, for no one will hurt us, but it is his faith in Divine Providence which makes him talk like that, and we are not to attribute any prophetic significance to his words.

Later Don Bosco did voice some doubts about the advisability of assembling a number of priests for a spiritual retreat, but the confreres in Marseille kept insisting that he come to deal personally with house matters of the highest importance. They knew, however, that he was not feeling well. In fact, his eye problem, fever attacks and skin rashes were good reasons to cancel his trip. In all truth, he would personally have gone all the same, disregarding his ailments, but his doctors took a firm stand, and he sent Father Rua in his stead. His faithful alter ego remained the last ten days of August in Marseille, taking a close look at both the local and the overall situation. Later he gave Don Bosco a full report at the second general chapter, which opened at Lanzo immediately upon his return.⁶

Sometime during September or October Canon Guiol went to Rome and there heard Pope Leo XIII personally praise Don Bosco most highly, calling him an extraordinary man. On that trip he met with Don Bosco, but we do not know when or where—perhaps at Sampierdarena, where Don Bosco happened to be at the end of September for the spiritual retreat. He would have liked Don Bosco to return to France with him, but he had to admit that it was not a good idea. Recent events counseled that nothing be done to arouse suspicion, and so, after discussing how to save the house of Marseille, they separated, agreeing to meet again as soon as possible.⁷

Everyone was led to believe that after the Jesuits' expulsion the same fate would befall unauthorized religious congregations, as ordered by the second decree, but it soon became apparent that it was an empty threat to get them to seek recognition. The government felt sorely embarrassed both by the pressure of the solemn threat of expulsion it had issued and by the unfavorable aftermath of its first experiment. Besides, legal proceedings against it were being rigorously pursued by France's most renowned lawyers. Furthermore, within days, one hundred and sixty-seven

⁶Minutes of August 5 and September 2. [Author]

⁷Minutes of October 21, 1880. [Author]

magistrates handed in their resignations.⁸ This was to their credit, but Don Bosco deplored their decision, preferring that these upright men find it in themselves to remain at their posts and so prevent anticlericals from replacing them. Hoping to get out of this predicament without appearing to capitulate, Premier Freycinet initiated secret negotiations with ecclesiastical authorities. A compromise had just been worked out when the radical press got wind of it and fiercely attacked the premier, branding him a coward and a traitor, and rousing the rabble against the government. The uproar became so menacing that it caused the downfall of the cabinet. As soon as a new cabinet was formed under Premier Jules Ferry, it unleashed the law enforcement agencies in an assault against the religious institutes. This full-scale attack began October 16 with the expulsion of the Carmelite friars and then proceeded against all the men's religious congregations until November 8, the eve of the reopening of parliament.

It was most crucial to protect our house in Marseille, for as it went so would the other houses of France go. Its legal status before the government was based on a statement made three years before by the parish priest of St. Joseph's Church that St. Leo's Festive Oratory was actually the parish choir school which he himself had founded with all personal required legal qualifications. By mutual agreement, Father Mendre, assistant parish priest, who was equally certified, was to register as director with eight or ten French teachers forming his staff. Father Bologna and the other Salesians, who were not allowed to reside in the house because they were aliens, though they did live there to do their share of the work, would have to play a cat-and-mouse game until the storm blew itself out. To ease the blow and apparently abide by the law, Don Bosco drafted for Canon Guiol the outline of a declaration which he was to send to the school superintendent.

Dear Sir:

I received your letter of . . . and, wishing to show you the respect and esteem which every citizen owes to civil authority, I think it opportune to give you some explanations which you may need for a proper

⁸See *Unità Cattolica*, July 18, 1880. Another one hundred and sixty-five magistrates resigned during the second phase of the law enforcement, as stated in the November 13 issue of the same paper. [Author]

understanding of St. Leo's Festive Oratory, Rue Beaujour 9, attended by the choirboys of St. Joseph's Church whose parish priest I am.

The purpose of this institution is to shelter poor, destitute boys, feed them, give them an education, and so save them from moral dangers, so that in due time they may earn their livelihood with the crafts they were taught. Presently they are learning to become tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths, bricklayers agricultural laborers, gardeners, and so on.

Every year a considerable number of these youngsters are literally snatched from juvenile delinquency and restored as honest citizens to civil society. Some of these and other day boys make up the parish choir school, regularly serving in the choir and on the altar at private and public church functions in this my parish church. They receive elementary schooling and some are also taking a classical course.

I am the founder of this school. A copy of my legal certification is herein enclosed. Father N. Bénard and [the cleric] Louis Cartier teach the classical courses; Father Ricard and Lassepas teach the elementary grades. The local superior is Father Taulaigo; Father Vincent and Father Cavagnac have supervisory duties. All the above named are French and lend their services free of charge.

Whatever additional information is needed, I shall gladly provide. I recommend this home for poor children to your kindly care and remain respectfully, etc.

Unfortunately, however, the worst enemies were those of the household. A French cleric and another Frenchman who lived at St. Leo's Festive Oratory, whose name we have not been able to ascertain,⁹ were the chief villains, the cleric the more ruthless of the two. He had come from another congregation, been welcomed like a brother, and been assigned his duties, but secretly he kept plotting against St. Leo's with others. He got hold of a copy of the rules and sent it secretly to the minister of religious affairs along with other documents, including a report of his own on all that he had seen in our houses in Italy and France. The Salesians, who until then had passed as free citizens, were now portrayed as members of an unauthorized religious congregation. This Judas, whom Don Bosco had invited to Turin for the feast of Mary, Help of Christians as a token of his affection, continued his spying until he was unmasked

⁹Minutes, October 21, 1880. St. Leo's Festive Oratory had suffered a great deal because of the most detestable ingratitude of these two young men whom it had welcomed [as staff members]. They shamelessly published outrageous articles which caused grave embarrassment and painful worry to the saintly founder and superior. [Author]

and charitably told to remove his clerical garb and leave. He wasted no time in falsely informing the press of cruel punishment inflicted upon the boys by the Salesians, even accusing them of trying to rouse the resident students to hatred against France. He went so far as to bring formal charges in a court of law against Father Bologna, the director, for violating the privacy of the mail. His hostility led him to portray the Salesians as a foreign gang bent on abusing French children—always a very explosive issue in France, but more deadly than ever at this time because of the unending national antagonism and bloody riots between Italian and French workmen.

To conclude this account, we add that this wretch was rewarded by the government with a teaching post in a public school, but it was not long before he paid the price of his villainy. Hardly a year later, while he was watching an outdoor public entertainment, the bleachers collapsed. He was pulled from under the debris more dead than alive with four broken ribs and other injuries. It is said that, on recovering somewhat, he went knocking at St. Leo's Oratory to seek readmission. Though the director could not grant his request, he still gave him financial assistance from time to time.

His anonymous accomplice and a few empty-headed residents of St. Leo's kept wagging their tongues freely, tattling outside the house, so much so that they nearly succeeded in causing a severe rift between the Salesians and Canon Guiol. The latter, however, soon becoming aware of their shameless intrigues, had this to say about the betrayal of St. Leo's Oratory to the ladies' committee at their meeting of October 21, 1880: "These trials, far from discouraging, practically set a seal on the goodness of this work and make us trust in its future. As this work comes from God, God will protect it. Nevertheless we must move prudently."

Under the above-described circumstances when religious institutions were methodically being closed, how could the Salesians find a way out? Could they hope for better treatment? Government agents had already taken initial steps, inspecting our houses and concluding that indeed they belonged to an unauthorized religious congregation. Finally, on November 2, All Soul's Day, the Salesians were ordered to vacate the premises within twenty-four hours or be forcibly evicted. As if to dispel any possible illusion, they could hear at St. Leo's the din of the attack on the nearby

Dominican monastery. As previously arranged, the Italian Salesians left the residence and took shelter with Canon Guiol, while the others did what all the other communities had already done on disbanding. The same was done at Nice and at La Navarre. Each house drew up a written protest to be handed to the law enforcement officers, and barricaded its doors, obliging the police to resort to force to execute their mandate. The last defense of their civil rights would be to yield finally to an overwhelming force.

Here we shall narrate only what happened at [St. Leo's] our main house, both because we know more about it and because substantially the same pattern was followed in all the others. Canon Guiol, parish priest of St. Joseph's, the entire board of trustees of the Beaujour Society, and a number of noble benefactors who belonged to the city's foremost families went to St. Leo's during the early hours of the morning to support the Salesians and protest by their presence all abuse of power and most especially the violation of a citizen's most sacred rights. The main door leading to the street was bolted and barred, with a barricade of tables and furniture piled against it. All persons present gathered in the hall to await events.

As dawn broke, curious sightseers began to roam about the premises—not a new spectacle, to be sure, but one that always had a flavor of its own. Milling about the crowd were the professional demonstrators, shouting out their usual slogans and giving the impression that this was an expression of the so-called will of the sovereign people.

At eight, the fatal hour struck. Everyone in the house was on the alert, yet there were no knocks at the door, no shouts in the street, no blare of trumpets. Nine o'clock struck, then ten and eleven, and still nothing happened. Since no official sporting a tri-colored sash of office appeared, the onlookers disappointedly began to drift away. Toward noon a few sharp raps on the door echoed through the hall. The doorkeeper, a staunch Italian who had orders to notify the others of the arrival of the police, walked up to the peephole in the door and called "Who is it?" An unknown voice said something in French which the doorkeeper did not understand. After a moment of silence, the voice again spoke, "I am not the police commissioner. Hurry! I am drenched to the skin." The rain was falling heavily. Grasping only the words "chief of police," the doorkeeper dashed upstairs in two bounds and burst into the room

where all were gathered, announcing breathlessly, "The chief of police is here." All instantly stood up, put on their gloves, straightened their clothing, and, clustering about the one who was to be their director for the occasion, went down to the main door. Someone was still furiously knocking. "Who is it?" they asked. This time there was no reply. The dreaded caller had in the meantime borrowed a stepladder and entered the house through a window. No one can describe how heartily all laughed when they heard the booming voice of Father Mendre behind them. He had been detained in the church of a late Mass and then had dashed over to his post like a good soldier under a heavy downpour. His appearance was just what was needed to break the tedious monotony of their long vigil.

But now what were they to do? When they went back upstairs, Canon Guiol told the bystanders of a letter in which Don Bosco had substantially said: "They will pester and bait you, but you'll only be harassed. If they want to expel you, ask for time to send the boys back to their parents, and meanwhile God will do the rest."¹⁰ On hearing this, Rostand [president of the Beaujour Society] said to his colleagues: "Let's not waste time here. If Don Bosco wrote that, we can leave because nothing will happen." They all left. Still, for several days the Salesians kept watch behind their barricade until all their fears were dispelled, and then they opened the door and resumed their regular routine. Two rabid papers, the *Radical* and the *Petit Provençal*, kept up their outcry and would not desist until they were silenced by the prefect of the province.¹¹

How did the boys at St. Leo's behave during this stormy period?

¹⁰Minutes, November 11, 1880. [Author]

¹¹Throughout that time Don Bosco's friends shared the Salesians' anxiety and made it their own, calling frequently at Valdocco. On November 12, 1880, Count Edward Mella, while talking about the events taking place in France, told an interesting story about King Charles Albert. When the Jesuits were expelled in disgrace from Piedmont in 1848, four of them took refuge in the home of a former student, the architect [Anthony] Spezia, whom Don Bosco asked to design the Church of Mary, Help of Christians in 1863. One evening an official of the carabinieri [Italian national police] called at his home and asked to speak with him.

"Are you Mr. Spezia, the architect?" he asked.

"Yes. May I help you?"

"How can I be sure that you are Mr. Spezia?"

"Because I'm not lying. If you wish, come in and ask anyone you like."

The officer walked in with a few carabinieri: then, opening his wallet, he said to Mr.

We have no indication that they did anything but take the side of their superiors. In fact, an important letter from Father Mendre to Don Bosco briefing him on those November days must have delighted the good father in what is said about them.¹² Furthermore a pocket notebook belonging to the cleric Louis Cartier, who witnessed it all, notes under the date November 3: "*At 9 o'clock, class as usual.*"¹³

We can see how sure Don Bosco was of his position from a very significant episode. Father Bologna, learning of the imminent expulsion, had sent a telegram to Father Cerruti, director at Alassio, requesting forty beds for the Salesians and their homeless boys. "We will all join you this evening," the telegram read. Father Cerruti also wrote to Father Rua to inform Don Bosco. So convinced was he that by the time his letter got to Turin the refugees would already be in the house at Alassio that he stated flatly that the Salesians expelled from Marseille had indeed arrived. Father Rua hastened to give Don Bosco the fateful news. "What are you saying?" Don Bosco replied. "That's impossible. They are not supposed to be expelled. I wrote as much to Father Bologna."

"Yet Father Cerruti says they are already at Alassio."

"Impossible."

"I'm sorry, Father, but the letter is very clear."

"Still I tell you they could not have been expelled. Give me the letter."

He read it and remarked, "There must be some misunderstanding, some mistake. . . . Leave me the letter. . . . I will write to Father Bologna. You will see that I am right." He then went to his room

Spezia, "His Majesty thanks you for your hospitality to the Jesuit fathers and sends you these four thousand lire to defray expenses."

Let it be remembered that King Charles Albert would never have signed an order of Eugene of Carignano, his lieutenant general. On September 10, 1848, the king wrote to Pius IX from Alessandria, "Your Holiness certainly knows what was done here against our faith and religious orders during my absence from Turin. I am sick at heart because of it." [Author]

¹²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

¹³The same pocket diary, giving us but a few jotting in pencil, contains the following beautiful notation under November 2: "The remainder of the day went by very tranquilly. Both pupils and teachers kept busy. Like gentle lambs we were all resigned, taking our meals in passive expectancy of what would befall us on the morrow to separate us from our beloved superior and from our boys. What upset us most was the thought that these many young boys, once out of the house, would be exposed to the worst dangers of losing their souls for all eternity." [Author]

and wrote to Father Bologna, asking for news. Notwithstanding Father Rua's insistence that Father Bologna was at Alassio, Don Bosco addressed the letter to Marseille and mailed it without a moment's delay.

He showed the same self-assurance when Father Lemoyne, who had come to Turin from Nizza Monferrato, asked him why he had written to Father Bologna, "Don't fear. You will be bothered and pestered, but they will not expel you." So too he could not understand why Don Bosco refused to believe Father Rua's statement. With that fatherly trust, so lavishly bestowed on his sons, Don Bosco did not hide the cause of his self-assurance. His explanation to Father Lemoyne was very brief, but he spoke at length about it on the evening of December 1 at San Benigno while he was there a few days with the superior chapter, putting some final touches on the deliberations of the general chapter. The chronicle tells us that they held long meetings both morning and evening. In the evening session he informed the chapter with a smile that he wanted to narrate a dream.

Back in 1858—he said—when I first went to Rome, as well as on other occasions, Pius IX told me to narrate or to record anything that might have a semblance of the supernatural. That's why I write or tell you certain things. I do so gladly because they always redound to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

I had this dream about the time of the feast of Our Lady's Nativity.¹⁴ I did not mention it before because I gave it little importance and bided my time. Well, like it or not, it has now taken on significance that warrants my recounting it.

It was the time when we were beginning to fear for religious congregations. Indeed, since the Jesuits had already been expelled, it was certain that the others would have the same fate. I feared for our own houses in France, praying and asking others to pray, and then one night, as I slept, I saw the Blessed Virgin Mary standing aloft before me very much like the statue of Mary, Help of Christians atop the dome. She wore a huge mantle spreading wide about Her, beneath which were sheltered all our houses in France. Our Lady was looking upon them with a smiling countenance, when suddenly a terrible storm arose, or perhaps it was an

¹⁴On September 21 [1880] the superior chapter held its meeting at Sampierdarena. When, during that session, the discussion centered on the expulsion of religious from France, one of the members asked Don Bosco if the Salesians would also be driven out. Certainly under the influence of this dream Don Bosco firmly answered: "No, no, no!" [Author]

earthquake, with lightning, hail, horrible monsters of every shape and form, and gunshots and artillery fire that paralyzed everyone with terror.

The monsters, lightning bolts and shelling were aimed at our Salesians who huddled beneath Mary's mantle, but of all those who were under the protection of such a powerful defender, not one was hurt. The missiles kept hitting the mantle and falling to the ground. Bathed in a sea of light, Her face radiant with a heavenly smile, the Blessed Virgin Mary kept saying, *Ego diligentes Me diligo* [I love those who love Me]. Little by little the storm abated, and none of our confreres fell victim to that storm or earthquake or hurricane, or whatever else you want to call it.

I did not intend to give much importance to this dream, but still I did write to all our confreres in France to remain calm. They asked me, "How come everyone is alarmed and you alone are serene in the midst of all this uproar and threat?" I answered only that they should trust in the protection of the Blessed Virgin. But no one took that seriously. I wrote to Father Guiol, parish priest of St. Joseph's, and told him not to be afraid because all would turn out well, but his answer showed me that he had not understood. And indeed, now that we reflect on it, as the storm dwindles away, we can recognize that something really extraordinary has taken place. All the French religious congregations which had been doing so much good in France over so many years were disbanded, while our own, a foreign congregation living on the generous charity of the French people, and harassed by a furious press constantly screaming to the government to throw us out, continues calmly. Isn't it amazing? This must be a constant encouragement to entrust ourselves to the Virgin Mary. But let us beware of bragging, because one single boastful gesture may well cause us to lose Our Lady's benevolence toward us and let the enemy claim the field.

At this point, Father Rua remarked, "But other congregations have also been devoted to Our Lady. How come . . ."

"The Madonna acts as She pleases," Don Bosco replied. "Besides, it has always happened in this most extraordinary way ever since I was nine or ten years old. I seemed then to be seeing vast crowds of boys there on my farm. And someone said to me, 'Why don't you teach them?'

"'Because I do not know how.'

"'Never mind, I am sending you.'

"I was so happy after that," Don Bosco concluded, "that everyone could see it."

In all reality, the reason why everything went so well was quite simple. The police official who was charged with evicting the

Salesians from St. Leo's first had to do the same to the nearby Dominicans. But it took him until ten o'clock that night before he could break down the doors and force his way through the barricades, and then it was too late to attack St. Leo's, the last religious house on his list. In addition, during the night, the prefect of the province received orders from the government to hold up on any further action; political considerations counseled moderation.

It would be wrong, however, to suppose that Don Bosco had disregarded taking prudent steps to avert danger from St. Leo's. The fact was that he had strongly appealed to the Italian consul in Marseille, Hannibal Strambio, a former schoolmate of his at Chieri.¹⁵ On this gentleman's advice and with Don Bosco's approval, Father Mendre compiled a dossier for the government defending St. Leo's, and so effectively rebutting the accusations of the press that the slanderous articles were stopped by order of the prefect of the province.¹⁶

Not only did Don Bosco rely on human prudence; he positively would not have his sons yield to a euphoric security because of his encouraging remarks. In a letter not in our possession, dated November 16,¹⁷ as Don Bosco expressed his personal relief for the temporary respite and reiterated his usual optimism, he still urged that, even after singing the *Te Deum*, they should continue to pray because the storm, though receding, was not yet over. Indeed, only a few weeks later a new bill was brought to the French Assembly, aimed at choking the life out of any surviving religious congregations and charitable institutions by relentless taxation.¹⁸ In that same letter, after saying that he had written to the Holy Father to brief him on the events, Don Bosco added that if things did not get worse, he would be visiting them in January. He then took up the request made to him that the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians who had been assigned to Marseille should go in secular clothing. He had no objection and thought it the thing to do under the circumstances, leaving it to Canon Guiol to determine the right time for them to go.¹⁹

¹⁵See p. 83. See also Vol. I, pp. 262, 265ff. [Editor]

¹⁶Minutes, December 16, 1880. [Author]

¹⁷Minutes, November 18, 1880. We do not know the addressee. [Author]

¹⁸Minutes, December 16, 1880. [Author]

¹⁹Minutes, November 18, 1880. Regarding the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, we read in the minutes of December 2: "The date of the sisters' arrival has not yet been set.

Don Bosco's foresight also prompted him to contact the Italian government. In October [1880] he appealed to Benedict Cairoli, Italy's premier and foreign minister, for a subsidy in acknowledgment of the charitable work of his houses in France to benefit the sons of Italian immigrants. "I enclose a letter for Premier Cairoli, and for Commendatore Malvano, who, though a Jew, has always been a good benefactor of ours," he wrote to Father Dalmazzo.²⁰ "Put them in clean envelopes and, in view of the present situation in France, deliver them personally without delay." The letter to the premier reads as follows:

Turin, October 18, 1880

Your Excellency,

Some years ago I had the honor of calling on the foreign minister then in office to discuss the deplorable condition of many boys of Italian families in southern France. In many instances, having been abandoned, they ran afoul of the law and were deported back to Italy.

At that time I suggested suitable remedies which the foreign minister praised and supported. Relying solely on the help of Divine Providence, I then opened two hospices for young apprentices at Nice and Marseille, respectively, as well as two agricultural schools in the area of Fréjus and Toulon.

Quite a few boys were taken in by these institutions, which soon proved inadequate to handle the growing number of applicants. The work of rebuilding and expanding soon began. However, since I lacked funds to maintain and operate these institutions, I respectfully appealed in April 1879, with the encouragement of the Italian consul at Marseille, to Your Excellency for assistance on behalf of these unfortunate young people, who have to combat vice and poverty and who keep increasing to many more than a hundred.

Since I have not yet received a reply to my previous petition and the need is pressing, I venture to renew my appeal. I fully trust that you will help me better the lot of this most endangered and dangerous segment of society. May God grant you good health.

Yours respectfully,
Fr. John Bosco

Meantime, a convent is being prepared for their convenience next to St. Leo's. Formed at Don Bosco's school, they will make a positive, intelligent and dedicated contribution to Don Bosco's work. Without fail, their coming to Marseille will greatly and in a very special way contribute to the good will and the anxious cares of the ladies of the committee." [Author]

²⁰Turin, October 18, 1880. [Author]

The appeal touched the heart of the foreign minister, who arranged for a yearly subsidy of a thousand lire to be included in the 1881 budget and disbursed annually to our house in Marseille and to each of the other houses. To sidestep parliamentary debate, he lumped the amount in with other moneys budgeted for the Italian consul in Marseille on behalf of Italian immigrants.²¹ This was also one way for Don Bosco to call the government's kindly attention to his activities in France during these trying times.

Finally, on Christmas Eve, Consul Hannibal Strambio sent him a very warm letter from Marseille, addressing him as "Dearest Father John," and assuring him that all danger seemed to have been averted, and that people were beginning to appreciate St. Leo's Festive Oratory as a hospice of high moral standards immensely helpful to the underprivileged. Don Bosco strongly urged his sons in Marseille to thank God for the blessings showered upon them throughout the past year, and to renew their trust in heaven's protection for the coming year, repeating the slogan, "Forward, without fear."²²

Seemingly troubles never came singly to Don Bosco. In May 1880 the French situation caused him a very painful letdown which did not make news, but cut deeply within him. Readers may recall the "observations" noted by the Holy See to his first triennial report, which we considered in Chapter 8 of this volume.²³ One of the points in controversy concerned the novitiate in Marseille.²⁴ After sending his second reply on January 12,²⁵ he received no further communication in writing from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. Four months later, however, Father Dalmazzo, procurator general, came to learn that Don Bosco's clarifications on that question had been regarded as no better than specious ruses, if not downright deceptions. Wounded to the heart by this information, Don Bosco wrote to Father Dalmazzo, pouring out all the bitter grief within him in the following letter:²⁶

²¹Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, November 27, 1880. [Author]

²²Minutes, December 30, 1880. This slogan is quoted in Italian as "Andiamo avanti senza timore" in the minutes of January 13, 1881. We do not have the letter from which it was taken. It is the letter cited at the meeting of December 30, 1880. [Author]

²³See pp. 156-169. [Editor]

²⁴See p. 165. [Editor]

²⁵See pp. 163f. [Editor]

²⁶He also made a report to Cardinal Nina, cardinal protector, as we gather from a reference of His Eminence in a note to Don Bosco dated May 13, 1880. [Author]

Sampierdarena, May 7, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

The novitiate at Marseille is merely under construction, with much work still to be done. No novices have been or are living there. As things stand [in France], it seems foolish to try to open it now as we tried to do back in 1879. Hence, our French novices continue to come to Turin until we can clearly see what we can do to benefit our holy Catholic faith.

I have already submitted three petitions for this novitiate, and if and when the time comes to open it, a fourth will be sent to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, if the other three have been misplaced.

Had I been able to obtain an audience with Cardinal Ferrieri three years ago or even this year, I could have given him clarifications which would have saved us a mess of trouble and offset considerable harm to our Congregation, but my efforts were all in vain.

I cannot conceal my bitter sorrow at not being able to make myself understood. I work for the Church and intend all my Salesians to work for it until their dying breath. I seek no financial assistance, but only that understanding and that charity which are compatible with Holy Church's authority.

I am waiting for further requests for clarifications, and I shall do my utmost to express myself lest what I intend to say be totally misinterpreted.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Three facts cannot be denied. First, in January 1879, Don Bosco, urged by the new bishop of Marseille, renewed his petition to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for authorization to establish a canonically approved novitiate in that city. Second, on February 5, the same Sacred Congregation forwarded Don Bosco's petition to the bishop of Marseille for additional information and received from Bishop [Jean Louis] Robert a lengthy letter of commendation dated February 23, stating the assured feasibility of immediately opening a novitiate in the Salesian house at Marseille. Third, despite the bishop's statement that the novitiate could be opened *at once*, Don Bosco took no action because the house did not have convenient quarters for the novices' residence, and so he waited until 1882.

During those years most French novices went to Italy, though a few made their novitiate singly in our French houses. Once again we are obliged to repeat ourselves *ad nauseam*, but we must do so because now we have documents to back us up. In the archdiocesan process conducted by the chancery of Turin with the Holy See's authorization in 1917-18, Cardinal Cagliero deposed in a sworn statement:²⁷ "Until 1884 when the customary privileges were granted [to the Salesian Congregation], Don Bosco availed himself of every indult granted him orally by Pope Pius IX and, later, by Leo XIII. He did so very prudently, but more often when he deemed it necessary for God's glory and the welfare of souls, as I was personally told by Don Bosco himself and by his [second] successor, Father Albera."

Esteem, love and reverence for Don Bosco in France were the theme of eloquent testimonials which continually increased and spread to the day of his death. In Nice, Dr. [Charles] D'Espiney wrote a short biography of Don Bosco to meet the desires expressed by many people in France who eagerly sought to know more of his life and work. We shall consider it in the next volume. The minutes of meetings of the Marseille ladies' committee regularly refer to Don Bosco's words and blessings as those of a saint. In Paris the famous Father [François] Moigno, S.J., learned physicist and mathematician, founder of the scientific journal *Cosmos* and author of the monumental work *Les splendeurs de la foi* [The Splendors of the Faith], wrote to the director at Marseille, who had consulted him on a heating system: "Heart and soul I am devoted to Don Bosco and his wondrous works." Such expressions of forthright outspoken admiration are all the more worthy of note when we realize that they were uttered by Frenchmen in reference to an Italian—a clear sign that they were seriously convinced of his holiness, not alien to any segment of the Church.

²⁷*Summarium*, p. 84. [Author]

CHAPTER 26

The Beginning of the Real Missions of Patagonia

PATAGONIA today [1933] is not the Patagonia of sixty years ago. So radically have conditions changed throughout the territory that when young Patagonians hear talk of savages, even of Patagonian Indians, they immediately react with almost fiery indignation against such an affront to their native land. Yet their own Argentine ancestors, who lived on the outskirts of Buenos Aires before General [Julio] Roca's military expedition [against the Indians] and who witnessed first-hand the poverty and the deeds of these wilderness and jungle tribes, would certainly view the whole matter quite differently. All we need do is quickly glance at one of the maps of De Moussy's admirable volume on Argentina,¹ written sixty years ago, to form an idea of the conditions then prevailing throughout that boundless territory. Sprawled across those vast expanses are written the words *Wasteland, Pampas, Unexplored Territory, Unknown Territory, Indians, Southern Desert Traversed Only by Savages*. It was suicide for white men to venture into that territory, where they were summarily taken captive and treated as overbearing invaders. Not even those who lived on the fringes of the wilderness were safe, since they were at all times exposed to the *indiadas*, the Indian raids, as roving savages fell in hordes upon the well-cleared ranch lands of the Argentine herders and rustled their cattle to supply beef for the neighboring Chileans who had no herds of their own. We need not dwell on the savage forays made upon small, isolated outposts scattered over vast distances across the plains, as the Indians plundered, massacred and burned all to the ground.

Terrorized by the army's firepower, the natives withdrew into the recesses of the Cordilleras and a few hideouts along the banks of

¹Martin De Moussy, *Description géographique et statistique de la Confédération d'Argentine*, Paris 1862, Plate X. [Author]

the great southern rivers, freeing boundless tracts of land for colonization; settlements rapidly shot up and grew. Salesians played a major role in this process of civilization, for, once the troops left, they set up mission posts at strategic points, from which they could offer the settlers an effective program of religion and education, reaching out all the while to the surviving Indians. Ever loyal to their tribal chieftains, the natives slowly came to look upon Don Bosco's missionaries as their best friends who brought them the light of the Gospel and strove to reconcile both victors and vanquished into a new relationship of mutual benefit.

The numbers of these Indians did not loom as large as they had claimed to be when, armed and organized into a federation, they threatened the Argentine government as if they could even face up to its troops. All told, the Indians were no more than eighty thousand, and if they rejected the white man and his civilized ways, it was not only because they could not forget the ill treatment they had suffered, but also because they greatly feared that they would be robbed of their independence. Unchallenged masters of their own mysterious wastelands, they saw even religion as posing a danger of servitude; hence no missionary had ever safely managed to draw near to their clustered tents. Consequently, the utter futility of such a sacrifice of life kept both diocesan and religious missionaries from venturing into that treacherous territory.

As a result, Indian pride swelled to the point of a madness which so inebriated them that they felt they were the unchallenged lords of their own wilderness, imagining that no one would dare cross it without first submitting to Indian supremacy. The daring expedition of 1879² was undertaken to disillusion them and wipe out for all time their threatening stance.

These were the natives of Patagonia. Now let us look at the territory itself which was to be the first apostolic field of Don Bosco's missionaries. The Patagonia region geographically included the Pampas, Rio Negro, Chubut, Santa Cruz, and Tierra del Fuego, but strictly speaking it was limited to Rio Negro, Chubut and Santa Cruz. For the time being, we shall consider only the far northern portion of the territory named after the Rio Negro River, which is formed by the confluence of the Neuquén and the Limay

²See p. 217. [Editor]

and flows over six hundred and thirty miles to the Atlantic Ocean. It is an area about twice the size of Italy.

Once the Indian threat had been quelled, it became obvious that the territory itself posed almost insurmountable obstacles. Today, with even better reason, we may say with Dr. Gabriel Carrasco that "from the Atlantic shores to the peaks of the Andes one meets scattered towns and colonies of varying wealth and development which open themselves to civilization. Steamships churn their way up the deep waters of the once feared Rio Negro, bringing vibrant new life into old Indian strongholds. The strident shrieks of locomotives awaken sleepy echoes in the valleys. The remote Andean mountain lakes look down with awe upon the Argentine flag flying at the masts of ships plying their way through their waters."³ But what did the missionary find fifty years ago? A shoreline skirted by a desert where fierce winds whipped up mountains of sand known as *médanos*; further inland, a chain of rising hills and plateaus covered with very scant vegetation, dotted here and there with brackish pools trailing off into endless sandy waterless wastes called *traversias*, and rudimentary vegetation. In summer the heat is oppressive, the dust is blinding and choking, and man and beast languish from thirst. The Andes region, encased between the Argentine Pre-Cordillera and the Royal Cordillera of Chile, is a beautiful land indeed, of meadows and forests, mountain streams and lakes: a panorama of indescribable majesty, but inaccessible to human travel. This was the varied environment in which the Salesians witnessed the development of a new Patagonian federation, to which they contributed a giant share by their churches in whose kindly shade settlers met and rested, by their trade schools and agricultural colonies for white and Indian children alike, by their first attempts at agriculture, by their first hospitals, and even by their first newspapers.

A bird's-eye view such as this introduces us to the unfolding of these missions' history which our narrative will have to cover in bits and pieces. This summary presentation will serve as a basis of our historical reconstruction.

The true history of the Patagonian missions begins with the twin settlements of Patagónes and Viedma on the banks of the Rio

³*Almanaque de la familia Católica*, July 1, 1902, Buenos Aires. [Author]

Negro, some ten miles from the mouth of the river.⁴ For nine years these were the only two mission stations; it took that much time to develop a well-worked-out plan of mission apostolate. From those two strategic positions the Salesian missionaries set out on their journeys along the course of the river and made their way, at the price of heroic sacrifice, into the valleys, the back hills and the mountains to visit the poor Indians in their huts (*toldos*), the settlers in their ranches, and the outposts which were sprouting everywhere. First they explored the territory; then they chose the spots best suited for mission stations, thus working their way into all of northern and central Patagonia and into the Pampas, to bring the regeneration of baptism to the natives.

The Patagónes mission came first. The archbishop of Buenos Aires, after entrusting the entire mission of Patagonia—particularly the two parishes of Patagónes and Viedma—to Don Bosco in August 1879, opened negotiations with the provincial, Father [Francis] Bodrato, on how to systematize them, while at the same time soliciting the necessary funds from the government. To say two parishes is just a manner of speaking, much as if we were to divide Italy into two halves, north and south of the Po River, and assign the pastoral care of each half to one parish priest. Negotiations were concluded by November, and preparations were made for the missionaries to leave for their mission stations; but they finally left on January 15 of the following year. On that day the impressive departure ceremony which had been held in Turin was copied, though on a smaller scale. It was held in the Church of St. Charles, and the archbishop, assisted by his canons and other priests, delivered a moving sermon to a full congregation of the Salesians' friends and benefactors. Then, after the ritual prayers for a safe journey, the departing missionaries were escorted to the steamship "Santa Rosa," which weighed anchor the next morning. Father Joseph Fagnano, director of the mission, was accompanied by two priests, two coadjutors, and four Daughters of Mary, Help of

⁴These two settlements, facing each other on either bank of the Rio Negro, formed a single town known as Carmen de Patagónes until 1879. From that year on, the right bank settlement took the name of its founder, Francis Viedma, while the other was named simply Patagónes. Today Viedma is the capital of the state of Rio Negro and is within the archdiocese of Buenos Aires. (Politically and administratively, territories which are not provinces or federal states are controlled by the federal government.) Patagónes is now a city of the province of Buenos Aires, which is within the diocese of La Plata. [Author]

Christians; the latter were to open their first convent in that territory. One newspaper⁵ in the capital wrote of the sisters: "This is the first time since the dawn of creation that nuns will be seen in those far-off southern lands."

As pastor of Patagónes, including all the villages and Indian tribes between the Rio Negro and Rio Colorado, Father Fagnano lost no time in starting his apostolate. By September he had two schools fully operating in Patagónes; the boys' school had forty-eight pupils, while the girls' school had forty. Special attention was given to the Indian children whose parents came to town for trading or other business. God only knows what sacrifices those first five years cost the missionaries: insufficient personnel, scant funds, and opposition from civil authorities worked against Father Fagnano's efforts. Had not God's mighty hand upheld him, he would have been forced to give up, despite his undaunted spirit. In 1884, handing over his thriving mission to others, this gallant son of Don Bosco was appointed prefect apostolic of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, where he worked wonders of zeal.

One of his fellow Salesians served alone for some time in the parish of Viedma, until the newly appointed pastor—Father Dominic Milanesio,⁶ whom we have mentioned several times in these Memoirs—arrived in December. Whether or not he previously had any general notion of the vastness of his mission territory, he zealously set about tracking down the Indians and manifested such leadership qualities that a year later his superiors sent that great-hearted missionary, Father Joseph Beauvoir,⁷ to take his place at Viedma and left Father Milanesio free to devote himself full-time to his cherished apostolic explorations. He was truly God's gift to all the settlers along the Rio Negro, but most of all a father to the Indians, whose language he spoke fluently. His name carried so much power that the Indians would invoke it whenever they found themselves defenseless against the ill-treatment of the whites. In his thirty-three years of apostolic work he repeatedly crisscrossed all of Patagonia on horseback and traversed the Cordilleras no less than twenty-seven times. He suffered much, but his sacrifices were abundantly compensated by

⁵*America del Sur*, January 13, 1880. [Author]

⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

the good he did. It was due to him that the remaining armed Indian tribes made their peace with the commanding officers of the army posts. He initiated contacts with the fiery Manuel Namuncurà, later baptized with his whole family by Bishop John Cagliero who was the embodiment of all the efforts exerted to Christianize Patagonia.

Just as the Indians hailed Father Fagnano as the "Great Father," they called Father Milaneseo the "Good Father." Don Bosco had fostered the belated vocations of both these mission heroes, and it was he who welcomed and formed them even before he initiated the Sons of Mary Program.

They and other early missionaries failed only in one important thing: they sacrificed and worked themselves to death on the field of their apostolic labors but never troubled to record in writing for the sake of those who followed them the history of their struggles and victories. Hence, with the passing of years, doubts have recently been voiced as to the reality of their genuine missionary accomplishments. But one day an impartial history will refute these odious insinuations, as one well-informed speaker solemnly dubbed them.⁸

At the proper time and place we will continue our account of the Salesian missionaries' achievements in Patagonia during the last years of Don Bosco's life. To the very end of his days he followed them with encouragement, counsel and prayer, while they made their way into those remote lands to bring faith and civilization to their inhabitants. But more than any more support he could possibly give, Don Bosco mostly contributed to his missionaries' progress by obtaining for them, not without considerable effort, a solid, ecclesiastical structure which we shall now begin to discuss.

For some time Don Bosco had realized the advantages of having an apostolic vicariate in Patagonia, and the reader is already acquainted with his first presentations of this matter to the Holy See,⁹ but the more the mission developed, the more this plan became not just a wise move but a downright necessity, if missionary activity there was to have any kind of regularity and permanence. Setting up an ecclesiastical jurisdiction subject not to

⁸Monsignor Duprat in the funeral oration for Cardinal Cagliero, which he delivered in the cathedral at Buenos Aires on February 26, 1926. [Author]

⁹See Vol. XIII, p. 595. [Editor]

the local ordinary but only to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith would guarantee a homogeneous, well-organized personnel not subject to local Church authorities, freedom of action in the exercise of priestly ministry, and the possibility of direct, unbroken contact with the government, whose favorable attitude offered much promise. For these reasons, this was one of Don Bosco's main concerns during his stay in Rome at the beginning of 1880. Accustomed to set his mind on the business at hand as fully as it warranted, he first confidentially sought the advice of several prelates. Then he brought it up to the Holy Father in his audience of April 5. In turn the Holy Father kindly asked Archbishop Jacobini, secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, to discuss the matter unofficially with Don Bosco and with Cardinal Alimonda of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Assisted by Father Dalmazzo, Don Bosco held several meetings with both prelates and drew up a memorandum which he handed to the cardinal, together with several corroborative documents, on April 15. That evening the cardinal presented them to the Pope. Don Bosco accompanied the packet with a covering letter:

Rome, April 13, 1880

Most Holy Father,

It is my privilege to present to Your Holiness a brief report on the current situation of the Salesian missions in [South] America, and on several measures deemed necessary to consolidate the work among the Indians of the Pampas and of Patagonia. At your kind request, I conferred at length with His Eminence Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda and with His Excellency Archbishop Dominic Jacobini. Prizing the mature reflections and suggestions of these two learned dignitaries, we came to the conclusion that an apostolic vicariate should be established for the existing settlements along the Rio Negro and that a seminary for the training of missionaries should be set up in Europe.

Any directive Your Holiness may wish to issue on this matter will serve as our norm in negotiating with the Argentine government and with Archbishop Aneyros of Buenos Aires.

In humble reverence, I invoke your apostolic blessing on all the

members of our lowly Congregation, especially on those who labor in our American missions and implore your blessing.

Your most humble and devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The memorandum itself was a clear, well-written report on the plan of action which had been adopted, on what had already been done and what remained to be done, and its obvious conclusion: the necessity of a vicariate apostolic in Patagonia and of a seminary for the training of future missionaries in Marseille.

Rome, April 13, 1880

Report to His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, on the Salesian missions in South America with a view to establishing a vicariate apostolic in Patagonia.

THE SALESIAN MISSIONS
AND THEIR RELATIONS WITH THE HOLY SEE

The foreign missions have always been a cherished concern of the Salesian Congregation. The need of strengthening the faith in the baptized, of spreading that faith in uncivilized territories, and thus of assisting their people to shed the darkness of error in which they live has always been the object of our study, reading, and admiration. For a long time our former pupils went to mission lands by joining other religious institutes or at the request of local bishops in America, Australia, India, China and Japan. Our initial approach to sending a missionary expedition was made in 1872 to His Eminence Cardinal Barnabò, prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Later, His Holiness, Pope Pius IX, advised us to gather those Salesians who volunteered for the missions and send them in groups to open houses and hospices where the need was greatest. Among other regions, the Supreme Pontiff kindly suggested South America and the Argentine Republic in particular. Having himself spent some time there, he knew the crying need for missionaries to care for Italian immigrants and also make some attempts to reach out to the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia. With great generosity, Pius IX effectively supported our first missionary expedition financially. On November 1, 1875, ten Salesians called on the Holy Father to seek his blessing and to receive their apostolic mandate personally from him. The Vicar of Christ welcomed them very graciously, encouraged them fervently, and gave

them a letter of introduction to the archbishop of Buenos Aires dated that very day and issued by the cardinal secretary of state.

They were granted required faculties by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in a decree dated November 14, 1875.

Some time later the Supreme Pontiff voiced his deep satisfaction in a brief dated November 17, which praised and approved the new expedition.

To further stabilize that mission, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, once informed of the growth of the spiritual harvest and of the beginning of native vocations, authorized the erection of a novitiate by a decree of July 6, 1876.

The present Pontiff—may God preserve him in good health for many years—graciously issued a second brief on September 18, 1878, voicing his fatherly love and warm approval of the Salesian mission in [South] America.

The same Leo XIII—though himself in financial straits—made a generous contribution to our fourth missionary expedition when he learned of our monetary difficulties and encouraged us to persevere in our endeavors in a letter dated November 23, 1878.

AIM OF THE SALESIAN MISSIONS IN [SOUTH] AMERICA

Pope Pius IX suggested three objectives to the Salesian missionaries:

1. To care for Italian immigrants, especially the young, scattered in great numbers across South America.
2. To open hospices near Indian territories and make them serve as junior seminaries as well as homes for the poorest and most destitute youths.
3. By these means to pave the way for bringing the Gospel to the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia. The first missionary expedition of Salesians, as previously stated, left on November 14, 1875,¹⁰ and arrived in Buenos Aires, the capital of Argentina, one month later.

THE SALESIAN MISSIONS IN [SOUTH] AMERICA TODAY

At present one hundred and twenty Salesians work in [South] America, as follows:

1. In the diocese and city of Buenos Aires, the provincial house is the center of direction and administration. The provincial resides in the recently established parish of San Carlos in the Almagro neighborhood where it cares for some six thousand souls. The Pius IX Hospice shelters

¹⁰See Vol. XI, pp. 366ff. [Editor]

one hundred and fifty poor boys who are taught trades; non-resident boys and adults are instructed and entertained on Sundays.

We also have a novitiate and a house of studies for Salesians. Furthermore, in a neighborhood called "La Boca,"¹¹ a parish dedicated to St. John the Evangelist cares for some twenty-seven thousand people, mostly Italian immigrants. We also run a school for poor boys.

Lastly, we service the Church of Mater Misericordiae which offers pastoral care mainly to Italians, young and old, who come in large numbers from scattered areas in the city and surrounding countryside.

2. In the town of San Nicolás de los Arroyos, situated on the fringe of the Indian territory, we have a boarding school or junior seminary for the missions; some vocations have already matured.

The Salesians also conduct a public church and a parish in Ramallo, a village of four thousand souls. The people live on widely scattered farms, assembling on Sundays for Mass, confession, Communion and baptism.

3. With God's help we have already established several houses in the Republic of Uruguay.

The Pius IX Boarding School at Villa Colón is rated as a diocesan seminary for missionaries and has been affiliated with the state university; moreover a parish church serves the suburbs of Villa Colón.

In Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay, we run a day and Sunday oratory with a school for poor and imperiled boys.

In Las Piedras, a parish of six thousand souls, we conduct a day school and a festive oratory.

DAUGHTERS OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

Three years ago the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians went to [South] America to assist the Salesians and to work among the countless poor girls who live in situations that daily imperil their faith and morals.

In the parish of Las Piedras, in the diocese of Montevideo, the sisters aid the missionaries in teaching religion and other subjects, supervising and preparing Indian girls for confession, Holy Communion, and confirmation.

In Villa Colón they teach courses in home economics on weekdays and run a Sunday school for older girls.

In Montevideo they have a hospice and school for girls who might be in danger of falling under Protestant influence.

In Buenos Aires, the sisters have started a number of classes, workshops and Sunday schools for abandoned girls.

¹¹See Vol. XII, pp. 190ff. [Editor]

SETTLEMENTS ALONG THE RIO NEGRO

After this rapid survey of Salesian missions in [South] America, I should like to consider briefly the most necessary steps we must take to improve the lot of the Pampas and Patagonian Indians who live along the banks of the Rio Negro.

The Rio Negro, rising in the Cordillera de los Andes, follows a long, torturous course of well over six hundred and thirty miles and empties into the Atlantic Ocean at 40° latitude south. The north bank of the river borders the vast wilderness of the Pampas, while the limitless range of eastern Patagonia starts on the south bank.

For four centuries Catholic missionaries worked very hard to penetrate this wild hinterland, enduring indescribable hardships, but all in vain as far as we know, for none of those who headed into the interior of Patagonia ever came back.

In 1878 the Salesians too, eager to make an attempt, sailed in a government ship to the Rio Negro, but a raging storm threatened to destroy them, driving them off course several times and finally forcing them to put into harbor at Buenos Aires.¹² In 1879 they tried a second time, taking a different route with better success.¹³ They crossed the Pampas and met with the *caciques* or chiefs of the savages; they received a warm welcome and baptized more than four hundred Indian children. On reaching the Rio Negro, they went to the settlements which the archbishop of Buenos Aires had entrusted to the Salesians in a letter dated August 15, 1879, in which he described this mission as follows:

“At long last the moment has come when I can offer you the Patagonian mission in which you are so interested, as well as the parish of Patagónes which may serve as headquarters for the mission. As you will have already seen in letters from Father Costamagna, the parish of Patagónes takes in:

“1. Carmen de Patagónes, with some thirty-five hundred souls, and a rectory for the parish priest.

“2. Guardia-Mitre, about fifty miles from Patagónes, with a population of roughly one thousand.

“3. The Conesa settlement, a hundred and two miles from Patagónes, with about eight hundred Indians of the Catriel tribe.

“4. The new settlement at Choele-Choel, two hundred and ten miles from Patagónes, with a population of about two thousand, including Christians and Indians.

“All of these centers are located on the north bank of the Rio Negro,

¹²See Vol. XIII, pp. 612f. [Editor]

¹³See pp. 216ff. [Editor]

which is easily fordable since its width does not exceed nine hundred feet. Opposite Carmen de Patagónes, on the south shore of the Rio Negro in Patagonia, lies Mercedes de Patagónes, residence of the governor of these territories. It has a church adequate to the needs of fifteen hundred people.

"About twenty-four miles from Mercedes de Patagónes is the settlement of Francis Xavier, also on the south bank of the Rio Negro in Patagonia, with four hundred Indians of the Linares tribe.

"There is but one priest for all these centers. On Sundays, after celebrating Mass in his place of residence, he crosses the river to say another Mass at Mercedes. It is obvious that one priest cannot possibly serve all these parishes regularly, even with another priest to help him. I regret to say that a shortage of priests has made it impossible for me to remedy the situation.

"Some years ago the Lazarist Fathers took charge of this mission, but little was done besides some repairs on the missionaries' residence; lack of personnel forced their withdrawal.

"Besides these problems we must also contend with the consequences of Protestant infiltration."

To stem the rising tide of such evils, to give the Patagonian missions some degree of stability, and to shield the people from the snares set by the enemies of our faith, we accepted the zealous archbishop's offer and the generous proposals he made us in the Argentine government's name to send Salesians to Patagonia. Last December 15, twelve Salesians left by ship for Carmen de Patagónes and after a fairly smooth voyage arrived there on January 2. Other confreres left later to join them. With the continued support of Divine Providence, we hope to send out another expedition shortly.¹⁴

To promote both the civil and the religious well-being of these settlements, the Argentine government established them into a province; it favors the work of the missions and presently offers to cooperate with the Salesians in evangelizing the Indians on both sides of the Rio Negro. To this end we have been promised material and moral support. Lately, the president of the republic formally asked us for a report outlining the conditions we feel are needed to regularize the relations between the missionaries, the government, and the Indians.

On arriving in Patagonia the Salesians were advised by the archbishop of Buenos Aires to select Carmen de Patagónes for their headquarters.

¹⁴The expedition was to leave in December 1879, but as we have said, it was postponed. [See Vol. XIII, p. 610—Editor.] Don Bosco thought they had departed on schedule and so calculated that they should have arrived on January 2. He also assumed that all the Salesians and sisters assigned to that territory had been sent there. [Author]

Their first efforts were directed to building churches, hospices and schools for boys and girls. Thus, while some Salesians are engaged in teaching skills, trades and agriculture in the established settlements, others continue to advance into Indian territory to catechize and, where possible, establish new settlements in the hinterland.

The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians are already working in these Indian villages, setting up schools and hospices for homeless girls.

FUTURE PLANS

To establish our faith firmly in Patagonia and effectively to foster the mission's development and expansion, we believe that three important steps must be taken:

1. To set up a prefecture or vicariate apostolic as a center for existing settlements and those which, God willing, we hope to set up.
2. To found a seminary for students to learn the culture, language and customs of the Indians, as well as the history and geography of the territory.
3. To come up with a proposal which, while accepting the Argentine government's favorable offers, would guarantee the religious and civic status of the Indians embracing our faith.

Since negotiations with the government demand time and further refinement, the presentation of this proposal may be deferred.

However, the setting up of a vicariate apostolic and the founding of a seminary for the Patagonian missions should be considered immediately.

VICARIATE APOSTOLIC IN PATAGONIA

Since the Argentine government recently united the above settlements into a province named "Province of Patagonia," the vicariate or prefecture apostolic might be given the same name. It would comprise the settlements on both the north and the south banks of the Rio Negro and the territories to the east of Patagonia, until a second vicariate can be erected at Santa Cruz, a small settlement founded toward the Strait of Magellan, where the Rio Magellan empties into the Atlantic. The new vicariate would thus extend from 36° to 30° latitude south.

It should be borne in mind that the Cordillera de los Andes cuts through Patagonia from 40° to 50° latitude south and down to the Strait of Magellan; the eastern half faces the Atlantic, the western the Pacific. This second half belongs to Chile and hence should not form part of the projected vicariate. Below the Strait of Magellan lie Tierra del Fuego and surrounding islands extending as far south as Cape Horn, from 50° to 63°

latitude south. It would be wise to omit mentioning these lands in our proposed plan for a vicariate, since they are presently under contention by both the Argentine and Chilean governments.

Once the Holy See has set up a vicariate apostolic at Carmen de Patagónes and a permanent mission center, we will be entitled to funds from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood Association. We can also receive aid from charitable organizations founded in Buenos Aires to favor the spread of the Gospel into the Pampas and into Patagonia.

We also have well-founded hopes that the Argentine government will allot an annual subsidy to the vicariate which is considered indispensable to the political and religious needs of the territory.

SEMINARY FOR THE PATAGONIAN MISSIONS

Three boarding schools or junior seminaries have already been founded in South America, as noted previously, to foster vocations to the priesthood. One of these is at Villa Colón; another at Buenos Aires; the third at San Nicolás de los Arroyos, the last outpost of the Argentine Republic on the Pampas border. A few vocations have already matured, but for the time being they are exceedingly rare and far between, absolutely nowhere enough to meet the overriding needs of these dioceses, all of which suffer from a severe shortage of priests. It is therefore indispensable to set up a seminary in Europe to train evangelical workers for Patagonia.

Mature reflection on the feasibility of opening such a seminary in Italy, France or Spain shows that the city of Marseille is the best place for the seminary itself because it offers greater opportunity for material assistance and moral support, but later on a seminary residence could be opened in Spain to facilitate the study and practice of Spanish, the official language of the government and of the public schools and the first language to be taught to the Indians.

Once the vicariate apostolic has been established, both the seminary and the mission center could confidently hope to receive some financial assistance from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood Association; further, at the Holy Father's discretion, some simple way of getting donations for this purpose could be worked out.

So as not to offend the sensitivities of the dioceses, all of which are hurting from a painful scarcity of priestly vocations, it might be wiser to run the seminary courses only up to philosophy, leaving the students free to return to their own dioceses, enter a religious order, or choose to serve the Patagonian missions. Only these last should definitively be accepted

for courses which are clearly geared to the Indian missions of the Pampas, Patagonia and, God willing, Tierra del Fuego.

Everything set forth here has already been discussed with His Excellency, Archbishop Dominic Jacobini, secretary of the Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastic Affairs, and with His Eminence, Cardinal Cajetan Alimonda, of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, both of whom were expressly charged by His Holiness, Leo XIII, to deal with this matter and report to him. May the Holy Father graciously bless and approve all deliberations that he judges will redound to God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

Two days later, certainly in accord with the above-mentioned discussions, Don Bosco sent a formal notice to Archbishop Frederick Aneyros of Buenos Aires that this matter was now under negotiation; he also so informed Father Bodrato, the Salesian provincial. We cannot help but be touched by the exquisite delicacy and evangelical simplicity with which, in the first letter, Don Bosco handles a topic bound by its very nature to touch upon sensitive matters of jurisdiction.

Rome, April 15, 1880

Your Excellency,

I have duly received your letter as well as that sent me by your vicar general, Monsignor [Anthony] Espinosa, in which you personally and in the name of the Argentine government offered the missions of Patagónes and of the other settlements along the Rio Negro to the Salesians. I gratefully accepted that proposal and sent several missionaries to get first-hand information about the area and its needs, and to prepare the way for more missionaries who are ready to go. However, duly weighing your proposal, I thought it best to bring everything to the attention of the Holy Father and to ask for his enlightened counsel and guidance in so important a step. Wishing to be kept fully informed on this matter, His Holiness appointed a committee of high-ranking dignitaries who offered the following suggestions for the great glory of God and the welfare of souls.

1. They commend the pastoral concern of the archbishop of Buenos Aires, his zeal to develop his vast diocese, and especially his care to spread the Gospel to the Indians of the Pampas and Patagonia.

2. Because of the vast distance between the Rio Negro settlements and the archdiocesan seat (a journey of fifteen days), the committee proposed that a vicariate apostolic be established to comprise present and future

settlements along the shores of the Rio Negro. The new vicariate would extend from 36° to 50° latitude south. It would be called the “Vicariate Apostolic of Patagonia,” keeping the official name of the province. Its seat would be Carmen de Patagónes, which Your Excellency chose as the center of Salesian missionary action among the Indians.

3. Your Excellency is requested to use your good offices with the Argentine government to obtain an annual financial subsidy to set up and maintain the vicariate, which is judged indispensable for the civil and spiritual well-being of the area. In this connection I am writing to the superior of the Salesian missions to ask that, in full agreement with Your Excellency, he take all necessary steps to ensure the growth and stability of that mission work.

4. Would Your Excellency please send your reflections and suggestions to His Eminence Cardinal Nina, Secretary of State to His Holiness?

For my part, I shall not cease to do all I can to keep sending more missionaries to boost the ranks of those now in Patagonia and to solicit all the material help I can here in Europe.

Your Excellency zealously summoned the Salesians to South America, and in your goodness you have always supported and encouraged us. I fully trust that you will continue your fatherliness to us, while we respectfully promise to obey and serve you in every way we can.

With highest esteem and deep respect,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco
Superior General of the Salesian Congregation

The second letter was also couched in every careful terms, as is proper in a document which will eventually be subject to the critical scrutiny of competent authorities.

Rome, April 15, 1880

My dear Father Bodrato,

The good will shown by His Excellency, the archbishop of Buenos Aires, and by the Argentine government in their desire to bring civilization and religion to the Indians and settlers along the Rio Negro has persuaded me to accept willingly their offer of missions whose aim is to civilize and evangelize the inhabitants of that vast wilderness. As you well know, this prompted us to send Father Fagnano and others to prepare the grounds and accommodations for other Salesians who will soon leave to reinforce the ranks of their confreres in Patagonia.

But, anxious to lend firmer stability to our civilizing task among these people and to foster the teaching of trades, skills and agriculture among the Indians, I went to Rome and informed the Holy Father of the Argentine government's willingness to aid the Salesians with their travel expenses and their living needs in those wild lands. The Holy Father was quite pleased with this offer which gives him well-founded hopes of extending the Kingdom of Jesus Christ here on earth. In order that this pious undertaking be well thought out, he appointed a committee of high-ranking dignitaries to study what had been done in the past and what could be done now to aid the government's efforts to civilize and convert these natives, who also are children of Our Heavenly Father and have been called to enter the haven of the Catholic faith, the official religion of the Argentine Republic. After a careful study of the historic, geographic, civil and religious features of the Pampas and Patagonia, in view of the vast distances between those settlements and the archdiocesan seat of Buenos Aires, and of the population already exceeding ten thousand with constant growth, the Pope's committee concluded that a vicariate apostolic would serve as a moral and religious bond to hold the people and at the same time as a secure center about which the converted Indians could settle. Relying upon the Argentine government's generosity in an enterprise which aims at civilizing a large and very needy portion of that territory and considering the above-stated factors, the committee reached the following conclusions:

1. To thank the Argentine government for its support of religion, especially for bringing it to the Indians.

2. To consolidate the civil and religious standing of the Rio Negro settlements by establishing a vicariate apostolic. It would adopt the official name of the province and would comprise the present settlements and those which may later be founded in the areas bordering Indian territory. The new vicariate would extend from 36° latitude south to 50° latitude south.

3. To request of the government an annual financial subsidy to help erect and maintain this vicariate apostolic which is so far distant from any civilized center.

4. The government's intent may be communicated to His Eminence Cardinal Lawrence Nina, secretary of state of His Holiness. For a smooth procedure and the faithful execution of the government's plans, a written reply must be sent to it.

When you have duly informed the government authorities and provided all the information it requests, please send me a report so that we may do what we must to get this holy undertaking underway.

I take this occasion to express my thanks to the government of Argentina for the protection, good will and aid it has given the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

This formal letter, meant for the eyes of government officials, was accompanied by a more intimate note which expressed Don Bosco's fatherly love for his Salesians and for the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians.

Rome, April 17, 1880

My dear Father Bodrato,

Enclosed please find a letter to be forwarded to the government; it might be wise to make a copy in case you have to hand in the original. An almost identical letter has been sent to the archbishop; confer with him and please keep me informed on any decisions that might be taken. This has been a very lengthy negotiation, but the Holy Father, who now has it in hand, has given and continues to give it his personal attention.

Father Dalmazzo and I held preliminary discussions with Archbishop Jacobini of the Sacred Congregation of Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs, and with Cardinal Alimonda of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

If we can get a vicariate established, our missions will be subsidized by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, which will also help set up a seminary in Europe for the training of missionaries for the Pampas and Patagonia.

I have had news from the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians from time to time, and I bless the Lord for helping us in such manifest ways.

Tell everyone of my deepest satisfaction. The Holy Father is very enthusiastic about our missions. He sends you all his special blessing. He often speaks of you and he too intends to give us material assistance.

Urge our dear confreres:

1. To work just as much as their health will allow while being on guard against idleness.
2. To observe our rules. How tragic if we were to know them and not practice them!
3. Let me also know whether at least one of you can attend the general chapter in September. I would like this, if it is at all feasible. We have very

little news of Father Fagnano and his companions. We are busily training others to come to your assistance.

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Bodrato, and with you may He also bless all our dear Salesians and Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Give my respects to Dr. Carranza and Monsignor Espinosa. May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Yours always in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Fr. John Bosco

While all these protracted negotiations were going on, the time of the spiritual retreat during which Don Bosco would have to present some twenty Salesians as candidates for holy orders was fast approaching, but all the problems caused by his lack of privileges were still persisting.¹⁵ Therefore for graver reasons than in the past, wishing to obtain the ordination of two priests for the missions which Leo XIII had so benevolently approved and encouraged, he submitted this petition to the Holy Father:

Turin, July 14, 1880

Most Blessed Father:

The missions of Uruguay and Patagonia, which Your Holiness so graciously blessed and entrusted to the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, are experiencing wonderful growth and bear hopes of a rich spiritual harvest. A considerable number of priests, master craftsmen and sisters have already, with God's help, founded churches, houses, schools and hospices for Indian boys and girls, thousands of whom have been converted to the faith within a short period of time. But the present number of laborers is inadequate to meet the growing needs of that population, and

¹⁵He had gotten a taste of this in April, while in Rome. On April 8 Archbishop Gastaldi had written to Father Cagliero who, as catechist general of the Congregation, was in charge of those to be ordained: "I wish to caution you that when a diocesan ordinary allows a religious to receive holy orders outside the diocese, the ordinary is *under obligation* to submit him to an examination as prescribed by the Council of Trent and by the Pontifical. It was an oversight on my part to authorize you verbally to have the chancery's required permission to send a few Salesians to be ordained outside the prescribed time without being required to take the above examination." Then, as now (*Codex Iuris Canonici*, 997, #1), the ordinary of the diocese in which the ordinand lived could quite easily leave this examination to the ordaining bishop, and it was an exaggeration to speak of an *obligation* in this case. It is improbable that Archbishop Gastaldi, well versed in canon law, could have erred in so obvious a matter. However, it is quite likely that someone ill disposed [to the Salesians] might have suggested that they be required to take the examinations in Turin, as the archbishop was entitled, but not obliged, to demand. [Author]

therefore, with Your Holiness' consent, another missionary band is now being readied and should be leaving in the early part of next November. However, that we may carry out this holy enterprise, as demanded by these grave circumstances, we request that Your Holiness, in your sovereign clemency, allow the superior of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales to avail himself twice, within the months of August, September and October, of the *extra tempus* privilege, so as to present for holy orders those priests he has in Italy and in France who have reached canonical age, have completed their studies and are blessed with all other qualities required by Holy Church.

Humbly prostrate before you, I implore this distinct favor which will, I pray, be to God's greater glory and the welfare of the Indians, who most anxiously await those who will bring them the light of the Gospel and guide their steps on the path of eternal salvation.

Humbly,
John Bosco, *Petitioner*

Father Dalmazzo, whom Don Bosco instructed to present this petition, was also given the following counsel:¹⁶ "Please read the enclosed petition which is addressed to the Holy Father, and the letter, which is for Archbishop Agnozzi. Then, putting both into one envelope, deliver it to the curia and ask to see him.¹⁷ For your information, I requested the same faculty two years ago, but it was not granted until two months after the missionaries had departed.¹⁸ If you foresee any problems, ask Archbishop Agnozzi not to take it amiss if you appeal to our cardinal protector or have recourse to any other channel he may suggest. Remember too that Archbishop Agnozzi has always been kindly disposed to us: faculties granted to our missionaries and permission to open a novitiate in South America were all his doing."

Don Bosco was still putting his trust in the good offices of Archbishop Agnozzi, but circumstances had changed. From secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, the archbishop had become secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and in this office he had to follow the policies of the cardinal prefect with regard to Don

¹⁶Letter to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, July 14, 1880. [Author]

¹⁷He means Archbishop Agnozzi, who was then secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. [Author]

¹⁸See Vol. XIII, pp. 599f. [Editor]

Bosco's affairs. Father Dalmazzo received ample proof of this when, obeying Don Bosco's instructions, he appealed to Cardinal Nina for the *extra tempus*.¹⁹ When Don Bosco learned of this he was very much grieved, but, when expressing his feelings to his procurator after the news that his request was being opposed, he wrote like a saint, opening and closing his letter with a joking reference to the effects of the heat, and expressing in a single sentence all his magnanimity.

Turin, July 21, 1880

My dear Father Dalmazzo,

Here we are, half frozen by the heat! We are penny-pinching in putting wood in the furnace. We are surely saving on that.

I can't understand how Father Bonetti's case,²¹ which had been entrusted to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, you tell me is now at the Congregation for Bishops and Regulars. We are losing ninety percent of our effectiveness. Please tell me what happened, if you can.²²

I think it would be wise for you, either alone or with Attorney Leonori, to call on Cardinal Nina, our protector. Also, make sure he sees the application for the *extra tempus* faculty. If the Holy Father expects us to run the missions he has entrusted to us, then he, the Holy Father himself, must support us especially in the matter of those privileges which all other congregations possess without any expiring date. Could he not allow us, for this one time at least, to apply directly to the Congregation of the Council whose competence it is? A simple request for the *extra tempus* for a few ordinands does not meet our needs. I have requested this before on other occasions, and then all they did was to appoint ordaining bishops whose services I could not use. Furthermore, for every ordination we had to pay a stole fee. Speak of this to Cardinal Nina when you give him my petition to read. If we have to initiate a suit against our archbishop, we had better get all our grievances together, and we have plenty of them. For

¹⁹Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, undated, but in reply to Don Bosco's letter dated July 21, which will immediately follow: "I heard from Cardinal Nina that Agnozzi and Ferrieri have become two bodies with one soul. This explains why Archbishop Agnozzi displayed such indignation with Attorney Leonori at these 'yokels'²⁰ who are so obstinate and pig-headed as to think that they can reform Rome's ways." [Author]

²⁰A disparaging epithet given to the Piedmontese after the seizure of Rome in 1870. [Editor]

²¹See Chapter 9. [Editor]

²²The explanation was the following: "Father Bonetti's case is still with the [Congregation of the] Council. I must have explained myself badly, because the tongue ever turns to the aching tooth." Letter, July 15. [Author]

your information, the archbishop recently lodged a complaint which the cardinal secretary of state passed on to us. According to him, we are impossible to deal with, because we rejected a proposal of his.²³ Father Berto will send you the details or, better, a copy of the reply he sent to your cardinal protector.

Every time they throw up obstacles before us, I react by opening another house. Let's wait and see which house it will be this time.

Should you notice that your table friends are in danger of tiring cold because of the heat, send them to Piedmont and do likewise, unless you can make other provisions. If it's only for a few weeks, I am sure that our good Sigismondi will gladly feed you. What's your financial situation?

My perspiration is dropping onto this paper and I cannot write any further.

God bless us all! May He keep us in His holy grace! Pray for me!

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Thanks to the intervention of Cardinal Nina the dispensation for two *extra tempus* ordinations was granted.²⁴

Don Bosco's letters reached Argentina at too critical a time for the archbishop and government to do anything about them. The threatening clouds of civil war were gathering on the horizon. Presidential elections had been set between September and October, since Avallaneda's term was running out. Two candidates were contending for the presidency: Argentina-born General Roca, son of Italian immigrants, and counsellor-at-law Tejedor. Roca had the government, the army and eleven provinces on his side; the latter had the province of Buenos Aires of which he was governor, two other provinces, and all the aristocracy. The national army ranged itself on the general's side, but Tejedor, determined to maintain his hold by force, hastily rigged up an army of his own and equipped it as well as he could under the circumstances. The followers of both candidates engaged in a bloody conflict which reached its climax in June.²⁵

²³Erecting an additional building with the Sacred Heart parish. [Author]

²⁴Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, August 11, 1880. (This letter serves as the postscript to his letter of August 5, written from Teano). [Author]

²⁵To visualize the nature of this struggle, it suffices to know that two combat teams fighting each other were under the command of two brothers, while two contending frigates in Rio de la Plata were under the respective command of father and son. [Author]

The national army laid siege to the capital, so that the boarding school of San Carlos found itself caught between two fires. Foreseeing such a crisis, Father Bodrato had early stocked a fair supply of biscuits, flour, dried fruit, dried fish and other essential foods. Boys who had parents he sent home, but some forty others, artisans and students, were still with him. Our priests wanted to minister to the wounded as soon as the fighting would break out, but their provincial read a letter from Don Bosco stating that no one was to expose himself to danger unless it was necessary, as, for example, if other religious institutes could not handle the work alone, or if the fighting was near our houses or parish churches. In these cases the Salesians were to be the first to help out.

On June 21 a fierce battle left several thousand dead along the border of our parishes of San Carlos and "La Boca." Just on that day, Father Bodrato, who was seriously ill, had obtained permission, at his confreres' relentless insistence, to enter the embattled city to see a doctor. What carnage he witnessed—cartloads of dead and wounded dripping blood along the roads, as women and children ran after them, screaming and anxiously searching for their loved ones. He did not have the heart to go any further amidst such horrors and soon turned back, the terror of what he had seen showing itself on his face when he rejoined his confreres.

The whole gamut of horror hit them in those dark days: hunger,²⁶

²⁶Receiving in October a donation of a hundred lire for the mission, Don Bosco informed the donor, a Father Valacchi, of these horrors, as follows:

Turin, October 24, 1880

Beloved in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

You shall receive a hundredfold and eternal life.

I thank you in my own name and in that of my sons in Patagonia who are in desperate straits. The government is no longer able to grant a subsidy because of the civil war; for one week they had to subsist on raw donkey meat, no salt, no bread. It was a veritable miracle how assistance reached them on the ninth day, as they were on the verge of collapse from hunger.

Bless you, Father! Come to see us. Pray for me and for the Gospel laborers among the Indians! May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with us! Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The rare *asado con cuero* (roasted with the hide) as done in Argentina was just plain raw meat to Italians. We do not know where he got the information about "donkey meat."
[Author]

arrest under suspicion of espionage, forceful recruiting of older boys, robbery attempts, threatening shots. However, more than all the evils befalling them, the Salesians were distressed by their superior's physical deterioration and by the realization that the prevailing tragedy made it impossible for him to obtain medical assistance. When the civil war finally ended, he was beyond all hope of recovery.

Though he had been ill for quite some time, this virtuous priest had concealed it with his habitually serene countenance and unceasing activity, but pain and recent privations brought all to a head. Once peace was re-established, the doctors found that he had cancer of the stomach. From that dark day of June 21 to August 4, when he left this world for a better one, his life was one unceasing agony. Added to his acute pains was pneumonia, whose cure only doubled his agony. He never complained, never mentioned his physical condition. When the archbishop visited him, he spoke of the public calamity and recommended the trade school to him. He continued to direct the house until the beginning of July, when he told Father Costamagna, "There is nothing more I can do. I offer my life to God for our work. I shall now get ready for death." After that he no longer spoke of business matters, replying only to those who asked him questions. One morning, as he was about to receive Holy Communion, he reproached himself and asked pardon of all present and absent, urging them all to brotherly unity, diligent piety and love of chastity. Some time later, to Father [Joseph] Vespignani,²⁷ Father [Stephen] Bourlot²⁸ and Brother [Felix] Caprioglio,²⁹ then a coadjutor, he said, "Do you know, I now see before my eyes all the years of my life. Some cause me sorrow because I did not think of God and my soul as I should. Of so many years, however, sixteen fill me with joy, and they are the years I have lived in the Congregation." He had come to Don Bosco at the age of forty-one from Mornese, where he was teaching elementary school, and was ordained a priest at the age of forty-six.

As he received Viaticum in the presence of his confreres kneeling tearfully about his bed, he told them, "Oneness in charity, oneness

²⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²⁸See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²⁹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

in chastity. That is all I recommend to you, oneness in charity, oneness in chastity!" When he breathed his last, the sound of sobbing filled the house, while outdoors a chorus of praise for the virtue and work of this excellent disciple of Don Bosco filled the air. Father Vespignani testified that the power of his intercession in heaven became at once apparent.³⁰

Informed by cable of the tragic loss he had suffered, Don Bosco telegraphed the archbishop and through him the Salesians on August 7, appointing Father [James] Costamagna as acting provincial. On this mournful occasion, the archbishop, who had been unable to carry out any of Don Bosco's wishes or even communicate with him because of the national crisis, sent the following letter:

Buenos Aires, August 10, 1880

Very Reverend Don Bosco,

With apostolic resignation you will have by now received the tragic news of the death of our very dear friend, Father Bodrato, your beloved son in Jesus Christ.

His death is a grave loss for us and is felt now more than ever since he was the superior of the Salesian houses in America.

Certainly his was a heavy burden which he bore with true apostolic courage. The Lord wished to reward him for his great hardships and for the sufferings which he sustained so heroically for the Congregation. We trust that from his glory in heaven he will now obtain graces and favors for his confreres and the poor orphans whom he took from the streets into the Salesian houses with such tender concern.

The last few months have been a nightmare for Buenos Aires because of a fierce civil war, and the trade school of San Carlos at Almagro, caught between the fire of both the national and the provincial troops, has suffered extensively. We had to dismiss almost all the boys, keeping only those who have no home of their own. We had our hardships, but Father Bodrato suffered more than any of us. God has now rewarded him for his pains and his kindness. Despite the nation's critical conditions, the trade school and the other Salesian houses are doing quite well.

You will be very happy with the news I sent you about the Patagonian mission. I am sorry that so far I have not been able to obtain the subsidy which the government promised the missions. I shall renew my request

³⁰Father Vespignani recorded all this in the school chronicle, singling out eight reasons why the house of San Carlos was so blessed by God. [Author]

and hope to get it soon, since it is already earmarked in the national budget. I shall not rest until I have this money and use it to aid the missions which are in such dire need. God thus wishes to purify and increase our merit.

I received your cable informing me of Father Costamagna's appointment as [acting] provincial of the South American missions. You could not have made a better choice.

Dear Don Bosco, please give my regards to all your beloved Salesians. Always at your service,

Yours affectionately,
✠ Frederick, *Archbishop*

Don Bosco sent his condolences to his bereaved sons from Nizza Monferrato, where he was conducting a women's retreat, but only after receiving Father Costamagna's report on the death of Father Bodrato.³¹ Father Bodrato was to have come to Turin in May to attend the second general chapter, but in view of his pleading poor health, Father Rua had excused him from this obligation in Don Bosco's name and his own, authorizing Father Costamagna to take his place. But with Father Bodrato's death, Father Costamagna was no longer free to leave his post. Don Bosco wrote him the following letter, with two others addressed respectively to Father Vespignani and Father Fassio:³²

Nizza Monferrato, August 22, 1880

My dear Father Costamagna,

You cannot attend the general chapter and take part in the election of the Congregation's new councillors. It's a disappointment for you and bitter grief for me.

Now let us take heart. Pick up the rules and do all you can to see to their observances. Our prayers and God's help will not fail you. Call your council together often, urge Father Vespignani to talk, and consult with the archbishop. Once I thoroughly know our present state of affairs, I shall proceed definitively to appoint a new provincial. Till then, the authority is in your hands.

Make sure that no one loses any papers belonging to Father Bodrato. Among them you will find documents concerning the establishment of a vicariate in Patagonia. The Holy Father is very concerned about this.

³¹Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1880. [Author]

³²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

As soon as the government has settled down, resume negotiations with it, but be sure that everything is done in agreement with the archbishop. Both he and the government are responsible to the Holy See.

Painstakingly gather together whatever concerns our late lamented Father Bodrato, no matter how trifling. You will not have to edit or compile anything. Just send everything here and we will tie it in with the letters and other material we already have.³³

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Costamagna, and with you may He bless all our dear confreres and boys. Pray for me.

Always your affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please give my best to everyone individually: the archbishop, Carranza and Monsignor Ceccarelli. Please tell him that the Holy Father has approved the title of prelate for him. I shall be writing to you *very soon* about it.

Now, for the first time in four years Don Bosco addressed Father Joseph Vespignani with the familiar “tu” [you, in the singular]. He had received undeniable signs of the latter’s worth and virtues. The polite form of address which he had always used showed a certain reserve which he purposely kept while he was studying him. The moment in which Don Bosco showed him all his fatherly confidence could not have been better chosen. To thoroughly understand this letter, we must explain that in the above-mentioned account [of Father Bodrato’s confidential words shortly before his death] Father Vespignani mentioned some unpleasant incidents that took place in the San Carlos School. Don Bosco must have been told about it, for here he briefly outlines the norm to be followed:

Nizza Monferrato, August 22, 1880

My dear Father Vespignani,

I was very happy to receive your letter. All is well. Now be brave. Patience, prayer, courage: this must be our program for the moment. Do all you can to strengthen the others and remove cause for discontent.

³³Unfortunately Father Bodrato’s biography either was never written or was not published. We find a few things scattered in the early editions of Father Barberis’ handbook [of spiritual life]. Born at Mornese in 1823, he came to the Oratory in 1864, took final vows in 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1869. (See Vol. VII, pp. 451, 464). [Author]

Tell the students and our novices that I expect great things from them. Morality, humility, diligence in study: that is to be their ideal.

God bless you all! In Our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

The letter to Father Michael Fassio also apparently refers to the same situation.

Nizza Monferrato, August 22, 1880

My dear Father Fassio,

What you wrote is fine. Under the circumstances show yourself to be an example of good works.

No one must lose heart at this time, nor is anyone to complain or pull back a single step. Courage! God is with us! In my Mass I remember you and your work. Tell Father Rabagliati,³⁴ Father Remotti, Father Milesanio, and Bettinetti to whom I hope I shall soon write, what I have told you.

God bless us all! May He keep us in His holy grace! Amen.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

The Argentine postal service held out as well as it could during the upheaval of the civil war, but heaven knows what happened to Don Bosco's and Father Fagnano's letters. Only in October did Don Bosco receive one letter which he immediately acknowledged. We have the original of this reply, found among the few remaining papers of Father Fagnano after his death.

Turin, October 21, 1880

My dear Father Fagnano,

I have finally received your letter of September 6, the first I have had from you since you went to Patagonia. I was terribly worried because, despite three letters I sent you, I have had no replies at all. My letters dwelt at length on norms for your guidance. Patience! I hope this letter will reach you.

³⁴See Appendix 1. [Editor]

You already have the answer to your first question: I did write to you and you did not get the letters; likewise I did not get your letters.

My answer to your second question is that your assignment to Patagonia was all my doing. The Holy Father wished you to go to Paraguay, but, since we had to send someone absolutely trustworthy and able to cope with situations, a man also of *sound morality*, the superior chapter had no other choice than your own revered and always beloved self. Neither doubt nor mistrust nor anything else had any part in the change of assignment.

You may ask: why not Father Costamagna? For reasons it is useless to spell out, Father Costamagna could not be sent.

Just now Father Cagliero and I are all involved getting together another expedition of Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and Salesians to come to your help. But what can we do? The future looks pretty rough, even though our Society is making giant strides forward.

I was really delighted with your letter and that of Sister Vallese. If you receive this letter, let me know and I shall write again immediately.

Give my regards to all the sisters and confreres. Tell the girls and boys that I bless them and love them all in Jesus Christ.

Shall we see each other again in this world? Yes.

Forget your home and your parents and invoke the Lord's care upon them.

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Fagnano. Pray and have the others pray for me too! Always in Jesus Christ,

Your most affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

It was now up to Father Costamagna, who was temporarily taking Father Bodrato's place as provincial, to push negotiations for the vicariate apostolic. The ex-president of Argentina, who had drafted the law authorizing the military expedition of 1879, had allowed the Salesians to accompany the troops and had shown them his favor; hence there was every reason to believe that he would throw no obstacle in their way. But the political unrest had not given Father Bodrato a chance to open negotiations with him. Initial steps therefore had to be taken with the new president, General Julius Roca, who had always been favorable to the Salesians. In November Don Bosco pressed Father Costamagna to get some action in the matter. The letter he wrote on this subject

cites Mr. Anthony Oneto, who had asked for a Salesian or two for Chubut in 1876.³⁵

Turin, November 12, 1880

My dear Father Costamagna,

I received all your news. Fine! For your guidance I enclose a copy of the letter written to General Roca. Go to see him and take with you the dossier on our project for a vicariate in Patagonia.

The Holy Father is most anxious to establish it. Without it, the Society for the Propagation of the Faith will not give us any help, and our mission, even the government of the Patagonian province, will not be secure.

We are busily working to get ready a new expedition of Salesians for South America. Father Cagliero is in Sicily. We shall finalize everything on his return.

I also wrote in a general way to Mr. Oneto, who has great projects in mind. I will examine them and pass them on to you and others. I repeatedly plead our debts in America to all who visit us from there. If you think that a letter from me may help, let me know, and I will write immediately.

The others will send you more news. Give my heartfelt regards to my dear sons in America. Tell them I love them with all my heart and remember them every day at Holy Mass.

God bless you all! Pray for me!

Always yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

The Constitution of Argentina, Article 67, stated that the Indians' conversion to Catholicism was within the competence of the legislature. These long-delayed pious desires of the lawmakers were finally becoming a reality, to the priceless benefit of God's Kingdom and of the Argentine Republic. What Don Bosco had said from the pulpit of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians at the first missionary departure ceremony of 1875 had a far greater significance than imagined and was now beginning to come true: "We are starting a great enterprise!"

³⁵See Vol. XII, pp. 186f. [Editor]

CHAPTER 27

The Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians

IN 1880 the six-year term set by the constitutions of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians for the mother general and the superior chapter expired, and so the second general chapter¹ was summoned to elect a new slate of superiors. Eighteen sisters had the right to vote, the members of the superior chapter and the superior of each community. With Don Bosco's consent they met at the convent of Nizza Monferrato on August 20, and, after making their spiritual retreat, held elections [on August 29]. Father Cagliero, director of the Institute, presided as Don Bosco's personal representative. With him was Father Lemoyne, director of the local community. Sister Mary Mazzarello was unanimously re-elected as mother general, and the following received the required majority of votes: Sister Catherine Daghero, *Vicar*, Sister Joan Ferettino, *Economer*, Sister Emily Mosca, *First Assistant*; Sister Henrietta Sorbone, *Second Assistant*.

As the election had to be ratified by the superior general before the superiors-elect could assume office, Don Bosco gave his written approval by signing the minutes of the meeting held on September 1.³ He asked God to instill His spirit of fervor and charity into the newly elected superiors so that the lowly Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians might grow in number and reach out to many other countries where the sisters, while saving their own souls, might win other souls to God. Mother Mazzarello, hoping

¹The first was held June 14, 1874,² when the first superior chapter was elected. All the professed nuns then voted, and Don Bosco presided. [Author]

²The *Cronistoria* (Chronicles of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians), Vol. 1, p. v, states: "The idea of publishing the *Cronistoria* of the Institute dates from 1884 when the first General Chapter was held." The same is reasserted in Vol. 4, pp. 298ff. [Editor]

³Cf. *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XIV, Document 74, pp. 814f. [Author]

anxiously to be relieved of office, explained her reasons to Don Bosco, who listened quietly. Only when she mentioned a worsening deafness in the left ear did he remark, "All the better. That way you won't have to listen to idle talk."

During that year the sisters' numbers increased to one hundred and sixty-seven. They had opened eight new houses after closing the house at Mornese and putting it up for sale; among them, in January, as related above, was the convent at Patagónes in Argentina.

In February the first three sisters left Nizza Monferrato for Sicily, summoned to Catania by Duchess Cárcaci, who entrusted to their care an orphanage she had founded.⁴ Father Dalmazzo, who had been residing at Tor de' Specchi over the past month since being appointed procurator general of the Salesians, accompanied them. Their stay at Catania lasted seven years, after which they withdrew only because of outside interference with their work. However, a much more important mission awaited them in the city.

In April three other sisters, headed by Sister Catherine Daghero, set off in just the opposite direction to assume direction of the orphanage at Saint-Cyr. They walked into a messy complication. Father Vincent, whom Don Bosco had allowed to stay on as director, merged the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians with six nuns of the congregation he had founded. Immediately national bias threatened to shatter for good any harmony existing between them; furthermore, the elderly priest, irascible by nature, often berated the newcomers. That is why Don Bosco's choice of Sister Daghero had not been unthinking. She was a woman of exquisite tact, rare prudence and much charity, qualities soon to stand her well as mother general.

Chronologically, in September the sisters' next work was a kindergarten at Borgomasino in the diocese of Ivrea, with an annexed festive oratory and later a public school.

October saw four other houses founded, three on the feast of St. Teresa: at Este and Penango, where, besides taking care of the

⁴See p. 242. The orphanage registers would have us conclude that the sisters went there in 1878, but that is an error. In 1878 the request was made to the sisters, and in 1879 Father Cagliero and Father Durando went to see the place, as we have already narrated. Otherwise, in his letter to the Salesian cooperators in January 1880, Don Bosco could not have said, "In these very days a little group of these sisters will leave to take charge of an orphanage in Catania." [Author]

cooking and laundry of the nearby Salesian boarding schools, the sisters also conducted a festive oratory for girls, and the convent at Melazzo in the diocese of Acqui. Here the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were entrusted with a kindergarten, a homemaking class and an orphanage by the wealthy and generous pastor, Father Chiabrera, whose charitable work received considerable aid from Marquis [Victor] Scati. The marquis called on Don Bosco at Christmas time to thank him for having sent his nuns to Melazzo, assuring him of their excellent success and praising to the skies their good work in the festive oratory.

"Those Sunday gatherings do a vast amount of good, as I told you before," Don Bosco remarked.⁵ "The homemaking class and kindergarten are also very beneficial, but in a limited way. The festive oratory has a far broader scope and serves as a strong deterrent to evil, drawing the older girls from sinful occasions and the deceits of dissolute young men who, especially on Sundays and holy days, have every opportunity to court and corrupt them. Not many years ago, right here, you could see ugly things happening on Sundays: boys and girls clustering about street corners, acting and talking indecently. We started drawing the boys away, getting them to attend the festive oratory and entertaining them there. Then came the girls' opportunity, and now they overflow the church, crowding on the steps, and, occasionally, standing for hours even in the rain hoping to catch some words of the sermon."

"This is clearly due to God's grace and assistance," the marquis interrupted. "It would not seem possible otherwise."

"Yes, to God's assistance, true," Don Bosco replied, "and that will never be wanting as long as we really work trusting in God's help." He then went on to narrate the episode of a British minister coming to visit the Valdocco Oratory.⁶

Finally, in the latter part of October, the sisters opened St. Mary's boarding school at Bronte, a large town on the slopes of

⁵Handwritten report by the marquis, April 24, 1891. [Author]

⁶Document 10 in the Appendix of Volume XIII of the *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco* has this footnote by Father Ceria on p. 921: "Tradition always identified this cabinet minister as Lord Palmerston. On December 20, 1880, Don Bosco, narrating this incident to Marquis Victor Scati, stated: 'Years ago Lord Palmerston paid me a visit. He arrived at ten in the morning and stayed until six in the evening, thoroughly inspecting the whole place and seeking relevant information about everything with characteristic British interest.'" (Handwritten report, Turin, April 24, 1891. Cf. *Bollettino Salesiano*, October 1922, p. 259.) [Editor]

Mount Etna, not far from Randazzo. They had charge of the girls' elementary schools and of the local hospital. With considerable wonder we admire the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, born and reared in closed environments and used to homey life, who took off for distant lands and different tongues, particularly in those days when lengthy journeys were not as frequently or as easily made as now. So prevailing was Don Bosco's influence over them that he could push them to any sacrifice to help others. However, he never sent them forth into the world alone; now he had Father Cagliero accompany them to Bronte by way of Rome, Messina and Catania.

They reached their destination on October 22, after a journey of eight days. The townspeople turned out in crowds to welcome them, and the religious and civic authorities gave them a tasteful reception. The following morning in the town's mother-church, packed with people, Father Cagliero obligingly delivered a short sermon to point out the outstanding traits of nuns and to speak of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians and their religious educational program for girls. In the next two days he met with the municipality and with the local Congregation of Charity⁷ to discuss the smooth running and stability of the new girls' residence to be opened as soon as possible.

On his return [to Turin] Father Cagliero visited the Salesian house at Randazzo, where he found that boarding school making rapid progress, and the house at Catania. Later he journeyed to Caltanissetta, Siracusa, Noto, Acireale and Messina, and was welcomed everywhere with genuine enthusiasm by those zealous bishops who were so anxious to bring Don Bosco's sons to their dioceses.⁸

Sister Caroline Sorbone, blood-sister of Sister Henrietta,⁹ was one of the teaching nuns sent to Bronte; to her Don Bosco made two predictions just two months before her departure for Sicily. Twin concerns weighed heavily upon her: her desire to go to South America rather than Sicily and the fear that her brother, who had become a Salesian, might not persevere. Fortunately she enjoyed

⁷A moral body legally established in every municipality of Italy to oversee the administration of local charitable organizations. [Editor]

⁸Letter from Father Cagliero to Don Bosco, Randazzo, October 27, 1880. [Author]

⁹See Vol. XIII, pp. 142ff. [Editor]

nearly an hour's private talk "with that sweet, dear father" as she expressed it.¹⁰ After bidding her to be at peace, for he could read her heart like an open book, Don Bosco continued, "For the moment, offer South America as your sacrifice to God and prepare yourself for Sicily. There you will have much to suffer, and you will run up against many spiritual and material setbacks, but the blessing I now give you will strengthen you against them." Indeed, it all came true. Sister Caroline claims that only the strength she received from that blessing supported her and kept her from losing her mind in her frightful spiritual battles. As regards her brother Charles, she worried that after nine years of army life, he would not persevere in the Salesian Congregation which he had recently entered. She asked Don Bosco whether Charles would persevere. "Yes," he told her. "Rest assured he will remain in the Salesian Congregation to the end of his days." Her brother, having been transferred from our school at Randazzo, was then at Magliano, but it seemed quite likely that he would soon leave religious life. Shortly after his arrival, however, he was stricken with a fatal illness which brought him to the grave. As the moment of death drew near, he renewed his former good resolutions and, like a true son of the Congregation, died in an edifying manner.

The archives of the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians safeguard a fine collection of news tidbits gleaned from the sisters who knew Don Bosco and were fortunate to speak to him. From these miscellaneous anecdotes we will choose a few dating from 1880. They are sayings, incidents, and a prediction or two, all recalling typical traits of Don Bosco.

Mother Petronilla Mazzarello happened to be present when he met a rather non-observant nun in a corridor of the convent at Nizza Conferrato. With customary fatherliness he asked her how she was doing. "I am well enough in health," the sister answered, "but as for my soul. . . ."

"Look," Don Bosco rejoined. "Our physical health is in God's hands, but the health of our soul is in ours."

When Sister Vincenza Bessone had been admitted by Don Bosco as a postulant, he had lightly placed his hand on her hand, saying, "Hair of gold. Is your heart of gold too?" Then he had added,

¹⁰Report written by Sister Henrietta at the request of Father Michael Rua, Borgomasino, April 8, 1888. [Author]

“Wait one more year and come.” She faithfully followed his word.

Sister Angiolina Demartini recalls having a glimpse of Don Bosco at Lu in 1880, at the age of nine, when she was attending the sisters’ school. He had come into the classroom, and, placing a gentle hand on the pupils’ heads, had asked each her name. Most of them, on growing up, became nuns, nor could they be dissuaded from believing that his visit and blessing that day had influenced their choice of life.

Sister Sofia Miotti recalls that she and some other sisters who had not seen or heard Don Bosco begged Father Cagliero to take them to Turin and that Don Bosco had sent word, “Tell the sisters that we are not meant either to see or to speak to one another in this world, but rather to be always together in heaven.”

Sisters Teresina Germano and Giacinta Morzoni recount two episodes which reveal Don Bosco’s charity. Sister Teresina’s account concerns Nizza in August 1880. As a postulant, she had by chance found herself near a group of superiors in the portico leading to the old community dining room. The blessing of the meal was to be given that day by Don Bosco, who came in with Father Cagliero. The sisters, novices, and postulants were already in the dining room. Don Bosco pronounced the blessing. Then he glanced about him and remarked with a smile to Father Cagliero, “See how many they are already! In time the superiors will no longer reside here in Nizza with the sisters, but will live in Turin nearer to the Salesian superiors.” The postulant kept these words in mind, often wondering if they would ever come true, for, like everyone else, she saw that as a remote, if not impossible, reality. Of course, that change of residence is today [1933] a fact. After that remark Don Bosco asked Mother Assistant, “May I see the portions of soup and main course you are serving?” Sister tried to bring him some better filled plate, but he remarked, “Mother, what are you doing? These sisters have much work to do. Feed them well. Do what we do. We have two separate courses.” Backed by her associates, Mother Assistant tried to explain that the sisters were satisfied with less and did not need as much food as men, adding that as regards dishwashing they weren’t short of work. “Never mind that,” Don Bosco interposed. “Put it all on one dish if you like, but pile it up with much more food. You have so much work to do!”

Sister Giacinta relates the following. As a postulant she often

heard that candidates in frail health would be advised to return home. Being of delicate constitution herself, she feared that a similar fate would befall her and hoped that she could confide her apprehension to Don Bosco and ask his advice. Convinced that he was a saint, as everyone kept saying, she was sure that whatever he said could not be wrong, and so in August 1880 she sought some way of approaching him. Her natural shyness however always kept her from going up to him, until, realizing that he was about to leave, she summoned all her courage and walked to the Salesians' residence. Having never been there before, she unknowingly found herself in front of the room where he usually gave his audience. Some sisters waiting there told her to go away, because Don Bosco was hurrying to leave. Just then he appeared, hat on his head and traveling bag in his hand. He had but a few moments left before catching a train back to Turin. As soon as the postulant saw him, she stood on tiptoe behind the sisters and cried out, "Father, I have something to tell you." Don Bosco asked the others to let her through and then, quite calmly, turned about, re-entered the room, greeted her, sat down, bade her be seated, and slowly and quietly asked what she wanted. "Father, will the Lord give me the health I need to stay in the Congregation? Will He?" "The Lord will grant you health and holiness," he replied. Since she had nothing else to say, Don Bosco stood up, said good-bye, and, unperturbed, set out for the station. In 1919 Sister Giacinta wrote: "Thirty-nine years have passed since that blessed encounter, and, though my health is very frail, I have always managed to carry out my teaching duties, even though I was told that I had but a year or two to live. As for the second part of his prediction, well, that is something else."

Sister Orsolina Rinaldi had not been able to make up her mind about joining the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians because of a seemingly incurable disease of her right foot. In that condition how could she plan on a life of busy activity which she saw sisters living? Advised to see Don Bosco, she went one morning to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, and on entering the sacristy and seeing that he was hearing the boys' confessions, she waited until he had finished. Then she approached him and told him of her hopes and fears. He looked at her and told her that she had to be more assertive and more resolute in will, for her disease was of no account. He was looking for good sisters ready to go far away, he

said. Then he bade her kneel, recited a Hail Mary with her, and gave her the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians. He told her to see Mother Mazzarello and tell her in his name that she was to accept her as a postulant. Orsolina entered the Congregation in November 1880 and never had reason to complain of her foot, despite long walks and strenuous work.

Sister Giacinta Laureri too, stricken with an eye disease while a novice, quite suddenly found, almost on the eve of her profession, that she was practically blind. When Don Bosco came to Nizza in June 1880, Mother Mazzarello suggested that she go and ask for a blessing and a healing from him so that she might take her vows. The novice obeyed. Acting surprised, as though he had misunderstood her, Don Bosco asked, "Oh! When the Madonna calls you to heaven, you won't want to go?"

"Oh, yes, Father, I do want to go to heaven," she answered, "but just now I am afraid they will dismiss me from the Congregation because of my eyes. I would be unhappy for the rest of my life!"

"No, no," Don Bosco replied. "You can rest assured that it was Our Lady who sent you here. She wants you to be here. Our Lady asked you to do what is right and wants you to become a saint. . . . Now let me give you the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians, and tomorrow I shall pray for you at Holy Mass. Wear this medal of Mary, Help of Christians, make a novena to Our Lady and be quite serene. Go now and apply for religious profession. Pray to Her now and always."

She prayed intensely and finally one day she was healed, her sight as clear and sharp as if never touched by disease. During her retreat she was admitted to religious profession without any question.

Sister Louise Boccalatte recalls two foreboding predictions made by Don Bosco when he went to Nizza to preach the ladies' retreat. He had been greeted by a brief musical, at the end of which the singers came up to kiss his hand. He looked at them kindly and said, "Prepare yourselves to sing even better in paradise. Four of you will go there this year." Indeed, that year, four of them did pass away: Sisters Luigina Arecco, Mary Mazzarello, Clotilde Turco and Tersilla Ginepro, all of whom were in the group and, according to the superiors' report, were given a special glance by Don Bosco when they bowed to kiss his hand. He later made the same

prediction to the retreatants. "Four of you too," he said, "will appear before God's judgment seat." Distressed by these words, the women were too frightened to go to bed, and Mother Assistant approached Don Bosco, saying, "Please, Father, for heaven's sake, don't say such things again, because we can't calm them!" "I must do God's will," Don Bosco answered. "If the Lord sends me such inspirations, it is my duty to express them."

To this year also belongs the aftermath of a similar incident, though it comes to us from another source. Sister Celestine Torretta had requested Don Bosco's blessing before going to Nizza as a postulant. Don Bosco had told her, "Go, for from this day on, your family will be blessed in a remarkable way. Do you still have any sisters living?"

"Yes, two."

"The younger will join you."

The younger sister was named Felicina. Celestine said nothing to her because she wanted to see if the prediction would come true.

In time their mother became ill. She had been an invalid for two years when her daughter Felicina persuaded her to go to Turin with her and receive Don Bosco's blessing. The poor woman could not rest day or night, nor could she stand the noise of people talking, and she tolerated no one in her room. A few moments outdoors upset her. She was subject to fainting spells and could bear no one near her but her daughter Felicina.

On May 24, 1878, Felicina, then sixteen, accompanied her mother to the Oratory. They had gone from Buttigliera d'Asti to Chieri, where they spent the night, since the invalid could not have made the entire trip without a break. On reaching the Oratory, Felicina left her mother in the doorkeeper's lodge and went up to Don Bosco's waiting room, which she found crowded. When she asked the others if they would do her the favor of letting her mother go before them, they all consented. Her mother went up and was ushered inside. Don Bosco asked her name and where she came from, inquiring about her family and her daughter who was a nun. Then the woman told her of her grief when her oldest daughter had left home, saying how upset she still was because her daughter was a sister in the world, whereas she had wanted to see her in a cloister, for she had always jealously sheltered her from any danger. Don Bosco smiled but said nothing.

Then the mother asked if she had any hope of recovery. Three times Don Bosco silently glanced from mother to daughter and back. Felicina, who knew of Don Bosco's holiness, feared he saw something amiss in her soul, as she put it when later recounting the episode, and so she hid behind her mother. Don Bosco said to the mother, "You will recover when you let this other daughter of yours become a sister." On hearing these words, the mother made no answer, but tears trickled down her face.

At that moment Don Bosco turned to Felicina and asked, "Isn't this true? Are you glad?" The girl had cherished this desire from childhood but had never told anyone, least of all her mother, for she knew how painfully her mother had felt her other daughter's departure. On hearing Don Bosco's words, however, she was convinced that he had read her inmost heart. Still standing behind her mother, she clasped her hands silently and raised her eyes to heaven. Don Bosco saw and understood. Moments later he gave the mother a blessing and repeated, "You will recover when you let this other daughter of yours become a sister."

Two more years passed. The poor woman's condition went from bad to worse. However, not even at home did she ever mention her visit to Don Bosco. Finally, one evening, trusting fully in Don Bosco's words, Felicina made a supreme effort and told her mother, "Do you remember what Don Bosco said—that you would recover if I became a sister? Well, tomorrow I am leaving you, and Mary, Help of Christians will heal you!" She had already been in touch with the mother general.

She kept her word. Three days later her mother began to get better, steadily improving until she recovered fully. Father Lemoyne, who heard the account from Sister Felicina herself and made a written report, wrote, "She is still living today, 1907, and is seventy-eight years old." Only when she met her sister at Nizza did Celestine tell her of Don Bosco's prediction made four years before.

CHAPTER 28

Foundations in 1880: Refused, Delayed or Hardly Begun

APART from the foundations initiated at Patagónes and Viedma, Argentina, twin cities of the Rio Negro, no new [Salesian] houses were opened in 1880. All other proposals which came in that year, excluding verbal offers or requests not found in our archives, were either summarily turned down or delayed or hardly initiated.

Two proposals were never pursued. The first came from Rome. Princess Mary Odescalchi wanted to open a school at Bracciano, her feudal estate in Lazio, where a defrocked friar was then at home and elsewhere teaching classes which hardly reflected moral standards. The princess asked for three Salesian priests: an elementary school teacher and two secondary school instructors who would be given lodging, linen, furniture and six hundred lire each. Were it not possible to have the three priests that year, she would settle for the coming year and would also be willing to set other terms to suit Don Bosco.¹ Don Bosco replied that he could not possibly oblige;² as a result, all talk of it died out. By this time, unless the possibility of further development loomed, Don Bosco was refusing to scatter his Salesians in minor undertakings.

The second proposal, promptly discarded for a contrary reason, was to send the Salesians to Spàlato³ in Dalmatia.⁴ The Dalmatian bishops had jointly agreed to set up in the seminary at Spàlato a

¹Letter from Father Dalmazzo to Don Bosco, Rome, May 28, 1880. [Author]

²Letter from Don Bosco to Father Dalmazzo, Turin, June 8, 1880. [Author]

³A seaport on the Adriatic, now part of Yugoslavia and known as "Split" or "Spljet." [Editor]

⁴Former Austrian crownland on the Adriatic coast extending from near the Albanian border on the south to Zadar on the north and including many islands. This name was later applied to most of the Yugoslav coast. [Editor]

regional private secondary school for their dioceses, with the exception of Zadar which already had a school of its own. Preliminaries, needed funds and other requirements had been ready for over a year, but negotiations were stalled for lack of a teaching staff, especially in philosophy, Latin, Greek, Italian and the natural sciences. In view of this, the bishop of Spàlato appealed to the Holy Father in the name of his brother bishops, asking for his intervention that classes might begin in the forthcoming school year of 1880-81. The Pope informed Don Bosco of this plan through his secretary of state, stating that he would be deeply gratified if Don Bosco could supply teachers for the secondary school.⁵ A Dalmatian priest who had been given the task of finding suitable personnel, and discussing eventual financial outlays, came to the Oratory to meet with Don Bosco. Since the Pope had left it up to him to accede if possible, Don Bosco found it easier to decline the request. Undoubtedly, had the Holy See expressed an unconditional wish, he would have sought a way to oblige, but in this case there was no reason why he could not state unhesitatingly that he could not put together such a large, qualified staff.

Meanwhile at Lugo (Ravenna) the Salesians were awaited with growing impatience.⁶ The pressure was building up, but there was nothing concrete in sight that could prompt Don Bosco to take action. The visits made by Father Lazzero, Father Barberis and, later, Father Bretto⁷ had only heightened the townsfolk's expectations, and their hopes had soared higher when Father Cagliariero and Father Durando made a brief stopover there. Father Bretto wrote after his investigation:⁸ "I can assure you of two things: one, Romagna⁹ is in dire need of teachers for poor boys who almost inevitably are exposed to corrupting influences; two, everywhere in the region, especially at Lugo, the crowds favor us." In fact, Monsignor Joseph Emaldi of Lugo was offering the Salesians two houses to be converted into a boarding school.

⁵Letter from Monsignor [Seraphim] Cretoni to Don Bosco, Rome, August 27, 1880. Cardinal Nina had not written to him now for some time because he was ill at Grottoferata. In September Cardinal [Ludwig] Jacobini was appointed secretary of state. [Author]

⁶See Vol. XIII, p. 498 [Editor]

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁸Letter to Father Rua, Alassio, October 20, 1878. [Author]

⁹An historic region in central Italy forming the provinces of Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forlì. [Editor]

However, on the monsignor's death in 1879 no mention of this was found in his will, which appointed the Salesians trustees of the modest sum of twenty thousand lire for such a time as the school could be opened. The Count Emaldi family seemed willing to help, but nothing ever materialized. In Lugo the Vespignani family had persistently pressed for action since 1877, particularly the elder brother of Father Joseph Vespignani, Charles, who had met Don Bosco in Turin.¹⁰ Don Bosco however moved very cautiously when it came to new foundations, taking no action until everything was quite clear. He had confirmed his good intentions to Lugo in a very convincing letter he had written to Charles Vespignani and which but recently came to light. Noteworthy is his reference to the excluding of any political action in his houses. In Romagna, especially at Lugo, a fierce struggle was raging against the republicans, who were a catch-all for the region's anticlericals. Naturally, of course, Charles Vespignani's letters reflected the local political climate.

Turin, April 11, 1877

My dear Charles,

I do not hesitate to take a risk in projects which may benefit endangered youth or help lead souls to God. Your plan to start something to help morally endangered youngsters by rescuing them from juvenile delinquency and helping them become good citizens and *good Christians* is also our aim.

Prepare the ground and get the harvest ready, and I shall gladly come to personally meet and thank so many co-workers, who are already so kindly disposed to me before they have even met me.

Following the suggestion given me, I asked Father Charles Cavina¹¹ to agree to act as the Salesian delegate and form a chapter. Get in touch with him as regards our plans.

Father Joseph is sending you twenty-five cooperators' diplomas; more are available when needed.¹²

¹⁰G. Vespignani, *Un anno alla scuola di Don Bosco*, pp. 98-100, San Benigno Canavese, 1930. [Author]

¹¹Parish priest of Lugo who died in September 1880. In a letter to Don Bosco, dated May 11, 1877, signed by nine other residents of Lugo and handwritten by Charles Vespignani, Father Cavina undersigned himself "delegate." [Author]

¹²After his tour of central Italy in October 1878, Father Bretto sent twenty-four diplomas only to Fermo. Don Bosco and the Salesians availed themselves of every opportunity to acquaint people with the [Association of Salesian] Cooperators and enlist new ones. [Author]

You have asked me to go along with you in your endeavor. I accept, but we must exert every effort and make all sacrifices to see this through to its conclusion.

Bear in mind that if we want to move forward, we must never get involved in politics either *for* or *against*; let our program be solely to help poor boys.

I shall not forget the other matters you mentioned and will discuss them in another letter.

May God bless your family, both the little one and the big one.¹³ Please give my regards to our co-workers. Tell them I willingly commend them to God every day at Holy Mass, while I ask for their prayers.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always.

Yours affectionately,
Fr. John Bosco

Teano, a small town in Campania, was also clamoring for Don Bosco's attention; unable to send them any Salesians, he settled on a temporary arrangement. The municipality ran a secondary boarding school which was not doing well scholastically and morally. Determined on reform, the authorities fired the director and staff and agreed to give it over entirely to Don Bosco.

Bearing a letter of recommendation from Cardinal [Bartholomew] D'Avanzo, bishop of Calvi and Teano, Marquis Dal Pezzo, provincial councillor and president of all local Catholic societies, went expressly from Naples to plead the cause with Father [Francis] Dalmazzo, who, he hoped, would persuade Don Bosco to accept the offer since the terms seemed good. Don Bosco replied as follows to Father Dalmazzo:¹⁴ "We can't do anything about a house in Teano because we lack personnel. Nevertheless, tomorrow and the day after we shall scrutinize the roster and at our chapter meeting on Sunday evening will do whatever we can to please those who have placed such great trust in the Salesians."

The matter came up at the chapter meeting, but all good intents were blocked by the reality of lack of personnel. It was decided to suggest that the municipality entrust the direction of the school to Father Joseph Manfredi, a canon of St. Ambrose in Milan, for a

¹³This is a frequent expression used in Don Bosco's letters. By "little family" he meant his reader's actual family; by "big family" he meant the Salesian Congregation, of which the addressee was considered a member in a wide sense of the word. [Author]

¹⁴Letter, Turin, July 15, 1880. [Author]

period not longer than three years, during which time the canon was to recruit a full staff. The proposal was accepted and a twelve-year agreement running from October 15, 1880 to October 15, 1892 was drawn up. During those years the municipality was to assign the premises which were then being used for the secondary school, renovating and properly maintaining them. Once the enrollment should go beyond fifty, it agreed to enlarge the facilities. Furthermore, it would allot an annual subsidy of twelve thousand lire, plus an additional fifteen hundred at the school's opening to indemnify the teachers who had been transferred. Father Dalmazzo visited Teano twice and was received most cordially. After hiring his staff, Father Manfredi took over the school's direction until such time as Don Bosco would be able to send his Salesians there. However, due to changed circumstances, that day never came.

We will now look at Penango, which, though opened in 1880, did not fully function until a year later, and at Mogliano Veneto, whose construction began in 1881 after lengthy negotiations.

Penango is a small community on the outskirts of the diocese of Casale Monferrato. Perched atop a delightful hill stood a fine public building which was for sale. Father Joseph Garavelli, a parish priest, spoke so convincingly to Don Bosco that the latter decided to purchase it and the surrounding property for sixty thousand lire from Messrs. Ghiron and Fiz, Casale Jews, agents of Baron Leonine Sabino, the owner. One reason Don Bosco was moved to buy it was his wish to reclaim a church adjoining the property. It has been dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows but later, like the church in Nizza Monferrato, had been turned into a wine cellar, so that, amid filters, huge glass jars, wine kegs and vats, Our Lady was doubly sorrowful.

Don Bosco took possession immediately after the purchase. On June 6, 1880 the church was most solemnly reopened with the participation of our two hundred and twenty-five pupils of Borgo San Martino. Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda, a native of Penango and then bishop of Fossano, blessed the church, celebrated Mass, and preached. The devout people of Moncalvo, Cagliano, Casorzo, Vignale and other neighboring villages flocked into Penango on learning of the forthcoming celebration. Never before had the town seen such a vast multitude, such hustle and bustle! Don Bosco's name was fondly revered and blessed throughout the countryside,

and the opening of a school of his became a source of joy throughout the whole district. The elementary boarding school was to act as a branch of the school at Borgo San Martino, where yearly large numbers of applicants had to be turned away for want of space. Don Bosco was scheduled to make his first visit to the new school in October 1881.

The origins of the house at Mogliano Veneto date from 1879, though the actual opening came in 1882. Two zealous laymen stand out in its early history: Attorney Paganuzzi, dauntless champion of the Italian Catholic Action League¹⁵ in the [early years of the] “Opera dei Congressi e dei Comitati Cattolici” [Confederation of Catholic Congresses and Delegations],¹⁶ and Peter Saccardo, another militant Catholic of Venice. These two devoted laymen were pained by the sight of swarms of boys endlessly roaming the streets and squares of Venice, growing up unprincipled and foul-mouthed, most of them utterly ignorant of God and religion, indolent, shattered physically and morally by all sorts of adversities and hardships. Those two gentlemen strove to find a remedy for such evils. True, charitable institutions did exist, but they were few and quite inadequate to the need; there were also night schools, but, being small and strapped for funds, their effectiveness was minimal. How was one to rescue so many young people?

Temporarily relinquishing their plan to boost the efficiency of the local charitable organizations, these two laymen adopted the project of the late patriarch of Venice, [Angelo] Ramazzotti,¹⁷ namely to found an agricultural school as a haven of salvation for so many poor, practically destitute boys. To their way of thinking there was no lack of work in the countryside, as just then vast marshlands and swamps were being reclaimed with mechanized equipment. Farming was physically and morally healthier and better attuned to human nature than working in a plant like just another piece of machinery. Furthermore, school, lodging and food

¹⁵Defined by Pius XI in his encyclical *Ubi arcano* as “the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy.” [Editor]

¹⁶Founded in 1876 to unite all Catholic associations or leagues in a single force in defense of the rights of the Church and of the religious and social concerns of Italian Catholics. [Editor]

¹⁷Born in Milan in 1800 Ramazzotti was ordained a priest in 1830 after joining the Oblates Missionaries of Rho. Consecrated bishop of Pavia in 1850, he founded the *Pontificio Istituto Missioni Estere di Milano* and in 1858 was appointed patriarch of Venice. He died in 1861. [Editor]

would cost far less in the countryside than in a city institution. Then, no matter how modest the amount of work done by still inexperienced hands, it would still profit not only the boys themselves, but the whole of society, since subversive notions, class hatred, and other baneful principles which fired up the masses could not find any incentive there. On the contrary, they became more peaceful and reflective in contemplating nature, which brings about wholesome effects under the benign influence of Divine Providence.¹⁸ Both Attorney Paganuzzi and Peter Saccardo pleaded with Don Bosco to weigh this grave situation and, even more, the remedy they suggested. When Patriarch [Dominic] Agostino of Venice heard of it, he cordially gave his blessing.

It seems that instantly Divine Providence came to the support of the charitable initiative. A pious, fairly recently widowed lady, Elisabeth Bellavite Astori, was planning to found an agricultural school in the neighboring village of Mogliano where her estate was located, and to do so immediately, not after her death. She consulted Senator Rossi of Schio whose estimate of the cost was so high that she was ready to abandon her plan and limit herself to a home for a dozen or so elderly men. Peter Saccardo, however, who had been asked to sketch a preliminary drawing of the school, persuaded her to stick to her original plan and get in touch with Don Bosco. The mere mention of Don Bosco's name, so well known, delighted her and, after going over Saccardo's plan, she decided to give Don Bosco whatever land he needed for a school at Mogliano Veneto as well as one hundred and fifty thousand lire to put up the school building. Shortly before the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, the lady came to Turin at Don Bosco's invitation, discussed the matter with him and left with the best of impressions, as we may see from her correspondence.

She now saw the founding of the agricultural school as her life's supreme aim, much like a mission to be fulfilled before she could peacefully close her eyes to this mortal life. She consequently knew no peace until Don Bosco formally accepted responsibility for this undertaking, so intense was her faith in his holiness and in the Lord's protection over all his works.¹⁹ After considering the matter

¹⁸Letter from Peter Saccardo to Don Bosco, Venice, June 12, 1879. [Author]

¹⁹Letter from Saccardo to Father Durando, Venice, October 1, 1880. [Author]

with the superior chapter, Don Bosco sent her his formal acceptance,²⁰ whereupon the lady put the agreed sum of money at his disposal. She would greatly have welcomed a visit from Don Bosco but resignedly gave up hoping. "I am truly sorry that once again I am denied the honor of welcoming the venerable person of Don Bosco within my walls," she wrote,²¹ "but I trust that I will have the opportunity on a more propitious occasion. Yes, I know that the Lord usually makes us yearn for a special favor before granting it, but I am sure He will grant me this one." Father [Anthony] Sala called on her instead, since he was in charge of all construction projects, and brought her a contract signed by Don Bosco for her own signature. Work began in the spring of 1881 and was soon completed despite the problems attendant on undertakings of this nature. Church authorization had of course already been obtained. Mogliano Veneto is within the diocese of Treviso which was then vacant because of the death of Bishop Zinelli. Canon Joseph Sarto,²² vicar capitular, not only granted the request but chose to write out the entire decree in his own hand, using exceptionally benevolent words for Don Bosco whom he had personally met at the Oratory in 1875.²³ The school was inaugurated November 8, 1882 by Father Moses Veronesi,²⁴ director. Later on, the impossibility of setting up an agricultural school in that area made it necessary to change the purpose of the school which today [1933] is still flourishing.²⁵

In 1880 a lengthy correspondence was opened regarding a new foundation for Oporto, the second largest city in Portugal, where its devout priests were deeply grieved by the people's wretched religious condition. Taking advantage of their ignorance of religion, the Protestants were doing incalculable damage. To check this surging evil, several priests had opened a Catholic school with funds raised by the faithful, and good results were soon apparent though short-lived. Once the students graduated and went on to learn a trade in environments steeped in irreligion and immorality,

²⁰Letter from Father Rua signed by Don Bosco, Lanzo, October 8, 1880. [Author]

²¹Letter, Venice, October 28, 1880. [Author]

²²The future Pius X. [Editor]

²³See Vol. XI, p. 301. [Editor]

²⁴See Appendix 1 [Editor]

²⁵Presently it is a junior and senior high school, junior college, and technical and industrial institute. [Editor]

they soon forgot the little good they had learned. One of these priests, remarkable for both noble lineage and priestly zeal, Father Sebastian Leite de Vasconcellos, future bishop of Beja, thought of founding an institution where boys, on leaving Catholic school, could learn a craft or trade enabling them to become honest Christian workmen. While striving to realize his plan by setting up a workshop under St. Joseph's patronage, he heard of Don Bosco and his trade schools. He immediately wrote, imploring him in the name of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to send him at least three Salesians to run shops to train tailors, shoemakers and carpenters. Many more letters followed. Father Durando answered them all, but the reply, though couched in various terms, was invariably the same: lack of personnel made it impossible at that time; hopefully it might come about later on. Very moving are the ardent pages written by Father Sebastian Leite any time a phrase in Father Durando's replies seemed to hold out some glimmer of hope.

Believing that he would more easily obtain a favorable response from Don Bosco, Father Leite secured an influential recommendation from Father Ficarelli, Jesuit superior in Portugal. In 1881, since Father Cagliero had to go to Seville to see about a new foundation about which we shall report later, Don Bosco asked him to go to Oporto and survey the situation. His visit gave Father Leite new courage, and he shortly afterward went to Turin to see Don Bosco, study the Oratory at close range, negotiate with him and receive his blessing. Don Bosco listened very sympathetically and gave him some precious advice, concluding with, "As God hears me, I believe that you should open your boys' workshops right now. Later I will send you Salesians." When the priest returned home, he followed Don Bosco's instructions. Putting to good use what he had seen at the Oratory, at Sampierdarena and Marseille, he formed a committee of eminent local citizens and officially opened St. Joseph's Workshop with the specific stipulation that it was to be turned over to the Salesians as soon as they arrived, but he patiently had to wait until Don Bosco's successor fulfilled his promise.

Though no houses were opened in Europe in 1880, much was done to expand those already in existence. Don Bosco gave an account of this in his annual conference to the Salesian cooperators in January 1881. At La Navarre in France the premises were

enlarged, as also were those at St. Pierre's Hospice in Nice; a new building made it possible to triple the number of pupils at St. Leo's Oratory in Marseille. In Italy, at Vallecrosia, both the boys' and the girls' schools as well as the residence for the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were completed, and work on the adjoining church also progressed. It was the same in Turin in the Church of St. John the Evangelist and adjacent hospice; at La Spezia the school building and the church which were under construction suffered serious damage during a hurricane, but repairs were quickly made; in Rome work started on the monumental Church of the Sacred Heart.

Lest the deceits of the enemy of all good deprive him of the Pope's support—because without it so much effort would prove unavailing—Don Bosco sent an accurate report of the Salesian houses in South America and Europe to his cardinal protector in August 1880. By reason of his office and his marked benevolence toward the Congregation, Cardinal Lawrence Nina could help Don Bosco in his relations with the Holy See better than anyone else.

Nizza Monferrato, August 20, 1880

Most Reverend Eminence:

I believe that as the protector and friend of our humble Congregation, you will be pleased to receive a report on some of our larger houses in South America and Europe.

Our missions in Uruguay and in Patagonia are progressing very satisfactorily, but, due to national unrest, the government, which had promised substantial subsidies for new settlements, churches, schools, hospices and increasing contacts with the savages, is unable to honor its commitments and has left us to our own resources for the payment of heavy debts. I have already given necessary instructions to have at least the larger ones paid.

The situation in Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina, is more complicated. Schools and hospices for boys and girls had to be closed in order to save the honor and the very lives of pupils, priests and nuns. Unfortunately these institutions were located in battle zones. The material damage runs high, but far more lamentable is the death of the superior of our missions, Father Francis Bodrato. Worn down by relentless work, he was forced to take to his bed as the civil war broke out. His sorrow at being unable to cope with increasing difficulties aggravated his sickness. Day and night, firearms and cannons blasted his neighborhood and hastened

his death, of which we were informed by cable on August 4. By return cable I notified the archbishop of Buenos Aires of the appointment of Father James Costamagna as temporary superior. Highly esteemed for his preaching, he was the first Salesian priest to cross the Pampas and penetrate as far as the Rio Negro and beyond to found our missions in Patagonia. Once I receive his awaited letter I shall immediately brief Your Eminence on the situation and officially appoint a regular superior. Also, for this and other reasons, one of our priests is now visiting [our houses] in Europe to draw up an exact report on their conditions.

As for these houses, I am pleased to tell you that, so far, we have had no inkling of forthcoming trouble in France. In Marseille we are moving along swiftly on the novitiate and the seminary for Patagonia. I trust that by the end of October, both will be practically completed and ready for occupancy. The old building now houses eight students who are pursuing regular classical studies. We have received many more applications.

The church adjoining our hospice in Nice is almost finished and will be opened to worship in November.

We are moving as fast as we can on the construction of our school and church at Vallecrosia near Ventimiglia. We hope that these new buildings will be ready for occupancy by next February. The Protestant school and church are still vacant, their former pupils attending only our school and church, even though, to be honest, they are no more than an empty warehouse adapted for our use.

In Turin, work is progressing with equal enthusiasm on the church and school of St. John the Evangelist in the neighborhood of the Protestant temple and school. The boys' festive oratory will be occupied in November while the church should be ready for worship by June 1881.

Our hospice at La Spezia is doing well, but we had a hard time overcoming the obstacles which crop up every day. Yet, despite that, we evaded the snares which only Protestant meanness and godlessness can set up. We signed the purchase contract of the property where we plan to build the school and the church and the residence for our teachers on the feast of St. Lawrence. We really hoped we could move this long-awaited step up a bit sooner and make it our gift of flowers to Your Eminence on the occasion of your name day, but new obstacles kept arising and threatening the whole project. Yet that evening we signed the legal deed and paid cash for five acres on which to build. The architect's plans have been finalized, and since the 17th our economist has been on the spot to get the work going, so that we can get settled there by next March. I doubt we can get all that work done so soon, but necessity knows no laws and we hope to make it with God's help.

I trust we can meet all current expenses in Marseille, Nice, Vallecrosia

and Turin without any problem. I cannot say the same about La Spezia, for which there is no chance of financial help. So far its only subsidy has come from the boundless generosity of our Holy Father. Under separate cover, I am expressing an idea of mine and ask that you consider it and then pass it on to His Holiness if you prudently think it wise to do so.

Please let the Holy Pontiff know of the humble efforts of the Salesians on behalf of Holy Church, and ask him to give his apostolic benediction to all of us, most particularly to our missionaries in South America.

While commending all of us to your prayers, I am highly honored to remain in reverence and gratitude,

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

In the face of such gigantic commitments undertaken by a single person, it was only natural for Don Bosco to say to himself, "The first block one usually encounters in carrying out great enterprises for God's glory and for the relief of suffering humanity is lack of funds. How are we to provide for all the boys we take in, and how are we to support all the works we begin? Where am I to find food and clothing for so many Salesians and pupils?" To these grave questions he had one answer: "The wealth of Divine Providence is inexhaustible. It has never failed us in the past; are we to worry about the future? Certainly not. Let us do our little bit, and God will supply the rest. But, as we put unlimited confidence in God's goodness, let us not hold back our cooperation. Let each of us reflect momentarily on the Lord's words: 'Give and it shall be given to you in abundant measure.' [Cf. Lk. 6, 38] Elsewhere, He said: 'Give that which remains as alms.' [Cf. Lk. 11, 41] All have a surplus of goods, some indeed more than they need."²⁶

His cooperators responded charitably, promptly, and generously to the appeals which Don Bosco kept increasing more frequently and more insistently as he multiplied his enterprises.

²⁶Letter to Salesian cooperators, *Bolletino Salesiano*, January 1881. [Author]

CHAPTER 29

Predictions, Reading of the Heart, Cures and Bilocation

FEW beatified founders of congregations have been endowed with as many charisms as was Don Bosco, especially in the later years of his life, when his supernatural gifts became ever more evident. This final chapter will add a few more instances to what we have already narrated in this matter.

Time and again Don Bosco revealed the future, predicting either death, longevity or events which could not humanly be foreseen. Three death predictions were made probably in 1880. Thomas Buffa, a railway inspector, a fine family man, one of whose sons became a Salesian and died as a young cleric in the repute of sanctity, was discussing with Don Bosco one day about how long they would live. Buffa remarked, "I shall die before you." "No," Don Bosco rejoined. "You shall die eight years after me." Buffa, who indeed lived until 1896, left an account of this conversation and prediction to his children.¹

Father John Gazza, twenty-four, an Oratorian priest living in Turin, was very seriously ill and his family asked Don Bosco to go to bless him. Gladly obliging, Don Bosco gently comforted him, but, on leaving the young priest's family, frankly told them that their dear one would die on November 27. His sister, who was present and heard him speak, informed Father Philip Rinaldi of both the prediction and its actual fulfillment.²

Don Bosco made another sad prediction to Baroness Jocteau but in rather cryptic terms. Some years before, she had enrolled a son of hers at the Salesian college in Valsalice while Father Francesia was director. She now [circa 1880] brought a younger son, sickly and pitifully crippled to Don Bosco and begged for his blessing.

¹Apostolic Process, summary of *Positio super virtutibus*, No. XVII (witness Father Rua). [Author]

²Statement by Father Philip Rinaldi, Turin, February 26, 1918. [Author]

Don Bosco responded in a way unusual for him. He picked the child up and sat him on his knee, fondly saying, "Yes, by all means I will very gladly bless him." Turning to the boy, he said a word or two about living forever in heaven, adding gently, "You will feel better on this day," mentioning the year, day and hour. He then blessed the child. The mother left with tears of comfort. The boy however died on the very day and at the very hour that Don Bosco had predicted. The baroness, feeling that she had been disillusioned, took it very hard and did not call on Don Bosco again for some time. Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, who often narrated this incident, on one occasion, when she unburdened herself to him, gently explained how Don Bosco's "You will feel better" really meant heaven. He comforted her by helping her to see that her child was most certainly with God, thanks to Don Bosco's prayers. Almost as though a veil had been lifted from her eyes, the baroness understood and thanked the Lord.

There was also an instance of predicting a long life. A nun named Mary Auxiliatrix of St. Joseph died on June 20, 1931 in the Sacramentine convent at Bassano del Grappa. Though of frail health, she had been admitted in 1880 to their sisters' novitiate in Turin only on the word of Don Bosco, who, advising the young woman, had assured her that she would have strength to carry out her monastic commitment. He had also given her a medal with an image of Mary, Help of Christians on one side, and that of St. Joseph on the other. It is a strange coincidence that her superiors, who did not know of this, should have given her that very same name in religion. Don Bosco had also predicted to her: "Many years from now, an abbess and several nuns from Veneto³ will join the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. In due time you will be sent to Veneto and be elected superior. There you will strive for perfection and prepare yourself to leave this earth for heaven at the same age that I shall die." In fact, the nun was sent to Veneto in 1901 to found the convent of Bassano del Grappa, but she never told anybody about Don Bosco's prediction. In 1916 she was elected superior and later re-elected to a second term. After inspiring that same community for many years, she fell seriously ill but recovered

³A region in northern Italy between the Po River and the Alps, including the Istrian peninsula. [Editor]

sufficiently to arouse hopes that she would be able to celebrate her golden jubilee of profession. However, when she asked about Don Bosco's age at his death and was told, she became very pensive. To that day all had happened as Don Bosco had predicted; the last part of his prediction could not prove untrue. She went to her reward in her seventy-second year, as had also Don Bosco.⁴

For another nun Don Bosco had a reading of heart and a prediction as well. Sister Brambilla received the habit of the Sisters of Charity in Turin on September 4, 1880 and was assigned to a girls' orphanage at Sassari, Sardinia. She left for her assignment with two elderly sisters. Her departure is described in the following letter which she dictated and which was given to us:

We left on September 11, 1880. When we took our places in our coach compartment, I did not put my baggage (which had my name on it) on the upper rack as my companions had done, but tucked it under my seat. Some moments later a gentleman and a priest boarded the train and sat directly opposite us. For a long time we sat in silence, but at our first stop, Asti, a group of people approached our compartment and, shaking the priest's hand, joyfully greeted him, "How are you, Don Bosco?" Emboldened, I stared at the saintly priest, realizing that this was the Don Bosco who was doing so much for boys. These young men, I thought, were certainly former pupils of his. I was very glad to see him because I was quite convinced already that he was a saint. Considering the influence he had over boys, I had envisioned him as tall, heavy-set and impressive in appearance. Instead I saw an ordinary priest and noted that the only extraordinary thing about him was his rather large ears. This detail, of course, I kept to myself.

When the train started again, Don Bosco abruptly turned to his friend and said, "I once thought of having my picture taken, but when the photographer showed me six proofs, I looked at one and exclaimed in great surprise, 'I thought I looked. . . .' And he spoke aloud the nun's precise thoughts, including the size of his ears. The poor sister blushed. Wishing perhaps to relieve her embarrassment, he smilingly asked, "Where are you going, Sister?"

⁴From the chronicles of the Convent of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament in Turin, June 20, 1931. [Author]

“To Sardinia.”

“What will you do there?”

“I am going to care for orphan girls.”

“What if you had to look after little boys instead?”

“Oh?”

“Wouldn’t you like that?”

“No.”

“Yet one can do a lot of good for little street boys.”

One of the other nuns interrupted: “Don Bosco, why don’t you send your priests there? They can do plenty of good.”

“For the moment Sardinia does not seem to be our field of work, he said, gently shaking his head. “We shall see. . . .”

Meanwhile they arrived at Sampierdarena, where Don Bosco got off, bidding a hearty farewell to his traveling companions. Then, turning to the young sister, he said, “Sister Brambilla, do all you can for those little boys.”

On reaching Leghorn, the nuns found a letter waiting for them at their convent. The nun to whom it was addressed was asked to inform Sister Brambilla that she was not to go to the girls’ orphanage but rather to a boys’ hospice. When she got there, she understood the purpose of Don Bosco’s parting exhortation. The run-down hospice housed fifty orphan boys; two of the five nuns who had cared for them had gone to their heavenly reward within six months. Sister Brambilla shared the work with the three remaining sisters and, fifty years later, in word and writing, told us this precious anecdote, to the glory of our recently beatified Don Bosco.

In 1932 our confreres in Marseille recalled a prediction Don Bosco had made back in 1880. St. Leo’s Oratory had at one time been closed in on all sides by private homes and fields, and no one could possibly have foreseen if and when this would all become the property of the Salesians, or, rather, of the Beaujour Society—no one, that is, except Don Bosco. Just diagonally across, on the northeast corner of a home located on Rue des Princes 60, some distance from the original Salesian festive oratory, stood a pretty fountain, gently spouting into the air. One day, as Don Bosco was passing by it with Father Bologna, the director, and Brother Nasi, he stopped a moment to look at the fountain and remarked, “In due time our festive oratory will come as far as this fountain.” Both his

companions told others repeatedly of this prediction, but the years went by and no one ever thought of it again. Still, through a series of purchases between 1891 and 1923, all the aforesaid buildings and land did eventually become the property of St. Leo's Oratory, though not as far as the fountain. This last step was reached on May 24, 1932. Father Bologna and Brother Nasi had been dead for some time, but there were others living who had heard them repeat the prediction, particularly Brother Charles Fleuret, who distinctly recalled Brother Nasi stating the very words uttered by Don Bosco on that memorable occasion.

As regards the reading of hearts, we shall describe just one instance more striking than several others. One day in 1880 a boy who had been transferred from an irreligious boarding school named after Garibaldi, and who had been enrolled against his will at the Oratory, went to Don Bosco for confession, stubbornly determined not to reveal several very important matters. Before the lad could even open his mouth, Don Bosco listed all his sins. The boy was so shaken up that he left without waiting for absolution and returned later only after he had calmed down and had decided to make an honest confession. He soon mended his ways and a few years later made his novitiate at San Benigno, where he told this in detail to the well-known moral theologian, Father Louis Piscetta.⁵ When he was asked if he had ever spoken of his sins to anyone else, the young man replied that he had been alone when he committed them, far from the Oratory, and had never revealed them to anyone.

Two really extraordinary cures also took place during this period. John Bisio, a Turinese storekeeper well known at the Oratory, where he had lived seven years, after completing his military service in 1864, testified under oath during the apostolic process [for Don Bosco's beatification] in 1895. He stated that fifteen years before his wife had been suffering from a serious heart ailment which her physicians declared incurable. Knowing this, he told his wife that he wished her to receive Don Bosco's blessing. She welcomed the idea. Don Bosco visited and comforted her, assuring her that she would not die at that time. As a matter of fact, she lived for fifteen more years to the astonishment of her physicians.

⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Another blessing of Don Bosco halted a partial atrophy in Brother Louis Tabasso while still a young artisan. He had been a sickly lad ever since he had first come to the Oratory. His problem was that his body developed only on the right side, leaving the left side atrophied. This abnormality put added pressure on his heart, making breathing difficult and bringing on spasms of the facial muscles. Several outstanding physicians in Turin studied the ailment. In June 1880 Doctor Concato, a university professor, sent him to the hospital for closer examination and also allowed his students to study the case. There was no problem in diagnosing the boy's trouble, but medical science could offer no remedy. Then faith took over. One Sunday [after returning home] the boy called on Don Bosco, told him of his hopeless condition and asked for a blessing. Don Bosco asked him to kneel, prayed with him and then blessed him. Instantly, as the boy stood up, he felt that a great weight had been lifted from his heart, and the pain in his left cheek disappeared. Some days later he regained his strength, and his left arm grew to the size of the right! Only a slight hollow remained on his face, as though a piece of bone had been removed, and his tongue softened, slightly turned to the left. His ailment was gone. As soon as Don Bosco realized the effect of his blessing, he forbade the boy to mention what had happened but urged him to thank the Blessed Virgin Mary. Two years later, the lad injured his leg and again asked for Don Bosco's blessing, hoping for a similar cure. Don Bosco agreed only on condition that recovery would prove beneficial to the salvation of his soul, and that if it were not he would not be healed. He kept this impairment to the end of his days.⁶

Augustine Calcagno of Arenzano was one of the very first Salesian cooperators, and he was a fine cooperator indeed! He attended every meeting called by Don Bosco in Turin or anywhere in his native Liguria, bringing substantial donations he had collected. He also brought sick persons. In 1881, while attending a meeting within the novena of Mary, Help of Christians, he offered Don Bosco five donations. Don Bosco lined them up in a row on the table; then, without asking who the donors were, he pointed to them and said, "These three will obtain the grace they are asking

⁶Report by Brother Tabasso to Father Lemoyne, Nice, February 14, 1888. [Editor]

for, the other two will not." Before the novena ended the three donors recovered from their ailments. One is still living today [1933], a respectable nonagenarian,⁷ but the other two have died.

An instance of bilocation should have been narrated in the preceding volume, but we set it aside as it was apparently poorly documented. In 1891 a lady wrote to Father Rua about a matter she had brought to his attention before. Her letter very sketchily presented this instance of bilocation such as people usually do when merely recalling events already known to them. This year [1933] the oldest daughter of the woman has given us several more particulars of which she is well informed. After quite an extensive search we managed to locate her and obtained from her a detailed report which satisfactorily complements her mother's letter. Now that Don Bosco's sanctity has been formally acknowledged, we believe it our duty to publicize a phenomenon which is not unusual in the lives of the saints and which, as a series of indisputable documents shall show us, happened repeatedly throughout our founder's life.

Don Bosco was most certainly in Turin on October 14, 1878. Yet that very day an unknown French-speaking priest who refused to give his name was the guest of Adele Clément at Saint-Rambert d'Albon, in the department of Drôme. Giving in to the lady's insistent questions as to his identity, he replied, "A few years from now my name will be printed in books, and these books will come into your hands. Then you will know who I am."

The lady's husband, an oil and coal merchant, had brought the priest home with him while returning from Chanas, a hamlet less than half a mile from Saint-Rambert, where he had taken on a load of material. He noticed a priest who apparently was plodding along with difficulty. Sympathetically he remarked as he caught up with him, "Father, you look very tired."

"Yes, my good man, I am," the priest answered. "I have walked a long way."

"If I had a better cart, Father, I would gladly give you a lift, but I am ashamed to invite you to sit here."

⁷Written report by his niece, Mrs. Anselmo, a midwife, and by his nephew, Father Dominic Anselmo, a Salesian missionary, Arenzano, 1933. [Author]

“You would do me a great favor if you did. I really can walk no further.”

So saying, he climbed into the cart with the man's help. He seemed to be somewhere between thirty and forty years of age and had a handsome appearance. One detail which the man paid little attention to then and there but clearly recalled later was that, although the priest was sitting at the rear of the cart and his head with its three-cornered hat was quite visible, no passers-by gave the slightest sign of noticing him.

When he arrived home, Monsieur Clément helped the priest to alight, and then hastened to tell his wife that they had a priest guest who was exhausted and hungry. His wife, a kindly and devout woman, instantly asked him to stay for dinner. He accepted and during the meal listened sympathetically as the woman recited her woes, the worst of them being that as a consequence of a sudden illness, her infant son had become blind, deaf and dumb. The poor mother was quite beside herself, having prayed to every saint, but all in vain. The priest then told her, “Keep praying, madame, and your prayer will be answered.”

“Do you really mean that, Father? Come and see him!”

During the meal the husband had poured wine into the priest's glass. Next to the wine bottle on the table, as was then the custom, stood a white china jug with a silver circle on it, containing water. “Keep this jug to remember me,” the priest said. They did so, as their daughter, who was then a child, has told us. Later, she made this statement: “The year before my father died he said to me, ‘That jug must not go to your brothers. I leave it to you, and you must keep it. It is a souvenir of that holy priest.’”

Toward the end of the meal, Monsieur Clément went out to water the horses and get ready to leave again. Just then the priest rose and told the woman, “A voice is calling me, my dear lady, and I must leave.”

“Wait a moment, Father,” the woman said. “My husband will be back immediately, and he will take you in the cart to see my son.”

“A voice is calling me,” he said again. “I must go.” And he left.

The woman ran out to her husband. Quickly they harnessed the horses and raced after him, certain that they would soon catch up

with him, but they could not find him and believed that he must have missed his way. Imagine their surprise when, on going to the wet nurse who was then caring for the infant, she told them that a priest had called and had cured their child. The nurse was living at Coinaud, a village about two miles from Saint-Rambert. The parents realized from their calculation that the very moment the priest had left their house he had entered the nurse's home.

For seven years those good people helplessly cudgelled their brains to find out who the mysterious priest might have been. Then one person who had seen the priest healing the infant, and clearly remembered his features, showed them a book on Don Bosco containing his picture, saying, "This is the priest who healed your child!" Undeniably it was Don Bosco, and the parents recognized him immediately.

On April 10, 1888 the woman, who in the meantime had miraculously been healed of some illness, as she believed, through Don Bosco's intercession, sent an account of it to Father Rua, but her letter has been lost. Nor did the woman herself know what had happened to her letter, for she again wrote to him on April 13, 1891, perhaps urged by remorse that she had not done all she could to make this miracle known to Don Bosco's successor. Among other things she wrote,

There are still living witnesses who can testify to this. Some can give detailed information. But do not question the parish priest at Saint-Rambert, because he does not believe in Don Bosco's holiness. I am doing all I can to help Don Bosco's works, but he has bidden us not to introduce extraordinary occurrences, for, he says, they are all sheer fantasy, noting that here in France we already have enough charitable enterprises. . . . I could write a book about all the headaches this priest at Saint-Rambert has caused me and all the tokens of miraculous protection which God and Mary, Help of Christians have given me through Don Bosco's intercession. Please ask some good priest to investigate this account and question the witnesses. You might for instance contact the parish priest at Breuil at Bois-d'Oingt near Lyons or the parish priest of Diemaze near Vienne.

Was this letter ever answered? Our archives do not tell us. The daughter of the Cléments, from whom we received a long letter dated April 18, 1932, lives at Lyons (Avenue de Saxe, 136) and is

married to a Monsieur Durand. Her mother died in 1914, her father in 1925; the infant who was instantly cured lived until 1928, when he developed a brain tumor. The doctors expected a very painful death, but, on the contrary, he died very peacefully. It appears that this too was another grace granted by Don Bosco.⁸

“God is wonderful in His saints.” [Ps. 67, 36] But from such divine wonders the saints drew stronger incentives for humility. Don Bosco was convinced that, had God found a weaker and more unsuitable instrument than himself, He would have called that person to do His work. Whenever he voiced this conviction of his, as he did very frequently, those who heard him were convinced of his sincerity from his expression and the tone of his voice. No less sincere was the touching grief with which, toward the end of his days, he remarked, “How many are the wonders God has performed among us! But how many more would He have performed, had Don Bosco only had greater faith!” He then begged his sons never to be so ungrateful as to attribute to themselves rather than to God, even in the smallest measure, any good which Providence might deign to work through them.

⁸Just as this was going to press (June 1, 1933), we learned that Madame Durand died last January 23. Her daughter told our confrere, Father John Siméon (Letter from La Mulatière, May 30, 1933), that her mother “in her last moment” had an almost painless death, which she attributed to Blessed Don Bosco.” [Author]

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SALESIAN BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

ALBERA, PAUL (1845-1921), Fr., *Rector Major*

Paul Albera was born at None (Turin) on June 6, 1845 and entered the Oratory in the fall of 1858. He made his profession on May 14, 1862. After his ordination to the priesthood on August 2, 1868, he was appointed prefect of the Oratory, a post he held until 1871, when he was sent to Marassi (Genoa) as director of the Salesian Hospice, and later transferred to Sampierdarena. There he had the responsibility of the Sons of Mary and helped Don Bosco in preparing for the first missionary expedition. The printshop which he initiated in 1877 printed the *Bollettino Salesiano*. In 1881 Fr. Albera was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses in France, with headquarters at Marseille. He remained in that position ten years, and, despite the harassment of the times, the houses in France grew from three to thirteen.

Fr. Albera was called "the little Don Bosco." A man of action—above all, interior action—his main concern was spiritual formation. He became spiritual director of the Salesian Society and a member of the superior council.

In 1896 Don Rua asked him to compile the "Director's Manual." In 1898 he visited France, Spain, and Belgium. In 1900 he traveled through the South American Salesian missions—a journey of three years. He returned to Turin on April 11, 1903, in time to head preparations for the crowning of the picture of Mary, Help of Christians in the basilica.

In fulfillment of a prophecy of Don Bosco, known only to Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Fr. Albera was elected superior general on August 16, 1910, Don Bosco's birthday. He headed the Congregation during the trying years of World War I.

The depth of his personal piety and asceticism imbued the numerous circulars which he wrote to the Salesians, as well as the *Director's Manual*, published in 1915.

In 1918 Fr. Albera celebrated his golden jubilee of ordination. He inaugurated the monument of Don Bosco which dominates the square of Mary, Help of Christians and presided over the Congress of Alumni and Cooperators in 1920.

Exhausted by his many journeys as rector major in visiting the houses and strengthening the confreres and Salesian cooperators, Fr. Albera passed the last years of his life in precarious health. He died on October

29, 1921. He was interred at Valsalice, alongside Don Bosco and Fr. Rua, whose sterling virtues he so faithfully reflected.

AMADEI, ANGELO (1868-1945), Fr.

Fr. Angelo Amadei succeeded Fr. Lemoyne in 1908 as the editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and at the same time became his invaluable assistant in the work of research and compilation for *The Biographical Memoirs*.

At Fr. Lemoyne's death in 1916, Fr. Amadei interrupted other literary activities and undertook the continuation of the work on *The Biographical Memoirs*. After supervising the publication of Volume IX, he wrote and published Volume X covering the years 1871-1874, a period characterized as perhaps the most active and the most interesting in the life of St. John Bosco.

He was relieved of further responsibility for *The Biographical Memoirs* so that he could resume his earlier studies and research, and devote his full attention to work on the life of Fr. Michael Rua, the first successor of St. John Bosco.

Il Servo di Dio Michele Rua, a three-volume work of patient and dedicated scholarship, was his major achievement. His last important work was a new edition of Fr. Lemoyne's two-volume life of Don Bosco. He died in Turin on January 16, 1945 at the age of 76.

BARBERIS, JULIUS (1847-1927), Fr.

Fr. Barberis had the distinction of being the first novice master of the Salesian Congregation, a post assigned to him by Don Bosco himself. "We will always be friends," the saint told fourteen-year-old Julius on his entrance into the Oratory in 1861. "One day you will be my helper," he added. Fr. Barberis was a quiet, gentle person, very much attuned to Don Bosco's spirit, prudent and kind with his young charges, demanding yet patient and understanding.

He was born at Mathi (Turin) on June 7, 1847. He made his first vows in 1865. Ordained in 1870, he attended the University of Turin and earned his doctoral degree in theology in 1873. The following year Don Bosco personally appointed him novice master, a position he held for twenty-five years. As master he formed a veritable host of young men into zealous, hard-working Salesians who looked up to him for inspiration and guidance, among them the servants of God Andrew Beltrami and August Czartoryski. Don Bosco utilized his experience in setting up novitiates throughout Europe. From 1892 to 1900 he was a member of the superior chapter. From 1902 to 1911 he was provincial of the central province and in 1910 was named spiritual director of the Congregation, a position he held to his death on November 24, 1927. Truly a man of God, gifted with

enviable simplicity and extraordinary goodness, he mirrored the fatherliness of Don Bosco to all his novices. His *Vade Mecum*, the first textbook on Salesian spirituality, is still a valuable introduction to religious life.

BEAUVOIR, JOSEPH (1850-1930), Fr.

Joseph Beauvoir was born in Turin on June 1, 1850, made his vows in 1870 and was ordained a priest in 1875. Three years later, when Don Bosco asked him if he would volunteer for the South American missions, he accepted and left that same year. After a short stay in Uruguay and at Buenos Aires, he headed for the mission fields of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. He was perhaps the missionary who worked the hardest and the longest to keep in touch with the Indians.

As military chaplain he took part in General Villegas' expedition to the Andes in 1882-1883 and was awarded a silver medal for his priestly zeal. He then spent twenty-five years evangelizing the Indians of southern and western Patagonia. His love for them prompted him to compile a small dictionary of the Onas Indians which was later amplified and merged with the highly praised work entitled *Los Shelknam Indigenos de la Tierra del Fuego*, dealing with the traditions, customs and languages of the local natives. In 1892 Father Beauvoir accompanied a group of Indians who represented Tierra del Fuego to the Colombian Fair then held in Genoa. He died in Buenos Aires on April 28, 1930.

BELMONTE, DOMINIC (1843-1901), Fr.

Dominic Belmonte, born in Genoa on September 18, 1843, went to the Oratory in 1860 and, although seventeen, was advised by Don Bosco to begin high school. He studied music and became a proficient choir director and composer. Professed in 1864, he was ordained in Turin in 1870. After being prefect at Borgo San Martino, he was sent to Alassio as catechist in 1873. Four years later he returned to Borgo San Martino as director, succeeding Fr. Rua and Fr. Bonetti. In 1881 he was appointed director of the school at Sampierdarena, where he also taught theology, headed musical activities, and became first pastor at the Church of St. Cajetan. In 1886 Fr. Belmonte was chosen prefect general of the Salesian Society. In 1891, on the death of Fr. Bonetti, he was named postulator of Don Bosco's cause. Though he gave up his active musical career, he sponsored the musical training of the Congregation's most noted musician, Fr. John Pagella.

Don Bosco had told Fr. Belmonte that, if he took care of himself, he would live beyond sixty. However, he felt that he could not spare himself any work. He died in Turin on February 17, 1901 at the age of fifty-eight.

BERTO, JOACHIM (1847-1914), Fr.

Joachim Berto entered the Oratory in 1862. He was one of the privileged few who witnessed many of Don Bosco's wonderful deeds. He joined the Salesian Congregation in 1865. Even before his ordination in 1871, he was chosen by Don Bosco to be his secretary—a post he retained for the next twenty years until ill health forced him to retire. During these years he accompanied Don Bosco on his most important trips to Rome on the Congregation's affairs and to Rome and Florence in delicate negotiations between the Italian government and the Holy See. He was a great help to Don Bosco in carrying out his voluminous correspondence and in safeguarding confidential documents concerning the above negotiations. His accounts of these journeys constitute some of the most precious archives of the Salesian Society. While carrying out his secretarial duties, Fr. Berto also carefully kept a diary and authored several devotional and ascetical booklets. As catechist for the Oratory students, he cultivated the sodalities of the Blessed Sacrament and the Altar Boys. To his last days he was a skilled and well-loved confessor. He died at the Oratory on February 21, 1914.

BODRATO, FRANCIS (1823-1880), Fr.

Francis Bodrato was born at Mornese on October 18, 1823. He first met Don Bosco in 1864 on one of the latter's fall picnics to Fr. Pestarino's parish at Mornese. Francis, a teacher, was anxious to learn Don Bosco's secret of winning the hearts of boys. His own heart was won and, though a widower with two children, he came to Don Bosco, who, wise judge of character, immediately accepted him. He received the casock and was sent to teach at Lanzo. He made his perpetual profession in 1865. Ordained a priest in 1869, he held various offices at Alassio, Borgo San Martino and the Oratory. In 1875 Don Bosco recalled him to the Oratory to be economer of the Congregation. In November of the following year he was appointed to head the second missionary expedition of twenty-two Salesians to Argentina. He was named pastor of Our Lady of Mercy Parish in Buenos Aires for immigrant Italians; within its limits was the infamous "Boca del Diablo" quarter, where even the police trod warily. Under Fr. Bodrato's leadership the neighborhood changed marvelously. In 1877 Don Bosco appointed him provincial of the Salesians in South America. In 1880 civil war broke out in Argentina. After an extended period of an unknown and painful illness, Fr. Bodrato died in Buenos Aires on August 4, 1880, mourned by the entire city.

BOLOGNA, JOSEPH (1847-1907), Fr.

Joseph Bologna was born at Garessio (Cuneo) on May 15, 1847, and

entered the Oratory in 1863. He was a companion of the saintly lad, Francis Besucco, whose virtues he made his own. He joined the Salesian Congregation in 1868 and was ordained a priest in 1872. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to Marseille to open the St. Leo's Festive Oratory, which he directed until 1892, when he was appointed provincial of the houses in southern France with headquarters at Marseille. Six years later he was sent to Paris and named provincial of northern France and Belgium. His last days were saddened by the government's anti-religious legislation closing even Salesian houses. He died in Turin on January 4, 1907 while on a visit to the Oratory.

BONETTI, JOHN (1838-1891), Fr.

John Bonetti was born at Caramagna (Cuneo) on November 5, 1838. He came to the Oratory in 1855 at the age of seventeen. Fr. Matthew Pico, who taught him in his senior year, called him "a priceless youth." John was one of the young men who in December 1859 banded with Don Bosco to found the Salesian Congregation. He was elected a member of the first superior council. (See Volume VI, pp. 181f) He won high honors in philosophy and theology and soon became a well-known writer. His book, *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [The First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales], merits special mention. Its wealth of detail constitutes a small library of Salesiana.

Fr. Bonetti was a capable public relations man. Gifted with a fine intellect and a brilliant imagination, he was also a great story teller. Like Don Bosco, he defended the Catholic Church against attacks of vociferous Protestant leaders. A man of balanced zeal, warm piety, and deep spirituality, he was elected spiritual director of the Salesian Congregation in 1886.

He died at the Oratory at the age of fifty-three on June 5, 1891, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that he would be the first member of the superior chapter to follow him in death. Blessed Michael Rua hailed Fr. Bonetti as "a tireless apostolic laborer, a valiant champion in promoting God's glory and the salvation of souls, an amiable counselor in comfort and advice."

BORGATELLO, MAGGIORINO (1857-1929), Fr.

Born at Varengo (Alessandria) on February 8, 1857, Maggiorino Borgatello first met Don Bosco at the age of sixteen when he entered the Oratory. He liked Don Bosco so much that he decided to bind himself to him for life. He took his vows as a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained a priest in 1880. In late 1888, after recovering from a severe illness through Don Bosco's intercession, he volunteered for the missions of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, where he labored twenty-five years. In 1893 he

inaugurated a museum of Indian artifacts and natural history in Punta Arenas, Chile. Its collection is priceless, and the museum has now been named in his honor. In 1925, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the Salesian missions, Fr. Borgatello published a history of the apostolic endeavors of the Salesian missionaries in those far-off lands. In 1928 he also authored a grammar and glossary of the Alakaluf Indians, and in 1930 his biography of Msgr. Joseph Fagnano, another intrepid Salesian missionary, was published. He spent his last years as assistant pastor of the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin, where he died on December 20, 1929.

BOURLLOT, STEPHEN (1849-1910), Fr.

Stephen Bourlot first met Don Bosco in 1866. After spending some time with him at the Oratory, he enrolled at the archdiocesan seminary in Turin and was ordained a priest in 1871. A few years later, he decided to become a Salesian; in 1876 he made his vows and volunteered for the South American missions.

Assigned to the newly erected parish of La Boca del Riachuelo in Buenos Aires (*see* Vol. XIII, p. 129) he zealously dedicated himself to the well-being of all his parishioners, particularly during a cholera epidemic which flared in 1886.

The most outstanding of his many achievements were the construction of the grandiose church of La Boca and the spiritual formation of his parishioners. He died in Buenos Aires on November 28, 1910.

BRETTO, CLEMENT (1855-1919), Fr.

Born at Montanaro, Turin, in 1855, Clement Bretto received his elementary and secondary education at the Cottolengo school. After studying theology at the Turin diocesan seminary for two years, he transferred to the Oratory in 1874 and became a Salesian. He made his perpetual vows in March 1877 and was ordained in December of the same year. He was then appointed spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians at Nizza Monferrato. He did so well that, eleven years later, Fr. Rua did not hesitate to name him director general of the Institute. After a few years as provincial in Piedmont and Lombardy, the new rector major, Fr. Paul Albera, appointed him economer general, an office he held to his death in 1919. He was distinguished for his efficiency, prudence, common sense and Christian wisdom.

CAGLIERO, JOHN (1838-1926), *Bishop and Cardinal*

John Cagliero was born in Castelnuovo d'Asti on January 11, 1838. He was received by Don Bosco in the Oratory in 1851. (*See* Vol. IV, pp.

200ff) He became a Salesian on May 14, 1862. A month later he was ordained a priest in Turin and appointed spiritual director of the Oratory. He soon showed an exceptional talent for music, and from that talent came a steady flow of sacred and recreational music which was the delight of the Oratory. Even such composers as Giuseppe Verdi and Lorenzo Perosi praised his art.

Cagliero obtained his doctorate in theology at the University of Turin in 1873; the following year Don Bosco appointed him spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. Cagliero is best remembered as an intrepid missionary. In 1875 he led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina, where they carried out their ministry to the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. Soon, however, Fr. Cagliero penetrated the interior of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. Then he opened a trade school at Almagro and another at Villa Colón, Uruguay. He was recalled to Turin in 1877 to become spiritual director of the Congregation, an office he fulfilled until 1884, when Pope Leo XIII nominated him vicar apostolic of northern and central Patagonia. He was the first Salesian bishop and was consecrated in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin on December 7, 1884, in the presence of Don Bosco. Immediately afterward he returned to South America and was welcomed by Fr. Joseph Fagnano, with whom he explored Tierra del Fuego, meeting up with the various Indian tribes. In 1887 he crossed the Andes to inaugurate the first Salesian house in Chile, at Concepción. In December of that year he returned to Turin to assist Don Bosco on his deathbed.

After Don Bosco's death Bishop Cagliero returned to Argentina. Years later, in 1908, he founded Patagonia's first hospital at Viedma. Pope St. Pius X appointed him minister plenipotentiary of Costa Rica and apostolic delegate to the countries of Central America. In 1915 Pope Benedict XV nominated him cardinal and assigned him to the Sacred Congregations of Religious, Propagation of the Faith and Sacred Rites. In 1920 he was named bishop of Frascati.

He died in Rome in 1926. In June 1964 his remains were brought back to Argentina and solemnly laid to rest in the cathedral of Viedma, his first episcopal residence. For further details see the Indexes of Volumes II through XIII.

CAPRIOGLIO, FELIX (1851-1940), Fr.

Born at Rosignano, Italy in 1851, Felix entered the newly opened Salesian school at Mirabello in 1863, where Fr. Michael Rua was director. He then went on to the Oratory, where he joined the Salesian Society and made his vows at Lanzo in 1870. Six years later he left for Argentina with the second missionary expedition. He was ordained a

priest in 1886. The following year he was named director at La Plata, then at Buenos Aires, Vignaud, Victoria and General Costex. His directorship lasted thirty-four years. His long, fruitful life ended at Córdoba on May 19, 1940.

CARTIER, LOUIS (1860-1945), Fr.

Born in Colomban, France, on February 7, 1860, Louis was studying at the seminary of St. Jean de Maurienne when, attracted by Don Bosco's fame, he went to Turin and made his novitiate at San Benigno Canavese. After his ordination in 1883 he was sent to Marseille as the first master of novices and director of the novitiate. From 1886 to 1923 he was director of the Salesian house at Nice. By prudence and fortitude he withstood the anti-clerical persecution and confiscation of religious property by the French government. He was a staunch promoter of religious and priestly vocations. His crowning work was building the Church of Mary, Help of Christians in Nice. In his later years he was a familiar figure in the city as, white cane striking the pavement, for he was practically blind, he made his way to wealthy friends to beg funds for the Salesian works. He died in Nice on December 29, 1945.

CAYS, CHARLES (1813-1882), Fr.

Count Charles Cays was born in Turin on November 24, 1813, of an ancient, noble family. He did his secondary and college studies with the Jesuits and earned a law degree from the University of Turin. He married Countess Agnes Provana, by whom he had a son and a daughter. The daughter died in infancy. At the age of thirty-two he was widowed and, being generous-hearted, he became very active in the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. With Don Bosco he was instrumental in setting up the Turin chapter and was chosen its president. He lavishly gave of his wealth and time at the festive oratories of Valdocco, the Guardian Angel, and St. Aloysius. A staunch Catholic, he served as deputy in the Subalpine Parliament from 1857 to 1860.

After retiring from politics, he confined himself to works of charity. After long consultation with Don Bosco he left his comfortable home and entered the Oratory. From then on he lived a life of utter simplicity and fervent piety, putting his talents at the service of Don Bosco and poor youth. He became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained a priest on September 20, 1878. After serving as director in one of the Salesian schools in France, he was recalled to the Oratory to manage *Letture Cattolice*. He was of invaluable assistance to Don Bosco for many years and died on October 4, 1882, as he himself had predicted.

CERIA, EUGENE (1870-1957), Fr.

Fr. Eugene Ceria already enjoyed the reputation of a distinguished scholar, author, and editor when in 1929 Fr. Philip Rinaldi, Superior General, asked him to continue the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs*, the monumental work begun by Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne. Fr. 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 Fr. 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 Blessed Fr. Michael Rua, the Servants of God Fr. Andrew Beltrami and Fr. 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.

CERRUTI, FRANCIS (1844-1917), Fr.

Francis Cerruti, born in Vercelli on April 28, 1844, entered the Oratory in November 1856 and immediately fell under the influence of Dominic Savio. He completed the five-year secondary school course in three years and was chosen by Don Bosco for teacher certification studies. He was among the first seventeen young men who joined Don Bosco and his fledgling Salesian Congregation in 1859. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1865 his life was threatened by a severe bout with pneumonia, but, as Don Bosco predicted, he miraculously recovered. In 1866 he made his perpetual profession, received a Ph.D in literature, and was ordained a priest. A scholar by talent and training, he compiled an Italian dictionary for school use at Don Bosco's request. In 1870 he became the first director of the Salesian school in Alassio and in 1879 he became the first provincial of the Liguria province. In 1885 Don Bosco personally chose him to be prefect general of studies, a position which enabled him to put his educational and administrative expertise to good use for the schools of both the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. He was also a prolific writer. He died at Alassio on March 25, 1917, just shy of his seventy-third birthday.

COSTAMAGNA, JAMES (1846-1921), *Bishop*

James Costamagna was born at Caramagna (Cuneo) on March 23, 1846. At the age of twelve he began his studies at the Oratory. On September 27, 1867 he made his first profession and less than a year later was ordained a priest. In 1874 Don Bosco sent him to Mornese as spiritual director of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, a post he held for three years. In 1877 he headed the third missionary expedition. In Argentina he accompanied General Julio Roca as chaplain on a military expedition calculated to subdue the uprising tribes of the Pampas. He saved many Indians from the vengeful attacks of the soldiers and brought them to the faith.

In 1880, on the death of Fr. Bodrato, he was named director of San Carlos School in Buenos Aires and provincial of South America. He was a stern person. "I want sterling Salesians" was his motto. He himself set the example in promoting the genuine spirit of Don Bosco, correcting all deviations and weaknesses. He brought in the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians for the care of the girls of Almagro. In 1882 he began publishing the Argentine edition of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and, two years later, that of *Letture Cattoliche*. To counteract the anticlerical spirit of the public schools of Buenos Aires, he opened more festive oratories for the teaching of catechism. He was also in demand as spiritual director of religious communities. In 1887 he began the Salesian work in Chile with a school at Talca, and the following year he toured neighboring countries for future Salesian foundations.

Appointed apostolic vicar of Mendez and Gualaquiza, Ecuador, he was consecrated bishop in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians on May 23, 1895. Since his return to Ecuador was blocked by its government, he went to Buenos Aires, where he was appointed by Fr. Rua to be visitor to the Salesian houses of South America, with residence in Santiago, Chile. In 1902 he was granted permission to visit his vicariate for three months, a visit he repeated the following year. Eventually he obtained permission to enter Ecuador and set up his residence among the Jivaros.

In 1918, suffering from a heart condition, he ceded his post to Salesian Bishop Dominic Comin and retired to the novitiate house at Bernal, Argentina, where he died on September 9, 1921.

DALMAZZO, FRANCIS (1845-1895), Fr.

Francis Dalmazzo entered the Oratory in 1860. After a few days, unable to adjust to the frugal meals, he wanted to return home. On the morning of his departure, after going to confession to Don Bosco, he saw him perform a miracle by multiplying a few buns into hundreds for the

boys' breakfast. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 453ff)

Astounded, he decided to remain at the Oratory, became a Salesian and was ordained a priest in 1868. From 1872 to 1880 he was director of the Valsalice College; subsequently he was appointed director and pastor of the school and Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome and procurator general of the Salesian Society at the Vatican. Toward the end of 1887 he was sent to London to open a Salesian house; afterward, from 1888 to 1894, he was rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Turin. In all these undertakings he won the admiration and good will of all who came in contact with him. Finally, in 1894, in deference to the wishes of the bishop of Catanzaro, he assumed the direction of that diocesan seminary staffed by Salesians and within a short time opened also a small secondary school. A tragic death, however, awaited him at the hand of a murderer; a victim of duty, he died on March 10, 1895, forgiving his assailant.

DOGLIANI, JOSEPH (1849-1934), Br.

Joseph Dogliani was born in Castigliole di Saluzzo on May 13, 1849. He 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 John De Vecchi. He made such rapid progress that as a young Salesian he became the chief collaborator of Father Cagliero, and when in 1875 the latter led the first Salesian missionary expedition to South America, Don Bosco appointed Dogliani choirmaster of the Oratory. In 1889 he also directed the brass band. Under his direction the Oratory choir numbered four hundred and achieved fame by its impeccable execution of classical sacred music of the most renowned composers: Cherubini, Haydn, Gounod, and Palestrina, to mention a few. Various cities in Italy and abroad invited the Oratory choir on solemn occasions, such as the inauguration of Marseille's new cathedral and the centennial of Joan of Arc. 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.

DURANDO, CELESTINE (1840-1907), Fr.

Celestine Durando, born at Farigliano di Mondovì on April 29, 1840, entered the Oratory in 1856, and on his very first day met Dominic Savio, with whom he later founded the Immaculate Conception Sodality. On December 18, 1859, with other young clerics, he joined Don Bosco in

forming the Salesian Congregation. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He was ordained a priest in Mondovì in 1864. The following year he became a member of the superior chapter and held that office for nearly forty years.

Fr. Durando was well known for his several, greatly praised school publications. In 1869 Don Bosco directed him to compile *La Biblioteca della gioventù italiana* [Italian Classics for the Young]. (See Vol. IX, pp. 51, 196f, 391) From 1869 to 1885 two hundred and four volumes were published, nineteen of them edited by Fr. Durando. He also authored an excellent Latin grammar and dictionary.

From 1886 to 1903 he served as provincial to a wide range of Salesian houses in Europe, Africa and Asia, loosely linked into one unit. A zealous priest, he distinguished himself in the ministry of the confessional. He died at the Oratory on March 27, 1907. "A silent man," wrote Fr. Rua, "Fr. Durando lived a career of good works, rich in merit. Wherever he passed he left the image of a truly priestly Salesian spirit."

FAGNANO, JOSEPH (1844-1916), Fr., *Prefect Apostolic*

Joseph Fagnano was born in Rocchetta Tanaro (Asti) on March 9, 1844. At twelve he enrolled in the diocesan seminary of Asti. When the seminary closed in 1859, due to a shortage of students, the seminarians were encouraged to transfer to the Oratory in Turin, but Joseph returned home. After serving as an orderly in the army hospital at Asti, he decided to resume his priestly studies under Don Bosco's care. He was soon won over by the happy family life he found at the Oratory and by Don Bosco's serene fatherliness. What most impressed him, however, was Don Bosco's telling him his sins, circumstances and all, during his general confession. That convinced him that he was talking to a saint, and he decided to stay with him.

Joseph made his first vows in 1864 and was ordained on September 19, 1868. On November 14, 1875, since one of the ten Salesian missionaries who were assigned to the first missionary expedition was unable to go, Don Bosco asked Fr. Fagnano to replace him, and he gladly did.

From Buenos Aires he went to San Nicolás de los Arroyos and converted an old home to a boarding school. The following March it was ready for occupancy by a hundred and forty-four boarders and as many day students. In April 1879, while director at the school, Fr. Fagnano contracted typhoid. After his recovery six months later, he was made pastor at Patagónes, in northern Patagonia, where he built a church and two schools, one for boys, one for girls. He formed a school band and set up a meteorological station, soon given official status by Argentina. When a military expedition was sent out against the Indians, Fr. Fagnano zealously volunteered his services as a chaplain so as to extend his

pastoral care to the hunted natives, of whom he baptized thirty.

Appointed prefect apostolic of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, he sailed to Punta Arenas in 1877 and then to Dawson Island, where he established St. Raphael Mission, which the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians staffed in 1890. At Punta Arenas he set up a weather station and a church. In Tierra del Fuego, where a lake has been named after him, he founded a mission which became an Indian settlement. It burned down three years later, and Fr. Fagnano rebuilt it, but, when the government withdrew funds, he had to abandon the project.

Fr. Fagnano died in Santiago, Chile on September 18, 1916.

FASCIE, BARTHOLOMEW (1861-1937), Fr.

Born at Verezzi (Savona) on October 20, 1861, Bartholomew Fascie enrolled at the age of fifteen as a student in the Salesian lyceum at nearby Alassio and after graduation moved to the Oratory to continue his studies at the University of Turin. It was during this period that he felt attracted to Don Bosco's saintliness and the Salesian life. In 1883, after obtaining his university degrees in letters and philosophy, he delayed joining the Salesian Congregation for family reasons and returned to Alassio as a teacher of literature in the Salesian lyceum. In 1890 he finally decided to become a Salesian and received the clerical habit from Fr. Michael Rua. A year later he made his perpetual vows. His sound intellectual formation, spiritual maturity and love of work hastened his ordination to the priesthood in 1891.

He exercised his Salesian apostolate first at Alassio and then at Este and Ascona (Switzerland). From 1897 to 1910 he was director at Bronte (Sicily) and provincial from 1907 to 1913. He filled the same office in Tuscany and Emilia from 1913 to 1920. While he was still provincial, Fr. Paul Albera appointed him prefect general of studies in 1919 when this office became vacant. Subsequent general chapters reappointed him to the same post. Having completely absorbed Don Bosco's spirit in his frequent contacts with him, he became its jealous guardian and faithful interpreter. Among his writings, outstanding is his booklet on Don Bosco's preventive system which was adopted as a textbook in all teachers' training colleges in Italy. He died of a stroke on January 31, 1937, shortly after delivering a panegyric in honor of St. John Bosco on his feast day in the Basilica of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin.

FASSIO, MICHAEL (1853-1936), Fr.

Michael Fassio was born in Revigliano d'Asti, Italy in 1853 and entered the Oratory in 1866. He donned the cassock in 1872 and made his religious profession at Lanzo the following year. Soon after his priestly

ordination in 1876, he joined the second missionary expedition to South America, where he carried out a very fruitful apostolate in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile. When he retired from the missionary field, his piety, love of work, and priestly zeal were put to good use at the motherhouse in Turin as long as his health permitted, as one of the secretaries of the rector major and as spiritual director in various houses of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. He went to his eternal reward on January 1, 1936.

FRANCESIA, JOHN BAPTIST (1838-1930), Fr.

John Baptist Francesia, who was born in San Giorgio Canavese (Turin) on October 3, 1838, began attending the Valdocco Festive Oratory when about twelve; two years later he became a resident student at the Oratory. In 1859 he was one of the sixteen young men 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. In 1865 Don Bosco named him spiritual director of the Congregation. From 1878 to 1902 he was provincial of the Piedmont-Lombard province. Characterized by a gentle fatherliness which he had acquired from Don Bosco and by a heartwarming smile, Fr. Francesia was a prolific writer and a distinguished Latin and Italian scholar. A man of letters he also wrote plays and poems which Don Bosco had the boys perform on the Oratory stage. His last forty years were spent at the Oratory, and over those years hardly a feast or commemoration was observed without a celebration of Salesian annals in fluent Latin or Italian by Fr. Francesia. The long list of his writings is a very impressive one, ranging from Latin and Italian literature to biography and devotional works.

Besides being a witness of the first years of Don Bosco's work for youth, which he recorded in a biography of our founder, Fr. Francesia was an historian and a poet, writing fluently in Latin and Italian. He also wrote brief accounts of the lives of deceased Salesians. Fr. Francesia was very much the oral historian of the Salesian Congregation's beginnings, recalling events in detail and holding his audience spellbound in the many "Good Nights" he gave to the Oratory's large communities over the years. He died at the Oratory on January 17, 1930. For further details *see also* the Indexes of Volumes IV through XIII.

GHIVARELLO, CHARLES (1835-1913), Fr.

Charles Ghivarello, born at Pino Torinese (Turin) on September 16, 1835, entered the Oratory at the age of twenty and received the clerical habit from Don Bosco the following year. He was a schoolmate of

Dominic Savio. On December 18, 1859 he was one of the young clerics who cast his lot with Don Bosco and became a co-founder of the Salesian Congregation and a consultor of the superior chapter. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He made his first vows in 1862 and was ordained a priest in 1864. In 1876 he was elected economer general and filled that office until 1880 when Don Bosco sent him to Saint-Cyr as director of the Salesian orphanage. Two years later he was appointed director at Mathi and filled that office until 1888.

At his ordination Don Bosco had predicted that he would be an excellent confessor, and it was in that ministry that he best revealed his fatherly goodness.

A talented architect, engineer, and agriculturist, Fr. Ghivarello rendered valuable service to Don Bosco and to the Salesian Congregation. At San Benigno Canavese, where he spent twenty-five years of his life and where he died on February 28, 1913, he built the school chapel and a machine shop.

GROSSO, JOHN BAPTIST (1858-1944), Fr.

Born in San Pietro in Val Lemina (Turin) on February 8, 1858, John was ten when he was received into the Oratory by Don Bosco himself. He was gifted with an exceptional talent for music and, as a cleric, he was sent to Marseille to study music. He made his first profession in 1876 and was ordained in 1881. He began a brilliant musical career by founding the famed "St. Joseph Choir School" in Nice. When religious were banned from France in 1900 he was first sent to Lombriasco, and then to Foglizzo as director of the theology students, and finally to the Oratory.

In 1923 he became director of music at the Salesian International Theologate in Turin, where he trained numberless confreres in sacred polyphony and Gregorian chant. A man of unquestioning fidelity to his vocation as a Salesian, musician and liturgist, Fr. Grosso was truly the founder of the liturgical music movement in the Salesian Congregation. He had the gift of uniting prayer with song. He died at Bagnolo (Cuneo) on November 21, 1944.

GUIDAZIO, PETER (1841-1902), Fr.

Born in Turin on April 23, 1841, Peter Guidazio entered the Oratory at the age of twenty-two. In 1864 Don Bosco sent him to the newly opened school at Lanzo, where he remained six years and proved his ability as a good teacher. In the meantime, in 1867 he took his vows and seven years later was ordained a priest and appointed director of studies at the Oratory. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to direct the high school department of the diocesan seminary at Montefiascone (Viterbo). A year later he

opened the first Salesian school in Sicily at Randazzo and was its director from 1879 to 1885. He was also director at Lanzo from 1885 to 1901. His expertise, prudence, and determination gave the Salesian schools in Sicily particular eminence. He died at Randazzo on July 12, 1902.

LAGO, ANGELO (1834-1914), Fr.

Angelo Lago was born in Peveragno (Cuneo) in 1834. At the age of twenty-one he graduated as a pharmacist from the University of Turin and promptly opened a pharmacy in his native town with the firm intent of scrupulously fulfilling his duties and turning over his profits to the poor. For this reason, in 1872 he went to Lanzo where Don Bosco was conducting a spiritual retreat in order to hand over to him a few thousand lire. Don Bosco thanked him for his generosity and gave him a receipt, telling him that he accepted his donation simply as a loan. Hearing that Don Bosco was about to go to the chapel to give a sermon, Lago asked permission to be present. In his talk Don Bosco most eloquently described to his Salesians the great reward that Our Lord would give to those who made themselves poor for His sake. Lago was so impressed that afterward, escorting Don Bosco to his room, he said to him, "After such a sermon I can no longer keep your receipt. With your permission I would like to become as poor as you."

He went home, sold his pharmacy, and in September of that same year he returned to the Oratory to place himself at Don Bosco's disposal. Seeing him well qualified for the priesthood, Don Bosco invited him to take the necessary courses in theology. In 1877 he was ordained a priest and given as an assistant to Fr. Rua, then prefect general. Fr. Lago was outstandingly laborious, humble, prudent, and zealous. At his death in 1914 those who knew him exclaimed, "A saint has passed away."

LAZZERO, JOSEPH (1837-1910), Fr.

Joseph Lazzero was born in Turin on May 10, 1837 and entered the Oratory at the age of twenty. In 1859 he was one of the first young clerics to join Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Congregation. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He made his first vows in 1862 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1865. In 1870 he made his perpetual profession. In 1874 Don Bosco appointed him to the superior chapter and put him in charge of technical schools, a post he held until 1898. In 1877 Don Bosco chose him and Fr. Barberis to represent the Salesian Congregation at Pius IX's golden jubilee as bishop. Stricken in 1897, he retired and died after a long illness at Mathi (Turin) on March 7, 1910.

LEMOYNE, JOHN BAPTIST (1839-1916), Fr.

Fr. John Baptist Lemoyne was the first great chronicler of the life of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

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

In 1883 he came to the motherhouse as editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and secretary of the superior chapter. The five years that followed he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and heard from the saint himself the story of the arduous road he had to climb in his youth to arrive at the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Providence guided the Salesian work.

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

MARENCO, JOHN (1853-1921), Bishop

John Marengo was born in Ovada (Turin) on April 27, 1853. He applied to Don Bosco to become a Salesian in 1873, while he was a third year theology student. Discerning his fine personal qualities, Don Bosco accepted him without further discussion as a novice and admitted him to his religious vows the following year. He was ordained a priest in 1875. Five years later Don Bosco sent him to Lucca to open a new house. The talents he showed as a director induced Don Bosco to recall him to Turin and entrust to him the construction of the Church of St. John the Evangelist. In 1888 Fr. Rua sent him to Sampierdarena as director; in 1890 he appointed him provincial of the Salesian houses in Liguria and Toscana, in 1892 he made him vicar general of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, and finally in 1899 he sent him to Rome as procurator of the Salesian Society with the Holy See. He filled that office until 1909, when Pope Benedict XV named him bishop of Massa Carrara and eight years later titular bishop of Edessa and apostolic internuncio to the republics of Central America. Within four years he established an

archdiocese, a diocese and a vicariate apostolic in Costa Rica, reopened diplomatic relations between El Salvador and Honduras, founded two interdiocesan seminaries in Nicaragua and San Salvador, and strengthened ecclesiastical discipline. In 1921 Bishop Marengo returned to Turin because of failing health, and there he died a few months later on October 22.

MILANESIO, DOMINIC (1843-1922), Fr.

Dominic Milanesio was born at Settimo Torinese on August 18, 1843. In 1866 he called on Don Bosco for advice about his vocation and, as a result, promptly decided to become a Salesian. Three years later he made his first vows, and in 1873 he was ordained a priest. In 1877 he took part in the third missionary expedition to Argentina. He first worked at "La Boca" in Buenos Aires, but in 1880 he became a full-fledged missionary at Viedma in Patagonia, which he criss-crossed at incredible sacrifice, winning the love of all.

When in 1883 the leading *cacique* Manuel Namuncurà decided to surrender to the Argentinian government, he asked Fr. Milanesio to act as an intermediary. It was he again who, on December 24, 1888, baptized the cacique's son, Zephyrin, whose cause of beatification has been introduced. Fr. Milanesio was rightfully called the "Father of the Indians." He died in Bernal, Argentina, on November 19, 1922.

MONATERI, JOSEPH (1847-1914), Fr.

Joseph Monateri was born in Crescentino (Vercelli) on March 3, 1847. Don Bosco personally accepted him into the Oratory in 1860. Seven years later he made his first profession at Trofarello. After teaching at Mirabello and Borgo San Martino, he was ordained a priest in 1869. Don Bosco then sent him as director to the new house of Albano (Rome) in 1877. He was among the twenty-three confreres who formed the first general chapter at Lanzo in 1877. In 1898 he was appointed provincial of the Salesians in Sicily and director of the house at Catania. For reasons of health he left Sicily in 1903 and became director of Lanzo. He died at Colle Salvetti (Leghorn) on September 22, 1914, at the age of sixty-seven.

NAI, LOUIS (1855-1932), Fr.

Born at Nicorno (Pavia) in 1855, Louis Nai completed his secondary schooling at the Oratory under Don Bosco's guidance. In 1872 he took his first vows as a Salesian at Lanzo and was ordained a priest in 1877. Two years later Don Bosco appointed him prefect at San Benigno Canavese, where eventually he was director from 1887 to the expiration of his term

of office in 1892. He was then 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 and from 1926 he filled the office of director until his death in 1932. His courtesy and amiability, his genuine Salesian spirit and his love of Don Bosco endeared him to all.

PAVIA, JOSEPH (1852-1915), Fr.

Joseph Pavia was born at Asti on March 6, 1852. At the age of twenty-four he took his vows, and two years later, in 1878, he was ordained a priest. After obtaining his teacher certification, he was appointed by Don Bosco to our school at Albano (Rome). Subsequently, in 1884, Don Bosco called him to Turin to head the flourishing day and Sunday oratory at Valdocco. He organized catechetical contests, splendid church services, sport activities, gymnastic performance and sightseeing trips. He earned the gratitude of many people by his generous help to needy boys and families. He died in Turin on July 14, 1915.

PERROT, PETER (1853-1928), Fr.

Peter Perrot, born at Laux-Usseaux (Turin) on October 23, 1853, made his first vows as a Salesian on September 27, 1872, and was ordained a priest in Turin on June 10, 1876. Two years later Don Bosco sent him as director to La Navarre in the township of Hyères in southeast France, where the young priest overcame serious difficulties and earned everybody's esteem and confidence. With the help of generous benefactors he built a chapel and part of a new school building, which he completed in 1884. He wrote a manual on farming for the agricultural department of the school. In 1898 he was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses in southern France with headquarters in Marseille. During the government's persecution of religious he sought refuge in Italy, but eventually returned to La Navarre where he died on February 24, 1928.

PICCOLLO, FRANCIS (1861-1930), Fr.

Born in Turin on April 8, 1861, Francis Piccollo was so exemplary a pupil at the Oratory that Don Bosco spoke of him as another Dominic Savio. He took his vows as a Salesian at Lanzo on September 26, 1877, at the age of sixteen, and was ordained a priest at Ivrea on September 23, 1883.

He was first assigned to Ariccia (Rome) and to Sicily where he remained for thirty years as an able and saintly teacher, director at Catania and at nearby San Gregorio (1891-1901), and finally provincial (1901-1907). In 1909 he was afflicted by a very painful tumor and, even after surgery, he suffered from the open wound until the end of his life on December 8, 1930. On his deathbed he left this memento to his confreres—a reflection of his saintliness. “The most beautiful moment of our life is the moment of our death.”

PISCETTA, LOUIS (1858-1925), Fr.

Fr. Piscetta became a Salesian at the age of sixteen in 1874. Ordained a priest in 1880, he earned his doctorate in theology and taught successively for nearly forty years Church history, canon law and moral theology in the Turin diocesan seminary. His work *Theologiae Moralis Elementa* ran through several reprints and editions. From 1892 to 1907 he directed the Salesian Studentate of Philosophy at Valsalice (Turin), and in 1907 he became a member of the superior chapter of the Salesian Society. He died in 1925.

RABAGLIATI, EVASIUS (1855-1920), Fr.

Born at Occimiano, Italy in 1855, Evasius first met Don Bosco at the age of twelve during one of Don Bosco's outings with his boys in the countryside. In 1869 he entered our school at Mirabello and from there transferred to Borgo San Martino and the Oratory at Valdocco. In 1874 he made his novitiate and crowned it with his religious profession in September 1875. The following year he joined the second missionary expedition to Argentina and began his apostolate among the Italian immigrants in Buenos Aires. Ordained a priest in 1877, he first accompanied Bishop James Costamagna to Patagonia, and then from 1880 to 1886 he directed the Salesian school of San Nicolás de los Arroyos. In 1886 he crossed the Alps to his new assignment at Concepción, Chile, where he remained until 1890, when Fr. Rua sent him to open a trade school at Bogotá, Colombia. After completing this task he interested himself in the local leper colonies and greatly improved their services. In 1896 he became provincial of the newly established Colombian province and governed it until 1910, when for reasons of health he had to retire.

Sent back to Chile for a well-deserved rest, he continued to work tirelessly in the priestly ministry and in raising funds for the Colombian lepers. He died in Santiago, Chile on May 2, 1920. At his death the Colombian government declared a day of national mourning in his honor.

RINALDI, PHILIP (1856-1931), Fr., *Rector Major and Servant of God*

Philip Rinaldi, born at Lu (Alessandria) on May 28, 1856, entered the Salesian school at Mirabello at the age of ten. On July 9, 1867, while making his confession to Don Bosco, he saw the priest's face transfigured by a mysterious light. He again witnessed the same phenomenon on November 22, 1877 at Borgo San Martino. This experience totally confirmed his belief in his vocation. A few days later, on November 26, he went to Sampierdarena, where Don Bosco had set up a program for late vocations. In two years he completed his secondary schooling with top grades and in October 1879 entered the novitiate at San Benigno Canavese, where he made his first vows on August 13, 1880. In 1882 he was ordained a priest. The following year Don Bosco appointed him director of Mathi Torinese, the new house for late vocations which, later, was relocated in Turin near the Church of St. John the Evangelist, where he remained five more years as director.

In 1889 Don Bosco sent him to Spain as director of the house of Sarriá (Barcelona), and in 1892 he appointed him provincial of the houses of Spain and Portugal, where, within nine years, he opened sixteen more houses. In 1901 he was recalled to Turin as prefect general and worked hand in hand, first with Fr. Michael Rua and then with Fr. Paul Albera, the first two successors of St. John Bosco. During Fr. Albera's rectorship he gave new impetus to the growth and improvement of festive oratories, established an international federation of Salesian alumni and alumnae, built Don Bosco's monument, and gave a new thrust to the association of Salesian cooperators.

At the death of Fr. Paul Albera in 1922, Fr. Rinaldi was elected rector major on the first ballot. During his nine years in office 1,868 Salesian priests and brothers and 613 Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians left for the foreign missions and Salesian houses were opened in various parts of the world. At his death the Salesian Congregation had 43 provinces, 646 houses, and 8,954 Salesians.

In 1929 he had the joy of witnessing the beatification of his teacher, Don Bosco. Heavenly favors obtained through his intercession prompted the introduction of his cause of beatification in 1947.

ROCCA, ANGELO (1853-1943), Fr.

Born in Rivara (Turin) in 1853, Angelo Rocca joined the Salesian Congregation in 1875 at the age of twenty-two. Ordained a priest the following year, he was immediately asked by Don Bosco to direct our new house at La Spezia (Genoa), where he remained until 1882. He was next assigned to teach theology at the diocesan seminary of Trecata (Novara)

until 1899. He was a distinguished orator and writer of ascetical books. Poor in health, in 1901 he retired to our school at Cuorgnè (Turin) where he died in 1943 at the age of ninety.

ROCCA, LOUIS (1853-1909), Fr.

Louis Rocca was born in Milan on July 6, 1853. He entered the Oratory in 1868 at the age of fifteen. The following year he decided to become a Salesian. Good-hearted, forbearing and level-headed, he took his vows in 1874 and was ordained a priest the following year. Assigned to the Salesian lyceum in Alasio, he remained there twenty years, first as a teacher and then as a financial administrator and director. In 1893 he volunteered to go to Colombia to work in the leper colony of Agua de Dios, but his superiors decided otherwise. In 1895 he was appointed economer general and remained in office for the next thirteen years, during which he supervised the construction of Salesian churches and schools in Italy, Austria, Poland, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, and Malta. An endearing trait of his was his love for the sick. A stroke ended his fruitful life in Turin on June 21, 1909.

RONCHAIL, JOSEPH (1850-1898), Fr.

Joseph Ronchail, born in Laux-Usseaux (Turin) on May 21, 1850, first met Don Bosco in 1868. (See Vol. IX, pp. 148ff) Convinced that Don Bosco was inspired by God, he entered the Oratory and joined the Salesian Congregation in 1869. Ordained in 1872, he distinguished himself as a hard worker and zealous priest. He was director of the Salesian school at Nice from 1876 to 1887 and at Paris in 1888. He was also acting provincial of northern France and Belgium until his death in Paris in 1898.

ROSSI, JOSEPH (1835-1908), Br.

Joseph Rossi was born in Mezzanabigli (Pavia) in 1835. His reading of Don Bosco's prayer book, *Il Giovane Provveduto* [*The Companion of Youth*], led him to Don Bosco himself at the age of twenty-four.

He was among the first to seek admission into the Salesian Congregation and made his profession as a lay religious on September 29, 1864. Noting that the young man had the qualities of a good administrator, Don Bosco carefully cultivated him and entrusted more and more of the Congregation's business matters to him. He also called him to attend the first and fourth general chapters as consultor. Even after Don Bosco's death Br. Rossi had the full trust of Fr. Rua. He died in Turin on October 28, 1908.

ROTA, PETER (1861-1931), Fr.

Born at Lu Monferrato (Alessandria) on June 7, 1861, Peter Rota was drawn to join the Salesian Congregation by the example of Fr. John Bonetti. He made his first profession at Lanzo in 1877 and was a member of the third missionary expedition sent by Don Bosco in 1877. Completing his studies in Uruguay, he was ordained a priest in Montevideo in 1884. Skilled in school administration, he became the first director of the Salesian school in Niteroi, Brazil. He also directed schools in Villa Colón, Uruguay, and at Bagé in southern Brazil. In 1925 he was recalled to Turin and appointed provincial of the central province. He died in Lisbon, Portugal on August 8, 1931, while visiting the Salesian houses. His natural kindness, serenity, cheerfulness, and prudence endeared him to all.

RUA, MICHAEL (1837-1910), Fr., *Rector Major, Blessed*

Michael Rua was born in Turin on June 9, 1837. As a pupil of the Christian Brothers' school he first met Don Bosco at the age of seven, and an unbreakable bond was forged between the two. In 1852 he donned the cassock, and from then on his life was so closely intertwined with that of the founder that he has often been dubbed "Don Bosco's double." On January 26, 1854 he and three other boys of the Oratory gathered in Don Bosco's room to band themselves into what was to become the Salesian Congregation. (See Vol. V, p. 8) The following year he took his first vows. While studying theology he took charge of the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory in Turin. In 1859 he accompanied Don Bosco on his first visit to Rome, and that year, when the Congregation was approved by Pius IX, Michael Rua, though a subdeacon, was elected by his peers to be spiritual director of the new-born Society of St. Francis de Sales. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f)

He was ordained a priest on July 29, 1860 and three years later became the first Salesian director, assuming charge of the junior seminary at Mirabello. On the death of Fr. Victor Alasonatti in 1865, Don Bosco recalled Fr. Rua to the Oratory in Turin to assume financial responsibility for the Salesian Society. He was Don Bosco's right-hand man. As Fr. Eugene Ceria states: "Don Bosco could not have asked for a more devoted son, a more loyal interpreter of his every wish, a more tireless and intelligent worker, a more enlightened mind and a superior of more unchallenged authority . . . fully dedicated to his mission, totally imbued with his ideas and amply qualified . . . to be the founder's worthy spokesman at all levels." (See Vol. XIV, p. 1)

In 1884, at Don Bosco's request, he was appointed his vicar by Pope Leo XIII, and four years later, at the founder's death, he became rector

major, a position he held for twenty-two years. During that time the Congregation grew from sixty-four houses to three hundred and forty-one, reaching out to Europe, North, South and Central America, Africa and Asia.

Fr. Rua was often defined as “the living rule” because of his fidelity to Don Bosco’s concept of Salesian life and mission. Though he may have externally given an impression of strictness, he was a gentle, warm, and thoughtful superior, so much so that he seems to have rivaled Don Bosco in gentleness and fatherliness.

Fr. Rua died on April 6, 1910 at the Oratory. In 1922 the diocesan process for his beatification and canonization was begun, and in 1926 the cause was taken up in Rome. He was declared Venerable in 1953 and was beatified on October 29, 1972 by Pope Paul VI. His feast day is observed on October 29.

SALA, ANTHONY (1836-1895), Fr.

Anthony Sala, born near Como on January 28, 1836, entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family’s silk mill. He was God’s gift to Don Bosco. Entrusting himself to Don Bosco’s guidance, he made his profession on December 29, 1865 and in little more than six years became a priest. Showing special administrative talent, he was assigned to help Fr. Alasonatti, who was then in poor health.

In 1875, Fr. Sala was appointed counselor of the superior chapter, replacing Fr. Ghivarello. Recognizing his particular ability, Don Bosco put Fr. Sala in charge of remodeling the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato and in constructing the new houses at Este, Cremona, Chieri, and Randazzo. In 1880 Don Bosco appointed him economer general, a post to which he was re-elected almost unanimously in both 1886 and 1892. He supervised the construction of St. John the Evangelist Church and school and directed the planning of the Salesian exhibit in the National Exposition of 1884 in Turin. He also lightened Don Bosco’s burden in building the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. During Don Bosco’s final illness he offered the lowliest of services in the sick room.

Fr. Sala worked tirelessly to his dying day. He went to his eternal reward on May 21, 1895 after a brief illness.

SAVIO, ANGELO (1835-1893), Fr.

Angelo Savio was born at Castelnuovo d’Asti on November 20, 1835 and entered the Oratory in 1850. He was already a deacon when in 1859 he joined the first group of young men who banded with Don Bosco to

form the Salesian Society. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) At their first historic meeting he was elected economer general, a post to which he was re-elected in 1869 and in 1873. He was ordained in Turin in 1860. As economer he was entrusted with all construction. In 1885, at the age of fifty, he went to the South American missions, opening houses in Chile, Peru, Paraguay and Brazil. A tireless and fearless worker, he was always a man of deep prayer and great trust. He died while on a missionary journey in Ecuador, after eight years of fruitful mission activity, on January 17, 1893.

TRIONE, STEPHEN (1856-1935), Fr.

Born in Cuorgnè (Turin) on December 8, 1856, Stephen entered the Oratory in 1869 and soon distinguished himself for his good-heartedness, serenity, joviality and, especially, his fervent piety. He made his first vows as a Salesian in 1872 and was ordained a priest in Rome on July 12, 1879. At his first Mass in St. Peter's he prayed for "efficacy of speech."

He first exercised his priestly ministry in Randazzo (Sicily) and Lanzo. In 1884 Don Bosco, already declining in health and feeling the need for a faithful interpreter of his spirit in the spiritual formation of the Oratory's students, chose Fr. Trione for that task. Following Don Bosco's footsteps he became the ideal Salesian spiritual director.

The gift of "efficacy of speech" for which he had prayed was very noticeable in his ministry of the word. He was a fervent apostle of devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians and a matchless organizer of Eucharistic and Marian congresses in various dioceses. The outstanding field of his Salesian activity was the Association of Salesian Cooperators. All the dioceses of Italy and the main centers in Europe and South America witnessed his ardent zeal for the spreading of Don Bosco's spirit and undertakings.

As assistant postulator of the causes of beatification and canonization of Don Bosco, Dominic Savio, Fr. Andrew Beltrami and Prince Czartoryski, he had the privilege to be present at Don Bosco's canonization and at the conferring of the title "Venerable" on Dominic Savio. He went from the Oratory to his reward on April 1, 1935 at the age of seventy-nine.

UNIA, MICHAEL (1849-1895), Fr.

Born on December 18, 1849 at Roccaforte (Cuneo), Michael Unia took his first vows at San Benigno Canavese on August 13, 1880 and was ordained a priest at Ivrea on December 23, 1882 at the age of thirty-three.

In 1890 he joined the first group of missionaries going to Colombia at

the government's request to open a trade school in Bogotá, the capital.

A year and a half later, learning that many lepers lacked material and spiritual assistance, Father Unia felt inspired to dedicate himself to this specific and dangerous apostolate and sought permission from Fr. Rua, Don Bosco's first successor, and from the archbishop of Bogotá. When it was finally granted, Fr. Unia promptly walked all the way to Agua de Dios, a forsaken place three days away from the capital. There he found seven hundred and thirty adult lepers and a hundred and twenty children under ten, to whom he immediately offered spiritual and material assistance. The following year two other Salesians joined him, and he was thus able to organize the civil and religious life of the village. Totally selfless, he lavished his care on all, even in giving to the lepers the usual signs of affection given to healthy people, such as shaking hands with them and caressing the children.

Having obtained the help of a few Sisters of the Presentation, he opened a kindergarten and then started a fund-raising drive to erect a large hospital and beautify the poor village chapel. He also succeeded in having an aqueduct built to bring drinking water to the leper colony and introduced vocal and instrumental music to lift up the lepers' spirits. The beautiful church services and the frequent reception of the sacraments were also a great source of comfort and hope for all his charges.

In 1893 a severe case of dropsy and other ailments forced him to return to Italy for treatment. He went back to Agua de Dios the following year, but a recurrence of the disease required his removal to Bogotá. Toward the end of July 1895 the disease took a turn for the worse and he was recalled to Italy. He passed away at the Oratory in Turin on December 9 of the same year.

VERONESI, MOSES (1851-1930), Fr.

Born at Bovisio, Milan, in 1851, Moses Veronesi first met Don Bosco in 1868 when he was a resident student at our Salesian school in Lanzo. "You will live to an old age if you will be good," Don Bosco told him. After donning the clerical habit at the Oratory at Don Bosco's hands, he began his philosophy and theology studies. In 1873 he fell critically ill, but Don Bosco, informed of this, sent this telegram to Fr. Rua: "I bless Veronesi, but I am not sending him his passport."

Veronesi made his religious profession in January 1876 and, after being ordained a priest in June of that same year, he was promptly appointed catechist at the Oratory, where he worked so zealously that Don Bosco called him "his heart and his arm." In 1882 he was appointed director at Mogliano Veneto until 1895, when he was named provincial of the

Salesian houses in Veneto and later, from 1908 to 1910, in Lombardy. He then became director of the Oratory until 1917, when he was reassigned to Mogliano Veneto as director until 1926. Fidelity to Don Bosco, ardent love for the Blessed Virgin and great fatherliness for his confreres were his outstanding traits. He died in Verona on February 3, 1930.

VESPIGNANI, JOSEPH (1854-1932), Fr.

Born at Lugo, Italy in 1854, Joseph started his secondary schooling with the Benedictines at Cesena and then entered the seminary of Faenza for his philosophy courses. While there, a virulent pneumonia nearly took his life. After an uncertain recovery, he continued his theological studies and, though still sickly, was ordained a priest in 1876. He barely hoped to live long enough to say at least three Masses, and yet, three months later, he felt strong enough to go to Turin to see Don Bosco. So impressed was he by the fact that Don Bosco could read his conscience that he stayed with him for a whole year. He made his religious profession on Christmas Day 1876, and the following year Don Bosco sent him to Argentina with the third missionary expedition to be novice master. After spending seventeen years with Bishop James Costamagna, he succeeded him in 1894 as director of Pius IX School in Buenos Aires and, later, as provincial.

In 1922 he was recalled to Turin as a member of the superior chapter 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. Outstanding is his book *Un Anno alla Scuola del Beato Don Bosco*.

Appendix 2*

ADVICE GIVEN BY DON BOSCO IN CONFESSION

(See page 86, footnote 1)

Turin, June 4, 1879, Third Day of Retreat: Remember to fulfill all your duties as assistant, student and teacher. As for keeping money, I am not sure whether one might be allowed to receive Holy Communion when guilty of one act of disobedience. When disappointments come your way, accept them as penance for your sins and bear them patiently for Jesus' sake. For your penance, recite the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin.

June 12, Feast of Corpus Christi: Pray to Mary. Ask Her to obtain from Her Son the grace of always praying with due fervor. In addition, think often of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, whose feast we celebrate today. Be at ease. For your penance, recite the *Pange Lingua*.

June 21, 1879, Vigil of Our Celebration of St. Aloysius: Confess again your past sins and make an act of contrition. Your penance is one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be. Pray for me.

July 17, 1879, Last Day of the Forty Hours' Devotions: If ten or twelve days after your last confession you are still without serious sin, go to Communion tranquilly. Today ask Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament to keep you constantly in good health and promise that you will always use it for God's greater glory, doing His will in all things. Say the Hail, Holy Queen three times as your penance. Go in peace.

August 9, 1879: We are in the novena of the Virgin Mary's assumption into heaven. Think of Her during these next few days and entrust yourself to Her protection. Reflect that you are under the protection of not only a merciful Mother, but also a most powerful and merciful Queen. At Her assumption Mary was crowned Queen of heaven and earth by Her Divine Son and made superior to all the saints. Think of all She can do for us. Trust Her and you will see yourself growing in fervor and devotion. For your penance say the Hail, Holy Queen three times with the invocation, "Queen of Angels, pray for us." Go in peace and keep cheerful.

September 1879: At the retreat in Lanzo Don Bosco gave me the following advice: "Reflect on your past; listen attentively to God's word; make good resolutions to guide you throughout your future."

*For the original Italian see *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. 14, pp. 712ff. [Editor]

November 8, 1879: Today begins the month which prepares us for the feast of the Immaculate Conception. The school year is not far advanced, and so earnestly resolve to do your very best by entrusting everything you do to Mary Immaculate. She will certainly help you in all your needs. For your penance say once the *De Profundis* for the souls in purgatory. Go in peace and God bless you.

November 30, 1879: We are in the novena of the Immaculate Conception. Keep it as devoutly as you possibly can. Go to Communion every day if you wish. Pray to Mary Immaculate, and ask Her to help you in all you do. For your penance say three times, "O Mary, conceived without original sin, pray for us." Go in peace, and God bless you.

May 14, 1880: It was good for you to recall the sins of your past life. Now bear in mind that we are about to start the novena to Mary, Help of Christians. Entrust yourself to Her. Try to honor Her during this novena and have your boys do the same. She will particularly help you overcome all temptations. For your penance, say one Hail Mary and repeat three times the invocation, "Mother most pure, pray for us." Go in peace and God bless you.

July 22, 1880: Today is the feast of St. Mary Magdalene. Though once a great sinner, she turned a new leaf in life and never again strayed from the right path. Pray to her that you may do the same. For your penance say one Our Father and Hail Mary in her honor. In your act of contrition, renew your sorrow for your past sins, especially sins of . . . Go in peace and God bless you.

August 8, 1880, Toward the End of the Retreat: Don Bosco greeted me by name. "There now," he said, "we know each other. I shall pray that you may make a good retreat and I'll do all I can to help you. You must pray too and do your very best in preparing for your annual confession. Don't bother too much about the little things; stick to the important ones. Go in peace and God bless you.

August 13, 1880, Last Day of the Spiritual Retreat at San Benigno: Confess once more the sins of your past life and then be at peace. Strive to keep your good resolutions. Go in peace.

September 3, 1880: Three days after the San Benigno retreat, Don Bosco said to a priest, "Bear in mind that a priest never goes to heaven or hell alone."

August 27, 1881: At the beginning of the spiritual retreat at San Benigno Don Bosco said to me, "Be at peace. From now on make it a point to observe exactly even the smallest rules because they are the ones that will lead us into paradise."

September 11, 1881: During the retreat at San Benigno Don Bosco told me: “Confess again all your past sins and those you may have forgotten. Make some good resolution. If you recall other faults or sins of omission, acknowledge your guilt and steadfastly resolve to do your utmost to correct yourself.”

November 11, 1883: Don Bosco said to a newly ordained priest, “Now that you have attained your goal, have but one concern, your ultimate goal—a holy death. Start thinking about it now and don’t wait for death suddenly to overtake you.”

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

D.B.	Don Bosco
D.M.H.C.	Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.N.	Good Night
M.H.C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Cooperators
S.S.	Salesian Society

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